

East Asian Cultures: From Zen to Pop

The course examines various aspects of culture in both pre-modern and modern East Asia, ranging from literature, art, performance, and cuisine to contemporary pop culture (film, manga, anime, etc.). Each week we will analyze a specific cultural phenomenon, or aspect of material culture, from China, Japan or Korea in order to gain insights into the cultures of these countries. We will also consider the central influence of major philosophical systems such as Confucianism and Buddhism on East Asian cultures. A comparative perspective will be employed to examine the cultural links, and the cultural differences between these three countries of East Asia (as well as Hong Kong and Taiwan). The course will also introduce students to a variety of methodologies for the study of culture (e. g. cultural studies, anthropology, and history). This course is suitable for students of all levels.

The course will focus on an analysis of **primary materials** such as novels, memoirs, and films (in translation), **art objects** and **material artifacts** from the countries of East Asia.

The course includes one field trip to the MFA.

There are 5 film screenings for the class, noted on the syllabus.

“East Asian Culture”

The term “**East Asia**” refers to China, Japan, Korea (and sometimes Vietnam), countries that historically have been divided by politics and geography, but that have shared close **cultural** links.

A focus on culture thus serves as one of the most useful means of looking at “East Asia” as an entity.

What is meant by “**Culture**”?

Notions about the term “culture” or “cultures” have changed over time:

Raymond Williams writes that: “**Culture** is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language.”

Williams offers three general definitions: 1. “a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development” 2. “a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group, or humanity in general” 3. “the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity...music, literature, painting and sculpture, theatre and film” [1976]

Robert Redfield, “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired....as a member of society” [1940]

James Watson, “Culture...is not something that people inherit as an undifferentiated bloc of knowledge from their ancestors. Culture is a set of ideas, reactions, and expectations that is constantly changing as people and groups themselves change.” [1997]

Through the course of the term we will explore these various concepts of “culture.”

Requirements: In addition to the class readings, students will be required to write a 1-2 page journal reflecting on cultural issues every week. At the end of the semester, students will compose a final journal portfolio working with concepts learned in the class. Students will complete a total of approximately 20 pages of writing by the end of the semester. Students will also be expected to give informal oral presentations and to lead class discussion once during the term.

Grading: Class participation 40%*, oral presentations 10%, journal 20%, final portfolio 30%

* Class participation: students are expected to attend every class, having completed the homework assignment, prepared to participate actively in class discussion and/or answer questions about the reading. This means no unexcused absences. Students who miss film viewings will be expected to make them up on their own time.

Readings: All books are on reserve at Reserve Reading Library

readings marked with *on electronic reserve at <https://eres.mit.edu/> (password -- pop)

Required Texts:

Shen Fu, *Six Records of a Floating Life*
Haboush tr., *The Memoirs of Lady Hyegyong*
Zha, *China Pop*
Kendall, *Getting Married in Korea*

Recommended Texts:

Watson, *Golden Arches East*
Fang, *Treasures of the Chinese Scholar*
Gunter Nitschke, *Japanese Gardens: Right Angle and Natural Form*

Optional:

Schodt, *Dreamland Japan*
Lent, *The Asian Film Industry*
Nahm, *Introduction to Korean History and Culture*

Film List: (can be borrowed from Film and Media Studies Office)

Eat, Drink, Man, Woman (Taiwan)
Tampopo (Japan)
301/302 (Korea)
Akira (Japan)
Ghost in the Shell (Japan)
Armageddon (Korean)
Red Sorghum (a) (China)
Judou (a) (China)
Raise the Red Lantern (b) (China)
Farewell My Concubine (b) (China)
Rouge (Hong Kong)
Chungking Express (Hong Kong)
A Better Tomorrow (Hong Kong)
Once upon a Time in China, I (Hong Kong)
Fong Sai Yuk (Hong Kong)

Week 1
Introduction to East Asia

Film: *Buddha in the Land of the Kami*

Week 2
Overview of East Asian Culture

*de Bary *Sources of Chinese Tradition* pp.15-33 (Confucius), 48-53 (Taoism),
266-274 (Introduction to Buddhism)

*"Thinking about Culture," in *Comparing Cultures*, 3-11

February
MFA field trip

Week 3
Zen and Japanese Arts

*de Bary, "Zen Buddhism," 226-229, 255-260

*D. Suzuki, "Painting, [Haiku], Swordsmanship, Tea Ceremony," in *Zen Buddhism*, 279-294

*Selections from Nitschke, *Japanese Gardens*, "Rocks in the Sand," 65-109, "Path and Goal," 115, "The Rustic Tea Garden," 146-156, "Wabi- restraint and poverty," 160-162, look at all pictures pp. 64-167.

Week 4
Literati Culture in Late Imperial China

Shen Fu, *Six Records of a Floating Life* (ch 1-3)

*Fang, "Introduction," *Treasures of the Chinese Scholar*, 1-3

*Zhang, "The Chinese Language and Scholar Objects," *Treasures of the Chinese Scholar*, 15-17

*Zhang, "Scholar Objects and Folk Beliefs," *Treasures of the Chinese Scholar*, 23-26

*Clunas, "Furnishing the Self in Early Modern China," 21-34

*Wen Zhenheng, "Treatise on Superfluous Things," excerpts

*"The Scholar's Garden," 4-9

Week 5
Lady Hyegyong's *Hanjungnok* and Korean Confucianism

Film: *Chunhyung*

Haboush tr., *The Memoirs of Lady Hyegyong*, "Introduction," "The Memoir of 1795," "The Memoir of 1805", Look through the illustrations between pp. 195-197

*Andrew Nahm, "The Yi Dynasty and a Confucianized Korea," 94-95, 108-109, 113-114

Week 6

Food and Cuisine: Tastes Good, Looks Good, or Good for You?

Film Screening -- Eat, Drink, Man, Woman

China:

*Simoons, "Food in Chinese Thought and Culture," 13-37

*Watson, "From the Common Pot: Feasting with Equals in Chinese Society," 389-401

*Cooper, "Chinese Table Manners: You Are How You Eat," *Human Organization* 45: 179-84 (1986)

Japan:

*Richie, "A Taste of Japan: Introduction,"

*Richie, "Okashi," *A Taste of Japan*, 90-96

Korea:

**Annual Customs of Korea*, excerpts

*Marks, *The Korean Kitchen*, excerpt

Films: to watch on your own

Tampopo

301/302 (optional)

Week 7

Reinventing Tradition: Old and New Style Weddings in Korea

Kendall, *Getting Married in Korea: of Gender, Morality and Modernity*

Ch. 1, 2, 3, 7, conclusion

Week 8

Hong Kong Cinema: Kung Fu, Gangsters, and Local History

Film Screening:--- *Once upon a Time in China*

*John Lent, *The Asian Film Industry*, selection

*Ryan, "Blood, Brothers and Hong Kong Gangster Movies: Pop Culture Commentary on "One China," 61-76

Film to watch on your own: *A Better Tomorrow*

Week 9

Reading by Chang-rae Lee

Homework:

Watson ed., *Golden Arches East*

(students will read Intro, Afterword and 1 chapter on Beijing, Hong Kong, Taipei, Seoul **or** Tokyo)

Week 10

Popular Culture in Contemporary China

*****Film Screening: *Raise the Red Lantern***

Zha, *China Pop*, selections

Films to watch on your own: *Red Sorghum*, *Judou*

Week 11

Science Fiction in Japan: Utopias and Dystopias

Film screening: *Akira*

*Tanner, "Mr. Atomic, Mr. Mercury, and Chime Trooper: Japan's Answer to the American Dream," 79-102

*Napier, "Panic Sites: The Japanese Imagination of Disaster from *Godzilla* to *Akira*." 327-351

*William Gibson, "Is Japan Still the Future?", "My Own Private Tokyo," *Wired*, September, 2001

*William Gibson, "The Future Perfect: How Did Japan Become the Favorite Default Setting for so Many Cyberpunk Writers?" *Time Magazine*, April 30, 2001.

Film in class: *Japan Dreaming*

Week 12

final presentations

final portfolio due