

US-Japan Relations: Power Dynamics, Partnership, and Paradoxes

Kyoto Consortium for Japanese Studies (KCJS)

Fall Semester 2025

Course Information

- **Course Title:** US-Japan Relations: Power Dynamics, Partnership, and Paradoxes
- **Term:** Fall 2025
- **Class Days/Times:** Tuesdays and Thursdays, 14:00-15:30
- **Classroom Location:** TBA
- **Course Format:** Seminar
- **Credits:** 3 points

Instructor Information

- **Instructor:** Yoneyuki SUGITA, Ph.D.
- **Email:** TBA
- **Office Location:** TBA
- **Office Hours:** Tuesdays 16:00-17:30 and by appointment

Course Description

This seminar examines the complex, evolving relationship between the United States and Japan from the late 19th century to the present, with particular emphasis on pivotal transitions in the post-WWII era. Moving beyond simplified narratives of American dominance, we will analyze how the relationship has been characterized by surprising power reversals, strategic adaptations, and mutually beneficial compromises despite significant power asymmetries.

Students will explore critical turning points in US-Japan relations, including the early encounters and unequal treaties, the road to Pacific War, American occupation policies, the formation of the "Yoshida Doctrine," Japan's high economic growth in the 1950s-60s, Cold War alliance dynamics, economic frictions of the 1980s-90s, post-9/11 security cooperation, and current challenges in the Indo-Pacific strategic environment.

Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Analyze key historical developments in US-Japan relations within their proper historical contexts
2. Evaluate the shifting power dynamics between the US and Japan across different historical periods
3. Apply international relations theories to explain patterns and paradoxes in bilateral relations
4. Conduct original research on specialized aspects of US-Japan relations

5. Critically assess contemporary issues affecting the US-Japan alliance using historical precedents
6. Demonstrate effective presentation, discussion moderation, and participation skills
7. Connect historical knowledge with contemporary developments in US-Japan relations

Required Texts

All readings will be provided through Yone's Reading Packet (YRP), which will be distributed according to weekly topics.

Recommended Texts

- Caprio, Mark E. and Yoneyuki Sugita (eds). *Democracy in Occupied Japan: The U.S. Occupation and Japanese Politics and Society*
- Dower, John W. *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*
- Green, Michael J. *Line of Advantage: Japan's Grand Strategy in the Era of Abe Shinzo*
- LaFeber, Walter. *The Clash: A History of U.S.-Japan Relations*
- Mauch, Peter, Jon Van Sant, and Yoneyuki Sugita. *Historical Dictionary of United States-Japan Relations*
- Pyle, Kenneth B. *Japan Rising: The Resurgence of Japanese Power and Purpose*
- Schaller, Michael. *Altered States: The United States and Japan Since the Occupation*
- Smith, Sheila A. *Japan Rearmed: The Politics of Military Power*
- Sugita, Yoneyuki. *Pitfall or Panacea: The Irony of US Power in Occupied Japan, 1945-1952*

Course Requirements and Grading

Requirement	Percentage of Final Grade
Daily News Analysis & Discussion Participation	20%
Research Paper (Proposal 5%, Final Paper 15%)	20%
Topic Presentation	15%
Research Presentation and Discussion Leading	20%
Midterm Examination	15%
Field Trip Reports & Guest Speaker Reflections	10%
Total	100%

Daily News Analysis & Discussion Participation (20%)

Students must read daily newspapers as a requirement. The first 15 minutes of each seminar will be dedicated to interactive opinion exchanges on current events related to US-Japan issues. This

practice connects historical knowledge with contemporary developments. Quality of contributions is valued over quantity. Students are expected to engage with assigned materials critically and constructively.

Research Paper (20%)

Each student will write a research paper (2,500-3,000 words) on a specific aspect of US-Japan relations. A proposal (5% of grade) is due Week 5, and the final paper (15% of grade) is due Week 14. Papers should demonstrate original analysis, utilize primary and secondary sources, and present a coherent argument about some aspect of US-Japan relations.

Topic Presentation (15%)

A 20-minute presentation on an assigned weekly topic, analyzing key readings and historical developments. Students will sign up for topics during the first week of class.

Research Presentation and Discussion Leading (20%)

A 20-minute presentation on original research. Following this presentation, the presenter will serve as chairperson for a 15-minute structured discussion, moderating questions and facilitating dialogue among classmates.

Midterm Examination (15%)

The midterm will assess comprehension of key concepts, historical developments, and analytical frameworks covered in the first half of the course through short answer and essay questions.

Field Trip Reports & Guest Speaker Reflections (10%)

Students will submit a 500-word analytical reflection after each field trip and guest speaker session, connecting the experience to course themes and readings.

Course Policies

Attendance

Daily attendance is mandatory. NO make-up classes will be given. In the event of illness or other absence, please notify your instructor, the Resident Director or the office staff as soon as possible by telephone or via e-mail.

Each unexcused absence beyond the first will result in a 3% reduction of the final grade. Students who miss more than three classes without a documented excuse may be asked to withdraw from the course.

Participation

Active, thoughtful participation is essential to seminar success. Quality of contributions is valued over quantity. Students are expected to engage with assigned materials critically and constructively, responding to both readings and classmates' comments with substantive insights. Daily news analysis will form an important component of participation evaluation.

Electronic Devices

Laptops are permitted for note-taking purposes only. Cell phones must be silenced and put away during class sessions. Recording of class sessions is not permitted without prior permission from the instructor.

Late Assignments

Late submissions will be penalized by 5% per day, including weekends. Extensions may be granted in exceptional circumstances if requested at least 48 hours before the deadline.

Academic Integrity

As members of an academic community, each one of us bears the responsibility to participate in scholarly discourse and research in a manner characterized by intellectual honesty and scholarly integrity. Collaborative scholarship requires the study of other scholars' work, the free discussion of such work, and the explicit acknowledgement of those ideas in any work that inform our own. This exchange of ideas relies upon a mutual trust that sources, opinions, facts, and insights will be properly noted and carefully credited.

In practical terms, this means that, as students, all work submitted in this course, whether in draft or final form, must be your own. You must be responsible for the full citations of others' ideas in all of your research papers and projects; you must be scrupulously honest when taking your examinations; you must always submit your own work and not that of another student, scholar, or internet agent. Any breach of this intellectual responsibility is a breach of faith with the rest of our academic community. It undermines our shared intellectual culture, and it cannot be tolerated.

The use of ChatGPT or any other AI tools for course assignments (with the exception of artificial neural networks like DeepL for machine translations, duly cited) is tantamount to plagiarism. Any cases of plagiarism or cheating will be reported to Columbia Undergraduate Global Engagement and the academic advisor at your home institution and are subject to the code of academic conduct there. In such cases, your final grade will be determined by your home institution and not by KCJS.

Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability and have a DS-certified 'Accommodation Letter' please see the KCJS resident director to confirm your accommodation needs. If you believe that you have a disability that requires accommodation, you can contact your home school's Disability Services. The Center for Undergraduate Global Engagement (UGE) can also assist you to connect with Columbia University's Disability Services.

Detailed Course Schedule

Week 1: Introduction and Theoretical Frameworks

Tuesday: Course Introduction and Overview

- Required Reading: YRP #1 (Introduction to US-Japan Relations)

Thursday: Theoretical Approaches to US-Japan Relations

- Required Reading: YRP #2 (IR Theory and US-Japan Relations)

Week 2: Early US-Japan Encounters

Tuesday: Perry's Arrival and the Unequal Treaties

- Required Reading: YRP #3 (Early US-Japan Encounters)

Thursday: Meiji Modernization and Early Relations

- Required Reading: YRP #4 (Meiji Japan and US Relations)

Week 3: Road to the Pacific War

Tuesday: Rising Tensions and Imperial Competition

- Required Reading: YRP #5 (US-Japan Relations: 1920s-1930s)

Thursday: Decision for War and Pearl Harbor

- Required Reading: YRP #6 (Path to Pearl Harbor)

Week 4: Occupation and Reconstruction

Tuesday: Initial Occupation Policies

- Required Reading: YRP #7 (Occupation: Initial Phase)

Thursday: Constitutional Reform and Democratization

- Required Reading: YRP #8 (Occupation: Political Reforms)
- Research Paper Topic Brainstorming Session

Week 5: The "Reverse Course" and Cold War Alignment

Tuesday: The "Reverse Course" and Economic Recovery

- Required Reading: YRP #9 (Occupation: Economic Reforms)
- **Research Paper Proposal Due**

Thursday: The San Francisco System and Security Treaty

- Required Reading: YRP #10 (San Francisco System)

Week 6: The 1950s: Rebuilding the Relationship

Tuesday: The Origins of the "1955 System" and US-Japan Relations

- Required Reading: YRP #11 (US-Japan in the 1950s)

Thursday: Security Treaty Crisis and Political Turmoil

- Required Reading: YRP #12 (Security Treaty Revision of 1960)

Week 7: The 1960s: High Growth and Alliance Management

Tuesday: Japan's Economic Miracle and US Support

- Required Reading: YRP #13 (Japan's High Growth Economy)

Thursday: Midterm Examination

Week 8: Okinawa and Vietnam

Tuesday: Student Topic Presentations: Okinawa Reversion

- Presentation Topics: Occupation of Okinawa, Reversion Movement, Strategic Importance
- Required Reading: YRP #14 (Okinawa Reversion)

Thursday: Student Topic Presentations: Vietnam War and US-Japan Relations

- Presentation Topics: Japan's Stance on Vietnam, Economic Benefits, Anti-War Movement
- Required Reading: YRP #15 (Vietnam War and Japan)

Week 9: The Nixon Shocks and Alliance Turbulence

Tuesday: Student Topic Presentations: Nixon Shocks

- Presentation Topics: China Opening, End of Bretton Woods, Impact on Japan
- Required Reading: YRP #16 (Nixon Shocks)

Thursday: Student Topic Presentations: Oil Crisis and Japan

- Presentation Topics: Economic Impact, Energy Security Policies, Middle East Diplomacy
- Required Reading: YRP #17 (Oil Crisis and US-Japan Relations)

Week 10: 1980s Trade Frictions

Tuesday: Student Topic Presentations: Trade Conflicts and Negotiations

- Presentation Topics: Plaza Accord, Semiconductor Dispute, Structural Impediments Initiative
- Required Reading: YRP #18 (US-Japan Trade Wars)

Thursday: Student Topic Presentations: The "Japan Problem" in American Politics

- Presentation Topics: Rising Anti-Japanese Sentiment, Congressional Responses, Media Portrayals
- Required Reading: YRP #19 (Japan as a Threat: US Perceptions)

Week 11: Post-Cold War Challenges

Tuesday: Student Topic Presentations: End of Cold War Impact

- Presentation Topics: Gulf War Response, Recalibrating Security Alliance, New Strategic Vision
- Required Reading: YRP #20 (Post-Cold War Alliance)

Thursday: Guest Speaker Session (TBA)

- Potential Topics: Japan's Evolving Security Role, Constitutional Revision Debates, Alliance Evolution
- Required Reading: Materials provided by guest speaker
- Guest Speaker Reflection Due (following week)

Week 12: 21st Century Alliance Challenges

Tuesday: Student Research Presentations

- Student Original Research Presentations and Discussion Leading (3-4 students)
- Required Reading: Research materials provided by presenters

Thursday: Student Research Presentations

- Student Original Research Presentations and Discussion Leading (3-4 students)
- Required Reading: Research materials provided by presenters

Week 13: Contemporary US-Japan Relations

Tuesday: Student Research Presentations

- Student Original Research Presentations and Discussion Leading (3-4 students)
- Required Reading: Research materials provided by presenters

Thursday: Student Research Presentations

- Student Original Research Presentations and Discussion Leading (3-4 students)
- Required Reading: Research materials provided by presenters

Week 14: Future of the Alliance

Tuesday: Field Trip (TBA - to be determined in consultation with students)

- Potential Locations: Japan-America Society of Kansai, American Consulate Osaka-Kobe, USJI Kyoto Office
- Preparation Reading: Materials related to field trip location
- Field Trip Report Due (following week)

Thursday: Course Conclusion and Future Directions Discussion

- Required Reading: YRP #21 (US-Japan Relations: Future Prospects)
- **Research Paper Due**

Note on Field Trips and Guest Speakers

Field trips and guest speakers are integral to this course. They provide opportunities to learn from real-world practitioners and visit relevant sites that illuminate aspects of the US-Japan relationship. Only mandatory class field trips will be funded by KCJS. The specific field trip locations and guest speakers will be determined in consultation with students based on their research interests and with approval from the KCJS Resident Director.

Note on Readings

In addition to the required texts, supplementary readings will be provided through the course website. Students should expect to read approximately 100 pages per week. Daily newspaper reading (English or Japanese) focused on US-Japan issues is also required for the current events discussion component.