

# JAPANESE CIVILIZATION

HIST 4393 • MWF 10:10-11:05AM • Fine Arts Complex 0012

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Office Hours: MW 8:30-9:30;  
F 11:15-12:15



**COURSE OVERVIEW** This course surveys Japanese history from its premodern past to its present, examining how myths, legends, and invented traditions have shaped Japanese identity and been deployed for political purposes across different eras. Through lecture, art, film, and translated texts, we explore the construction of imperial legitimacy, warrior ideals, and national narratives—while also attending to the lives of farmers, merchants, and others often excluded from official histories.

The first half of the course examines Japan's earliest civilizations and their continental connections, Heian court culture, the rise of warrior society, and Tokugawa rule. The second half turns to Japan since 1868: nation-state building, empire in Asia, war, and postwar transformation. Throughout, we ask how historians distinguish between legend and reality, whose stories get told and whose get erased, and why these distinctions matter—both for understanding the past and for the politics of memory today.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

- To encounter an overview of Japanese history, from its earliest beginnings to the present
- To assess the impact of the past on present-day Japan
- To explore ethnic and cultural differences
- To think, read, and write critically
- To analyze primary and secondary sources

## ASSESSMENTS

All assignments will be discussed in detail in class and in the relevant Canvas modules.

1. Attendance/Participation (20%)

Attendance and participation support learning by engaging students in sustained discussion, encouraging respectful consideration of diverse perspectives, and developing confidence in articulating historical interpretations in a public setting.

2. Exams (3) (40% total)

By practicing recall and application of key material, exams help students build a strong foundation of historical knowledge that allows them to better understand context, assess evidence, and explain why events unfolded as they did.

3. Semester Project (40%)

Students will practice the core methods of historical inquiry: asking researchable questions, locating and interpreting primary sources, analyzing evidence critically, and acknowledging the limits of what sources can tell us. The project also builds skills in public-facing historical communication and digital presentation.

Components: Project Proposal (5%); Annotated Bibliography (10%); Project Check-in (5%); Final Submission (20%)

KEY DATES			
<b>Exam 1</b>	Feb. 13	<b>Project Proposal</b>	Jan. 30
<b>Exam 2</b>	March 27	<b>Annotated Bibliography</b>	March 1
<b>Exam 3</b>	April 24	<b>Project Check-in</b>	April 12
		<b>Final Submission</b>	Finals Week

GRADING SCALE		
<b>A</b>	>89.5	Work of exceptional quality that demonstrates sophisticated understanding and engagement with the material
<b>B</b>	79.5–89.4	Work that demonstrates solid command of the material and effectively addresses assignment criteria
<b>C</b>	69.5–79.4	Work that demonstrates adequate understanding of the material but with notable gaps or limitations in execution
<b>D</b>	59.5–69.4	Work that demonstrates insufficient understanding of the material and/or fails to meet basic assignment requirements
<b>F</b>	≤ 59.5	Work that does not demonstrate meaningful engagement with the material or assignment requirements
<b><i>Final grades will not be rounded up.</i></b>		

## COURSE POLICIES

### MISSING CLASS

To account for illnesses, emergencies, and other unexpected life events or responsibilities, each student may miss up to six classes without penalty. Absences related to university-sponsored events (e.g., student athletes playing in a scheduled game or match) do not count toward this total.

Because class activities and discussions are central to the learning experience, arriving more than 10 minutes late will be counted as an absence.

Regular attendance and punctuality help create a shared learning environment and reflect professional expectations common in many workplaces. **When a class meeting is missed, students are responsible for keeping up with course material and assignments. Please do not email the Professor to ask for a summary of what was covered in a missed class or if you “missed anything important.”**

If you miss class, the most effective way to stay current is to:

- complete the assigned readings,
- review the posted lecture slides, and
- consult with a classmate for notes.

After taking these steps, Prof. Cole is happy to meet with you to discuss specific questions or areas of confusion. Please note that it is not possible to recreate an entire missed class session during office hours.

### EXAMS

There are three scheduled exams for this course. The lowest exam score will be dropped. Students who miss an exam due to illness, a personal emergency, or other extenuating circumstances should notify Prof. Cole as soon as possible, ideally before the exam or within 24 hours. Makeup exams are granted at the instructor's discretion; students may be asked to provide documentation depending on the circumstances. Conflicts due to personal travel or other foreseeable scheduling issues do not qualify for a makeup exam.

Exams are based on lecture material and assigned readings. **As this is an upper division course, no study guide will be provided for exams.**

### LATE ASSIGNMENTS

Late submissions received within two days after the deadline will receive full credit, no questions asked.

After the 48-hour grace period, late submissions will incur a penalty of one letter grade per day. Assignments submitted more than one week after the original deadline require prior approval from Professor Cole to be accepted.

Note: Canvas will automatically flag assignments as late if they are submitted after the original deadline. However, submissions within the 48-hour grace period will not be penalized. Only assignments submitted after this period will incur late penalties.

Students are responsible for managing deadlines and planning ahead to avoid late penalties.

### **ASSIGNED & RECOMMENDED READINGS**

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The assigned **TEXTBOOK READINGS** (e.g., Nancy Stalker's text) are designed to provide students with an in-depth overview of the topics that will be explored during the lectures. By engaging with these readings before attending class, students will be better prepared to understand and contextualize the material discussed in lectures. Additionally, these readings serve as essential resources for students who may be unable to attend a particular lecture or have gaps in their notes.

Assigned (i.e., required) **SECONDARY SOURCE READINGS** include news articles, podcasts, and short videos that connect the historical topics we examine in class to contemporary issues. Students should expect exam questions related to these readings. For example:

Compare how Robert Booth's "How millions of black and Asian men were mobilised in first [world] war" and the King's College London article "The colour of war" challenge the typical representation of WWI as a purely European conflict. What alternative historical narrative does these articles construct about who fought the war?

A good way to study and prepare for questions related to the secondary source readings is to write in your notes a short paragraph explaining the main idea of any assigned reading, podcast, or video.

Assigned (i.e., required) **PRIMARY SOURCE READINGS** enable us to engage directly with the past. We will explore textual, visual, and auditory primary sources throughout the semester. Students can expect short-answer questions on exams related to primary sources. For example:

Using Ōkuma Shigenobu's "Illusions of the White Race" and the March 1st Declaration (1919), explain how these two texts show contradictions in Japan's position within the imperial world. How does Ōkuma's defense of Japan's equality with Western powers contrast with Korean calls for independence from Japanese rule? What do these differences reveal about Japan's identity as both a victim and an agent of imperialism?

## CLASSROOM MATERIALS & CONDUCT

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The following policies are intended to maintain the integrity of course materials and ensure a respectful and productive learning environment.

**Recordings:** Recording (audio or video) of lectures, seminars, or classroom activities is strictly prohibited without explicit permission from both the instructor and all participating students. This includes recordings or transcriptions created using AI tools, such as Otter.ai. Authorized recordings, including those made for ADA accommodations, and all course materials (including those posted on Canvas) are intended solely for personal or group study within this course. Sharing materials outside the course without explicit permission is not allowed.

**Lecture Slides:** PowerPoint slides are provided as a visual aid to supplement your learning, highlighting key questions, terms, dates, quotes, and names of individuals, places, and events. Slides are not a substitute for your own notes; attending class and taking your own notes is essential for understanding and performing well on exams. Slides are a privilege provided to support your learning and may be revoked if misused, including unauthorized sharing or use of AI tools to reproduce or distribute content.

**Cell Phones and Personal Devices:** To maintain focus and respect for classmates, cell phones, smart watches, and other personal electronic devices should be silenced and put away during class. Laptops or tablets may be used only for note-taking or other class-related activities approved by the instructor.

To get the most out of lectures, students are encouraged to focus on the material as it is presented and take their own notes. This supports critical thinking and helps students process historical ideas and evidence in real time. Questions or requests for clarification are always welcome during class discussion or office hours.

**Note: Any visible use of cell phones or other unauthorized devices during class may result in a reduction of a student's participation/attendance grade.**

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY & AI

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**UT Tyler Honor Code:** I embrace honor and integrity. Therefore, I choose not to lie, cheat, or steal, nor to accept the actions of those who do. "Academic Dishonesty" includes, but is not limited to: cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable (in whole or in part) to another person without giving sufficient credit, taking an examination for another person, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to take unfair academic advantage by the student (such as, but not limited to: submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructor, providing false or misleading information in an effort to receive a postponement or an extension on a test, quiz, or assignment), or the attempt to commit such acts.

If any academic integrity violations occur, Prof. Cole will forward all related materials to the Dean of Student affairs.

[UT Tyler Academic Dishonesty Statement](#)

**UT Tyler Statement on AI:** UT Tyler is committed to exploring and using artificial intelligence (AI) tools as appropriate for the discipline and task undertaken. We encourage discussing AI tools' ethical, societal, philosophical, and disciplinary implications. All uses of AI should be acknowledged as this aligns with our commitment to honor and integrity, as noted in UT Tyler's Honor Code. Faculty and students must not use protected information, data, or copyrighted materials when using any AI tool. Additionally, users should be aware that AI tools rely on predictive models to generate content that may appear correct but is sometimes shown to be incomplete, inaccurate, taken without attribution from other sources, and/or biased. Consequently, an AI tool should not be considered a substitute for traditional approaches to research. You are ultimately responsible for the quality and content of the information you submit. Misusing AI tools that violate the guidelines specified for this course is considered a breach of academic integrity. The student will be subject to disciplinary actions as outlined in UT Tyler's Academic Integrity Policy.

**AI Policy for HIST 4393:** Students may not use generative AI tools (such as ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, or similar) to draft, revise, or complete any portion of their assignments in this course. This includes generating text, paraphrasing, outlining, or checking grammar. The goal is for you to develop your own analytical writing and critical thinking skills—capacities that will serve you well beyond this class. If you have questions about whether a specific tool is permitted, ask before using it. Suspected violations will result in a conversation with Prof. Cole; confirmed violations will receive a zero for the assignment and be reported to the Dean of Students.

### **ACCESSIBILITY**

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Your experience in this class is important to me. In addition to any accommodations you may have, I hope you'll speak with me about any barriers you experience to learning in this course. I am interested in working with you to find ways to engage in the core learning of this course and to provide opportunities for you to demonstrate your learning to the best of your abilities.

If you have a disability, please contact the Student Accessibility and Resources (SAR) office at UT Tyler (<https://www.uttyler.edu/disability-services/>) to request accommodations. Your experience in this class is important, and I am committed to working with you to ensure equitable access to learning.

## TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

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### UNIT 1: MYTHS IN THE MAKING

#### WEEK 1: THE ORIGINS OF “JAPAN”

What is Japan? What does mythology and archaeology reveal about the origins of “Japan”?

- Jan. 12: Orientation
- Jan. 14: Jomon (~14,500 – 300 BCE) – Yayoi (300 BCE – 300 CE)
- Jan. 16: Yayoi (300 BCE – 300 CE)

#### WEEK 2: IMPERIAL BEGINNINGS (2 days – holiday)

How did Yamato kings consolidate power to become emperors? What role did Buddhism play?

- Jan. 19: NO CLASS—HOLIDAY
- Jan. 21: Yamato [+ Kofun] (300 CE – 710 CE)
- Jan. 23: Shinto & Buddhism

#### WEEK 3: EMPERORS & ARISTOCRATS

How did Heian court culture shape Japanese aesthetics and gender ideals? How has *The Tale of Genji* been adapted across time for different purposes?

- Jan. 26: Nara (710 – 794)
- Jan. 28: Heian (794 – 1185)
- Jan. 30: *The Tale of Genji* discussion

**Sunday, January 30: PROJECT PROPOSAL DUE**

#### WEEK 4: THE RISE OF WARRIORS

How did provincial warriors rise to challenge aristocratic power? How do medieval realities differ from later samurai myths?

- Feb. 2: Kamakura (1192-1333)
- Feb. 4: Muromachi (1338-1573)
- Feb. 6: Watch clips of *Throne of Blood*; *Tales of the Heike* discussion

#### WEEK 5: WARFARE & CHAOS

Why did a century of warfare engulf Japan, and how did warlords bring an end to the chaos? Why is the Imjin War remembered so differently in Japan and Korea?

- Feb. 9: Sengoku (1573-1603)
- Feb. 11: Unification
- Feb. 13: UNIT 1 EXAM

## UNIT 2: INVENTING TRADITIONS

### WEEK 6: TOGUKAWA CONTROL (1603-1868)

How did the Tokugawa maintain control for 250 years, and how did peacetime transform warrior identity?

- Feb. 16: Internal control and external relations
- Feb. 18: Loyalty and Samurai Values
- Feb. 20: *The 47 Ronin* discussion

### WEEK 7: EDO POPULAR CULTURE (1603-1868)

How did commoner culture challenge elite dominance? What role did the "floating world" play in Edo society?

- Feb. 23: Urban Culture: Printing, Publishing, and the Pleasure Districts
- Feb. 25: Kabuki and other arts
- Feb. 27: Watch clips from *Samurai Champloo*; discussion

### Sunday, March 1: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE

### WEEK 8: COLLAPSE & REVIVAL

What caused the collapse of the Tokugawa system? How did the Meiji government construct a modern nation-state using selective interpretations of the past?

- March 2: Internal Troubles, External Threats (Tokugawa Collapse)
- March 4: Meiji Nation-State Building
- March 6: Watch clips from *Meiji Gekken: 1874*; discussion

### **[WEEK 9: SPRING BREAK March 9-13]**

### WEEK 10: MEIJI MODERNIZATION

How did Meiji Japan create "timeless traditions" for modern purposes? Why did they need to invent bushido?

- March 16: [No Class—Prof. at Conference]; documentary or film TBD
- March 18: Bunmei Kaika – Civilization and Enlightenment
- March 20: Fukoku Kyohei – Rich Nation, Strong Army

### WEEK 11: IMPERIALISM

How did Japan deploy ancient myths to justify modern imperialism? How did this differ from European colonial ideologies?

- March 23: Taiwan & Korea
- March 25: The Clash
- March 27: UNIT 2 EXAM



## UNIT 1: MOBILIZING MYTHS

### WEEK 12: WAR

How did myths of divine protection and warrior spirit shape Japan's wartime mobilization? Why invoke symbols from 1281 in 1944?

- March 30: War in China
- April 3: War in the Pacific
- April 5: Watch clips from *Space Battleship Yamato*; discussion

### WEEK 13: POSTWAR DEVASTATION & RECOVERY

How did Japan and America construct competing narratives about defeat, occupation, and recovery?

- April 6: The Occupation
- April 8: The Economic Miracle
- April 10: Watch *Our Job in Japan*; Discussion

**Sunday, April 12: PROJECT CHECK-IN DUE**

### WEEK 14: LOST DECADES

Is Japan uniquely "disaster-prone"? How do disaster narratives of resilience (*gaman*) shape national identity—and who benefits from these narratives?

- April 13: Disaster Japan
- April 15: Triple Disaster
- April 17: Watch clips from *Japan Sinks 2020*; Discussion

### WEEK 15: TO THE PRESENT

How do contemporary memory wars reflect ongoing struggles over Japan's past? Whose history matters? Whose future?

- April 20: Memory Wars: Yasukuni, Textbooks, Comfort Women
- April 22: Contemporary Japan - Whose History? Whose Future?
- April 24: UNIT 3 EXAM

**Finals Week: FINAL PROJECT DUE**