Course Syllabus

Recipes for Disaster: Cultures of Calamity in East Asia and Beyond

Instructor: Dr. Satsuki Takahashi

Meetings: MW 1:30-2:50 at Jones Hall Room 215
Office Hour: Mon 3:00-4:00PM at Jones Hall Room 215

Course Description

This course focuses on the cultural, social, and political dimensions of disasters. A disaster, whenever it confronts us, reveals issues that are usually blanketed underneath everyday lives. As we have learned from the Chernobyl nuclear accident, the Indian Ocean tsunami, Hurricane Katrina, and other catastrophes call attention to human rights, race, poverty, gender, religion, science, the environment, and so forth. Given the 2008 Sichuan Earthquake and the 2011 East Japan Earthquake, what kind of cultural, social, and political issues have been disclosed? Using the literature on disasters and popular media, we will discuss how experiences of disasters can help us understand contemporary East Asia, as well as how these recent Asian examples can offer lessons for reconsidering disasters elsewhere. Through disaster preparedness and post-disaster restoration/renovation, this course discuses broader anthropological issues such as memory, trauma, risk, and science.

Anthropological discussions of the relationships between disasters, vulnerability, and resilience have led in different directions, depending on whether the disasters are understood as caused by human or natural agency. Natural disasters can encourage communities to work together to develop better systems in the future, while human-made problems, such as air and water pollution, prey on vulnerable communities who are usually those in harm’s way. But how do people respond to challenges caused by not only earthquake and tsunami but also nuclear crisis as in the current case in post-3/11 Japan? How do concepts of “natural” and “manmade” matter for ways in which people respond to a disaster? Building upon and contributing to anthropological theories on resilience and vulnerability, this proposed research project will examine the cultural and political implications of nature-human distinctions, among other matters, for the ways in which people response to a disaster.

After a brief overview of anthropological accounts of disaster, we will look at recent major disasters in East Asia and elsewhere in comparative perspective. We will then discuss “categories” of disaster, the production of human vulnerability, the politics of disaster, and the sciences of disaster and through the course we will return especially to the recent Sichuan earthquake and the ongoing Japanese disasters in considering how these perspectives can inform our thinking. As new material on each disaster is published, I reserve the right to amend the syllabus to add new sources that deal specifically with them.
Course Requirements & Evaluation

1. One Short Essay* (due in class, on Oct 19) 20%
2. Midterm Exam (in class, on Oct 22) 20%
3. Term paper (draft due by Dec 12; final version due by TBA)** 30%
4. Attendance and Participation*** 30%

*One Short Essay
The essay is 3-4 pages (double-spaced, approximately 800-1,000 words) and should be written based on course readings, supplemented by additional materials on East Asia. Suggested topics will be posted on Blackboard. Outside reading or research for this assignment is not expected. You are encouraged to consult the instructor in defining the argument of your essay and if you wish to use outside reading(s).

You are also encouraged to consult the Princeton Writing Center by appointment. The evaluation of this short essay will be based in part on the clarity of argument and on the effectiveness of your use of course materials.

**Term Paper
The term paper is 10-12 pages (double-spaced, approximately 2,500-3,000 words) and should be written primarily on course readings, supplemented by additional materials on the topic that you choose. You are strongly encouraged to consult the instructor in selecting your topic, defining the argument of your paper and on the type of outside reading(s) you would like to use. Your topic may focus on a specific disaster (e.g., The 2008 Sichuan Earthquake, the 2011 Eastern Japan Earthquake, Hurricane Katrina, etc.) or a theme in relation to disasters (e.g., earthquake science, disaster preparedness, disaster communications, etc.). Although your paper should address issues relating to East Asia, you may choose a topic that does not focus on a disaster in East Asia.

A preliminary draft (roughly five pages) will be due in class on December 7, and we will have a discussion session on your paper drafts to talk about “half-baked” ideas and arguments. Accompanied by “fully-baked” cookies and other goodies, this session is designed to be enjoyable and helpful for the process of finalizing your paper. The final deadline for the term paper will be announced in class (and on Blackboard) later in the semester.

You are also encouraged to consult the Princeton Writing Center by appointment. The evaluation of the term paper will be based in part on the clarity and originality of your argument and as well as on the ways in which you mobilize source materials.

***Attendance and Participation
During our meetings, each student will participate in and facilitate class discussions and debates five times during the semester. The facilitator will open with comments on individual readings and on comparative perspectives, and will also provide questions that can lead class discussions. Students will be asked to sign up for five classes during the second meeting (Sept. 20th).
**Readings & Films**

This course uses one textbook (required for purchase) as well as articles, news reports, and films. All these readings/films are required. You are expected to share your reactions and comments on assigned readings of each meeting in class.

The textbook is available at Labyrinth but can also easily be purchased at online bookstores. A copy of the textbook is also on reserve at Gest (East Asian) Library. The other readings and films will be uploaded on the course’s Blackboard website or given in class.

**Textbook**
Hoffman, Susanna, and Anthony Oliver-Smith
(Below in course schedule, chapters from this text book are marked as “C&C”)

**Films**

- 1428, Dir. Du Haibin. 117 minutes
- *Japan Earthquake: A Horizon Special*. (BBC 2, UK, 60 min.) Dir. Lawrie, Ben, and Tristan Quinn
- *The Day After Tomorrow* (Emmerich, USA, 2004, 124m, c, 2.35:1)

**Schedule**

**Unprecedented Disasters**

**M. September 19 – Course Introduction**

**W. September 21 – The Anthropology of Disaster II**

- Anthony Oliver-Smith and Susanna M. Hoffman, “Introduction: Why Anthropologists Should Study Disasters” (C&C, pp. 3-22)

- Gregory Button. 2010. *Disaster Culture: Knowledge and Uncertainty in the Wake of Human and Environmental Catastrophe*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press. (pp. 11-18 “Introduction”) - handout

**M. September 26 – The Anthropology of Disaster II**


W. September 28 – The 2011 East Japan Earthquake & Tsunami


- Film: Japan Earthquake: A Horizon Special
  The URL for viewing this film will be provided via email

M. October 3 – The 2008 Sichuan Earthquake


- Film: 1428.

W. October 5 – Hurricane Katrina (2005)


M. October 10 – The 2004 Indian Ocean Earthquake & Tsunami


Syllabus – Disasters in East Asia

Satsuki Takahashi


**W. October 12 – Chernobyl Nuclear Disaster**


**Categories of Disaster**

**M. October 17 – Natural Disaster**


- Michael E. Moseley, “Modeling Protracted Drought, Collateral Natural Disaster, and Human Responses in the Andes” (C&C, pp. 187-212)

**W. October 19 – Manmade Disaster**

- [First paper due in class]

- Gregory V. Button, “Popular Media Reframing of Man-Made Disasters: A Cautionary Tale” (C&C, pp. 143-158)

- Christopher L. Dyer, “Punctuated Entropy as Culture-Induced Change: The Case of the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill” (C&C, pp. 159-186)

**M. October 24 – Natural/Manmade Ambiguities**


- FILM, *The Storm*, 60 min., PBS
  http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/storm/view/

**W. October 26: Midterm Exam**

Fall Break
Vulnerabilities and Resilience

**M. November 7 – History and Memories**

- Historical Disaster Research  Virginia Garcia-Acosta (C&C, pp. 49-66)
- The Monster and the Mother: The Symbolism of Disaster  Susanna M. Hoffman (C&C, pp. 113-142)

**W. November 9 – The Environment**


**M. November 14 – Negotiating with Disasters**


**W. November 16 – Post-disaster Utopia**


The Politics of Disaster

**M. November 21 – Distribution of Hazards**


**W. November 23 – Political Disasters**

- S. Ravi Rajan, “Missing Expertise, Categorical Politics, and Chronic Disasters: The Case
of Bhopal” (C&C, pp. 237-260)


Thanksgiving

The Science of Disaster

W. November 30 – “Normal Accident”


M. December 5 – “Risk Society”


W. December 7 – Experts

- Sharon Stephens, “Bounding Uncertainty: The Post-Chernobyl Culture of Radiation Protection Experts” (C&C, pp. 91-112)


M. December 12 – “Half-baked” Session

**Term paper DRAFT due in class**

During this meeting, we will talk about “half-baked” ideas and arguments of your term papers and help each other with comments and suggestions for revisions.

Conclusion

W. December 14 – To Live, to Survive


- Readings on Sichuan Earthquake and Japan Tsunami TBA.