HUMA 5451
IMAGES OF JAPAN
Spring 2023
Tuesdays, 12:00 – 2:50 pm
Rm 5566, Lift 27-28

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION
Baryon Tensor Posadas
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COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course takes up the visual and textual practices through which an imagined Japan has been constructed across history as a point of departure for interrogating the premises and practices of cross-cultural analysis more broadly. In examining non-Japanese texts' representations of Japan, the challenge in this course is not simply to determine the accuracy or authenticity of the various texts' respective representations, but to ask what is at stake in the deployment of “Japan” as an imagined geography. With these discussions as our point of departure, we will consider the critical and theoretical issues foregrounded by acts of looking, writing, and interpreting “Japan” to reflect on our own intellectual positions vis-a-vis acts of representing “the foreign.”

Particular emphasis will be placed on such focal points as: ethnographic cinema, the politics of travel and translation, the intersecting performances of race and gender, the uses of cultural otherness in the writing of alternate histories, and the ramifications of techno-orientalist discourse. We will consider such questions as: How do the texts in question call attention the political-economic conditions that have shaped representations of Japan at given historical conjunctures? How does the problem of gender and its intersections with discourses on race, ethnicity, or the nation complicate how we might apprehend the mechanisms through which “Japan” is imagined in fiction? How does the idea of “Japan” play out in different forms of representation, for example, filmic vs. literary representation? How might we account for the possibility of auto-orientalisms in Japanese cultural productions?

No preceding knowledge of Japanese language, literature, or history is required. All the required readings are available in English, and discussions are conducted in English.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

• Articulate key issues in cross-cultural analysis vis-à-vis Japan and beyond.
• Produce textual analyses of films and fictions with particular attention to how texts' formal devices, narrative strategies, and patterns of focalization mediate their practices of cross-cultural representation.
• Identify broader patterns of representation in works of film and fiction that take up Japan (and Asia) as their object of interest.
• Produce their own written critiques of texts that engage in cross-cultural representation.
• Familiarize themselves with professional academic practices for communicating their work orally to an audience.

COURSE EVALUATION
Attendance and participation 20%
Discussion board 10%
Class presentation 20%
Conference paper 20%
Final paper 30%

**Attendance and Participation**
Attendance to class sessions and active participation in the discussions are mandatory. Please come to class having already read both the literary texts and the critical materials assigned for that session and be prepared to critically discuss them in class.

**Discussion board postings**
Every week, students are required to electronically circulate a short response to be posted on the discussion board of the course website. In these responses, students are asked to identify key concepts and arguments from the one or more of the assigned readings and use these as a point of departure to formulate a discussion question, with the goal of provoking further conversation in mind. These should go beyond simple factual questions to instead raise open-ended issues that get at the larger critical context of the reading’s discussion, the stakes of its claims and contentions, potential implications and applications, etc.

(Due every week, from week 2 to week 11, 5 in total)

**Presentation**
From week 2 onwards, one student will lead the discussion by first briefly (15-20 minutes) presenting their review of the assigned readings and bringing it into conversation with the film or novel to be discussed for the session. These presentations will serve to open the discussion by raising further questions and points of discussion. During the first week of class, students are asked to sign up on Canvas for the session they wish to lead. Students may sign up for any session of their choosing, with every student leading the discussion once during the semester.

**Conference Paper**
In the final weeks of the semester, each student will present a conference paper based on their own research project while at once reflecting on the issues and challenges raised in the discussions throughout the semester. Presentations should be about 20 minutes in length (approximately 2000 words). Following the presentation, the class will be conducted as a public workshop wherein participants raise questions, discuss the issues raised, and offer comments and suggestions to the presenter. The topic and content of the conference paper will form the basis of the final paper, discussed in greater detail below.

(Due Nov 14)

**Final Paper**
Using one or more literary texts (or films, or animations) as a focal point, produce a solid analysis of the range critical issues in relation to the ways in which "Japan" is represented in literary and other discourses. Topics can include (but are not restricted to) any of the themes discussed in class, e.g., travelogues and ethnographies, intersections of gender, and nation, ethnic and gender passing, technorientalisms and empire, etc. Papers should be organized around a text (literary, filmic, etc.) not previously discussed in the class. While students are expected to make use of the relevant theoretical and critical materials covered in class, the specific focus of the paper and choice of text is for the student to determine in consultation with the instructor.
The final paper requirement will have two components: the first part will be the submission of an initial draft (2000-2500 words) for presentation in class (due April 21). Following the presentations/workshops, these papers shall be then revised and/or expanded in response to comments and suggestions received.

(Due Dec 12)

Late final papers will be subject to a 2% penalty per day.

REQUIRED TEXTS

BOOKS
Sheung-King, *You are Eating an Orange, You are Naked*, 2020

FILMS
Chris Marker, *Sans Soleil*, 1983
David Cronenberg, *M. Butterfly*, 1993
Alain Resnais, *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, 1959
Ridley Scott, *Blade Runner*, 1982
Pen-Ek Ratanaruang, *Last Life in the Universe*, 2004

All other materials listed below will be made available through the course website

SCHEDULE

**Week 1**  
**Historical Signposts: Orientalism and Japan**

Sep 5  


**Week 2**  
**Ethnographic Cinema**

Sep 12  
Chris Marker, *Sans Soleil*


Barr, B. “‘Wandering with Precision’: Contamination and the Mise-En-Scene of Desire in Chris Marker’ Sans Soleil." *Screen* 45, no. 3 (September 1, 2004): 173–89.
Week 3  Anthropology and Autobiography


Week 4  Sexuality and Nationality

Sep 26  David Cronenberg, *M. Butterfly*

Ayako Kano, “Acting Like a Woman” and "Modern Formations of Gender and Performance" in *Acting Like a Woman: Theater, Gender, and Nationalism* (Palgrave, 2001), 3-38.

Dorinne Kondo, "*M. Butterfly*: Gender, Ethnicity, and the Critique of Essentialist Identity" in *About Face: Performing Race in Fashion and Theater* (Routledge, 1997), pp. 31-54.

Week 5  Narrative Performance

Oct 3  Julie Otsuka, *The Buddha in the Attic*


Week 6  War, Representation, Desire

Oct 10  Alain Resnais, *Hiroshima Mon Amour*


Week 7  Alternate Histories

Oct 17  Philip K. Dick, *The Man in a High Castle*
Week 8  
Techno-orientalism

Oct 24  
Ridley Scott, *Blade Runner*


Week 9  
Consuming Images, Consuming Commodities

Oct 31  
Ruth Ozeki, *My Year of Meats.*


Week 10  
Japan and Asia

Nov 7  
Pen-Ek Ratanaruang, *Last Life in the Universe*


Week 11  
Diasporic Encounters

Nov 14  
Sheung-King, *You are Eating an Orange, You are Naked*

Week 12  
Workshops
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