

Note: This syllabus is tentative and subject to change.

Japanese Horror Film Syllabus [Tentative]

Instructor

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Office: [TBD]

Office Hours: [TBD]

Objectives

- Students will learn how to accurately recognize and apply basic film terminology to describe film form.
 - Students will be introduced to multiple ways to think about and study film, especially “genre films” that have not always been treated seriously in the academic and critical worlds.
 - Students will practice thinking about films in the context of their time and place, and learn basics about Japanese society, history, and culture as relates to the films viewed.
 - Students will integrate the analysis of themes, images, and/or narrative with formal analysis.
 - Students will be introduced to Japanese filmmakers from a variety of time periods who have relevance to the horror genre.
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Materials

- There will be no textbook for the course. Readings and viewings will be made available online through the Course Management System or class website. If you cannot access this system for some reason, notify the instructor immediately.
- **Students are responsible for checking email at least once per weekday. READ ALL EMAILS THOROUGHLY.**

Get help or learn more about film analysis with the [Yale Film Analysis Guide](#).

For tips on how to view films and prepare for class, see “Film Note Taking Tips” on Moodle.

Classroom Policies

1. Attend all classes on time for the full duration of the class.
2. Complete all readings before the class in which they are to be discussed.
3. Be prepared to discuss all readings and viewings, having taken notes on their central ideas, formal qualities, and important passages.
4. Engage in discussion civilly and in good faith.
5. While in the classroom, refrain from eating or drinking (except water).
6. While in the classroom, refrain from engaging in activities unrelated to class such as chatting, text/app messaging, internet browsing, gaming, social media use, etc.
7. If you have a question or concern, contact the professor immediately. Last-minute requests may not be granted.

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8. Do not engage in behaviors that might disrupt the class or distract classmates/the professor.
 9. Be fully familiar with all definitions of plagiarism and be sure to avoid all forms of plagiarism and academic dishonesty.
 10. Address all grade concerns/disputes with the professor within 2 weeks of receiving the grade, or forfeit the opportunity to revisit the grade.
 11. Do not use generative AI (for example Chat-GPT) to produce writing for this class on any assignments or tests/assessments. Writing should be the student's own. Use of generative AI will be considered plagiarism unless the instructor grants permission in advance for a special reason.
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Assignments and Grading

- Students are encouraged to ask for extensions if they think they will not be able to complete work on time. It is important to ask for extensions **before the due date**.
- Late assignments without a reason are penalized at 10% per day. **You are ultimately responsible for technical problems.**
- It is recommended that you submit all assignments in advance of the deadline and check that files have uploaded properly. **Unreadable or corrupted assignments will receive 0 credit**, taking lateness penalties of 10% per day until submitted in readable form.

1. Attendance and Participation (20% of total grade)

- Attendance is required. You may miss 2 classes before absences impact your grade. Frequent lateness will impact your grade.
 - See the AKP attendance policies for more information.
- **If you become ill or are facing any situation that prevents you from attending every class on time, engaging in class, or completing assignments on time, you MUST contact the instructor IMMEDIATELY.**
- Be prepared to discuss and collaborate in small groups, especially on peer review days.

2. Weekly Responses (10% of total grade)

- A total of **12 weekly responses (with replies)** will be completed in the course, using discussion forums on the class Moodle
- **Responses will be due by Wednesday night, and 2+ replies to classmates will be due by Friday night.**
- Weekly responses are NOT graded for grammar or perfection; they are meant to encourage discussion and collaborative thought for the whole class.
- Late responses or replies will result in a lower grade but can be completed for partial credit within 2 weeks.
- Credit will not be given for responses over 2 weeks late.
- Please **see the Weekly Responses and Replies** file under "Assignments" on Moodle for more information.

3. Major Assignments (26% of total grade / 13% each)

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- You will complete two Major Assignments (Film Form Description and Film Clip Analysis) designed to prepare you to do formal and topical/narrative analysis of film, which you will also need to perform on the final.
- A Major Assignment may have multiple steps, such as a first draft/attempt, peer review, and a final attempt. The first steps are to build skills that will continue to be used later. However, you must complete all steps on time to receive full credit.
- Initial steps will be submitted on Moodle and graded for completion and engagement unless severe problems are apparent.
- You must complete peer-reviewed steps on time to be prepared for peer review.
- You must submit your documentation of each step on Moodle.
- Submissions will be in **.doc or .pdf format**.
- Please see the **Major Assignment 1** and **Major Assignment 2** Guidelines for more information.

4. Reading Notes and Minor Assignments (10% of total grade)

- Reading notes must be completed for certain major readings, and should be submitted in .doc format.
- There may be occasional other small assignments (in-class reflective writing, etc.) that come up, which will be counted under this category.
- You will not get individualized feedback for reading notes, but tips will be given to the class based on patterns in reading notes (such as clarifications on frequently misunderstood points).
- You may discuss readings with other students before class. Reading notes should not be identical (each student must prepare their own based on their own thoughts), but study groups may help you approach them or discuss difficult points.

5. Midterm and Final Exam (34% of total grade/ Midterm = 10%, Final = 24%)

- The Midterm will have a closed-note portion and an open-note portion.
- The closed-note portion of the midterm exam will ask you to complete some multiple choice/short answer questions and short paragraph questions.
 - Please arrange accommodations according to program policy.
- The open-note portion of the midterm will ask you to complete short and long essay answers pertaining to material through the class.
 - All notes should be printed or hand-written in advance. Students will not use the internet, or any type of LLM (Large Language Model) or AI applications during this exam.
 - **Let the instructor know if you have any accommodations needs.**
- The final exam will ask you to complete multiple choice/short answer questions, short paragraph questions, and longer essay questions.
 - It is open-note.

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- The more effectively you learn and take notes throughout the semester, the more smoothly the final exam should go.

Grade Breakdown

20%	Attendance and Participation
10%	Weekly Responses
13%	Major Assignment 1 (Film Form)
13%	Major Assignment 2 (Film Analysis)
10%	Minor Assignments (Includes Reading Notes)
10%	Midterm exam (half closed-note, half open-note)
24%	Final exam (open-note)

Accessibility

It is my goal that this class be accessible to all students. I hope you will help me meet that goal by communicating with me about any needs I may have overlooked.

If you encounter any barriers to your learning, please feel welcome to contact me to discuss your concerns. Whenever possible, I hope to support the needs of each unique learner.

All films that use language will have English subtitles available.

Approachability, Trust, and Academic Honesty

It is extremely important that we communicate and work together. **I want to encourage students to contact me via email anytime you have a question or concern.** I recognize that it takes trust to make communication work. Please know that **I start with all my students from a place of trust.** If you tell me that you have a need or that a situation is impacting you, I will give you the benefit of the doubt. I will choose to trust you whenever possible, and try to give you what you need to make learning happen.

Trust is a two-way street. I hope that my trust and faith in you will inspire you to place trust in me, and believe my best intentions for treating you with dignity and helping you learn. I am a human person and I will sometimes make mistakes. **Let us be giving, open, and constructive with one another to make learning work.**

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Japanese Horror Film

Spring 2026 Schedule

- **Required Reading**
- **Required Viewing**
- **Assignment Due before class on this day (unless other deadline noted)**
- **Test on this day**
- **Optional Reading/Viewing**

Reminder: Weekly Responses are due on Mondays and Replies are due on Wednesdays.

Week 1 – January 13-17

Tues First Meeting and Introduction

Brief introductions, policies, orientation to course navigation, Q&A

Thur Early Inspirations

Intro discussion of genre history and genre studies

Introduce *Page of Madness* and silent film

- **Reading: Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, "The Tumor with the Human Face"**

Read this text before watching *Page of Madness* for homework:

This text was included in the program notes for original audience members:

"This is the grim interior of a mental hospital, resounding with dancing, shrieking, howling, and yelling. Here a pitiful and tragic tale is born, the drama of a sailor who had mistreated his wife, forgot his daughter, and eventually drove his wife insane. After a few years, the sailor, tired of life, returned to his hometown and learned that his wife had been saved at a mental hospital. He became a custodian there to gain access. His daughter has grown up beautifully and is about to marry a young man, but she worries about her insane mother. [In this time period, having a family member with mental illness was considered undesirable for a marriage partner.] The father's pain, his uneasy fear, is that his insane wife will destroy their daughter's happiness. In this way, events proceed darkly in relation to the crazy wife."

Before the next class, write down your thoughts about the following questions:

- Is the text above helpful for interpreting the film?
 - Are there other ways to interpret it if we don't have this text?
 - Are there parts of the movie that the text does not help us understand? Which ones? Why?
- What does the dancing woman have to do with the other characters, or why is she in the movie?

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- What is happening in the scene that involves the older man, the chest of drawers, and the band?
- What does the ending mean?

Week 2 – January 18-24

- Weekly Response 1 due Wednesday, Replies due Friday.

Tues Foundations 1: Genre

Early film history, the inspirations for the genre, expressionism. How to read silent film.

- **Viewing: Kinugasa Teinosuke, *Page of Madness*. 1926.** (view BEFORE class)

Thur Foundations 2: Genre

Learning about film form, thinking more deeply about the challenges of genre.

Continue discussing *Page of Madness*.

- **Reading: Rick Altman, “A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre.”**
- Complete Altman Notes before class, bring digital/hard copy to class for peer activity (submit next Tues)

Week 3 – January 25-31

- Weekly Response 2 due Wednesday, Replies due Friday.

Tues Foundations 3: Literary Traditions of Horror

Continuing to learn about film form, thinking about characteristics of Japanese horror and ghost stories

- **Short Viewing: Banchō Sarayashiki Ghost-story telling**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0NMwrbQcvGo>
- **Viewing: Nakagawa Nobuo, *Tōkaidō Yotsuya Kaidan*. 1959.**
- **Reading: Richard J. Hand, “Aesthetics of Cruelty: Traditional Japanese Theatre and the Horror Film.”**
- **Minor Assignment: Find a place in Kyoto that would be a good setting for a horror film. Specify the location/address, include a photo or drawing, and justify why this spot would make a good location for a horror movie.**

Thur Foundations 4: Stage Traditions of Horror

Continue examination of *Tōkaidō Yotsuya Kaidan* and kabuki aesthetics.

- Complete Freud Notes before class, bring digital/hard copy to class for peer activity

Week 4 – February 1-7

- Weekly Response 3 due Wednesday, Replies due Friday.

Tues Foundations 5: Literary and Visual Arts of Horror

Discuss the intersection of horror with the concept of the uncanny.

Preview and skill-build for midterm.

- **Viewing: Kobayashi Masaki, *Kwaidan* (aka *Kaidan*). 1964.**
- **Reading: Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny.” 1919.**

Thur Do Major Assignment 1A (Practice Formal Description), **submit on Moodle**, and **bring a hard copy to class Tuesday**

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Week 5 – February 8-14 (no classes 11th)

- Weekly Response 4 due Wednesday, Replies due Friday.

Tues Monsters of War

Thinking through the political and nuclear monsters of WWII.

- **Viewing:** Honda Ishirō, *Gojira*. 1954.
- **Reading:** Yoshikuni Igarashi, “Naming the Unnameable.”
- Complete Igarashi Notes (as with previous notes assignments) – submit Thursday
- **Submit** Major Assignment 1B (Description Peer Review Questions) by Thursday

Thur Monsters of War

Continue to discuss the form and narrative of Godzilla with readings.

Discuss upcoming midterm.

- **Reading:** Chon Noriega, “Godzilla and the Japanese Nightmare: When *Them!* Is U.S.”

Week 6 – February 15-21

- Weekly Response 5 due Wednesday, Replies due Friday.

Tues Midterm

- **In-class Midterm – Notify of Accessibility needs by 1/31**

Thur Monsters of War 2

War in horror film beyond WWII. What do anxieties about conflict look like in the postwar?

- **Viewing:** Shindō Kaneto, *Kuroneko*. 1968.
- **Reading:** Brian White, “Anxious Apocalypse: Transmedia Science Fiction in Japan’s 1960s.”

Week 7 – February 22-28 (no classes 23rd)

- Weekly Response 6 due Wednesday, Replies due Friday.

Tues Hippie Horror and Cult Classics

“Horrible form” and unusual aesthetics

- **Viewing:** Obayashi Nobuhiko, *House*. 1977.
- **Reading:** Evan Calder Williams, “Sunset with Chainsaw.”

Thur Catch-up/Preparation for field trip

Continue *House* discussion.

In-class viewings of portions of Toei films and Kyoto’s role in film production.

Exploration of early film technologies and destruction of early films.

Fri FIELD TRIP

Week 8 – March 1-7 (program field trips)

- Weekly Response 7 due Wednesday, Replies due Friday.

Tues Cult-Art

Considering the value of experimental or offbeat film.

Continuing with *House*, cult cinema, peer review.

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- **Reading: David Andrews, "Losing the Asterisk: A Theory of Cult-Art Cinema."**
- Complete Andrews Notes (discuss in class; submit Tuesday)

Thur Body Horror Between the Frames

Reading the nodes of anxiety where economics, aesthetics, and the body converge at the height of Japan's bubble economy.

Address midterm issues.

- **Viewing: Tsukamoto Shinya, *Tetsuo*. 1989.**
- **Reading: Laura Lee, "Animating the Image: Patch Work and Video Interactivity"**
- **Optional Viewing: Ōtomo Katsuhiro, *Akira*. 1988.**
- Complete Field Trip Reflection Assignment

Week 9 – March 8-14 (13th is hitoritabi pres)

- Weekly Response 8 due Wednesday, Replies due Friday.

Tues Flexibility or Skill-building day

Content TBA. This date can be used to make space in case the number of days is reduced by a holiday, or can be used to focus on unpacking complex ideas, such as the Lee reading, and building skills that may be needed for the final exam.

Thur Circular Contagion

Considering the fear of contamination and transmission of trauma

Practice describing film form

- **Viewing: Nakata Hideo, *Ring*. 1998**
- **Reading: Carlos Rojas, "Viral Contagion in the Ringu Intertext"**
- Complete Lee Notes (as before, submit Tuesday)

Week 10 – March 15-21 (no classes Mar 20)

- Weekly Response 9 due Wednesday, Replies due Friday.

Tues Emptiness and Atmosphere

Thinking about the endlessness of 1980s-1990s society

- **Reading: Aaron Gerow, "The Empty Return: Circularity and Repetition in Recent Japanese Horror Films."**
- Do Major Assignment 2A (Practice Analysis), submit, and **bring a hard copy to class Thursday**

Thur Violence and Broken Social Expectations

When is society horrifying?

- **Viewing: Fukasaku Kinji, *Battle Royale*, 2000.**
- **Reading: Se Young Kim, "Crisis in Neoliberal Asia: Violence in Contemporary Korean and Japanese Cinema."**
- Submit Assignment 2B (Peer Review Questions)

Week 11 – March 22-28

Tue The Lonely End

The threats of technology and isolation in the internet age.

Peer review for Assignment 2A.

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- **Viewing: Kurosawa Kiyoshi, *Pulse*. 2001.**

Thur Techno Terror

How do changes in technology change both the content and form of film?

Continue discussion of *Pulse*.

- **Reading: Mitsuyo Wada Marciano, “New Media’s Impact on Horror Cinema in the Digital Age.”**

Week 12 – March 29-April 4

- Weekly Response 10 due Wednesday, Replies due Friday.

Tue Return of the Vengeful Woman

What are the historical expectations regarding the female victim, and why does she so often become monstrous?

- **Viewing: Sono Shion, *Hair Extensions*. 2007.**
- **Reading: Linda Williams, “When the Woman Looks”**
- Complete Williams Notes (submit by Tuesday)

Thur Trauma and Gender Trouble

Thinking about the ways in which horror film reinforces, challenges, and plays with gender roles.

Continue *Hair Extensions*.

Week 13 – April 5-11

- Weekly Response 11 due Wednesday, Replies due Friday.

Tues Genre Borders

Returning to thoughts on genre boundaries, mixes, and breakdowns.

Discuss final exam.

- **Viewing: Ueda Shinichirō, *One Cut of the Dead*. 2017.**
- **Reading: Timothy Iles, “Horror, Thriller, Suspense: ‘Who Are You?’”**
- Group work: **Come to class prepared with a piece of feedback** you have received and/or specific skill you want to improve from your Assignment Sequences or Midterm. We will work together in groups to swap strategies and exchange peer feedback.

Thur Horror Humor

Thinking about the distance and closeness between humor and horror.

Reflecting back on the class.

- **Optional Reading/Viewing: “‘One Cut of the Dead’ director Shinichiro Ueda brings teleworking to Japan’s film industry”**

Final – April 14/15

- **Exam in Class**
- The final exam will be an open-note exam.
- Bring your own printed or hand-written notes.
- You may bring copies of readings.
- The better your notes, the easier it will be.
- You may not collaborate with classmates.

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- You are not permitted to use the internet or AI LLM applications such as Chat-GPT to formulate your responses.

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Field Trip Possibilities

Note: Many institutions have not announced their programming for the spring yet. The following are field trip possibilities, to be determined by availability of events and applicability to the class.

Possibility A – Toy Film Museum (Omocha Eiga Myujiamu) and Bunpaku (Kyoto Cultural Museum) [tentative]

Currently, the exhibits and screenings are only listed through the end of November. I would be able to confirm in December if any of the events might be especially relevant to the topic of our class. This could impact the ideal timing.

Currently, the events here are only listed through January 8.

The visit to the Toy Film Museum provides the occasion for several discussions:

- The history of early film technology
- How film technologies interact with play and toys
- Concepts of film preservation versus film object ownership
- The role of women and children in debates on early film

The visit to the Kyoto Museum could offer the occasion for various discussions depending on the theme of exhibitions or screenings available at the time. If there is no appropriate screening or exhibition, we will focus on the Toy Film Museum only.

Sample Itinerary:

11:00 Arrive at Toy Film Museum, experience and discuss toy film technologies
12:00 Mini-lecture on early film technologies, destruction of early films, and attitude toward children's interaction with film
12:30 Travel to Kyoto Cultural Museum – Lunch
1:30 Screening at Kyoto Cultural Museum [if appropriate]

Cost: 500 yen per participant for Toy Film Museum, 400 yen students/500 yen faculty for Kyoto Museum. (Total: 900-1000 yen per person)

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Possibility B - Toei Kyoto Studio Park (Eigamura).

Note: This park may be undergoing significant renovations that limit visiting options. Unfortunately, facilities such as the Eiga Bunkakan appear to be closed.

This park is well-known for its jidaigeki (period film) settings, so the trip will follow our engagement with two jidaigeki horror films, *Tokaido Yotsuya Kaidan* and *Kuroneko*.

The Toei studio is also the creator of several horror films and films in related genres (such as exploitation), which we will sample and explore prior to our departure (*Ju-on/The Grudge* series, *Battle Royale*, *Horrors of Malformed Men*, *The House Where Evil Dwells*, *Shogun's Sadism*, and many B horror movies from the 1950s-1960s).

The visit to the Eigamura provides the occasion for several discussions:

- The history of Tokyo vs. Kyoto filmmaking
- B movies and the economics of different film programming models
- “Movie magic” and filmmaking tricks and their relation to historical stagecraft (as we will discuss during our study of *Tokaido Yotsuya Kaidan*)
- How medium shapes experience: haunted houses vs. staged horror vs. film horror
- How jidaigeki (period) settings and tropes interact with the horror genre
 - Why is the Edo period so intertwined with the public imagination of ghosts?

The recommended field-trip course: <https://www.toei-eigamura.com/model-plan/school-trip/>

Sample Itinerary

10:00 Arrive, purchase tickets
10:30 Presentation on Edo life
11:00 Studio tour
11:30 Mini-lecture
12:00 Haunted house
12:30 Lunch