Japan in Today’s World Program, Semester 2, 2014

Enculturation and Education in Japan—Course Syllabus

Class meets: Tuesdays, 4:40-6:10 p.m., 403 International Student Center
Instructor: Jordan Pollack, 2nd Floor, International Student Center
Office hours: Fridays, 2:00-4:00 p.m., or by appointment
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Course Overview and Objective
This course examines past and present enculturation practices in Japan, focusing on character and identity formation and training, from infancy through late childhood, in the contexts of home, school, and society at large. Readings, lectures, and class discussions will address perennial and emergent development issues, and draw variously upon anthropological, psychological, sociological, and historical materials. We will consider research by Japanese and foreign scholars on such topics as pre-natal nurturance, mother-infant relations, family member roles and interactions, adjustment to formal schooling, peer socialization effects, functions of play, mental health issues, inculcation of morality and other cultural norms in the classroom, pedagogical strategies, and conventional modes of learning, among others. Evaluation will be based on class participation, written reflections, and a short research paper. The goal is to deepen appreciation of how Japanese become Japanese, and of how this broad topic has been approached in method and theory.

Procedure, Requirements, and Evaluation
Each class meeting will involve a lecture on a topic relevant to the course focus, followed by general discussion of an assigned reading.

The course requires that you…

1) attend all classes;
2) complete the assigned reading for each week;
3) write three (or more) reflections, of 300 words or so each, on any three of the assigned readings;
4) participate regularly in class discussion of the assigned readings;
5) write a short (2500-word) analytical paper, due on the last day of class, July 17.

In preparing for class discussion and in writing your reflections, formulate answers to one or more of the following questions:

What does the author say about enculturation as a dimension of development in Japan and/or more broadly? That is, what particular claims (assertions, arguments, explanations, etc.) are made? What methods are used to discover and justify the claims, and how are the claims illustrated? What, if any criticism(s) do you have of the author’s claims, methods, and so on? How do the author’s claims relate, if at all, to those of other authors, discussions, etc., and/or to your own personal experiences or to cultural practices at home?
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Regarding 3) above, please email your reflections to me (using pollackj@gmail.com) by noon (12:00 p.m.) on the Tuesday before we meet, so I have time to review everyone’s comments for possible use in class the next day.

And regarding 5) above, you are asked to analyze a Japanese children’s book of your own choosing, interpreting it in light of what you have learned about Japanese enculturation practices. I will provide specific guidelines for the exercise later in the term. The paper is to be handed in the last day of class (July 17), when you will be expected to give a very brief synopsis of the book and your findings.

Class participation effort will comprise 20% of your final grade; the written reflections, 30%; and the final essay, 50%. Differences in students’ English proficiency will be taken into account.

It is possible, by doing additional work (involving several extra readings and reflections), to earn a third credit for this course. If you are interested in this option, please let me know early in the term.

Lecture/Reading/Discussion Schedule
Assigned readings (tentative and subject to change) will be discussed in class on, hence are to be read carefully by, the dates listed below:

April 8      Course introduction
April 15     Enculturation
April 22     Enculturation in history
April 29*    No class, national holidays (Golden Week)
May 6*       Prenatal enculturation
May 13       Enculturation and infancy
May 20       Enculturation and infancy
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May 27*  No class

June 3, 9**  Enculturation and childhood (make-up class)


June 10, 17  Enculturation as education


June 23, 24**  Enculturation in preschool (make-up class)


July 1  Enculturation in primary school (make-up class)


July 7**  Video: “Children Full of Life”

July 8  Enculturation in middle school

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July 15  Enculturative themes--methods and goals


Children's book presentations; essays due