

JAPAN 4780 PREMODERN JAPANESE LITERATURE

Spring 2023 | MW, 1:25 pm–2:45 pm | BU C 208

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Office hours: MW, 10–11 am, or by appointment (LNCO 1325)

Course Description

This course surveys premodern Japanese literature through close readings of several texts. These readings will guide us through four of the major periods of Japanese literary history—ancient, classical, medieval, and early modern—and present a variety of topics to explore, including nature and seasonality; gender and sexuality; the oscillation between tradition and innovation; the influence of Buddhism and Confucianism; the material, visual, and performative dimensions of literature; and the construction of communal identity and memory. Students will come away with a firm grasp of many of the primary genres of the premodern literary canon—myth histories, tale literature, anecdotes, warrior tales, *waka* poetry, and essays—in addition to the social, linguistic, thematic, and narrative (dis)continuities that hold this canon together. Classes are conducted in English and all readings will be in English. I will provide portions of the readings in the original Japanese upon request.

Course Goals

- Gain a general understanding of the broad sweep of Japanese literary history, from ancient through early modern periods
- Improve close reading and critical interpretation skills
- Develop proficiency in comparing different texts and placing them in context
- Strengthen writing skills

Required Books

Purchase of the following books is required for participation in the course:

1. *The Kojiki: An Account of Ancient Matters*. Trans. Gustav Heldt. Columbia UP. Paperback. ISBN 978-0231163897.
2. Murasaki Shikibu. *The Tale of Genji*. Trans. Dennis Washburn. W.W. Norton & Company, abridged version. Paperback. ISBN 978-0393427912.
3. Ueda Akinari. *Tales of Moonlight and Rain*. Trans. Anthony Chambers. Columbia UP. Paperback. ISBN 978-0231139137.

We will also occasionally read and discuss chapters and articles provided in PDF format on the Canvas site. These will be denoted by “(Canvas)” on the schedule. One copy of each book is also available on reserve at Marriott Library. If you have concerns about acquiring the books, please let me know and we will work something out.