The Invention of Japan

Japanese cuisine, Japanese painting, Japanese dogs, Japanese sports, Japanese history, the Japanese race ... there was a time when these concepts did not exist. How did they come about? When? Why? This course will understand the invention of Japan as a process of co-invention. On one side were outsiders to Japan and on the other Japanese. The invention of Japanese painting, for example, required both the American Ernesto Fenollosa, an American art critic and curator, and Okakura Kakuzo, his Japanese student.

This course will explore the various ways in which Japan was invented through a mix of readings, short lectures, and student presentations. Each class will feature short 5 minute presentations by 3 students. The presentations will explore the invention of a practice in Japan, compare it to analogous practices invented elsewhere in the world, and relate it to recent events. The invention of Japanese cuisine, for example, will include a discussion of the history of cuisine in Japan, its comparison to other cuisines (such as Chinese or French cuisine), and a discussion to how today Japanese cuisine has become both a multi-billion dollar industry and a pillar of Japanese national identity.

Course Requirements

Presentations and Short Papers
Each student will be responsible for three presentation and three short papers. Paper writers will become "experts" on the day’s topic and will be given 5-10 minutes at the beginning of class to present their findings and lead the day’s discussion. To impart their expertise to the class, each expert will write a short essay (1-2 pages typed, single spaced) and be prepared to answer questions and lead discussion on the readings.

Copies of each essay should be sent to members of the seminar via email (using Blackboard) 24 hours before the beginning of the seminar. One hard copy of each essay should also be placed in the class mailbox in the third floor of Child Hall (next to the elevators) 24 hours before the start of the next seminar. All students are expected to read the student essays as part of the required readings each week.

Research Paper
Each student is required to write a research paper (6-8 pages single spaced) on one of the topics discussed in the course. The paper will incorporate some of the material discussed in the course, but will also require outside research and a comparison of Japan with other societies. The paper will be due on May 18 at 4 pm.

Required Texts
You are not required to purchase any texts. All readings will be posted on Blackboard or available online.
Grading and Assignments
Three presentations and short papers 15% each
Final paper 40%
Class attendance and participation 15%

Short papers are due 24 hours before the beginning of class. The final paper is due on May 18 at 4 pm. Late papers will be marked down 2/3 of a grade for the first day and 1/3 of a grade for every day thereafter. One week after the due date they will no longer be accepted.

Film Screening
“The Last Samurai” by Director Edward Zwick will be screened in King 243 on Tuesday February 15 at 7pm. Even if you have seen “The Last Samurai” it is recommended that you watch it again in the context of the course. The film is required and will be discussed during seminar and in conjunction with the readings for the week.

Honor Code
All students are expected to adhere to the Oberlin Honor Code on all written assignments.

Writing Assistance
Students are encouraged to visit the Writing Center in Mudd Library where tutors from the Writing Associates Program can provide strategies for improving writing skills.

Office Hours
Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:00-11:00 am or by appointment
Students are encouraged to come see the instructor with questions about any aspect of the course.

Class Schedule
Introduction
Feb. 8 (T) Introduction

Race and the Breeding of Fascism’s Furry Friends
Feb. 10 (Th)

Feb. 15 (T)

*Screening of “The Last Samurai” by Edward Zwick in King 243 at 7pm on Tuesday February 15.
The Way of the Warrior
Feb. 17 (Th)

Feb. 22 (T)

War Without Weapons
Feb. 24 (Th)


March 1 (T)

Gandhi and Kimonos
March 3 (Th)


 Origins of the Iron Chef
March 8 (T)


March 10 (Th)
Pencil vs. Brush
March 15 (T)

March 17 (Th)

Alphabets and Ideograms
March 22 (T)

March 24 (Th)

Spring Recess

Nation, Narration, and Film
April 5 (T)

April 7 (Th)

Chadō: The Way Tea
April 12 (T)

April 14 (Th)

China, Korea, and the Politics of Representation
April 19 (T)
April 21 (Th)

Edo/Tokyo as an Idea
April 26 (T)

April 28 (Th)

Japan: Green or Toxic
May 3 (T)

May 5 (Th)

Toyoda and the Magic of the Japanese Production System
May 10 (T)

May 12 (Th)

Final Paper Due on May 18 at 4 PM