

Keio University Syllabus and Timetable

AN INTRODUCTION TO JAPANESE HISTORY:
SURVEYING JAPAN'S PRE-MODERN PAST

Subtitle	An Introduction to Japanese Pre-Modern History: Surveying Japan’s Pre-Modern Past (Proto-Historic Japan to Sekigahara)
Lecturer(s)	KURASHIGE, JEFFREY Y.
Credit(s)	2
Academic Year/Semester	2026 Spring
Day/Period	Tue.2
Campus	Mita
Classroom	441
Class Format	Face-to-face classes (conducted mainly in-person)
Registration Number	14035
Faculty/Graduate School	INTERNATIONAL CENTER
Year Level	2, 3, 4
Grade Type	S, A, B, C, D
Course Description	A course to aim to examine the “pre-modern period” of Japan from its origins in the Jomon Period through to the end of the 16th century by focusing upon the emergence of the imperial state, court rulership, and the rise of the warrior class.
K-Number	CIN-CO-00153-212-03

▼ Detail

Course Contents/Objectives/Teaching Method/Intended Learning Outcome

This course will examine the “pre-modern period” of Japan from its origins in the Jomon Period through to the end of the 16th century by focusing upon the emergence of the imperial state, court rulership, and the rise of the warrior class. Though dominated by the rulership, religions, and lifestyles of courtiers and warriors, the course also explores the cultural context within which elites, commoners, and those in between lived and prospered. The approach is thus primarily socio-cultural, aiming to enhance the student’ understanding not only of the Japan of the past, but also of the present. By the end of the course, students will be familiar with the most important aspects of the classical Heian age, the dual (or tripartite) polity of Kamakura, the warrior rule of the Muromachi era, and the subsequent era of civil warfare.

Course Taught by Faculty Member with Professional Experience

Applicable

I previously worked as an investment banker. As the case of LTCM proved, history can be a powerful analytic tool when used correctly (although its misuse also can cause massive problems...).

Active Learning Methods

 [Description](#)

Discussions, Debates
Group work

Preparatory Study

All work will be done in English.

Course Plan

Lesson 1

Introduction and Proto-historic Japan: Jomon and Yayoi Japan

Lesson 2

The "Yamato" Era: Japan’s First “Empire”

Lesson 3

The World of the Shining Prince: Aristocratic Rules and Lifestyles in the Heian Period

Lesson 4

Late Heian Society: The Insei Period

Lesson 5

The Making of the Samurai: The Gempei War

Lesson 6

The First Shogunate: Yoritomo’s Kamakura Bakufu

Lesson 7

Review and Midterm Exam

Lesson 8

"Popular" Religions: New Faiths and New Systems

Lesson 9

The Mongol Invasions and the 14th Century “Divide”

Lesson 10

Zen and the Rise of the Ashikaga

Lesson 11

Life in the Muromachi Age and the Death of Cooperative Rulership

Lesson 12

The Onin War

Lesson 13

New Peripheries: the Creation of “Traditional” Japanese Culture

Lesson 14

Sengoku and the Unification

Other

Student presentations and final test

Method of Evaluation

Mid-term exam: 15% of the course grade

Final exam: 35%

Discussion attendance/participation: 30%

Bi-Weekly SHORT 1 page response papers (225-275 words): 20%

Generative AI Policy for Classes

None allowed.

Textbooks

All reading materials will be provided by the instructor in PDF format.

Reference Books

Reference books will be provided by the instructor in PDF format.

Lecturer's Comments to Students

Note: Class size will be limited to 25 students PER SEMESTER. The class will be “built” around discussion of the required readings, so a limited class size will enable all students to participate. If the number of interested students exceeds the limit, selection will be made according to a lottery.

In order that all interested students will be able to take the course, this class will be repeated in the same form during the Fall semester for those students who are unable to enroll during the Spring.

General Expectations: This course is very demanding, but I believe that it will help push each of the participants to grow both as scholars and as citizens of the international community. Students are expected to be attentive and contribute to in-class discussions, and express their ideas and opinions in a respectful manner. Classroom discussion of the provided reading materials is a central part of the class. Thus, students must be ready to read, write, and express their opinions each week.

Required Resources: Please make sure to have a working email account (not just an account associated with a keitai cell phone). You will also need access at home to a computer with word processing capabilities.

First Session:

-Class Format: In-Person

Question/Comments

Please feel free to contact me by email (kurashig[at]fbc.keio.ac.jp), but also do not hesitate to approach me before or after class. If I am in my office and the light is on, please feel free to knock as I am always happy to speak with students if time is available.

