

Sophia University – January Session 2027

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

Date: August 2026

Course Title	The Japanese Economy in a Comparative Perspective
Course Code	ECZ200
Instructor	Brieuc Monfort
Class Period	3rd Period (13:30-15:10)
Course Format	In-Person
Language of Instruction	English
Maximum class size	50
Course Description	The course “The Japanese Economy in a Comparative Perspective” is an introductory course presenting the specificities of the Japanese economy and its relevance to the global economy. Once promised to overtake the U.S. as “number one” two generations ago, Japan has since slid in international rankings. A member of the G7 and the G20, Japan remains relevant not just as a major global economy deeply integrated within Asian and global trade and financial networks. Japan has also been confronted ahead of its partners with complex challenges, from the impact of aging on rising government debt to the impact of low growth on subdued inflation. Studying the Japanese economy thus offers key insights to understand current global challenges more generally. After a presentation of historical developments (Part I), the courses will discuss domestic and international issues (Parts II and III) before discussing scenarios about Japan’s economic future (Part IV). The actual order of the lectures listed below may vary depending on the progress of the course and the students' specific interests.
Course Objectives	This is a non-technical course requiring no prior background in economics. The main objective of the course is to provide an overview of the Japanese economy, using a simplified analytical framework, with a focus on what makes Japan specific and how it is integrated commercially and financially with its global partners. To better leverage the understanding of the students, the course will adopt a comparative perspective to allow students to contrast the main features of the Japanese economy with those of their country of origin. The course will also provide numerous examples about how Japanese corporations have adapted to the changing economic environment. Whenever possible, each macroeconomic concept introduced in class will be illustrated through its impact on the managerial decisions of Japanese corporations.

	By the end of the course, students are expected to be able to develop a comprehensive understanding of the Japanese economy and to critically assess economic and business articles in newspapers related to Japan.
Expected work outside of class	Review course materials, answer to the online quizzes, preparation for the final presentation. This could take 30 minutes to 1 hour per class depending on the individual.
Course Materials	PowerPoint and materials available on Moodle.
	Optional reading (available in Sophia University's Library) Ito, Takatoshi; Hoshi, Takeo (2020). The Japanese Economy (second edition). Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press. ISBN: 9780262538244.
	Purchase of textbook: optional e-book: acceptable
Moodle	All course materials will be uploaded to Moodle, including the course PowerPoint slides, occasional short online quizzes (due the following day or the day after, to distribute the homework more evenly), transcripts of the videos presented in class, and optional reading materials (selected textbook chapters, articles, etc.).
Contact Instructor	• via Email
Evaluation (Attendance, Class participation, in-class assignments, final exam, quizzes, etc.)	The evaluation for the course will be based on the following components: • Class attendance and participation (30%) • One-line quizzes on Moodle to review each specific lecture (30%) • Final presentation (30%) • Reaction paper (10%)
Other comments	-
Class schedule	*January 7: Orientation *January 11, January 22: No-Class Day
	[DAY 1] Introduction. Why Japan is relevant: Japan as a cautionary tale ("Japanification") or as a model? This lecture will examine why and when academics, policymakers, and business leaders outside Japan have studied the Japanese economy. It will also assess students' initial knowledge of Japan's economy and its corporations.
	[DAY 2] Part I. Growth in historical perspective. From the Meiji period to the High-Growth era. This lecture examines Japan's experience of catching up with the West through modernization in the late nineteenth century, and its emergence as the world's second-largest economy in the postwar era. It explores how Japan moved from a secluded country in the mid-nineteenth century to one of the powerhouses of the global economy within a century.
	[DAY 3] The Lost Decades

	Following a real estate and financial bubble in the late 1980s, Japan's growth slowed, and the country experienced a protracted financial crisis in the 1990s, followed by a series of shocks stemming from both global developments and domestic factors.
	[DAY 4] Part II. Domestic issues and economic policies. Income, wealth, and gender inequalities in Japan Japan is still often viewed as an egalitarian society—but does this perception still hold today? This lecture will examine inequalities across multiple dimensions and various indicators, both economic and social.
	[DAY 5] Labor market and unemployment This lecture will examine Japan's persistently low unemployment rate and the institutional and demographic factors that help explain it. It will analyze the specific features of the labor market, including employment practices, labor market dualism, and recent structural changes.
	[DAY 6] Inflation and monetary policy Japan is unique in having experienced a prolonged period of deflation from the 2000s through the early 2010s. To exit deflation, it pursued innovative monetary policies, including quantitative easing. Does the rise in inflation following the COVID-19 pandemic signal a new area of higher and moderate inflation?
	[DAY 7] Public debt and fiscal policy Japan is the advanced economy with the highest public debt-to-GDP ratio. The lecture will examine the factors behind its accumulation and also fiscal policy choices, focusing on taxation, public spending, and long-term sustainability.
	[DAY 8] Part III. Global challenges. International trade and global value chains Exports have played a central role in Japan's economic growth and industrial development. Particular attention is given to Japan's trade relations with its major partners, especially within Asia, their evolution over time, and the impact of geopolitical tensions on trade.
	[DAY 9] Innovation and digitalization in Japan Innovation and digitalization are key drivers of Japan's economic transformation in a globalized economy. This topic examines international cooperation in research and development, as well as Japan's role in the global competition among high-tech firms. It also explores whether the perception of Japan as lagging behind is justified or not.
	[DAY 10] Global finance Japan's large banks (megabanks) are major actors in global finance, with a growing presence beyond domestic markets. Their expansion across Asia highlights Japan's role in regional financial integration and cross-

	border capital flows
	[DAY 11]. Adapting to climate change Japan's energy mix has undergone significant changes in response to environmental challenges and energy security concerns. The consequences of the Fukushima nuclear accident have played a central role in reshaping energy policy, alongside efforts to expand renewables and reduce carbon emissions.
	[DAY 12] Aging and demographic challenges Japan is among the world's most rapidly aging societies, with far-reaching consequences for its economy, labor market, and social systems. Its experience highlights both domestic challenges and global implications, offering important lessons for other aging countries.
	[DAY 13] Part IV. Final presentations and conclusions Final presentations by students (1) / Exiting the Lost Decades. Japan's efforts to move beyond the "Lost Decades" have involved a combination of countercyclical and structural reforms. To what extent have these policies succeeded?
	[DAY 14] Final presentations by students (2) / Scenarios for Japan's economic future. The final lecture will present scenarios highlighting different paths for growth and Japan's role in the global economy.

*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.