

PAAS 380 Japanese Economy, Politics and Culture

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Course description:

In this course, you will explore various political and socioeconomic issues in modern and contemporary Japan. In both scholarly and popular narratives, several keywords have been used to explain the national characteristics of Japan, which include “catch-up” modernization, ethnic/cultural homogeneity, collectivism, and a mixture of traditional and futuristic cultural elements. This course will help you challenge these conventional understandings that have reduced complex political and social relations to an essentialized national identity by engaging with crucial issues that have shaped the forms and dynamics of social relations within and beyond the Japanese context. A variety of reading and visual materials will be assigned to guide you through critical topics, including: the emperor system, grassroots democratic/right-wing movements, legacies of colonialism and the war, racial/gender inequalities, environmental/nuclear disasters, and population issues.

Proposed assignments:

- Regular class attendance and active participation (10%)
- A film review essay (15%)
- A book review essay (15%)
- Blog assignment (20%)
- Midterm & final exams (essay questions, each exam 20%, total 40%)

Proposed reading list:

- Saaler, Sven, and Christopher W. A. Szpilman. *Routledge Handbook of Modern Japanese History*. London; New York: Routledge, 2020.
- Field, Norma. *In the Realm of a Dying Emperor*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993.
- Seraphim, Franziska. *War Memory and Social Politics in Japan, 1945-2005*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006.