



SO 363 JAPANESE SOCIETY AND CULTURE
IES Abroad Tokyo

DESCRIPTION:

This course is an introduction to contemporary Japanese society and culture. The course will introduce students to various facets of Japanese society and dig beneath the surface to explore the structural and historical underpinnings of contemporary Japan. Topics covered range from class/education, gender/sexuality and ethnicity/cultural identity to technology, social isolation, and disaster. Students will be expected to keep up with readings, contribute to class discussion, and in lieu of a final paper, to design and complete their own research project related to modern or contemporary Japan.

CREDITS: 3 credits

CONTACT HOURS: 45 hours

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION: English

INSTRUCTOR: TBD

PREREQUISITES: None

ADDITIONAL COSTS: Students are required to pay for their transportation to excursion sites and may also have to pay modest entrance fees to events and exhibitions.

METHOD OF PRESENTATION:

This course provides a survey of some of the central issues characterizing contemporary Japanese culture and society. It focuses on values, institutions, processes, and patterns of social change against the background of history and tradition on the one hand, and on the other, the ways in which Japan is now having to redefine its place in the world order and in East Asia specifically. The course will expose the student to the main areas of debate in contemporary Japanese society through perspectives from the social sciences and humanities.

The course will focus on classroom discussion, and students will give one or more presentations in class. We will read academic articles pertaining to each topic and discuss how the reading relates to issues and problems in Japanese society today. In addition to the assigned readings, you are encouraged to familiarize yourself with, and relate to current issues through the optional readings, news sources such as *The Japan Times* and *The Mainichi*, or similar material. Through this course, students should come away with an understanding of Japanese society that is complex and nuanced, an ability to apply critical perspectives on contemporary culture, and a curiosity to find out more!

REQUIRED WORK AND FORM OF ASSESSMENT:

If you work hard to learn together, and contribute to a good discussion climate in class, you'll do great in this course. The requirements are as follows:

| | |
|------------------------|----|
| Reaction paper (2x10%) | 20 |
| Written Report (2x10%) | 20 |
| Presentation | 15 |
| Final paper | 35 |
| Participation | 10 |

| Grade scale | | | |
|-------------|--------|------|-------|
| A | 92-100 | A- | 90-91 |
| B+ | 88-89 | B | 82-87 |
| | | B- | 80-81 |
| C+ | 78-79 | C | 72-77 |
| | | C- | 70-71 |
| D | 60-69 | F<59 | |



READINGS AND REACTION PAPERS:

All assigned material will be available through Moodle, so you do not have to purchase any books for this course. Two times throughout the course, you will be responsible for writing a short paper in reaction to a specific reading, and presenting that reading in class. It is all right to be critical, however the goal here is not to find ways to dismiss or deconstruct the text, but to constructively summarize, explain and contextualize the argument as you understand it. Identify and show the parts of the text that you found important, or in need of further explanation or critique. You will probably need at least 500 words to do this, and at least 10 minutes to present the reading in class. In order to support your argument, you may refer to the complimentary readings or other sources, relate the text to contemporary issues, or show excerpts or related media in class.

- If you are presenting, please post your reaction paper and send me any presentation materials (slides and/or (links to other media) the night before class at the latest.
- If you are *not* presenting, please post your thoughts and questions on the assigned readings the night before class at the latest. This is to show that you've read and reflected on the assigned piece. Here, as well, you will want to phrase your reactions and questions in a constructive way; instead of pointing to a part you did not understand, for example, you could attempt to provide a better explanation, or the context that you found was missing from the text.

WRITTEN REPORTS:

There will be two written during the semester. More details about the assignment will be shared in class.

FINAL PAPER:

Throughout the course you will design your own research project, present it in class, and compile a research paper across a series of assignments.

- In week 1, we will share two words which capture what you are interested in learning more about in this course.
- In week 2, *three* keywords that narrow down our research interests, and how they relate to each other.
- In week 4, you will write short proposals outlining what we want to investigate, along with expected outcomes and obstacles.
- In week 5, share a list of references relevant to your research topic.
- In week 8, you will submit an annotated bibliography summarizing and discussing your collected material.
- Throughout weeks 5, 6, 7 and 8 we will all present the results of our research in class: this will be a chance to refine your interests, answer questions and get feedback from me and other students.
- Final papers are due before class, week 10. I will do my best to have comments, corrections, and questions ready by the following week. You may resubmit your amended paper by our last class for extra credit.

About plagiarism: Always give credit and make it clear when you use somebody else's work (including Wikipedia and other online material). When in doubt, ask me or consult online resources such as [this guide](#).

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION:

You are strongly encouraged to prepare and participate actively throughout the entire course. This includes:

- reading and taking notes
- completing assignments
- coming to class on time, with your reading notes and questions ready
- contributing to class discussion to make it as useful and productive as possible for yourself and your fellow students.

Whenever possible, please let me know in advance about your reasons for missing class, being late, or leaving early. If you are in need of any accommodation or feel uneasy about a particular topic or assignment on the syllabus, please also let me know as soon as possible.

TECHNOLOGY:

We will be using Slack for most course-related communication outside the classroom. Assignments can also be found on Moodle. You can always contact me on Slack, including urgent matters, or by email. In the classroom, please turn your cell phone off or to silent. Most of the time you may use larger devices to access readings and take notes, but please refrain from



unrelated activity (for example, posting on image boards or scrolling through social media feeds) but this might change if it turns out that technology becomes a distraction. If you fall victim to sleepiness, boredom, or the uncontrollable urge to look at social media, please contribute to discussion or ask a question instead – that might help wake you up!

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of the course students will be able to:

- Understand in a comprehensive manner key themes underpinning contemporary Japanese society and culture.
- Develop a foundation for detailed and critical analysis of specific aspects of Japanese society, economy, politics and popular culture.
- Utilize methods of social and cultural analysis, means of social observation and techniques for overcoming ethnocentricity.
- Develop and refine independent research and writing skills.

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Following the attendance policy of IES Abroad Tokyo, attendance to all class meetings is strictly required for the students. In other words, students are required to attend every class meeting including course-related trips.

The format for classes makes missing a single class equivalent to missing a full week during a regular semester. Unexcused absences will therefore result in significant grade penalties. The first unexcused absence will result in a penalty of one-third of a letter grade from your final grade; additional unexcused absences will result in a penalty of one of letter grade for each additional absence. That is, one missed class turns an A into an A-, two missed classes turns it into a B-, three turns it into a C-, and so on. An absence is considered “excused” only if it is unavoidable due to illness or other health conditions, or for other reasons approved by the instructor in advance.

CONTENT:

| Week | Content | Assignments |
|--------|--|---|
| Week 1 | Introduction An introduction to the content of the course. Basic concepts for understanding Japanese society. How has modern and contemporary history influenced the recent development of Japanese society and its values and institutions? Differing paradigms for understanding Japanese society. Self-introduction: one person, two words. Set up Slack and Moodle. Assign readings. Fill out survey on Slack after class. | |
| Week 2 | Cultural uniqueness, holism, <i>nihonjinron</i> Difference and identity; models of cultural comparison and distinction. “Who are the Japanese,” and why did this question come to dominate Western perspectives on Japan? How have the answers changed to | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mauss, Marcel (1973) “Techniques of the body”, <i>Economy and Society</i> 2:1.• Ohnuki-Tierney, Emiko (1993) “Rice as self, paddies as our land” in <i>Rice as Self: Japanese identities through time</i>.• Benedict, Ruth (1947) “Taking One’s Proper Station” in <i>The Chrysanthemum</i> |

| | | |
|--------|--|--|
| | <p>this question across time, and what can they tell us about Japanese self-images?</p> | <p><i>and The Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Skim through Mauss first. You don't have to comment on it, but with your reading response to the other texts, reflect on your time in Japan so far: what strikes you as significant in terms of bodily habits, regimes, disciplines? |
| Week 3 | TBD | |
| Week 4 | <p>War and memory, remembering/forgetting</p> <p>Imperial pasts; historical relations with the United States and the rest of the world. Remembering and forgetting the war. Reading and writing the constitution.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dower, John. 1986. "Patterns of a Race War" and "Know Your Enemy" in <i>War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War</i>. Igarashi, Yoshikuni. 2000. "The Bomb, Hirohito, and History: The Foundational Narrative of Postwar Relations between Japan and the United States" In <i>Bodies of Memory. Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945-1970</i>. <p>Recommended:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Watch "Know Your Enemy: Japan" (1945). We will watch excerpts of this propaganda classic in class, but if you are interested, the whole film is available courtesy of the U.S. National Archives. Dawes, James (2014) <i>Evil Men</i>. |
| Week 5 | Class, education, democracy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slater, David H. (2013) "Social class and social identity in postwar Japan." In Victoria Lyon Bestor & Theodore C. |

| | | |
|---------------|---|---|
| | <p>Trajectories, expectations and dreams. The political establishment and. How people (don't) talk about class. What happens to those not in the corporations or without higher education? What is happening to the ideals of lifetime employment in a globalizing environment?</p> | <p>Bestor (eds), <i>Routledge Handbook of Japanese Culture and Society</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sugimoto, Yoshio (2014) "Class and Stratification: An Overview" AND "Forms of work in cultural capitalism" in <i>An Introduction to Japanese Society</i>. • Cook, Emma (2016) "(Dis)Connections & Silence: Experiences of Family and Part-time Work in Japan." <i>Japanese Studies</i> 26:2 |
| Week 6 | <p>Family, gender, generations, demographics</p> <p>Socialization, family, gender and aging. Patterns of marriage, divorce, and reproduction. Those with families, and those without; being inside the system, and those on the outside.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hendry, Joy (2013) "The house and family system" in <i>Understanding Japanese Society</i>. • White, Merry (2011) "Change and diversity in the Japanese family." In Victoria Lyon Bestor & Theodore C. Bestor (eds), <i>Routledge Handbook of Japanese Culture and Society</i>. <p>Recommended:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sugimoto, Yoshio (2014) "Gender Stratification and the Family System" in <i>An Introduction to Japanese Society</i>. |
| Week 7 | <p>Minorities/majorities</p> <p>Discrimination (buraku, zainichi, yakuza, etc) and immigration; migrant labor and refugees. Thinking about ethnicity and cultural nationalism in Japan.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Miyazaki, Manabu (2005) "My Family" In <i>Toppamono: Outlaw. Radical. Suspect. My Life in Japan's Underworld</i>. • Hankins, Joseph (2014) "Introduction: the labor of multiculturalism" in <i>Working Skin: Making Leather, Making a Multicultural Japan</i> • Ellis, Thomas and Koichi Hamai (2007) "Crime and Punishment in Japan," <i>Asia Pacific Journal: Japan Focus</i> (quick read) <p>Recommended:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sugimoto, Yoshio (2014) "'Japaneseness,' ethnicity and minority groups" in <i>An Introduction to Japanese Society</i>. • Tsuda, Takeyuki (2009) "Japanese-Brazilian ethnic return migration and the making of Japan's newest immigrant minority" in Weiner, M (ed.) <i>Japan's Minorities: The Illusion of Homogeneity</i> (2nd edition). |
| Week 8 | <p>Center/periphery, urban/rural</p> <p>History and ecology; urbanization, nostalgia, furusato.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hane, Mikiso (2003) "The Coal Miners" in <i>Peasants, rebels, women, and outcasts: the underside of modern Japan</i> • Walker, Brett. L (2011) "Copper mining and ecological collapse" in <i>Toxic</i> |

| | | |
|---------|----------|---|
| | | <p><i>Archipelago: A History of Industrial Disease in Japan</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yano, Christine R. "Enka as Engendered Longing: Romance, Furusato, 'Japan'" in <i>Tears of Longing: Nostalgia and the Nation in Japanese Popular Song</i> <p>Pick one of the below. Some classic songs to listen to while reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kasagi Shizuko - Tokyo Boogie Woogie Misora Hibari - Kanashii Sake Miyako Harumi - Anko Tsubaki Yashiro Aki - Namida-goi At a karaoke parlor, sing (at least) one Japanese song. With your reading response, tell us which song you sang and why, along with the lyrics. <p>Recommended:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> George, Timothy (2002) <i>Minamata: Pollution and the Struggle for Democracy in Postwar Japan</i>. Kirby, Peter (2010) "Introduction: Japan's Waste Shadow" In <i>Troubled Natures: Waste, Environment, Japan</i> Broadbent, Jeffrey (1999) <i>Environmental Politics in Japan: Networks of Power and Protest</i>. Mishima, Akio (1992) <i>Bitter Sea: The Human Cost of Minamata Disease</i>. Tansman, Alan (1996) "Mournful tears and sake: the postwar myth of Misora Hibari". In John Treat (ed.) <i>Contemporary Japan and Popular Culture</i> |
| Week 9 | TBD | |
| Week 10 | Disaster | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yomota, Inuhiko (2007) "The Menace from the South Seas: Honda Ishirō's <i>Godzilla</i> (1954)." In Alastair Phillips and |

| | | |
|-----------------------|--|--|
| | <p>Disaster recovery and management. Earthquake culture/nuclear culture; volunteerism and nationalism; Godzilla and other monsters</p> | <p>Julian Stringer (eds): <i>Japanese Cinema: Texts and Contexts</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hopson, Nathan (2013) "Systems of Irresponsibility and Japan's Internal Colony," In <i>Asia-Pacific Journal</i> 11:52 OR • Broinowski, Adam (2013) "Fukushima: Life and the Transnationality of Radioactive Contamination" In <i>Asia-Pacific Journal</i> 11:41 • Read Yomota (it's short) and then pick one of the remaining two articles. Watch Shin Godzilla (2016). If you've already seen it, watch Godzilla (2014) instead. If you've seen both, watch the original Godzilla (1954). <p>Recommended further reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lochbaum et al (2014) Fukushima: the story of a nuclear disaster. |
| <p>Week 11</p> | <p>Popular culture, technology, communication</p> <p>Leisure and entertainment, consumer politics, fandom and desire. Anonymity and social anxiety; new ways of being alone and together.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warner, Michael (2002) "Publics and counterpublics" in <i>Public Culture</i> 14:1 • Freedman, Alisa (2009) "Train Man and the gender politics of Japanese 'Otaku' culture: The rise of new media, nerd heroes and consumer communities." In <i>Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific</i>, 20 • Galbraith, Patrick W (2012) "Idols: The Image of Desire in Japanese Consumer Capitalism" in <i>Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture</i> • Allison, Anne (2013) "The Social Body – in Life and Death" in <i>Precarious Japan</i> <p>Read Warner, at least the first few pages, and keep it in mind for the other readings. Go make a few comments on Niconico or 2channel to get a feel for the interface. Recommended:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lamarre, Thomas (2006) Otaku movement. In Tomiko Yoda and Harry Harootunian (eds.) <i>Japan After Japan: Social and Cultural Life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present</i>. • Saito, Tamaki (2011) "The psychopathology of Otaku" in <i>Beautiful Fighting Girl</i> • Nakamura, Karen (2013) <i>A Disability of the Soul: An Ethnography of Schizophrenia and Mental Illness in Contemporary Japan</i> |

| | | |
|----------------|---|---|
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kitanaka, Junko (2012) Depression in Japan: Psychiatric Cures for a Society in Distress • Allen, Jay (2014) How imageboard culture shaped Gamergate. https://boingboing.net/2014/12/31/how-imageboard-culture-shaped.html |
| Week 12 | Future/death (robots) Aging and dying, population decline and replacement. Robots and automation. The Olympics as event horizon; "post-2020" Japan. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Robertson, Jennifer (2014) "Human rights vs robot rights: Forecasts from Japan," Critical Asian Studies 46:4 • White, Daniel, and Patrick W. Galbraith (2019) "Japan's Emerging Emotional Tech" in Anthropology News. • Optional: Muramatsu, Naoko and Hiroko Akiyama (2011) "Japan: Super-Aging Society Preparing for the Future." <i>The Gerontologist</i> 51:4 |

REQUIRED READINGS:

- Allison, Anne (2013) "The Social Body – in Life and Death" in Precarious Japan.
- Benedict, Ruth (1947) "Taking One's Proper Station" in *The Chrysanthemum and The Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture*.
- Broinowski, Adam (2013) "Fukushima: Life and the Transnationality of Radioactive Contamination" In *Asia-Pacific Journal* 11:41
- Cook, Emma (2016) "(Dis)Connections & Silence: Experiences of Family and Part-time Work in Japan." *Japanese Studies* 26:2
- Dower, John (1999) "What do you tell the dead when you lose?" in *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War 2*.
- Dower, John. 1986. "Patterns of a Race War" and "Know Your Enemy" in *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*.
- Ellis, Thomas and Koichi Hamai (2007) "[Crime and Punishment in Japan](#)," *Asia Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*
- Freedman, Alisa (2009) "[Train Man and the gender politics of Japanese 'Otaku' culture: The rise of new media, nerd heroes and consumer communities](#)." In *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, 20
- Galbraith, Patrick W (2012) "Idols: The Image of Desire in Japanese Consumer Capitalism" in *Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture*
- Hane, Mikiso (2003) "The Coal Miners" in *Peasants, rebels, women, and outcastes: the underside of modern Japan*
- Hankins, Joseph (2014) "Introduction: the labor of multiculturalism" in *Working Skin: Making Leather, Making a Multicultural Japan*
- Hendry, Joy (2013) "The house and family system" in *Understanding Japanese Society*.
- Hopson, Nathan (2013) "Systems of Irresponsibility and Japan's Internal Colony," In *Asia-Pacific Journal* 11:52
- Igarashi, Yoshikuni. 2000. "The Bomb, Hirohito, and History: The Foundational Narrative of Postwar Relations between Japan and the United States" In *Bodies of Memory. Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945-1970*.
- Mauss, Marcel (1973) "Techniques of the body", *Economy and Society* 2:1.

- Miyazaki, Manabu (2005) "My Family" In *Toppamono: Outlaw. Radical. Suspect. My Life in Japan's Underworld*.
- Ohnuki-Tierney, Emiko (1993) "Rice as self, paddies as our land" in *Rice as Self: Japanese identities through time*.
- Robertson, Jennifer (2014) "Human rights vs robot rights: Forecasts from Japan," *Critical Asian Studies* 46:4
- Slater, David H. (2013) "Social class and social identity in postwar Japan." In Victoria Lyon Bestor & Theodore C. Bestor (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Japanese Culture and Society*.
- Sugimoto, Yoshio (2014) "Class and Stratification: An Overview" AND "Forms of work in cultural capitalism" in *An Introduction to Japanese Society*.
- Warner, Michael (2002) "Publics and counterpublics" in *Public Culture* 14:1
- White, Daniel, and Patrick W. Galbraith (2019) "[Japan's Emerging Emotional Tech](#)" in *Anthropology News*.
- White, Merry (2011) "Change and diversity in the Japanese family." In Victoria Lyon Bestor & Theodore C. Bestor (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Japanese Culture and Society*.
- Walker, Brett. L (2011) "Copper mining and ecological collapse" in *Toxic Archipelago: A History of Industrial Disease in Japan*
- Yano, Christine R. "Enka as Engendered Longing: Romance, Furusato, 'Japan'" in *Tears of Longing: Nostalgia and the Nation in Japanese Popular Song*
- Yomiuri Shimbun (2005) [Yasukuni: Behind the Torii: From government-run shrine for war heroes to bone of contention](#).
- Yomota, Inuhiko (2007) "The Menace from the South Seas: Honda Ishirō's Godzilla (1954)." In Alastair Phillips and Julian Stringer (eds): *Japanese Cinema: Texts and Contexts*

FILMOGRAPHY:

- ["Know Your Enemy: Japan" \(1945\)](#).

RECOMMENDED READINGS:

- Allen, Jay (2014) How imageboard culture shaped Gamergate. <https://boingboing.net/2014/12/31/how-imageboard-culture-shaped.html>
- Broadbent, Jeffrey (1999) *Environmental Politics in Japan: Networks of Power and Protest*.
- Dawes, James (2014) *Evil Men*.
- George, Timothy (2002) *Minamata: Pollution and the Struggle for Democracy in Postwar Japan*.
- Kirby, Peter (2010) "Introduction: Japan's Waste Shadow" In *Troubled Natures: Waste, Environment, Japan*
- Kitanaka, Junko (2012) *Depression in Japan: Psychiatric Cures for a Society in Distress*
- Lamarre, Thomas (2006) *Otaku movement*. In Tomiko Yoda and Harry Harootunian (eds.) *Japan After Japan: Social and Cultural Life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*.
- Lochbaum et al (2014) *Fukushima: the story of a nuclear disaster*.
- Mishima, Akio (1992) *Bitter Sea: The Human Cost of Minamata Disease*.
- Muramatsu, Naoko and Hiroko Akiyama (2011) "Japan: Super-Aging Society Preparing for the Future." *The Gerontologist* 51:4.
- Nakamura, Karen (2013) *A Disability of the Soul: An Ethnography of Schizophrenia and Mental Illness in Contemporary Japan*
- Saito, Tamaki (2011) "The psychopathology of Otaku" in *Beautiful Fighting Girl*
- Sugimoto, Yoshio (2014) "Gender Stratification and the Family System" in *An Introduction to Japanese Society*.
- Sugimoto, Yoshio (2014) "'Japaneseness,' ethnicity and minority groups" in *An Introduction to Japanese Society*.
- Tansman, Alan (1996) "Mournful tears and sake: the postwar myth of Misora Hibari". In John Treat (ed.) *Contemporary Japan and Popular Culture*
- Tsuda, Takeyuki (2009) "Japanese- Brazilian ethnic return migration and the making of Japan's newest immigrant minority" in Weiner, M (ed.) *Japan's Minorities: The Illusion of Homogeneity* (2nd edition).

Note on Possible Changes to the Syllabus: The instructor reserves the right to adjust the syllabus based on the general capabilities and interests of the students enrolled in the class.