

# Japan at Play: Nation-Building through Work and Leisure Politics

Instructor's affiliation, department, job title and name

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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

Nation-building at first glance appears as a matter of politics but it also penetrates deeply into the sphere of play, amusement, and leisure. This course revolves around the question how the Japanese state defined itself through leisure policies such as the introduction of “Western” forms of play during the Meiji period (1868-1912), prewar domestic tourism, the attempts to create a “lifestyle superpower” (*seikatsu taikoku*) or the recent “Cool Japan” campaign. What is the “Japaneseness” of play (*asobi*) and its opposites, seriousness and work?

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 [2 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 [6 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 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 and Presentations [6 weeks]

Building on the previous sessions, students will formulate and conduct own basic studies on current issues in Japan in which play is ordered and managed (e.g., through newspaper or forum analysis). Depending on the number of participants, these exercises are either done individually or in groups. Students will present their work in class.

(4) Conclusion and Feedback [1 week].

### Prerequisites

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2nd year and above.

### Evaluation

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Homework and exercise (60%), feedback (20%), participation (20%).

### Studies to be done outside of class

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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 exercise will play an important role in this course, so preparation and review out of the class requires at least about an hour.

### Textbooks

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None.

### Further readings

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

The course takes guiding cues from

- Kendall, Gavin, and Gary Wickham. 2001. *Understanding Culture: Cultural Studies, Order, Ordering*. London, Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Law, John. 1994. *Organizing Modernity*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Leheny, David. 2003. *The Rules of Play: National Identity and the Shaping of Japanese Leisure*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

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

### Others

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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 : Poster for the "Asobi – Play" exhibition at Kyoto National Museum, 2013.

M : Book covers of monographs about the play and the Japanese.

R : Posters from the "Cool Japan" Campaign showing Ayanami Rei, 2012.

## About the instructor

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### 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

"I would like my books to be a kind of tool box which others can rummage through to find a tool which they can use however they wish in their own area ... I don't write for an audience, I write for users, not readers" (Michel Foucault in O' Farrell 2005, 50).