

History 108 Midterm Essay

Part I: Essays (60%)

Write well-organized and engaging essays on **TWO** of the following questions. Be sure to back up general assertions with specific examples and draw as much as possible from the documents and artifacts that we have studied. Aim for about 1000 words each. Due October 1.

1. One theme in this course has been the relationship between “native” and “foreign” in the formation of early Japanese civilization. Select at least three significant items between the 6th and 12th centuries which were originally “foreign” to Japan and then explain how they became integral to Japanese civilization. In light of this history of importation and adaptation, what would you judge to be “Japanese” in Japan’s early civilization and why?
2. One theme in this course has been the relationship between “culture” and “politics” in the formation of early Japanese civilization. Explain how culture (religion, art, literature, kinship, and so on) and politics are intertwined in Japan between the 6th and 12th. Draw on concrete examples from Japanese history studied thus far to demonstrate your points and support your argument.
3. Carefully read the following passage from *The Pillow Book* by Sei Shônagon (a contemporary of Murasaki Shikibu, author of *The Tale of Genji*) and write an incisive essay explaining in some detail what insights it gives us into Japanese history, culture, and society at the time it was written. A successful essay will demonstrate balance between particulars within the passage and the general context in which it has meaning.

It is important that a lover should know how to make his departure. To begin with, he ought not to be too ready to get up, but should require a little coaxing: “Come, it is past daybreak. You don’t want to be found here. . . .” and so on. One likes him, too, to behave in such a way that one is sure he is unhappy at going and would stay longer if he possibly could. He should not pull on his trousers the moment he is up, but should first of all come close to one’s ear and in a whisper finish off whatever was left half-said in the course of the night. But though he may in reality at these moments be doing nothing at all, it will not be amiss that he should appear to be buckling his belt. Then he should raise the shutter, and both lovers should go out together at the double doors, while he tells her how much he dreads the day that is before him and longs for the approach of night. Then, after he has slipped away, she can stand gazing after him, with charming recollections of those last moments. Indeed, the success of a lover depends greatly on his method of departure. If he springs to his feet with a jerk and at once begins fussing around, tightening in the waistband of his breeches, or adjusting the sleeves of his court robe, hunting jacket, or what not, collecting a thousand odds and ends, and thrusting them into the folds of his dress, or pulling in his overbelt—one begins to hate him.

Part II: Keywords (40%) will be done in class on Friday, October 1. You will be asked to respond to FIVE items.