SOSC 1470 The Economic and Political Development of Modern Japan

Spring Semester 2021
Classroom: zoom
Time: Tuesday and Thursday, 15.00 to 16.20

Instructor:
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Course Description and Objectives:
The rapid economic modernization and building of a modern state in Japan after the Meiji Restoration of 1868 has long been considered a typical case of successful economic and political development. Japan’s success has been overwhelmingly attributed to its “learning from the west”. The lack of appreciation of Japan’s economic and political development achieved before the coming of Westerners leads to a western-centered view of development.

This course aims to place Japan’s development after 1868 against the historical background of economic and political development in Tokugawa Japan (1603-1868). It emphasizes the contribution of Japan’s indigenous market economy and state-building efforts to Japan’s transformation. We will cover topics such as rural commercialization and the rise of entrepreneurship; the business ethics of Tokugawa merchants and its contribution to a market economy; the spread of mass education and its significance to political participation; and the mercantile economic policies of major domain governments as well as the shogunate's economic policy-making. We will also underscore the role of politics, examining how domestic politics impacted the process of learning from the west and how the struggle for a political system with more representation shaped the process of modernization.

This course will deepen students’ knowledge of modern Japan. It provides a more nuanced picture of its modernization, as well as highlighting the multiple trajectories of development that were possible in Japan. Moreover, it will help students better understand the relationship between economic development and political participation through a concrete case-study, and allow us to rethink critically existing models of development.


Requirements:
Please read the assigned readings before the class and participate in class discussion. Attendance may be randomly checked by unannounced in-class quizzes.

Grading:
Mid-term exam 50 percent and final exam 50 percent.

Alternately, you can write one research paper (12 pages double-spaced). Students interested in this option must submit a proposal at least one week before the mid-term (by Week 8). The topic of the research paper must address either the continuity or discontinuity between Tokugawa and Meiji Japan. The proposal should include the topic of your paper, why you want to work on it, and the relevant scholarship. Your proposal must be approved ahead of time for you to take this option.

Reading Assignments:

Introduction: Why do we need to learn the history of Japan? Why study Tokugawa and early Meiji Japanese history in particular?

Week 1: The Political System of Tokugawa Japan


Week 2: Economic Development in Tokugawa Japan


Week 3: Popular and elite education in Tokugawa Japan
Jansen, The Making of Modern Japan, pp. 159-210;


Week 4: Was Tokugawa Japan closed to the outside world?


Week 5: The crisis of Tokugawa Japan
Jansen, The Making of Modern Japan, pp. 223-293

**Week 6: The Meiji Restoration as an event**


**Week 7: Political development after 1868: the legitimacy of the new regime**


**Week 8: Economic development after 1868: the state or market**

Yasukichi Yasuba, “Did Japan ever suffer from a shortage of natural resources before World War II?,” *Journal of Economic History*, vol. 56, No. 3 (September 1996): 543-60.

**Week 9: Popular reactions to the Meiji state-building**

**Week 10: The Parliamentary movement**


**Week 11: The military system of the Meiji state**

**Week 12: The Sino-Japanese War**


**Week 13: Post Russo-Japanese War Japan: the starting of a path toward the Pacific War?**