

International Agribusiness Studies (Spring/Summer 2024)

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

- Target year: 1st year students or above
- Number of credits: 2 credits
- Year/Semester: 2024 | 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. A consistent and overarching theme of this course is ***how to investigate and understand the power of business as a political actor***, especially the role of multinational corporations vis-à-vis the role of states and civil society actors. In 2019 and 2020, this course provided a comprehensive analysis of social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental issues surrounding specific agricultural products along the agri-food value chains (a global flow of the food from upstream to downstream across borders). In 2021, we turned our attention to one of the ongoing structural processes with profound influences on agri-food systems and rural economies around the world: financialisation. In 2022, we read together articles on the political economy of healthy and sustainable food systems published in International Journal of Health Policy and Management as a special issue on 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.

Tackling these topics in the past years, what we kept in mind in our review and discussion was 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.

In this semester, our focus will be 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 is not only in the content of technologies and impacts of corporate activities, but rather in the power of discourses and narratives surrounding "decontextualised", "futurism" and "techno-fix" orientation. Here, again, we will be looking into power relations within and behind the highly-political process of technology development that tend to be obscured and made invisible due to the seeming purity and neutrality of the data, and its "promissory narratives (or imaginaries)".

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] David Goodman (2023) *Transforming Agriculture and Foodways: The Digital-Molecular Convergence*. Bristol University Press.
- [B] Kelly Bronson (2022) *The Immaculate Conception of Data: Agribusiness, Activists, and Their Shared Politics of the Future*. McGill-Queen's University Press.

[Week 1 | April 8] Guidance / A1. Technological Convergence and Change in Modern Food Systems

[Week 2-3 | April 22] A2. Precision Agriculture: Big Data Analytics, Farm Support Platforms and Concentration in the AgTech Space / A3. Precision Agriculture: Adoption, 'Re-scripting', Farmer Identity, Path Dependence and 'Appropriationism 4.0'

[Week 4-5 | May 13] A4. Alternative Proteins: Bio-mimicry, Structuring the New Protein Industry. 'Promissory Narratives' and 'Substitutionism 4.0' / A5. The failed Promises of the Seed-Chemical Complex, CRISPR and Gene Editing, and Regulatory Capture

[Week 6-7 | May 27] A6. Between Physical Space and Digital Space: Changing Patterns of Food Provisioning, COVID-19 and Platform Capitalism / A7. Conclusion and Postscript: Continuities in Change and Lost Opportunities

[Week 8-9 | June 10] B1. Facebook, Google, and ... Monsanto? / B2. Revolutions, Disruptions, and the Future of Farming

[Week 10-11 | June 24] B3. Appropriate, Open, and Alternative / B4. The Immaculate Conception of Data

[Week 12-13 | July 8] B5. The Politics of Digital Farm Technologies / several book reviews

[Week 14-15 | July 22] Wrap-up discussion

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
- 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 for the next class is appointed to be a facilitator, who introduces presentation(s), manage time, collects, and organises questions and points for discussion, and facilitate 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 required other than English language ability sufficient to interact actively in class.

Evaluation methods and policy:

Grading will be carried out on a 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. GoogleDrive). 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.

International Political Economy of Agriculture (Autumn/Winter 2024)

Instructor: Shuji Hisano

- Target year: 1st year students or above
- Number of credits: 2 credits
- Year/Semester: 2024 | in the autumn/winter 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 provides a comprehensive and critical view on the development and current state-of-affairs of agriculture and food governance at the global, national, and local levels, by referring to various theoretical frameworks and concepts of international political economy and agri-food sociology and geography, especially with a focus on the unequal power relations between various actors. We will discuss issues and prospects of agriculture and food governance from the perspectives of “sustainable development”.

Since 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, it would be better to share the themes of the course in the previous years before introducing the theme in 2024. In 2021, our focus was on *the concept of “food as a commons”* that has re-emerged as a transformative narrative and framing to challenge the mainstream paradigm of food as a commodity, to broaden our imagination to explore and practice alternative paradigm of food and food systems. In 2022, we read the Handbook of Critical Agrarian Studies together to learn *origins, concepts and methodologies of critical agrarian studies*, a field of research that unites scholars from various disciplines concerned with understanding the process of agrarian change: the processes, implications, and limitations of pervasive capitalist penetration into the agricultural sector and rural livelihoods and landscapes. In each 2-period class, we picked up three to four chapters of the Handbook that consists of 72 chapters in total. In 2023, we turned our eyes to *urban food governance as a space and means of transforming food systems* globally as well as locally/regionally. Although it is in rural areas where our food is mainly produced, scholarly and policy attention is gradually drawn to urban and city regions as an important arena for making and implementing food policy. We learnt histories, concepts, and practices of urban food governance through case studies of plans, policies, and programmes implemented in different contexts.

We have often come across the question of how alternatives emerge and are constructed; and if and in what way they can demonstrate and realize their transformative potential (e.g. challenging and transforming the dominant food regime towards more just and sustainable food systems and bringing about social change at large). Therefore, in 2024, we will deepen the understanding, broaden the horizon, and enrich the imaginary of “alternatives and futures” of our agri-food systems through learning diverse practices, theories, and politics around the two most significant concepts of agri-food transformations: *alternative food networks (AFNs) and agroecology*.

Course objectives:

Through this course, students will acquire critical and interdisciplinary approaches to social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental issues surrounding agriculture and food, and gain insight into fundamental social science issues such as “structure and agency”, “commodification and alienation”, and “power of discourse”.

Course schedule and contents:

Every year, textbooks used in this course are different, but we use either introductory books with high international

recognition for textbooks so that even beginners of agri-food studies or international political economy and sociology can learn effectively, or handbook-style books with theoretically and conceptually elaborated introduction chapter and well-structured chapters that cover most of important issues and problems and include rich case studies. In the past years, we read the following books together:

- [2019] Jason Konefal & Maki Hatanaka, eds., *Twenty Lessons in the Sociology of Food and Agriculture*, Oxford UP, 2019.
- [2020] Jessica Duncan, Michael Carolan & Johannes S.C. Wiskerke, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Sustainable and Regenerative Food Systems*, Routledge, 2020.
- [2021] Jose Luis Vivero-Pol, Tomaso Ferrando, Olivier De Schutter & Ugo Mattei, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Food as a Commons*, Routledge, 2018.
- [2022] H. Akram-Lodhi, Kristina Dietz, Bettina Engels and Ben M. McKay, eds., *Handbook of Critical Agrarian Studies*, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2021.
- [2023] Ana Moragues-Faus, Jill K. Clark, Jane Battersby, Anna Davies, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Urban Food Governance*, Routledge, 2023.

In this semester, however, we will read the following highly specialised books.

- **[A] Ferne Edwards, *Food Resistance Movements: Journeying Through Alternative Food Networks*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2023.**
- **[B] Colin Ray Anderson, Janneke Bruil, M. Jahi Chappel, Csilla Kiss, and Michel Patrick Pimbert, *Agroecology Now! Transformations Towards More Just and Sustainable Food Systems*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.**

[Week 1 | 7 Oct] Guidance and Introduction

[Week 2-3 | 21 Oct] A1. Introducing Food Resistance Movements / A2. Food Waste Activism in Australia

[Week 4-5 | 11 Nov] A3. The Food Sovereignty Movement in Venezuela / A4. Autonomous Food Spaces in Catalonia

[Week 6-7 | 25 Nov] A5. Reflections on Food System Transitions / A6. Future Directions for Food Resistance Movements

[Week 8-9 | 9 Dec] B1. Introduction / B2. Origins, Benefits and the Political Basis of Agroecology / B3. Conceptualizing Processes of Agroecological Transformations

[Week 10-11 | 23 Dec] B4. Domain A: Rights and Access to Nature / B5. Domain B: Knowledge and Culture / B6. Domain C: Systems of Economic Exchange

[Week 12-13 | 6 Jan] B7. Domain D: Networks / B8. Domain E: Equity / B9. Domain F: Discourse

[Week 14-15 | 20 Jan] B10. Power, Governance and Agroecology Transformations / B11. Reflexive Participatory Governance for Agroecological Transformations / B12. Conclusion

[Week 16 | Jan 27] Wrap-up Discussion

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Course requirements:

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Evaluation methods and policy:

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

Study outside of class (preparation and review):

Students are required to read the assigned articles and book chapters for each class as well as other relevant reading materials so that they will be able to actively participate in discussions.