

## Lecture 1

### Introduction

Medieval period: 1185-1867

- Pre-1185: rule by emperor and aristocrats
- Japan ruled by warrior class (samurai) (this is what this class covers)
- Feudal Society - period of war and fragmentation, then peace and unification
- Flourishing of Buddhist values and arts
  - o Buddhism used to be exclusive to priests etc.

Experiences of warriors, courtiers, clerics, peasants, and merchants

Films: How is Medieval Japan Viewed Today?

- films keep this period alive in modern culture

Three units – each with a paper assignment

Unit 1: Ways of the Warriors

- What was the warrior ideal and how did it evolve and change over time?
  - o There is no “timeless way of the warrior” e.g. Bushido.
- Why was such an ideal necessary? What function did it serve?
  - o What is its purpose in society?
- What types of warriors were there? How did they really act?

Unit 2: Spiritual and Supernatural Worlds

- What is Japanese “spirituality”?
  - o We’ll look at this as it exists at all different levels; both high-class Zen and folktales and superstitions.
- How did it operate in popular and elite culture?
- Zen Buddhism, Secular Buddhism, Christianity, popular tales

Unit 3: Worlds of Pleasure / Worlds of Pain

- What were the experiences of women?
  - o Much of the historical records were written by women!
  - o We’ll look at experiences of different kinds and classes of women.
- How did different classes interact with each other?
- What were the tensions between social values and human feelings, relationships?

Why Medieval Japan?

- development of art, philosophy, religion
- continued presence in contemporary popular imagination
- dynamic, rich, multi-faceted society populated by diverse peoples
  - o this is what makes it so popular as inspiration for films

Temples:

1. Great Buddha (Daibutsu): Statue of Amida Buddha cast in 1252
2. Kinkakuji (Golden temple): Zen, built by Yoshitsune in 1397
  - mentally-disturbed monk burnt it down

Zen Gardens:

Daisen-in Garden (Kyoto): Built in 1509 by Soami  
Ryoanji (Temple of the Peaceful Dragon)

Noh/Kabuki

- Noh is much more ritualistic than Kabuki, which is more popular-culture.
- Kabuki was at first done by women in front of brothels
  - o Then the government banned women from doing this, so it became all-male

Bunraku (puppet theater)

- each doll has 3 people operating it (unhooded operator does head and right arm, hooded operators do left arm and legs)

Tea Ceremony (Chanoyu)

- art of serving/preparing tea “with a pure heart”
- became something you do among upper ruling warriors while they’re making decisions or having serious conversation

Mito Kōmon is an example of Jidai geki

- Jidai geki: popular TV shows about this period. Each show happens exactly the same way: the main character reveals corrupt officials, beats on them, reveals who he is, causing their immediate surrender; he corrects the problem, laughs, and walks away

Abarenbō Shogun (“Rowdy Boy Shogun”): another TV show: poor son of a samurai retainer. Corrects injustices, etc.

Anime:

Samurai 7: anime based on Seven Samurai by Kurosawa

Afro Samurai: Samuel L. Jackson is going to voice-act this one

Films for Unit 1: (see syllabus)

Recommended: Throne of Blood (Kurosawa, 1957) – will not be screened

Geography, 1185-1600

Basically, you can divide Japan between East and West. Japan wasn’t very unified; the people in the East were more of a horse-riding, plains-type culture, and they spoke a different dialect. West regions were more maritime; pirates, traders, etc. Sanyodō was main roadway; to give an idea of its size: the roads fit 2 horses. Main region is Kinai – “cradle of Japanese civilization;” it’s where the capital, Kyoto, was and where Nara, the Buddhist center, was; Kinai had 2 million people. Important lake: Biwa Lake – allows trade by connecting this part of Japan to the ocean. The different regions are very important.

Kanto region: this is where the warrior culture flourishes. Heavily agricultural.

Warriors were mostly horse+bow+arrow and very rich, due to the agriculture.

Hokkaido was referred to as Ezo; there was some limited trade with it.

Trade between Korea and farther eastern region.

The next map on the slides is a provincial map of Japan from Kamakura period; don't need to memorize it.

Now onto the reading for next week:

Tales of the Heike: very popular in Japan, "every schoolchild knows this."

Slide outlines the story.

- Note for this book: in this era, there was something called the "cloistered emperor" and the actual emperor.
- There are "hundreds and hundreds" of characters in this book.
- There's a point that might be confusing: once Yoshinaka takes Kyoto, power goes to his head and he becomes independent, and forms his own party.

It's part of a genre called "warrior tales." These tales were originally not written but sung by wandering blind minstrels called biwa hōshi; blindness indicated special spiritual powers. There were hundreds of versions due to embellishments and variations in how they were sung/told by the biwa hōshi. Finally a definitive version was written down.

There will be a character glossary.