

Sophia University –January Session 2026

January 7 – January 28, 2026 *January 7: Orientation

Date: August 23, 2025

Course Title	Modern History of Japan
Course Code	HSZ200
Instructor	Collin Rusneac
Class Period	2nd Period (10:55-12:35)
Course Format	In-Person
Language of Instruction	English
Maximum class size	40
Course Description	<p>This survey course introduces students to nineteenth- and twentieth-century Japanese history. The course covers politics, society, thought and diplomacy in Japan by focusing predominantly on the tumultuous domestic conflicts and imperialist pressures which produced the Meiji Restoration and the major transformations and developments that followed in its aftermath. The course also explores the first half of the twentieth century, a time marked by social instability, foreign aggression, wartime destruction and economic recovery. Finally, the course ends with an overview of Japan's position in the international arena and its relations with its East-Asian neighbors.</p> <p>The course is primarily lecture-based, but some time is devoted to discussions and group work.</p>
Course Objectives	By the end of the course, students should be familiar with important events in modern Japanese history, as well with important processes that take place nationally and globally during that time. Students will also have a framework for understanding Japanese society during the modern period.
Expected work outside of class	The course requires students to do mandatory daily readings. These could take between 1-2 hours, depending on the individual. Weekly assignments could take between 2-4 hours to prepare and write.
Course Materials	All class material – mandatory and optional readings – will be uploaded on Moodle. The main text for the course is Andrew Gordon's A Modern History of Japan from Tokugawa Times to the Present, 3rd edition 2014 (ISBN: 9780199930159); 4th edition 2019 (ISBN: 9780190920555); International edition, 2020 (ISBN: 9780197507339)
	Purchase of textbook: not necessary
	e-book: not applicable
Moodle	Moodle is essential to this course as all class material – mandatory and

	optional readings – will be uploaded on Moodle. Assignments will also be submitted through Moodle.
Contact Instructor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • via Moodle message • via Email: collin_rusneac@sophia.ac.jp
Evaluation (Attendance, Class participation, in-class assignments, final exam, quizzes, etc.)	<p>Students' grades will be determined based on the following criteria:</p> <p>Attendance + Participation: 30% + 10%</p> <p>Weekly Writing Assignments (3): 60%</p> <p>Attendance is mandatory. You can improve your attendance grade by actively participating in class discussions and by demonstrating that you have done the assigned readings.</p> <p>Students will have to write three (3) assignments. These will be 4-to-5-page-essays reflecting on any themes or topics discussed prior to the due date. The essays will be individual critical pieces which reveal your engagement with the course material, such as your mandatory or optional readings or any form of media introduced in class. You can pick an event, a place or a person and discuss the significance of your subject in Japanese modern history.</p> <p>In addition, students will need to visit a history museum for two (out of three) of these assignments and then write about their visit.</p> <p>More details about the grading scheme and assignments' requirements will be shared on the first day of class.</p>
Other comments	-
Class schedule	<p>*January 7: Orientation</p> <p>*January 12: No-Class Day</p> <p>[DAY 1] INTRODUCTION <i>Overview of the syllabus, course requirements, assignments and grading.</i></p> <p>[DAY 2] MODERNIZATION THEORY <i>Introduction to modernization theory and discussion of what makes Japan "modern."</i></p> <p>[DAY 3] THE TOKUGAWA SHOGUNATE (I) <i>Historical background leading up to the Tokugawa Shogunate.</i></p> <p>[DAY 4] THE TOKUGAWA SHOGUNATE (II)</p>

	<i>Continuation of the Tokugawa Shogunate, focusing on its historical aspects.</i>
	[DAY 5] JAPAN AND ASIA, 1600-1850 <i>Discussion of Japan's premodern international relations and the concept of "national isolation."</i>
	[DAY 6] THE MEIJI 'REVOLUTION' BEGINS <i>Discussion of the events leading to the start of the Meiji Restoration.</i>
	[DAY 7] THE MEIJI 'REVOLUTION' CONTINUES <i>Discussion of how the Meiji Restoration unfolded.</i>
	[DAY 8] MODERNIZATION, INDUSTRIALIZATION, WESTERNIZATION <i>Discussion of the key reforms of the Meiji era.</i>
	[DAY 9] THE JAPANESE COLONIAL EMPIRE <i>Discussion of Japan's relations with its neighbors during the Meiji era.</i>
	[DAY 10] THE ASIA-PACIFIC WAR BEGINS <i>Discussion of the events leading to the Asia-Pacific War (World War II).</i>
	[DAY 11] THE ASIA-PACIFIC WAR CONTINUES – AND ENDS <i>Continuation of the Asia-Pacific War (World War II)</i>
	[DAY 12] THE AMERICAN OCCUPATION OF JAPAN <i>Discussion of the immediate postwar reforms following World War II.</i>
	[DAY 13] POSTWAR JAPAN <i>Continuation of our discussion on the legacies of World War II and the reforms following the end of the American occupation of Japan.</i>
	[DAY 14] WRAP-UP <i>Crash course in Japanese history from the 1950s to the start of the 21st century, and course conclusions.</i>

*Course format, evaluation methods and class schedule may be subject to change.

[Important Note Regarding Class Capacity]

Course enrollment in each course is on a first-come, first-served basis. Please be aware that once the maximum capacity is reached, you will no longer be able to select that course.

If you plan to transfer the credits to your home university, please consider alternative courses as well when making your study plan, in case the courses you want to take are full.