565:320 “The Samurai Tradition in Japanese Literature and Film”  
Rutgers University  
Spring 2017

Syllabus

Instructor

Professor Paul Schalow schalow@rutgers.edu  
Office Hours: Scott Hall Rm. 325, Mon & Wed. 3:00-4:00 pm, or by app’t.  
Lecture: MW6 (4:30-5:50) Hardenbergh Hall B-4, CAC

Course Description

• The course explores the literary and philosophical traditions of the samurai warrior in Japanese history and the ongoing meaning of those traditions in contemporary Japanese culture.
• Coursework consists of analysis and discussion of visual media such as documentary and feature-length films and readings on warriors and swordsmanship.
• The course is divided into three Units: (1) Chūshingura: The 47 Rōnin, (2) Legendary Warriors, and (3) The Ethical Use of the Sword.
• All readings are in English translation.

Requirements

• Post a question/answer a classmate’s question. 15 Forums (2 pts. each) must be posted online on Sakai Forum for readings and films as indicated in the syllabus. Late postings are not possible once the Forum is closed.
• Three 5-page Unit papers (20 pts. each). Papers must be uploaded to Sakai Assignments by the due date at the end of each Unit. See the syllabus for a description of the assigned topic for each Unit.
• Your final grade is based on 15 Sakai Forum postings (30%), three 5-page Unit papers (60% total), and your class participation (10%).

Required Texts (available for purchase at Barnes and Noble Rutgers Bookstore)

• Hiroaki Sato, Legends of the Samurai (Overlook Press, 1995)
• Donald Keene, Chūshingura: The Treasury of Loyal Retainers (Columbia, 1971)
• Miyamoto Musashi, tr. by Thomas Cleary, The Book of Five Rings (Shambhala Classics, 2000)
Learning Goals

“The Samurai Tradition in Japanese Literature and Film” satisfies the following Asian Languages and Cultures Departmental Learning Goals for Japanese majors and minors:

Majors will be able to demonstrate substantial knowledge of Japanese literature and culture and pursue advanced study and/or employment in a capacity requiring such cultural knowledge. Minors will be able to analyze and interpret texts and relate relevant issues to other areas in the humanities.

(See full statement of Asian Languages and Cultures Departmental Learning Goals at http://sas.rutgers.edu/component/docman/doc_download/532-sas-learning-goals)

Academic Integrity Policy

Students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity at all times. Violations include cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, denying others access to information or material, and facilitating violations of academic integrity.


Attendance Policy

Students are expected to attend all classes. Students are allowed 1 excused absence per Unit. If you expect to miss a class, please talk to me in advance or send me an e-mail (schalow@rci.rutgers.edu) immediately with the date and reason for your absence. You may also use the absence reporting website https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/ and an email will automatically be sent to me.

If you ever have questions about the above goals or policies, please talk to me or send me an email immediately with your concerns: schalow@rutgers.edu
Class Schedule

Unit 1—Chūshingura: The 47 Rōnin

18 Jan.  Introduction to the course.
Film clip: “Japan: Memoirs of a Secret Empire” (PBS, 2004)
(Parts 1 & 2: The Way of the Samurai & He Cut His Belly) 20 mins.

23  Reading: Sato, Legends of the Samurai “Yamamoto Tsunetomo:
Hagakure (Hidden in Leaves)” pp. 287-303. Forum #1

25  Reading: Sato, Legends of the Samurai, “The Forty-Seven Samurai: An
Eyewitness Account” pp. 304-321. Forum #2

30  Film clip: The sword wound—Asano’s attack on Kira in the shōgun’s
Inagaki; and “The 47 Rōnin” (Genroku Chūshingura, 1941) dir.
Mizoguchi.

1 Feb. Reading: Sato, Legends of the Samurai, “The Forty-Seven Samurai:
Arguments” pp. 322-338. Forum #3

6   Film clip: The raid—the night assault on Kira’s mansion and the taking of
the head. “Chūshingura” dir. Inagaki; and “The 47 Rōnin” dir. Mizoguchi.

8   Reading: Sato, Legends of the Samurai, “Kō no Moronao: When a Warrior
Falls in Love,” pp. 188-203. Forum #4

13  Reading: Keene, Chūshingura: Treasury of Loyal Retainers Acts 1-6, pp.
29-103. Forum #5

15  Reading: Keene, Chūshingura: Treasury of Loyal Retainers Acts 7-11,
pp.104-180. Forum #6

20  First 5-page paper due. Topic: Discuss the story of the 47 Rōnin in terms
of the samurai concept of dying with honor. Explain how competing
allegiances made it difficult to determine what constituted an “honorable”
death in this case. Discuss how the vendetta was dramatized differently in
the puppet theater (1748) and in films by Mizoguchi (b&w, 1941) and
Inagaki (color, 1962). Give specific examples from readings and films to
support your discussion.
Film clip: Chūshingura (NHK, 2010): Act 5 “Two Shots Fired” and Act 7
“The Ichiriki Teahouse.”
Unit 2—Legendary Warriors

22 Reading: Sato, Legends of the Samurai, “Yamato Takeru: Loser as Hero”—“Sakanoue no Haruzumi: A Warrior’s Shame” pp. 3-60. Forum #7


6 Film: “Men Who Tread On the Tiger’s Tail” (Tora no o wo fumu otokotachi, 1945) dir. Kurosawa (60 mins.)


11-19 Mar. Spring Break

20 [class cancelled]

22 [class cancelled]


5 Second 5-page paper due. Topic: Choose one of the legendary warriors from Unit 2 and describe how he is depicted in literature and/or film. Discuss what deeds or accomplishments made him a legend and what aspects of his character or thought contributed to his fame. Address the ways that literary or cinematic depictions may differ from the historical facts. Give specific examples from readings and/or films to support your discussion. Film: “Sanjūrō” (Tsubaki Sanjūrō, 1962) dir. Kurosawa (96 mins.)
Unit 3—The Ethical Use of the Sword

10 The sheathed sword.
Film: “Sanjūrō” cont. Forum #14

12 False honor and the inhumane use of the sword.
Film: “Harakiri” (Seppuku, 1962) dir. Kobayashi (134 mins.)

17 “Harakiri” cont.

19 Nonviolence in the face of violence.
Film: “Samurai Fiction” (1998) dir. Nakano (111 mins.)

24 “Samurai Fiction” cont. Forum #15

26 Competing allegiances to family, clan, and state.
Film: “Twilight Samurai” (Tasogare Seibei, 2002) dir. Yamada (129 mins.)

1 May “Twilight Samurai” cont.

*5 Fri. Final 5-page paper due. Topic: Select one of the samurai films studied in Unit 3 and discuss the depiction of its hero and main characters. What does the film have to say about the ethical use of the sword? Be attentive in your analysis to the ways in which the film is set in the past but in fact serves as a critique of present-day ethical concerns. To earn full credit, you must compare and contrast the hero of your film to the hero from another film we viewed in class.