The Modernization of the Samurai

Instructor: Henry Smith

Course Description: This course explores the dramatic transformations in Japan’s military class over half a millennium. We will proceed through three stages, first the period 1550-1650 when the hardened battlefield warriors of the late medieval period were “tamed” into city-dwelling bureaucrats in an era of sustained peace. Next came the abolition of all samurai status after the Meiji Restoration of 1868, and its replacement by a modern conscript army. Third and most apparent to us is the pervasive re-imagining of the “samurai” and his code of “bushidō” in the modern period, both in Japan and abroad, and the creation in the post-World War II era of a global media world of samurai that has taken on an entire life of its own. We will read basic texts, primary and secondary, and look at examples of samurai stories and film. Throughout, the primary goal is to historicize and contextualize the samurai, both as a living historical figure and as a creation of the imagination, and to think about the relationship between the two.

Prerequisites: A basic survey-level knowledge of both pre-modern and modern Japanese history is highly desirable, although not required.

Requirements and Grading:

1) Attendance. You are expected to attend every class, or to let me know by email, before class unless it’s an emergency, when and why you are unable to attend. More than 2-3 unexplained absences may be reflected in your grade.

2) Commentaries: On most days, every member of the class is asked to write a commentary of up to one page (A4, single-spaced) on the assigned readings, in which you offer your thoughts on the key issues that they raise. These should not be summaries of the reading, but a presentation of issues, primarily historical, that are of interest or concern to you. In addition, one or two discussants will be designated for each class, who will prepare a brief introduction to specific readings, and to lead the discussion. Discussants should prepare a longer commentary (2-3 pages) on their specific assignment, using it as the basis for introducing the material and provoking discussion. All commentaries will be read and returned at the next class meeting. You will be excused from three commentaries (including absences) during the semester. (50% of grade)

3) Film Reviews: A series of films will be shown on Wednesdays beginning at 12 noon in Fusōkan 214. These will be open to anyone interested, but those enrolled in the course should watch at least three of the five films, and write one-page (single-spaced) reviews of two of them. Note that the Inagaki version of Chûshingura, which will be shown in two parts, counts as a single film. (15% of grade)

CLASS: “Gonza the Lancer” (Yari no Gonza); dir Shinoda Masahiro, 1986
CLASS: “Bushido: The Cruel Code of the Samurai” (Bushidō Zankoku Monogatari); dir Imai Tadashi, 1963
ON OWN: “Twilight Samurai” (Tasogare Seibei); dir Yamada Yōji (2002), 129 min.
ON OWN: “Harakiri” (*Seppuku*); dir Kobayashi Masaki (1962), 133 min.

5) *Final paper* (35% of grade)

*Textbooks and readings:*

The only text you are asked to purchase is Donald Keene’s translation of *Chushingura: The Treasury of Loyal Retainers* (Columbia University Press, 1971). All other assigned readings on CourseWorks (courseworks.columbia.edu, for which an activated Columbia ID is required): go to “Class Files” → “Shared Files.” A variety of useful books will be placed on reserve.
SYLLABUS

#00 Introductions

#01 Ways of Looking at the Samurai


“The 47 Rônin”: The Most Popular Play in Japan Reveals the Bloodthirsty Character of Our Enemy,” Life, November 1, 1943, p. 52.

Compare these two websites created on the occasion of for the “Lords of the Samurai” exhibit at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco in 2009 http://www.asianart.org/Samurai.htm, and http://www.asiansart.org/. As you will see, one is official and one is not.

#02 The Primal Samurai: From Heian to Kamakura


#03 The Warrior in his Medieval Prime: Tales and Codes

For historical background: Peter Duus, Feudalism in Japan, pp. 61-84.

Paul Varley, Warriors of Japan as Portrayed in the War Tales (University of Hawaii Press, 1994), pp. 56-66, 82-87, 167-83.

Helen McCullough, trans., Genji & Heike (Stanford University Press, 1994), ch. 9 (pp. 370-97).

Sato, Legends of the Samurai, pp. 157-87 (on Kusunoki Masashige) and pp. 188-203 (on Kô no Moronao).

#04 Sex, Violence, and Beauty in Samurai Culture
Ikegami, Eiko, The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan (Yale University Press, 1995), ch. 4 (pp. 95-117)

#05 The Sixteenth-Century Revolution

#06 Foreigners and Firearms

#07 The Establishment of the Pax Tokugawa
Wilson, Ideals of the Samurai, “The 21 Precepts of Hôjô Sôun” (pp. 74-80) and “The Last Statement of Torii Mototada” (pp. 121-125).
David Lu, Japan: A Documentary History (M. E. Sharpe, 1997), pp. 189-93 (Hideyoshi’s regulations) and 203-08 (“Laws of Military Households” (Buke shohatto).


Ikegami, The Taming of the Samurai, ch. 10 (pp. 197-222).

#08 Samurai Searching in the Era of Transition from War to Peace

Ikegami, The Taming of the Samurai, ch. 12 (pp. 241-64).


#09 Tales of Samurai Love


#10 The Forty-Seven Rônin in History: The Akô Incident of 170-03


Bitô Masahide, "The Akô Incident of 1701-1703." Translated by Henry D. Smith II. Monumenta Nipponica, 58:2 (Summer 2003), pp. 149-70.

#11 The Forty-Seven Rônin on Stage: Kanadehon Chûshingura
Takeda Izumo, Miyoshi Shôraku, and Namiki Senryû, Chushingura: The Treasury of Loyal Retainers, trans. Donald Keene (Columbia University Press, 1971), pp. 1-103 (Introductions and Acts I-VI);

#12 (Kanadehon Chûshingura Continued)

#13 FILM SHOWING: “Chushingura” (1962, dir. Inagaki Hiroshi) Part I |Part II will be shown at 12:30 pm in Samurai Film Series on Wed, Mar 9)

#14 Musui’s World

#15 The Samurai in the Meiji Restoration

#16 Women Samurai and the Women of the Samurai


#17 The Birth of the Martial Arts


#18 The Demise of the Bushi and the Birth of Modern Bushidô


#19 The Samurai and the Modern Military

*REVIEW* (from start of course): Karl Friday, “Bushidô or Bull: A Medieval Historian’s Perspective on the Imperial Army and the Japanese Warrior Tradition.”


NEW: Doris Bargen, “The Sword and the Brush,” from *Suicidal Honor: General Nogi and the Writings of Mori Ogai and Natsume Soseki* (Univ. of Hawai’i Press, 2006), pp. 64-81.


Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, *Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalisms: The Militarization of Aesthetics in Japanese History* (University of Chicago Press, 2002), Ch. 5 (“The Tokkôtai Operation,” pp. 157-85), and the introductory sections of Ch. 6 (“Five Tokkôtai Pilots”), pp. 186-193), and also sample some of the following descriptions of the writings of five different pilots (pp. 193-239).
#20 Mishima Yukio and the Way of the Samurai


#21 The Samurai in Film

**FILMS TO WATCH:**

“Seppuku” (Eng: ‘Harakiri’); dir Kobayashi Masaki (1962); 133 min.

“Tasogare Seibei” (Eng: ‘Twilight Samurai’); dir Yamada Yôji (2002); 129 min. **ALSO:** if you have the DVD version, be sure to watch the bonus section interviews with Yamada Yoji and Sanada Masayuki.

**READINGS (all on CourseWorks):**


4) Thornton, *ibid.*, Ch. 12, “Traditional Narrative and Yamada Yoji” (pp. 173-92). **NOTE:** This entire chapter is about “Twilight Samurai” (*Tasogare Seibei*), of which I have asked you to read only the pages assigned, but the last part (pp. 193-203) is included in the file in the hopes that you might be interested in reading this as well.

5) YOUR REVIEWS of the films we already watched as a class: “Yari no Gonza” (1986), *Bushido zanokoku mongatari* (1963) and “Chushingura” (1962).