

"An Introduction to Modern Japanese Popular Culture"

JCMU Spring Semester 2010

Thursdays 1 PM – 4 PM

Room: 545 (5th floor of the Finance Tower)

Course Syllabus

This course introduces students to some of the key aspects of modern Japan's popular culture. A variety of entertainment, leisure and artistic topics will be examined. Popular culture, in all its fascinating diversity, will be used as a window onto contemporary Japanese society. Students will be encouraged to consider the differences and similarities between Japan and their own country through an examination of how popular culture is consumed and reproduced.

The goals of the course are as follows.

- To introduce students to Japan's contemporary popular culture.
- To enable students to understand the role of popular culture in society, and to encourage them to examine a variety of theoretical methods that can be used for an analysis of such culture.
- To enable students to reflect on the dynamic that exists between "global" popular culture and the variety of ways in which culture is consumed and reproduced in various local settings including Japan, and the students' home countries.

Courses will be taught by members of the academic staff of Shiga University. The staff will bring an extra dimension to the rich variety of learning experiences that are offered in this course by bringing their own individual enthusiasm, interest and academic expertise to the classes they teach. Experts from outside the university have also been invited to give talks.

Grading will be 40% oral presentation, 50% final report and 10% attendance and participation. The report should be submitted in the last class.

Session 1. January 7th : Introduction lesson ASPINALL, MANABE

How do we study society and popular culture? Issues involved in comparing different societies as well as various views that foreigners have had (and still have) about Japan will be presented and discussed.

Session 2. January 14th : Modern Kyogen MATSUMOTO, MANABE

There will be a talk and demonstration by professional Kyogen player, Matusmoto Kaoru. He will talk about both traditional and modern aspects of Kyogen performance.

Session 3. January 21st : Remembering World War II ASPINALL

This class will focus on the issue of how nations remember traumatic periods in their past. It will focus on forms of remembrance from popular culture (movies, comics and TV dramas) and also look at the controversial debate over history text books.

[January 28th: Shiga University exams - NO CLASS]

Session 4. February 4th : “Social Dancing” in Japan ASPINALL

This class will look at the way in which dance styles from foreign countries are imported into Japan and “re-made” in a Japanese way. The class will look at ballroom dancing as well as Latin dance styles like Salsa, Tango and Flamenco each of which has attracted a strong following in Japan.

[February 11th : National Holiday – NO CLASS]

Session 5. February 18th : The “Lost Generation” ASPINALL

This class will look at aspects of youth culture related to delinquency and crime, focusing on young people who came of age during Japan’s “lost decade” of the 1990s.

[February 25th : Shiga University entrance exams NO CLASS]

Session 6. March 4th : Ukiyoe and the origin of Manga SCOTT JOHNSON

Guest speaker Scott Johnson gives an illustrated lecture on the artistic origins of Japanese Manga.

Session 7. March 11th: Kanji and Japanese Culture TORANO

Session 8. March 18th: Topic to be announced

Session 9. March 25th : Multicultural Japan ARUDOU DEBITO, ASPINALL

This class will look at the increasing numbers of foreigners living in Japan, and attitudes

to internationalization and globalization that are reflected in popular culture. A talk will be given by human rights activist Arudou Debito who is American born but has adopted Japanese nationality.

Session 10 April 1st : Modern Japanese Popular Literature MANABE

This class will look at popular literature, including authors like Mishima Yukio and Murakami Haruki.

Session 11. April 8th: Student presentations and debates ASPINALL

Students make oral presentations in groups based on aspects of Japanese popular culture. Students will be encouraged to discuss what they have learned about Japan though looking at its popular culture. They will also be asked to consider aspects of the culture of their home countries in comparison to Japan.

Sessions 12: April 15th: Concluding Class ASPINALL, MANABE

We will look at some of the themes that have emerged during this course. What is the relationship between Japanese popular culture and global popular culture? How has Japanese popular culture changed over time?

Fieldtrip

There will be a one day field trip to Kyoto involving a trip to the Kyoto Manga Museum. Mores details will be given later.