

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.

	Date	Contents
1	15 Jan	Introduction Your image of Japan
2	22 Jan	Changing social conditions in Post-war Japan Post-war reconstruction / Economic miracle / Lost decade
3	29 Jan	Labor and employment Freeter and working poor / <i>Karoshi</i> / <i>Hikikomori</i>
4	5 Feb	Friendship and love 'Herbivore men' and <i>otaku</i> culture
5	12 Feb	Aging society Shrinking population / Welfare system / Regional revitalization
6	19 Feb	Minorities in Japan (1) Gender inequality / Sexual minorities
7	26 Feb	Minorities in Japan (2) Ethnic minority / Migrant workers and refugees
8	4 Mar	Environment and disaster Geography and natural disasters / Nuclear disaster
		PAPER ONE DUE
9	11 Mar	War and peace Relationship with the US / Neighboring Asian countries
10	18 Mar	Discussion / Group research project
11	25 Mar	Group research project
12	1 Apr	Group research project
13	8 Apr	Group research project
14	15 Apr	Group presentation / PAPER TWO DUE

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