Popular Culture as Social Practice
Fandoms, Subcultures, and the Rest of Us

Section 1

Instructor/Title  Jeffry T. Hester, Ph.D.

【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.
2019 Spring Semester

Section 3

[Class Schedule/Class Environment, Literature and Materials]

Schedule

• Class 1
  Introduction to the course

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

• Class 2

• Class 3

• Class 4
  FILM: Consuming Kids (A. Barbaro and J. Earp, Writer/Director, 2008, 67min.)

• Class 5
  (Cont’d) +
  DISCUSSION GROUP FORMATION

Transformations of popular culture in Japan

• Class 6
  5. Schilling, Mark, “Consumer Culture”

• Class 7

“Cool Japan”: Globalization and national branding

• Class 8

Fans and fandoms: Attachment and belonging in the affective economy

• Class 9

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

• Class 10

Transnationalization and East Asian Pop Culture Industries
• Class 11

• Class 12

• Class 13

Manga and mass culture in Japan
• Class 14
  17. Norris, Craig, “Manga, Anime and Visual Art Culture”

Shōjo culture, shōjo manga
• Class 15
  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”
2019 Spring Semester

**Yaoi and Boys’ Love**

- Class 16

- Class 17
  Galbraith, P. (2011), Fujoshi: Fantasy play and transgressive intimacy

**Otaku: Shifting images of hyper-consumers of fantasy**

- Class 18

- Class 19

**Idols: Celebrity of the ordinary**

- Class 20
  31. Hongo, Jun, “Photos of preteen girls in thongs now big business”

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

- Class 21
  35. Kinsella, Sharon, “Cuties in Japan”

- Class 22
  38. Miller, Laura, ”Those Naughty Teenage Girls: Japanese Kogals, Slang, and Media Assessments”

- Class 23
  40. Miller, Laura, “Male Beauty Work”
  41. Hoffman, Jan, “Masculinity in a Spray Can”

**Pleasure, meaning and identity in musical expression**

- Class 24
  44. Martin, Alex, “FYI: ‘ENKA’ ‘Enka’ Still Strikes Nostalgic Nerve”
  45. Ito, Masami, “American Finds His Voice in the World of ‘Enka’”
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- Class 25

- Class 26

- Class 27

- Class 28
  49. Condry, Ian, “Chapter 1: Yellow B-Boys, Black Culture, and the Elvis Effect”

*What’s so funny?*

- Class 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”

- Class 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.