

Ethnographies of Japanese society

This course was implemented in spring 2022 at a Japanese Studies department. The positions selected for use in this course were divided into two groups: three which the course tutor was familiar with, and three new to them. Students were made aware of the fact in order to encourage the spirit of joint exploration. Position 3b below was selected as a rather rare example of a translation of an ethnographic work originally published in Japanese.

COURSE OUTLINE

In this course we will explore the unique insights that an ethnographic approach offers into the workings of Japanese society. We will do so through reading and discussing ethnographic texts focusing on people from a range of sections of Japanese society.

Apart from the thematic focus, the emphasis of this course will be twofold: on the strengths and weaknesses of an ethnographic approach in representing a society; and on how fieldwork, writing and theory come together in the production of an ethnographic text. We will use a mix of English and Japanese language materials and will practise writing book reviews and essays.

The course will be primarily student-led. Students will be required to read the assigned material and take turns in making presentations and leading discussion.

COURSE AIMS

1. To familiarise students with ethnographic studies of Japanese society.
2. To support students in developing skills in reading ethnography closely and critically.
3. To encourage students to reflexively view different forms of representation as sources of knowledge about the society.
4. To help students develop sensitivity to the context of knowledge production and dissemination.
5. To assist students in developing skills in independent research, academic writing and offering constructive feedback.

LEARNING GOALS

1. Knowledge of selected ethnographic studies on Japanese society.
2. Ability to place particular case studies in a broader social and theoretical context.
3. Awareness of benefits and limitations of ethnographic approach in studying and representing societies.
4. Ability to succinctly summarise read material.
5. Ability to logically construct and support a written argument.
6. Ability to offer constructive feedback.
7. Ability to locate and assess relevant scholarly work.
8. Capacity to take on different roles within one's peer group.

COURSE STRUCTURE

The course will revolve primarily around reading ethnographic monographs on different aspects of Japanese society. Each student will be required to closely read one or two

monographs (depending on the number of students enrolled in the course), give presentation(s) on the reading, and produce one book review. Everyone is also expected to identify other relevant sources (see below) and actively participate in discussions and exercises.

Overall, Mondays will be student-led and centred around student presentations of their selected monographs and the following discussion. Thursday sessions will be primarily devoted to writing-related practice.

INDEPENDENT STUDY TASKS

Tasks to be accomplished **by 25th March**:

1. Read ONE ethnographic monograph from the list below.
2. Write a short book review (circa 750 words) of the monograph.
 - To be written individually and submitted via the Assignment function.
3. Prepare a list of major themes, issues dealt with in the book.
 - Three to five points will suffice. Be fairly precise, but not overly descriptive. For example, “increase in reports of domestic violence under Covid lockdown in Japan”, “relationship between gender identity and employment among manual factory workers in Japan”. You can complement your points with keywords. This list will serve your fellow students as a guide for locating additional relevant material on the topic, so make sure that the information you offer is sufficient and not misleading.
 - The list is to be prepared in pairs (or threes, depending on the number of students) and uploaded to the designated page.
4. Prepare a presentation on the topic tackled by your selected monograph.
 - This presentation should last about 30 min, but you can go slightly over if you need to. You will have 45 minutes in total, but this time needs to include setting up of the equipment and so on, so factor that in. The presentation will be followed by a Q&As and a discussion. Each session will be chaired by a different student.
 - The presentation will be done in the same pairs or threes as the list of major themes.
 - There is no strict deadline as long as you are ready when your turn comes (the order will depend on your selected monograph), but I suggest you have a good idea what to do by **25th March as there will be other things to focus on once the presentations begin.**

You will notice that all the above tasks complement each other and that you will be able to use the same overall framework to accomplish all of them.

List of the ethnographic monographs to choose from:

- 1a. Borovoy, Amy. 2005. *The Too-Good Wife: Alcohol, Codependency, and the Politics of Nurture in Postwar Japan*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 2a. Nakamura, Karen. 2013. *A Disability of the Soul. An Ethnography of Schizophrenia and Mental Illness in Contemporary Japan*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- 3a. Świtek, Beata. 2016. *Reluctant Intimacies: Japanese Eldercare in Indonesian Hands*. New York: Berghahn Books.

- 1b. Baudinette, Thomas. 2021. *Regimes of Desire: Young Gay Men, Media, and Masculinity in Tokyo*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- 2b. Ikeuchi, Suma. 2019. *Jesus Loves Japan: Return Migration and Global Pentecostalism in a Brazilian Diaspora*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- 3b. Maruyama, Satomi. 2019. *Living on the Streets in Japan: Homeless Women Break Their Silence*. Translated by Stephen Filler. Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press.

Each monograph must be read by **at least two and a maximum of three** people. Please negotiate among yourselves if you have strong preferences. We will allocate the readings during our first meeting.

All the above books apart from 3b (Maruyama 2019) are available in digital format via the library. If you cannot access them, please get in touch with me as soon as possible. Maruyama's book has been ordered for the library and we're now awaiting its arrival.

NON-PRESENTING STUDENTS

Students who do not present will be required to do one of the following for each session:

- to have found and read one academic journal article that is relevant for the topic of the session (not necessarily based on ethnographic research). You will use the list of themes and keywords prepared by your fellow students to decide what to look for (see section Independent Study Tasks below for details). Having read the article, you are required to come to class being able to: a) shortly explain why you chose the given article; b) state what the main argument of the article is; c) explain the methods it is based on; d) ask a question about the session's topic based on your reading. Prepare this in writing.
- to have found and read a recent piece of news in Japanese that is relevant for the topic of the session. As above, you will use the list of themes and keywords prepared by your fellow students to decide what to look for. Having read the article, you are required to come to class being able to: a) shortly explain why you chose the given article; b) state what the main message of the piece is; c) ask a question about the session's topic based on your reading. Prepare this in writing.
- both groups of students will be required to submit (or offer a working link) to the texts they chose by the end of Wednesday the week before to the designated page.

EXAM

This course ends with a written assignment. I suggest you start thinking about what you want to write about and what sources you will use (including Japanese texts and/or primary sources) early on. You will be required to present your ideas in **week 14** when we will workshop them together. In **week 18** you will be required to submit the first kernel of your exam essay (an extended introduction or an annotated outline [1-2 pages long] + indicative bibliography). You will receive feedback on your writing the following week.

SESSION PLAN

Week 7: Introduction and What is ethnography and what is it good for?

14th February

- a) Course introduction, division of tasks, exams
- b) Anthropology contra ethnography

Required reading:

- Howell, Signe. 2017. 'Two or Three Things I Love about Ethnography'. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7 (1): 15–20. <https://doi.org/10.14318/hau7.1.004>.
- Ingold, Tim. 2017. 'Anthropology Contra Ethnography'. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7 (1): 21–26. <https://doi.org/10.14318/hau7.1.005>.
- Miller, Daniel. 2017. 'Anthropology Is the Discipline but the Goal Is Ethnography'. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7 (1): 27–31. <https://doi.org/10.14318/hau7.1.006>.

The above articles are transcripts of the authors' contributions to a debate that took place at School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London in 2016. You are welcome to have a look at the other contributions to the debate in *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* Volume 7, Number 1, Spring 2017.

17th February

More on ethnography, the classics.

Required reading:

- Clifford, J. 1986. "Introduction: Partial Truths." In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus, 1–26. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: Univ. of California Press.
- Geertz, C. 1973. "Thick Description: Towards an Interpretive Theory of Culture." In *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 3–32. New York: Basic Books.

Week 8: Fieldwork in Japan

21st February

In this session we will look at the practicalities of "doing fieldwork". We will focus on such issues as access; negotiation of relationships; language; forms of participation and observation; recording of observations, and the role these play in shaping ethnographic text.

Required reading:

- Bestor, T., P. Steinhoff, and V. Bestor, eds. 2003. "Inquisitive Observation: Following Networks in Urban Fieldwork." In *Doing Fieldwork in Japan*, 315–34. Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press.

Goodman, R. 2000. "Fieldwork and Reflexivity: Thoughts from the Anthropology of Japan." In *Anthropologists in a Wider World. Essays on Field Research*, edited by P. Dresch, W. James, and David J. Parkin, 6:151–65. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books.

24th February

Ethnography in the making – I will present my fieldwork among Buddhist priests in the Tokyo area. We will use materials from this session next week to discuss the place and use of theory.

Week 9

28th February

What theory? – we will discuss the use of theory in our writing (and in reading comprehension) and do practical exercises.

3rd March

Modalities of ethnography – in this session we will look at ethnographic representations using media other than written text.

Weeks 10, 11, 12:

To allow you time for completing the independent study tasks outlined above (close reading of your selected monographs, preparation of presentations, and writing book reviews), we will not have thematic sessions over these three weeks. Instead, we will meet once a week for reading seminars. During these meetings you will be required to discuss with your reading partner(s) what you have read up to that point with an eye on how and what to present to others. In groups we will clarify any puzzling points.

These sessions will be three hours long – details subject to scheduling limitations. TBC

I suggest that in week 12 you focus on finalising the presentations and the individually written book reviews (*more on writing book reviews in a separate document – the students also attended a session dedicated to writing reviews during an earlier course*).

25th March deadline for:

- Submitting book review
- Submitting list of major themes relevant to your monograph

Week 13: Care

28th March – student-led session (*Reluctant Intimacies*)

31st March – book review (peer feedback)

Week 14: Alcoholism

4th April – student-led session (*The Too-Good Wife*)

7th April – workshopping essay ideas / assigning second monographs

Week 15: Disability

11th April – student-led session (*A Disability of the Soul*)

14th April – NO SESSION (Easter)

Start reading your second monograph

- list of major themes will be due by April 28th (no book review)

During weeks 16 and 17 there will be no thematic sessions to allow you time for reading and working on the presentations.

Week 16

18th April – NO SESSION (Easter)

21st April – no thematic session – *Ushiku*, public film viewing followed by Q&A with the director

Week 17

25th April – no thematic session

28th April – no thematic session – *Boys for Sale*, in-class film viewing

Week 18: Sex and sexualities

2nd May – student-led session (*Regimes of Desire*)

5th May – On writing

6th May deadline: submission of the first kernel of your exam

Week 19: Homelessness

9th May – student-led session (*Living on the Streets in Japan*)

12th May – peer feedback on exam kernels

Week 20: Migration

16th May – student-led session (*Jesus Loves Japan*)

19th May – wrap up

ON PRESENTATION PREPARATION

The objectives of the course include not only gaining knowledge about Japanese society, but also reflecting on the type of knowledge that ethnographic studies can offer complete with their strengths and weaknesses.

Therefore, the presentations are to be both on the topic covered by the book and about the monographs themselves. In other words, think about the presentation as a way of introducing a piece of research. If it helps, imagine that it was you who conducted that research and are now presenting your results. You will want to tell your audience not only what you were looking at and what you have learnt, but also about how you went about finding information (methods), what you did and did not manage to do and why (limitations) and how you interpret what you have discovered (theory).

As long as you address the above, you are welcome to structure your presentation any way you want. You can include visual/audio and any other aids; you can use interactive methods; you can plan group discussions, and so on.