

Popular Culture as Social Practice

Fandoms, Subcultures, and the Rest of Us

Section 1

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【Course Outline / Description】

The aim of this course is to investigate the relationship between the consumption of popular cultural products (objects, images, discourses and practices) and social life in Japan, based primarily on perspectives from cultural anthropology and cultural studies. The primary focus will be on fandoms, subcultures and identities shaped through contemporary consumption practices.

In this course, we will critically explore selected topics from the broad field of popular culture in Japan, with a focus on the relationships between cultural products, consumption practices, and social norms, practices, and tensions within Japanese society. We will briefly discuss the historical development of popular cultural industry in Japan, followed by the recent emergence of a discourse on “cool Japan.” Most of the course will be devoted to exploring specific fandoms, subcultures or cultural categories constructed around consumption practices such as *otaku*, the *dōjinshi* world and *fujoshi* female consumers of male-male eroticism, J-rappers, *gyaru*, visual-*kei* fans and the legendary fans of the Takarazuka Revue. Fans’ creative “play” with norms of gender and sexuality will be a theme running throughout the course. We will also explore questions of creativity and self-expression, constructions of “deviance,” and the role of popular culture in resistance to, or reinscription of, dominant norms.

We will also follow the global circulation of cultural products to and from Japan as they slip out of the original contexts of production, are adapted to local contexts and given new meanings and social effects. Students’ own interests in and expertise on aspects of popular culture will be utilized to help us make sense of links between popular culture consumption practices and other aspects of social life.

Section 2

【Course Objectives/Goals/Learning Outcomes】

Students in this course will: (1) acquire understandings of a range of practices undertaken in Japan that serve to shape social relations and organization, identities and habits of mind among consumers of popular culture in Japan, and that more broadly help shape the texture of everyday life in Japan; (2) enhance their grasp of some of the central concepts in the growing study of popular culture consumption; (3) become familiar with some important methods of data generation in the field of popular culture consumption, and practice these methods, on their own and in group activities; and (4) gain critical insights into the complex relationships between popular culture consumption and other aspects of social life in Japan, and in their own lives. Furthermore, students will (5) develop critical thinking skills through close reading and discussion of written and audio-visual materials, (6) develop skills of expression and argumentation in both written form through writing reflective and critical papers, and in oral form through class discussion and debate and through group presentation, and (7) enhance teamwork skills and practice intercultural cooperation through a major group research and presentation project.

Section 3

【Class Schedule/Class Environment, Literature and Materials】

Schedule

• Day 1

Introduction to the course

Thinking through “culture(s):” Consumption, meaning, power

• Day 2

Jenkins, Henry, Tara McPherson and Jane Shattuc (2003). “Defining Popular Culture,” In *Hop on Pop: The Politics and Pleasures of Popular Culture*, Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, pp. 26-42.

• Day 3

Storey, John (2014). “Consumption in Everyday Life.” From *Popular Culture to Everyday Life* (pp. 81-94). New York: Routledge.

• Day 4

Lewis, J. (2013). “Introduction: The Problems of Consumer Capitalism ...” (pp. 1-12); “Consumer capitalism as a cul-de-sac” (pp. 15-25), from *Beyond Consumer Capitalism: Media and the Limits to Imagination*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

FILM: *Consuming Kids* (A. Barbaro and J. Earp, Writer/Director, 2008, 67min.)

• Day 5

(Cont’d) +

DISCUSSION GROUP FORMATION

Transformations of popular culture in Japan

• Day 6

5. Schilling, Mark, “Consumer Culture”
6. Schilling, Mark, “Zoku”

• Day 7

7. Nishijima, Takeo, “How the Baby Boomers Stirred Up Society”
8. Sakurai, Tetsuo, “The Generation Gap in Japanese Society since the 1960s”

“Cool Japan”: Globalization and national branding

• Day 8

Otmazgin, N. (2012). Japan imagined: Popular culture, soft power, and Japan’s changing image in northeast and southeast Asia. *Contemporary Japan* 24: 1-19.

Fans and fandoms: Attachment and belonging in the affective economy

• Day 9

Miyamoto, Naomi (2014). “Takarazuka Revue: Its Star System and Fans’

Support.” In *Made in Japan: Studies in Popular Music*, Tōru Mitsui, ed. New York: Routledge, pp. 23-36.

FILM: *Dream Girls* (Kim Longinotto and Jano Williams, 1993, 50 min.)

• Day 10

Chin, B. & Morimoto, L. (2013). “Towards a Theory of Transcultural Fandom.” *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* 10 (1): 92-108.

Transnationalization and East Asian Pop Culture Industries

• Day 11

Hester, J. (2007). Datsu zainichi-ron: An emerging discourse on belonging among ethnic Koreans in Japan. In N. Graburn, J. Ertl and R. K. Tierney (Eds.), *Multiculturalism in the new Japan: Crossing the boundaries within* (pp. 139-150). New York: Berghahn.

13. Onishi, Norimitsu, “Ugly Images of Asian Rivals Become Best Sellers...”

FILM: *GO* (YUKISADA Isao, 2001)

• Day 12

Nagayama, C. (2016). Women’s desire, heterosexual norms and transnational feminism: Kitahara Minori’s Good-bye Hallyu. *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, (14) 7.

• Day 13

14. Mori, Y., “Winter Sonata and Cultural Practices of Active Fans in Japan: Considering Middle-Aged Women as Cultural Agents”

Creighton, M. (2016). Through the Korean Wave looking glass: Gender, consumerism, transnationalism, tourism reflecting Japan-Korea relations in global East Asia, The Asia-Pacific Journal, (14) 7.

<http://apjif.org/2016/07/Creighton.html>

Manga and mass culture in Japan

• Day 14

17. Norris, Craig, “Manga, Anime and Visual Art Culture”

Shōjo culture, shōjo manga

• Day 15

Shamoon, D. (2012). The revolution in 1970s shōjo manga. From *Passionate Friendship: The Aesthetics of Girls’ Culture in Japan* (pp. 101-136). Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press.

18. (a) Oricon Style, Igai!? Onna no ko ga ichiban suki na komikkushi wa “Shōnen Janpu”! [Surprising!? The manga magazine girls like best is “Shōnen Jump!]. (b) Anime New Network, “Oricon #1 Manga Mag for Japanese Girls Is ... *Shōnen Jump*”

Yaoi and Boys’ Love

• Day 16

- Aida, Miho (2016). "The contemporary Comic Market: A study of subculture."
Journal of Fandom Studies 4 (1): 55-70. [BB]
24. Musiket, Yanapon, "Call Me 'Y': Girls Who Like Boys Who Like Boys"

• Day 17

- Galbraith, P. (2011), *Fujoshi: Fantasy play and transgressive intimacy*

Otaku: Shifting images of hyper-consumers of fantasy

• Day 18

- Kam, T. H. (2013). The common sense that makes the 'otaku': Rules for consuming popular culture in contemporary Japan." *Japan Forum* 25 (2): 151-173.

• Day 19

- Galbraith, P. (2009). Moe: Exploring virtual potential in post-millennial Japan. *Electronic Journal of Contemporary Japanese Studies* (October).

Idols: Celebrity of the ordinary

• Day 20

- Galbraith, P. (2012). Idols: The image of desire in Japanese consumer capitalism. In P. Galbraith and J. Karlin (Eds.), *Idols and celebrity in Japanese media culture* (pp. 185-208). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
31. Hongo, Jun, "Photos of preteen girls in thongs now big business"

Fashion statements: Styles, social meaning, gender and sexual norms

• Day 21

35. Kinsella, Sharon, "Cuties in Japan"

• Day 22

38. Miller, Laura, "Those Naughty Teenage Girls: Japanese Kogals, Slang, and Media Assessments"

• Day 23

40. Miller, Laura, "Male Beauty Work"
41. Hoffman, Jan, "Masculinity in a Spray Can"

Pleasure, meaning and identity in musical expression

• Day 24

43. Yano, Christine, "Letters from the Heart: Negotiating Fan-Star Relationship in Japanese Popular Music"
44. Martin, Alex, "FYI: 'ENKA' 'Enka' Still Strikes Nostalgic Nerve"
45. Ito, Masami, "American Finds His Voice in the World of 'Enka'"

• Day 25

- McLeod, K. (2013). *Visual kei: Hybridity and gender in Japanese popular*

culture.” *Young* 21 (4): 309-325.

48. Strauss, Neil, “End of a Life, End of an Era”

• Day 26

Monden, M. (2015). Ribbons and lace: Girls, decorative femininity and androgyny. From *Japanese fashion cultures: Dress and gender in contemporary Japan* (pp. 107-134). London: Bloomsbury
FILM: *Shimotsuma Monogatari* (“Kamikaze Girls,” NAKAJIMA Tetsuya, 2004)

• Day 27

Moden, M. (2008). Transcultural flow of demure aesthetics: Examining cultural globalisation through gothic & lolita fashion. *New Voices* 2: 21-40.
<http://newvoices.jpj-sydney.org/2/vol2.pdf>

• Day 28

49. Condry, Ian, “Chapter 1: Yellow B-Boys, Black Culture, and the Elvis Effect”

What’s so funny?

• Day 29

51. Stocker, Joel F., “*Manzai*: Team Comedy in Japan’s Entertainment Industry”
52. Stocker, Joel F., “Yoshimoto Kōgyō and Manzai in Japan’s Media Culture”

• Day 30

FINAL EXAM REVIEW + COURSE EVALUATION

Final exam week

FINAL IN-CLASS EXAM (date TBA)

【Textbooks/Reading Materials】

Readings will be available on the course Blackboard.

Section 4

【Learning Assessments/Grading Rubric】

Students will be evaluated based upon (1) in-class performance, including: preparation of readings, and class participation (15%); (2) a popular culture consumption reflection essay (15%); (3) a mini-ethnographic project: either a fan interview report or a site report (25%); (4) an in-class group presentation (25%); and (5) an in-class final exam (20%).

Section 5

【Additional Information】 ← use this section if any

Field trips are planned to view a performance of the Takarazuka Revue, as well as to Korea Town.