

Sophia University – Online January Session 2023

January 10th - 30th, 2023

Date: August 22, 2022

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| Course Title | The Media and Contemporary Issues in Japan (MACIJ) |
| Instructor | Robert Gilhooly |
| Class Period | 9:00~10:40 |
| Course Format (ex. real-time, on-demand) | Via remote learning, real-time |
| Course Description | <p>The Internet in general and social media in particular have become significant engines for alternative sources of news, often usurping conventional media outlets due to the immediacy that is inherent in new media. A perennial problem for the consumer is determining which media is providing reliable, trustworthy information, not least of all in an era when prominent figures in authority are accusing even the most respected news outlets of spreading “fake news” and then using social media to convey their own version of “the truth.” This is particularly problematic when issues that directly impact society are brought under scrutiny. On the other hand, conventional media are often held hostage by the masters of industry – i.e. their advertisers – who can have, and have had, an impact on the way certain issues are covered and relayed to the public.</p> <p>Indeed, consumers in Japan are faced with a conundrum that differs to many other countries. Unlike their counterparts overseas, many of Japan’s main media outlets are often viewed as lacking a clear voice, avoiding controversy in favor of appearing impartial. What’s more, its journalists are kept in line via a restrictive “press club” system. Thus, despite a wide range of controversial social issues in Japan – from the country’s nuclear energy policy and discrimination against “low caste” <i>burakumin</i> to revisions of the Constitution and the continuation of capital punishment – the perception is of a media that, at best, aims for neutrality and at worst seems to toe the government line.</p> <p>This ultimately means that views expressed by new media (sometimes in the form of Western news sources that have a Japanese presence online) can appear to stand in stark contrast to those expressed by conventional Japanese outlets. Nonetheless, the influence of Japan’s media continues to be strong – for example, its newspaper circulation figures, while falling, remain considerably higher than many other countries around the world.</p> <p>This course will look at a variety of social issues in Japan and how they are portrayed in the media. Students will be challenged to think critically about these issues as presented by different types of media and how those media, in turn, are influenced by external societal and other factors. The course will also provide the opportunity for discussions on how the situation in Japan compares internationally.</p> |

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| Course Objectives | This course will introduce students to some important social issues faced by Japan and how those issues are reported in the media. By examining the complexity of the nature and background of the media, the course aims to get students to think critically about the role various media play in raising awareness about social issues and how they could be resolved, as well as thinking about how they themselves can help develop a more conducive environment for improved media coverage of such issues. |
| Expected work outside of class | This course combines lectures, discussions, presentations, written reports and a final examination. Students will learn not just through instruction, but from one another by active participation in the exchange of ideas and opinions. Students are encouraged and expected to share their opinions, personal experiences and views in class. To this end, students will be expected to look through suggested reading, videos and other content, which will form the core of work outside the class. They will also be expected to work on their final presentation and written assignments. |
| Course Materials | URLs and other resources will be provided via the university's online Moodle portal |
| Evaluation (Attendance, Class participation, in-class assignments, final exam, quizzes, etc.) | <p>The final grade for the course will be determined by evaluation in the following areas, with the weight attributed to each area indicated in parentheses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class Attendance and Participation¹ (10%) • Homework (10%) • Term paper² (20%) • Presentation³ (30%) • Final Examination (30%) <p>¹Class attendance and active participation in discussions are mandatory. Students are expected to keep abreast of current news and issues within and outside of Japan and be prepared to discuss them in class.</p> <p>²One paper (written in English) should be approximately 800 words. Students with advanced level Japanese-language skills who feel more comfortable writing in that language rather than English may be permitted to write papers in Japanese.</p> <p>³Students are required to make a group presentation in a preferred medium.</p> |
| Class schedule | <p>I Media and Society</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of Japanese media and society • Looking at characteristics of Japan's media and the concepts of freedom of the press, the right to know and media responsibilities in a democratic society; |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Society's attitudes to mainstream and other media |
| II | Exerting control: Nuclear Power <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reporting the Great East Japan Earthquake: Nuclear or anti-nuclear? • Japan's "Nuclear Power Village" and role of media |
| III | Labor issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Karoshi," the internationally recognized word, and working for "Black Corporations" |
| IV | Social Divide and the Widening Wealth Gap <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor and emerging poor in the world's third-biggest economy • Hikikomori |
| V | Guest speaker |
| VI | Discrimination (1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Japan's ethnic minorities – Hate speech vs freedom of expression • Immigrants and migrant workers |
| VII | Discrimination (2) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Japan's untouchables |
| VIII | Discrimination (3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender inequality – Japan's #MeToo movement |
| IX | Guest speaker |
| X | Environmental Issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minamata and its legacy • Animal rights, Marine ecosystems and food culture |
| XI | The Legal System/Penal Code <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capital Punishment • Corporate Japan: Guilty until proven innocent? |
| XII | Student presentation (1) |
| XIII | Student presentation (2) |
| XIV | Final Examination |

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