



Japanese Culture in a Global World

JAPA 310 – Fall 2019

Tuesday and Thursday, 3:00 – 4:15PM
Robinson B203

Every April, Washington holds its world-renowned Cherry Blossom Festival, a celebration with deep roots in the long and tumultuous friendship between the United States and Japan. Although Americans are presented with enticing images of Japan as a country of blooming cherry trees and colorful kimono on one hand and high-tech robots and digital pocket monsters on the other, the reality of contemporary Japan is much more fascinating, especially since the threads that form the fabric of Japanese society are so closely interwoven with those of our own history and culture.

This course presents an overview of Japanese society in the twenty-first century with a special emphasis on the myriad roles Japan plays on an international stage. We will begin by considering how the political legacies of the twentieth century have shaped Japan's relationships with other nations before turning our attention to vocal special-interest groups who have come to the attention of Japanese and foreign news media during the past two decades. We will then consider gender and the environment, two major international social issues that have exerted a strong influence on Japanese domestic policies. Finally, we will examine Japanese popular culture and the economic “soft power” it wields. By the end of the semester, students will possess a broad knowledge of contemporary Japan that will allow them to better understand and interpret how social and cultural identities are constructed and challenged in a global world.

Course Attributes:

Global Understanding, Non-Western Culture, Undergraduate Upper Division

Instructor

Kathryn Hemmann
khemmann@gmail.com
Aquia Building Room 326
office hours by appointment (to be requested in writing via email)

Grading and Assignments

Unit Quizzes: 50%
Take-Home Exam: 30%
Participation: 20%

Unit Quizzes

There will be a quiz on the final day of each of the five course units. Each quiz will last approximately fifteen minutes and will feature three to five term definitions and one or two short answer questions. Each quiz will test all material covered in its respective unit, including the reading assigned for the day of the quiz. If a student misses a quiz for any reason, they will be required to schedule a make-up quiz before the next class meeting.

Quizzes will be given on the following days:

September 12
September 26
October 10
October 29
November 14

Take-Home Exam

The take-home exam will include seven to ten short answer questions and two or three essay questions. The short answer questions should be answered in a paragraph, while the essay questions should be answered in at least three paragraphs. Students will be able to complete the exam using the knowledge they have gained from the course readings and discussions, but outside academic research is permitted provided that it is sufficiently documented. That being said, answers that are clearly the result of an online search will not receive credit. The exam questions will be distributed on the final day of class. The completed exam must be submitted digitally via email by no later than **4:15PM on Thursday, December 12**. Although early submissions are encouraged, no submissions will be accepted after the deadline.

Participation

Students are expected to complete all required reading assignments and to be attentive during class lectures and discussions. Repeated lack of preparation will significantly lower the participation grade, as will a demonstrated lack of respect for the instructor or the other students.

If a student is uncomfortable or otherwise unable to speak in class, alternate methods of performance evaluation can be arranged through a consultation with the Office of Disability Services. Participation is graded according to the following rubric:

- A – Strong participation, speaks at least once or twice during each class.
- B – Fair participation, speaks perhaps once or twice a week.
- C – Minimal participation, does not speak but attends class.
- D – Poor participation, does not speak or attend class regularly.
- F – No participation, does not attend class.

Course Policies

Required Readings

There is no textbook for this class. All required readings will be available as downloadable PDF files on the course site on Blackboard. Students are strongly encouraged to print out a copy of each reading and bring it with them to the appropriate class.

Attendance

Each student is allowed **two unexcused absences**, no questions asked and no excuses necessary. If you would like to excuse an absence, you must submit at least one form of written proof of legitimacy (photocopies, printouts, and forwarded emails are fine). If your documents are not submitted **within three days** of your absence, they become forfeit. Each unexcused absence after the second will result in half a letter grade being deduced from the student's final course grade.

Technology

Tablets are permitted in their capacity as e-readers, but **smartphones and laptop computers are absolutely not allowed** without a formal letter from the Office of Disability Services.

Academic Integrity

All students are expected to abide by the Mason Honor Code. No instances of cheating, plagiarization, stealing, or lying in matters related to academic work will be tolerated.

Respect

As in any class dealing with media and contemporary social issues, students may find that the course material is directly pertinent to their lives, and a respectful attitude is an absolute necessity. No speech demonstrating or encouraging discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, body shape, or disability will be tolerated. Content warnings will be provided upon request.

August 27 (Tuesday)

Course Outline and Structure

August 29 (Thursday)

Cultural Essentialism and Cultural Appropriation

Yoshio Sugimoto, “The Japan Phenomenon and the Social Sciences,” pp.1-36
from *An Introduction to Japanese Society* (2010)

UNIT ONE: HISTORY

September 3 (Tuesday)

The “Civilization and Enlightenment” of the Meiji Period

Brett Walker, “Meiji Enlightenment,” pp.159-178
from *A Concise History of Japan* (2015)

September 5 (Thursday)

The Roaring Teens of the Taishō Period

Toby Slade, “Japanese Womenswear: Femininity and Modernity,” pp.99-113
from *Japanese Fashion: A Cultural History* (2009)

September 10 (Tuesday)

The Smithsonian Exhibition of the Enola Gay

Lawrence Wittner, “The Enola Gay, the Atomic Bomb and American War Memory”
from *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 3 (2005)

September 12 (Thursday)

Historical Memory, Pop Culture, and the Online Right-Wing
+ QUIZ ONE

Aleksandra Jaworowicz-Zimny, “Kandō Conservatism – ‘Moving’ War Narratives in Japanese Online Fan Videos”
from *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 16 (2018)

UNIT TWO: SOCIAL DEMOGRAPHICS

September 17 (Tuesday)

Japan’s Aging Society

Yoshio Sugimoto, “Geographical and Generational Variations,” pp.72-87
from *An Introduction to Japanese Society* (2010)

September 19 (Thursday)

Ethnic Minority Groups and Race in a Raceless Society

Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "Yearning for Lightness: Transnational Circuits in the Marketing and Consumption of Skin Lightness," pp.281-302
from *Gender & Society* 22 (2008)

September 24 (Tuesday)

Parasite Singles, Hikikomori, and Other Problem Children

Tamaki Saitō, "What Is Social Withdrawal?" pp.17-29
from *Hikikomori: Adolescence without End* (2013)

September 26 (Thursday)

Japanese Millennials and the Shrinking Job Market
+ QUIZ TWO

Andrea Gevurtz Arai, "The Recessionary Generation: Times and Spaces," pp.139-171
from *The Strange Child: Education and the Psychology of Patriotism in Recessionary Japan* (2016)

UNIT THREE: GENDER

October 1 (Tuesday)

Feminism in Japan

Ayako Kano, "The Future of Gender in Japan: Work/Life Balance and Relations between the Sexes," pp.87-109
from *Japan: The Precarious Future* (2015)

October 3 (Thursday)

Dangerous Schoolgirls

Sharon Kinsella, "The Surveillance of Financial Deviancy," pp.88-106
from *Schoolgirls, Money and Rebellion in Japan* (2014)

October 8 (Tuesday)

Constructions of Motherhood

Anne Allison, "Japanese Mothers and *Obentōs*: The Lunch Box as Ideological State Apparatus," pp.81-103
from *Permitted and Prohibited Desires: Mothers, Comics, and Censorship in Japan* (2000)

October 10 (Thursday)

Queer Sexualities in Japan
+ QUIZ THREE

Mark McLelland, "Toward a Lesbian and Gay Consciousness," pp.159-192
from *Queer Japan from the Pacific War to the Internet Age* (2005)

UNIT FOUR: ENVIRONMENT

October 15 (Tuesday)

FALL BREAK – NO CLASS

October 17 (Thursday)

The March 2011 Triple Disaster

David Pilling, "Fukushima Fallout," pp.257-278
from *Bending Adversity: Japan and the Art of Survival* (2014)

October 22 (Tuesday)

Urban Agriculture and Sustainable Lifestyles

Giles Bruno Sioen, Makiko Sekiyama, Toru Terada, and Makoto Yokohari, "Post-Disaster Food and Nutrition from Urban Agriculture: A Self-Sufficiency Analysis of Nerima Ward, Tokyo"
from *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2017)

October 24 (Thursday)

PROFESSOR AT A CONFERENCE – NO CLASS

October 29 (Tuesday)

Animals in Mass Media and Popular Culture
+QUIZ FOUR

Christine Marran, "Beyond Domesticating Animal Love," pp.39-50
from *Mechademia 6: User Enhanced* (2011)

UNIT FIVE: POPULAR CULTURE

October 31 (Thursday)

International Cinema

Valerie Wee, "Visual Aesthetics and Ways of Seeing: Comparing *Ringu* and *The Ring*," pp.41-60
from *Cinema Journal* 50 (2011)

November 5 (Tuesday)

Japanese Fashion and Subcultures of Cuteness

Christine Yano, “Marketing Global Kitty: Strategies to Sell Friendship and ‘Happiness,’” pp.84-105

from *Pink Globalization: Hello Kitty’s Trek Across the Pacific* (2013)

November 7 (Thursday)

The Korean Wave and Japan

Jimmy Parc and Nobuko Kawashima, “Wrestling with or Embracing Digitization in the Music Industry: The Contrasting Business Strategies of J-pop and K-pop,” pp.23-48

from *Kritika Kultura* 30 (2018)

November 12 (Tuesday)

Anime Goes Global

Ian Condry, “Dark Energy: What Overseas Fans Reveal about the Copyright Wars,” pp.161-184

from *The Soul of Anime: Collaborative Creativity and Japan’s Media Success Story* (2013)

November 14 (Thursday)

Otaku Media and “Cool Japan”

+ QUIZ FIVE

Casey Brienza, “Did Manga Conquer America? Implications for the Cultural Policy of ‘Cool Japan,’” pp.383-398

from *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 20 (2014)

UNIT SIX: SPECIAL TOPICS

November 19 (Tuesday)

Special Topics #1

November 21 (Thursday)

Special Topics #2

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November 26 (Tuesday)

November 28 (Thursday)

NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

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December 3 (Tuesday)
Special Topics #3

December 5 (Thursday)
Special Topics #4

The course material for the “Special Topics” section will be decided by the class. A written survey will be conducted on Tuesday, November 5, and we will discuss the results at the beginning of class the following Thursday. A schedule for the final two weeks of class will be distributed on Tuesday, November 12.

Options will include readings related to cultural nostalgia, divorce, education, mass media, organized crime, youth crime, technology, tourism, video games, urban legends, and so on.

Student suggestions are welcome and encouraged.

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Final exam questions will be distributed in class on Thursday, December 5.

- Ideally, you should be able to complete the exam in three hours.
- Please include all of your answers in one document.
- Make sure to put your name on the front page of the document.
- If you have any questions, please contact me before noon on the due date.

The deadline for submission of the final exam is **4:15PM on Thursday, December 12.**

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