Outline and purpose of the course

Nation-building or regional marketing at first glance appear as matters of politics but they also penetrate deeply into the sphere of play, amusement, and leisure. This course revolves around the question how certain actors seek to create a specific “Japan” through leisure policies, domestic tourism, or the recent “Cool Japan” country-marketing campaign. Who decides what is play and non-play? Who decides about “good” play (asobi) in Japan? What role do regions outside Japan as well as leisure’s supposed opposites, seriousness and work, play in these attempts?

By tracing play as a matter of concern for policy makers, intellectuals, and ordinary people, the course further introduces a new theoretical and methodological approach to Cultural Studies that is less concerned with meanings and values but with contested, contingent modes of cultural ordering: narratives about, for example, a given nation’s place in the world and their material embodiments, such as written laws or metropolitan redevelopment projects.

Course goals

Students will receive basic instruction in the etymology of asobi and its role in discourses about the Japanese (nihonjinron). First and foremost, students will learn step-by-step protocols for analyzing cultural phenomena, such as play and leisure activities, by focusing on describable attempts of ordering (discourses, institutions, embodiments) that produce these phenomena using the example of Japan in a transcultural context.

Course schedule and contents

The course will be offered in accordance with the following general structure. A detailed plan for each class will be determined depending on the number of and the feedback from the participants, and will be announced in class.

(1) Introduction [3 weeks]

Lecture on Cultural Studies as the study of ordering modes (theoretical concepts, basic terminology, methodological protocols) and “play” as an object of inquiry, followed by an introduction to debates about the “Japaneseness” of leisure activities in Japanese-language discourse (since the 1960s). Students will further be provided with guidelines for class preparation and exercises.

(2) Readings and Discussion [5 weeks]

Students will read studies on play, leisure and work taken from different moments in Japanese history (e.g., Meiji Restoration, prewar tourism, postwar income policies, lifestyle superpower, moratorium people or Akihabara redevelopment) to present and discuss these readings in class. The focus lies on the question if – and how – these readings exemplify studies of ordering modes and how different approaches may lead to different conclusions.
(3) Exercises [6 weeks]
   Building on the previous sessions and depending on the number of participants, students will formulate and
   conduct exercises on current issues in Japan in which play is ordered and managed. This can take the form of
   individual, basic studies of such a matter of concern (e.g., through a newspaper analysis), or the development of
   gaming simulations to understand cases of ordering.

(4) Conclusion and Feedback [1 week]

Method, Point of view, and Attainment levels of Evaluation

Homework (20%), exercise (20%), feedback (10%), final report (30%), participation (20%).

Reference books, etc.

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

The course takes guiding cues from


   University Press.

Reading these books is not mandatory but the course will reference certain points of their discussion.

https://www.cats.bun.kyoto-u.ac.jp/elearn/ (You will have to register with this site and use the enrolment key you
   received from the teacher).

Regarding studies out of class (preparation and review)

Regular homework as well as exercises will play an important role in this course. Participants need to prepare one
   reading before each class session and are asked to write short comprehension essays afterwards, both of which will
   require at least one hour. Participants present at least one topic in class, which also necessitates preparation out of
   class.

Others (office hour, etc.)

*Please visit KULASIS to find out about office hours.

Consultation (office hours) by appointment. The course webpage will be available to download the course material.

Please contact Björn-Ole Kamm <kamm@cats.bun.kyoto-u.ac.jp> for any questions regarding this course syllabus.