



Bachelor of Arts in Japanese Course Handbook

Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies

Academic Year 2026-27

Course Co-ordinator - Dr Jennifer Guest

This handbook applies to students who, in Michaelmas 2026, are starting their course (for information relating to the FPE), or are entering the Final Honour School (for information relating to the FHS). The information in this handbook may be different for students starting in other years.

The Examination Regulations relating to this course are available here ([Exam Regulations](#)).

If there is a conflict between information in this handbook and the Examination Regulations, then you should follow the Examination Regulations. If you have any concerns please contact the Senior Academic Administrator, [Edmund Howard](#).

The information in this handbook is accurate as at Michaelmas Term 2026; however, it may be necessary for changes to be made in certain circumstances, as explained at www.ox.ac.uk/coursechanges. If such changes are made the faculty will publish a new version of this handbook together with a list of the changes and students will be informed.

General faculty-wide information can be found in the [General Undergraduate Handbook](#).

This Handbook

The handbook sets out the basic framework for the BA in Japanese. You should consult the current edition of the Examination Regulations for information regarding your course. The information in this handbook should be read in conjunction with:

- the Faculty's general Undergraduate handbook;
- the Examination Conventions and Rubrics;
- the [Examination Regulations](#);
- the [University Student Handbook](#)
- your college handbook.

If there is a conflict between information in this handbook and the Examination regulations, then you should follow the Examination regulations.

Comments and criticism of the handbook are always welcome; they should be sent to the [Director of Undergraduate Studies](#) or the Senior Academic Administrator, [Edmund Howard](#).

Version history

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Introduction

The Oxford BA course in Japanese is a four-year course, including a compulsory study period of one year in Japan in the second year. The course is comprehensive and demanding, revolving around intensive work on the written and spoken language through all four years, combined with both general and specialised study of Japanese culture, civilisation and society. The language teaching takes place in classes and small groups and in language laboratories. It includes work conducted by experienced native speakers.

The course aims:

1. to give students a thorough grounding in modern written and spoken Japanese, and in the written classical language;
2. to ensure that students have a good general knowledge of Japanese civilisation, culture, history, and society;
3. to allow students to do in-depth, specialised study from a range of subjects, including both classical and modern literature, linguistics, pre-modern and modern history, anthropology, politics, economics, and art.

History

Japanese has been taught as a degree subject at Oxford since 1963. The course started with only one lecturer, but the field has shown a dramatic expansion in both staff and student numbers since then. Oxford is today a major national and international centre for the study of Japan. The University currently has sixteen senior faculty members and four full-time language Lecturers engaged in research and teaching in fields related to Japan. There are usually around fifty undergraduates reading for the degree of BA Honours in Japanese, and ten or so graduate students in Japanese in the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at any one time. It is possible to take Chinese, Korean, or Tibetan studies as a subsidiary language for the BA in Japanese degree, which will give you the opportunity to study the subsidiary language to intermediate level.

There are two centres for the teaching programme in the University, the main Faculty building at 1 Pusey Lane, and the Nissan Institute of Japanese Studies:

The Pusey Lane Building

The Pusey Lane Building is centrally located close to the Ashmolean Museum. It is there that the core curriculum of language classes for the B.A. Honours degree in Japanese Studies is taught. Other fields in Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, including Korean, and Tibetan,

share the same building. Korean, Tibetan, and Chinese are offered as subsidiary or optional languages for students of Japanese. There is a common room where tea and coffee are available and staff and students can meet.

The Nissan Institute of Japanese Studies

The [Nissan Institute of Japanese Studies](#) is one of the top European centres for the study of modern Japan. It forms part of the Oxford School of Global Area Studies in the University's Social Science Division and contributes to several of the degree programs offered by the University at both the undergraduate and graduate level. The Institute functions as the overall physical academic centre for Japanese Studies in the University and houses most tutors teaching on the Japanese course in both humanities and social sciences.

Bodleian Japanese Library

The [Bodleian Japanese Library](#) is housed within the Nissan Institute and holds the University's principal collections in the humanities and social sciences, which relate to the history and culture of Japan from the dawn of her civilisation to the present day. A significant collection of works on Japan on the history and social sciences in Japan since the Meiji Restoration has been built up; the Library, comprising about 120,000 volumes, offers one of the best research collections for Japanese studies in Europe.

Eastern Art Library

The [Eastern Art Library](#), housed in the Bodleian Art, Archaeology, and Ancient World Library, contains the University's research collection on Japanese art, in both Japanese and Western languages.

Ashmolean Museum

The University's [Ashmolean Museum](#) has a fine collection of Japanese art, particularly strong in holdings of ceramics and prints.

Course Outline

Year 1

The first year is dedicated to intensive work on the Japanese languages and study of the history and culture of Japan, and East Asia in general. At the end of the first year you will take Prelims, which examines the language and history and culture work you have done during the first year.

Subjects taken in the first year:

- Modern Japanese I
- Modern Japanese II
- East Asia Survey: Japan

Year 2

This year of the course will be spent at Kobe University in Japan for continued extensive language study, combined with the study of civilisation, culture and history. Details about

the year abroad will be given during the course of the first year.

Years 3 and 4 (Final Honour School)

The regular language work continues, and you will begin study in the classical language. An important part of these 2 years is specialised work within subject areas chosen by yourself from a wide array of available options, including both classical and modern literature, linguistics, pre-modern and modern history, anthropology, politics, economics, and art. You will choose 1 core special subject option, 2 special text options, 1 special subject option, and 1 option which can be either special subject or special text.

It is possible to study a subsidiary language (in which case you will only choose 1 core special subject option and 1 special text option).

In Year 4, you also write a dissertation on a subject of your own choice under supervision.

Japanese	Japanese with a subsidiary language
1. Modern Japanese I 2. Modern Japanese II 3. Spoken Japanese (1/2 paper) 4. Classical Japanese 5. Core special subject option I [essays] 6. Special text option I [translation and commentary] 7. Dissertation 8. Special text option II [translation and commentary] 9. Special subject option II [essays] 10. Either Special text option III or Special subject option III	1. Modern Japanese I 2. Modern Japanese II 3. Spoken Japanese (1/2 paper) 4. Classical Japanese 5. Core special subject option I [essays] 6. Special text option I [translation and commentary] 7. Dissertation A Subsidiary Language: 8. Chinese, Korean, or Tibetan Texts 9. Chinese, Korean, or Tibetan History and Culture 10. Chinese, Korean, or Tibetan Language

Students should note that not all subsidiary languages and special subject/text options may be available in a given year.

Subsidiary languages:

- Chinese
- Korean
- Tibetan

Available core special subject options:

These are all taught in Michaelmas Term only.

- Classical Japanese Literature
- Japanese Linguistics
- Modern Japanese Literature
- Pre-Modern Japanese History

Available special text options:

- Classical Japanese I: The Tale of Genji and the Pillow Book – runs in Michaelmas Term
- Classical Japanese II: Warrior Tales – runs in Hilary Term
- Japanese Linguistics I: *Boku wa unagi da* – runs in Michaelmas Term
- Japanese Linguistics II: Linguistic variation – runs in Hilary Term
- Japanese Linguistics III: Old Japanese – runs in Trinity Term
- Modern Literature I: Gender and Identity in Modern Japanese Literature – runs in Hilary Term
- Modern Literature II: Trauma and Narrative in Modern Japanese Literature – runs in Trinity Term
- Special Texts: Japanese Politics: runs in Hilary Term
- Pre-Modern Japanese History I: Origins of Japan – runs in Michaelmas Term (not available in 2026-2027)
- Pre-Modern Japanese History II: State and Society in Japan before 1600 – runs in Hilary Term (not available in 2026-2027)
- Pre-Modern Japanese History III: Knowledge, Life, and Culture in Early Modern Japan – runs in Trinity Term

Available special subject options:

- History of the Japanese Language – runs in Hilary Term
- Japanese Art – runs in Hilary Term (not available in 2026-27)
- Japanese Politics: Japanese Politics and International Relations – runs in Michaelmas Term
- Japanese Society – runs in Hilary Term and the first 2 weeks of Trinity Term, and is only available to Year 4 students
- Early Modern Japan (runs in Trinity Term)
- History of Modern Japan – runs in Michaelmas, Hilary and Trinity Terms.
- Topics in Classical Japanese Poetry – runs in Hilary Term
- Topics in Modern Japanese Literature – runs in Hilary Term
- Topics in Pre-Modern Japanese History – runs in Hilary Term (not available in 2026-2027)

Papers for FPE (Prelims)

All papers are compulsory. The exam regulations for Prelims can be found [here](#).

Modern Japanese I and Modern Japanese II

Students will have approximately 10 hours of language classes per week throughout the year, and 1 class per week of grammatical analysis in Hilary Term.

Students will be taught how to read, write, speak and listen to Japanese and how to translate from English into Japanese, as well as to analyse Japanese grammatically.

East Asia Survey: Japan

Students will have an average of just over 2 lectures per week throughout the year, and essay tutorials every fortnight. Students will write 12 essays throughout the year.

Lectures in Michaelmas and Hilary Terms will cover all of East Asian history with a focus on Japan in East Asia. Lectures in Trinity Term will focus entirely on modern and contemporary Japan.

Papers for FHS

Compulsory Papers

Modern Japanese I and Modern Japanese II

The two papers in Modern Japanese will test students' ability to translate into Japanese and from Japanese into English, as well as writing and reading in Japanese. The teaching for these papers will be language classes, translation classes, and text tutorials.

Spoken Japanese

The paper is an aural and oral examination and will be taken in the week before Trinity Full Term (0th Week) of the fourth year. It will test your ability to understand and produce spoken Japanese. The Spoken paper counts as half a paper. Most of the teaching directly preparing you for the paper in spoken Japanese will be language classes.

Classical Japanese

The paper in Classical Japanese will take the form of translation into English of Classical Japanese set texts and unseen texts, with brief linguistic commentary required on set texts. There will be classes and tutorials in Classical Japanese set texts (including *kanbun*) in Year 3 and classes on translation of unseen texts throughout Year 4.

Dissertation

Each student will produce a dissertation on a topic relating to Japan. You should already be thinking about your dissertation topic in Year 3, and the topic may well be informed by option work done on the course. You are expected to utilise your Japanese language skills in your research on your topic. Usually, students receive 2 hours of supervision in Trinity Term of Year 3 and 3 hours in each of Michaelmas Term and Hilary Term of Year 4. Please note the deadlines for submitting your dissertation title, and for submission of your dissertation. Dissertation supervision does not normally take place after Friday of week 7. A link to the Japanese BA Dissertation Guidelines can be found [here](#).

Core Special Subjects

Classical Japanese Literature: Ancient to Early Modern

Term in which it is taught: Michaelmas Term

Taught by Dr Jennifer Guest

This course provides a survey of classical Japanese literature from the earliest written texts to the early nineteenth century, with readings in English translation from a wide range of works as well as suggested secondary readings that address key questions about the literature of each period and about overarching topics like the social functions of literary creativity, the relationships between written texts and visual art/performance, and the construction of literary canons.

Week 1: What factors make a text classical, literary, or Japanese? (Does the Kojiki qualify?)

Week 2: The meaning of a “good poem” in early Japan

Week 3: Memoirs, diaries, and biographies in the Heian court

Week 4: Gender and genre in the mid-Heian classics

Week 5: Buddhist themes in medieval poetry and anecdotal literature

Week 6: Portrayals of warriors and warfare in medieval prose and theatre

Week 7: Humour in Edo literature

Week 8: Engagement with earlier classical literature among Edo period writers

Japanese Linguistics

Term in which it is taught: Michaelmas Term

Taught by Professor Bjarke Frellesvig

This option is designed to give an overview of the Japanese language and linguistics through reading and writing of essays on selected topics across the major fields of linguistics, beginning with a look at the main characteristics of Japanese as compared to other languages. Next, we look at variation within the Japanese language, considering both sociological characteristics of the speech situation (e.g., status and *keigo*) and of the speaker (e.g., gender). We will also examine loanwords in the Japanese vocabulary, lexical stratification, and phonology, and some selected aspects of Japanese grammar, focusing on transitivity in particular, as well as syntactic description in tree form. We will also work on description of Japanese dialects. Students taking this option should follow the lecture series on Japanese Linguistics in Michaelmas Term.

Week 1: Typological features of the Japanese language

Week 2: Honorific language (*keigo*) in Japanese, including its acquisition and use

Week 3: Gender as a factor in language variation in Japanese

Week 4: Lexical strata in Japanese

Week 5: Accent in Japanese

Week 6: Syntactic analysis (in tree form)

Week 7: The notion of transitivity and its role (including transitivity pairs) in Japanese

Week 8: Describing the features of a spoken dialect text in Japanese

Modern Japanese Literature: The Invention of Modern Japanese Literature

Term in which it is taught: Michaelmas Term

Taught by Dr Linda Flores

Tutorials by Dr Linda Flores and Dr Serena Ceniccola

How did the canon of modern Japanese literature develop? What factors contributed to the development of the genre? How does this impact how we read the canon today? This option examines the evolution of the category from the Edo period to the early 20th century. In our readings we will explore topics such as: national identity, the construction of gender, notions of the self, and modernity. Teaching will consist of weekly lectures and tutorials, with one essay per week. Students taking this option should follow Dr Flores' Modern Japanese Literature lecture series in Michaelmas Term. 'Essential' reading should be completed before the lecture.

Below is a sample syllabus for this option:

Week 1: Modern Japanese Literature: Deconstructing the Canon

Week 2: Japan in Edo

Week 3: Identity in Meiji

Week 4: Civilisation and Enlightenment

Week 5: The Invention of Literature

*Week 6: The Reform of *Tanka* Poetry*

Week 7: The Rise of Empire

Week 8: Japanese Naturalism and the 'I-novel'

Pre-Modern Japanese History

Term in which it is taught: Michaelmas Term

Taught by Dr. Matthieu Felt

This option provides an introduction to the chronological narrative, institutions, actors, source types, and historiographical questions of Japanese history before 1868. The course proceeds chronologically from foundation mythology to the end of the Tokugawa shogunate. Required readings are taken from primary sources in English translation and representative secondary sources in English. Suggested secondary readings for each period will also be provided.

Below is a sample syllabus for this option:

Week 1: Origins, Myths, and State Formation
Week 2: The *Ritsuryō* State and Classical Japan
Week 3: Aristocratic Society and Court Culture
Week 4: Warriors and the Medieval Transformation
Week 5: Religion, Institutions, and Medieval Society
Week 6: Muromachi Japan and Regional Power
Week 7: Sengoku Japan and Political Consolidation
Week 8: Tokugawa Japan and the Early Modern Order

Special Subjects

History of the Japanese Language

Term in which it is taught: Hilary Term

Taught by Professor Bjarke Frellesvig

This option focuses on the development of the Japanese language from Old Japanese as it appears in the earliest attested writings through to written and spoken Modern Japanese within the phonology, morphology and syntax of the language. Other themes covered will be the reconstruction of even earlier language stages than that of Old Japanese, the origins and development of the scripts used to write Japanese, dialectal and other variation within pre-modern Japanese, and the influence from foreign languages, both Chinese and European, on the Japanese language. Students taking this option should follow lecture series in Hilary Term on The History of the Japanese Language and on Introduction to Old Japanese.

Topics covered may include:

Proto-Japanese and Japanese before Old Japanese; Japanese scripts; The sound system of Old Japanese and phonological changes; The Eastern Old Japanese dialects; Old Japanese morphology and later changes in inflection and verb morphology; Historical syntax; External influences on Japanese.

Japanese Art (NOT AVAILABLE IN 2026-27)

Term in which it is taught: Hilary Term

Taught by Dr Clare Pollard

This option provides an introduction to Japanese art in the Meiji and Taisho eras, with reference to the collections of the Ashmolean Museum. The course explores developments during the important transitional period of Japanese art in the late 19th to early 20th century, as artists and makers adapted to changes following the opening of Japan to international trade and the Meiji Restoration. Students taking this option should also follow Dr Pollard's series of lectures and object-based sessions which take place in the Ashmolean Museum.

Japanese Politics: Japanese Politics and International Relations

Term in which it is taught: Michaelmas Term

Taught by Dr Kristi Govella

This option examines the evolution of Japanese domestic politics and international relations focusing on the end of World War II to the present, situating the country in regional and global context and highlighting the ways that its experiences shed light on broader questions in social science. Japan is often seen as a puzzle by scholars of politics and international relations. It has a vibrant and mature democracy, yet it has been dominated by a single political party for most of the last seven decades. It

formally renounced war in its “peace constitution,” but its Self-Defense Forces are considered by many to be one of the most sophisticated militaries in the world. It surprised observers with its “economic miracle” after World War II, then it suddenly slumped into several decades of slow or no economic growth after the bursting of its asset bubble in the early 1990s. It is viewed as a powerhouse of cultural appeal and as a good international citizen by some, yet it continues to be embroiled in historical disputes over its imperial past. This option will explore these topics as well as other key dimensions of Japanese politics and foreign policy. Students taking this option must also follow the companion lecture series during Michaelmas term.

Japanese Society

(Please note that this option is only available for fourth years)

Term in which it is taught: Hilary Term and first 2 weeks of Trinity Term

Taught by Professor Roger Goodman

This option has two main aims: (a) to provide an introduction to Japanese society from an anthropological perspective and (b) to show how the study of Japan can contribute to mainstream anthropological theory. Major themes which will be covered include notions of personhood, rituals and symbols, time and space, structure and agency, continuity and change, and the construction of ethnic, gender, sexual and minority identities. It will be possible to study a number of contemporary social institutions in depth, including the Japanese educational, legal, medical, welfare, company, household and kinship systems, new religions and the worlds of traditional arts and popular culture. At the micro level, the details of these operations and the ideologies which support them will be examined, while at the macro level the course will explore their relation to other social institutions and the wider political and economic arena both inside and outside Japan. Students taking this option must also follow the companion lecture series on Japanese Society in Hilary Term.

Recommended Introductory Reading:

Victoria BESTOR and Theodore BESTOR with Yamagata Akiko (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Japanese Culture and Society*, Routledge, 2011.

Joy HENDRY, *Understanding Japanese Society*, (5th edition), Routledge, 2019.

Nakane, Chie. 1973. *Japanese Society*. Penguin.

Robertson, Jennifer (ed.). 2005. *A Companion to the Anthropology of Japan*. Blackwells.

Ryang, Sonia. 2004. *Japan and National Anthropology: A Critique*. Routledge Curzon.

Sugimoto, Yoshio. 2010. *An Introduction to Japanese Society* (3rd edition). CUP.

History of Modern Japan

Terms in which it is taught: Michaelmas, Hilary and Trinity Terms

Taught by: Dr Alice Freeman

This course provides an overview of the history of modern Japan from the Meiji *Ishin* of 1868 into the post-World War Two era. Themes include: The Meiji *Ishin*: Restoration or revolution?; The Opening of Japan (*Kaikoku*) to the wider world; Civilisation and Enlightenment (*Bunmei Kaika*) and Meiji society; The Japanese colonial empire; Taishō “democracy” and Shōwa “fascism”; The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; The post-war economic miracle and its accompanying environmental destruction. Students are also welcome to suggest their own topics of interest.

Recommended Introductory Reading: Any overview of modern Japanese history, for example:

Gordon, Andrew. 2009. *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present*. Oxford University Press.

Pyle, Kenneth. 2006. *The Making of Modern Japan*. Heath.

Topics in Classical Japanese Poetry

Term in which it is taught: Hilary Term

Taught by Dr Jennifer Guest

This option focuses on poetry of the Heian, medieval, and early modern periods as well as its various literary and social contexts. Students taking this option should follow the seminar ‘Topics in Classical Japanese Poetry’ in HT, which involves discussion of selected waka, kanshi, and haikai poems in the original language (with an eye to understanding form and content rather than for translation as set text) as well as a closer look at some premodern manuscript materials. Essay tutorials for the option will further contextualise these primary sources with secondary reading in English on relevant issues, including the material and performance contexts of different poetic forms; the role of intertextuality and seasonal topics in composing and anthologising poetry; relationships between poetry, storytelling, and literary scholarship; and the role of poetry in imagining travel and landscape (from *Sarashina nikki* to Bashō’s travel diaries). It may be helpful to take the Classical Japanese Literature Special Subject Core option first and/or to have completed the third-year Classical Japanese set texts, but this is not necessary or required.

Topics covered may include:

The Kokinshū and ideas about the nature of waka poetry; Poetry competitions and material culture; Kanshi (Chinese-style poetry) and Heian academics; The *Wakan rōeishū*: poetry as visual and aural art; Poetic miscellanies and storytelling; Medieval commentary and poetics; Travel diaries, intertextuality, and the poetic landscape; Haikai poetry and visual art.

Topics in Modern Japanese Literature

Term in which it is taught: Hilary Term

Taught by Dr Linda Flores

Tutorials by Dr Flores/Dr Ceniccola

This option provides an overview of Japanese literature from the early twentieth century to the present day, with an emphasis on the literary, social and political tensions that defined the period. Topics may include: proletarian literature; Japanese modernism; Occupation literature; atomic bomb literature; the feminist movement; political unrest in the 1960s; 3.11 literature; the environment; and representations of social alienation and difference in contemporary literature. Teaching will consist of weekly lectures and tutorials, with one essay per week. Students taking this option should also follow Dr Flores' Modern Japanese Literature lecture series in Hilary Term. 'Essential' reading should be completed before the lecture.

Early Modern Japan

Term in which it is taught: Trinity

Taught by Dr Pia Jolliffe

This special subject provides a general overview over early modern Japanese society. Our tutorials start with the political "unification" of Japan, a transition that spanned from the late sixteenth to the early seventeenth century. In this way we gain an understanding of the political-economic and socio-cultural conditions that set the stage for Japan's development under the Tokugawa Shogunate (1603-1868). During this period, foreign relations were strictly regulated. Nevertheless, economic and cultural relations with European and Asian peoples existed. We shall examine these non-state relations and discuss how they may have contributed to the flourishing of Japanese society. We shall discuss the status system of early modern Japanese society and how different people experienced their everyday lives, paying particular attention to women and children. Tutorials also engage with art and popular culture as well as the high level of education and literacy during the Tokugawa period. In our last tutorial we shall discuss the final years of the Tokugawa shogunate (*bakumatsu* period) and the "opening" of Japan to Western countries.

Details

Week 1: The "unification" of Japan

Week 2: Everyday life and material culture

Week 3: Foreign Relations

Week 4: Women in Society

Week 5: Children and youth

Week 6: Art and popular culture

Week 7: Education and literacy

Week 8: The *bakumatsu* period

Topics in Pre-Modern Japanese History (NOT AVAILABLE IN 2026-2027)

Term in which it is taught: Hilary Term

Taught by Dr. Matthieu Felt

This option examines the major interpretive frameworks that have shaped the field of pre-modern Japanese history. While the Core Special Subject option answers the question of what happened in Japanese history, the Special Subject option focuses on how historians have explained what has happened and the major disagreements in the field.

Problems addressed in the course may include: the idea of the Japanese state; violence and political authority; religion and power; households, kinship, and gender; commerce; knowledge and intellectual networks; Japan in a global setting; and the idea of early modernity, among others. As many problems are not time boxed to existing schema of periods, the course is not chronologically organized.

It will be immensely helpful to have completed the Core Special Subject option in Japanese Pre-Modern History prior to taking this option, but it is not required.

Special Texts

Classical Japanese I: The Tale of Genji and the Pillow Book

Term in which it is taught: Michaelmas Term

Taught by Dr Jennifer Guest

This option will involve readings from two near-contemporary works of Heian court prose, the Tale of Genji and the Pillow Book. Through close reading of passages from the Pillow Book, students will trace Sei Shōnagon's accounts of how she outwitted various other courtiers and impressed the empress with her quick literary responses; get to know the rhythms of Heian court life and the seasonal progression of waka topics; and consider the socio-political and gendered dynamics behind the brilliant setting of mid-Heian court salons. Readings from the Tale of Genji will focus on the early volumes of the tale and on Genji's relationship with the character known as Murasaki, perhaps the most iconic (if at times problematic) romance in Japanese literary history; the dynamics of romantic longing, power, and transgression established in these early episodes provide one possible set of signposts through the complex plot of the text as a whole.

These two texts, which are now among the best-known canonical works of classical Japanese literature, illuminate many facets of life in the Heian court around the turn

of the eleventh century, including poetry and aesthetics; ideals of romance and other relationships; shared assumptions about literary and cultural knowledge; conceptions of death, the supernatural, and the world beyond the capital; and attitudes toward gender and women's writing. By reading key excerpts from the Tale of Genji and Pillow Book alongside each other, we will aim for a deeper understanding of these themes and the roles they played in Heian court literature.

Classical Japanese II: Warrior Tales

Term in which it is taught: Hilary Term

Taught by Dr Jennifer Guest

In this option, students will read, translate, and comment on selected medieval warrior tales. Our focus will be on iconic passages from the immensely influential Tales of the Heike (*Heike monogatari*), which depicts the rise and fall of the Taira warrior clan along with the heroic acts and tragic deaths of characters on both sides of the twelfth-century civil wars. As we examine specific scenes in detail, we will also consider themes that run through the text as a whole and have wider implications for medieval Japanese literature, including portrayals of ideal warrior conduct and feats of bravery; Buddhist worldviews and attitudes toward death; the roles played by women in the tale; and the interaction between written sources and oral performance. We will conclude with a quick look at how the characters of the Heike were reimagined in later storytelling, art, and Noh drama, reading a passage from the Story of Yoshitsune (*Gikeiki*) – a popular account of the exploits of the Genji general Minamoto no Yoshitsune and his loyal warrior-monk companion Benkei that provides a chance to think further about the literary construction of warrior heroes (particularly doomed ones).

Japanese Linguistics I: Boku wa unagi da

Term in which it is taught: Michaelmas Term

Taught by Professor Bjarke Frellesvig

The purpose of this option is to examine a particular set of issues in Japanese linguistics in some detail, while assimilating the necessary concepts and vocabulary in the process. Students will read, translate, and critically comment on parts of the book *Boku wa unagi da' no bunpō: da to no* by Okutsu Kei'ichirō (1979).

This is an oft-quoted work on Japanese grammar that takes as its starting point various possible uses and interpretations of the sentence *boku wa unagi da* sometimes literally (but almost always mistakenly) translated 'I am an eel'. Depending on context, this sentence can be used in reply to questions such as "What did you order?", "What are you fishing for?", or "What is your favourite fish?", amongst many others. Okutsu examines sentences that can be formed on the same basic pattern from the perspectives of syntax and semantics.

The book addresses in particular the question of the status of the 'copula' within Japanese. It also raises questions about focus, presupposition, etc., thus covering

some basic notions in pragmatics. The book covers a broad range of issues using basic intuitions about meaning and grammaticality in a very accessible way.

Japanese Linguistics II: Linguistic Variation

Term in which it is taught: Hilary Term

Taught by Professor Bjarke Frellesvig

The purpose of this option is to explore varieties of the Japanese language, and to consider the factors that bear on the choices speakers make with regard to what they say and how they say it.

We will first look at various dialects of Japanese and the geographical patterns that dialectal variation exhibits. The readings will be taken from the book: *O-kuni kotoba o shiru* (Satō 2002). The topics looked at may include: the east/west dialect split in Japan; inferring how innovations spread; the standardisation of Japanese; the future of dialects in Japan; philology and dialectology; the sources of dialect items.

We then go on to focus specifically on gender as a factor in variation in speech and writing in Japanese, and its interaction with other sociolinguistic variables. The readings are selections from the book *Onna to Kotoba* (Endō 2001). The topics looked at may include: girls who refer to themselves using *boku*; which genders use masculine and/or feminine speech in TV dramas; factors on women's use of pauses and fillers in speech; the place of feminine speech in 'queer' contexts.

Japanese Linguistics III: Old Japanese

Term in which it is taught: Trinity Term

Taught by Professor Bjarke Frellesvig

The purpose of this option is to learn to read, translate and comment on texts written in Old Japanese, the oldest attested form of the Japanese language (from the Asuka/Nara period). The writing, the vocabulary, and the grammar of Old Japanese are significantly different from that of the canons of Classical Japanese literature from the Heian period onwards. The texts will be read and studied from a linguistic, rather than literary, point of view, focusing on the special features of Old Japanese script, phonology and grammar. These texts raise many points of interest for all students of Japanese, but knowledge of Old Japanese is an especially valuable addition to the study of Classical Japanese.

Most of the texts from this period are poetry. We will read texts from the poetry anthology the *Man'yōshū* (compiled after 759 AD), which is the main source of texts from the period, but we will also read poetry from other sources. We will also read works written in a ritualistic prose, from the *Senmyō* (imperial edicts) in the *Shoku-Nihongi* and from the *Norito* (prayers and blessings) from the *Engishiki*. We will also read some of the few texts written in Eastern Old Japanese, a group of dialects with characteristics that are different from the language of the capital, which is that reflected in the majority of sources.

Students taking this option should follow the lecture series on the History of the Japanese Language and Introduction to Old Japanese in Hilary Term.

Modern Literature I: Gender and Identity in Modern Japanese Literature

Term in which it is taught: Hilary Term

Taught by Dr Linda Flores/Dr Serena Ceniccola

This option is designed to explore issues of gender, sexuality, and identity in modern and contemporary Japanese literature. Topics for discussion may include: motherhood, singledom, constructions of gender, literature of resistance, minorities in Japan, technology, and what it means to be human. The primary texts for this option will consist of literature by writers such as Li Kotomi, Yagi Emi, Qudan Rie and Kawakami Hiromi; it may also include literary criticism relating to these writers and the issues raised in their works. In addition, we will read relevant scholarship in English. Note that readings for this option may include topics such as sexuality, violence (including sexual violence), and discrimination. Students taking this option are welcome to attend the Modern Japanese Literature lecture series taught during Michaelmas and Hilary terms.

Modern Literature II: Trauma and Narrative in Modern Japanese Literature

Term in which it is taught: Trinity Term

Taught by Dr Linda Flores/Dr Serena Ceniccola

The emphasis in this option will be on '3.11 Literature', works produced after the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake Disaster (earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster at Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant). Students will read and translate primary texts of trauma fiction and/or literary criticism in Japanese; they will also read criticism on trauma theory and related issues in English. We will consider questions such as: How is the trauma of 3.11 represented in literature produced after the disaster? How does the field of trauma studies inform our understanding of the genre of *shinsaigo bungaku* (post-disaster literature)? How have subsequent traumatic events such as the Covid-19 pandemic been represented in 3.11 literature? Authors studied in this option may include writers such as Kawakami Hiromi, Furukawa Hideo, Satō Atsushi and Ishizawa Mai. Students taking this option are welcome to attend the Modern Japanese Literature lecture series taught during Michaelmas and Hilary terms.

Japanese Politics

Term in which it is taught: Hilary Term

Taught by Professor Ian Neary

This option will explore core topics in Japanese politics.

The main focus will be on two texts: Bando Taro, 政治のしくみ *Seiji no Shikumi* (Nippon Jigyo Shuppansha, 2016) pp 230-251 and Fujiwara Akira, Arakawa Shoji, Hayashi Hirofumi.

日本の現代史 Nihon Gendaishi 1945-85 (Otsuki Shoten 1986) pp 306-360.

Students will do translations and write essays on topics that we will discuss in tutorials.

Pre-Modern Japanese History I: Origins of Japan (NOT AVAILABLE IN 2026-2027)

Term in which it is taught: Michaelmas Term

Taught by Dr. Matthieu Felt

This option explores the history of Japan from the earliest written objects and foreign accounts of Japan through the formation and development of the classical Japanese state. Topics include archaeology and early society, the emergence of political authority, relations with the Korean peninsula and China, the development of the imperial institution, religion and ritual, and the political and social structures of the Nara and Heian periods.

Primary texts for this option will consist of selections from early Japanese historical writings, especially the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, supplemented where appropriate by regional gazetteers, poetry, legal and administrative documents, epigraphic writing, wooden tablets (*mokkan*), and other early sources.

Pre-Modern Japanese History II: State and Society in Japan before 1600 (NOT AVAILABLE IN 2026-2027)

Term in which it is taught: Hilary Term

Taught by Dr. Matthieu Felt

This option explores the history of Japan from the emergence of warrior power in the late Heian period through the political and social transformations of the medieval era. Topics include the rise of the warrior class, the Kamakura and Muromachi governments, changing ideas of political authority and legitimacy, religious institutions, warfare, regional power, and the fragmentation and reunification of Japan.

Primary texts for this option will consist of medieval historical and political writings, such as the *Azuma kagami*, *Gukanshō*, *Goseibai shikimoku*, *Jinnō shōtōki*, and *Shinchō kōki*, with the particular texts varying from year to year, along with secondary sources on medieval Japanese history.

Pre-Modern Japanese History III: Knowledge, Life, and Culture in Early Modern Japan

Term in which it is taught: Trinity Term

Taught by Dr. Matthieu Felt

This option explores the history of Tokugawa Japan (1600–1868) using materials from a variety of genres, including essays, diaries, encyclopaedias, and correspondence, among others. Particular emphasis is given to paradigms for knowledge creation, everyday lived experience, social commentary, mass literacy, and the distinction between prescriptive and descriptive source materials. Texts used in the course will capture a variety of social status, gender, and geographic perspectives.

Primary texts for this option will consist of works such as *Masters of the World: An Account of What I Have Seen and Heard* (anonymous, 1816), *Solitary Thoughts* (Tadano Makuzu, 1817), and *Snow Stories of North Etsu Province* (Suzuki Bokushi, 1837), among others.

Japanese with a subsidiary language

Chinese, Korean and Tibetan are offered as subsidiary languages. The courses spread across the third and fourth year and consist of language teaching with a focus on the acquisition of a strong foundation in the language plus the study of history and culture. In each case the examinations consist of two language papers and an essay paper.

Studying for the subsidiary languages requires initiative from the students as the pattern of work is different from that of the majority of your year group. It is important that you keep track of which classes and tutorials you should be doing and contact teachers where necessary.

More information about each of these subsidiary languages is available in the AMES UG Subsidiary Languages Handbook.

Japanese as a subsidiary language

Students studying BA Chinese may take Japanese as a subsidiary language.

Please refer to the AMES UG Subsidiary Languages Handbook for more information.

Recommended Patterns of Teaching (RPT)

Below is an indication of the type and number of teaching hours on this course.

FPE Japanese (Year 1)

Paper	Term	Dept/ Faculty		College		Comments
		Lectures	Classes	Tutorials	Classes	
						<i>Figures in this table are in hours per term.</i>
[1.] Modern Japanese I	MT		80			Language classes overall contribute to both language papers.
[2.] Modern Japanese II	HT	8	80	1		
	TT		80			The lectures and the tutorial specifically contribute to the 'Grammatical analysis' part of Modern Japanese II.
[3.] East Asia Survey: Japan	MT	20		8		Tutorials also contribute to some extent to the two language papers.
	HT	20		7		
	TT	20		8		
	TT					
<u>Notes</u>						

FHS Japanese (Years 3 and 4)

Paper	Term	Faculty		College		Comments
		Lectures	Classes	Tutorials	Classes	Figures in this table are in hours per term.
[1.] Modern Japanese I	MT	8*	32*	8**		Note: *: Both 3rd and 4th year **: Only 3rd year
[2.] Modern Japanese II	HT	8*	32*			
[3.] Spoken Japanese (1/2 paper)	TT	8*	32*			
[4.] Classical Japanese	MT	8*				Note: *: Both 3rd and 4th year **: Only 3rd year
	HT	8*		8**		
	TT	8*		8**		
[5.] Core special subject option I [essays]	MT	8		8		MT in the 3rd year
	HT					
	TT					
[6.] Special text option I [translation and commentary]	MT					Note: The term and year in which this option is taken can vary, depending on other option choices.
	HT			16		
	TT					
[7.] Dissertation	MT	3**				Note: *: 3rd year **: 4th year
	HT	3**				
	TT	2*				
[8.] Special subject option II [essays]	MT	8		8		Note: The term and year in which this option is taken can vary, depending on other option choices.
	HT					
	TT					
[9.] Special text option II [translation and commentary]	MT					Note: The term and year in which this option is taken can vary, depending on other option choices.
	HT					
	TT			16		
[10.] Either						Note: The term and year in which this option is taken can vary, depending on other option choices.
a: Special text option III; or	HT	8 ^b		16 ^a		
b: Special subject option III				8 ^b		
Notes For each of papers 5, 6, 8, 9, and 10 a single hour of revision tutorial is sometimes offered in TT in the 4th year.						
Students taking Japanese with a subsidiary language will take papers 1-7 above, plus 3 papers from their subsidiary language in place of papers 8-10. For details on hours of teaching for each subsidiary language please see the RPT tables in the AMES UG Subsidiary languages handbook.						

Core Teaching Staff

- Dr Matthieu Felt, Associate Professor of Pre-Modern Japanese History (Wolfson College)
- Dr [Linda Flores](#), Associate Professor of Modern Japanese Literature (Pembroke College)
- Professor [Bjarke Frellesvig](#), Professor of Japanese Linguistics (Hertford College)
- Dr [Lena Fritsch](#), Curator, Modern and Contemporary Art (Ashmolean Museum)
- Professor [Roger Goodman](#), Nissan Professor of Modern Japanese Studies (St Antony's College)
- Dr [Kristi Govella](#), Associate Professor of Japanese Politics and International Relations
- Dr [Jennifer Guest](#), Associate Professor of Classical Japanese Literature (Queen's College)
- Ms [Junko Hagiwara](#), Senior Lecturer in Japanese
- Mrs [Sumire Hori](#), Lecturer in Japanese
- Ms [Hiroe Kaji](#), Lecturer in Japanese
- Dr Pia Jolliffe, Fellow (Blackfriars Hall)
- Professor [Takehiko Kariya](#), Professor of Japanese Sociology (St Antony's College)
- Professor [Sho Konishi](#), Associate Professor of Modern Japanese History (St Antony's College)
- Dr [Laurence Mann](#), Lecturer in Japanese
- Ms [Kaori Nishizawa](#), Lecturer in Japanese
- Dr [Clare Pollard](#), Curator of Japanese Art (Ashmolean Museum)

Examinations and Assessment

Please refer to the [Examination Regulations](#) for Prelims and FHS in Asian and Middle Eastern Studies.

In Trinity Term of Year 1, students will sit 3 written examinations. Students must pass all papers to proceed into Year 2 of the course.

Please refer to the Conventions for Prelims examinations.

In Trinity Term of Year 4, students will take 8 written examinations, 1 oral examination. Students will submit their dissertations in Hilary Term of Year 4.

Please refer to the conventions for FHS examinations for detail of compulsory papers, and papers for Japanese with a subsidiary language.

Required Handwritten Language Components

The ability to produce East Asian scripts independently is an essential competence standard of this course. This means that it is necessary for students to demonstrate these skills in order to successfully complete the degree programme.

Since all available software for inputting certain target scripts on a computer includes a 'predictive text' function which cannot be turned off, using such a program would prevent

examiners from understanding whether the student has achieved the required proficiency in the target language. Handwriting the script is therefore required to demonstrate that the student has reached the required level of competence, ability, and knowledge of the target language.

All students will be required to handwrite these papers. Although they cannot be removed or substituted with alternative papers, and no adjustments to this mode of completion of the assessment can be made, reasonable adjustments may be available to the conditions in which the assessment is completed, such as extra time and rest breaks.

The Faculty appreciates the impact that these requirements may have on students with certain accessibility needs and works closely with the Disability Advisory Service (DAS) to provide appropriate support in line with our responsibilities under the Equality Act (2010). Support within the Faculty is available in the first instance by speaking to the designated Disability Coordinators (see *Welfare and Support* below).

The papers covered by this provision are enumerated in the table below:

Preliminary Examination in Japanese	Modern Japanese I
BA in Chinese	Paper I: Modern Chinese I
BA in Japanese with Chinese	Chinese (as 2nd Language): Chinese Language
BA Japanese	Japanese: Modern Japanese I
BA Chinese with Japanese	Paper I: Japanese Language
BA Chinese with Korean and BA Japanese with Korean	Korean (as 2nd Language): Korean Language
First Public Examination in Chinese	Chinese I: Modern

If you have any questions or concerns relating to this, please speak with your Course Co-ordinator or the Director of Undergraduate Studies.

Deadlines

Date	Year of Course	Event	How
Monday 9 th Week Trinity Term	1	Provisional start date of the First Public Examinations.	
Friday -2 nd Week Michaelmas Term	3	Deadline for submission of Core Special Subject option for Michaelmas term; and, if relevant, intention to read a subsidiary language.	Via form submitted to the AMES Academic Administration office
Thursday 4 th Week Michaelmas Term	4	Deadline for exam entry.	Via Student Self Service
12 noon Monday 0 th Week Hilary Term	4	Deadline for submission of dissertation titles for Faculty Board approval.	Online Thesis Title Approval Form available through the Intranet Approval Forms page
12 noon Friday 10 th Week Hilary Term	4	Deadline for submission of dissertation.	Via University online submission platform (Inspera)
0 th Week Trinity Term	4	Oral examination for Japanese language. Timetables available about 5 weeks before the oral exams.	
Monday 7 th Week Trinity Term	4	Provisional start date of the Final Honour School examinations.	

Examination Regulations

The Examination Regulations relating to this course are available at

<https://examregs.admin.ox.ac.uk/>. If there is a conflict between information in this

handbook and the Examination Regulations, then you should follow the Examination Regulations.

Student Information and Support

Student Hub

The [Student Hub](#) is an ongoing project to provide a live online version of the handbook, together with more detailed course information and further resources such as forms and exam conventions, as well as archived documents from previous years. You can also access the Student Hub through the top bar of the Faculty Website, through the '**NEW Faculty Intranet**' button. You will need to log in using your SSO.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

In accordance with our [Statement of Values](#), the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies is committed to creating a teaching, learning, and research environment in which every member of our community – at every academic level from undergraduate to senior academic, and among library and administrative staff – can achieve their full professional potential without discrimination on the basis of age, disability, gender, marriage or civil partnership, nationality, pregnancy or parenthood, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation.

We welcome suggestions for making our courses more diverse and inclusive. In general, you are encouraged to tell us if you see any ways in which the courses or this handbook might be improved. Staff and students are welcome to contact the Equality and Diversity team with any suggestions or concerns:

Japanese and Korean Group Equality and Diversity Representative: [Laurence Mann](#)

Faculty Equality and Diversity Officer: TBC

Welfare and Support

Our community aims to encourage and support all students. The student experience at Oxford offers lots of opportunities for you to thrive, grow, and look after your own wellbeing, but we know that sometimes there can be stresses and challenges too.

We want to give you the agency to navigate welfare support, and to make your own decisions. This includes by:

- Keeping in touch with your College and Department, and letting them know if you need help
- Seeking support when needed
- Supporting your fellow students
- Registering with Disability Advisory Service for structured support if you have a disability

Should you have any concerns, or for guidance and support, please do not hesitate to contact the following people:

Disability Coordinators: [Thomas Hall](#) and [Edmund Howard](#)

Welfare Contact: [Edmund Howard](#)

Harassment Adviser: [Leyla Najafzada](#)

Details of the range of sources of support available in the University are available from the **Oxford Students** website, including in relation to mental and physical health and disability.

More information about the support and resources available can be found in the general Undergraduate Handbook and on the Faculty and University websites.