

ASC Course Syllabus
2012 Death in Traditional Japanese Literature in Asian Context

Syllabus

Course Description:

This course surveys the literary treatment of death and killing in the Japanese tradition from the 7th to the 18th centuries. It is both a chronological introduction to the literary tradition and an investigation of Japanese conceptions of death, with particular attention paid to origins in mainland culture and contrasts with that culture. It takes its examples from English translations of the early mythological books, song / poetry collections, and popular didactic literature of the 8th century, from the poetry, fiction and diaries of the court period (800 - 1200), from warrior literature (to 1600), from dramatic forms and popular literature from the period of printing (1600 to 1900). Video and other media will be brought in to support the readings. Major goals of the course are: (1) to explore the way in which a number of approaches to death have arisen and been integrated within the tradition, and (2) to help students learn to read closely and consciously materials from within a tradition, and to understand something of the nature of a literary tradition.

Grading Policy:

The final grades are accumulated as follows:

- (1) Class participation component = 30%
Consisting of 10% for attendance, 20% for active and relevant participation.
- (2) Final examination = 70%

Readings:

The readings for the course will be distributed in class.

No textbook covers the content of the course. Nevertheless students who would like some background information on Japanese traditional literature might be interested in looking at:

Kato Shuichi, 1979. *A History of Japanese Literature*, volume 1, (Kodansha) or
Donald Keene, 1993. *Seeds in the Heart* (Henry Holt).

These are not pre-requisites for the course.

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Class Schedule:

The following schedule is subject to change. Any changes will be announced in class well in advance. Listed are the textual sources of primary materials read in translation. Supporting video materials will be shown or recommended.

INTRODUCTORY SECTION

Organisational Aspects, Introduction to Japan: Geography, History, Literature, General discussion of pre-Buddhist attitudes to death.

SECTION 2 The Cosmology of Death: Myths, legends and politics of the early court (to 9th century)

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|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Mythical death | selections from <i>Kojiki</i> |
| Ritual death poetry | selections from <i>Manyōshū</i> , |
| Death to explain life | <i>Nihon Ryōiki</i> |

SECTION 3 Death in the Heian Court (to the 12th century)

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|------------------------|---|
| Waka poetics and death | <i>Kokinshū, Ise Monogatari, Tosa Nikki</i> |
| Jealousy and death | <i>Genji Monogatari</i> |
| The good death | <i>Eiga Monogatari,</i> |

SECTION 4 Death as the warrior's fate (to 16th century)

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|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Warrior Deaths | <i>Konjaku Monogatari</i> |
| Suicide and Honour | <i>Taiheiki</i> |
| Zen, haiku and death | Chinese and Japanese death poems |

SECTION 5 Death as aesthetic and literary, dramatic device (to 19th century)

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|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| The regretful dead | <i>Mugen</i> Noh plays |
| Death in the puppet theatre | Puppet plays |
| Dying for your lord | Mori Ogai. |