

Japan and the Modern Transitions, Fall 2008

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Note: course content is subject to change

The course can be subtitled: The making of our modern world. Our modern world emerged in four major transitions: a Demographic Transition, from high to low birth and death rates; an Industrial Transition, from agrarian to industrial economies; an Urban Transition, from rural to urban living; and an Age transition, from a "traditional" age structure through a "younging" to an "aging" of the population. These transitions have also brought great increases in human welfare and an equally a massive impact on our global environment.

This major transformation began in the Western World (Europe and North America) and has been most developed there. Japan is the only Non-Western country to make the transition along with the Western world. A major focus of this course will be to ask: what are the causes and consequences of Japan's exception?

The rest of Asia, Africa and Latin America are now following the West and Japan in the great transformation. To what extent do the newcomers follow the established paths? What role do Japan and the rest of the more developed regions play in the transformations? Does Japan present a "different" model for others to follow?

This course will consider all aspects of these transitions and their environmental impact. Students will acquire the technical skills to use national level demographic, economic and social indicators to assess broad historical movements and national conditions. They will also acquire skills in integrating quantitative data with qualitative historical narratives, especially through the main requirement, a paper.

There will be a special writing project. Students will work in small teams of 2-3, preparing a comparative analysis of two countries: Japan and one other country, either from a more developed or less developed region. Students will learn how to find and use many types of quantitative data to assess the transitions. They will also work with historical narratives, learning how to link those quantitative analyses with historical and institutional processes.

The papers will be done in three installments, following the three major parts of the course: quantitative country comparisons, historical processes, and modern institutional processes. This is a strategy I have often used and which students very much appreciate because of the rapid and detailed comment they receive on their work.

In the first few weeks of the course, students will go over quantitative measures of the transitions. They will prepare a one page statistical table showing the past half century of the transitions in their two countries and will write a one or two page description of those transitions. This will identify a problem to be addressed in the rest of the paper: what are the causes and consequences of the national differences they identify? The first installment will be submitted and reported in class on the fourth week of class. Within one week, students will be given detailed written comments on their first installments.

The second installment will be due, and reported in class, about the 9th week of class. This will contain a revision of the first installment and a review of the history of the two countries, showing how that history is linked to the current transitions. Again, within a week the students will receive detailed comments on the revised first and new second installments. The third installment will examine some specific aspect of the modern transitions, showing how human ecological forces (geography and political-social-cultural institutions) impact the environment and what policies can be developed to enhance human welfare and mitigate the environmental impact. As before, the third installment will include revisions of the first two and a linking to the final installment. This will be due and reported in class in the last class session.

Readings. In the first three weeks of class, students will read a chapter I have done for a basic text on Global Environmental Change. This provides details of demographic, economic, and environmental changes and the indicators used to assess those changes. At the beginning of part two of the course: historical transitions, students will read an essay I have written on the rise of the West. Then they will select readings on the history of modernization in Japan and the country with which they are making the comparison. They will also select readings that focus on the specific topic they choose for the final section of the course.

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Schedule of Weekly Topics

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Wk	Topic	Activities
1	Introduction Comparing Countries	Build teams of 3 Begin Country Selection
2	Population: 2 demographic transitions	Country selection
3	Economic Development, Welfare and Environment, Carbon and Sulfur emissions	Prepare country comparisons
4	Student Presentations of statistical comparisons	First installment due
5	Imperialism Expansion, waves of expansion Western Imperialism in Asia	
6	Colonialism: link to waves, race and modern bureaucratic society	
7	Nationalism: two historical waves of National Independence Movements.	

8	Japanese Exceptionalism: Causes and consequences of Japanese differences	Prepare presentations
9	Student History presentations	Second installment due with revision of the first installment
10	Urbanization: two historical transitions, Asian urbanization for the new millennium	
11	Agriculture: Transitions in rice agriculture	
12	Arms and War: 19 th and 20 th centuries; emerging world wars	
13	Environmental impact and protection: carbon and sulfur emissions; the rise of environmental protection	
14	Student Presentations Papers	Final paper presentation