



Japan in the 21^o Century

DR ANDREA BOCCARDI – WEEK 1 . INTRODUCTION



Course Content

▶ Introduction:

▶ This course aims to provide a historical overview of Japan and Japanese society *at the turn of the 21st century*, focusing on the manifold perspectives, phenomena, and experiences that transformed Japan during the '*Heisei*' period and the beginning of the *Reiwa*. In particular, this course will serve as an introduction to the prevailing ideas and views that shape what Japan is today, what pivotal issues are perceived and discussed in Japanese society, and what impact they can have on the domestic population as well as individuals interacting with it – such as you. In order to do so, this course will touch upon *economic, social, political and cultural issues* as a way to outline an introductory depiction of Japan in the 21st century within its own borders and in its interaction with the rest of the world.

A matter of period(isation)

- ▶ *At the turn of the century:*

- ▶ While the course focuses on Japan in the 21st century, we need to necessarily go back to the cultural and historical roots that defined Japan as we see it in the last 24 years.

- ▶ As a matter of fact, this course will not start with 2001 (the beginning of the new century), but in 1989. Why is that?

- ▶ *Heisei, Reiwa, and the like:*

- ▶ They are defined as nengō 年号 or gengō 元号.

- ▶ A nengō is a compound of two Chinese characters that define an era and it was imperial prerogative to change it – it is, in fact, a way to show the Emperor's power (Tokoro, 1996: 3-13).

Nengō

- ▶ Before the beginning of the Meiji period (1868 – 1912), nengō were changed by the Emperor «at critical moments» during his reign (Iwatake, 2013: 235).
- ▶ Following the Meiji Restoration in 1868, a new nengō system was created, according to which to a single Emperor would correspond to a single nengō – meaning, every time an Emperor dies, a new nengō is created with the enthronement of the new Emperor (Iwatake, 2003: 237).
- ▶ Japanese sociologist Suzuki Hirohito (2019: 56) argues that the names of Japanese eras forms a collective historical perception of the country based on the images surrounding the sociopolitical condition of Japan during such periods (e.g. «Meiji people», «Taishō democracy»).

Structure of the course

- ▶ While not comprehensive of *everything* that happened in Japan during the Heisei (1989 – 2019) and Reiwa (2019 –) periods, this course will offer a somewhat chronological approach, although some jumps back and forth will be necessary to explain causes and consequences.

- ▶ The course is divided into five macro-blocks, corresponding to one or more sessions:

- ▶ **BLOCK 1 – The Lost Decade**
- ▶ **BLOCK 2 – Politics of Memory**
- ▶ **BLOCK 3 – Indigeneity and the Central Government**
- ▶ **BLOCK 4 – The Triple Disaster**
- ▶ **BLOCK 5 – Domestic Politics**

Format of the Course

- ▶ Frontal lectures – that's it.
 - ▶ Each frontal lecture is backed up with academic sources (obviously!). I will share them with you on the IS. Some of them are required readings for the final exam, some are only recommended if you want to deepen further your knowledge but won't be required for the final exam.
 - ▶ I will share with you a more detailed syllabus with the list of required and recommended readings for each week, besides uploading them on the IS for you to download.
 - ▶ Attendance in class (more than 75%) is required to be able to take the final exam – you won't be allowed to do so otherwise (unless you are justified).

Final Exam

- ▶ The exam will be a mix of open-ended and multiple-choice questions regarding the content of the lectures and the required readings.
- ▶ The exam is open-book format. You can bring your notes (and the reading material, for what matters), but please, only in paper form.
- ▶ The exam, as for the rest of the course, is in English, but the use of English language is (obviously) not going to be evaluated (unless the answer is incomprehensible). You can bring an English vocabulary or bilingual dictionary (again, not a digital one) if you feel like it, but it is not required.

References

- ▶ Iwatake, Mikako. "From a shogunal city to a life city: Tokyo between two fin-de-siècles." *Japanese Capitals in Historical Perspective*. Routledge, 2013. 233-256.
- ▶ Suzuki, Hirohito. 2019. "‘Tennō = Gengō = Jidai’ no Hōkai Jidai Kataru Imi Toi Naoshi wo (Tokushū Tennōron)" [The Collapse of the ‘Emperor = Japanese Era Name = Period’ - Requestioning the Meaning of Narrating Eras (Special issue on Discussing the Emperor)]. *Journalism* 327(4): 56-64.