**UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS**

**HUMS 2090**

**Japanese & Western Video Games: A Comparative Study of Storytelling Forms**

UNO-Japan: Study at Dōshisha University, Summer 2022 Class meets Period II (10:45 am - 12:15 pm)

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

In this class we will compare and contrast the storytelling conventions of Japan and the West through the lens of video games. Why games? Because they are the most recognizable gateway media for many Westerners’ interest in Japanese culture (and to a degree, vice versa).

There is plenty to unpack here, starting with the obvious broad brushes this course title implies. There are, of course, multiple storytelling tools within the West and Japan, and even ‘West’ and ‘Japan’ are concepts that deserve deeper analysis. Nonetheless, our class will explore and interrogate storytelling elements like plot, characterization, setting, and aesthetics, and less traditional narrative tools such as gameplay mechanics.

All of this analysis is bent towards trying to catalogue and understand the commonly recognized tropes associated with Western and Japanese narrative. Games that we will discuss include series like Earthbound, Chrono Trigger, Pokemon, Resident Evil, Final Fantasy, Metal Gear, and Katamari Damacy.

**COURSE GOALS AND OUTCOMES**

1. Participants will be able to isolate, compare and contrast the narrative conventions that are particular to the subgenres discussed in the course.
2. Students will appreciate that while differences in narrative technique may exist, all cultures have universal storytelling aims: namely, capturing something unique and compelling about life and the human condition.

**REQUIREMENTS TO ACHIEVE COURSE GOALS**

1. Participants will read assigned readings and engage in class discussions.
2. Participants will actively engage in class discussions.
3. Participants will produce presentations and essays that demonstrate command of subject matter.

**READINGS**

I will provide all readings via Moodle:

* 1. *Japanese Culture Through Video Games* (excerpts)*,* by Rachael Hutchinson. This will serve as our main text. Individual chapters from this excellent title will constitute the majority of our presentations.
  2. *Chrono Trigger* (excerpts), by Michael P Williams
  3. *Final Fantasy V* (excerpts) by Chris Kohler
  4. *Shadow of the Colossus* (excerpts) by Nick Suttner
  5. *Kawaii Japan: Defining JRPGs through the Cultural Media Mix*, by Douglas Schules, Rikkyo University
  6. *Hyperculturality, Globalization and Cultural Representation in Japanese Survival Horror*, by Carlos Ramírez-Moreno, University of Seville
  7. *Cuteness as Japan’s Millennial Product*, by Anne Allison, from *Pikachu’s Global Adventure*

Additionally, please listen to the podcast *Mythology*, specifically the episodes *Amaterasu Pts 1 & 2,* available online for free

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

**Assignments:** One midterm paper, ~5 pages, with citations, that reflects the student's understanding of the topics covered in the class. This paper will be expanded into a final term paper of ~10-15 pages, following feedback from myself.

**Participation:** Students are expected to engage in active discussion and dialogue on the assigned readings.

**Presentations:** During the semester, you will make a presentation and lead a discussion on one of our assigned readings that demonstrates an understanding of the content in question. Depending on class enrollment, these may end up being group presentations. Your presentation should last roughly 20 minutes (feel free to go over, but try not to go under), and I ask that you bring copies of your material to share with classmates. Note that I have divided longer readings into two presentations. These presentations will serve as our jumping off point for the day’s in-class discussions.

**Attendance and punctuality:** Participants are expected to be consistently present and on time. Except in special instances, absences and lateness are unacceptable. Please contact me, preferably well beforehand, about any circumstance that will cause you to be tardy or absent.

**Excursions:** Note that I have built one excursion into our class schedule. This trip, to a Kyoto temple/Zen garden, will give us a chance to experience local folklore-related world building in an immediate, physical manner.

**Evaluation:**

* **Participation (10%)**
* **Presentation (10%)**
* **Mid-term paper (20%)**
* **Final paper (60%)**

**Grading for HUMS 2090:**

90-100% = A

80-89% = B

70-79% = C

60-69% = D

< 60% = F

**Accommodations:** It is University policy to provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. Students with disabilities should contact the Office of Disability Services as well as their instructors to discuss their individual needs for accommodations. For more information, please go to http://www.ods.uno.edu.

**Academic integrity**: Academic integrity is fundamental to the process of learning and evaluating academic performance. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following: cheating, plagiarism, tampering with academic records and examinations, falsifying identity, and being an accessory to acts of academic dishonesty. Refer to the Student Code of Conduct for further information. The Code is available online at http://www.studentaffairs.uno.edu.

**TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Week** | **Monday 月** | **Tuesday 火** | **Wednesday 水** | **Thursday 木** |
| **1 (Pre-departure)** | Meet online. Discuss your favorite video games and why you love them. | The oldest stories: *chaoskampf,* and the idea of a sky god defeating a dragon, and how this concept translates into Japanese/Shinto folklore. | Rebels vs obedience, individual vs community -- are these values really so relegated to the West and Japan? | Identify, compare and contrast Western and Japanese hero and villain tropes. I will provide links to tvtropes.com that will be a launching point for this discussion. |
| **2**  **You do you, ha-dou-ken** | Orientation party | Presentation:  Cuteness as Japan’s Millennial Product, by Anne Allison, from *Pikachu’s Global Adventure* | Presentation: Katamari Damacy: nostalgia andkitsch, from *Japanese Culture Through Video Games* | Presentation: Japan and its Others in fighting games, from *Japanese Culture Through Video Games* |
| **3**  **The RPG**  **(part 1)** | Presentation and discussion: *Chrono Trigger*, part 1 | Presentation and discussion: *Chrono Trigger*, part 2 and *Final Fantasy V*, part 1 | Presentation:  *Final Fantasy V*, part 2 | Presentation: *Kawaii Japan: Defining JRPGs through the Cultural Media Mix*, by Schules  Mid-term papers due |
| **4 The RPG (part 2 – boss fight!)** | Excursion: we’ll go to either Daitoku-ji Temple or Nanzen-Ji temple | Based off our excursion, discuss themes of an idealized green ‘before’ time; see:  The Shire/Lord of the Rings vs Nausicaa, Secret of Mana, etc. | Presentation: Packaging the past in Okami, from *Japanese Culture Through Video Games* | Presentation: *Shadow of the Colossus* |
| **5 Shared stubble: Japan, the West, and the war game** | Presentation:  An Uncomfortable Genre: the Japanese War Game, from *Japanese Culture Through Video Games*, part 1 | Presentation:  An Uncomfortable Genre: the Japanese War Game, from *Japanese Culture Through Video Games*, part 2  Presentation: Nuclear Discourse in Final Fantasy, from *Japanese Culture Through Video Games* part 1 | Presentation: Nuclear Discourse in Final Fantasy, from *Japanese Culture Through Video Games* part 2 | Presentation: Violence and trauma in Metal Gear Solid, from *Japanese Culture Through Video Games* |
| **6 The horror!** | Film: watch *Kwaidan* | Presentation:  *Cultural Representation in Japanese Survival Horror*, by Carlos Ramírez-Moreno | Discussion: What monsters haunt our respective nights? I.e. Yurei vs killer clowns, or kaiju vs slasher films. | Final discussions |