

HUM-444

Contemporary Japan I

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Cursus	Sem.	Type
Humanities and Social Sciences	MA1	Obl.

Language of teaching	English
Credits	3
Session	Winter
Semester	Fall
Exam	During the semester
Workload	90h
Weeks	14
Hours	3 weekly
Courses	2 weekly
Project	1 weekly
Number of positions	60

Summary

This introductory course is an inquiry into the culture of Japan - its thought and way of life - that is designed to foster future study of the archipelago. It elucidates the specificities of a Japanese identity that is imbued with both tradition and openness to innovation.

Content

Culture and thought as mirrored in cinema and anime

Specifics in four parts

Do – The Way

Keys of understanding: Japanese society after the opening of Japan to the West at the end of the 19th century.
 Spirituality and martial arts: Akira Kurosawa's film *Judo Saga (Sanshiro Sugata)* 1943
 Introduction to Zen: traditional as in Japanese temples and in a contemporary global context.

Professional and private life

Several reflections on the lives of women and men from the postwar period to the present day
 Examples of arranged marriage Yasujiro Ozu's film *Banshun (Late Spring)* 1949
 Communication through a third party

First examination: written answer to one thematic among five

Cool Japan – Aging Japan: innovation and ethics

Animé and science fiction: Osamu Tezuka
 From Hiroshima to Fukushima: questioning ethics in a nuclear context
 Visualizing dreams: Satoshi Kon's animé *Paprika* 2006

Contemporary Japan

From technological visions to reality: "Soul" in Japanese robotics, by Raphaël Holzer
 Nature – nurture – Shinto as a social reinvigorator: Naomi Kawase's film *An (Sweet bean)* 2016
 Synthesis

Second examination: research plan for the spring semester (individual or as a group)

Keywords

Interculturality, Do, Shinto, Zen, arts, communication, robotics, food, nurture, innovation, ethics, cinema, anime

POLY-perspective :

- interdisciplinary perspective
- creative perspective

<https://www.epfl.ch/schools/cdh/cdhs-vision/>

Learning Prerequisites

Recommended courses

Japon Contemporain A BA5
 Histoire de l'Asie contemporaine A BA3
 Histoire de l'Asie contemporaine B BA6
 Chine Contemporaine BA4
 Economie de la Chine BA5
 Chine: une nouvelle puissance globale? BA6
 Introduction au monde russe BA6

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, the student must be able to:

- Develop a critical methodology for studying ethnocentric thinking
- Interpret cultural stereotypes attached to Japan (spirituality, gender, arts)
- Develop an intellectual argument on a proposition relevant to the course
- Synthesize the array of knowledge necessary to have a good understanding of social integration in Japan
- Synthesize the contributions of contemporary Japan (innovation, work ethics, spirituality, robotics, arts, architecture, gardens, food)
- Compose or write a paper
- Use a work methodology appropriate to the task

Transversal skills

- Communicate effectively with professionals from other disciplines.
- Communicate effectively, being understood, including across different languages and cultures.
- Take account of the social and human dimensions of the engineering profession.
- Demonstrate the capacity for critical thinking

Teaching methods

Fall semester: **lecture and visiting speakers + supervision** (English/French) of the elaboration of a research plan
 Spring semester: **supervision** of research, mini-colloquium, a paper sample will be furnished to students

Expected student activities

Elaboration of an individual or group research plan, active participation, critical lecture of articles and books, working discipline and time management, writing skills

- Fall semester: written examination, research plan (two pages: title, issue, detailed plan, bibliography)
- Spring semester: abstract (250 words), participation to a mini-colloquium, paper (4000 words)

Assessment methods

Fall semester: written examination (50%), quality of the research plan (50%)
 Spring semester: oral presentation at the mini-colloquium (50%), paper (50%)

Supervision

Office hours	Yes
Assistants	Yes
Forum	No

Resources

Bibliography

Bibliography will be furnished (see below), plus specialized resources on the moodle

- Yoshiko Okuyama *Japanese mythology in film: a semiotic approach to reading film and anime* Lexington Books 2016
- Mariko Walter, Jacqueline I. Stone *Death and the afterlife in Japanese Buddhism* Hawai Press 2016
- Akira Nakamura, Ronald J. Hrebenar *Party Politics in Japan* Routledge 2015
- Ayako Kano *Japanese Feminist Debates* Hawai Press 2016
- Kenzaburo Ôé *Teach us to outgrow our madness: four short novels* Grove Atlantic 2011

Ressources en bibliothèque

- [Yoshiko Okuyama Japanese mythology in film](#)
- [Mariko Walter, Jacqueline I. Stone Death and the afterlife in Japanese Buddhism](#)
- [Akira Nakamura, Ronald J. Hrebenar Party Politics in Japan](#)
- [Ayako Kano Japanese Feminist Debates](#)
- [Kenzaburo Ôé Teach us to outgrow our madness](#)