

SOSC 1470 The Economic and Political Development of Modern Japan

Fall Semester 2026

Classroom: Room 2465

Time: Tuesday and Thursday, 10:30 am to 11.50 am

Instructor:

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Office Hour: 1 pm to 2 pm, Friday, or by appointment

TA: Roy Ho

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Office hour: By appointment

Course Description and Objectives:

The rapid economic modernization and building of a modern state in Japan after the Meiji Restoration of 1868 has long been considered a typical case of successful economic and political development. Japan's success has been attributed to its whole-hearted efforts of "learning from the west". In the meantime, Japan's colonial expansion after 1895 and particularly after 1905 has also been characterized as "learning from the west", in this case, imperialism. Why then did not Japan learn liberal democracy from western countries? This is a puzzle. Japan did establish a constitutional monarchy in 1891. In 1925, it became the first country in East Asia to achieve universal male suffrage, a crucial measure of democracy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. How did Japan build a system of imperial democracy before 1930? Why did democracy not consolidate in Japan but instead be replaced by military fascism after 1937?

This course examines the political and socio-economic development in Japan from 1858 to 1937. Instead of interpreting Japan's modernization as copying western experience, it pays attention to the domestic sources of Japan's development. The first half of the course covers the period from 1858 to 1905 and focuses on the contribution of Japan's indigenous market economy and state-building efforts to its transformation. In particular, we will examine how the western ideas of democracy and constitutionalism were introduced into Japan after 1858. In the second half of the course, we will focus on how political participation expanded in Japan after its victory in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905. On the one hand, we will discuss how socio-economic development in post-1905 Japan contributed to the achievement of universal male suffrage and inspired Japanese women to demand similar political rights. On the other hand, we will examine the limitations of democratization in Japan before 1931. We will examine Japan's domestic development against the international context and explore the reasons it moved to a trajectory of military power, invading neighboring Asian countries and ultimately entering into a total war with the US.

This course will deepen students' knowledge of modern Japan. It provides a more nuanced picture of its modernization, as well as highlighting the multiple trajectories

of development that were possible in Japan. Moreover, it will help students better understand the relationship between economic development and political participation through a concrete case-study, and allow us to rethink critically existing models of development and political change.

The textbooks that we use in this course are Marius B. Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, third printing (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002) and Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, fourth edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020). Lectures will introduce more recent research in English as well as the scholarship of Japanese historians.

Below are the copies available from our library:

Marius B. Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, third printing (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002)

Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, fourth edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020)

Requirements:

Please read the assigned readings before the class and participate in class discussion. Attendance may be randomly checked in classes.

AI Policies:

This course is aiming to become an AI-integrated one. The students are encouraged to use AI to acquire more historical knowledge of Japan, and the instructor and TA will work with the students on how to critically analyze the information generated by AI: are they accurate or fabricated; how to organize these information into arguments or counterarguments; how to evaluate the intellectual merits of various accurate information acquired by using AI. **Hallucinated or inaccurate references will be treated as failure to properly adhere to academic integrity standards.**

For more information, please visit the website below:

<https://registry.hkust.edu.hk/resource-library/academic-integrity>

Grading:

50 percent of your final grade is determined by class presentations in each week's class. You are expected to use AI to collect more information to address the research questions suggested every previous Thursday. **We will have 4 to 5 students per group who will present in each Thursday class starting September 14th. There may be multiple groups of presenters, and the finalized schedule will be announced after the add-drop period.** Your performance will be mainly evaluated by how well you address questions after your presentation.

The remaining 50 percent of your grade is determined by a final exam at the end of the term, which is accumulative and covers the content taught in the entire semester. The final exam will be a closed-book one and no electronic devices (including AI eye-glasses) are allowed in exam.

Presentation Evaluation Rubric

Criteria	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Failure
Content Knowledge	Demonstrates thorough understanding of the topic; accurately conveys complex concepts.	Shows good understanding; conveys most concepts accurately.	Demonstrates basic understanding; some concepts are unclear or inaccurate.	Lacks understanding of the topic; many concepts are presented inaccurately.
Organization	Information is presented in a logical and coherent sequence; easy to follow.	Generally organized with clear transitions; mostly easy to follow.	Some organization is present, but ideas may be presented in an inconsistent order.	Disorganized; lacks clear sequence, making it hard to follow.
Response to Questions	Expertly handles questions; provides clear, thoughtful, and knowledgeable answers.	Answers questions effectively, but may lack depth or clarity in some responses.	Provides basic answers; struggles with more complex questions.	Does not adequately answer questions; appears unprepared.

Exam Evaluation Rubric

Criteria	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Failure
Content Knowledge	Demonstrates a comprehensive understanding of the material; accurately addresses all key concepts.	Shows good understanding of the material; addresses most key concepts accurately.	Displays basic understanding; some key concepts are misunderstood or missing.	Lacks understanding of the material; many key concepts are incorrect or absent.
Application of Knowledge	Effectively applies knowledge to complex problems; demonstrates critical thinking and analysis.	Applies knowledge to various problems; shows some critical thinking, but may lack depth.	Limited application of knowledge; struggles with complex problems; minimal analysis.	Fails to apply knowledge appropriately; lacks critical thinking and analysis.

Reading Assignments:

Week 1: Historical legacies of Tokugawa Japan

Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, “The Tokugawa State,” pp. 32-62 and “Urbanization and Communication,” pp. 127-158.

Recommended: Ronald P. Toby, “Rescuing the Nation from History: The State of the State in Early Modern Japan,” *Monumenta Pipponica*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (Summer 2001): 197-237.

Week 2: Was Tokugawa Japan closed to the outside world?

Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, pp. 72-95, and

Marius B. Jansen, “Japan in the early nineteenth century,” in Marius B. Jansen ed., *The Cambridge History of Japan*, volume 5 *The Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 87-115.

Week 3: Popular and elite education in Tokugawa Japan

Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, pp. 159-210;

Ronald Dore, *Education in Tokugawa Japan* (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies and the University of Michigan Press, 1992), pp. 252-290.

Kiri Paramore, “The Naturalization of Confucianism: Academism, Examinations, and Bureaucratic Governance in the Late Tokugawa State,” *Journal of Japanese Studies*, vol. 38, No. 1 (Winter 2012), pp. 25-53.

Week 4: The crisis of Tokugawa Japan and the Meiji Restoration

Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, pp. 257-364.

Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, fourth edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), chapter 4.

Week 5: Political and economic development after 1868

Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, pp. 371-413 and 456-494.

Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, fourth edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), chapters 5 and 7.

Week 6: Popular reactions to the Meiji state-building

Stephen Vlastos, “Opposition movements in early Meiji, 1868-1885,” in Marius B. Jansen ed., *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 5 *The Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 367-431.

Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, pp. 414-41.

Recommended:

Kyu Hyun Kim, *The Age of Visions and Arguments: Parliamentarianism and the National Public Sphere in Early Meiji Japan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007), pp. 257-287 and pp.331-378.

Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, fourth edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), chapter 6.

Week 7: The Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War

Helen Hardacre, *Shintō and the State: 1868-1988* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), chapter 1.

Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, fourth edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), chapter 8.

Week 8: Economy and Society before 1929

Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, fourth edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), chapter 9.

Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, pp. 528-36.

Week 9: The emergence of party politics

Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, pp. 495-511.

Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, fourth edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 126-144.

Week 10: Imperial Democracy: the extension of voting rights

Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, pp. 537-575.

Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, fourth edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), chapter 10.

Week 11: The Great Depression and its impacts

Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, fourth edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), chapter 11.

Week 12: Japan as a new great power in world politics after 1917:

Frederick R. Dickinson, *World War I and the Triumph of a New Japan, 1919-1930* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), chapters 3, 5, and 6.

Week 13: Japan and China: the road to the Pacific War

Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, pp. 576-624.