

Japanese Contemporary Popular Culture in a Global Context

Instructor's affiliation, department, job title and name

Björn-Ole KAMM, Project Specific Senior Lecturer
Center for the Promotion of Interdisciplinary Education and Research

Academic semester that the course is offered / Language

Fall 2015 / English



Outline and purpose of the course

Japanese popular media practices play not only in Japan a major role in the everyday lives of many people. The course investigates various elements of this popular and consumer culture, such as manga, games or *cosplay*, in their historical development and from a global perspective. The main focus lies on theoretical concepts and analytical techniques useful to examine the role of popular culture in late capitalist societies. One area of interest revolves around media content, for example, cultural representations of nationality or gender. A second point of departure is formed by questions of production, reception and appropriation by users in and outside Japan.

Course goals

Many students outside and especially within Japan are already familiar with what is called Japanese popular or consumer culture, lessening the importance of keeping them at the receiving-end of knowledge. Instead, the aim of this course is to assist students in taking the leap from “insider” or “practitioner” to a position of knowledge-production within academic discourse. Thus, the course seeks to establish an understanding of various angles of research on popular media practices (e.g., media entertainment theories, cyber-ethnography, qualitative text analysis).

Course schedule and contents

A detailed plan for each class will be determined depending on the number of and the feedback from the participants, but will be guided by the following overall procedure:

- (1) The students gain access to necessary tools via lectures and detailed discussions of methodological and theoretical examples taken from existing research [first five-week period].
- (2) The class decides on a shared question for project investigations, a specific object and appropriate methods. As networks of humans and artifacts (media), popular culture often necessitates analyses of contents as well as “users.” Accordingly, the class is divided into different project groups (e.g. text analysis, ethnography, cyber-ethnography), working on the same question from different angles (triangulation) [second five-week period].
- (3) Employing an e-learning environment (forums, journals), the groups plan and execute the projects under the instructor’ s supervision. Finally, the groups present results, discuss problems and achievements in accordance with the overall study question [last five-week period].

The lectures, individual preparations (homework/feedback) and group projects will figure 1/3 of the course each.

Prerequisites

None.

Evaluation

Homework (30%), project work and presentation (30%), feedback (20%), participation (20%).

Studies to be done outside of class

The participants are expected to attend every class and spend a certain amount of time outside of this class for this course. Regular homework as well as group exercise will play an important role in this course, so preparation, review and project work out of the class requires at least about an hour.

Textbooks

None.

Further readings

The course materials as well as lecture slides will be made available via the course webpage.

The course takes some guiding ideas from “Inside-out Japan? Popular culture and globalization in the context of Japan,” by Matthew Allen & Rumi Sakamoto. 2006. *Popular Culture, Globalization and Japan*. London & New York: Routledge. pp. 1-12. Reading their introduction/book is not mandatory but the chapter may be obtained prior to the course by contacting the instructor.

Others

Consultation (office hours) by appointment. The course webpage will be available to download the course material. Please contact the instructor Björn-Ole KAMM <kamm.bjornole.7e@kyoto-u.ac.jp> for any questions regarding this course syllabus.

Picture L : A glimpse of Akihabara, Tokyo, 2010.

M : Cosplay from the other side; photo shooting at Comic Market, Tokyo, 2010.

R : Main exhibition hall of the Kyoto International Manga Museum, 2010.

About the instructor



Björn-Ole KAMM

Ph.D. in Japanese Studies, Heidelberg University, Germany

M.A. in Japanese Studies and Communication & Media Studies, Leipzig University, Germany

Areas of Specialization: Practice theory, transculturality, uses and gratifications of Japanese popular media

“Outside of Japan, or in work written in a context outside of Japan, there are times when, to put it somewhat ironically, people seem to believe that in an island nation in the Far East, alongside ‘samurai’, ‘geisha’ and ‘ninja’, a bizarre social group called ‘otaku’ exists. These ‘otaku’ are seen to have roots in the tradition or postmodern condition of that island nation. [I want to stress] my apprehension about the discourse surrounding ‘otaku’ and Japanese popular culture, which continues to be an ‘un-self-aware Alan Sokal.’ [Thus,] it is very important to read as critically as possible the work of the first generation of ‘otaku’ (Ōtsuka Eiji 2015; “Otaku Culture as ‘Conversion Literature’”).