History 86B

**Imperial Japan and the United States**

Fall 2008  
Thursdays 2:00–4:00  
CGIS South Room 354

Instructor: Professor Andrew Gordon  
Teaching Fellow: Jeremy Yellen

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Office Hours: Tues. 2-4 PM or by appointment**  
Office Hours: Thurs. 4-6 PM

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**Course Description**

The United States and Japan emerged more or less simultaneously as world powers engaged in imperialist projects at the end of the 19th century. Japan is often characterized as a “late developer” seeking to “catch up” to the West, but in significant ways, the United States was equally a late-developer vis-à-vis Britain and Western Europe.

With this premise in mind, we begin by exploring what might be called the history of “hard power” in the American and Japanese cases—the building of modern nation states which engaged in diplomacy and war, among other activities. We then turn to a hands-on investigation of the exercise of “soft power” through US-Japan cultural interactions. We also pay attention to the local scene, to Japanese and Americans connected in various ways to Harvard, to Boston, to New England and the Northeast, asking how the attitudes, the projects, and the experiences of such individuals exemplified, shaped, or perhaps resisted or questioned this larger history of the emergence of two Pacific empires.

The lives and interactions of a fascinating array of characters from each country, men as well as women, can be studied using rich local stores of English-language primary and archival sources. The first two-thirds of the course center on discussions of various historical studies that address aspects of the geo-political and cultural clash of empires. In addition, after the first few weeks, you will work together with us to define and carry out individual research projects. In your research papers, you will be given the opportunity to address the issues raised in the course through study of a particular event, group or individual drawing on primary materials in English, or Japanese for those able to read the language. The final weeks of the course will be devoted entirely to the preparation of your papers and to reading and commenting on your classmates work.
**REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING**

The course grade will reflect attendance, participation, and the quality of papers students produce. Attendance and participation are crucial not only for the success of the course, but also for the quality of your papers. We expect you to actively participate in each class, as each student can bring something of value to group discussions. You are also required to submit peer reviews of the prospectuses and paper drafts of your fellow students in your peer review group. All deadlines should be met in a timely fashion. The breakdown of the grading scale is:

- Attendance and Participation: 30%
- Peer Review Performance: 10%
- Final Paper Preparation: 20%
- Final Paper: 40%

**REQUIRED BOOKS AVAILABLE IN HARVARD COOP FOR PURCHASE**


**SYLLABUS**

[Books marked * are available for purchase at Harvard Coop.  All other readings are on reserve at Harvard Yenching Library and/or e-reserve]

Week 1 (9/18): Introduction and Course Overview.

Week 2 (9/25): The Clash: A Power Political Overview (I)


Week 3 (10/2): The Clash (II)

  Akira Iriye, *Pacific Estrangement*, Chs. 5-7, 8-9 (pp. 126-68, 202-37).
  Charles Maier, *Among Empires*, chapter on “What is an Empire,” pp. 24-77

Week 4 (10/9): Social Darwinism and Racial Thinking Across the Pacific

Hiroshi Unoura, “Samurai Darwinism: Hiroyuki Katô and the Reception of Darwin’s Theory in Modern Japan from the 1880’s to the 1900’s,” *History and Anthropology* vol. 11 no. 2/3 (June 1999), pp. 235-55. [Available via Academic Search Premier]


Week 5 (10/16): Pacific Crossings


**Assignment:** Schedule a meeting with Jeremy during the week to discuss paper topics. Be prepared to submit in advance a brief statement of two or three possible final paper topics, each with an accompanying bibliography.

Week 6 (10/23): The Russo-Japanese War, and the United States

Bill Clifford, “Boston: Autumn, 1904” (handout in class)
**Assignment:** bring in one article of interest, covering some aspect of the Russo-Japanese war or its aftermath, from *Boston Evening Transcript* or other Boston or New York press.

**Assignment (2):** Schedule a meeting with Professor Gordon during the week to discuss (and finalize) paper topics.

Week 7 (10/30): Local Connections—MFA visit [pending]

Christopher Benfey, *The Great Wave*, epilogue, pp. 265-293.
Selected articles from *Okakura Kakuzo and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* (pp. 162-175).

**Assignment:** Submit by October 31 to the course website a prospectus, tentative outline of the final paper, and a detailed bibliography that includes primary and secondary sources.

Week 8 (11/6): World War I, Woodrow Wilson, and New Visions of World Order

Frederick Dickinson, *War and National Reinvention: Japan in the Great War, 1914-1919* (Harvard University Press, 1999), Chapter 6 (pp. 204-237).


**Assignment:** Read and write a brief, one-page critique of each student’s prospectus in your peer review group. The critique should be submitted to the course website before class on November 6.

Week 9 (11/13): A Bright Future? Consumerism, Gender, and the Roaring Twenties


Week 10 (11/20): Toward Crisis–Immigration Exclusion, the Depression, and Beyond


Week 11 (11/27): No Class—Thanksgiving Recess

Week 12 (12/4): No Class

Students work on their projects while consulting with course instructors.

Week 13 (12/11): Discussion of paper drafts, handed in by **Monday December 8**.

**Discussion will occur in breakout groups that will be set up after course enrollment is finalized, precise schedule to be determined.**

**Assignment:** Write a one-page critique of the draft of each classmate in your peer review group. The critiques will be discussed and submitted in break out groups.

**Reading Period**

Week of January 5: No Class

Individual meetings as needed to discuss and review final paper drafts
Final papers due at end of reading period, Monday, January 12, by 5 PM in Professor Gordon’s office or mailbox. **No late papers or extensions.**