

Introducing the Guest-Edited Section

Japanese Popular Culture

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Over the past decade Japanese popular culture has become an important subject in the scholarship and teaching about Japan. The increase in popularity of Japanese popular culture both within and outside of the academy can be indexed in a number of ways: the number of books (popular and scholarly) published on the topic; the increased number of undergraduate students who take course in Japanese or Japanese studies due to their interest in manga and anime; and even the number of job openings at the college/university level for someone who specializes in “Japanese Visual Culture” or “Japanese Popular Culture.” As scholars and teachers of Asia are discovering, these topics are of interest to our students and often serve to make Japanese studies more visible outside of the academy as well. In support of these trends, this special section of the *ASIANetwork Exchange* will focus on Japanese popular culture, by combining articles on recent research and practiced pedagogy from a range of scholars and across various disciplines (anthropology, literature, and religion) from different professional levels (new scholars and veterans).

The essays that follow each engage in the symbiotic relation between research and teaching, as experienced by liberal arts faculty. They put scholarly perspectives on Japanese popular culture in dialogue with conversations that are held in our classrooms, student unions, and wider media. The first three articles directly address ways to teach about Japanese popular culture to undergraduates who may or may not have Japan related coursework. 1) Dr. Deborah Shamoan outlines her strategy in teaching Japanese popular culture with a focus on narrative media. In particular, Shamoan addresses the inclusion of theoretical approaches to popular culture, the use of multi-

media course materials, and the challenges of teaching to those with varying levels of interest, from those without a background in Japanese studies, to those who are *otaku* (fans). 2) Dr. Jan Bardsley by contrast outlines pedagogical strategies for teaching undergraduates about geisha and the field of geisha studies through a combination of text and film, art and literature. Similarly, 3) Chris Born's analyzes the role of Confucian values in the recent anime hits *Naruto* and *Bleach* and argues that contemporary anime can be used in the classroom to examine traditional values and is also a useful device for understanding the connection between Japanese popular culture and larger anthropological and historical themes. Each of these essays provides strategic information as to how to teach about Japanese popular culture, drawing on the authors' own research interests and teaching successes.

The final two papers offer current research on topics related to Japanese popular culture. 4) My essay provides a link between research on popular culture in Japan and the experiences of undergraduate students in the U.S., by examining the ways that Japanese culture is produced, packaged, and marketed by the manga industry in the U.S. In particular, I analyze the ways that distributors and fans utilize and engage with the "Japaneseness" of these products in their own marketing and understanding of these popular texts. Finally, 5) Dr. Laura Miller provides a cross media analysis, examining why animals are so frequently used as stand-ins for human figures in Japanese imagery. Miller explores the use of animals as a type of displacement that renders potentially dangerous or sensitive domains safe and acceptable. Thus, while Japanese popular culture is a broad topic, these essays seek to draw together the breadth of the subject through discussions of manga and anime, theater, film, and marketing in Japan and in the U.S.