

## **The Samurai Tradition in Japanese Literature and Film**

Rutgers University

Spring 2005

Professor Paul Schalow

### **Course Description**

Explores the historical and contemporary image of the samurai warrior through analysis and discussion of Japanese literary texts, writings on samurai philosophy, and feature-length films. All readings in English translation.

The course is divided into three units:

**Unit 1** “Death with Honor” addresses samurai concepts and practices such as seppuku (hara-kiri), vengeance, and junshi (following one’s lord in death) in relation to the famous Akō Vendetta of 1702.

**Unit 2** “Warriors and Warfare” focuses on pivotal figures in Japan’s history who remain central to cinematic representations of the samurai.

**Unit 3** “Samurai Heroes” presents three archetypes that appear regularly in cinematic depictions of samurai: the skilled fighter, the vengeful warrior, and the family man. The archetypes are explored in terms of the ethical issues they raise.

A one-page response sheet is due for each reading. Response sheets turned in on the day of the assigned reading earn 2.5 points or 2 points depending on quality; late submissions earn 1 point. A short five-page paper on an assigned topic is due at the end of each unit. Final grades are based on my assessment of the ten response sheets (25%) and three 5-page papers (25% each).

### **Required Texts** (for purchase at Rutgers Bookstore, Ferren Mall)

1. Hiroaki Sato, Legends of the Samurai (Overlook Press, 1995)
2. Donald Keene, tr. Chūshingura: The Treasury of Loyal Retainers (Columbia UP, 1971)
3. Miyamoto Musashi, The Book of Five Rings (Shambhala Classics, 2000)

## Class Schedule

18 Jan Introduction to the course.

### Unit 1—Death With Honor: the Akō Vendetta

- 20 Reading: Sato, Legends of the Samurai “Yamamoto Tsunetomo: Hagakure (Hidden in Leaves)” pp. 287-303. **Response sheet #1**  
Film clip: “Japan: Memoirs of a Secret Empire” (PBS, 2003) part 1
- 25 Reading: Sato, Legends of the Samurai, “The Forty-Seven Samurai: An Eyewitness Account, with Arguments” pp. 304-338. **Response Sheet #2**
- 27 Film clip: Scene when Lord Asano attacks Kira in the Shōgun’s castle and is ordered to commit seppuku, from “Chushingura: The Loyal 47 Retainers” (Chūshingura, 1962) dir. Inagaki (part 1) and “The 47 Rōnin” (Genroku Chūshingura, 1941) dir. Mizoguchi (part 1).
- 1 Feb Reading: Reading: Keene, Chūshingura: Treasury of Loyal Retainers pp. 1-76, Acts 1-4 (focus on Act 4). **Response sheet #3**
- 3 Film clip: Scene when Oishi visits Asano’s widow, then leads the attack on Kira’s mansion, from “Chushingura: The Loyal 47 Retainers” (Chūshingura, 1962) dir. Inagaki (part 2) and “The 47 Rōnin” (Genroku Chūshingura, 1941) dir. Mizoguchi (part 2).
- 8 Film clip: Scene when Oishi takes Kira’s head to Lord Asano’s tomb and he and his men await their punishment, from “Chushingura: The Loyal 47 Retainers” (Chūshingura, 1962) dir. Inagaki (part 2) and “The 47 Rōnin” (Genroku Chūshingura, 1941) dir. Mizoguchi (part 2)
- 10 Reading: Keene, Chūshingura: Treasury of Loyal Retainers pp. 77-180, Acts 5-11 (focus on Act 7). **Response sheet #4**
- 15 Film: “Japan: Memoirs of a Secret Empire” (PBS, 2003) part 2
- 17 **First 5-page paper due.** Topic: Discuss the Akō Vendetta in terms of the samurai concept of death with honor. Explain the practice of seppuku, vendettas, and junshi (following one’s lord in death) in relation to the incident and clarify how competing allegiances made it difficult to determine what constituted an “honorable” death in this case. Discuss how the vendetta was dramatized differently in the puppet theater (1748) and in films by Mizoguchi (b&w, 1941) and Inagaki (color, 1962). Give specific examples from readings and films to support your discussion.

## Unit 2—Warriors and Warfare

- 22 Lecture: Samurai and the imperial court  
Readings: Hiroaki Sato, Legends of the Samurai, “Raikō and Others: Tales of Archery” to “Minamoto no Yoshiie: The Samurai of the Greatest Bravery under Heaven” pp. 80-109. **Response sheet #5**
- 24 Lecture: The Minamoto and Taira conflict  
Readings: Hiroaki Sato, Legends of the Samurai, “Minamoto no Yoshitsune: A Hero Hounded” pp. 110-156. **Response sheet #6**
- 1 Mar Film: “Men Who Tread On the Tiger’s Tail” (Tora no o wo fumu otoko, 1945) dir. Kurosawa (60 mins.)
- 3 Readings: Hiroaki Sato, Legends of the Samurai, “Kusunoki Masashige: A Guerrilla of Unflinching Loyalty” pp. 157-187. **Response sheet #7**
- 8 Reading: Hiroaki Sato, Legends of the Samurai, “Kō no Moronao: When a Warrior Falls in Love” pp. 188-203. **Response sheet #8**
- 10 Reading: Hiroaki Sato, Legends of the Samurai, “Takeda Shingen and Uesugi Kenshin: Two Warlords” pp. 204-231. **Response sheet #9**  
Film clip: “Samurai Banners” (Fūrin kazan, 1969) dir. Inagaki, 165 mins.
- 12-20 SPRING RECESS
- 22 Readings: Sato, Legends of the Samurai “Miyamoto Musashi: Gorin no Sho (Book of Five Elements)” pp. 254-272; and Miyamoto Musashi, The Book of Five Rings pp. 3-62. **Response sheet #10**  
Film clip: “The Duel at Ganryū Island” (Samurai Trilogy III, 1956) dir. Inagaki.
- 24 Readings: Yagyū Munenori, The Book of Family Traditions on the Art of War, pp. 65-111 (in The Book of Five Rings). **Response sheet #11**  
Film clip: “Wolf and Cub” (Kozure ōkami)
- 29 Reading: Sato, Legends of the Samurai “The Abe Family” by Mori Ogai, pp. 342-379. **Response sheet #12**
- 31 **Second 5-page paper due.** Topic: Choose one of the samurai figures from Unit 2 and describe how he is depicted in literature and/or film. Discuss what deeds or accomplishments made him a legend and what aspects of his character or thought contributed to his fame. Address the ways that literary or cinematic depictions may differ from the historical facts. Give specific examples from readings and/or films to support your discussion.

### Unit 3—Samurai Heroes

- 5 Apr Lecture: The skilled fighter  
Film: “Sanjūrō” (Tsubaki Sanjūrō, 1962) dir. Kurosawa (96 mins.)
- 7 “Sanjūrō” cont.
- 12 Lecture: The vengeful warrior  
Film: “Harakiri” (1962) dir. Kobayashi (134 mins.)
- 14 “Hara Kiri” cont.
- 19 Lecture: The family man  
Film: “Twilight Samurai” (Tasogare Seibei, 2002) dir. Yamada (129 mins.)
- 21 “Twilight Samurai” cont.
- 26 Lecture: The new-style samurai  
Film: “Samurai Fiction” (1998) dir. Nakano (111 mins.)
- 28 “Samurai Fiction” cont.
- 4 May **Final 5-page paper due** in Scott Hall Rm. 330. Topic: Select one of the samurai archetypes studied in Unit 3 and discuss it in detail. What aspects of the samurai ethos does the figure support or critique? Be attentive in your analysis to the ways in which your hero’s story is set in the past but in fact serves as a critique of contemporary ethical concerns and issues. You may discuss the figure in relation to one of the films viewed in class or in relation to any other relevant Japanese samurai film.