Introduction to Japanese Culture

Fall 2017 - 21G.064/21G.592
Prof. Paul Roquet E-mail: proquet@mit.edu
Class: Tuesday/Thursday 11-12:30 in 14N-313
Office Hours: Thursdays 2-4pm or by appt. in 14N-334
Website: https://mit.instructure.com/courses/71

A critical introduction to Japan's expressive cultures, with a focus on media, society, and cultural history. Taught in English; 21G.592 includes additional work in Japanese. Communications intensive (CI-H).

Objectives

- Understand key contexts and concepts underlying contemporary Japanese culture.
- Critically examine what we talk about when we talk about “Japan.”
- Produce careful written analyses of creative materials and their position in the wider culture.

Required Materials

- All readings and films will be made available via Canvas, Plex, and Kanopy.
- You will also be required to visit the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (free to MIT students) to see the Takashi Murakami exhibition sometime between 10/18-11/8.

Student Responsibilities

1. In-class engagement and participation, including image introduction presentation (20%)
2. One battle presentation (based on Kyoto University's bibliobattle format) during term (10%)
3. Online critical responses (CR) (~300-400 words/week x10) (25%)
4. Paper 1: Exhibition Report (800-1000 words; 10%) - Draft 11/9
5. Paper 2: Research Paper (2500-3000 words): Proposal (5%) 11/2, Draft (10%) 11/30 (in class), 12/4 (upload), Presentation (5%), Final Draft (15%) 12/12

Each paper will include in-class peer-review. Note: 21G.592 includes an additional short paper written in Japanese, utilizing at least 2 Japanese-language sources.

Schedule

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tr>
<td>9/7</td>
<td>R &gt; Introduction</td>
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<td>9/12</td>
<td>T &gt; Is there such a thing as ‘Japanese aesthetics?’</td>
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<td>• Kamo no Chômei, “An Account of My Hermitage” (1212, 14p)</td>
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<td>• Nô play: “Dôjôji” (14c?, 16p)</td>
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<td>• Ryôsuke Ôhashi, “Cutting” (1986, 3p)</td>
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<td>In class: Image introductions 1/4</td>
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<td>Naoki Sakai, “You Asians: On the Historical Role of the West and Asia Binary” (2000, 18p)</td>
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| 9/19  | How did ordinary people experience Japanese colonialism and the Pacific War? | Excerpts from “Kokutai no hongi [Fundamentals of our national polity]” (1937, 3p)  
|       |                                                                      | Ango Sakaguchi, “Discourse on Decadence” (1946, 5p)                            |
|       |                                                                      | Ango Sakaguchi, “The Idiot” (1946, 33p)                                       |
| 9/21  | Did the American occupation set the terms for the U.S.-Japan relationship today? | Pigs & Battleships [Shōhei Imamura, 1961, 108’) [Kanopy]                       |
| 9/26  | How did manga experiments of the 60s and 70s shape today's pop culture? | Yoshiharu Tsuge, “Chico” (1968, 17p) and “Screw Style” (1968, 23p)           
|       |                                                                      | Ryōko Yamagishi, “Couple of the White Room” (1971, 80p)                      |
| 9/28  | Did the emergence of the mass media change what it meant to be Japanese? | Tokyo Drifter [Seijun Suzuki, 1966, 83’) [Kanopy]                            
|       |                                                                      | Mieko Kanai, “Rabbits” (1973, 17p)                                            |
|       |                                                                      | Yasutaka Tsutsui, “Rumors About Me” (1974, online)                           |
| 10/5  | What does 80s cyberpunk sci-fi tell us about the 2020 Tokyo Olympics? | AKIRA [Katsuhiro Ōtomo, 1988, 125’) [Plex]                                    |
| 10/10 | No class (Indigenous People’s Day)                                   | Consider: “Japan’s Government to Stipulate Ainu as ‘Indigenous People’ for First Time” Japan Times August 28, 2017 (online) |
| 10/12 | Are the aesthetics of ‘cute’ regressive or transgressive?           | Emily Flynn-Jones, “Game Cutification: A Violent History of Gender, Play and Cute Aesthetics” (2013, 19p)  
|       |                                                                      | Lorraine Plourde, "Babymetal and the Ambivalence of Cuteness" (2016, 15p)   |
| 10/17 | Where are video games in the larger Japanese ‘media mix?’            |                                                                          |
- Mia Consalvo, "Convergence and Globalization in the Japanese Videogame Industry" (2009, 8p)
- Marc Steinberg, “8-Bit Manga: Kadokawa’s Madara, or, The Gameic Media Mix” (2015, 12p)
In class: Gamebattle

### 10/19 R > How is popular culture redrawing the line between Japanese/non-Japanese?


### 10/24 T > Where is the cultural interface between Japan and the rest of the world?

- *Japanese Girls at the Harbor* (Hiroshi Shimizu, 1933, 72') [Kanopy]
In class: Mangabattle

### 10/26 R > Does transnational media create transnational togetherness?

- Koichi Iwabuchi, “Undoing Inter-national Fandom in an Age of Brand Nationalism” (2010, 9p)
In class: Bibliobattle

### 10/31 T > Who gets to tell the story of the Fukushima disaster?

- *The Land of Hope* (Sion Sono, 2012, 142') [Plex]
- Natsuko Fukue, “Aging Japan Faces Dementia Time Bomb“ (2017, online)

### 11/2 R > How should we understand Japan’s complex relationship with nuclear power?

- Eiji Ōtsuka, “Disarming Atom: Tezuka Ozamu’s Manga at War and Peace” (2008, 14p)
**Due in class: Peer Review Proposals (bring two copies)**

### 11/7 T > No meeting - in lieu of class go see Takashi Murakami’s “Lineage of Eccentrics” exhibition at the MFA sometime between 10/18-11/8

### 11/9 R > Do anime aesthetics have something to teach us about history?

- Jiying Li, “From Superflat Windows to Facebook Walls: Mobility and Multiplicity of an Animated Shopping Gaze” (2012, 18p)
**Due in class: Exhibition Report**

### 11/14 T > What is the connection between robots, role-play, and care for others?

- Hozumi Ikan, “Souvenirs of Naniwa” (1738, 5p)
- In class: Guest lecture from Michelle Ho
Participation: You are expected to come to class having engaged with the assigned materials carefully and with questions and observations to introduce to the group. As we will be looking very closely at each of the assigned readings, always bring a copy with you to class.

Attendance: Missing more than two class sessions will adversely affect your participation grade. In some cases, make-up work can be arranged if you contact me ahead of time.

Late work: 5% of the grade will be subtracted for every 24 hours late.

Academic Honesty: Consequences for plagiarism can include zero points for the assignment, failure of the course, and suspension. If you have any doubt about what constitutes plagiarism in the context of a particular assignment, or whether a source is reliable, contact me. See https://integrity.mit.edu/ for official policy.

Students with Disabilities: Any student with a documented disability is welcome to contact me as early in the semester as possible so that we may arrange reasonable accommodations. As part of this process, please be in touch with MIT Student Disabilities Services.