Japanese society and culture:
Contemporary social issues and identities

Japan Center for Michigan Universities
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Course Description
This course examines several pressing issues in contemporary Japanese society with focus on changing economic environment, social condition and identities. Although Japan is commonly known as peaceful and well-ordered country, underneath this image is the economic instability after the collapse of bubble economy and cultural norm that pushes people to suicide, *karoshi* (death from overwork) and *hikikomori* (social withdrawal). In addition, the disastrous earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdown in 2011 revealed the huge risk underlying the convenient lives in Japan. By investigating these challenges, the lecture encourages students to critically assess both bright and dark sides of contemporary Japanese society and culture. Each lecture will have a group discussion in which students are expected to compare and contrast their own experience with the reality of Japanese society.

Objectives
• To understand the social issues of contemporary Japan and analyse their cultural and social backgrounds.
• To critically discuss the bright and dark sides of Japanese society by comparing and contrasting them with your own society.
• To work collaboratively in a team and give constructive feedback to your peers.

Evaluation
1) Group presentation (30%)
Analyse one of the social issues in contemporary Japan and provide suggestions for improvement.
2) Papers (40%)
Students are required to write two papers.

3) Attendance and participation (30%)
Participation means good preparation for class, and active engagement in group discussions and activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 15 Jan | Introduction  
Your image of Japan |
| 22 Jan | Changing social conditions in Post-war Japan  
Post-war reconstruction / Economic miracle / Lost decade |
| 29 Jan | Labor and employment  
Freeter and working poor / Karoshi / Hikikomori |
| 5 Feb | Friendship and love  
‘Herbivore men’ and otaku culture |
| 12 Feb | Aging society  
Shrinking population / Welfare system / Regional revitalization |
| 19 Feb | Minorities in Japan (1)  
Gender inequality / Sexual minorities |
| 26 Feb | Minorities in Japan (2)  
Ethnic minority / Migrant workers and refugees |
| 4 Mar | Environment and disaster  
Geography and natural disasters / Nuclear disaster  
PAPER ONE DUE |
| 11 Mar | War and peace  
Relationship with the US / Neighboring Asian countries |
| 18 Mar | Discussion / Group research project |
| 25 Mar | Group research project |
| 1 Apr | Group research project |
| 8 Apr | Group research project |
| 15 Apr | Group presentation  
PAPER TWO DUE |

Required reading: All reading materials will be provided by the instructor.