

Spring 2023, History 295: Modern Japan

Monday, Wednesday and Friday: 3-3:50 pm HSSC S1321

Instructor: Jomo Smith, smithjomo@grinnell.edu

Office: HSSC N3148

Office Hours: Feel free to schedule a time with me or just drop by. I'm usually in my office.

Communicating with the professor: Email communication works best if you simply wish to inform me of something or ask me a question. Please note that many of your questions can often be answered by reading the syllabus or referring to previous emails. I will do my best to respond to your inquires within 48 hours. Naturally, you can always grab me after class or visit me during office hours.

Historians generally place the beginning of modern Japan in the year 1868, when the Tokugawa shogunate was replaced with full sovereignty by the imperial throne. It had been over 700 years since a Japanese emperor had any real political authority. Of course, the *Meiji Ishin*, as the transfer came to be called, was not merely a transfer of power; instead it encompassed a complete reorganization of Japanese political, social and economic life. Western gunboats and trading interests were largely the impetus for Japan's transformation in the 19th century, a transformation that would eventually bring Japan into open conflict with her neighbors and nations further afield. Using primary source documents, films, and chapters from numerous historical monographs, we will consider Japan's modern history not only from those at the pinnacle of society but also from the perspective of the many classes of people that were simply being swept along with the tremendous changes of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Required texts: Gail Lee Bernstein. *Isami's House: Three Centuries of a Japanese Family*. (University of California Press, 2005)

Shigeru MIZUKI. *Onwards towards our noble deaths*, translated by Jocelyne Allen. (Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly, 2011)

** Readings from other texts are scattered throughout the syllabus and will be available on PWeb (Blackboard). Most of the primary source documents come from De Bary, William Theodore et. al, eds. *Sources of Japanese Tradition. Vol. 2, 1600–2000*. 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005) and De Bary, William Theodore et. al., eds. *Sources of the East Asian Tradition, Vol. 2*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008). The required texts are the only ones that we will read in their entirety.

Course/Learning Objectives

- Understand the course of modern transformation in Japan, modernization as a theory and Japan's role in East Asia.
- Identify key people or events from the past and articulate their historical import and impact.
- Develop an ability to draw connections between actions taken in the distant past and the circumstances in the modern world.

- Develop effective communication skills, written and oral.
- Recognize that historical methodology—namely, evidence-based work that presents multiple sides of an issue—is transferrable to any academic and professional pursuit.

Course Expectations

- *Read all assigned materials:* Conducting yourself as a historian requires, as a basic requirement, that you read carefully and think about what you are reading. This is particularly important for primary source documents which we will read in class and on your own time.
- *Be mentally and physically present while in class:* Attendance in class is required. You will also find that your ability to stay focused while in class will aid in your learning.
- *Participate as much as possible:* Asking questions is a sign that you are thinking and curious about what you are hearing. Engaging your classmates while in group discussion shows that you take responsibility for their learning and your own. You engage your classmates, and the material, by making comments and observations that are substantive, comparative, analytical or constructively critical (when needs be).

Assessments: Your grade for this course consists of the following categories.

Response Papers: 15%

Discussant: 10%

Midterm Debate: 25%

Film Review: 10%

Term Paper: 30%

Attendance and Participation: 10%

Response Papers: Three times in the semester, you will write 3 pages of commentary and analysis of the week’s readings. Since I am only asking you to do this three times in the semester, you may find it necessary to refer to texts from prior weeks in your short paper. The purpose of this assignment (sometimes also called ‘reaction papers’) is to provide space for you to think about and react to what you are reading in a structured manner. While we will discuss the readings in class, writing about them in shorter papers will also prepare you for the longer paper you will write at the end of the term. These response papers do not have a set due date, but you should at least complete one of the reviews by Week 5. I will create a dropbox on OneDrive for your response papers and other writing in this course.

Discussant: Beginning in Week 2, one student will be responsible for raising discussion points from the primary and secondary sources assigned for that week. These questions can come from text-derived content or you can draw them from related material. Ultimately, the questions and issues that you raise should help further our understanding of the relevant issue/era in Japan. The lead discussant should post their points or questions to PWeb before class. Not only will this

allow the entire class to easily see the discussion questions, keeping an open record will also be beneficial as we go through the semester.

I will grade you on how well you lead discussion (7 pts. for understanding the text, questions asked, etc.) and the remaining 3 points for turning in questions/points to PWeb. This will be for a total of 10 points (100%).

Midterm: In lieu of a standard written midterm, we will dive deep into the competing factions of early 20th century Japan through a group project of debate teams. Beginning in the late Meiji, and stretching through the Taishō and early Shōwa eras, Japan was rife with competing factions of feminists, anarchists, socialists, political parties, union organizers, oligarchs and, of course, the military, to name a few. Through this group project, you will learn more about the ideologies of your chosen group, what their goals were, and how close they came to achieving them. A debate structure will allow you to synthesize material that we have read in class and material that your group has found through research. You will use your research to engage one of your competing factions in Japanese society. Thankfully, in this class, the end result will be more amicable than what actually occurred in Japanese history.

Film Review: You are required to write one film review of the various films listed in the syllabus. Film reviews should be 3-4 pages and should make reference to scholarly analyses of the film that the professor will provide. Please note that you CANNOT write a film review on “Emperor” or “The Last Samurai”, despite both being listed on the syllabus. You can, however, use them in other writing that you do for the course.

All films, and readings, for this course were carefully chosen to reflect upon themes that are important for understanding modern Japanese history. When you read and watch films, please keep this basic point in mind and ask yourself what the broader concepts that are being represented in the text or film are. In particular, when watching a foreign language film, it is very important that you take notes. This is part of active learning. Your notes should probably include a list of major characters, the towns/cities they mention, and the character's relationship with each other. Your notes will aid you in analyzing the film and keeping track of events.

When you write your film review, you may choose to comment on the following aspects:

- 1) Why did the director choose to direct a film, on this topic, during this particular moment in Japanese history?
- 2) What form of social commentary is the film making through its plot? Is the purpose of the plot to comment on the present or the past?
- 3) How does the film engage with themes we have been covering in class or that you have seen mentioned in your readings?
- 4) Is the film a fair reflection of what you know about history and Japanese society at the time?

Please note that for your film review, and all other writing for this course, standard rules of English composition and grammar apply. Please take time to reread your work, or have a friend read your essay, before submitting it.

Term Paper: 200 level history classes at Grinnell are usually designed with a research paper component. In general, these research papers should be 10-15 pages in length and be written on a topic that the student and professor agree upon. To aid in this process, research paper topics will be due in Week 9. You will also submit a thesis statement, annotated bibliography and a portion of your paper prior to the final deadline. More details to follow.

Attendance and Participation: Being absent in a relatively small class is always noticeable. I will automatically excuse 2 absences with no questions asked. Please make all attempts to be here and to come prepared to class. Coming prepared means having completed the week's assigned readings or watched the film. The class size also means that your active participation is doubly important. Active participation means asking questions, occasionally answering questions that I pose to the class, and engaging your classmates during group discussion.

Five or more unexcused absences will result in a failing grade for the course.

Content and Schedule

WEEK 1

Monday Jan 23: Introductions

Wednesday Jan 25: Late Tokugawa society and changing values

Film: *Chushingura (The Loyal 47 Ronin)*, 1962 [available from Grinnell library database 'Films on Demand']

Fri January 27: Sonnō Jōi and the Meiji Restoration; Satsuma and Chōshū rebellions

Film: *The Last Samurai*, (Tom Cruise, 2003)

Primary Source Docs

Honda Toshiaki, "A secret plan of government" *Sources of the East Asian Tradition* (hereafter, *SEAT*), pgs. 331-334

Aizawa Seishisai, "New theses" (Shinron), *SEAT*, pgs. 342-348

WEEK 2

Monday Jan 30: Learning from the West and defining modernity

Primary Source Docs

Fukuzawa Yukichi, "The autobiography of Fukuzawa Yukichi", *SEAT* pgs. 366-368

"Sakamoto Ryōma: Eight-point proposal, 1867", *SEAT* pgs. 368-369

"Letter from Saigō Takamori and Ōkubo Toshimichi on the Imperial restoration, 1867", *SEAT* pg. 370

"Kume Kunitake's Assessment of European Wealth and Power", *SEAT* pgs. 476-477

“Kido’s Observations on Returning from the West,” *SEAT* pgs. 477-479

Wed Feb 1: The Meiji vision of emancipation

Readings

“Modernization and the Peasants” in Hane, Mikiso. *Peasants, rebels, women, and outcastes: the underside of modern Japan*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2016: 2-27

Botsman, Daniel V. “Freedom without Slavery? ‘Coolies,’ Prostitutes, and Outcastes in Meiji Japan’s ‘Emancipation Moment’.” *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 5 (2011): 1323-1347.

Friday Feb 3: Meiji Emancipation cont’d; Documents Discussion

WEEK 3

Monday Feb 6: Trappings of modernity in the Meiji state; Education and change in social structure; the imperial gaze

Primary Source

“The Imperial Rescript on Education”, *Sources of the Japanese Tradition* (hereafter, **SJT**) pgs. 108-110

Wed Feb 8: Aspects of Rural Japan

Friday Feb 10: Discussion of Isami’s House: Three Centuries of a Japanese Family

Bernstein, Gail Lee. *Isami’s House: Three Centuries of a Japanese Family*. University of California Press, 2005. (Introduction – Ch. 4)

WEEK 4

Monday Feb 13: Fugoku Kyōhei; Wars with China and Russia

Wed Feb 15: Cont’d

Friday Feb 17: Document discussion

Primary Sources

“Tokutomi Sohō: A Japanese Nationalist’s View of the West and Asia,” *SEAT* pgs. 543-545

“Tokutomi Sohō: Supporting the Imperial State and Military Expansion”, *SEAT* pgs. 545-548

WEEK 5

Monday Feb 20: State and society; Taishō era imperial democracy

Wed Feb 22: Women in the new Japan; Factory Girls and Modern girls

Friday Feb 24: Discussion

Bernstein, Gail Lee. *Isami’s House: Three Centuries of a Japanese Family*. University of California Press, 2005. (Chs. 5 – 7)

“Empire and Domestic Order” and “Economy and Society” in Andrew Gordon. *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present (3rd Edition)*. Oxford: Oxford University, 2014.

Film: *Anarchist from Colony*, dir. Lee Joon-ik (2017) [streams from various sites]

WEEK 6

Monday Feb 27: Taishō era democracy and its discontents

Wed March 1: Political parties, civil society groups and assassinations

Friday March 3: Discussion

“The Struggle for Survival” and “The textile factory workers” in Hane, Mikiso. *Peasants, rebels, women, and outcastes: the underside of modern Japan*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2016

“Social Management: An Introduction” in Sheldon Garon, *Molding Japanese Minds: The State in Everyday Life*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.

WEEK 7

Monday March 6: Midterm preparation—group work to decide your faction or political party

Wednesday March 8: In-class research work to prepare your debating points

Friday March 10: **Preliminary work due to the professor**

WEEK 8

Monday March 13: TBA

Wed March 15: In-class midterm debates

Friday March 17: In-class midterm debates

Spring Break [March 18 – April 2]

WEEK 9

Monday April 3: Beacon of hope and imperialist nation—Japan’s contrary roles in Asia

Wed April 5: Total Empire: Manchukuo and Korea

Friday April 7: Discussion

Bernstein, Gail Lee. *Isami’s House: Three Centuries of a Japanese Family*. University of California Press, 2005 (Chs. 8-10)

Primary Sources

Ishiwara Kanji, "A Plan to Occupy Manchuria," *SEAT*, pgs. 618-620

Konoe Fumimaro, "Concerning the New National Structure." *SEAT*, pgs. 620-1

Film: *No Regrets for Our Youth*, 1946 (dir. Kurosawa Akira) [available from Grinnell library database 'Films on Demand']

** Research paper topics due **

WEEK 10

Monday April 10: The War against America and its aftermath

Wed April 12: Japan's war in Asia

Friday April 14: Discussion

Bernstein, Gail Lee. *Isami's House: Three Centuries of a Japanese Family*. University of California Press, 2005 (Chs. 10 and 11)

Primary Sources

"On the basic meaning of national defense and its intensification" (1934), *SJT*, pgs. 299-301

"Selected passages on Bushido" in John E. Moser, *Japan 1941: Between Pan-Asianism and the West*. (New York: W.W. Norton & co., 2021): 67-72

"Imperial Rescript to soldiers and sailors, 1882" in John E. Moser, *Japan 1941: Between Pan-Asianism and the West*. (New York: W.W. Norton & co., 2021): 72-74

Films: *Fires on the Plain*, 1959 (dir. Ichikawa Kon); <https://youtu.be/I0wv79C0zqc>

Grave of the Fireflies, 1988 (Studio Ghibli, dir. Isao Takahata) [streams from various sites]

WEEK 11

Monday April 17: World War 2 through the eyes of Japanese soldiers

Shigeru MIZUKI, *Onwards towards our noble deaths* translated by Jocelyne Allen. Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly, 2011

Wed April 19: Continued discussion of "Onwards towards our Noble Deaths"

Friday April 21: Processing war through comics

Manga: "Ground Zero, 1945: A schoolboy's story"

WEEK 12

Mon April 24: Japan's total defeat and the afterlives of its citizens

Wed April 26: Occupied and reborn, at what cost?

Friday April 28: Discussion

Bernstein, Gail Lee. *Isami's House: Three Centuries of a Japanese Family*. University of California Press, 2005 (Chs. 12 and 13)

“Cultures of Defeat”, “Imperial democracy: Evading Responsibility” in John Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*. W.W. Norton & Co., 2000.

Film: *Emperor*, 2013 (Tommy Lee Jones)

WEEK 13

Monday May 1: Labor and Economic “Miracle”

Wed May 3: Final Paper workshop

Friday May 5: Discussion

Bernstein, Gail Lee. *Isami's House: Three Centuries of a Japanese Family*. University of California Press, 2005. (Chs. 14-16)

Laura E. Hein, “Growth versus Success: Japan’s Economic Policy in Historic perspective” in Gordon, Andrew, ed. *Postwar Japan as history*. (Univ of California Press, 1993): 99-123

Koji Taira, “Dialectics of Economic Growth, National Power, and Distributive Struggles” in Gordon, Andrew, ed. *Postwar Japan as history*. (Univ of California Press, 1993): 167-186

Primary Sources

Mishima Yukiō, “The National Characteristics of Japanese Culture” in **SJT**, pgs. 1178-1182

Ōe Kenzaburō, “Japan, the ambiguous and myself”, in **SJT**, pgs. 1183-1187

Film: *Crazed Fruit*, 1956 (dir. Kō Nakahira); <https://archive.org/details/crazed.-fruit.-1956>

WEEK 14

Monday May 8: Japan’s emperor, the past and historical memory

“The Mayor”, in Norma Field, *In the Realm of a Dying Emperor*, Vintage Books, 2011.

Carol Gluck, “The Past in the Present” in Gordon, Andrew, ed. *Postwar Japan as history*. (Univ of California Press, 1993): 64-95

Wed May 10: Paper Workshops

Friday May 12: Paper Workshops

Film: *Tokyo Story*, 1953 (dir. Ozu Yasujiro) [available from Grinnell library database ‘Films on Demand’]

University Policies and Course Policies

Attendance:

Your attendance, particularly in a small class, is really important. I will automatically excuse two absences for emergencies or anything else that may come up in your life. Absences beyond two will only be granted with a doctor's note attesting to a dire illness. If you have a condition that requires you to leave class periodically, please notify the instructor and sit near a door.

The college's overall attendance policy can be read [here](#). Students who plan to observe holy days that coincide with class meetings or assignment due dates should consult with me in the first three weeks of classes so that we may reach a mutual understanding of how you can meet the terms of your religious observance and also the requirements for this course. Please also speak with me if you need to miss class due to an athletic event or another co-curricular activity.

Honesty/Intellectual Integrity:

Consult and follow the rules for Academic Honesty in the Grinnell College Student Handbook and the college catalog. You can see the academic catalog policies on academic honesty [here](#).

It is the college's expectation that students be aware of and meet the expectations expressed in this policy. If you have any questions about how a particular assignment relates to the College's policy, please consult with me in advance of the assignment's due date. Any suspected case of academic dishonesty will be referred to the Committee of Academic Standing.

Learning Needs:

Creating a fully inclusive classroom is important to me as an instructor; thus I welcome you to approach me directly about any distinctive learning needs that apply to you. Specifically, I encourage students with disabilities to have a conversation with me and disclose how our classroom or course activities might impact the disability and what accommodations would be essential to them. Students with disabilities will also need to have a conversation about their disability with the Coordinator for Disability Resources, Jae Hirschman (hirschma@grinnell.edu), located on the 1st floor of Steiner Hall. Appropriate documentation is required for this process.

Statement on Diversity and Inclusion:

All students should feel welcome in this course, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability/disability, economic background, religious belief, or political perspective. I will work hard to create a classroom environment where everyone feels safe and has the opportunity to have his or her voice heard. This includes referring to you by the pronoun of your choice. Please recognize that any occasional lapses are not intentional.