Japanese Popular Culture
MW 5–6 in Cohen 402; optional film screenings to follow on W 6–8:15

Today, Japanese manga, anime, J-pop, and film have a global audience. But these exports can only be truly understood in light of longstanding domestic anxieties about sex, violence, “the kids these days,” and vulnerability to natural and anthropogenic disaster. This course traces some of these anxieties through critical examinations of manga, anime, teen fiction (light novels), television commercials, music, and fashion in Japan.

As we engage with the assigned texts and films, we will investigate how the popular culture products of the present reflect Japan’s past and envision its future. We will also have opportunities to ask whether these media products are truly “Japanese,” why people call them “popular,” and what exactly the commonplace word “culture” actually means.

Learning Outcomes
The purpose of a liberal arts education is not merely the accumulation of facts. While you will emerge from this course with more general knowledge about Japanese popular culture, its primary objectives are to facilitate opportunities to engage in the transferable and life-long skills of critical reading, spirited yet civil discussion, and meticulous analytical writing. We expect you to demonstrate reflexive awareness of your own biases and healthy suspicion regarding stakeholders’ truth claims, both in your writing and in your contributions to class discussion.

Books to Buy at Penn Book Center
(130 S. 34th Street; NOT the Penn Bookstore at 36th and Walnut)

• Inoue Takehiko, Vagabond, vol. 1 (VizBig edition; actually vols. 1–3).
• Yazawai Ai, Nana, vol. 1.

—all other readings available in PDF form on Canvas—

Expectations and Workload
Each week you will have approximately 75 pages of academic reading, plus viewing a primary source (anime, live action films, and, in some weeks, reading manga). You must watch assigned films on your own time, but I have arranged group screenings after class on almost all Wednesdays this semester. Screenings will take place in Cohen 402 from 6 to 8:15 and will include time afterward for open discussion.

Class sessions will balance short lectures interspersed with review of specific passages or clips in small groups. You are expected to come to each lecture and recitation prepared to discuss the assigned material. Beginning in Week 2 and continuing through the semester, you will be expected to post a question or comment to the discussion board by 11:59 p.m. Tuesday. Your question or comment should cite or refer to a specific passage in the readings or a specific scene from the assigned films. Ideally, your post should not just be a request for factual information, but rather should be a point of interpretation (trying to figure out the meaning of a confusing
passage, for example) or perhaps a point of comparison (picking out two passages or scenes and highlighting an apparent continuity or discontinuity between them). You are welcome to respond to somebody else’s post to satisfy this assignment, but please make sure that your response addresses the person’s question substantively or takes the conversation in a new direction.

You must post at least 10 times over the course of the semester, but you are not allowed to cram all of your posts into a single week, nor may you make all of your posts at the end of the semester. In our 14-week semester this schedule gives you the flexibility to skip a post during those weeks when you are busier than normal, but in principle you should post every week. The reason for posting by midnight on Tuesday is that it gives me enough time to weave your questions and comments into lecture on Wednesday.

**Attendance**

Attendance and participation (including online) will count for 20% of your grade. Writing assignments reward those who attend lecture and recitation regularly.

You may miss one recitation session without penalty, no questions asked. If you know you will be absent due to illness or travel, please be courteous enough to email your TF ahead of time.

**Written Assignments**

30% of your grade will be based on a midterm paper, and another 30% will be based on a final paper. The first of these papers asks you to think about how the Japanese popular culture of the present exhibits continuities and discontinuities with the pop culture of the past. The second, due at the end of the semester, asks you to reflect on how current popular culture products embody anxieties about Japan’s present and future. The midterm and final papers are to be no fewer than 2000 and no longer than 2500 words.

You will also have two short response papers of no fewer than 400 words and no more than 800 words. Each response paper is worth 10% of your grade.

A sample grading rubric for each of the papers is available on Canvas. You are encouraged to seek help from the Writing Center for your assignments.

All papers should be written in Times New Roman 12-point font with one-inch margins. Submit them through the designated course dropbox as either Microsoft Word or Apple Pages documents. (Do not submit documents in .odt format or as PDFs.) Papers should be formatted according to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

**Academic Dishonesty**

If we catch you in an act of plagiarism, or if it is evident that you have arranged for someone else to do your work for you, you will fail the assignment and possibly the course. *There are no exceptions to this rule.* If you are struggling to finish an assignment on time, talk with your TF about getting an extension before you gamble with your future by cheating. It’s not worth it.
Grade Grubbing
Don’t do it. I will only entertain legitimate concerns about fairness in the very exceptional cases where there seems to be a major inconsistency in grading practices. The TFs and I meet regularly to discuss grading practices, guidelines, and expectations to ensure consistency across discussion sections. Needlessly needling me or your TF about a grade may very well work against you.

(Dis)comfort
In accordance with the guidelines laid out by the American Association of University Professors, I do not provide trigger warnings for course content. Please approach all course material as if it has an “R” rating—you can expect some explicit sex and some gratuitous violence. If this will bother you, then take another course. It is a big, scary, messy world out there, and undergraduate education is designed to prepare you for it, not shield you from it.

Screen Time
We expect you to be able to resist the lure of social media, shopping, and other non-academic activities while you are in class. I do not allow screens to be open during lecture unless we are discussing one of the readings. Your TF has final say on the use of screens during recitation.

Communication
As practice for the post-baccalaureate professional world, your e-mail communication with us should be formal. You are expected to use a formal salutation ("Dear" works well), identify yourself ("My name is X and I am in EALC 069"), and write clearly and politely about what it is you need ("I am afraid that I am going to miss recitation on Friday because I am ill").

Office Hours
My office hours are on Wednesdays from 2–4 or by appointment. I encourage you to contact me by email ahead of time so that I know to expect you. It also helps me to know in advance what you would like to discuss.

Teaching Fellows
Mark Bookman: bookman@sas.upenn.edu
Paul McBain: mcbp@sas.upenn.edu
Harry Schley: hschley@sas.upenn.edu

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grading Scheme (100 Points Total)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recitation Attendance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion Board Posts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Response Paper #1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Response Paper #2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extra credit is available through participation in Japan-studies related events. Details in class.</td>
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COURSE SCHEDULE

Part I: The Basics

Week 1: “Japan”/“Pop”/“Culture”
Wednesday (31 August): No readings, but familiarize yourself with the syllabus

Week 2: Manga
Monday (5 September): Labor Day. No Class.
  ‣ Ōtomo Katsuhiro, supervising dir. *Short Peace* (2013, 68 mins.)

Week 3: Anime
  ‣ Kon Satoshi, dir. *Paprika* (2006, 90 mins.) NOTE: Film cannot be streamed but is on reserve at Van Pelt; screening after class on 14 September.

Week 4: Robots and Cyborgs
  ‣ *Ghost in the Shell* (1995, 83 mins.)

***RESPONSE PAPER #1 DUE ON 23 SEPTEMBER***

Part II: The Past in the Present

Week 5: Drawing on Classical and Medieval Tradition
  ‣ Takahata Isao, dir. *The Tale of the Princess Kaguya* (2013, 137 mins.)

Week 6: From the Floating World to Modern Manga and Back

- Kudō Kankurō, dir. *Yaji and Kita, Midnight Pilgrims* (film optional this week)

**Week 7: Nostalgia for the Impossible Past**

Wednesday (12 October): Thomas, “Shūkyō Asobi and Miyazaki Hayao’s Anime.”


**Week 8: Empire and War**
Monday (17 October): Guest lecture by Dr. Stephen Poland (Harvard). Readings TBD.

Wednesday (19 October): Orbaugh, “Kamishibai and the Art of the Interval,” 78–100; Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen*

- Takahata Isao, dir. *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988, 89 mins)

***MIDTERM PAPER DUE ON 21 OCTOBER***

**Part III: The Anxious Present**

**Week 9: Good Girls and Bad Gyaru**


- Nakashima Tetsuya, dir. *Shimotsuma Monogatari* (*Kamikaze Girls*; 103 min.)

**Week 10: Boys to Men**


- Kon Satoshi, dir. *Perfect Blue* (1997, 121 mins.) Film screening room TBD.

**Week 11: Sex**

Week 12: Violence

Week 13: Family Values

Week 14: J-Pop and Japanese Takes on Global Musical Genres

Week 15: Protest and the Politics of Precarity

Week 16: Every Word in the Course Title Is Wrong

***FINAL PAPER DUE ON 16 DECEMBER***