COURSE DESCRIPTION

The purpose of this seminar is to introduce students to important puzzles and questions about Japanese politics, and to survey various ways in which scholars have attempted to solve these puzzles. Japanese language proficiency is not required. Neither is an extensive knowledge of Japanese politics assumed.

Japan's postwar political history has often been summarized as a set of conventional “puzzles”—the conservative Liberal Democratic Party’s impregnable dominance, the economic miracle which seemed to have little to do with politics, the equally surprising end of the miracle, egalitarian growth coupled with its non-conventional welfare system and so on.

To understand why these are puzzling and to find out good explanations, we will employ the tools of comparative politics. Without having some knowledge of other democracies and theories based on them, it is hard to distinguish good explanations from bad. Also, we need tools to help us navigate a myriad of facts and events. Therefore, the readings have been chosen to provide students with theoretical foundations and comparative perspectives as well as to help them grasp major issues and debates in contemporary Japanese politics. Our weekly readings are subject to change, depending on students’ interest and needs.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND EVALUATION

1. Class attendance and participation (20%)
   This is a graduate seminar of which success is highly dependent on students’ active participation and contribution. Every student is expected to come to class having done the reading and to contribute to the seminar discussion. If you miss more than two sessions without legitimate reasons, you will receive a F.

2. Response papers (20% each)
   There are three written assignments. Each student will write three short response papers (3 pages, single-spaced) over the course of the semester on the week’s readings. The papers need to present a critical evaluation of the debates covered in the week. At the same time, they need to identify a significant theoretical issue that is unresolved in the current literature. In other words, the assignments should not be simply a summary of readings. Papers are due a day before class (i.e. 3pm on Wednesday).

3. Class presentations and discussion (20%)
   Once or twice throughout the semester, each student will have an opportunity to present his/her paper and lead a discussion. In the first 15-20 minutes of the class, paper writers will summarize their findings and lead discussion on the readings.
READINGS

<WEEK 1> Course Introduction


<WEEK 2> Puzzles and How to Solve Puzzles


<WEEK 3> One-Party Dominance (I)—Why Is It Puzzling? What Do Parties and Elections Do?


<WEEK 4> One-Party Dominance (II)—The Role of Electoral Systems


<WEEK 5> Japan’s Economic Success and Policy-Making


*****[OPTIONAL]******


<WEEK 6> Politics and Bureaucracy: Theory and Comparison


<WEEK 7> The Fall of Japan: Revisiting Bureaucracy


<WEEK 8> The Fall of Japan (II)

<WEEK 9> The DPJ And The Survival Of The LDP

<WEEK 10> Equality, Redistribution and The Welfare State: Theoretical Background

<WEEK 11> The Japanese Welfare State


<WEEK 12> The Politics of Gender Inequality


<WEEK 13> Growing Inequality


<WEEK 14> Protectionism and Immigration


<WEEK 15> Wrap-Up