

Japanese Social Anthropology 2018-2019

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Eight lectures in Hilary Term, Classes in Hilary and Trinity Terms

This course has two main aims; (a) to provide an introduction to Japanese society from an anthropological perspective and (b) to show how the study of Japan can contribute to mainstream anthropological theory. Major themes which will be covered include notions of personhood, rituals and symbols, time and space, structure and agency, continuity and change, and the construction of ethnic identity. It will be possible to study a number of contemporary social institutions in depth, including the Japanese education system, medical system, household and kinship systems, legal and economic systems, new religions, and the worlds of traditional arts and popular culture. At the micro level, the details of these operations and the ideologies which support them will be examined, while at the macro level the course will explore their relation to other social institutions and the wider political and economic arena both inside and outside Japan.

In Hilary Term, there will be a series of 8 lectures which will introduce students to the anthropological literature on Japan (details below). There will also be a weekly class. Students will be able to choose from a list of around 20 topics for the class which they would like to pursue. Each topic is headed by a key anthropological reading which all those who attend the class must read (copies will be available in the library) and the purpose of the class is to relate the specific readings on Japan (not all of which will be anthropological) to the themes covered in this anthropological text. Each week, four or five students will be assigned to present position papers to the class; two others will act as discussants. In Trinity Term, there will be a combination of new topics and revision classes.

All students will be required to undertake a piece of assessed work by the end of week 4 of the term in which the classes are taught. Details will be given during the first class of the term

Learning outcomes

- To see how an advanced, industrial urban society like Japan can be studied using mainstream anthropological methods;
- The implications of studying a society like Japan for anthropological theory.

Lectures

Please note that the lectures are a central part of the course and all students are very strongly recommended to attend.

The Construction of Japanese Ethnicity: An Anthropological Introduction

1. Issues in the study of Japan: Said and Orientalism

The Functionalist/Essentialist Dominant Paradigm of Japanese Ethnicity

2. Technology and the changing demography
3. Homogeneity, minority groups and migrant workers
4. The concept of the person
5. Groupism and hierarchy
6. Nakane, Doi and the 'kinship model' of Japanese society

Critique of the Model

7. Inherent assumptions and a critique of the 'kinship model'
8. Case study of functionalist versus the conflict models of the Japanese company