

Soga Japan Center Special Talk

Streaming Samurai: Historical Japan in Contemporary Media

Dr. Ethan Segal



Ethan Segal is an associate professor at Michigan State University specializing in East Asian history with expertise spanning the ancient to early modern periods. Topics of his research include Japan's premodern economic history, women and gender, and depictions of Japan in film. He holds a doctorate degree from Stanford University and was a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Tokyo. He also taught for Harvard University's Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations.

November 6 • 3:30 p.m.
Brown Hall, Rm 3025

Although the age of samurai ended more than 150 years ago, medieval Japanese warriors continue to fascinate people today as characters in video games, movies and on television. This talk analyzes the depiction of samurai in three recent streaming shows: “Shōgun” (2024), “Blue Eye Samurai” (2023) and “Age of Samurai” (2021). Can they promote historical understanding while conveying entertaining stories? How do they balance accuracy with viewer expectations? What does their popularity reveal about Western ideas of Japan? This talk explores these and related questions of historical authenticity, spectatorship and reception, and the stakes inherent in the transposition of contemporary issues onto historical but fictionalized settings.



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