

HISTORY 396 Samurai in Film Fall 2021  
HISTORY 396 Samurai in Film.

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**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*

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(*hari-kari* in English mispronunciation). Of course they appear in Japanese film, which can provide a window on 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, or *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.

Apart from the assigned texts (see next page), other course material is available in “Modules” for Canvas for the course. That material includes: this syllabus; scholarly articles (available as PDFs); Powerpoints of the lectures; film synopses; study guides for exams; etc.

**Films:** All the films are “examinable,” and questions relating to them will be on the exams.

1/ In principle, will be screened in class.

2/ Will also be available a/ through the Knight Library catalog, via online access to Kanopy; b/ through Canvas, via “Panopto Recordings;” c/ via an internet link. See syllabus for details.

3/ Physical copies of most of the films are also available in the Knight Library.

**NOTE: ACCESSING KANOPY:** *Using the Knight Library catalog, search for the film by title, and then follow the online link provided (you may need to look at more than one of the catalog entries for the film to locate the online link “available online”).*

*If for some reason you are unable to find such a link (except for films noted on the syllabus as available via “Panopto Recordings” or the internet), then access Kanopy via e.g. Seven Samurai (aka Shichinin no samurai), and then, when in Kanopy, search for the film for which you were originally looking; it should be there.*

### Expected workload.

In addition to class attendance, 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, and perhaps notice things (particularly when exploring themes) not noticed on first viewing.

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### **Evaluation.**

1/ **Attendance** (10% of course grade).

2/ **Mid-term in Week FIVE 10/27** (20% of course grade). Study guide will be available on Canvas. Exam will include a 500-word take-home essay (possible essay topics will be provided).

3/ **1000-word exploration of Cooper, *They Came to Japan*. Due no later than Week SEVEN 11/10** (20% of course grade). To focus on a particular theme (e.g. social values and attitudes; castles; historical figures such as Nobunaga or Hideyoshi; customs).

4/ **1000-word film report. Due no later than Week TEN.** (20% of course grade). To be on one of: *Moonlight and Rain, Seven Samurai, Hidden Fortress, Heaven and Earth, Throne of Blood, Hara-kiri*. 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.

5/ **Final Exam on 12/08** (30% of course grade). Study guide will be available on Canvas. It will be based on course material covered since the mid-term exam, and compared to the mid-term will have more emphasis on the films. Exam will include a 650-word take-home essay.

*It is possible that the final exam will be open book, and will be conducted remotely. Details will be noted on the study guide.*

6/ **Failure to pass the Final Exam is an automatic fail for the entire course.**

### **Submission of class assignments.**

Assignments are to be double spaced, 12-point, Times New Roman font, and submitted as Word documents.

In principle, all class assignments are to be submitted in hard copy to the instruction team. We may also make provision for, or even request, electronic submission – details will be forthcoming prior to the mid-term.

Late submission without prior instructor approval is liable to be penalized.

**Assigned Texts.** Michael Cooper, *They Came to Japan*.  
Willis, Clive. “Captain Jorge Álvares and Father Luís Froís S.J.: Two Early Portuguese Descriptions of Japan and the Japanese.” (Available on Canvas, under “Modules”).

Weekly readings from these texts are designed to provide the opportunity for ongoing and reinforcing engagement of material.

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

**Synopses of Films.** Synopses of most films are available on Canvas, under “Modules”.

**Study Guides:** Are available on Canvas, under “Modules.”

**LECTURE, FILM AND READING SCHEDULE**

**WEEK ONE 09/29.**

Course Introduction and General Overview of Japan, 1467-1630.

**Ritual Suicide *Harakiri*** 切腹 (Kanopy; and VT 06739; 134 mins.).

**Readings:**

Willis, Clive. "Captain Jorge Álvares and Father Luís Froís S.J.: Two Early Portuguese Descriptions of Japan and the Japanese," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Series 3, 22.2 (2012), 391-438.

Cooper, *They Came to Japan*, Chapters 1 (Country), 3 (The People), 4 (Social Relations), 10 (The Language), 11 (Food and Drink), 12 (Dress), 13 (The House), 14 (Daily Life and Customs), 16 (Cities and Travel).

**WEEK TWO 10/06-10/08.**

Lecture: Loyalty and Life: True to Who?

**Tales of Moonlight and Rain *Ugetsu Monogatari*** 雨月物語. (Kanopy; and DVD 02165; 98 minutes).

**Readings:**

Willis, Clive. "Captain Jorge Álvares and Father Luís Froís S.J.," 391-438.

Cooper, *They Came to Japan*, Same as Week One.

**WEEK THREE 10/13**

Lecture: Governing Chaos in the Sixteenth Century.

Lecture: Villages and villagers.

**The Seven Samurai *Shichinin no samurai*** 七人の侍 (Kanopy, and DVD 03041; 203 mins.).

**Readings:**

Cooper, chapters 5 (Emperor and Nobility), 9 (Law and Order), 17 (Shinto), 18 (Buddhism), 20 (Festivals and Funerals).

Willis, Clive. "Captain Jorge Álvares and Father Luís Froís S.J.," 391-438.

Steenstrup, "Hōjō Sōun's Twenty-One Articles: The Code of Conduct of the Odawara Hōjō." *Monumenta Nipponica*, 29.3 (1974), pp. 283-303.

Jansen, Marius. "Tosa in the Sixteenth Century: The 100 Article Code of Chōsokabe Motochika." In *Studies in the Institutional History of Early Modern Japan* (Princeton University Press, 1968).

**WEEK FOUR 10/20**

(Continuing) **The Seven Samurai** *Shichinin no samurai* 七人の侍.

**Readings:**

Cooper, chapters 4 (Social Relations), 15 (Art and Culture), 16 (Cities and Travel), 19 (Temples and Idols).

**WEEK FIVE 10/27. MID-TERM EXAM**

Lecture: Armor.

Lecture: The Mōri Family and Its Culture.

**Readings:**

Cooper, chapter 8 (Castles and Soldiers), 9 (Law and Order), 10 (The Language).  
Stavros, “Military Revolution in Early Modern Japan,” *Japanese Studies* 33.3 (2013), 243-261.

Goble, “Memento Mori: Mōri Warriors, Manase Physicians, and the New Medico-Cultural Nexus of the Late 16<sup>th</sup> Century.”

**WEEK SIX 11/03**

Discussion of approaches to and expectations regarding the forthcoming Exploration of Cooper, and the Film Report.

**The Hidden Fortress** *Kakushi toride no san akunin* 隠し砦の三悪人 [Kanopy; and DVD 01011; 139 mins.].

**Readings:**

Cooper, chapters 4 (Social Relations), 6 (Portrait of a Ruler), 10 (The Language), 12 (Dress), 14 (Daily Life and Customs).

**WEEK SEVEN 11/10. Exploration of Cooper due.**

Lecture: Warlord Stand-off: The 4<sup>th</sup> Battle of Kawanakajima: Uesugi and Takeda clans.

**Heaven and Earth** *Ten to chi to* 天と地と. (Panopto Recordings, in Canvas; VT 06718; 104 mins.).

**Readings:**

Cooper, chapters 6 (Portrait of a Ruler), 7 (Audiences), 8 (Castles and Soldiers), 9 (Law and Order), 18 (Buddhism).

Asao, “Sixteenth Century Unification.”

**WEEK EIGHT 11/17.**

Lecture: Family Costs of War.

**Throne of Blood** *Kumo no su no jō* 蜘蛛の巣城 (Spider's Web Castle) (Kanopy; 110 mins.).

**Readings:**

Brockey and Elisonas "Tragedy of Quabacondono." *Monumenta Nipponica*, 76 (2021)  
Cooper, chapters 6 (Portrait of a Ruler), 7 (Audiences), 8 (Castles and Soldiers), 9 (Law and Order), 11 (Food and Drink), 14 (Daily Life and Customs).

Wakita, "The Emergence of the State in Sixteenth-Century Japan."

**WEEK NINE 11/24.**

**Ritual Suicide** *Harakiri* 切腹 (Kanopy; and VT 06739; 134 mins.).

**Readings:**

Cooper, chapters 6 (Portrait of a Ruler), 7 (Audiences), 8 (Castles and Soldiers), 9 (Law and Order), 11 (Food and Drink), 14 (Daily Life and Customs), 17 (Shinto), 20 (Festivals and Funerals).

Nagahara, "Shaping the Process of Unification: Technological Progress." *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 14.1 (Winter 1988), pp. 77-109.

**WEEK TEN 12/01. Film report due. Last date** by which film report can be handed in.

Lecture: Tokugawa Victory: Battles of Sekigahara 1600, and Ōsaka Castle 1615.

Lecture: Tokugawa Triumph: Reshaping Samurai and Society.

The following films, set in the post-*Harakiri* Edo period, are not examinable. They are more tongue-in-cheek looks at warriors (*samurai* in households and government, and *rōnin* and assassins) than we have encountered to date. Feel free to watch either, both, or neither.

**Mission Impossible: Samurai** *Chōkōsoku! Sankin Kōtai* 超高速!参勤交代 (Panopto Recordings, in Canvas; 119 mins.). [Funny, charming, great fight scenes].

**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). [Based on a *manga* comic series, featuring a single father and his son, over-the-top fight scenes]. **AVAILABLE online:** google for, Shogun assassin: ultragoji2: <https://archive.org/details/ShogunAssassin>.

**Readings:** Cooper, chapter 7 (Audiences).

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**FINAL EXAM: 12/08; 1915-2200. NOTE: Possibly open book and conducted remotely.**

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### GUIDE FOR BOOK EXPLORATION AND FILM REPORT

The book exploration will be a different effort than a film report.

We will also them in class.

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

You are to also 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).

#### **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 else.

Cell-phones, texting etc.: please from any texting (sending or receiving) or use of cell phones during class. Life threatening emergencies (such as family health matters) that require you to leave the classroom immediately are excepted. If you use them in class otherwise you may be asked to leave the classroom.

Lap-tops, tablets, 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 Outcomes:**

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 who lived 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 in presenting your own conclusions.

**Academic Misconduct.**

Students are expected to be familiar with the provisions of academic misconduct, which is part of the student conduct code. See

<https://policies.uoregon.edu/vol-3-administration-student-affairs/ch-1-conduct/student-conduct-code>

As a general observation: it is my experience that, irrespective of outcome, nobody who has gone through the process of addressing what is termed “suspected academic misconduct” remembers it fondly.

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### **Accessibility:**

If you have a documented disability that needs accommodations in this class, please contact the instructor, and also request that the Counselor for Students with Disabilities send a letter outlining your approved accommodations. For more information, contact the Accessible Education Center in 360 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or [uoaec@uoregon.edu](mailto:uoaec@uoregon.edu). (See <https://aec.uoregon.edu/best-practices-faculty> for more information).