

Alison Okuda, Ph.D.  
AASCU-Japan Studies Institute 2019  
Project Summary

The 2018 AASCU-Japan Studies Institute was one of the most rewarding experiences of my career. As a historian who teaches introductory courses on World History, my goal at the outset of the JSI was to find ways to integrate a Japanese perspective on the world into these courses. Through the JSI, I was not only able to do that, but I was also able to discover other areas in which I could bring modern Japan into the History curriculum, interdisciplinary studies curriculum, our exchange programs, and my own research. I plan to lead a teaching and learning workshop on Japan Studies for my colleagues at Worcester State University in Massachusetts.

In previous versions of my World Civilization II course, covering roughly 1500-1914, I taught students about the changes that occurred in Japan during the Meiji Restoration. I used Japanese portrayals of Dutch and Portuguese ships, as well as a local art exhibit on the evolution of metalwork as samurai lost relevance and power. During the Institute I learned about the importance of mythology and origins to Japanese society, and how this ties the Tokugawa, Meiji, and postwar periods together. Three great examples of mythology and origins struck me throughout the JSI: the goddess Amaterasu Oomikami, *The Tale of Genji*, and *The Tale of the Heike*. The first is responsible for giving power to the Emperor and the importance of religious beliefs in society; the second reveals the ways in which social class and gender have and have not changed since the 11<sup>th</sup> century; and the third is a 12<sup>th</sup> century source of inspiration for everything from nationalism to cultural arts. In my Fall 2019 World Civ II course, I plan to bring all three into the classroom through sources that students will find familiar and challenging, as outlined by the themes and potential sources below:

- Religion and State
  - Amaterasu Oomikami in artwork
  - Who can be emperor?
  - Reasons for isolation
  - *Silence* (Dir. Martin Scorsese, 2016)
- Social and political hierarchy
  - *The Tale of Genji* (Murasaki Shikibu; adapted by Waki Yamato, 1980; English trans, 2019)
  - *The Tale of Genji* in artwork (Metropolitan Museum of Art special exhibit, 2019)
  - Gender and women's roles
  - Architecture, social class, the way of tea
  - *The Twilight Samurai* (Dir. Yoji Yamada, 2004)
- *Monogatari* and Modern Japan
  - *The Tale of the Heike* (c. 12<sup>th</sup> century)
  - Oral history
  - Buddhism
  - *Kwaidan: Hoichi the Earless* (Dir. Masaki Kobayashi, 1965)
  - Performance: Noh, Kyogen, Kabuki
  - *Atsumori* (Zeami Motokiyo, early 15<sup>th</sup> century)
  - Manga creator (students make their own)

Students will learn about modern Japan through reading, watching, and creating different aspects of cultural arts, including artwork, film, performance, and manga. These activities will help students to understand important developments in Japanese society from a place that decenters the “West.”

The JSI also demonstrated the importance of film to twentieth century Japanese history. In the future, I would like to develop an intermediate level course on “World History through Film,” which would highlight film production and thematic development in specific locations, such as Japan, France, Italy, Brazil, India, and Nigeria.

One of the most rewarding aspects of the JSI is working with the student assistant and interns, all of which have studied abroad in Japan (or will) or have come from Japan to study at SDSU. Through the JSI and Dr. Higurashi’s detailed information on creating exchange programs with Japanese universities, I would like to work with my colleagues at WSU to develop a formal exchange partnership with a Japanese university and lead WSU students on a short study abroad trip to Japan. Our university is also interested in creating faculty exchange programs with our partner institutions, and I aim to spend time in Japan researching my project on African-Caribbean-East Asian collaboration against nuclear weapons during the 1960s. At WSU, several of my colleagues have discussed the creation of an Asian Studies Concentration. Another of my goals is to participate in its development, specifically advocating for ongoing Japanese language instruction on our campus (we would be one of two universities to offer Japanese in central Massachusetts), as well as creating multiple study abroad program options and offering the entire campus workshops on Japanese arts and crafts. I have already benefitted from the JSI immensely (they bring together a fantastic community of scholars) and will encourage faculty and administrators at my university and at others to apply in the future.