

International Agribusiness Studies (Spring/Summer 2026)

Instructor: Shuji HISANO (Professor, Graduate School of Economics, Kyoto University)

- Target year: 1st year students or above
- Number of credits: 2 credits
- Year/Semester: 2026 | in the spring/summer semester
- Days/Periods: 13:30-16:30 on alternate Mondays
- Class style: Lecture (reading seminar)
- Language of instruction: English

Overview and purpose of the course:

This course is designed also for a group of students who are supervised by the instructor and therefore continuously attend the course over several years. What we have kept in mind in our discussion over the past years is ***power relations within and behind the process of agri-food business development and transformation***: how powerful business actors are able to exert a direct and indirect influence on the process of international and national policy-making (agenda-setting) and governance of agri-food systems and technologies.

In 2022, we read together articles on *the political economy of healthy and sustainable food systems* published in the *International Journal of Health Policy and Management* as a special issue on the Political Economy of Food Systems. They include several systemic review articles using various methods of literature search, review, and analysis, while some others use narrative review methods to analyse policy-making and governance processes. Through reading these articles, we learned how to conduct qualitative literature reviews and narrative analyses as well.

In 2023, we again turned our eyes to *a rather broader framework, or research agenda*, to explore the pressing issues that confront food systems and the emerging responses to them: from the contribution of food production to climate breakdown to the emergence of regionalised and regenerative food systems; from the contribution of alternative proteins in dietary change to the potential of digital agriculture in sustainability transition; from the persistence of food poverty to the development of urban food systems; etc.

In 2024, our focus was on *emerging agri-food technological innovations: datafication of agriculture*, such as precision agriculture, alternative proteins, and gene editing, especially attending to historical, political-economic, and cultural-ideational contexts in which novel technologies (and the scientific knowledge supporting and embodied in these particular technical forms) are designed, produced, and applied. Our interest was not only in the contents of technologies and impacts of corporate activities but rather in the power of discourses and narratives surrounding “decontextualised”, “futurism” and “techno-fix” orientation. We looked into power relations within and behind the highly political process of technology development that tends to be obscured and made invisible due to the seeming purity and neutrality of the data, and its “promissory narratives (or imaginaries)”.

Since the politics of agritech and foodtech has captured a lot of political, academic, and public attention these years, we read a book in the same line of critical studies, in 2025, on *the rise of apolitical and simplified “technology-fix” solutions*, with its logic (“solutionism”) and trajectories being similar to those in Silicon Valley. In relation to that, we also studied the power of narratives and the narratives of power, especially on *how contrasting narratives are socially and epistemologically constructed and associated with theories of change (food systems transformation)*.

While not directly related to “agribusiness studies”, this year we turn our attention to ***philosophical perspectives on agriculture (and technology)***. This allows us to reflect on our own values, positionality, and philosophical commitments, ***thereby navigating conflicting narratives and views over innovation and agrarian change and facilitating intellectual dialogues***. More specifically, the textbook we are going to read describes four contrasting rationales for technical and policy change in agriculture and food systems, or “archetypes for future food systems”:

technological modernisation (industrial agriculture), sustainable intensification (techno-fix for sustainability), rural resilience (social role of farmers and rural communities), and urban agriculture (localised food systems as emancipatory project). Within the limited time available, we tackle the second textbook, which, similarly but grounded in critical social theory, addresses the contrasting policy discourses on climate change: “climate-smart agriculture” and “climate-just agriculture”. It particularly focuses on the role of international institutions (e.g. World Bank and CGIAR) and social movements (e.g. the movement for food sovereignty).

Course Goals:

By reading the literature and actively participating in discussions, by the end of this course, you should be able to have a deep understanding, theoretical conceptualisation and critical/reflective insights into the current state of the global food system, the processes and mechanisms of food system governance and the role of powerful political and business actors: how and in what way they are able to exert their influence on food systems governance, including the governance of agri-food technologies; and if and how it is possible to challenge such a hegemonic regime and bring the governance of food systems and the process of knowledge production and applications more democratic and genuinely participatory.

Course schedule and contents:

- **[A] Paul B. Thompson (2025) What is Agriculture For? Archetypes for Future Food Systems. Oxford UP.**
- **[B] Anthony Pahnke (2026) *From “Climate-Smart” to “Climate-Just Agriculture”: International Institutions and Challenging False Solutions to Our Ongoing Climate Crisis.* Routledge.**

[Week 1 | April 13] Guidance / A0. Introduction / B0. Introduction

[Week 2-3 | April 27] A1. Four Archetypes for Future Food Systems / A2. Archetypes, Imaginaries, and the Philosophy of Technology

[Week 4-5 | May 11] A3. Technological Modernization and Industrial Agriculture / A4. Science and Sustainable Intensification

[Week 6-7 | May 25] A5. Rural Resilience and the Food Movement / A6. Urban Agriculture: The Food Movement Moves On

[Week 8-9 | June 8] A7. Gaps, Overlaps, and the Political Ecology of Food Systems / A8. Deep Agrarianism

[Week 10-11 | June 22] B1. Bringing Political Economy Back into Critical Theory with Agriculture and Climate Politics / B2. Universalizing Capitalist Ideology with International Institutions and the Development of “Climate-Smart Agriculture”

[Week 12-13 | July 6] B3. Power, Ideology, and Practice Within Discussions of “Climate-Smart Agriculture” / B4. Policy Pathways from “Climate-Smart” to “Climate-Just Agriculture” in International Institutions

[Week 14-15 | July 13] B5. Conclusion: Climate Justice Beyond the Latest Populist Moment

Basic rules in class

- One or two students are assigned to prepare a summary presentation of book chapter(s) or journal papers, including questions, reflections, and some points for discussion
- The summary part of the presentation should not be detailed too much
- Handout (a summary, questions and discussion points) needs to be circulated via email 2-3 days beforehand

- A student who will be assigned to the next class is appointed to be a facilitator, who introduces presentation(s), manages time, collects, and organises questions and points for discussion, and facilitates discussion
- All the participants are required to actively join the discussion
- Anybody can present anything additional but closely relevant to the chapter(s) with or without a handout

Course requirements:

No prerequisite knowledge or skill is required other than English language ability sufficient to interact actively in class.

Evaluation methods and policy:

Grading will be carried out on the basis of active class participation (70%) and assignment presentation (30%).

Textbook, Reference Books, etc:

Readings will be made available through a Cloud system (e.g. Google Drive). The reading list will be shared with the participating students in due time.

Study outside of class (preparation and review):

Participating students will be assigned to read required articles or self-selected articles beforehand. Since classes are very interactive, well-preparation for each class is very important for students to participate in discussions.

Dear GSM students who are interested in International Agribusiness Studies:

Every year we receive a substantial number of GSM students in the guidance class at the beginning of the semester. We are well aware that they are keen to study something about agriculture, food and related industries, though for different reasons. Unfortunately, however, it is usually only a few GSM students who actually register and continue to attend classes throughout the semester. There seem to be the following two reasons, or a kind of gap between expectation and actual offers.

First, as described in the course syllabus, this course provides a critical and comprehensive analysis of social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental issues surrounding agriculture, food and rural economies: specific agricultural products along the agri-food value chain, the ongoing financialisation of agri-food systems, and the political economy of healthy and sustainable food systems with a focus on power relations in the past semesters. For this line of studies, we need to take multidisciplinary approaches in the social sciences. Rather than economics or management, it opts for political economy and sociology, and also geography and cultural studies in certain contexts. Very qualitative.

Second, this course is designed and offered mainly for research-oriented GSE students (especially those of the International Graduate Programme for East Asia Sustainable Economic Development Studies), and its course format is seminar-based (or “readings” it may be called). This means that, instead of having one-way (or even interactive) lectures, students are assigned to read 2-3 articles or book chapters on the topic, while one or two students are assigned to present a 2–3-page written summary of the readings in each class; based on which students discuss together readings’ main arguments, approaches, limitations or whatever related to the topic.

Therefore, this course and discussion in class are not designed for practical (business/project management) or technical (econometric) purposes at all. If this is not what you expect from the course, you are kindly asked to cancel your provisional registration and look for another course. This suggestion is especially because we will decide who will take care of the summary presentation of which chapter(s) in the first class.

If you still want to join this course, you are most welcome, of course.