

Environmental Politics in Japan

Fall 2026

Tuesday/Thursday

Student Hours:

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Overview

This course uses environmental politics as a window to understand the Japanese political system and Japan's political culture. After a brief overview of the Japanese political system and the history of environmental politics in Japan, and a midterm to ensure that our foundational knowledge is sound, the bulk of the course will focus on different contemporary environmental issues and examine how Japan, and Kyoto in particular, is addressing them.

A key theme throughout the course will be the connection between local and global environmental effects and efforts—environmental politics may be the ultimate example of “think global, act local.” In Japan, the link between local behavior global environmental politics is especially evident.

Our in-class discussions will be supplemented with several outings near campus, a Friday Field Trip, and a participant observation of an environment-related activity in order to get a better understanding of how environmental issues are playing out on the ground in Kyoto and meet some of the people and organizations working locally on these issues.

Additionally, each student will complete an independent research project related to environmental politics in Japan. This will enable students to gain specialized knowledge about a particular topic of interest and develop independent research skills. At the end of the semester each student will have produced and presented a short pechakucha video about the project and a 5-page detailed outline detailing: (a) your main research question, (b) related scholarly literature, (c) evidence (with sources) to address your research question, and (d) your main findings.

Learning Objectives

- Understand the how government and politics works in Japan
- Greater knowledge about a range of contemporary environmental issues
- Develop a comparative perspective when analyzing politics around the world.
- Improve academic research and writing skills
- Improve oral and visual presentation skills
- Greater sense of empowerment to become positively involved in your local community

Assignments and Grading

There are six components of your final grade: in-class participation, Perusall, an in-class midterm exam, a participant observation, and a video presentation and annotated outline on your research project.

Class Participation	10%
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<p>Classes like this one rely on quality participation by their members in order to be successful. Students are expected to come to class prepared and engage productively with the material and with their peers during class meetings.</p> <p>What makes a good class discussion?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Outcome: Did we come to a good understanding of the topic(s) addressed in class? Did we come to a good understanding of how we as a class think about the topic(s)? ● Process: Were different views taken seriously? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Be critical of ideas/policies, not countries or groups of people (e.g., OK to criticize some aspect of the Xi government, not OK to criticize “China” or “the Chinese”) ○ Commit to learning, not to being right ● Inclusion: Were all voices represented? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Allow everyone a chance to speak ○ Listen respectfully and actively ● Action: Did we make connections to course materials and previous discussions? ● Enjoyment: Did you feel comfortable, heard, and intellectually challenged from the discussion? <p>→ In order to promote high quality discussions and improve engagement, electronic devices of all kinds will generally be prohibited during class.</p>	
<p>Perusall Readings</p> <p>Students are expected to engage intellectually with the readings prior to coming to class. The quantity and quality of that engagement will be graded by Perusall. To gain a maximum score for an assignment, you will need to make at least three high-quality comments spread throughout the reading.</p> <p>Please note that each reading’s Perusall score accounts for less than 0.5% of your grade, so don’t worry if you get low scores for a few readings. If you find that you are persistently getting low Perusall scores even though you do the reading and make high-quality comments, please see me to see if we can figure out what is going on.</p>	15%
<p>Midterm exam</p> <p>The midterm exam will cover the broad conceptual material in the first half of the course. It will be an in-person exam given during class. You will need some kind of laptop/tablet to take the exam</p>	25%
<p>Participant Observation Assignment</p> <p>Each student will conduct a participant observation of an environmental activity in Kyoto. The activities must be part of a public, organized, environment related event (e.g., public hearing at city hall, Junkan Festival,</p>	10%

<p>community clean-up, etc. A “forest bathing” walk organized by a local environmental organization would work. A hike with friends would not).</p> <p>Prior to the activity, the student must submit a one-page plan for their observation including how it relates to class material. After the activity the student must submit a 2-3 page response paper about the observation.</p>	
<p>Final Project</p> <p>The final research project is an opportunity for students to engage more deeply on a topic of their choice related to the class. The final deliverables will be (a) pechakucha video presentation and (b) a outline detailing the main research findings and sources.</p> <p>Prior to turning in the final outline, you will hand in a research question and a preliminary outline that will include a few academic sources and a research design. The goal of the assignments is to have you conduct all the research necessary to produce a 20-page independent research paper but not actually write the paper. Towards the end of the semester, you will present your research in a short video. The projects will be grouped by theme, and students will answer questions related to their research. Finally, at the end of the semester, we will experiment to see how well AI models can take the research outlines that you generate and turn them into useful prose.</p> <p>The final outline will be worth 35% of your final grade, and the video presentation 5%.</p>	40%

Assignments

All readings are in Perusall, and all assignments will be submitted through the **Class Moodle**.

While the exact time commitment for the class will vary individually and over the course of the semester, I recommend that you budget 1-2 out-of-class hours for every class hour to complete the reading, assignments, and project research. If you are spending more time than this on a regular basis, I encourage you to check in with me to see if I can help you be more efficient in completing assignments.

Grading

All grades in this class will be calculated on a 10-point scale (10 = A, 9 = A-, 8 = B+, 7 = B, etc.). All other grades will be listed as a comment on the assignment itself when I give feedback in the Moodle. Please ignore any letter grade that Moodle might generate.

Grade complaints will not be entertained until 24 hours after the assignment is returned to you or more than two weeks after the exam/assignment has been returned. If you have a question concerning the grade you have received:

- 1) Wait 24 hours.
- 2) Write out an explanation of your question, including the reasons why you think your grade should be changed.
- 3) Submit your written complaint/question to me and make an appointment to meet either during my office hours or at some other time.

AI Policy

Generative AI tools (e.g., Grammarly, ChatGPT, Claude, etc.) can be a powerful way to enhance learning. However, they can also be used as a shortcut that ultimately diminishes intellectual development while enhancing the strength and capacity of the AI tool. The goal of these policies is to enable positive-use, discourage negative-use, and promote fairness.

General principles:

1. With the exception of Perusall, the use of AI tools is neither required nor expected for any student on any assignment in the course. All use of AI tools is entirely voluntary.
2. Any and all use of AI tools for an assignment should be acknowledged and explained at the end of any assignment.

Prohibited AI Use:

1. Use of AI to generate original language for large sections of a paper/assignment.
2. Asking AI to summarize readings for class
3. Asking AI to generate comments for Perusall
4. Making any audio recordings of class (and any AI use of those recordings)
5. Use of AI tools during the in-class midterm exam

AI use that is permitted (caution recommended):

1. Use of AI tools to organize class notes taken by the student (recording class is NOT permitted)
2. Use of AI tools to generate suggestions of sources to read (as part of the research process)
3. Use of AI tools as a thought partner for midterm preparation (e.g., asking it to generate practice midterm questions)
4. Use of AI as a thought partner in writing. For example: Uploading notes to ask for suggestions about organizing ideas. Uploading small (1-3 sentences) sections of a paper and asking for feedback on how to make a point more clearly.

Examples of clear acknowledgement of AI use:

- ChatGPT was used as a thought partner to refine the research question
- ChatGPT was used as a thought partner to explore research design ideas
- Gemini was used to assist in the organization of the sections of the paper
- ChatGPT was used to find sources
- Grammarly was used to check the grammar and spelling in the paper
- ChatGPT was used to refine the language on p.3 about how I used the term “path dependence”

Examples of incomplete acknowledgement of AI use:

- ChatGPT was used in writing this paper
- ChatGPT was used to smooth the language of the paper
- Gemini was used to make writing clearer

Accommodations

We will be going on several outings in this class, usually on foot or using public transportation. If you have any physical limitations, please let me know as soon as possible so I can ensure that all members of the class can access all planned outings. Additionally, if you have a documented disability and need other accommodations related to activities in this class (e.g., more time for the midterm, etc.), please let me know right away, so we can ensure that you have appropriate access to all course materials and modes of learning.

I hope that you will look to me as a resource. I **highly encourage** you to take advantage of my office hours to stop by and talk about issues raised in the course, or other questions you have. I am very open to feedback about the course and would appreciate you sharing any thoughts you might have for improvement *earlier* rather than later in the semester. I am very excited about this course, and I hope that we can all have an interesting and productive semester!

I reserve the right to change this syllabus without notice.

Reading Schedule

Part I: Foundations and Approaches to Environmental Politics	
Week 1	Introduction —Why study Japan’s environmental politics?
	<p>Brief History of Environmental Politics in Japan—setting the context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mary Alice Haddad, <i>Environmental Politics in East Asia</i> (2023) pp. 1-28 • Takashi Kanatsu, “Local Activism and Environmental Innovation in Japan” in <i>NIMBY is Beautiful</i> (2015) pp. 161-178.
Week 2	<p>Environmental Politics in Japan Today – Local, National, Regional, Global</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mary Alice Haddad, “Environmental Activism in Japan After 3.11” in Simon Avenell and Akihiro Ogawa, <i>Handbook of Civil Society in Japan</i>, Amsterdam University Press, 2025, pp. 202-215. • Richard Katz “The Political Economy Driving Change in Japan’s Climate Change Policies” (currently a draft chapter in an edited volume. Should be published before class is offered)
	<p>Japanese Political System—the Basics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mary Alice Haddad, <i>Building Democracy in Japan</i> (Ch. 3 and 4)
Week 3	<p>Japan’s Developmental State and Contemporary Environmental Policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ziya Öniş, “The Logic of the Developmental State.” <i>Comparative Politics</i> 24:1 (Oct. 1991), 109-126. • Tiberghien, Yves. "Kishida's Climate Policy and Opportunities for US-Japan Cooperation." <i>Asia Policy</i> 18.1 (2023): 49-65. <p>→ Participant Observation Plan Due</p>
	<p>Environmental Policymaking – the Basics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watch Khan Academy’s primer on the policy process • Watch Tragedy of the Commons short • Sinclair, “Self-Regulation versus Command and Control” <i>Law and Policy</i> 1997, pp. 529-559.
Week 4	<p>Environmental Politics: Local vs. National vs. Global</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Busch et al, “Global Diffusion of Regulatory Instruments” • Haddad, “Make it Work Locally” in <i>Effective Advocacy</i> (2021)
	<u>IN CLASS MIDTERM</u>

Part II: Environmental Issues	
Week 5	<p>ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS AND JUSTICE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tu Weiming, “The Continuity of Being: Chinese Visions of Nature” • Asby Brown, <i>Just Enough</i> (2009), preface, forward, conclusion. <p>Movement Workshop! Wear comfortable clothes and prepare to move.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maruyama, Hiroshi. "Ainu landowners’ struggle for justice and the illegitimacy of the Nibutani Dam project in Hokkaido Japan." <i>International Community Law Review</i> 14.1 (2012): 63-80. • Avenell, Simon. “Legal Experts and Environmental Activism in Japan: Fighting for ‘Environmental Rights.’” In Ashley Esarey, Mary Alice Haddad, Joanna I. Lewis, and Stevan Harrell, eds., <i>Greening East Asia: The Rise of the Eco-developmental State</i>, Chapter. 5. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press. <p>→ Final Project Research Question Due</p>
Week 6	<p>POLLUTION& WASTE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Siniawer, “A War Against Garbage in Postwar Japan” <i>Asia Pacific Journal</i> 22:2 (2018). • Basu, Soumya, et al. "Synergies and trade-offs quantification from regional waste policy to sustainable development goals: The case of Kyoto City." <i>Sustainable Development</i> 32.6 (2024): 5966-5986.
	[No class—Friday Field Trip]
Friday Field Trip	Sustaina Kyoto. (Ideally open to all, not just class members)
Week 7	<p>ENERGY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sakamoto, “Local Energy Initiatives in Japan” • Hymans, Jacques EC, and Fumiya Uchikoshi. "To drill or not to drill: determinants of geothermal energy project siting in Japan." <i>Environmental Politics</i> 31.3 (2022): 407-428.
	Participant Observation Sharing Group #1
Week 8	<p>BIODIVERSITY AND CONSERVATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tatsushi, Fujihara, and M. H. M. Tatsushi. "A History of Tree Planting in Modern Japan: Resource Utilization and Environment

	<p>Conservation." <i>Handbook of Environmental History in Japan</i>. Amsterdam University Press, 2023. 233-251.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takeuchi, Yayoi, et al. "The Asia-Pacific Biodiversity Observation Network: 10-year achievements and new strategies to 2030." <i>Ecological Research</i> 36.2 (2021): 232-257.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shimpo, Naomi. "Urban ecological life in a metropolitan area—an insight from Satoyama conservation activities in the Greater Tokyo Area." <i>Landscape and Ecological Engineering</i> 18.1 (2022): 109-119. <p>→ Nature walk (Kamo river bank or Imperial Garden)</p>
Week 9	<p>GREEN BUSINESS and GREEN TECH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mary Alice Haddad, "Make it work for business" <i>Effective Advocacy</i> (2022) ch. 7
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jang Minyoung, Park Sung-Hyun, Lee Myeong-Hun, "Conservation Management of Historical Assets through Community Involvement: A Case Study of Kanazawa Machiya in Japan." <i>Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering</i>. 16:1. 2017. <p>→ Outing to Maana Atelier – tradition + sustainability</p>
Week 10	<p>GREEN CITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Haddad, "Cities and Communities Lead East Asia's Energy Transition" <i>Decarbonizing East Asia</i> (forthcoming) • Miyagawa, Tomoko, Noriko Otsuka, and Hirokazu Abe. "Green space creation and utilization in coordination with policies for healthy cities in Japan." <i>Cities & health</i> 7.5 (2023): 854-874. <p>→ <u>Outline for Final Paper and 5 Sources Due</u></p>
	<p>CLIMATE and RESILIANCE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daniel Aldrich et al, "Seawalls or Social Recovery?" (2021) • Mavrodieva-Shaw (2020)-Disaster and Climate Change Issues in Japan's Society 5.0
Week 11	<p>Japan's Local & Global Environmental Activism Today</p> <p>→ Video-- Michinoku Power</p> <p>Class visit—Koichiro Shigihara?</p>

	JAIF people (https://kyoto.cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp/en/event/20260529/ workshop on the 28 th)
Week 12	Participant Observation Sharing Group 2
	Pechakucha Videos & Research Panels
Week 13	Final Research Project Outlines Due From ideas & facts to research papers: ChatGPT experimentation
	Lessons from Environmental Politics in Japan and Wrapping Up
