

Department of History
University of Wisconsin-Madison
College of Letters and Science

Modern Japan: Reading History/Writing History History 855

Spring 2010
Class Meeting: Friday 2:30-4:30
Room 5257 Humanities

Professor Louise Young
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Course description

This course is designed to develop reading, analytic, and conceptual tools for historical or historically situated research on modern Japan. We examine both the historical and historiographical questions that are raised by close readings of a series of recently published monographs. The readings are organized around three core elements in the design of a major research project: methodology (how you approach your topic), time frame (defining the historical context), and the big question you hope to address.

The first part of the course focuses on the historical turn in Japanese literary analysis to help us think about inter-disciplinary modes of research. How are these works methodologically innovative? How can we apply their strategies to other kinds of inter-disciplinary research? What intellectual trends do they reflect and where do these come from? What kinds of sources do they use? What kinds of theoretical tools do they deploy?

The second part of the course examines the problem of historical “periods” by examining a series of books that are broadly concerned with the nineteenth century transition. What do people mean by “the nineteenth century” and why is this a coherent historical period? What are the continuities and discontinuities that mark this off as a distinct phase/period/moment? What draws people to the nineteenth century and why does it make sense as the temporal setting for their particular research question?

The third section looks at the historical “problem” – the larger questions we address through the particular research topics we choose. Here, we read a group of books that explore the big questions about Japanese imperialism through analysis of particular discourses, social movements, and colonial sites. What are the relationships between the “big” and the “small” questions here? How do we identify “big” questions and construct a practical research project (“small” question) that can answer them?

Requirements

- Weekly reflection on readings (1 page). Due on class website at learn@UW by 10 am Friday before class. This response essay should include three basic paragraphs. The first paragraph should summarize the key arguments in the reading and their significance. The second paragraph should analyze how the book addresses the thematic question under consideration (method, moment or problem). The third paragraph should offer the student's critical assessment of the week's readings: What was the most persuasive? What was the least persuasive? Which are the issues and questions that need more attention? What kind of new research do the readings inspire?
- Two short papers (4-6 pages). Apply insights from our readings and discussion to a description of your "method" and your "moment", respectively. Due Feb 26 and March 26.
- One research prospectus (8-10 pages). Present your research topic in the form of a grant proposal, or a prospectus for a master's essay or PhD thesis. Introduce readers to the topic, make the case for its importance, and explain your approach. You may incorporate parts of the two short papers into the research prospectus. Draft due on class website on May 5; final draft due in hard copy by May 10.
- Group historiographic exercise (oral presentation in class). Choose one of our three themes (literature and history, signifying the late nineteenth century, writing empire) and with your group trace changes in scholarship from 1950s through the present. For example, looking at trends in literary and historical studies over the past fifty years: How have our definitions and theorizations of "literature," "culture," and "thought" changed? When did historians start using literature as source material? What are the changing meanings of "historical context" for literary scholars? Do these developments relate to changes in our research agendas? What are the stakes in being "interdisciplinary"?

Class schedule

January 22 **introduction**

Disciplinary Crossings: Between Literature and History

January 29 **theoretical groundings**

Read: Graem Turner, *British Cultural Studies: An Introduction* (Routledge, 1992)

February 3 **literature and the social imagination**

Read: Jonathan Zwicker, *Practices of the Sentimental Imagination: Melodrama,*

the Novel, and the Social Imaginary in 19th Century Japan (Harvard 2006)

February 12 **literature and cultural critique**

Read: Rachel DeNitto, *Uchida Hyakken: A Critique of Modernity and Militarism in Prewar Japan* (Harvard 2008)

February 19 **literature and the modern subject**

**Group historiographic exercise: changing trends in literary analysis and in cultural and intellectual history.

Read: Ken Ito, *Age of Melodrama: Family, Gender, and Social Hierarchy in the Turn of the Century Japanese Novel* (Stanford 2008)

Historical Moments: the late nineteenth century

February 26 **a time of settlement**

**First short paper due: Explain your historical method

Read: Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the late Meiji Period* (Princeton University Press, 1985)

March 5 **the birth of the public sphere**

Read: Kyu Hyun Kim, *Age of Visions and Arguments: Parliamentarianism and the National Public Sphere in Early Meiji Japan* (Harvard, 2007)

March 12 **the Western opening**

Read: Douglas Howland, *Translating the West: Language and Political Reason in nineteenth century Japan* (University of Hawaii, 2002)

March 19 **the age of nations**

** Group historiographic exercise: changing views of the “late nineteenth century”

Read: Christopher L. Hill, *National History and the World of Nations: Capital, the State, and the Rhetoric of History in Japan, France, and the United States* (Duke, 2009)

Historical Problems: Writing Empire

March 24** **theorizing empire**

** note change in meeting time: Wednesday 3:30-5:30**

**Second short paper due: Define your historical moment

Read: Wolfgang Mommsen, *Theories of Imperialism*, trans. PS Falla (University of Chicago, 1982)

April 9 **empire and science**
Read: Hiromi Mizuno, *Science for the Empire: Scientific Nationalism in Modern Japan* (Stanford, 2009)

April 16 **empire and nationalism**
Read: Hyun-ok Park, *Two Dreams in One Bed: Empire, Social Life, and the Origins of the North Korean Revolution in Manchuria* (Duke, 2005)

April 23 **colonialism and culture**
**Group historiographic exercise: changing approaches to Japanese imperialism

Read: Kim Brandt, *Kingdom of Beauty: Mingei and the Politics of Folk Art in Imperial Japan* (Duke, 2007)

April 30 **NO CLASS**

May 7 **Summary Session: Writing History**
**Draft of research prospectus due on class website by May 5
Read: student drafts of research prospectus