

SAJ/YIJ JAPAN STUDIES 3

PROJECT WORK IN JAPANESE:  
EXPLORING CONTEMPORARY JAPAN THROUGH  
ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODS

Spring 2025



## INSTRUCTOR

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## CREDITS AWARDED

3 credits

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces students to the qualitative research methodology of ethnography, which is used to examine people, communities, and cultures from an insider's viewpoint. By learning how to conduct ethnographic research, students will look closely into various elements of local cultures of the *Kansai* region, including family and household, education and schooling, youth culture, dating and marriage, work and professionalism, and consumer culture and lifestyle. Students will select a topic and conduct a research project throughout the semester. While the main goal of this course is to promote cultural understanding of Japan, this course also aims to further develop students' Japanese language skills through research activities. In order to achieve these two goals, students are expected to use both English and Japanese when conducting ethnographic observations (E/J), carrying out interviews with local people (J), transcribing spoken data (J), collecting and analyzing media and artifacts (J), making oral presentations (E/J), and writing a research report (E). These activities will help students develop their research skills necessary to achieve a deeper and critical understanding of Japanese language, culture, and society while also enhancing their Japanese language skills.

## STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon successful completion of the course, students should be able to:

1. Gain cultural knowledge of Japan through research articles on Japanese culture and society.
2. Critically analyze information about Japanese culture and local communities of the Kansai region.
3. Conduct close observations of local communities and their practices
4. Conduct interviews with local people using Japanese in order to gain insight into their perspectives.
5. Summarize and present their research in a spoken and written format.
6. Comprehend and use a wide range of Japanese vocabulary and expressions in discussing Japan-related topics of current or historical importance to Japanese people.

## COURSE GRADE

Reading Responses & Class Participation.....	20%
Assignments.....	50%
♦ Observation	
♦ Interview	
♦ Etc.	
Final Project.....	30%
♦ Fieldwork and analysis	
♦ Oral presentation or Paper	

## REQUIRED TEXTS/MATERIALS

All the texts and materials will be made available on the course management site (*My Konan*).

## COURSE POLICY

### a) Attendance

This course will be delivered in the in-person format. Students are required to be present and engage in discussions in each class meeting. **You must attend a minimum of 80% of class sessions to obtain credit.** Failure to attend more than half of any class session will be considered an absence. If you are disrupting your class, you may be asked to leave the class and will be marked absent for that day. We have one field trip scheduled for Sunday, February 18. Participation is mandatory and is included in your course grade.

### b) Reading and Preparation

Regular class attendance with readings in hand (either print outs or reliable e-versions on a laptop computer/tablet, not your smartphones) is mandatory. Students are expected to read assigned texts and/or complete the worksheet before each class.

### c) Class Participation

Students are expected to contribute to the class discussion by asking questions, making comments, bringing additional information, etc. They are also expected to actively participate in and contribute to group activities.

10	Exemplary. Student came to class punctually, was well prepared, showed active interest in class proceedings and in mastering course material.
8	Acceptable. Student came to class punctually and satisfactorily prepared, displayed adequate interest in class proceedings and in mastering course material.
5	Unsatisfactory. Student came to class late and/or left before the scheduled time. Other criteria: student was insufficiently prepared or displayed little interest in class proceedings or in mastering course material.
0	No participation due to absence. Other criteria: student was extremely late, left class well before the scheduled time, or was a disruptive presence.

d) **Assignments**

There will be 4-5 ethnography assignments planned for the class. These assignments are aimed to provide students with opportunities to make use of various ethnographic techniques. Students are expected to complete and submit these assignments by specified due times/dates.

e) **Final Presentation / Paper**

Each student will be conducting an ethnographic project on a topic of his/her interest. Students will summarize their research in a written report or an oral presentation. Details will be announced in class.

## COURSE SCHEDULE (TENTATIVE)

1/20 (M) **Course Intro**

- Course syllabus
- EE Chapter 1 – What is ethnography?

1/22 (W) **Introduction to Ethnography 1**

- EE Chapter 2 – Choosing an ethnographic topic

1/27 (M) **Introduction to Ethnography 2**

- IER Chapter 4 – Participant observation

1/29 (W) **Family and Household 1**

- Hinokidani (2007) – Housing and family

2/3 (M) **Family and Household 2**

- Yamashita (2023) – Family diversity

2/10 (M) **Education 1**

- About Japanese elementary school
- Japanese students clean classrooms
- A year without homework

2/12 (W) **Introduction to Ethnography 3**

- IER Chapter 5 – Writing field notes
- Field activity – observation and field notes

2/17 or 18 **Field Trip**

- Motoyama Dai-ni Elementary School (8:00 am – 2:00 pm)

2/26 (W) **Education 2**

- Observation report (500-1000 words) due
- Presentations & discussions

3/3 (M) **Education 3**

- Sato, Mason, & Kataoka (2020) – Teachers in Japanese schools

**3/5 (W) Career and Work 1**

- [Why Is Japan's Work Culture So Outdated?](#)
- [Karoshi](#)

**3/10 (M) Introduction to Ethnography 4**

- IER Chapter 6 – Interviewing
- Field activity – Interviewing

**3/19 (W) Career and Work 2**

- Interview report (500-1000 words) due
- Presentations & discussions

**3/24 (M) Youth Culture 1**

- [Youth culture in Japan](#)
- [J-Pop and K-Pop](#)

**3/26 (W) Introduction to Ethnography 5**

- IER Chapter 10 – Indirect observation

**4/2 (W) Youth Culture 2**

- Observation report (500-1000 words) due
- Presentations & discussions

**4/7 (M) Dating and Marriage**

- Tahhan (2019) – Intimacy in Japanese-Australian Families
- (optional) Alexy (2019) – Communicating intimacy

**4/9 (W) Consumer Culture 1**

- Whitelaw (2018) – Konbini
- (optional) Meyer-Ohle (2018) – Department store

**4/16 (W) Consumer Culture 2**

- Observation report (500-1000 words) due
- Presentations & discussions

**4/21 (M) Aging Society 1**

- [Hikikomori](#)
- (optional) Tajan (2021)

**4/23 (W) Aging Society 2**

- [Dementia](#)

**5/7 (W) Final Project Prep**

**5/12 (M) Final Presentation**

**5/14 (W) Final Presentation**

## ASSESSMENT RUBRIC FOR THE FINAL PROJECT

	4 Excellent	3 Satisfactory	2 Acceptable	1 Unsatisfactory
Reference to the existing research or resources	More than five references are cited	More than three references are cited	1-2 references are cited	No reference is cited
Quality of analysis	Accurate and convincing analysis	Analysis is mostly accurate but some parts are not convincing	There are some inaccurate parts in analysis	Major issues with accuracy
Quality of presentation/writing	Very effective and clear	Somewhat effective and moderately clear	Minor changes are required	Major changes are required
Knowledge of Japanese culture/concepts	Clear evidence of mastery	Sufficient mention/use of concepts	Only marginal mention/use of concepts	No mention/use of concepts
Quality of arguments/discussion	Abundant display of awareness toward diverse, disparate viewpoints and issues involved	Some display of awareness toward diverse, disparate viewpoints and issues involved	Insufficient display of awareness toward diverse, disparate viewpoints and issues involved	No display of awareness toward diverse, disparate viewpoints and issues involved