CLI 3950 – Resilience & Ritual

Lead Instructor
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Guest Instructor
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Course Description & Objectives
In this course, we will evaluate how resilience is integrated, practiced, and promoted in Japanese culture. We will examine some historic and natural disasters (wars, tsunami, earthquakes, etc.) that affected Japan as a nation. Then we will examine various perspectives and activities that led to achieving resilience. The concept of recovery and resilience will be viewed through traditional Japanese aesthetics, alternative medicine and neuroscience perspectives. The main aim of this course is to develop an understanding of the concept of resilience and the different aspects of Japanese culture that promote resilience. A further aim of the course is to facilitate students’ critical reflection upon, and drawing of differences and connections between the concept of resilience and recovery in Japan and in the United States.

By exploring medicine, resilience and healing in Japan in this course, students will be able to:

1. Explain the concept of resilience in Japan in terms of its cultural origins and;
2. Critically engage with traditional cultural practices of art and narrative which served as sources of resilience, recovery and wellness;
3. Compare and contrast the practice of Western with traditional Japanese healing methods and modern Japanese healthcare;
4. Critically engage with different approaches to the process of healing from natural disasters and war.

Course Themes & Overview

Our course will focus on the following themes:

1. Japanese Aesthetics

Achieving resilience and sustaining wellness are closely tied to self-directed practices that incorporate distinctive moral and aesthetic dimensions, such as Sashiko embroidery, tea ceremony, flower arrangement, gardening, and poetry. These activities are deeply rooted in the traditional lifestyle of the Japanese people. To understand the source of resilience and its value, we will first examine traditional Japanese aesthetics and their origin through historical texts, scholarly articles, and works of literature and philosophy. Through these reading materials, we will examine various perceptions of recovery and develop responses to a range of key questions. How did/do Japanese people overcome severe hardships such as natural disasters? How is beauty defined and appreciated? How does the perception and value of
beauty relate to an ability to move forward?

2. The Role of Art and Narrative
One of the common threads for achieving resilience after trauma is the role of art; the attention that is required to focus on creating something out of nothing has been a central healing tool for bringing people through disasters and for bringing them together. We will examine organizations like The Senninbari Project (meaning “Thousand Person Stitches”) in Sendai and the Otschi Sashiko Project in Otsuchi. These groups demonstrate the resiliency that residents who lost their homes and livelihood to the earthquake and tsunami of 2011 gained by participating in sewing projects. These women, who used to work as the wives of fishermen, became artists, creating traditional clothes and began displaying them at various exhibitions. We will discuss how art could serve as a means to celebrate community resilience, but also turn into a narrative of healing to be shared with individuals who have experienced trauma.

3. Alternative Medicine and Neuroscience Perspectives on Resilience
Modern, governmental responses to natural disaster and war tend to focus on two aspects of recovery: infrastructure and physical health. While these are definitely important, wellness and healing can also be viewed from personal (intellectual and emotional) and spiritual levels. Often these aspects of recovery are handled in less formal, and more personal manners. The role of Japanese complementary and alternative medicine in aiding people to recover from trauma of any sort, but focusing on large scale societal disasters, will be examined. In addition, the effect of trauma on the mind and brain will be examined, as will how mental neurological resilience is discovered and developed through alternative tools, including Japanese Zen meditation.

4. The Role of Spirituality & Community
Frequently tied into alternative medicine, religious and spiritual practices have created opportunities for bringing people through personal and societal trauma and served as sources of strength and resilience for many communities. Japan is no exception. The importance of personal involvement in the spiritual activities practiced in Japan, including visiting Shinto and Buddhist sites, will be examined, as will community religious practices. How did religion and other forms of spiritual and community support work to encourage recovery from trauma as it occurred in Japan? How did Japanese communities and religions change in the face of natural disasters and war?

5. Resilience & Attitude
Japan is known for its attitude of endurance (gaman 我慢) toward difficulty. This attitude was especially noted globally during the earthquakes and tsunami, which affected the Northeastern part of Japan in 2011. We will examine Japan’s attitude toward the entire country’s struggle in relation to the country’s past experiences of recovering from the World War II. How did this perception serve the healing and coping of Japanese citizens as a whole?

6. Global Citizenship and Responsibility
We will examine how different nations’ activities affect one another in a global context, and some of the problems that are involved in global citizenship. We will focus upon the events in Fukushima Daiichi in Japan as a prime case study in the problem of determining responsibilities of global citizens. Inspiration for this aspect of the course is taken from the following statement by Dr. Jared Diamond, a medical
researcher and professor of physiology: “Globalization makes it impossible for modern societies to collapse in isolation... Any society in turmoil today, no matter how remote ... can cause trouble for prosperous societies on other continents and is also subject to their influence (whether helpful or destabilizing.)” How did the accidents in Fukushima Daiichi influence the political and ethical debate on nuclear power globally? How did this incident shape the public opinion globally? How did this incident reflect or reveal global concerns and social needs? The main aim of this aspect of the course is to encourage students to reflect critically upon their position in the world by exploring the connection between their lives and global concerns. We will also examine one country’s recovery in relation to the collaborative effort and support from the world.

Preliminary list of all possible program excursions and site visits

Tokyo
- Amuse Museum
- Asakusa/ Sosenji Temple
- Harajuku
- Meji Shrine (Seijinno-hi)
- Tsukiji
- Tsukiji Ryogoku Sumo

Narita
- Narita-mountain & shrine

Kyoto
- Kiyomizu Temple
- Kinkakuji
- Ginkakuji
- Sanjusangen-do
- Zen Meditation

Tohoku (the Northeastern part of Japan, Tohoku, affected by the tsunami in March 2011)
- Otsuchi-cho, Iwate

Assessment of student performance in the class

Global Seminar Assignments and Grade

Assessment for the global seminar will be based on three projects, as follows:

1. Participation project: 10%
Students will earn participation points throughout the course by being on time, attending site visits, participating actively and appropriately in class discussions and activities, being prepared for course work
and activities, being courteous towards others, by following directions, and by following the University of Minnesota student code of conduct.

2. Journal Project: 50%
We would like you to keep a journal throughout your global seminar experience.

What do we mean by ‘journal’?
A journal offers an informal — though intellectually serious — space for reflection and conceptual experimentation. Practically, it acts as a way to track your reading, thinking, and experiences. In your journal, you can make a note of key phrases, concepts and ideas, test out the cohesion and defensibility of different arguments, sketch out questions and arguments, record and explore ideas which emerge from class discussions and excursions, and critically examine your intuitions about different ideas and experiences.

Type of writing/audience
The ideas expressed in your writing should be the products of careful and sustained intellectual engagement with, and critical reflection upon, our class materials and excursions. However, writing your journal need not mean producing the kind of writing typical of a formal paper. Sometimes we will ask you to write for a period of time without editing your thoughts, while at other times we may ask you reflect on these initial impressions, or to make more formal journal entries, responding to specific prompts.

Number of assignments
We anticipate assigning 8-10 journal entries. Prompts will be handed out throughout the course, including one prompt that we would like you to complete prior to departure. Some entries will be completed in class and others outside class.

Grading
We will grade your journal entries for completion. A complete journal entry is one that shows evidence of careful and sustained critical engagement with relevant ideas, concepts, class materials, and excursions.

Sample freewriting entry
I’ve just been reading Dan Brock’s article on the role of philosophers in health policy development. It troubles me. He makes a reasonable point (p. 715-718) that academic scholarship and public policy have different goals, and demand different virtues and behaviors; but I am just not sure how far I buy into this distinction, or rather, how clear-cut this distinction really is. His description of the central point of conflict seems to be that where policy makers focus on the consequences of their actions for policy and for members of the public directly affected by policy (often unwittingly), philosophers are engaged in an unconstrained search for truth, the fruits of which are mediated by institutions, events, and (presumably) other people. I will need to do quite a bit of reading and cogitating on this point to figure out what I really think; I’m not sure whether I just find this characterization of the field annoying, or whether there is a serious objection to be made to the claim that the search for truth is unconstrained. Brock’s points on philosophers’ credibility problems seem like valid ones; certainly I recognize in myself the tendency to
avoid voicing extreme, outrageous and yet valid questions in order to maintain some professional credibility — unless there is something important to be gained from so doing, which in some cases is the need for a real, no-holds-barred debate about some pressing question — but, so far as I am aware, this has more to do with not being clear on what my views are and wanting to find out than with a desire to press my own existing views onto others. I’ll think more about this; maybe I can reflect more on the notion of philosophical virtues that he mentions towards the end of the article in order to get clearer on how far I really should buy into his distinction between philosophers and policy-makers.

3. Final Project: 40%
You will develop a web-based project on a topic or theme of your choice, using reading materials, experiences, and discussions undertaken as part of the global seminar. Your project must include analysis of materials presented by the instructor and should not only be reflection-based.

Format
Please develop a Google site and share it with class members and instructors. Google sites are freely available via the University of Minnesota Google system and are very simple to use. We encourage you to be creative, but we suggest that your site might feature some blog postings, images and/or video, critical commentary on course materials, and discussion of specific seminar excursions and experiences.

Sharing online
With your permission, your final project will be shared online in order to demonstrate the type of learning opportunity created by the global seminar, and to share your ideas. We would like to ask for your permission to share the same work worldwide, and via a link to the UMR website. We will not share your work worldwide without your permission. Please contact the instructors about any concerns.

Submitting your work
Please create your site and share it with the instructors. Please also send us an email specifying whether or not you agree to share your site with (i) other students in the seminar and/or (ii) worldwide.

Grading
We will grade your final project for completion. A complete final project is one that engages with the concept of healing examined throughout the course, which includes critical analysis of materials presented by the instructor, and which is presented through the medium of a Google site.

Due dates for both projects: 2 weeks after the final day of the seminar

Grading for both projects: Grading will be conducted on a S/N basis, according to the criteria mentioned above.

Reading List

Books
Articles (available online via UMN Library)


About your instructor:

Yuko Taniguchi is an instructor of Writing in the Center for Learning Innovation at the University of Minnesota Rochester. She earned an M.F.A. at the University of Minnesota. Her first volume of poetry, Foreign Wife Elegy, was published by Coffee House Press in 2004. Her first novel, The Ocean in the Closet, was published by Coffee House Press in 2007. Some of her awards include finalist for The Dayton Literary Peace Prize, the Kiriyama Prize Notable Book, the Gustavus Myers Center Outstanding Book Award Advancing Human Rights, and the McKnight Artist Fellowship for Writers. Taniguchi has taught a variety of literature and writing courses that incorporate Japanese literature in translation. She also has conducted creative writing workshops for the Mayo Medical School as well as the Mayo Foundation's Cancer Center as a part of the Creative Renewal Series since 2004.