

JAP4010: Theory and Method in Japanese Studies

Autumn 2024

Exam Instructions

The examination for JAP4010 consists of three parts:

1. An oral presentation of your MA research project (10 minutes presentation + 10 minutes Q&A) on November 14, 9:15-16:00, Georg Sverdrups hus Group Room 4
2. A project proposal for your MA thesis (approximately 5 pages of text and 1-2 pages of bibliography). The submission deadline is December 10 at 11:00 am on Inspira
3. An essay on a theoretical or methodological issue relevant to your MA thesis (approximately 10 pages). The submission deadline is December 10 at 11:00 am on Inspira

You will receive a grade for each part of the exam, and you need to pass all three parts in order to pass the course. Each part will count as one third of the total grade.

Oral Presentation

All oral presentations will take place on November 14. The purpose of the presentations is threefold:

1. To help you formulate the research focus and main questions of your MA thesis project, and structure your ideas
2. To improve your presentation skills
3. To receive useful feedback and suggestions from your fellow students and teachers

Your presentation should contain the following elements:

- Introduction: Explain what it is you want to write about. Do not take for granted that your audience is familiar with your topic. If you want to write about Hokusai, show some pictures of works by Hokusai to refresh their memory. If you want to write about Watsuji Tetsurō's philosophy, start by explaining who Watsuji was, when he lived, and why he is famous. If you want to write about religious imagery in *Pom Poko*, remind us of who made this movie and when, and show some pictures of it – some of us may not have seen it!

- Research question or hypothesis: This should be clearly formulated. Tell your audience *what it is you want to find out*. Why is this an important question? How does it add to the existing knowledge?
- Methodology: Explain how you are going to answer your question. What are your main sources? What are your data? How will you collect these, and where? Why do you think this method is helpful for answering the research question?
- Theory / conceptual framework: Oral presentations are not usually heavy on theory, because of time limitations. However, it is helpful to introduce some of the core concepts and theories that inform your thinking and approach, even if only briefly. Abstract concepts often carry multiple meanings, so define your core concepts.
- Examples: Examples usually work very well in oral presentations, as they serve to make difficult topics more concrete, and help your audience understand what you are talking about.
- Questions and possible challenges: Don't be afraid to share some of your questions or concerns with the audience. Your project is still in its early stages, so it is perfectly fine not to know all the answers yet – as long as you show that you have reflected upon your plans. Your audience may also have useful advice/feedback to share in relation to these.
- Presentation style: It is important that you share your ideas with your audience. Reading a dense text from a piece of paper without looking at the audience is not helpful for getting your ideas across. It is fine to have a paper with some notes, but the most important part is that you succeed in communicating your ideas. Address your audience, speak loudly and clearly, and share your enthusiasm.
- Use of PowerPoint: You are strongly encouraged to use PowerPoint but remember that it is only a visual aid; it is *not* the actual presentation. In other words, do not put the entire text of your presentation on PowerPoint. While you are presenting, resist the temptation to constantly look at the screen; look at your audience!
- Timing: You have 10 minutes for your presentation. After 10 minutes, you have to finish. Time yourself while you practice to ensure that you do not go over the time limit. If your presentation is too short or too long, it will negatively impact your grade.
- Q&A: After each presentation, there will be 10 minutes for discussion. Use this as an opportunity – it can help you develop your project further. You are also expected to make suggestions and ask questions after your fellow students' presentations. Your grade will not only be based on your own presentation, but also on your participation in the Q&A sessions.

Project Proposal

As in your oral presentation, in your project proposal you discuss your plans for your MA thesis research project. A written project proposal, however, is a different genre from an oral presentation: in a written proposal you generally do not show pictures and give many examples to illustrate your idea to an audience. Instead, it is important that the proposal is concise, well-written, in understandable and grammatically-correct language, and well-referenced. You should also keep in mind that the deadline for submitting the proposal is not until December 10, which means that you have almost 4 weeks to develop your ideas further based on the feedback you received on November 14. Use this feedback! It is also important that you submit a comprehensive bibliography with your project proposal. The proposal should be 5-7 pages in total: 4-5 pages of text and 1-2 pages bibliography (Times New Roman font, 12 points, 1.5 line spacing).

There are different ways to write a good proposal, but it should contain at least the following elements:

- Working title: A good title is important. As the “shortest summary” of a text, it informs the reader what the text is about, and it will help you focus. It should not be too short or generic (e.g., “Japanese onsen culture”). It should not be too long either (e.g., “The *onsen* culture of the Japanese archipelago in the Heisei period, with special reference to the snow monkeys at Shibu Onsen, Nagano Prefecture: Or, the commodification of a companion species in today’s tourism industry”). It should draw the attention of readers and inform them about the contents of your thesis, but still leave something to the imagination (e.g., “Bathing with monkeys: *Onsen* culture and tourism in contemporary Japan”).
- Main research question or hypothesis: Formulating a good research question is equally important and difficult. The question should be neither too general nor too specific. Answering the question should be feasible: you should be able to adequately answer it. Yet it should be something that requires time and effort to find out; not something that is easily searchable. The question should be analytical, and lead to more understanding about a given topic. It should not be normative: for example, “What should the Japanese government do in order to increase gender equality?” is an important *policy* question, but not a good *research* question. Instead of a central question, you may also choose to work with a hypothesis, which you then test and try to verify or falsify in your thesis.
- Other questions: It can be useful to formulate some sub-questions, which can guide you in the different parts of your research. These should relate to your main question or hypothesis.

- Outline: Give a basic overview of the different parts or chapters of your thesis – i.e., a preliminary table of contents.
- Introduction to the topic: Use one or two paragraphs to introduce the topic of your thesis. Give some basic facts to explain to your readers what the thesis is about (e.g., if you will write about bathing monkeys in an *onsen*, explain where the *onsen* is located, what kind of monkeys there are, how this is used to promote the place, etc.). In other words, tell your reader what exactly you are going to write about (and what not), and explain why this is an important topic for future research.
- Literature: What are your main primary and secondary sources (in English and Japanese, at least)? What is the current state of the field, and how are you going to contribute to it? This is an important part; it must be concise, but comprehensive. If some crucial secondary sources are missing here, it shows that you have not searched well enough, which means that you may be missing out on important insights.
- Theoretical / conceptual framework: What are the main theoretical sources which will guide you in your interpretation of the data? What are your key concepts, and how do you define them? Be specific.
- Methodology: Explain how you are going to approach your research question. What are your data? How will you collect these, and where? In other words, what exactly will you be *doing* when you are doing your research? And why do you think this method is particularly useful for answering the research question? Define your terms well: for example, if you want to use “critical discourse analysis” as a method, explain what you mean by it.
- Planning/Timeline: Please describe your plans for the second semester (which courses?), and third semester (how will you spend your time in Japan? Will you register at a university in Japan, do an internship, or do fieldwork as part of JAP4020?).
- Bibliography: List your sources. Make sure they are all in the same format (and correctly cited), and make sure the references in the text correspond to the style of the bibliography.

Term Paper

Your term paper is an essay on a theoretical or methodological issue relevant to your MA thesis (approximately 10 pages, not including references; Times New Roman font, 12 points, 1.5 line spacing). In this paper, you are asked to adopt a meta-perspective. The purpose of the paper is *not* to write about a particular Japanese social, cultural, historical or linguistic phenomenon, but, instead, to write about *how to approach* such a phenomenon academically. The paper is

not a plan of research (e.g., I will first do ..., then ...), but rather an independent essay, with an introduction in which you formulate both a central question *and* a clear and concise argument, a body of text in which you analyze the topic of choice, a conclusion, and of course a reference list. In other words, in terms of structure, this is a “normal” term paper, not unlike the ones you have written before. However, rather than writing about topic X in Japan, you should write about *how topic X in Japan can be studied*. You may discuss and compare previous approaches, then add your own ideas and arguments on how to approach the topic academically. What methodological, conceptual, or ethical challenges do scholars face when doing research on that topic? How do different theoretical perspectives affect a researcher’s interpretations?

In other words, “Onsen bunka in contemporary Japan” is not a good topic for a term paper for this course. But an essay on the difficulties of doing ethnographic fieldwork at *onsen* could be interesting (how does being naked affect the ethnography? Can bathing people give informed consent?); or a discussion of the possible relevance of anthropological theory on pollution and purity (e.g., Mary Douglas) for the study of this topic; or a discussion of the concept of “commodification” and its applicability to the study of “traditional culture” (including *onsen*); or a review article of two or three monographs that discuss onsen bunka; or a discussion of the emergence of multispecies ethnography in Japan (e.g., John Knight’s work on monkeys bathing with humans, inspired by Donna Haraway’s theories); and so on. Use your imagination! Original insights and convincing arguments will be appreciated.

Good luck!