Syllabus
Class Meets: tbd
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ASAN 320J
Asian Nation Studies: Japan (Machida Edition)

Brief Course Description
ASAN 320J is an integrated, multidimensional and interdisciplinary introduction to Japan designed for students seeking a basic foundation of knowledge about the country. This particular version of the course uses a student-inquiry-driven format designed to take extensive advantage of object-based learning opportunities available in the immediate vicinity of Obirin University. More specifically, it uses the area surrounding the university—“Greater Machida” or, namely, Machida City, neighboring Sagamihara City, and the broader Tama Hills region—as a lens through which to explore various dimensions of Japanese geography, history, religion, traditions, social institutions, arts and popular culture. In tandem with lectures and readings covering topics explored from a macro-level Japan-wide perspective, students will be assigned four group research projects in which they will explore how that which is described in the general readings is manifested at the grass roots level in Greater Machida. Students will mobilize material and experiences garnered from primary sources, field trip sites and independent observation. Findings will be synthesized and presented in group presentations. Edited and refined versions of the work of individual students in their group presentations will be incorporated into a portfolio that will be turned in at the end of the semester along with a short essay summarizing the portfolio’s content and reflecting on what the student learned over the course of the semester. This portfolio, in turn, will be assessed as one component of a student’s final grade.

Student Learning Objectives
After successfully completing this course a student will be able to:
1. Identify Japan’s primary geographic features and explain how these shaped its culture and society historically, and continue to do so today
2. Explain the key features and sociocultural significance of Japan’s primary religions and community-level traditions, and be able to visually identify the key features of, and fixtures, symbols and icons typically found in, Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples
3. Point out the basic parameters of contemporary Japan’s primary socioeconomic, political, and economic institutions, and mobilize sufficient ground-level knowledge of how these operate to begin to navigate your way through them
4. Identify and appreciate traditional and contemporary Japanese arts and craft forms along with primary contemporary primary popular cultural media like manga and anime
5. Locate and utilize major sources of information on Japan in future research
6. For all of the above, explain how and why these are similar or different from those in your home country and thereby demonstrate your ability to apprehend and appreciate the diversity of human experience
Course Grade Components

1. Attendance and participation (30%)
2. Group report contribution (30%)
3. Final portfolio (40%)

A note on field site visits. All field site visits listed in the course schedule are mandatory with the exception of those listed under “for a deeper dive.” Wherever possible, field sites visits will take place during scheduled class time. When this is not possible, weekend field site visits will be scheduled. It is, of course, anticipated that many of you for one reason or another (class schedule, etc.) will not be able to participate in every site visit. In such instances, you will need to arrange a visit to the site that you missed at another time when you are free. Where this is the case: 1) discuss your situation with the instructor, 2) submit a report detailing when you went to the site, how much time you spent there, what you found of greatest interest or insight, and why; 3) include a photo of yourself next to the site’s sign or some other object clearly associated with the site. For the latter, “selfies” are perfectly acceptable. Recommendation: If you have a Japanese language exchange partner or friend, try to talk them into going with you. They will be a big help, and will likely find it fun and eye opening.

Schedule

Introduction and Orientation.

Weeks 1-4. Machida and Japan in Geographic/Geological Space and Historical Time.

In this section of the course we will explore where Greater Machida fits into the geographic space of Japan and the larger flow of Japanese history. For this section’s assignment, the class will be divided into groups and each group will be assigned one of the periods covered in the Sagamihara Museum’s permanent exhibit. Each group will then prepare a presentation detailing how Greater Machida’s location, in tandem with developments beyond its borders, shaped the region.

Readings

- Translations by the authory of the Machida and Sagamihara entries in the *Heibonsha Rekishi chimei* series

Fields Sites
• Sagamihara City Museum (link): Objects displayed in its permanent collection will be used to illustrate both the geological development of Machida and the region surrounding it and the historical development of these areas from ancient times to the present.

• Oyamadaryokuchi Park (link): In addition to giving one a sense of what the Greater Machida area looked like prior to extensive human settlement, the park’s overlook provides a panorama of the natural features of Machida and the area surrounding it.

• Recommended for an optional deeper dive:
  • National Museum of History (link): undoubtedly the most extensive museum coverage of Japan’s history from ancient times to the postwar period.
  • Edo-Tokyo Museum (link): best museum coverage of central Tokyo’s development from the early modern period to the present.

Weeks 5-8. Religion and Tradition in Machida and Japan

In this section of the course we will explore Japan’s primary religions, Shinto and Buddhism, along with the contemporary traditions associated with them. For the assignment for this section, students will visit a local temple and a shrine. Using the sources listed below and information gather elsewhere, you will report on 1) the history of the shrine or temple and any legends of stories associated with it; 2) (if applicable) the sect or shrine group with which the shrine or temple is associated and what distinguishes that sect or group, 3) the features and symbolic significance of objects found on the grounds of the temple or shrine and their placement therein; and 4) the festivals, rituals and other events that are held there.

Readings
• Ian Reader and George Tanabe, Practically Religious Ch 1 (Benefits in Religious Systems
• Steven Vlastos, “Tradition: Past/Present Culture and Modern Japanese History.”
• list of festivals in Machida--to be distributed

Fields Sites and Reference Sources
• field site: a shrine and a temple of your choosing--suggestions to be provided
• sources to be used in conjunction with the above
  • Shintō Guidebook website (link)
  • Michael VanHartingsveldt, Who's Who in Japanese Deities web pages (link)

Weeks 9-12. Machida/Japan: Community and Society

In this section of the course we will explore the socioeconomic structure of, and the primary social institutions associated with, life in Japan. Each group will be assigned a specific institutional sector discussed in the Sugimoto readings and will use the Machida statistical yearbook, Google Maps, first hand observations, and other sources to determine how these are manifested and operate within the context of Machida City.

Readings
• One of the following chapters in Yoshio Sugimoto, An Introduction to Japanese Society (4th ed):
  o Ch 4 (“Forms of Work in Cultural Capitalism”).
Weeks 13-15  Arts and Entertainment in Machida

In this section of the course, we will explore aesthetic values and stylistic elements associated with classical and contemporary expressive culture in Japan. For the group project for this section, students will identify examples of objects and performances in Greater Machida that exemplify the aesthetic and stylistic sensibilities discussed in the readings and conduct an informal inventory of the artistic and entertainment forms and genres that are available to enjoy in the greater Machida.

Readings

- Robin E. Brenner, Understanding Manga and Anime, Chapter 2 (“Manga and Anime Vocabulary”)
- Pick one:

Fields Sites and Sources

- Machida City Museum of Graphic Arts (link): A local museum focusing on the art of hanga, or wood block printing. Works displayed therein will be used to highlight how traditional and classical aesthetic sensibilities are incorporated into works on display.
- Parthenon Tama Arts Center (link): This massive arts complex which is scheduled to reopen in April 2022 highlights the vast array of artistic and entertainment forms embraced in contemporary Japan. It also has a museum exhibit on the urban development of the Tama Hills area that provides the setting for the anime, Pom Poko.
- Pom Poko (Movie) (link): This Studio Ghibli production will be used to explore the conventions of Japanese manga and anime.
- Recommended for a deeper dive
  - Suntory Museum of Art (link): The museum specializes thematically focused exhibits featuring classical Japanese aesthetics. With excellent English-language captioning and audio commentary, the museum is probably the best place in Japan for those not fluent in Japanese to gain an understanding of these.
- Tokyo National Museum of Modern Art (link): The works in the museum’s permanent exhibit are arranged in a way that highlight the chronological development of modern Japanese art since the initial introduction of Western forms and concepts.
- Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Contemporary Art (link): Features changing exhibitions of cutting edge trends in Japanese art while the permanent collection focuses on post-World War II items.
- Ghibli Museum (link): Operated by the production company associated with numerous internationally successful anime features, the museum is an excellent place to explore anime and manga aesthetics.
- Tokyo National Museum (link): A bit overwhelming, this is the place to go if you want one-stop exposure to treasures of Japanese and East Asian art.

Wrap Up
- Finish up and submit portfolio. Your portfolio consists of a) a short 7-10 page essay that summarizes the portfolio’s content and reviews what you learned over the course of the semester through your four projects, and 2) edited and improved versions of your individual contributions to the group presentations that you were part of. Your portfolio is due the Monday after the last class meeting.

Bibliography, Readings


