



Japanese Social Anthropology

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Eight lectures in Hilary Term, 8 Classes in Hilary Term and 2 in Trinity Term

Aims:

This course has two main aims; (a) to provide an introduction to Japanese society from an anthropological perspective and (b) to show how the study of Japan can contribute to mainstream anthropological theory. Major themes which will be covered include notions of personhood, rituals and symbols, time and space, structure and agency, continuity and change, and the construction of ethnic identity. It will be possible to study a number of contemporary social institutions in depth, including the Japanese education system, medical system, household and kinship systems, legal and economic systems, new religions, and the worlds of traditional arts and popular culture. At the micro level, the details of these operations and the ideologies which support them will be examined, while at the macro level the course will explore their relation to other social institutions and the wider political and economic arena both inside and outside Japan.

In Hilary Term, there will be a series of 8 lectures which will introduce students to the anthropological literature on Japan (details below). There will also be a weekly class. Students will be able to choose from a list of around 20 topics for the class which they would like to pursue. Each topic is headed by a key anthropological reading which all those who attend the class must read (copies will be available on-line) and the purpose of the class is to relate the specific readings on Japan (not all of which will be anthropological) to the themes covered in this anthropological text. Each week, four or five students will be assigned to present position papers to the class; two others will act as discussants. In Trinity Term, there will be a further topic covered and a revision class.

Course Assessment:

Assessment will be through a three-hour examination in Trinity Term.

All students will be required to submit a piece of written work for assessment by the end of week 4 of the term in which the classes are taught. Details will be given during the first class of the term.

Learning outcomes:

- To see how an advanced, industrial urban society like Japan can be studied using mainstream anthropological methods;
- The implications of studying a society like Japan for anthropological theory.

Lectures:

Please note that the lectures are a central part of the course and all students are very strongly recommended to attend.

The Construction of Japanese Ethnicity: An Anthropological Introduction

1. Issues in the study of Japan: Said and Orientalism

The Functionalist/Essentialist Dominant Paradigm of Japanese Ethnicity

2. Technology and the changing demography
3. Homogeneity, minority groups and migrant workers
4. The concept of the person
5. Groupism and hierarchy
6. Nakane, Doi and the 'kinship model' of Japanese society

Critique of the Model

7. Inherent assumptions and a critique of the 'kinship model'
8. Case study of functionalist versus the conflict models of the Japanese company

Recommended Introductory Reading:

The following recent *textbooks* and *compendiums of overview chapters and articles* are suggested as useful background to the whole course:

Victoria BESTOR and Theodore BESTOR with YAMAGATA Akiko (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Japanese Culture and Society*, Routledge, 2011.

Joy HENDRY, *Understanding Japanese Society*, (5th edition) Routledge, 2019.

Jeff KINGSTON (ed.), *Critical Issues in Contemporary Japan*, Routledge, 2014 (Part IV).

Satsuki KAWANO, Glenda S ROBERTS and Susan Orpett LONG (eds), *Capturing Contemporary Japan: Differentiation and Uncertainty*, University of Hawaii Press, 2014.

D.P. MARTINEZ, 'Modernization and its aftermath: The Anthropology of Japan', pp. 312-25 in Fardon, Richard (ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Anthropology*, Sage, 2012.

NAKANE, Chie, *Japanese Society*, Penguin, 1973.

ROBERTSON, J (ed.), *A Companion to the Anthropology of Japan*, Blackwells, 2005.

SUGIMOTO, Yoshio, *An Introduction to Japanese Society*, Cambridge University Press, 2010 (3rd edition).

Statement of Coverage

This document applies to students starting the MSc and/or MPhil in Japanese Studies in Michaelmas Term 2024. The information in this handbook may be different for students starting in other years.

Disclaimer

The information in this document is accurate as at 19 September 2024, however it may be necessary for changes to be made in certain circumstances, as explained at www.graduate.ox.ac.uk/coursechanges. If such changes are made the department will publish a new version of this handbook together with a list of the changes and students will be informed.