

Hidden Views of Edo Japan (1600–1868): Music and the Arts

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Course description

The urban pleasure quarters of the *Floating World* of Japan hold an endless fascination, as too the popular theatrical forms whose actors vie with courtesan and *geisha* in the well-known wood-block culture of the day. But this time is characterized as well by refined solo and chamber music, the poetry of the *haiku* master Matsuo Bashô, song-cycles of profound beauty and sadness, by the songs and the arts of the *geisha* herself ...

We shall move between the two, situating our historical interests in music, song, and theatre — and our present-day listening and viewing too — against their socio-cultural background through accompanying, broad-based readings drawn from literature, aesthetics, history, religion.

This course does not require specialized knowledge of music, nor of East Asian languages. It is open to majors in any field. Students address their particular interests via individual projects, culminating in an extended research essay from each student.

Required texts

- S. Addiss, G. Groemer, and T. Rimer (Eds.) (2006). *Traditional Japanese arts and culture: An illustrated sourcebook*. University of Hawaii Press
- M. Bashô (1996). *The narrow road to Oku*. Trans. by D. Keene. Illustrated Japanese Classics. Tôkyô: Kodansha International
- H. de Ferranti (2000). *Japanese musical instruments*. Images of Asia. New York: Oxford University Press

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Recommended texts

- K. M. Foreman (2008). *The gei of geisha: Music, identity and meaning*. SOAS Musicology Series. Aldershot: Ashgate
- J. Hillier (1961). *Utamaro: Colour prints and paintings*. Oxford: Phaidon

Course structure

Five-section format

The course takes up an idea from Japanese painting where an artist may produce a series of views of one scene, one object, but in which forms were often partially hidden: objects were thought to be most beautiful when only half revealed. We are interested in music and the arts in an historical context (Edo Period Japan), in various social and cultural contexts — for what music and the arts meant in that past, and for what they mean now. And so we are obliged to try to draw back the curtaining of what might be hidden from us on the surface. Here we follow the approach of musicologist William Malm in his book *Six hidden views of Japanese music*. He looked at Japanese music not from a concert performance, say, but from the “point of view” of how it is taught and learned, how the instruments used are made, and so on. We shall take five quotations from scholars and writers associated with our almost 300-year long Edo period (1600-1868) and let them work as headings to structure our course into five different “viewing pavilions”. From these vantage points we shall observe and try to form a picture of these “long, long centuries” in a Japan officially cut-off from the world in a self-imposed policy of seclusion, but actually heavily occupied with European and Chinese intellectual and artistic thinking. Central to our study throughout will be readings (in translation), listenings, and viewings of original materials.

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Class schedule

Part One

The culture of the Edo period (1603-1867) was the product of a juxtaposition of samurai values and an ever-more vigorous urban popular culture that emerged with the prosperity of the merchant classes. (de Ferranti, *Japanese musical instruments*, p.13)

- Backdrop
- *The floating world/The sorrowful world*
- Theaters, restaurants, teahouses, *geisha* and courtesans
- Theater and playwrights
- Theater and actors
- Wood-block culture: *The floating world of Ukiyo-e*
- **Case studies: from *Bunraku* and *Kabuki***

Part Two

... by the 1630s Japan had banned Christianity and virtually cut off ties with the West, except for a trickle of contacts in Nagasaki, largely with the Dutch (safely Protestant and completely dedicated to trade) and the Chinese. (Addiss et al., *Traditional Japanese arts and culture*, p. 137)

- Backdrop
- The Portuguese, the Dutch, and *Rangaku* “Dutch studies”
- Zen Buddhism and the arts
- Neo-Confucianism and the scholars

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- Social classes, guilds, and ranks
- *Bunjin* “men of culture”
- **Case studies: some meditative “Zen” music for *shakuhachi***

Part Three

These *bunjin* [“men of culture”] artists and intellectuals spent at least part of their lives in seclusion, meditating on old texts and creating art and poetry that paid homage to elements at considerable variance with the bustle of everyday Edo-period life. (Addiss et al., p. 139)

- Backdrop
- Bashô and poetry
- Painting
- Elite theater, patronage – and aristocratic amateurs
- *Cha-no-yu*: The Japanese tea ceremony
- The garden
- **Case studies: from *Noh*, and a reading of Bashô’s *Oku no hosomichi* “The narrow road to Oku”**

Part Four

I maintain that for many geisha, *gei* [藝 (芸) “art”] is not incidental or pursued as a means to create a pretty product for sale (geisha-object); it is the basis through which they experience and define themselves. Because geisha certainly have had and continue to have a relationship to art and because this perspective has been bypassed in favor of viewing them as objects of beauty, as servants of the entertainment

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industry, or as sex workers, the research presented here ... is intended to offer insight into the relationships of geisha to their *gei*, the arts that form the foundation of their title. (Foreman, *The gei of geisha*, p. ix)

- Backdrop
- *Gei-sha* 芸者 “art” + “person”
- Training and repertory
- *Geisha* performances and their construction
- *Geisha* and the traditional arts
- Entertainer vs. artist
- The aesthetic of *iki*
- **Case studies: from her repertory**

Part Five

As the Edo period came to an end, new forces from the West changed Japanese culture more dramatically than anything that had occurred since the influx of Chinese and Korean influences almost fifteen hundred years earlier. Just as in that previous era, however, elements from the past persisted, especially in the traditional arts and the belief systems that invigorated them. (Addiss et al., p. 223)

- Backdrop
- Japan and the West: Artistic Cross-fertilization
- *Japonisme*
- A musical observer from Europe
- *Madame Butterfly* and an image of *geisha*
- “Curtain call”
- **Case studies: from *Madame Butterfly***

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Course requirements

Course assignments

There will be 2 take-home writing projects and an extended research essay.

Attendance

Attendance Full attendance is required. Any reason for absence must be verifiable.

Mulberry-Leaf Lecture Attendance is also required at the annual *Mulberry-Leaf Lecture in Early Asian Musics*, to be given by the scholar of early Chinese art and archaeology, Professor Robert Bagley (Princeton University), in Giffels Auditorium, Old Main, on Thursday, September 10 at 4 p.m.

“The archaeology of music in China: The tomb of the Marquis Yi of Zeng(d. 433 BC)”

Note: There will be no regular class on the morning of Thursday, April 10.

Class web-site The course has its own web-site to keep you up to date.

Technicalities

Venue: Classes will be held in Holcombe Hall, Room 0104F .

Contact information: I can be reached by email at MARKHAM@UARK.EDU. My office phone number is 575-7955. If you need to ring me at home in an emergency, my home-phone number is 251-1864.

Consultation hours: I have a “consultation spot” each Wednesday between 2:30 and 3:30 p.m. My room number is 512 in Old Main. I am very happy — and it is nearly always possible — to make arrangements outside this fixed time.

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Inclement weather policy: My policy follows that of the university: if the university is closed, we don't have class. But I have the addition that at times of severe ice or snow the class may be cancelled. If so, you will receive an email by 9 a.m. (In principle, if the Fayetteville Public Schools are closed this means that driving is too dangerous for all of us who need to drive.)

Tasks and grading policy: Take-home writing projects are 4–6 pages (AIST 4003) or 6–8 pages (AIST 4003 H /HUMN 3923 H / MUSC 3923 H) (12pt type) of English prose (with citations etc. as required). You will have two weeks for each; late submission will need an urgent and verifiable reason.

The research essay (due on Dead Day) is to allow each student to follow a particular interest sparked (I hope) by the course and its readings, lookings, listenings, and viewings. The topic should be chosen and discussed with me by week 8 (at the latest): I shall welcome research-questions, verbal or via e-mail, from then on; individual consultations for the research essay will be gladly arranged.

The two take-home projects will each count for 25% of your final grade. Your personal research essay will count for 40% of your final grade, and participation in class will count for 10% of your grade. 3 absences from class without a convincing reason (see above) will result in a 5% deduction from your final grade.

Grade Structure:

A+ = 95%–100%	A = 90%–94%	A- = 85%–89%
B+ = 80%–84%	B = 75%–79%	B- = 70%–74%
C = 60%–69%	D = 50%–59%	F = 0%–49%

Due-dates for graded assignments

- Project 1: Monday, 28 September (5 pm)
- Project 2: Monday, 2 November (5 pm)

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- Research essay: Dead Day (5 pm.)

Essay format: Writing projects and research essay are to be submitted electronically: as plain text or as pdf-format attachments to emails. Hard copies are not required.

Academic honesty Adherence to academic honesty is strictly required, and it so easy to maintain: **always** acknowledge from where you got an idea, or a quote, etc. You don't want to even know the consequences of not adhering...

Hope you enjoy the class!