

Sophia University –January Session 2027

January 7 – January 29, 2027 *January 7: Orientation

Date: August 2026

Course Title	Japanese Cinema and Visual Culture
Course Code	ARZ201
Instructor	Juanita Barreto Barreto
Class Period	1st Period (9:00-10:40)
Course Format	In-Person
Language of Instruction	English
Maximum class size	20
Course Description	The course is a film series that surveys the history of Japanese cinema and specific moments in Japanese history from the Meiji period to the present day. The assigned films range from works made in the 1940s to the contemporary era, both fiction and documentary films, and will serve as a guide to explore Japanese visual aesthetics framed in popular culture. We will delve into each filmmaker's vision and her/his place in the Japanese film scene of the moment. In general, the purpose is to introduce students to the appreciation and analysis of images, and of cinema, by tracing the formal and narrative elements characteristic of the cinematographic language and in relation to the historical, political and social contexts in which the films were produced, as well as to recognize the discourses that these images have constructed and how they have contributed to the configuration of Japanese identity. The course reviews the national cinema of the 20th century modernity and the contemporary era to provide students with a better understanding of how the formal and discursive components of cinema are highly significant conceptual and cultural elements. During each session, films will be discussed considering parameters and thematic or analytical aspects proposed by the professor. Studying the materials selected for each class is key to engage in classroom activities designed to promote a productive and enjoyable exchange among students. All readings and lectures will be in English.
Course Objectives	At the end of the course, students will have broadened their knowledge of modern and contemporary Japanese visual culture and deepened their understanding of its global value. By considering issues such as

	Eurocentrism, Orientalism/auto-Orientalism, aestheticism and <i>Japonisme</i>, students should acquire in-depth knowledge to engage in questions such as what is “Japanese cinema”? The goals are to acquire analytical tools and methodologies of study to optimize the visual experience of Japanese film productions; to cultivate a sensitive and thoughtful view towards cultural products distant from one's own culture; to identify the cultural and socio-political context in which the director in question produced her/his work, and her/his relationship to it; to understand, appreciate and discuss the visual and narrative elements that characterize each cultural artifact. The ultimate objective is to express ideas clearly orally and in writing through the conduction of a brief presentation on an artifact relevant to the class and the submission of a report with a critical lens about the experience of attending either a local movie theater, a local mini-theater, or a museum dedicated to film, such as The National Film Archive of Japan, The Fujifilm Photo History Museum, The Ghibli Museum, among others. It should be noted that: 1) This activity is to be carried out outside class hours as fieldwork, 2) Students are free to choose one of the above mentioned activities, among which there are both free and paid options with student discounts.
Expected work outside of class	Students should carefully watch assigned films before class meets, along with completing supplementary readings like articles, book chapters and critical essays. Those interested in taking this course must be willing to watch films as homework, which sometimes means watching one film every day of the week consecutively. Preparation of homework assignments (exercises and note-taking while watching the films), a short presentation and a written or audiovisual report. (1.5-2.2 hours for watching films or reading materials depending on the class schedule + preparation and research for presentation + visit to a Japanese cinema-related activity).
Course Materials	Links to films, PDFs, videoclips, and others on Moodle.
	Purchase of textbook: not necessary
	e-book: not applicable
Moodle	Daily materials such as films, texts and assignment prompts will be posted on Moodle. Watching and reading the daily materials before class is mandatory.

Contact Instructor	• Via Email *The email address will be available at CGED office or informed by the instructor in the first class if needed.
Evaluation (Attendance, Class participation, in-class assignments, final exam, quizzes, etc.)	Attendance 20% Class participation and in-class activities 25% Quizzes (3) 15% Written or audiovisual report 20% Final presentation 20% (Outline of presentation included)
Other comments	-
Class schedule	*January 7: Orientation *January 11, January 22: No-Class Day [DAY 1] Introduction to the class: What is “Japanese cinema”? Students will be introduced to different ideas around the category of Japanese Cinema through discourses established by European and American film scholars, local and international audiences, Film Festival Circuits, among others. They will learn about connections between early Japanese motion pictures and Japanese theater and aesthetics, as well as French Orientalism. [DAY 2] The Birth of Cinema in Japan Students will learn about the birth of cinema in Japan with the arrival of new technologies and the subsequent influence of Hollywood's typified moviemaking in the development of the Japanese film industry as well as deviations from it. They will continue to expand their knowledge of the evolving connection between performing arts and early Japanese films. [DAY 3] Japanese film from the 1940s: Film Director Kenji Mizoguchi - <i>Jidaigeki</i> and censorship during the Occupation - Watch: <i>Five Women Around Utamaro</i> (Utamaro o Meguru Gonin no Onna). Dir. Kenji Mizoguchi (1946). Students will become familiar with the work of Kenji Mizoguchi by learning about the narrative and visual strategies chosen by the filmmaker. They will learn how to analyze the discursive and formal components of his work by considering different film departments such as direction, cinematography, production design, sound, etc. They will get to know about the post-war and Occupation cultural and socio-political context in which Mizoguchi produced his work.

	[DAY 4] “The Golden Age” – Part 1: Film Director Yasujiro Ozu - Form and narrative: aesthetic concepts and the everyday - Watch: <i>Tokyo Story</i> (Tōkyō Monogatari). Dir. Yasujiro Ozu (1953). Students will become familiar with the work of Yasujiro Ozu by learning about the narrative and visual strategies chosen by the filmmaker. They will learn how to analyze the discursive and formal components of his work by considering different film departments. They will get to know about the post-war and Occupation cultural and socio-political context in which Ozu produced his work.
	[DAY 5] “The Golden Age” – Part 2: Film Director Kinuyo Tanaka - The Female Gaze in Postwar Mainstream Cinema - Watch: <i>The Eternal Breasts</i> (Chibusa yo eien nare). Dir. Kinuyo Tanaka (1955). Students will become familiar with the work of Kinuyo Tanaka by learning about the narrative and visual strategies chosen by the filmmaker. They will learn how to analyze the discursive and formal components of her work by considering different film departments. They will get to know about the cultural and socio-political context in which Tanaka produced her work to understand her decision to become a director and how the figure of ‘woman director’ was being constructed and represented in the public sphere and the Japanese media.
	[DAY 6] <i>Taiyōzoku</i> films (Sun Tribe) and the <i>Nūberu bāgu</i> (Japanese New Wave) Students will learn about the cultural and socio-political context of the late 1950s and 1960s, and the rise of new film genres and filmmakers whose perspectives were in line with the political and social upheaval in Japanese society.
	[DAY 7] Documentary filmmaking in Japan – Part 1: Film Director Kazuo Hara - Watch: <i>Extreme Private Eros: Love Song 1974</i> (Gokushiteki erosu: Renka 1974). Dir. Kazuo Hara (1974). Students will become familiar with the documentary work of Kazuo Hara by learning about the narrative and visual strategies chosen by the filmmaker. They will learn how to analyze the discursive and formal components of his work by considering different film departments. They will get to know about the cultural and socio-political context in which

	Hara produced his work.
	[DAY 8] Film Genres and International Film Festivals: Film Director Takeshi Kitano - Watch: <i>Fireworks</i> (Hana-bi). Dir. Takeshi Kitano (1997). Students will have a better understanding about the correlation between Film Festival Circuits, Japanese cinema and film genres by taking as example director Takeshi Kitano. They will learn how to analyze the discursive and formal components of his work and will get to know about the cultural and socio-political context in which Kitano produced his film.
	[DAY 9] Documentary filmmaking in Japan – Part 2: Film Director Yang Yong-hi - Alternative perspectives and Korean-in-Japan (<i>Zainichi</i>) cinema - Watch: <i>Dear Pyongyang</i>. Dir. Yang Yong-hi (2005). Based on the work of Yang Yong-hi, students will learn about the relationship of an alternative visual discourse with contemporary Japan and the film industry. They will be introduced to the so-called female gaze and its presence or absence in her documentary.
	[DAY 10] Part 1: Japanese Film and the 2000s - Emerging filmmakers: contrast between auteur and popular cinema. Students will gain knowledge about the 2000s film industry backdrop and film genres such as anime. They will also learn about the new generation of filmmakers, transmedia storytelling, and the presence or absence of the connection between performing arts and the current panorama of Japanese cinema. Part 2: Contemporary Ecofeminist Cinema Students will learn about ecofeminist approaches in contemporary Japanese film by considering genre and the concept of <i>Inaka</i>. They will get to know about the cultural and socio-political context in which films following this trend were produced. - Watch (choose one): On Part 1: Japanese Film and the 2000s: <i>Shara</i> (Sharasōju). Dir. Naomi Kawase (2003).

	On Part 2: Contemporary Ecofeminist Cinema: <i>Kamome Diner</i> (Kamome shokudō). Dir. Naoko Ogigami (2006) <i>Little Forest: Summer/Autumn</i> (Ritoru foresuto: Natsu/Aki). Dir. Jun'ichi Mori (2014). <i>Little Forest: Winter/Spring</i> (Ritoru foresuto: Fuyu/Haru). Dir. Jun'ichi Mori (2015).
	[DAY 11] Narratives of Food, Aesthetics, and Society in Contemporary Japanese Cinema: Film screening and conversation The selected film will function as a case study to address the connection between food and aestheticism, and question the social issues surrounding that relationship.
	[DAY 12] Workday for presentations/ Individual meetings In this session, students are expected to come to the classroom to check in. Afterwards, they should work on their presentations either in the classroom, library or preferred place to study. They can also ask for an individual meeting with the professor to talk about any questions they may have.
	[DAY 13] Presentations
	[DAY 14] Presentations

*Course format, evaluation methods and class schedule may be subject to change.

[Important Note Regarding Class Capacity]

Course enrollment in each course is on a first-come, first-served basis. Please be aware that once the maximum capacity is reached, you will no longer be able to select that course.

If you plan to transfer the credits to your home university, please consider alternative courses as well when making your study plan, in case the courses you want to take are full.