



# Syllabus for Special Topics in Japanese Society and Culture — DRAFT —

Updated 5 September 2025

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## Essential Information

|          |                                      |
|----------|--------------------------------------|
| Credits: | 2                                    |
| Classes: | 1 per week; 13 class sessions total  |
| Type:    | mix of online and in-person meetings |
| Length:  | 15 week semester*                    |

*\*of which 1.5 weeks of break and 1 “Finals week” with no classes*

## Course Description

The goal of this course is to create a country-specific immersive academic experience focused on Japan. We engage with specific problems that are important to current Japanese culture and society by understanding their origins and researching and designing solutions. This course provides students with an opportunity to compare and contrast the *experience of living* in Japan with their other cultural experiences, to have hands-on experience grappling with topics especially relevant to contemporary Japanese society, and to connect past lessons learned to new challenges. What global solutions are there to Japan's challenges? Minerva students are well situated to think about this.

Unit 1 covers essential basics about Japan's geography and culture to frame the semester, including immersive experiences around mediation, food, and film.

Next, in Unit 2, students engage directly with the urban fabric of Tokyo. Students explore the question "How can Tokyo's urban landscape tell stories of its cultural tensions, historical transformations, and contemporary issues?" by designing a walking tour (with input from the Faculty in Residence and Student Life Team) that illustrates and explores a theme related to Tokyo and Japanese cultural life. Students end the unit by submitting their walking tour.

Then, in Units 3 and 4, students expand on their work from Unit 2 and go beyond the themes within Tokyo's landscape to engage directly with significant issues confronting Japanese society today. In groups of 4, students will have a choice of the selected issues and locations presented in the table below:

| Issues   | Research Location to visit          |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Population Decline</li> </ul>   | Wakayama (Tanabe)<br>Hyōgo (Himeji) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Food: Balancing Culinary Heritage, Globalization, and Sustainability</li> </ul> | Wakayama (Tanabe)                   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Natural Disasters, Energy, &amp; the Grid</li> </ul>                            | Iwate (Kamaishi)                    |

*Note that the issues and locations above are dependent upon planning and coordination between the student life team, faculty in residence, and city partners. There will be 2-4 issues running per semester.*

Student groups will work together to investigate a problem to solve, identify sub-issues to address, and review data/previous research. With the faculty-in-residence, student life teams, and civic partners, students will visit the locations to conduct interviews and gain site-specific knowledge. The groups present to other teams within their section.

The culmination of the course is a full-cohort Presentation Competition in the final week of the semester, featuring the top presentation from each section. A panel of external experts, professor-in-residence, and student life experts crowns one winner.

## Summary of Faculty in Residence Application (Tokyo)

- Act as a liaison with the student life ground team and project manager for the on-the-ground, immersive components of the mandatory Japanese History and Culture course that all students will take
- Teach approximately 5 sections of the hybrid, 2 credit Japanese History and Culture course in Fall and/or then a 1 credit Civic Project course in Spring.

## Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

- #participation: Students will participate in an active learning environment
- #reflectionincontext: Students will reflect on their learning experiences and be able to express what they have learned in the context of their own cultural experiences
- #irlengagement: Students will engage with at least one real world problem
- #culturalawarenessIRL: Students will compare and contrast their experiences with those of their classmates and the citizens of Japan
- #communicationincontext: Students will practice effective communication skills within a Japanese context
- #locationspecificengagement: Students will demonstrate strong knowledge of the city of Tokyo as well as at least one other Japanese locale
- #selfawarenessIRL: Students demonstrate autonomy and self awareness by participating in projects and cultural experiences connected to their academic and personal interests
- #buildingskills: Students will build on the knowledge and skills they developed in their first-year courses

## Prerequisites & Working Knowledge

Cornerstone courses on Empirical Analysis, Multimodal Communication, Formal Analysis, and Complex Systems.

The course assumes that basic etiquette guidance will come from the Student Life Team at Semester Orientation (on, for example, bowing, shoe etiquette, train manners, and others).

## Assignment Overview

### 1. [Tokyo Walking tour](#)

Due at the end of Unit 2.

Working in small groups of 2-3, students will create a walking tour that illustrates and explores a theme related to Tokyo and Japanese cultural life. They must visit at least three sites on their tour and connect their commentary to the broader themes of the course. They will submit a critical write-up of their tour.

- **Draft** (with an initial outline, 3-4 stops). Due as homework.
- **Final walking tour project.** A detailed map with 3-6 stops that illustrate and explore a theme related to Tokyo and Japanese cultural life. This itinerary should bring this theme to life via a set of carefully chosen places or experiences throughout the city.

### 2. [Selected Issues presentation](#)

Due at the beginning of Unit 4 (week 13).

Working in groups of 4, students will research, create, and give a presentation that proposes a solution or a novel way towards a solution for a problem or issue currently faced by Japanese society (the subject of Unit 3). Each class section will choose a winner to represent them at a full-cohort Presentation Competition at the end of the semester.

- **Selected Issues presentation draft.** Due as homework in Week 11.
- **Selected Issues final presentation.** Semifinal Presentations in class during week 13.
- **Attendance at the Symposium (Final Presentation Competition)** in week 14 (attendance validated via the Reflection Assignment).

### 3. [Reflection assignment](#)

Due during week 15 (Finals week).

A short reflection on the preceding semester and on the presentation competition.

Members of groups that present in the competition automatically receive all 4s.

Members of the winning group automatically receive all 5s.

## Course Score Calculation

|   |      |
|---|------|
| Class Engagement (pre/post-class work, participation) | 40 % |
| Assignment 1 (walking tour)                           | 20 % |
| Assignment 2 (presentation on Selected Issue)         | 30 % |
| Assignment 3 (reflection on Presentation Competition) | 10 % |

# Schedule of Topics and Preliminary Readings

*Note: readings and other resources are preliminary and subject to change.*

## Pre-semester preparatory work

Students are expected to prepare by reading or watching the following required resources before beginning the semester:

- Nancy K. Stalker, Chapter 1 “Early Japan” in *Japan : History and Culture From Classical to Cool* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), pp. 1-27.  
<https://openurl.ebsco.com/contentitem/nlebk:1838711?sid=ebsco:plink:crawler&id=ebsco:nlebk:1838711&crl=c>.
- Hiromu Nagahara, Video #2 “Map of Edo, 1680s,” *Visualizing the Birth of Modern Tokyo*, MIT Visualizing Cultures, accessed July 23, 2025,  
<https://openlearninglibrary.mit.edu/courses/course-v1:MITx+VTx+1T2019/courseware/3e595c71b7144bcfb3216d4f4e3d7a69/03339652cf4c4e0a88873c5873d96aab/?child=first>.

## Unit 1: Foundations

This unit introduces students to Japanese culture and society through exploring content focused on history, geography, worldviews, and food. Since the locations for Unit 3 are dispersed across Japan, it is important to understand the intersections of geography and worldview. The final week explores culture through the lens of food as it relates to sustainability and leads into the next unit.

- Session 1: Mapping place and time  
*Class held on zoom*
  - **Big picture:** Geography and history.
  - **Activities:** Establish expectations for self and others. Explore the design and objectives for the semester together. Explore the historical, social, geographical factors shaping Japan.
  - **Resources:**
    - John W. Dower, “Chapter One, ‘Introduction,’” in *Black Ships & Samurai*, MIT Visualizing Cultures (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2008),  
[https://visualizingcultures.mit.edu/black\\_ships\\_and\\_samurai/bss\\_essay02.html](https://visualizingcultures.mit.edu/black_ships_and_samurai/bss_essay02.html).
    - Jennifer Robertson, “It Takes a Village: Internationalization and Nostalgia in Postwar Japan,” in *Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions of Modern Japan*, ed. Stephen Vlastos, Twentieth-Century Japan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 110–31. Focus on sections from the beginning up to “The Landscape of Nostalgia,”

pp.110-119, and “Concluding Remarks: Rupture and Recuperation” pp. 127-31. (Skim the sections “The Landscape of Nostalgia,” Internationalization As ‘Inter Nation’ Making,” and “Gender and Nostalgia”). Available on EBSCO:

<https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=dcc16895-022f-3cb4-86c1-6b19a6104891>

- REVIEW: Nancy K. Stalker, Chapter 1 “Early Japan” in *Japan : History and Culture From Classical to Cool* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), pp. 1-27.  
<https://openurl.ebsco.com/contentitem/nlebk:1838711?sid=ebsco:plink:crawler&id=ebsco:nlebk:1838711&crl=c>.
- REVIEW: Hiromu Nagahara, Video #2 “Map of Edo, 1680s,” *Visualizing the Birth of Modern Tokyo*, MIT Visualizing Cultures, accessed July 23, 2025,  
<https://openlearninglibrary.mit.edu/courses/course-v1:MITx+VTx+1T2019/courseware/3e595c71b7144bcfb3216d4f4e3d7a69/03339652cf4c4e0a88873c5873d96aab/?child=first>.

○ Additional optional readings:

- “Meiji Restoration & Birth of Tokyo,” Tab #2, 2 videos (“What was the Meiji Restoration?” and “Images of the Emperor”) in *Visualizing the Birth of Modern Tokyo*, MIT Visualizing Cultures, accessed July 24, 2025,  
<https://openlearninglibrary.mit.edu/courses/course-v1:MITx+VTx+1T2019/courseware/58648b6ed86147ca839718c966654a25/843203e4602c4958813235fbf46a852d/?child=first>.
- ~~Harumi Befu, “Concepts of Japan, Japanese Culture and the Japanese.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Japanese Culture*, edited by Yoshio Sugimoto, 21–37. Cambridge Companions to Culture. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.~~
- Eika Tai, “Rethinking Culture, National Culture, and Japanese Culture.” *Japanese Language and Literature* 37, no. 1 (2003): 1–26.

● Session 2: Value orientations: Philosophy and worldviews

*Class in person.*

- **Big picture:** Introduction to zen and spiritual practice, as a gateway into Japanese mindset.
- **Activities:** A hands-on *shodo* interactive demonstration, preceded by a mindful walk through the Japanese Garden at Prince Hotel.
- **Readings:**
  - Shunryu Suzuki, “Prologue” and “Part I: Right Practice,” in *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind: Informal Talks on Zen Meditation and Practice*, ed. Trudy Dixon, 50th Anniversary Edition (Boulder, Colorado: Shambhala, 2020), pp.22-50.  
<https://archive.org/details/zenmindbeginners0000suzu>

- Nancy K. Stalker, “Religious Foundations: Buddhism and the Early Japanese State,” in *Japan : History and Culture From Classical to Cool* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 23–26,  
<https://openurl.ebsco.com/contentitem/nlebk:1838711?sid=ebsco:plink:crawler&id=ebsco:nlebk:1838711&crl=c>.
- REVIEW: Nancy K. Stalker, “Religion in Medieval Japan,” in *Japan : History and Culture From Classical to Cool* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 87–93,  
<https://openurl.ebsco.com/contentitem/nlebk:1838711?sid=ebsco:plink:crawler&id=ebsco:nlebk:1838711&crl=c>;
- Gohitsu Shodo, “What Is Shodō?,” *Gohitsu Shodo Studio* (blog), February 2020, <https://www.gohitsushodostudio.com/what-is-shodo/>.
- Gohitsu Shodo, “Shodo Is Zen. Zen Is Shodo,” *Gohitsu Shodo Studio* (blog), February 2018,  
<https://www.gohitsushodostudio.com/shodo-is-zen/>.
- **Additional optional readings:**
  - Markus Nornes, section “Shodo: The Way of Japanese Calligraphers” pp.24–28 in *Brushed in Light: Calligraphy in East Asian Cinema* (University of Michigan Press, 2021), 24–28,  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3998/mpub.11373292.5>.
  - For more on the history of religion(s) in Japan: Nancy K. Stalker, “Meiji Religion,” 238–242, and “Tokugawa Religious Culture,” 166–172, in *Japan : History and Culture From Classical to Cool* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018),  
<https://openurl.ebsco.com/contentitem/nlebk:1838711?sid=ebsco:plink:crawler&id=ebsco:nlebk:1838711&crl=c>;
  - Jirō Taniguchi, “Around Town” and “Tree Climbing” (excerpts) in *The Walking Man*. Tarragona : Fanfare/Ponent Mon, 2014.  
<http://archive.org/details/walkingman0000tani>.
  - John C. Maraldo, “Nishida Kitarō.” In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, Spring 2024. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2024.  
<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2024/entries/nishida-kitaro/>
- **Session 3: Food: Culinary heritage and gastrodiploamacy**  
*Class in-person: film screenings, followed by food tastings and discussion.*
  - **Big picture:** Food (and film) as key elements of culture and society. Set up questions of diplomacy and sustainability. Includes an introduction to the vibrant history of Japanese film.
  - **Activity:** Group analysis of films and foods: what are the values proposed by the films. Discuss the history of these food types, and their role in contemporary food culture. Place those foods on images/maps of districts in Tokyo. Explore the concept of *washoku*, gastrodiploamacy, and how it connects



to the films. Initiate discussions around food self-sufficiency, Japan's reliance on imports, and questions around sustainability.

○ **Readings (all students):**

- ~~Naomichi Ishige, "Food Culture." In *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Japanese Culture*, edited by Yoshio Sugimoto, 300–316. Cambridge Companions to Culture. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.~~
  - Ishige is the writer of *The History and Culture of Japanese Food* (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge, 2014), the pre-eminent text in English on this topic.
- Felice Farina, "The Politics of *Washoku*: Japan's Gastronationalism and Gastrodiplomacy." In *Food Issues 食事: Interdisciplinary Studies on Food in Modern and Contemporary East Asia*, edited by Miriam Castorina and Diego Cucinelli, 1st ed., 233:93–107. Studi e Saggi. Florence: Firenze University Press, 2021.
- Optional: Scott Haas, "The Price of Harmony: The Ideology of Japanese Cuisine," *Gastronomica* 17, no. 2 (2017): 1–4, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26362434>.

○ **Films:** Students are divided into groups to watch films based on a particular Japanese food: sushi, ramen, bento, tofu, dorayaki. Films:

- *Tamponopo* (ramen).
  - Reading: Barak Kushner. *Slurp! A Social and Culinary History of Ramen - Japan's Favorite Noodle Soup*. Leiden: Brill, 2012. <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=0c8f5d28-a4d-3f7e-b2f6-d9be5caa23a4>
- *Jiro Dreams of Sushi* (sushi).
  - Reading: Theodore C. Bestor, "Supply-Side Sushi: Commodity, Market, and the Global City," *American Anthropologist* 103, no. 1 (2001): 76–95, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/683923>.
- *Sweet Bean* (sweet red bean/ dorayaki)
- *Akanazora: Beyond the Crimson Sky* (tofu).
  - Reading: Judith Thurman, "Night Kitchens," *New Yorker* 81, no. 26 (2005): 66–74, <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=a6c1df8b-ba4-3c05-b889-a52424fb711d>.
- パパのお弁当は世界 — *Papa No Obentō Wa Sekai Ichi* — *Dad's Lunch Box* (bento).
  - Reading: Beatrice-Maria Alexandrescu, "Cooking and Eating as Linguistic Experiences: Metamorphoses in the Japanese Familial Culinary Universe Reflected in the Movie パパのお弁当は世界 — Papa No Obentō Wa Sekai Ichi — Dad's Lunch Box," *East West Cultural Passage*, ahead of print, January 1, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.2478/EWCP-2021-0006>.



## Unit 2: Tokyo Immersion and Exploration

This unit focuses on Tokyo as a city of many narratives and asks the question “How can Tokyo’s urban landscape tell stories of its cultural tensions, historical transformations, and contemporary issues?” How do these stories contribute to a nuanced analysis of, and proposed solution to, a current, connected issue at play in Japan?

This unit is structured around creating a walking tour of Tokyo that illuminates a key theme or tension in Japanese culture. Working in pairs and guided by City Experiences crafted by the Minerva University Student Life Team, students explore the city and its rich history. Student groups may choose a theme that appeals to them; these themes intersect with the Selected Issues in Unit 3.

- Session 4: Mobility in Tokyo’s urban landscape: Values of the urban environment  
*Class held on zoom or in person*
  - **Big picture:** Introduction to Tokyo. Investigate Tokyo via the tension between urban development and mobility (i.e., transit).
  - **Objective:** Introduce students to Tokyo’s complex identity: there is no single Tokyo—one must read it like a puzzle. Investigate how Tokyo’s dense urban environment is the result of historical accretion and how people move through the city. Introduce walking tour assignment.
  - **Readings:**
    - Jorge Almazán and Studiolar, “Chapter 1: Introduction: Why Tokyo?,” in *Emergent Tokyo: Designing the Spontaneous City* (Novato, California: ORO Editions, 2022), 1-17, 162–93. In depth preview: [https://issuu.com/oro\\_editions/docs/emergent\\_tokyo\\_look?fr=sYjkzNzQ5NzMlMTQ](https://issuu.com/oro_editions/docs/emergent_tokyo_look?fr=sYjkzNzQ5NzMlMTQ)
    - **CHOOSE ONE:**
      - Jorge Almazán and Studiolar, “Chapter 4: Undertrack Infills,” in *Emergent Tokyo: Designing the Spontaneous City* (Novato, California: ORO Editions, 2022), 98–129.
      - OR**
      - “Chapter 5: Ankyo Streets,” in *Emergent Tokyo: Designing the Spontaneous City* (Novato, California: ORO Editions, 2022), 130–61.
    - Hotta Junji, “The Chūō Line: Gateway to Tokyo’s Distinctive Subcultures.” nippon.com, October 16, 2023. <https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-topics/g02318/>
    - Robert A. Karl, “How to Make a Walking Tour in Story Map.” 2022. [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jtbPrAIWrF9BIAkFf\\_QVurQUJz08GN\\_OV/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jtbPrAIWrF9BIAkFf_QVurQUJz08GN_OV/view)
    - Optional: Klara Eriksson, host. “Destruction, Construction, and Reconstruction of the German Identity.” AH162 Location-Based-Assignment, Berlin, December 2018.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/15SLyAkXB0YBvdLsc9KYteMbNa8BgsVQx/view>

- Session 5: Tokyo's rebirths (memory, trauma, and Tokyo's resilience)  
*Asynchronous, self-directed scavenger hunt.*
  - **Big picture:** Examine Tokyo's role as a city of memory, from trauma (e.g., 1923 earthquake, firebombing of 1945) to the city's rebuilding and globalization.
  - **Activity:** Scavenger hunt: In pairs, students seek out sites tied to Tokyo's collective memory (including but not exclusively post-WWII), such as Hiroshima-Nagasaki monuments or post-disaster areas. Explore, on foot, how Tokyo has processed trauma and natural disasters (multiple fires, 1923 earthquake, 1945 firebombing, the 2011 earthquake). Including landmarks such as the Tokyo Tower and the 1964 Tokyo Olympics infrastructure.
  - **Readings:**
    - Carola Hein, "Resilient Tokyo: Disaster and Transformation in the Japanese City," in *The Resilient City: How Modern Cities Recover from Disaster*, ed. Lawrence J Vale and Thomas J Campanella (Oxford University Press, 2005), 0,  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195175844.003.0016>.
    - Additional optional reading: Sundus Al-Bayati, "The City Designs Itself: Tokyo in the Post-War Years." Blog. Society of Architectural Historians Blog, April 4, 2023.  
<https://www.sah.org/publications/sah-blog/blog-detail/sah-blog/2023/04/04/the-city-designs-itself-tokyo-in-the-post-war-years>.
- Assignment 1 (Walking Tour) due.

## Unit 3: Selected Issues in Contemporary Japanese Society

Building off the thematic investigations in Tokyo, students expand their view to a significant problem or issue confronting contemporary Japanese society outside of the capital, focusing on proposing a solution. The structure of Units 3 and 4 is based around a loose design methodology framework: Discovery, Ideate, Design, Iterate, Present.

Solutions to these Selected Issues require truly interdisciplinary approaches, which means that input from students across all colleges (Arts & Humanities, Business, Computational Sciences, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences) will be equally valuable. At the end of this unit, student groups present their proposed solutions to their section. Each section then nominates one group to represent them at a full-cohort Presentation Competition, at which one winner is selected by a panel of judges drawn from professors and Student Life Team Members. (It would be ideal to include stakeholders from Civic Partners, but this is not required.)

In this unit, students will sort themselves into groups of ~4. All groups in a section have the same Selected Issue, though different sections might have different Selected Issues. Students will be provided with annotated bibliographies (“Quick-Start Guides”) on the topics, though they may need assistance accessing the resources if they aren’t in our Minerva University Library. Each section travels to a city outside Tokyo, with the goal of researching their topic on the ground, forging real-world connections and gaining insights from experts in the field.

Due to scheduling around partners’ calendars, the events and meetings during this unit fall on different days for the different sections.

The full list of potential topics (see the [Appendix of Resources on Selected Issues](#) for detailed guidance on topics and locations) is:

- [Population Decline and Aging Society](#)
  - [Natural Disasters, Energy, & the Grid](#)
  - [Food: Balancing Culinary Heritage, Globalization, and Sustainability](#)
- 
- Session 6: Pre-Study #1: Empathize- Understand and Research  
October 17, Friday: Natural Disaster Response Pre-study #1, Empathize- Understand and Research  
*In person.*
    - **Big Picture:** All students in the Natural Disaster Response sections traveling to Kamaishi review human-centered design methodology and participate in a multi-hour workshop focused on Iwate and the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake and Tsunami. The workshop will include interactive sessions where students are able to test NTT's developing technologies. Led by NTT partners.
    - **Goals:** Understand the problem to solve and begin to select a smaller problem or sub-issue to address. Understand and research the prefecture (and city, if appropriate).
    - **Readings:**
      - “Quick Start Guide: Natural Disaster Response”
      - Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford. (2010). Bootcamp bootleg.  
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57c6b79629687fde090a0fdd/t/58890239db29d6cc6c3338f7/1485374014340/METHODCARDS-v3-slim.pdf>
        - The premiere resource on human-centered design, and design thinking methodology, produced by the Design School at Stanford.
      - Koichiro Agata et al., eds., *Public Administration in Japan*, 1st ed, Governance and Public Management Series (Springer International Publishing AG, 2024),  
<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-58610-1>.

October 24, Friday: Population Decline Pre-study #1 (Himeji and Tanabe),  
Empathize- Understand and Research

*In person.*

- **Big Picture:** All students in the Population Decline sections, traveling to Tanabe and Himeji, participate in a multi-hour workshop on the topic and review of human-centered design methodology. This workshop introduces both the topic of Population Decline and important contexts around the two cities (Tanabe and Himeji) to which they will travel. Framing Session to provide an introduction to demographic trends in Japan and Hyōgo Prefecture.
- **Readings:**
  - All students:
    - “Quick Start Guide: Population Decline”
    - Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford. (2010).  
Bootcamp bootleg.  
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57c6b79629687fde090a0fdd/t/58890239db29d6cc6c3338f7/1485374014340/METHODC-ARDS-v3-slim.pdf>
      - The premiere resource on human-centered design, and design thinking methodology, produced by the Design School at Stanford.
    - Koichiro Agata et al., eds., *Public Administration in Japan*, 1st ed, Governance and Public Management Series (Springer International Publishing AG, 2024),  
<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-58610-1>.

- October 30, Thursday: Food: Balancing Heritage, Globalization, and Sustainability Pre-study #1 (Tanabe), Empathize- Understand and Research  
*In person.*

**Big Picture:** All students in the Food: Balancing Heritage, Globalization, and Sustainability section, traveling to Tanabe, participate in a multi-hour workshop on the topic and review of human-centered design methodology. This workshop introduces both the topic of Food: Balancing Heritage, Globalization, and Sustainability and important contexts around Tanabe, to which they will travel.

- **Readings:**
  - “Quick Start Guide: Population Decline”
  - Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford. (2010).  
Bootcamp bootleg.  
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57c6b79629687fde090a0fdd/t/58890239db29d6cc6c3338f7/1485374014340/METHODC-ARDS-v3-slim.pdf>

- The premiere resource on human-centered design, and design thinking methodology, produced by the Design School at Stanford.
- Koichiro Agata et al., eds., *Public Administration in Japan*, 1st ed, Governance and Public Management Series (Springer International Publishing AG, 2024),  
<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-58610-1>.
- Session 7: October 31, Friday:  
**All students:** Required Culture Exchange (TMG High school) and Zen University Zushi Beach Clean-up, Education Ministry, Tokyo Government
- Session 8: Pre-Study #2: Define- Understand, Research, and Ideate
  - October 27, Monday: Natural Disaster Response Pre-study #2 (Kamaishi), Define- Understand, Research, and Ideate  
*In person.*  
**Big Picture:** Additional context and background for students traveling to Kamaishi. Continued use of design thinking methodology to workshop groups' research topics and sub-problems.
    - Required for all students in the Natural Disaster Response sections. Special guest academic lecturer focusing on the history of 3/11.
    - **Readings:**
      - William J. Siembieda and Haruo Hayashi, "Chapter 6: Japan's Megadisaster Challenges: Crisis Management in the Modern Era," in *Japan : The Precarious Future*, by Frank Baldwin and Anne Allison, Possible Futures Series (New York: NYU Press, 2015), 139–166,  
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1020837&site=ehost-live>.
      - Hiroaki Inatsugu, "The Great East Japan Earthquake and the Fukushima Nuclear Accident," in *Public Administration in Japan*, ed. Koichiro Agata, Hiroaki Inatsugu, and Hideaki Shiroyama, 1st ed, Governance and Public Management Series (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2024), 351–368,  
<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-58610-1>;
      - Masakatsu Okamoto, "Crisis Management," in *Public Administration in Japan*, ed. Koichiro Agata, Hiroaki Inatsugu, and Hideaki Shiroyama, 1st ed, Governance and Public Management Series (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2024), 333–350,  
<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-58610-1>.

- November 3, Monday: Population Decline Pre-study #2 (Tanabe & Himeji), Define- Understand, Research, and Ideate
  - **Big Picture:** Review data/previous research. Interview experts, Introduce to Government issue and partners
  - **Guest Speaker:** Representatives from Himeji City Hall or regional experts will provide insights into the ongoing challenges of population decline, examining its far-reaching implications for Japan's economy, society, and long-term national vitality.
  - **Readings:**
    - Inagawa Hidekazu, "Introduction," in *Japan's Population Implosion*, ed. Yoichi Funabashi (Singapore: Springer, 2018), 1–26,  
<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1651446>.
    - Frank Baldwin and Anne Allison, "Introduction: Japan's Possible Futures," in *Japan: The Precarious Future*, ed. Frank Baldwin and Anne Allison (NYU Press, 2015), 1–10,  
<https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=2b06b987-2f4e-3b5e-934b-9933de6c5987>.
    - Sawako Shirahase, "Chapter 1: Demography as Destiny: Falling Birthrates and the Allure of a Blended Society," in *Japan: The Precarious Future*, ed. Frank Baldwin and Anne Allison (NYU Press, 2015), 11–35,  
<https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=2b06b987-2f4e-3b5e-934b-9933de6c5987>.
- November 6, Thursday: Food: Balancing Heritage, Globalization, and Sustainability Pre-study #2 (Tanabe), Define- Understand, Research, and Ideate
  - **Big Picture:** Review data/previous research. Interview experts, Introduce to Government issue and partners. Ideally this would involve visiting locations in Japan connected to these specific issues to gain site specific knowledge.
  - **Readings:**
    - Tine Walravens and Andreas Niehaus, eds. *Feeding Japan: The Cultural and Political Issues of Dependency and Risk*, 2017,  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-50553-4>.
    - Naomichi Ishige, *The History and Culture of Japanese Food* (Routledge, 2014),  
<https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=d1d8737b-cl43-3e6c-9968-dca9ac9bc5a6>.
- Session 9: EXCURSION
  - November 7-10, Friday-Monday: Excursions to Kamaishi and Himeji  
Kamaishi: Natural Disaster Response (2 sections)



### Himeji: Population Decline (1 section)

#### Example itinerary for Population Decline in Himeji (not finalized):

- Day 1 – Orientation & Urban Context
  - Afternoon: Everyone meets in the residence hall courtyard at 11:50 and departs for the Train Station at 12:15. Arrive at Himeji City at 17:00. Guided walking tour of Himeji Castle area and nearby Shōtengai (shopping arcades) to observe how tourism sustains parts of the city while other areas struggle with shuttered shops.
- Day 2 – Intergenerational Perspectives
  - Morning: Guided walking tour of Himeji Castle area and nearby Shōtengai to observe how tourism sustains parts of the city while other areas struggle with shuttered shops. Compare Shōtengai near Himeji Castle to more suburban areas of Himeji
    - Reflection discussion: “What does vitality look like in a shrinking city?”
  - Afternoon: Cultural exchange with local students. Small-group dialogues about career aspirations, plans for the future, and whether students plan to remain in Himeji or move to larger cities.
  - Evening: Group reflection: Compare perspectives from students as well as observations of different parts of the city to reflect on the future of Himeji.
- Day 3 – Rural Excursion (Shisō / Tatsuno Area)
  - Morning: Travel to nearby rural towns experiencing sharper population decline. Visit a family farm facing generational transition challenges. Speak with farmers about succession issues and urban migration. –OR– visit to local Akiya home and meet with locals to discuss how population decline has impacted rural communities
  - Afternoon: Meeting at a local town hall in Tatsuno or Shisō. Learn about rural revitalization programs (e.g., subsidies for relocation, creative uses of abandoned homes, akiya policies). Optional visit to a rural temple or shrine where the head priest discusses how fewer parishioners affect community rituals.
  - Evening: Return to Himeji. Reflection session on rural vs. urban contrasts. Create space for students to begin synthesizing which replaces the need for them to attend class during the week.
    - Ask students to prepare a 5-minute presentation that will be given to the City of Himeji the next morning. Workshop: Students develop mini research projects (oral history, photo essay, or short video) synthesizing what they’ve learned.



- Day 4 – Synthesis & Creative Project
  - Morning: Final group presentations: Sharing key insights with peers, faculty, and (optionally) local partners who hosted the group —Students meet with the City Office of Himeji from 8am - 10am and present their experience, reflections, and findings to the City of Himeji.
  - Afternoon: Return on train, students asked to reflect on the question of How can Himeji serve as a microcosm of Japan's demographic challenges? Students are encouraged to work in their working groups to continue planning for their presentations which will take place during Week 13.
- November 14-17, Friday-Monday: Excursion to Tanabe  
Tanabe: Population Decline (1 section)  
Tanabe: Food: Balancing Heritage, Globalization, and Sustainability (1 section)  
See above for sample itinerary (to be tailored to Tanabe).
- Session 10: Prototype- Design solutions (...and iterate ...and iterate)  
*Class on Zoom.*
  - **Big Picture:** Synthesize excursions to Kamaishi, Himeji, and Tanabe. Workshop presentations and continue research, as needed.
- Presentation Draft Assignment due.
- Week 12: no class, Friendsgiving break (fall) / Quinquatria break (spring)

## Unit 4: Synthesis

Groups in each section compete for the glory to represent their section in a competition for the best solution to a sub-problem from their Selected Issue. Each section works together to workshop their semifinalist. All sections come together in person and have a presentation competition. One winner is crowned.

- Session 11: Section presentations and evaluation
  - Each section holds a semifinal competition where groups present to each other. Each group gives their 5-7 minute presentation to the rest of the section. By anonymous voting, they vote/give points to decide which group will represent their section at next week's Final Presentation Competition.
  - In the second half of the lesson, all groups are responsible for assisting and improving their section's semifinalist. Everyone in the section collaborates to workshop (interrogate/ test/ improve) their representative.

- **Assignment Deliverable:** Submit Presentation.
- Session 12: Full cohort Final Presentation Competition
  - All students from all sections convene in person for a Presentation Competition, judged by a panel of Professors, Student Life Team Members, Partners from the excursion cities, and hopefully Nippon Foundation representatives.
  - Presentations may be up to 10 minutes long.
  - A winner is chosen!
  - Assessment could also contain ways for Nippon Foundation and MU to advertise innovation and demonstrate experiential/active learning.
- Finals week (no classes)
  - **Assignment Deliverable:** Submit Reflection assignment.

## Appendix of Resources on Selected Issues

This Appendix combines thoughts on major Selected Issues (What can students learn? What can students research?) with selected resources. Summaries for books are taken from the Read Japan website unless otherwise noted.

Moved to a separate tab [here](#).

## Appendix of Resources on Locations

This Appendix combines thoughts and notes on potential city and prefecture locations, along with how these locations intersect with major Selected Issues (What can students learn? What can students research?).

Moved to a separate tab [here](#).