



## **Introduction to Japanese Popular Culture**

JAPA 360 – Fall 2019

Tuesday and Thursday, 4:30 - 5:45

Krug Hall 7

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 from MTV to Walmart, and the rapidly growing video game industry is dominated by Japanese intellectual property. In fact, certain cultural elements borrowed from Japan have become so naturalized within America that many people may not be 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 East 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 the early twentieth century 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

Kohei Horikoshi, *My Hero Academia* (Volume 1)  
Naoko Takeuchi, *Pretty Guardian Sailor Moon* (Volume 1)  
Tsukumizu, *Girls' Last Tour* (Volume 1)  
Hiromi Takashima, *Kase-san and Morning Glories*  
Steven Moffat, Mark Gatiss, and Jay, *Sherlock: A Study in Pink*

## Instructor

Kathryn Hemmann  
khemmann@gmail.com  
Aquia Building Room 326  
office hours by appointment (to be requested in writing via email)

## Grading and Assignments

Five Quizzes: 25%  
Final Project Presentation: 25%  
Zine Page Based on Final Project: 20%  
Final Project Proposal: 10%  
Class Participation: 20%

### *Five Quizzes*

There will be five 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 reading assignments and class lectures and discussions. The reading assigned for the day of a quiz **will be tested** on that quiz.

### *Final Project*

Your final project 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.

### *Final Project Presentation*

Each presentation will be five minutes in length. 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) structure, or ability to give a satisfactory presentation within the time constraints, and (4) appropriate use of visual aids. You should plan to submit your PowerPoint file or other visual aids for your final project presentation no later than noon on the day you're scheduled to present. If I do not receive your presentation materials, **your presentation will be given a failing grade** regardless of how well you perform.

### *Final Project Proposal*

The goal of your proposal is to explain the questions and issues you want to explore in your final project and address in your final presentation. Your proposal should (1) specify a concrete topic that can be covered 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 adequate sources of information documented according to the Chicago Manual of Style. Your proposal should be approximately a page, or four 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 a failing proposal within a week of receiving feedback.

### *Zine Page Based on Final Project*

A zine (pronounced like **magazine**) is a self-published book with a small distribution. In Japan, small publications shared between friends are called *dōjinshi* (同人誌), and they collectively form the foundation of a large and thriving ecosystem of interrelated fandom cultures, which in turn guide and shape the contemporary media industry.

Each student will contribute a page based on their final project to the class zine. You can submit your zine page in whatever file format you'd like; but, to ensure the fidelity of the image, a PDF file is preferred. Portrait orientation is also preferred, but landscape-oriented images and other two-page spreads are also acceptable. A digital copy of your zine page(s) is due on **Tuesday, November 12**, and the following **Thursday, November 14** is the deadline for edits and corrections. As printing the zine will take time, these are both hard deadlines that cannot be extended or negotiated. Your zine page will be graded according to a standard letter-grade rubric, with more detailed feedback given upon request.

### *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. 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 your 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, plagiarization, 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, age, or disability will be tolerated. Content warnings will be provided upon request.

**Important Dates**

*Quizzes*

Thursday, September 12

Thursday, September 26

Thursday, October 10

Thursday, November 7

Thursday, November 21

*Final Project Proposal*

Thursday, October 17

*Zine Page Submission*

Tuesday, November 12

*Zine Page Corrections Due*

Thursday, November 14

*Final Project Presentations*

Tuesday, December 3

Thursday, December 5

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

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### **Week One: Course Introduction**

August 27  
Course Outline and Structure

August 29  
Introduction to Media Studies

Lori Morimoto, “Before Fan Studies”  
from *An Introduction to Media Fan Studies*, pp.20-35

### **Week Two: Popular Culture in the Modern Era**

September 3  
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 5  
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 10  
Godzilla and *Kaijū Eiga*

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

September 12  
Giant Robots and Super Sentai  
+ **QUIZ #1**

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

### **Week Four: Japan As Number One**

September 17  
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 19  
Contemporary Television and the Korean Wave

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

### **Week Five: Cinema Anime**

September 24  
Hayao Miyazaki and Studio Ghibli

Susan Napier, “Umbrellas in the Haunted Forest: Transcending National and Personal Trauma in *My Neighbor Totoro*”  
from *Miyazakiworld: A Life in Art*, pp.101-121

September 26  
Makoto Shinkai and DIY Animation  
+ **QUIZ #2**

Maria Grajdian, “The Precarious Self: Love, Melancholia and the Eradication of Adolescence in Makoto Shinkai’s Anime Works”  
from *Visions of Precarity in Japanese Popular Culture and Literature*, pp.117-131

### **Week Six: It’s A Boy’s World**

October 1  
The Anime and Manga Media Mix

Marc Steinberg, “Media Mixes, Media Transformations”  
from *Anime’s Media Mix*, pp.135-169

October 3  
The Neverending ~~Battles~~ Appeal of Shōnen Manga

Kohei Horikoshi, *My Hero Academia*, Volume 1

### **Week Seven: Chicks Dig Comics**

October 8  
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 10  
Short Skirts and Superpowers  
+ **QUIZ #3**

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

**Week Eight: Rated “M” for “Mature”**

October 15  
FALL BREAK – NO CLASS

October 17  
Manga for Adults  
+ **FINAL PROJECT PROPOSAL**

Tsukumizu, *Girls’ Last Tour*, Volume 1

**Week Nine: Geek Chic**

October 22  
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 *Debating Otaku in Contemporary Japan Historical Perspectives and New Horizons*,  
pp. 129–146

October 24  
Queer Stories and Diverse Audiences

Hiromi Takashima, *Kase-san and Morning Glories*

**Week Ten: The Beautiful People**

October 29  
Street Fashion and *Kawaii* Culture

Masafumi Monden, “Ribbons and Lace: Girls, Decorative Femininity, and Androgyny”  
from *Japanese Fashion Cultures: Dress and Gender in Contemporary Japan*, pp.107-134

October 31  
Girl Groups and Pop Idol Culture

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

### **Week Eleven: Video Games**

November 5  
Nintendo, The Legend of Zelda, and Pokémon

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

November 7  
Square Enix, Final Fantasy, and Kingdom Hearts  
+ **QUIZ #4**

Rachael Hutchinson, "Nuclear Discourse in *Final Fantasy*"  
from *Japanese Culture through Videogames*, pp.129-152

### **Week Twelve: All Your Internets**

November 12  
Social Media, Line, and Twitter  
+ **ZINE PAGE DUE**

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

November 14  
Love in Two Dimensions

Forrest Greenwood, "A Spectral Pop Star Takes the Stage: Hatsune Miku and the Materialization of the Ephemeral in Contemporary Otaku Culture"  
from *Spectator* 33, pp.10-17

### **Week Thirteen: The Creative Economies of Fandom**

November 19  
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 21  
Transnational Fandoms  
+ **QUIZ #5**

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

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November 26 (Tuesday)  
November 28 (Thursday)  
NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

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**Week Fourteen: On the Cutting Edge**

December 3  
Student Presentations

December 5  
Student Presentations