POLS 307H Japan (WI, E)
Contemporary Human Rights Issues in Japan
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Course Description
International human rights norms and the international human rights regime presents us with a series of paradoxes. Internationally there is both broad consensus and widespread contention regarding the role and importance of human rights. Observing human rights is widely accepted as a fundamental basis of state legitimacy in contemporary international politics, but many countries challenge the cultural underpinnings of these norms. Human rights is an area where non-state actors exercise significant influence, making it possible for them to challenge state sovereignty in significant ways, yet states play an essential role in promoting and protecting human rights. Finally, international human rights norms both constitute state interests and identities while also constraining state behavior. In this course we will explore theoretical and empirical questions about the role of human rights in Japan. In the first part of the course we will focus on the question of universal rights, gender, and culture. The reading for this section of the course will provide much of the theoretical foundation that we will use throughout the semester. All of the reading engages important questions that challenge the idea of universal human rights without dismissing it outright. The second and third sections of the course will concentrate on contemporary human rights issues (political, civil, social, economic, and cultural) in Japan. In the second section, we will focus on violations of women’s human rights and in the third section we will look more closely at identity, ethnicity, and minority rights.

"This course has a Contemporary Ethical Issues (E) Focus designation. Contemporary ethical issues are fully integrated into the main course material and will constitute at least 30% of the content. At least 8 hours of instruction time will be spent discussing ethical issues. Through the use of online discussions and assignments, students will develop basic competency in recognizing and analyzing ethical issues; responsibly deliberating on ethical issues; and making ethically determined judgments."

Student Learning Objectives
At the end of this course students will be able to:
1) understand and discuss the ethics and politics of human rights at both the national and international levels with others from diverse backgrounds
2) analyze and discuss how culture impacts the adoption and implementation of human rights in different national contexts
3) identify and think through ethical issues from different perspectives
4) discuss and explain how international human rights treaties have been implemented in Japanese law
5) critically analyze how international human rights treaties influence social and cultural norms in Japan, the United States and other countries
Course Organization, Assignments, and Grading
This is an advanced undergraduate lecture and discussion course. What you learn depends on the time you commit to reading the material, the effort you make to understand the material, and the quality of your contributions to the discussion. I suggest that you read as many of the assigned readings as possible early in the week; this will allow you to keep up with and contribute to the discussion as well as ask questions. You should take notes on the reading, and prepare questions and comments to contribute to our online discussions.

Each week will comprise a unit that consists of five task areas designed to present material in various forms—reading, lectures, films, etc. Thus, you will be asked to read, listen, watch, discuss and write each week.

You will sign up along with one other student to facilitate a class discussion one time during the semester. You do not have to coordinate your facilitation and you will be graded separately. In addition, you will also find rubrics for how participation and student-led discussions will be graded. Please carefully read through the syllabus and the other materials.

Discussion (300 points total; 30 points per week)
This informal writing activity will enable students to experience writing without the stress and anxiety that often accompanies the start of a formal writing assignment. Participation in discussion represents a significant part of your final grade. I calculate participation on both the quantity and quality of the contributions that are topic driven and meaningful to the development of the class discussion.

Student Discussion Facilitator (60 points)
Each week at least two students will facilitate a substantive discussion of the class topic for the week. Each student is required to facilitate discussion one time during the course. I will distribute a handout that describes my expectations for discussion as well as a rubric to evaluate the quality of your discussion each week. I have also posted guidelines and a rubric for student led discussion and facilitation.

Quizzes (10) (100 points total; 10 points each)
These quizzes are short answer based on the reading and can be answered in 3-5 sentences.

Film Reaction Papers (10) (300 points; 30 points each)
Two 5-page essays (240 points; 120 points each)
There will be two short papers during the semester. Drafts of these assignments will be ungraded but they will count as an in-class assignment. Below you will find brief descriptions of each assignment; a more detailed assignment sheet will be distributed in class. There will be one paper due for each of the three sections of the course. The papers will be graded on mechanics, format, organization, style, substance, and logic. We will discuss this further in class.
To facilitate the writing process, you will workshop a draft of each paper in class by a small group of your peers. You will rewrite the paper based on those comments then you will submit the rewrite to the professor for a grade and written comments. Working in this way will give you an opportunity to help each other improve and allow you to improve your writing through the process of drafting then rewriting. Each student will be required to meet with me to discuss their papers and to ask questions about how they could improve their papers.

Course Policies
Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will result in an “F” for the course. If you borrow words, ideas, thoughts, etc. from someone, you must give them credit. Purchasing papers online, cheating on exams or turning in work written for another course without the instructor’s permission is also unacceptable.

You are expected to turn in assignments on the day they are due. No late assignments will be accepted without a doctor’s note or prior permission of the instructor.

READING LIST

I. The Question of Universal Rights and Culture

Week 1—Universal Human Rights?
Film: I Just Didn’t Do It (2009)

Week 2—The Impact of International Human Rights Law on Japan

II. Women, Gender, and Human Rights

Week 3—Gender and Culture

Week 4—Gender, Military Prostitution, Sexual Violence
Film: The Apology (2016)
- “Constructing Rape: Judicial Narratives on Trial,” Japanese Studies, 24:1, 2004

Week 5—Reproductive Rights, Freedom, and Law
- Hertog, Ekaterina. "'The worst abuse against a child is the absence of a parent': how Japanese unwed mothers evaluate their decision to have a child outside wedlock." In Japan Forum, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 193-217. Taylor & Francis Group, 2008.

III. Identity, Ethnicity, and “Minority” Rights
Week 6—Indigenous Ainu Struggle for Rights

Week 7—Okinawan Struggle for Rights
Film: We Shall Overcome (Mikami 2015)

Week 8—Buraku Struggle for Rights
Film: Angry Drummers (2005)

Week 9--Zainichi (Resident) Korean Struggle for Rights
Film: Mapping the Future, Nishinari (2005)
• Chung, Immigration and Citizenship in Japan chapters 2 and 3

IV. Rights of Social and Cultural Minorities
Week 10--Sexual Minorities

Week 11--Rights of People with Disability
Film: 37 Seconds (Hikari 2020)
Bethel: Community and Schizophrenia in Northern Japan (Nakamura 2008)

V. Reflecting the Values of Our Society?
Week 12--Capital Punishment
Film: Escaping Death Row in Japan

Week 13--Health Care
Film: Sick Around the World