Anthropology 191
Japanese Popular Culture
Fall 2008

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Class meetings          Thursdays: noon-2:50 pm in Haines 314
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Course Description

This course takes popular culture in Japan as a means for discussing contemporary topical issues (in both Japan and the US) such as gender relations, nationalism, emotion, sexuality, and consumer culture. What is popular culture? Is there such a thing as “Japanese popular culture”? And if so, how does that differ from “Japanese culture” and/or “American popular culture”? How does “Japanese popular culture” move from Japan to the US and vice versa? How does it move from Japan to the rest of Asia and vice versa? These are among the questions we will ask in this class. This is a small seminar that combines intensive reading, discussion, and individual as well as group projects and their presentations.

Reading:

At the end of this syllabus, I will list the books that you find under reserve for this class at Powell Library. I plan to place our weekly readings on our class website at least a week before of your group presentation and our class discussion.

Class schedule

Week 1: Business meeting.

Week 2: First project: No reading yet.

Japanese popular culture (Show and Tell):

What is your most favorite icons, items, or representations of Japanese Popular (J Pop) Cultures (e.g., music, film, fashion, advertisement, animation, comic, and fashion)? Show some of them to the class, describe them (you are also free to use your computers), and explain why you pick them (5 minutes). Present in a way that solicits questions from your audience (3 minutes). (If you are not yet familiar with Japanese pop culture, choose any other pop culture originating in the country other than Japan.)

Week 3: Is pop culture new? In lieu of reading the history of Japanese pop culture, let us look at Takarazuka
Reading of:
Jennifer Robertson: “Introduction” to *Takarazuka*.

Screening of: “Dream Girls.”

Week 4: What is “popular culture”?  

Reading of:
Some materials from internet.
Marilyn Ivy: “Formations of Mass Culture.”

Make groups in preparation for group project:  
My tentative idea is to form groups according to your interests, which hopefully cluster around the following themes.
1. Animation movies and videos  
2. Pop music  
3. “Cutie” stuff (such as Hello Kitty)- which does not exclude animation movies and other forms of popular culture.  
4. Godzilla or interactions between Japan and the US  
5. Japanese popular culture and globalization (or Japanese popular culture in East Asia)

From Week 5 on, each group will facilitate class discussion.  However, EACH ONE OF YOU MUST COMPLETE WEEKLY READINGS.

Week 5: Godzilla and Godzilla  

Reading of:

Screening of:  
Of course, Godzilla!  The Godzilla group, choose various scenes from the two movies of Godzilla, and comment on the differences and the similarities.

Week 6: “Cuties” in Japan  

Reading of:
Christine Yano: “Monstering the Japanese Cute.”  
Sharon Kinsella: “Cuties in Japan.”  
Brian McVeigh: “How Hello Kitty Commodifies the Cute, Cool, and Camp.”

Screening of:  
The Cutie group will show the class the “cuties,” including goods (such as Hello Kitty goods), Japanese girls’ fashions, and anime films..
Week 7: Animation

Reading of:
Susan Napier: "Why Anime?"
Susan Napier: “Panic Sites.”

Screening of:
The Anime group will show the class the anime movies of their choice. Find the major themes of anime movies.

Week 8: J Pop and “Idols.”

Reading of:
William Kelly: Introduction to Fanning the Flames.
F. Darling-Wolf: “SMAP, Sex, and Masculinity.”
Hiroshi, Aoyagi: Excerpts from his Islands of Eight Million Smiles.

Screening of:
Let’s get some interesting videos from the Japanese video shop.

Week 9: Japanese popular culture and Globalization

Reading of:
Norimitsu Onishi: “Roll Over, Godzilla: Korea Rules.”
Cho Hae-Joang: “Reading the ‘Korean Wave’ as a Sign of Global Shift.”
Yu-Fen Ko: “Hello Kitty and the Identity Politics in Taiwan.”

Screening of:
The globalization group will show the class the items of their choice.
The video, “Please teach me English” is also available.

Week 10: Party!

Grading is based on:

1. Attendance and participation in class discussion. If you miss more than two seminars, you will be eliminated from this course.
2. Show and Tell presentation.
3. Group project: Group grade is your grade.
4. Individual final paper on your critical reading of the materials of another group: if you are the member of Godzilla, write the paper on, say, “cuties.” (No more than 10 pages, double-spaced.)

I will also place the following books at Powell Library for you to use if you would like to refer to them.
Susan J. Napier: Anime: *From Akira to Princess Mononoke.*
William Kelly, ed.: *Fanning the Flames.*
W. Tsutsui et al. eds.: *In Godzilla’s Footsteps.*
John Treat, ed.: *Contemporary Japan and Popular Culture.*
Hiroshi, Aoyagi: *Islands of Eight Million Smiles.*