

Sociology of Japanese Society 2018-2019

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Eight classes will be taught in Hilary Term.

Contents and Structure:

The course will be open without prerequisite to anyone with interest in modern Japanese society and also to anyone interested in understanding social change in developed countries in general. No Japan-specific knowledge will be necessary, but an interest in social science concepts and methods will be important. Both lecture and discussion formats will be utilized throughout the course.

Aims:

The main goal of this course is to develop an understanding of the features of contemporary Japanese society as a non-western and highly advanced society from a sociological perspective and to discuss how Japanese society has changed since WWII.

Course Assessment:

The main assessment will be through a three-hour examination in Trinity Term. In each week, students will be assigned to make short presentations based on the assigned readings. Everyone is expected to participate with comments and questions. In addition, students are required to submit two essays, one by the end of week 4 and the other in week 9 of the term in which they are taught.

Rubric:

Japan once was regarded as “a model” for the West not only for its economic and industrial power but also for its excellence in education, culture, low crime rates, stable families, and its perceived meritocracy. More recently less favourable images of Japan have been coming to the surface. But are any of these images of Japan true? To investigate this, the class will centre on the following questions: How does a society become a particular, in this case a “Japanese society”? How are the changes in the processes of becoming “Japanese” related with changes in Japanese society? How do individual decisions amount to social trends? How do those interchanges in people and society make Japanese society look “unique” (or at least make people believe it is unique)? To understand these complex issues, in this class we will discuss the key themes from a range of vantage points: education, family, youth problems, work, social welfare, social stratification, and social change.

Learning Outcomes:

- 1) better understanding of features of contemporary Japanese society and its changes
- 2) development of “sociological imagination” (a way of thinking “sociologically” both with sociological theories and methods) necessary to understand contemporary (post-) industrial societies including Japan and UK.

Schedule:

- Week 1** What is sociology and what is sociology of Japanese society?
- Week 2** School and education policies
- Week 3** How to Become a Japanese Worker (1): From school to work transition and youth problem
- Week 4** How to Become a Japanese Worker (2): Work Place
- Week 5** Family, motherhood, and demographic challenge

- Week 6** Social welfare and social policy
Week 7 Social mobility and social stratification in Japan
Week 8 3.11 Disaster and social changes in Japan

Essay questions will be given out one week in advance of the class.

Recommended readings:

- Ragin, Charles and Amoroso, Lisa. (2010). *Constructing Social Research*, 2nd edition, Pine Forge Press.
- Sugimoto, Y. (2014). *An introduction to Japanese society*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Rohlen, T. P. (1983). *Japan's High Schools*, University of California Press.
- Kariya, T. *Education Reform and Social Class in Japan*, Routledge, 2013.
- Brinton, C. M., *Lost in Transition*, Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Mouer, R. and Kawanishi, H. *A Sociology of Work in Japan*, 2005.
- Chiavacci, D. and Hommerich C. eds. *Social Inequality in Post-growth Japan*, Routledge, 2017
- Schoppa, L. J. *Race for the exits: the unraveling of Japan's system of social protection*, Ithaca, N.Y. ; London, Cornell University Press, 2006.
- Ishida, H. and Slater, D eds. *Social Class in Contemporary Japan*, Routledge, 2010.
- Shirahase, S. (2014). *Social Inequality in Japan*, Routledge
- Yoichi F. and Kushner B. eds. *Examining Japan's lost decades*, Routledge, 2015.

*A more detailed reading list will be provided in class.