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JPNS 412.01: Introduction to Classical Japanese

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Japanese 412: Introduction to Classical Japanese

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This course is a nuts and bolts introduction to classical Japanese language, its grammar and sentence structure in particular, designed to captivate you with the inimitable pleasures of classical Japanese. We will be sampling various poetic and prose materials in the literary realm, these excerpted in small pieces and selected to foster your ability to read and appreciate pre-modern Japanese writings. Most works read this term will be pieces from the 8th to the 14th century, the Court Period. Edo period works may also be introduced, if time permits. This course will be largely conducted in English, as discussions will be, first and foremost, linguistic in nature. Japanese will also be used, where appropriate, to render classical prose into Japanese and to make comparisons with modern sentence structure.

There will be some exercises and translations assigned, but the main work of the course will be to read and analyze thoroughly the assigned passages, word by word, line by line, using the techniques and knowledge gained in class. Please come well prepared each time to work through the assigned text; all words should have been looked up in advanced and a tentative analysis of the passage made, however far off the mark it might turn out to be (no matter). Your effort to prepare will be reflected in my grade assessment of your participation/preparation, as noted below. It is my observation, after teaching this course many times, that students who consistently review the days learning rapidly accumulate the basic knowledge required to achieve full success in the course. Daily application, rather than occasional bursts of activity, will foster excellent mastery of the subject. Unlimited personal assistance from the professor is also offered, but you need to ask for it. Email questions also welcomed.

Course Texts:

Reikai Kogo jiten (classical Japanese dictionary)

Bungo Manual by Helen C. McCullough

Bound, xeroxed materials and course readings (sold at cost, \$20.00)

Grading breakdown:

A (90-100) B (80-89) C (70-79) D (60-69) F (50-59)

*Three 90-minute tests of equal value, roughly at 5 weeks, 10 weeks, and 15 weeks (end-of-term test).

These will be worth 20/20/30% each for a total of 70%. There is no separate final.

*Homework/small translation assignments (5%), including end-of-term translation assignment (5%): Please note: There will be random spot checks of your homework/assignment completion. Please bring your notes and tentative analyses of each passage assigned on the date it is to be read in class. Provide guesses when you get stuck; practice the art of intuitive inference. Do not leave blanks in your homework, but freely mark uncertain interpretations with a question mark.

*Pop quizzes, open book, for review purposes, in which you will be asked simply to give an analysis of a phrase or even a single grammar point, one clarified in the preceding lecture. The purpose of this exercise is to encourage you to correct your work in class and take good notes, as well as to review those notes before class so that you are up to speed. For this reason, quizzes are not announced in advance and will be instead a part of our normal routine: 10%

*Class participation and demonstrated level of acquired knowledge and preparation: 10%. Consistent with sectional policies on absenteeism and tardiness, each absence and tardy arrival after the first two gratis ones will be reflected in a one-point deduction from the participation percentage. In addition, more than four 90 min. absences will result in an automatic failing grade for the course, at the discretion of the professor. If there are medical or other major emergencies, please advise me immediately, so that appropriate assistance may be arranged.

General plan for course:

We will begin with a survey of the xeroxed materials, including a variety of tools and charts, this to be followed by an introduction to McCullough's handbook. The use of these essential materials will be explained to you, but it will take some weeks for you to become thoroughly used to them. We will continue during our second meeting to work through this material: you will learn how to conjugate Japanese classical verbs, how to attach special--and very meaningful!--suffixes to them, how in turn to attach further suffixes to the suffixes. You will learn to identify inflectable suffixes and non-inflectable ones, and learn the basic parts of speech in Japanese. We will also begin to talk about the general meaning categories into which these many special suffixes fall: what do they mean? Grammatical exercises will be assigned at the second or third meeting (depending upon our rate of progress, which differs somewhat year to year), and these will be completed prior to our beginning to read the first selected text, Iroha Uta, the so-called Japanese alphabet poem.

Assignment for the second session: please familiarize yourself further with the main xerox packet introduced during the first meeting; read the Introduction gAh (pp. 1-7 only) and Introduction gBh (pp. 1-5) towards the end of the xerox packet in the Introductory Readings and Grammar Exercises section. One or more short written exercises will be assigned during the second meeting. At least two weeks will be spent covered introductory grammar points, using the various charts/tools supplied. After this, we will begin to read the following sources:

List of Works to Be Read and Enjoyed (As Time Allows)

Items not completed will be read in the second semester.

gIrohah (A-B-C) poem: the old Japanese alphabet nicely camouflaged as an imayo style poem with a Buddhist message. This renowned poem, a model for calligraphy practice and a handy syllabic inventory used in the Heian court, will be read first in this course as it also serves a primer of Japanese grammar.

A small sample of Kojiki [Record of Ancient Matters, 712], the first Japanese work of literature, myth, and history which survives intact. Written in an experimental style of writing which mixes Japanese and Chinese forms and uses a non-defunct syllabic kanji alphabet system. Kojiki also contains more than 100 poems, which constitute the earliest recorded verse in the Japanese tradition.

A few selections (1-2) from Man'yōshū [The Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves, ca. 759], the first anthology of Japanese poetry, all recorded in an experimental, now defunct script.

gHarugasumih: an amusing anecdote about "poetry contests" taken from the Kokoncho monju, a diverse collection of 720-plus interesting stories compiled in 1254, possibly by a courtier named Tachibana no Narisue.

The first page of Taketori monogatari (early ninth c), the Bamboo's Picker's Tale, considered the first surviving Japanese tale from the Heian period.

An episode from the Tosa Nikki (934), the first Japanese (as opposed to Chinese) literary diary from the Heian period (tenth century, to be more exact), documenting in amusing fashion the adventurous, pirate-infested journey of a Heian provincial governor and his wife, as they travel by sea from their provincial post in Tosa (in modern Shikoku) back to their home in Kyoto. Written by Ki no Tsurayuki, a male courtier and poet of high status, who adopts the persona of a female, breaking new narrative literary ground.

An episode from Ise Monogatari (ca 900), the first Heian poem-tale containing poems attributed to famous poet-lover Ariwara no Narihira and those in his [romantic] entourage.

An excerpt from court lady Sei Shōnagon's Makura no soshi (The Pillow Book, ca 1000), a classic Heian collection considered the earliest known work in the zuihitsu essay tradition.

The little tale gSorane no Chigoh (The Child Who Feigned Sleep), from the collection of tales Uji shui monogatari, compiled in the early Kamakura Period (ca 13th c).

gAnyo no Ama no Kosodeh [The Short-Sleeved Garment of Anyo the Nun]: a great little tale from the Jikkunsho, a morally edifying story collection dating from ca 1251.

The opening passage from Hojoki, Kamo no Chōmei's renowned essay on reclusion and worldly impermanence, ca. 1212.