

**ANTH 5402**  
**Topics in Ethnography: The Anthropology of Japan**  
**Fall 2024**

Instructor: Aaron HAMES, email address, NAH room number, phone

Course times: Wednesdays 11:30-1:15, Tutorial 1:30-2:15

Office Hours: By appointment

Updated: 2024.7.23



In the popular imagination, Japan occupies a complex and often contradictory position. It is home to futuristic anime and an aging population, picturesque villages and dolphin hunts, high-end cameras and the widespread use of quaint fax machines. This course provides a broad survey of contemporary Japanese society and culture. Engaging with common stereotypes, students will learn to analyze, discuss, and write about various issues and cultural features of Japan. Particular attention will be paid to youth, popular culture, family organization, labor, and health as well as the transition to a highly aged society. We will examine persistent cultural patterns as well as the emergence of new forms of social life. Students will learn how to apply theoretical concepts from anthropology and think critically about Japanese culture and its portrayals in the media. The ethnographic approaches and theoretical perspectives covered in this class are applicable to other cultural contexts.

## Required Texts

All readings are either posted on Blackboard or available as an eBook through the University Library.

## Resources

The following suggestions are not required reading, but they may be helpful in getting oriented. Both are available as eBooks via the University Library:

Bestor, Theodore C. 1989. *Neighborhood Tokyo*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

White, Merry I. 2002. *Perfectly Japanese: Making Families in an Era of Upheaval*. University of California Press.

## Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this course, students will:

1. Have a general understanding of contemporary Japanese culture and society.
2. Learn how to think critically about media and scholarly portrayals of Japan.
3. Expand knowledge about anthropological approaches to the study of culture.
4. Gainer a deeper awareness of cultural diversity and universals.

## GRADE DESCRIPTORS

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Criteria for 1) the course and 2) for coursework</i>
A	1) Outstanding performance on all learning outcomes. 2) The work has creatively synthesized course materials and key ideas in an original way. Observations are nuanced, the argument is logical and cohesive, the discussion is well-organized, and the writing is clear. Concrete evidence corresponds to statements and claims. The work responds directly to the assignment prompt.
A-	1) Generally outstanding performance on all (or almost all) learning outcomes. 2) The work synthesizes course materials and key ideas in an original way, but there are areas for improvement.

B-range	<p>1) Substantial performance on all learning outcomes, OR high performance on some learning outcomes which compensates for less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall substantial performance.</p> <p>2) The work demonstrates a solid grasp of course materials and key ideas. There are areas for improvement with respect to handling complexity, building a cohesive argument, organizing the discussion, communicating clearly, and/or identifying relevant evidence. Response to the assignment prompt may not be sufficient.</p>
C-range	<p>1) Satisfactory performance on the majority of learning outcomes, possibly with a few weaknesses.</p> <p>2) The work shows some effort, but course materials have not been sufficiently engaged. The argument and the writing is not clear, and/or there is no evidence for statements and claims made. Understanding of course materials and key ideas has not been demonstrated.</p>
D-range	<p>1) Barely satisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes.</p> <p>2) The work shows little effort to engage course materials. There are major problems with clarity of argument and writing.</p>
F	<p>1) Unsatisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes, OR failure to meet specified assessment requirements.</p> <p>2) The work has failed to respond to the assignment prompt.</p>

### Evaluation

<i>Grade Item</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Due Date</i>
Participation and Response Papers	20%	Weekly
Discussion Facilitation	10%	--
Ethnographic Sketch	10%	October 16
Book Review	20%	October 30
Final Paper	40%	December 20

### Expectations

This course is focused on closely reading and discussing texts. To make the discussions lively and informative, it is necessary to keep up with the readings and attend class. In addition to the articles noted in the schedule below, we will collectively choose four ethnographies to explore and analyze. Required and optional sections are posted on Blackboard. You should come prepared to ask questions and participate in the discussion.

#### Participation and Response Papers (20%)

This content belongs to The Chinese University of Hong Kong and shall not be distributed, shared, copied or uploaded.

Regular class attendance is vital for this course. Your class participation grade is based on your preparation for discussions and frequent, valuable contributions online and in the classroom. During the last portion of each class, you will be given time to write an **informal, brief** response (<200 words). In addition to your general thoughts, please include any questions or issues you would like to explore further in future classes. For tutorial sessions, you need to post a question for the class on blackboard about the session's ethnographic section by 5pm the day before the session. Facilitator(s) of that tutorial may use the questions to help foster a discussion.

#### Tutorial Discussion Facilitation 10%

During the term, you will facilitate a discussion in the tutorial of the week's section of an ethnography. After providing a short introduction to the reading, your main task is to offer questions about the reading to stimulate discussion. Please keep in mind that you are free to disagree and be critical about the material in the paper. A signup sheet will be sent out once enrollment settles.

#### Book Review (20%)

You will write a book review of one of the ethnographies we read together for tutorial. Rather than a summary, the paper will critically address the ethnography's arguments, style, presentation, and any other relevant features. Instead, give your own critical perspective. The reflection paper is due before class on week 7.

#### Ethnographic Sketch (10%)

For this short essay (~600-900 words), you need to visit a place in Hong Kong that is in some way connected to Japan. It can be a Japanese restaurant, department store, museum exhibit, art gallery, sweet shop, or anything space that has a link to Japan. Spend some time in the place and take notes on what your senses tell you. Use those notes and your recollections to write a short sketch that communicates what it is like to be in that space. The sketch is due before class on Week 9.

#### Final Paper (30%)

A final paper (~2400 words) on a topic of your choosing will be due at the end of the course. This is an opportunity for you to engage in research that uses, develops, and/or critiques the concepts from class. You may go deeper in one of the topics the class addresses or pursue a different aspect of Japanese culture. You must use at least five sources. The final paper is due December 20, but you may turn in a draft for feedback no later than December 2. I will give you an initial grade as well as indicate areas for improvement. If you are satisfied, you can keep the initial assessment as your final grade for the paper. However, I highly encourage revision and resubmission of the final paper. The timeline for completion is as follows: your topic and a list of tentative sources (Week 6); 300-word abstract (Week 11); optional rough draft (December 2); complete final paper (December 20).

## **Schedule**

Week 1 (September 4): Introduction: What is Japanese Culture?

- 📖 **Optional:** Geertz, Clifford. 1973. "Thick Description: Toward and Interpretative Theory of Culture." Chapter 1 in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. Pp. 3-30.

Week 2 (September 11): Foundational Works: Benedict and Nakane

- 📖 Nakane, C., & Roquet, P. (2013 [1967]). "Group Characteristics Based on 'Place.'" *Review of Japanese Culture and Society*, 25, 170–178.
- 📖 Benedict, Ruth. 1946. "Debtor to the Ages and the World." Chapter 5 in *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture*. Pp. 98-113.

Week 3 (September 18): Mistakes and Myths of "Japaneseness"

- 👉 Martin Fackler. "Fearing Crime, Japanese Wear the Hiding Place." *New York Times*, October 20, 2007. <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/20/world/asia/20japan.html>
- 👉 Nicholas D. Kristof. "In Japan, Nice Guys (And Girls) Finish Together." *New York Times*, April 12, 1998. <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/04/12/weekinreview/correspondence-uncompetitive-tokyo-japan-nice-guys-girls-finish-together.html?pagewanted=all>
- 👉 Ross Douthat. "Japan, the incredible shrinking country." <https://www.twincities.com/2012/04/30/ross-douthat-japan-the-incredible-shrinking-country/>, *Twin Cities*, April 30, 2012.
- 📖 Ethnography #1

Week 4 (September 25): Traditions and Inventions

- 📖 Friday, Karl F. 1994. "Bushidō or Bull? A Medieval Historian's Perspective on the Imperial Army and the Japanese Warrior Tradition." *The History Teacher* 27 (3): 339–49.
- 📖 Ethnography #1 continued

Week 5 (October 2): Health and the Body

- 📖 Kuriyama, Shigehisa. 1997. "The Historical Origins of *Katakori*." *Japan Review* (9), 127–149.
- 📖 Ethnography #1 continued

Week 6 (October 9): Gift-giving and Ritual: Chocolate and Accounting

- 📖 Hendry, Joy. 1995. "The Ritual of the Revolving Towel." Chapter 10 in *Ceremony and Ritual in Japan: Religious Practices in an Industrialised Society*. Jan van Bremen and D. P. Martinez, eds. Pp. 210–226.
- 📖 Ethnography #2

**Ω Final Paper Topic and Tentative List of Sources Due**Week 7 (October 16): Gender: Office Ladies, White Collars, and Beauty

- 📖 Miller, Laura. "Male beauty work in Japan." *Men and Masculinities in Contemporary Japan*. Routledge, 2005. 55-76.

### **Ω Ethnographic Sketch Due**

#### Week 8 (October 23): Childhood and Schooling

- 📖 Allison, Anne. 1991. "Japanese Mothers and Obentōs: The Lunch-Box as Ideological State Apparatus." *Anthropological Quarterly* 64(4): 195–208.
- 📖 Ethnography #2 continued

#### Week 9 (October 30): Cute and Otaku

- 📖 Kinsella, S. (1995). Cuties in Japan. In L. Skov & B. Moeran (Eds.), *Women, Media, and Consumption in Japan* (pp. 220–254). University of Hawaii Press.
- 📖 Miller, Laura. 2011. "Cute Masquerade and the Pimping of Japan." *International Journal of Japanese Sociology* 20(1): 18–29.
- 📖 Ethnography #2 continued

### **Ω Book Review**

#### Week 10 (November 6): Labor, Precarity, and Social Class

- 📖 Cook, Emma E. 2013. "Expectations of Failure: Maturity and Masculinity for Freeters in Contemporary Japan." *Social Science Japan Journal* 16 (1): 29–43.
- 📖 Ethnography #3

#### Week 11 (November 13): Love, Marriage, and Children

- 📖 Tanaka-Naji, Hiromi. 2009. "Stated Desire versus Actual Practice: Reviewing the Literature on Low Fertility Rates in Contemporary Japanese Society." *Japanese Studies* 29(3): 415–430.
- 📖 Ethnography #3 continued.

### **Ω Final Paper Abstract Due**

#### Week 12 (November 20): Aging Society and End of Life

- 📖 Onishi, Norimitsu. 2017. "A Generation in Japan Faces a Lonely Death." *The New York Times*, November 30, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/30/world/asia/japan-lonely-deaths-the-end.html>
- 📖 Ethnography #3 continued

#### Week 13 (27): Godzilla to TEPCO

- 📖 Morimoto, Ryo. 2023. "Radioactive Mosquito Bite and Its Surreal Life: Science, the State, and the Invisible." *Public Culture* 35 (3 (101)): 319–30.

### **Ω Optional Rough Draft for Final Paper Due (29/11)**

### **Ω Final Paper Due (20/12)**

## **POLICIES**

### Late Submissions

Papers submitted after the due date will suffer a fraction of a grade deduction for every day it is late. For example, an A- will become a B+, a B will become a B-, et cetera.

### Academic Honesty

The Chinese University of Hong Kong places very high importance on academic honesty, and adopts a policy of zero tolerance on academic dishonesty. Any such offence will lead to disciplinary action including possibly termination of studies at the University. Students should know how to properly use source material and how to avoid plagiarism. Detailed guidelines and examples for the acknowledgement of sources can be found on the University's website at <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/>. All papers must be submitted through VeriGuide.

### Use of AI Tools

Use of AI tools for course papers is strictly prohibited. You are expected to work independently, and to cite sources for any and all information you did not collect yourself.