

Open to Sophomores



DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
University of Wisconsin
Spring 1983

History 454
JAPAN IN THE AGE OF THE SAMURAI:
SEVEN CENTURIES OF FEUDAL RULE

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5114 Humanities

Course Description. "Japan in the Age of the Samurai" deals with the period from the late 1100s to the mid-1800s, when Japan was governed by a warrior class. These seven centuries witnessed the development of distinctive value systems at both the elite and popular levels. At the same time, they saw the emergence of dynamic social, economic, and political patterns that profoundly shaped the nature of "modern" Japan.

The course devotes roughly equal time to the three great epochs of feudal development in Japan: (1) the formative period of "proto-feudalism," beginning with the founding of the Shogunate in the late 12th century; (2) the chaotic era of decentralized "high feudalism," extending from 1333 to the end of the 1500s; and (3) the several centuries of seclusion and "centralized feudalism" under the aegis of the Tokugawa shoguns, whose demise in 1868 marked the end of warrior rule.

Attention is given to the changing social and economic underpinnings of feudal institutions, and to the lives of the commoners as well as elites. Topics covered in the first part of the course include the medieval war chronicles and emergence of a samurai ethos ("the way of the warrior"), the flourishing of Buddhist faith sects, Zen influence on Japanese culture, and Japan's century of contact with Christian missionaries and Western traders beginning in 1543. In the Tokugawa period, topics include the bureaucratization of the samurai, commercialization of the economy, rupture of intellectual orthodoxies, and rising incidence of peasant uprisings. Particular attention is given here to the buoyant popular culture centering on the "floating world" of the pleasure quarters and accessible to students through a wide range of literature, drama, and art. The course concludes with the arrival of the Western "barbarians" in 1853 and overthrow of the Shogunate fifteen years later.

Lectures are complemented by slides and movies, and students will be introduced to primary materials in translation. A general outline of topics to be covered in the class sessions is attached.

Course Requirements. There are three formal requirements: (1) a one-hour exam on February 24; (2) a second one-hour exam on April 14 or a 5-7 page paper on a subject of the student's own choice, to be turned in on April 14; and (3) the two-hour final examination on May 19, covering the entire course.

Students who choose the option of writing a paper to meet the second requirement will discuss their topics beforehand with the instructor. The papers should be based on additional reading in at least one major outside book (or the equivalent thereof), and place this in the context of the general readings and lectures in the course. The paper must include a bibliography and proper annotations (notes can be given all in one place at the end of the essay), and comply with basic scholarly as well as editorial standards.

The final grade will be calculated as follows: first exam, 25%; second exam or paper, 25%; final exam, 50%.

Supplemental Activities. A film festival featuring 14 Japanese samurai films will be presented on campus during the semester (on Thursdays, from 7 p.m.). Students should see at least half of these films, and be prepared to discuss them or to deal with the cinematic version of "the world of the samurai" in the exams.

Required Texts (all are available in paperback editions).

- John W. Hall. JAPAN: FROM PREHISTORY TO MODERN TIMES.
A. L. Sadler, trans. THE TEN FOOT SQUARE HUT AND TALES OF THE HEIKE.
Michael Cooper. THEY CAME TO JAPAN: AN ANTHOLOGY OF EUROPEAN REPORTS ON JAPAN, 1543-1640.
D. T. Suzuki, ZEN AND JAPANESE CULTURE.
Miyamoto Musashi. A BOOK OF FIVE RINGS.
Ihara Saikaku. THE LIFE OF AN AMOROUS WOMAN.
Basho. THE NARROW ROAD TO THE NORTH.
Noel Perrin. GIVING UP THE GUN: JAPAN'S REVERSION TO THE SWORD, 1543-1879.

Sequence of Readings.

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| I. (prior to 1st exam) | II. (prior to 2nd exam) |
| Hall, 1-102 | Hall, 102-160 |
| Sadler | Cooper |
| | Suzuki |
| | Miyamoto Musashi |
| III. Hall, 160-272 | |
| Ihara Saikaku | |
| Basho | |
| Perrin | |