COURSE OVERVIEW

Samurai

Japan’s *samurai* warriors, a social class dating from at least the 900s, were a distinct element of Japanese society, culture, and government from the 1150s to the 1870s. The social and political position of the warrior class changed over time. Until the 1150s they were mainly rural land-managers and administrators; from the 1180s some became members of successive warrior governments; from the 1250s warrior leaders became significant cultural patrons; from the 1600s almost all warriors lived in garrison town cities. The composition of the warrior class also changed over time. Until the mid-1300s most were of hereditary warrior background; in the 1400s and 1500s the warrior class was a socially mobile group drawn from many backgrounds; from the 1600s warriors were in essence hereditary bureaucrats and keepers of the peace.

The samurai have continued to enjoy a virtual as well as a historical existence. Samurai and their ethos are encountered in such contexts as *anime samurai* from outer space, *samurai* businessman, the *samurai* spirit that infuses the martial arts, the *samurai* ethos of *bushido* in World War Two (self-immolation, death before defeat, self-sacrifice), exponents of *hara-kiri* (*hari-kari* in English mispronunciation). Of course they appear in Japanese film, which can provide a window in contemporary society as well as historical background. Samurai have also been appropriated in films produced for other cultural contexts (such as *The Magnificent Seven, 47 rōnin* starring Keanu Reeves, *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai*).

This class will look at aspects of the samurai during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, an age of civil war and eventual reunification. This is the one period in Japanese history when samurai were most likely to be habitually engaged in warfare, and had to deal with existential situations that raised questions of self-identity, place in society, acceptable behavior, and the issue of life and death.
**Structure.**
The course combines lectures and films. Course material includes a textbook, and items in “Modules” on Canvas: Powerpoints, assigned readings, and film synopses.

**Expected workload.**
In addition to attendance at class, students are advised to allocate at least ten hours per week for completing reading assignments and reviewing class films. In my own experience, preparing a good film report can entail viewing a film at least three times, in order to clarify details.

**Evaluation.**
1/ **Attendance** (15% of course grade); please let me know if there are mitigating circumstances for an absence.
2/ **First Quiz on 07/08** (15% of course grade). Study guide will be available on Canvas. Quiz will include a 500-word take-home essay.
3/ **1000-word exploration of Cooper, They Came to Japan. Due on 07/10.** To focus on a particular theme (e.g. social values and attitudes; castles; historical figures such as Nobunaga or Hideyoshi; customs (20% of course grade). **It is due in hard copy no later than 07/10.**
4/ **1000-word film report. Due on 07/15.** To be on one of: Moonlight and Rain, Seven Samurai, Hidden Fortress, Heaven and Earth, The Shadow Warrior, or Hara-kiri (25% of course grade). The report is to focus on themes relating to warriors: warriors and society, warfare, or notions of honor. It is **NOT** a film review: please see the guidelines below. **It is due in hard copy no later than 07/15.**
6/ **Second Quiz on 07/17** (25% of course grade). Study guide will be available on Canvas. It will be based on course material covered since the first quiz, and compared to the first quiz will have more emphasis on the films. Quiz will include a 500-word take-home essay.
7/ **Failure to pass the Second Quiz is an automatic fail for the entire course.**

**Written Work.** To be double spaced, 12-point, Times New Roman font. Late submission liable to be penalized. Take-home quiz essays are to be handed in with the in-class exam.

**Assigned Texts.** Michael Cooper, *They Came to Japan.*

**Additional Readings.** All potentially examinable. Available on Canvas, under “Modules”.

**Films:** Available at Knight Library. Some films are also available online on “Canopy” via the Knight Library catalog (see catalog entry for individual films).

**Synopses of Films:** Available on Canvas, under “Modules.”

**Study Guides:** Available on Canvas, under “Modules.”
LECTURE, FILM AND READING SCHEDULE.

WEEK ONE.

06/25  Introduction.
       Lecture: Loyalty: True to Who?
       Lecture: Villagers, Villages, and Samurai.
06/25  Tales of Moonlight and Rain Ugetsu Monogatari 雨月物語. (DVD 02165, 98 minutes).

06/27  The Seven Samurai Shichinin no samurai 七人の侍. (DVD 03041; 203 minutes).

Reading for Week One:
   Cooper, They Came to Japan, Chapters 1 (Country), 3 (People), 4 (Social Relations), 11 (Food and Drink), 12 (Dress), 13 (The House), 14 (Daily Life and Customs).

WEEK TWO.

07/02  Lecture: Governing Chaos in the Sixteenth Century.
       Lecture: Armor and Display.
07/02  The Hidden Fortress Kakushi toride no san akunin 隠し砦の三悪人. (DVD 01011; 139 minutes).

07/04  Independence Day Holiday. No class.

Reading for Week Two:
Cooper, Chapters 6 (Portrait of a Ruler), 7 (Audiences), 8 (Castles and Soldiers), and 9 (Law and Order), 22 (Persecutions).
WEEK THREE.

07/08 First Quiz.
07/08 Heaven and Earth Ten to chi to 天と地と. (VT 06718, 104 minutes).

07/10 Report on Cooper They Came to Japan due.
07/10 The Shadow Warrior Kagemusha 影武者. (DVD 01510, 180 minutes).

Reading for Week Three:
Cooper, They Came to Japan, Chapters 6 (Portrait of a Ruler), 8 (Castles and Soldiers), 15 (Art and Culture), 16 (Cities and Travel), 19 (Temples and Idols).

WEEK FOUR.

07/15 Film report due.
07/15 Ritual Suicide Harakiri 切腹. (VT 06739; 134 minutes; on Canopy via UO Knight Library catalog).

07/17 Lecture: End of War: Samurai and Society Reshaped.
07/17 Second Quiz.
07/17 Lone Wolf and Cub: Baby Cart at the River Styx Kozure Ōkami: Sanzu no kawa no ubaguruma 子連れ狼 三途の川の乳母車. (DVD 01711; 89 minutes).

Reading for Week Four:
Cooper, They Came to Japan, Chapters 2 (History), 5 (The Emperor and Nobility), 7 (Audiences), 8 (Castles and Soldiers), 16 (Cities and Travel), pp. 340-342, Chapter 22 (Persecution).
Book Exploration and Film Report Guidelines

**Book exploration** of Cooper, *They Came to Japan.*

You are to focus your efforts on a couple of themes in which you might have a particular interest, such as: values of warriors, loyalty, customs and attitudes, castles, violence, significant figures (e.g. Nobunaga or Hideyoshi).

We will also address the book exploration in class.

**Film Report**

There are several ways in which you can craft a film report. In this course, the emphasis is on your writing a report that demonstrates clear familiarity with the film; and that you have reflected on some of the themes or issues relating to samurai and warfare. Please remember that the class is not one on film or film history; and that the film report is **NOT** a film review that deals with directors, cinema technique, and suchlike. If it reads like a film review rather than something written for this course, then you may easily achieve an “F” grade.

The report could emphasize a particular theme that comes through in the film, or even a couple of themes. You could also reflect upon the film and discuss issues that occurred to you. We will address some possibilities in class.

The **least desirable** film report, which being such is not to be submitted (and if so might well earn a grade of “F”) is one that provides a synopsis of the film – after all, we’ve all seen it.

Feel free to inform your report with ideas and general information that you may have encountered in the readings, although this is not required in order to write a successful report.

**Classroom Protocol:**

We see the classroom as a collective learning environment, where you concentrate on the class content, and do not distract either yourself or anyone around you.

Cell-phones, texting etc.: please turn cell phones to silent mode; and do not use them while the class is in session (life-threatening emergencies excepted). Lap-tops, IPads etc.: to be used for taking notes. If it appears that they are being used for non-class-related reasons, you may be asked to turn them off.

The classroom is not a theater or your living-room: 1/ Please eat meals before or after class, not during class. 2/ If however you have a candy/sugar craving, odorless items are preferred, and we do not want to hear you opening them noisily. 3/ Non-alcoholic liquids are OK.

Please arrive on time. Late arrivals are always disruptive. Late arrival for quizzes may prevent you from taking them.
Course Achievements:

By the end of the course, you will have had the opportunity to:
- Appreciate the broader social and historical context for the samurai.
- Gain a sense of various ways in which warfare impacts a society.
- Gain an in-depth familiarity with the workings of society and social groups in a culture distant in time and place.
- Become familiar with how historians explain social contexts of human behavior.
- Develop your skills in analyzing and interpreting primary source material.
- Develop your skills in writing and presenting your own conclusions.