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Project Summary

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My underlying ideas for an upper-level literature course in Post-war and Contemporary Japanese Literature have undergone a zen-like transformation during my time participating in SDSU's Japan Studies Institute. I had initially thought I would frame my course around a very traditional literature survey model, where I would introduce selected texts through Japan's social history and biographical information about the featured authors, and then discuss the texts as autonomous entities in that particular constellation. But thanks to the interdisciplinary focus and intense integration of many cultural aspects illuminating Japan for me, I have decided to frame the class in such a way to take advantage of the richness of my experience here. I have decided to construct the theoretical framework of the class around the parallel thought provoking notions of "Why the Novel Matters" and "Why Japan Matters." These pillars of inquiry are both energized with the anguish about cultural relevance and sense of place in the course of history. I want to encourage students to explore the implied sense of the traditional Western skeptics' point of view about these issues, and to place themselves outside their inherited points of view, their comfort zones of understanding, when we read and discuss selected texts, and view and discuss selected films. I hope to present all of this through Stefan Tanaka's question of "Can Japan be Modern," while exploring Post-war and contemporary texts. Through these texts, I hope to move them beyond a sense of literary tourism, and ask them to rethink Western notions of empathy, ethics, and social justice.