

Sophia University – January Session 2027

January 7 – January 29, 2027 *January 7: Orientation

Date: August 2026

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	This survey course examines the historical roots of Japanese modernity, with particular emphasis on developments from the early modern period through the Meiji era. The course explores the political, social, intellectual, and economic transformations that laid the foundations for modern Japan, including changes during the Tokugawa period, the domestic conflicts and foreign pressures surrounding the Meiji Restoration, and the major developments that followed. The course also considers Japan's emergence as an imperial power and the political and social instability that characterized the first half of the twentieth century. The final portion of the course provides a more selective overview of wartime destruction, postwar reconstruction, and some of the major transformations that shaped Japan after 1945. Rather than attempting to provide an equally detailed account of every period, the course focuses primarily on the historical processes through which modern Japan emerged and on the ways in which earlier developments continued to influence Japanese society, politics, and relations with its East Asian neighbors. The course is primarily lecture-based, although some class time is devoted to discussion and group work.
Course Objectives	By the end of the course, students should be familiar with the major events, developments, and historical processes that contributed to the emergence of modern Japan. In particular, students should understand how political, social, intellectual, and economic changes during the early modern period and the Meiji era laid the foundations for Japanese modernity. In other words, students will develop a framework for understanding how earlier historical transformations continued to shape modern Japanese society.

Expected work outside of class	The course requires students to do the mandatory readings. These could take between 30 minutes to 1 hour, depending on the individual. Weekly assignments could take between 4-6 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 Christopher Harding's <i>A Short History of Japan</i> (9780241563199, Pelican Books, 2025)
	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	• via Moodle message • via Email: collin_rusneac@sophia.ac.jp
Evaluation (Attendance, Class participation, in-class assignments, final exam, quizzes, etc.)	Students' grades will be determined based on the following criteria: Attendance + Participation: 30% + 10% Weekly Writing Assignments (3): 60% 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. Students will complete three (3) individual reports of 4–5 pages each, based on visits to museums and/or religious sites (e.g., temples or shrines) relevant to Japanese modern history. Each report should be a critical, analytical reflection that demonstrates thoughtful engagement with both the site visited and the course material, including required or optional readings, lectures and any media introduced in class. You are expected to draw meaningful connections between your observations and broader historical themes covered in the course. • Two (2) of the three reports must be based on visits to history museums. • One (1) report may focus on a religious site such as a temple or shrine. • However, you may not submit more than one report on a religious site. The other two must focus on museum visits. This is a mandatory requirement. Your reports must include:

	• Original photos taken by you at the site as proof of your visit • Clear references to course themes, readings, or lecture content More details about the grading scheme and assignments' requirements will be shared on the first day of class.
Other comments	-
Class schedule	*January 7: Orientation *January 11, January 22: No-Class Day [DAY 1] INTRODUCTION <i>Overview of the syllabus, course requirements, assignments and grading.</i> [DAY 2] MODERNIZATION THEORY <i>Introduction to modernization theory and discussion of what makes Japan "modern."</i> [DAY 3] BEFORE THE TOKUGAWA SHOGUNATE <i>Historical background leading up to the Tokugawa Shogunate.</i> [DAY 4] THE TOKUGAWA SHOGUNATE (I) <i>Delving into the political and social aspects of the Tokugawa Shogunate.</i> [DAY 5] THE TOKUGAWA SHOGUNATE (II) <i>Continuation of the Tokugawa Shogunate, focusing on its historical aspects.</i> [DAY 6] JAPAN AND ASIA, 1600-1850 <i>Discussion of Japan's premodern international relations and the concept of "national isolation."</i> [DAY 7] THE MEIJI 'REVOLUTION' BEGINS <i>Discussion of the events leading to the start of the Meiji Restoration.</i> [DAY 8] THE MEIJI 'REVOLUTION' CONTINUES <i>Discussion of how the Meiji Restoration unfolded.</i> [DAY 9] MODERNIZATION, INDUSTRIALIZATION, WESTERNIZATION <i>Discussion of the key reforms of the Meiji era.</i> [DAY 10] THE JAPANESE COLONIAL EMPIRE <i>Discussion of Japan's relations with its neighbors during the Meiji era.</i>

	[DAY 11] THE ASIA-PACIFIC WAR BEGINS <i>Discussion of the events leading to the Asia-Pacific War (World War II).</i>
	[DAY 12] THE ASIA-PACIFIC WAR CONTINUES – AND ENDS <i>Continuation of the Asia-Pacific War (World War II)</i>
	[DAY 13] THE AMERICAN OCCUPATION OF JAPAN <i>Discussion of the immediate postwar reforms following World War II.</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.