



Introduction to Japanese Popular Culture

JAPA 360 – Fall 2017

Tuesday and Thursday, 4:30PM – 5:45PM
Enterprise Hall 276

In the United States, there are dozens of yearly conventions celebrating Japanese popular culture, and the largest of these conventions can draw tens of thousands of attendees over the course of a single weekend. Hollywood has been fascinated by Japan for decades, and the aesthetics of Japanese illustration and animation have greatly influenced American artists, designers, and storytellers, many of whom grew up admiring Japanese cinema and televised cartoons. Japanese music and fashion have invaded American cultural institutions such as MTV and Walmart, and the rapidly growing video game industry is dominated by Japanese products. In fact, certain cultural elements borrowed from Japan have become so naturalized within America that many people are not aware of their Japanese origins.

Behind the flash and glitter of the ephemera of Japanese popular culture lies a deep and fascinating history, as well as an intricate system of economic connections that support the production of media within Japan and its neighbors in Asia. The purpose of this course is to study the cultural heritage of representative elements of Japanese media such as cinema, television, comics, music, and video games in order to better understand the entertainment industries that shape contemporary Japanese society and global mediascapes. We will begin in Japan's Taishō era and move through the Pacific War and its aftermath while reflecting on the role of popular culture in shaping political and national identities. We will then study anime and manga in an attempt to understand how characters and narratives are designed and marketed to appeal to different demographic audiences. Finally, we will examine the dynamics of fan cultures as we explore the interplay between cultural production and consumption in the twenty-first century. By the end of this course, students will be able to analyze a wide range of media and entertainment trends within their broader cultural, political, and economic contexts.

Course Texts

Kazue Kato, *Blue Exorcist* (Volume 1)
Naoko Takeuchi, *Pretty Guardian Sailor Moon* (Volume 1)
Kaoru Mori, *A Bride's Story* (Volume 1)
Hiromi Takashima, *Kase-san and Morning Glories*
Steven Moffat, Mark Gatiss, and Jay, *Sherlock: A Study in Pink*

Instructor

Kathryn Hemmann
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Aquia Building Room 326
office hours by appointment (to be requested in writing via email)

Grading and Assignments

Four Quizzes: 20%
Three Response Papers: 30%
Final Presentation Proposal: 10%
Final Presentation: 20%
Class Participation: 20%

Four Quizzes

There will be four quizzes given at the beginning of class over the course of the semester. These quizzes, which will consist of several short answer questions, are designed to test students on the knowledge they have gained through the course reading and class lectures and discussions. The reading assigned for the day of a quiz will not be tested on that quiz.

Three Response Papers

Each of these papers will be two double-spaced pages (or approximately six hundred words) in length. The purpose of a response paper is to formulate a personal response to a topic addressed by the reading or class discussions. Response papers can deal with any topic covered since the due date of the previous response paper, and each paper is to be submitted at the beginning of the class period in which it is due. These papers will be graded on a ✓, ✓+, and ✓- scale, with papers demonstrating critical thinking and analysis receiving higher scores. Students should feel free to critique the reading and to offer information and examples drawn from texts outside of the course material, including the texts and cultures of countries other than Japan.

Final Presentation Proposal

The goal of this proposal is to explain the questions and issues you want to address in your final presentation. Your proposal should (1) specify a concrete topic that can be addressed within the time limit, (2) introduce this topic to an unfamiliar reader, (3) contain a brief outline of the structure of your presentation, and (4) provide a list of at least five sources of information documented according to the Chicago Manual of Style. Your proposal should be approximately a

page and a half, or five hundred words, in length. This proposal is intended to function as a formal abstract and must be written in standard academic style. It will be graded on a Pass/Fail basis according to whether it meets the specifications of the assignment, and students will be expected to resubmit inadequate proposals before the next class period.

Final Presentation

The final presentation may deal with any topic relating to popular culture and Japan. The scope of this project is not limited to contemporary Japan and may take a comparative approach in terms of historical periods and different countries. Topics not addressed in class, such as children's entertainment, food cultures, and sports fandoms, are welcome and encouraged.

Each presentation will be five minutes in length. There will be a short period for questions and comments at the end of each presentation. Plan on using a PowerPoint slideshow or some other type of visual aid, but try not to rely too heavily on video. These presentations will be graded according to a four-point rubric: (1) clarity, or ability to convey content, (2) impact, or ability to demonstrate why the project is interesting and important, (3) appropriate use of visual aids, and (4) ability to handle questions and comments.

The PowerPoint file and/or other visual aids for the final project presentation should be submitted by noon of the day of the presentation.

Participation

Students are expected to complete all required reading assignments and to be attentive during class lectures and discussions. Repeated lack of preparation will significantly lower the participation grade, as will a demonstrated lack of respect for the instructor or the other students. If a student is uncomfortable or otherwise unable to speak in class, alternate methods of performance evaluation can be arranged through a consultation with the Office of Disability Services. Class participation is graded according to the following rubric:

- A – Strong participation, speaks at least once or twice during each class.
- B – Fair participation, speaks perhaps once or twice a week.
- C – Minimal participation, does not speak but attends class.
- D – Poor participation, does not speak or attend class regularly.
- F – No participation, frequently does not attend class.

Course Policies

Attendance

Each student is allowed **two unexcused absences**, no questions asked and no excuses necessary. If you would like to excuse an absence, you must submit at least one form of written proof of legitimacy (photocopies and printouts are fine). If your documents are not submitted **within three days** of your absence, they become forfeit. Each unexcused absence after the second will result in half a letter grade being deduced from the student's final course grade.

Technology

Tablets are permitted in their capacity as e-readers, but **smartphones and laptop computers are absolutely not allowed** without a formal letter from the Office of Disability Services.

Academic Integrity

All students are expected to abide by the Mason Honor Code. No instances of cheating, plagiarism, stealing, or lying in matters related to academic work will be tolerated.

Respect

As in any class dealing with media and contemporary social issues, students may find that the course material is directly pertinent to their lives, and a respectful attitude is an absolute necessity. No speech demonstrating or encouraging discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, body shape, or disability will be tolerated. Content warnings will be provided upon request.

Important Dates

Quizzes

September 14
October 5
November 2
November 30

Response Papers

September 21
October 19
November 9

Final Project Proposal

November 16

Final Project Presentations

December 5
December 7

There is no final exam or final paper for this class!

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Week One: Course Introduction

August 29
Course Outline and Structure

August 31
Introduction to Media Studies

Marshall McLuhan, "The Medium Is the Message"
from *Understanding Media*, pp.7-21

Week Two: Modern Popular Culture

September 5
Popular Literature and Mass Market Magazines

Sarah Frederick, "Not That Innocent: Yoshiya Nobuko's Good Girls"
from *Bad Girls of Japan*, pp.64-79

September 7
Wartime Propaganda

Thomas Lamarre, "Speciesism, Part I: Translating Races into Animals in Wartime Animation"
from *Mechademia 3: Limits of the Human*, pp.75-95

Week Three: Postwar Dreams and Nuclear Nightmares

September 12
Godzilla and *Kaijū Eiga*

William Tsutsui, "The Birth of Gojira"
from *Godzilla on My Mind*, pp.13-42

September 14
Giant Robots and Super Sentai
+ **FIRST QUIZ**

Anne Allison, "*Mighty Morphin Power Rangers: The First Crossover Superheroes*"
from *Millennial Monsters*, pp.93-114

Week Four: Japan As Number One

September 19
Newspaper Comics, Television Home Dramas, and Shōwa Nostalgia

Akiko Hashimoto, "Blondie, Sazae, and Their Storied Successors: Japanese Families in Newspaper Comics"
from *Imagined Families, Lived Families*, pp.15-32

September 21
Contemporary Television and the Korean Wave
+ **FIRST RESPONSE PAPER**

Laura Miller, "Korean TV Dramas and the Japan-Style Korean Wave"
from *Post Script* 27, pp.17-24

Week Five: Cinema Anime

September 26
Hayao Miyazaki and Studio Ghibli

Hayao Miyazaki, "Earth's Environment as Metaphor"
from *Starting Point: 1979-1996*, pp.414-32

September 28
Makoto Shinkai and Toho Animation

Gavin Walker, "The Filmic Time of Coloniality: On Shinkai Makoto's *The Place Promised in Our Early Days*"
from *Mechademia 4: War/Time*, pp.3-18

Week Six: It's A Boy's World

October 3
The Anime and Manga Media Mix

Marc Steinberg, "Media Mixes, Media Transformations"
from *Anime's Media Mix*, pp.135-169

October 5
The Neverending Battles Appeal of Shōnen Manga
+ **SECOND QUIZ**

Kazue Kato, *Blue Exorcist* (Volume 1)

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October 10
NO CLASS – COLUMBUS DAY HOLIDAY

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Week Seven: Rated "M" for "Mature"

October 12

The Adult Gaze of Seinen Manga

Kaoru Mori, *A Bride's Story* (Volume 1)

Week Eight: Chicks Dig Comics

October 17

The Beautiful Revolution of Shōjo Manga

Deborah Shamoon, "The Formation of Postwar Shōjo Manga, 1950-1969"
from *Passionate Friendship: The Aesthetics of Girls' Culture in Japan*, pp.82-100

October 19

Short Skirts and Superpowers

+ **SECOND RESPONSE PAPER DUE**

Takeuchi Naoko, *Pretty Guardian Sailor Moon* (Volume 1)

Week Nine: Geek Chic

October 24

Otaku Culture, Maid Cafés, and Moé

Alisa Freedman, "*Train Man* and the Gender Politics of Japanese '*Otaku*' Culture: The Rise of New Media, Nerd Heroes and Consumer Communities"
from *Intersections* 20, <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue20/freedman.htm>

October 26

The Absolute Territory of Subcultures

Hiromi Takashima, *Kase-san and Morning Glories*

Week Ten: The Beautiful People

October 31

Street Fashion and Kawaii Culture

Michal Daliot-Bal, "Creativity in Play"
from *License to Play: The Ludic in Japanese Culture*, pp.99-118

November 2
Girl Groups and Pop Idol Culture
+ **THIRD QUIZ**

Brian Ashcraft and Shoko Ueda, "Idol Worship"
from *Japanese Schoolgirl Confidential*, pp.30-53

Week Eleven: Video Games

November 7
Nintendo, The Legend of Zelda, and Pokémon

Koichi Iwabuchi, "How 'Japanese' Is Pokémon?"
from *Pikachu's Global Adventure*, pp.53-79

November 9
Square Enix, Final Fantasy, and Kingdom Hearts
+ **THIRD RESPONSE PAPER DUE**

James Newman, "Characters"
from *Videogames*, Second Edition, pp.123-39

Week Twelve: All Your Internets

November 14
Social Media, Line, and Twitter

Dana Goodyear, "I ♥ Novels"
from *The New Yorker*, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/12/22/i-love-novels>

November 16
The Seedy Underbelly of the Internet
+ **FINAL PRESENTATION PROPOSAL DUE**

Rumi Sakamoto, "'Koreans, Go Home!' Internet Nationalism in Contemporary Japan as a Digitally Mediated Subculture"
from *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 10, pp.1-21.

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November 21 (Tuesday)
November 23 (Thursday)
NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

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Week Thirteen: The Creative Economies of Fandom

November 28

Comic Conventions and Fanzines

Fan-Yi Lam, "Comic Market: How the World's Biggest Amateur Comic Fair Shaped Japanese *Dōjinshi* Culture"

from *Mechademia 5: Fanthropologies*, pp.232-48

November 30

Transnational Fandoms

+ **FOURTH QUIZ**

Steven Moffat, Mark Gatiss, and Jay, *Sherlock: A Study in Pink*

Week Fourteen: On the Cutting Edge

December 5

Student Presentations

December 7

Student Presentations