

Keio University Syllabus and Timetable

INTRODUCTION TO JAPANESE CINEMA 1

Subtitle	A History of Film in Japan
Lecturer(s)	MES, THOMAS P.
Credit(s)	2
Academic Year/Semester	2025 Spring
Day/Period	Fri.4
Campus	Mita
Classroom	411
Class Format	Face-to-face classes (conducted mainly in-person)
Registration Number	08913
Faculty/Graduate School	INTERNATIONAL CENTER
Year Level	2, 3, 4
Grade Type	S, A, B, C, D
K-Number	CIN-CO-00123-212-01

▼ Detail

Course Contents/Objectives/Teaching Method/Intended Learning Outcome

This course explores the origins of cinema in Japan and its development up to the present day. It will look into cultural influences that shaped approaches to filmmaking as well as narrative conventions and genres. We will also investigate how Japanese films have shaped foreign views of Japan and Japanese culture. Particular attention will be paid to issues and problems of film study in relation to cinema from Japan, including the construction of the “Japaneseness” of Japanese films.

Goals:

- To develop knowledge of the course topic (Film in Japan) and the research and debates that have been central to it.
- To develop general skills in the critical reading of and reflecting on academic texts.
- To apply these skills to the course topic in the shape of analytical papers, including on films viewed in class.

Active Learning Methods ⓘ [Description](#)

Not applicable

Preparatory Study

The students are recommended to read the assigned texts AFTER each week's course.

Course Plan

Lesson 1

Japan and its cinema, through Western eyes
Incl. introduction, course structure and scheduling
Required reading: Yoshimoto

Lesson 2

FILM SCREENING: *Rashomon* (*Rashōmon*, dir: Kurosawa Akira, 1950)

Lesson 3

Rashomon in the thicket of geopolitics

Lesson 4

The beginnings of cinema: the sound of silent movies

Required reading: Gerow

Recommended viewing: *A Page of Madness* (*Kurutta ippeiji*, director: Kinugasa Teinosuke, 1932)

Lesson 5

Sound, modernism, and the first Golden Age

Required reading: Wada-Marciano (1)

Recommended viewing: *Mr. Thank You* (*Arigatō-san*, director: Shimizu Hiroshi, 1936)

Lesson 6

Cinema in war and occupation

Required reading: Hirano

Recommended viewings:

China Night (*Shina no yoru*, director: Fushimizu Osamu, 1940)

No Regrets for Our Youth (*Waga seishun ni kuinashi*, regie: Kurosawa Akira, 1946)

Lesson 7

Ozu and Naruse: masters of the everyday

Required readings: Bordwell, Russell

Recommended viewing:

An Autumn Afternoon (*Sanma no aji*, director: Ozu Yasujirō, 1963)

When a Woman Ascends the Stairs (*Onna ga kaidan o noboru toki*, director: Naruse Mikio, 1960)

Lesson 8

Kurosawa and Mizoguchi: masters of the historical drama

Required readings: Prince, Mellen

Recommended viewing:

Seven Samurai (*Shichinin no samurai*, director: Kurosawa Akira, 1954)

The Life of Oharu (*Saikaku ichidai no onna*, director: Mizoguchi Kenji, 1952)

Lesson 9

Yakuza, samurai, and Japanese cowboys: the genre films of the studio era

Required reading: Schrader

Recommended viewing: *Tokyo Drifter* (*Tokyo nagaremono*, director: Suzuki Seijun, 1965)

Lesson 10

“Nūberu bāgu”: young and angry in the 1960s

Required reading: Desser

Recommended viewing: *The Sun’s Burial* (*Taiyō no hakaba*, regie: Ōshima Nagisa, 1960)

Lesson 11

New genres and the fall of the studios

Required reading: Zahlten

Recommended viewing: *Sailor Suit and Machine Gun* (*Sērāfuku to kikanjū*, director: Sōmai Shinji, 1981)

Lesson 12

Another new wave? The West’s “rediscovery” of Japanese cinema (1989-2004)

Required reading: Mes

Recommended viewing: *Maborosi* (*Maboroshi no hikari*, director: Koreeda Hirokazu, 1995)

Lesson 13

Japanese cinema in the digital age

Required reading: Wada-Marciano (2)

Recommended viewing: *The Stranger from Afar* (*Marebito*, director: Shimizu Takashi, 2004)

Lesson 14

The long road: female filmmakers in Japan

Required reading: Saito

Recommended viewing: *The Eternal Breasts* (*Chibusa yo eien nare*, director: Tanaka Kinuyō, 1955)

Other

Any additions to the syllabus will be communicated during the first class.

Method of Evaluation

The course will contain three assignments: **one mid-term paper** based on the film viewed in class (*Rashomon*), **creating a research question** for your final term paper and **the final term paper** on a topic of your choosing related to the course.

Writing of the final term paper will happen in two steps: a first draft and a final draft

You will be graded for each of the papers. Your final grade for the course will then be decided in the following manner:

Mid-term paper: 35%

Research question: 15%

Final paper grade: 50%

All deadlines will be communicated during the first class.

Textbooks

None

Reference Books

These readings will be available through K-LMS:

David Bordwell, *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988, pp. 31-50

David Desser, *Eros Plus Massacre*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988, pp. 39-57

A.A. Gerow, “The Benshi’s New Face: Defining Cinema in Taishō Japan”, *Iconics* 3 (1994), pp. 69-86

Kyoko Hirano, “The Occupation and Japanese Cinema”, *The Occupation of Japan: Arts and Culture*, ed. Thomas W. Burkman. Norfolk, 1988, pp. 142-153

Joan Mellen, “History through Cinema: Mizoguchi Kenji’s *The Life of Oharu* (1952)”, *Japanese Cinema: Texts and Contexts*, eds. Alastair Phillips and Julian Stringer. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2007, pp. 90-101

Tom Mes, “V-Cinema: How Home Video Revitalized Japanese Film and Mystified Film Historians”, *Introducing Japanese Popular Culture*, ed. Alisa Freedman and Toby Slade. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2017, pp. 216-226

Stephen Prince, *The Warrior’s Camera: The Cinema of Akira Kurosawa*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991, pp. 3-31
Catherine Russell, “From women's writing to women's films in 1950s Japan: Hayashi Fumiko and Naruse Mikio”, *Asian Journal of Communication*

Lecturer's Comments to Students

This is a lecture course.
Class format for this course is FACE-TO-FACE.
All class materials and feedback on assignments will be supplied through K-LMS.

Question/Comments

Dr. Tom Mes (t.mes@keio.jp)