

SOZ330: Japanese Popular Culture

Sophia University, Summer Session Online 2021(June 14-July 1)
Period 4 (15:25-17:05 Japanese Standard Time)

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Course Description

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this course will be taught online (**on demand**). If the class would like, we can schedule optional Zoom discussions to discuss course topics and texts.

Japanese fashions, games, manga, anime, toys, music, and more have spread worldwide and have created a new form of national superpower. Popular culture has changed Tokyo space and revitalized neighborhoods. Anime has played important roles in international events like the 2020/2021 Tokyo Olympics. Hello Kitty is arguably the most recognizable icon in the world and was made tourism ambassador to Asia in 2008. Emoji are programmed into global cellphones; Pokémon continues to inspire new franchises. Words like “sushi” and “otaku” are well known in several countries, and the suffix “zilla” (from Godzilla) is part of American slang. Before the 2020 pandemic, tourists from around Asia came to Japan in droves to buy popular culture goods, shopping patterns that have influenced the economic relationship between China, Japan, and South Korea. During the pandemic, popular culture has been integral to campaigns to stop the spread of COVID-19. What makes Japanese popular culture so fascinating? How are cute characters like Hello Kitty transforming global politics and the ways people construct their own identities? Are there any negative effects of regarding Tokyo as the “capital of cool”? We will look at how people of different age groups around the world have used Japanese popular culture to form communities, make statements about gender and identity, and to overturn cultural stereotypes. We will discuss how artists and corporations have spearheaded major trends, often with support from the Japanese government and through efforts of fans. We will analyze how Japanese popular culture both “belongs” to Japan and has become an “international” culture, linking people around the world.

To cover several topics in a few weeks, we will adopt an “object-centered” approach and introduce key trends through use of example historical and contemporary trends that have shaped artistic production, as well as, politics, society, and economics in Japan. These case studies are also a way to examine broader themes in Japanese culture (e.g., cultural literacy, otaku, and kawaii). As a result, more than delving into a “time capsule” of influential trends, we will learn enduring lessons about how popular culture reflects the societies that produce and consume it.

We will experiment with methods of the new academic field of Japanese popular culture studies. Students are encouraged to bring in materials related to course themes and to share their own experiences. Prior knowledge of Japanese culture and language is helpful but not required. All readings and discussions will be in English.

SOZ330 Reading List

1. Alisa Freedman and Toby Slade, eds., *Introducing Japanese Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2017). Available as an ebook.

- The *Introducing Japanese Popular Culture* book website provides helpful suggestions, additional resources and discussion questions –

<http://www.routledge-textbooks.com/textbooks/9781138852105/default.php>

2. Readings, websites, and videos available Moodle. (Indicated by an * on the syllabus.)

Tentative Assignments (Total of 150 points) – Information about assignments will be provided.

1. 2 tests (2 tests X 50 points = 100 points)
2. 1 trend report (50 points)

Each course topic includes readings from our class textbook (*Introducing Japanese Popular Culture*), supplementary audio and video texts, pre-recorded lectures, and assignments, all posted on Moodle. A complete syllabus with the list of assignments, deadlines, and other course information will be provided to students registered for the SOZ330.

Example Course Topics

Topic 1: Course Introduction

Topic 2: Popular Culture to Teach Disaster 1

Topic 3: Popular Culture to Teach Disaster 2

Topic 4: Anti-War, Anti-Nuclear Godzilla

Topic 5: Japanese Cute Characters Invade the World 1 – Hello Kitty

Topic 6: Japanese Cute Characters Invade the World 2 – Doraemon

Topic 7: Pokémon Secrets

Topic 8: “Robot Boys”

Topic 9: “Magical Girls”

Topic 10: Emoji, Cultural Literacy, and Globalization

Topic 11: Otaku Heroes and Internet Novels

Topic 12: Idol Examples – Girl Bands from Japan and Korea

Topic 13: Wrap-Up and Future Predictions

Topic 14: Trend Reports