Popular Culture Studies in Global Education
グローバル化教育とポピュラー・カルチャー

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1. Introduction

According to the Oxford English Dictionary "popular culture" is "the cultural traditions of the ordinary people of a particular community" and "culture based on popular taste rather than that of an educated elite, usually commercialized and made widely available by the mass media." Popular culture study hereby researches fields, forms and genres like music, literature, film, art, television, computer and video games, fashion, comics and graphic novels to give just a few examples.

Popular culture is especially alive and thriving in Japan. Furthermore, Japanese pop culture has turned out to be one of the biggest exports over the last decade: Manga, anime, J-Pop and *kaiju* movies are just some examples of the worldwide popularity of Japanese pop culture.

On this background it is sad to see that Japanese pop culture does not seem to be too much in the focus of academic interest. In the United States regular conferences about pop culture are regularly being held. At the National Conference of the Popular Culture Association of America (PCA) or the International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts held by the International Association on the Fantastic in the Arts (IAFA) academics, artists and fans debate various aspects of popular culture. Furthermore, at these conferences also the use of pop culture in education is being debated. In Japan no such conferences are being held, nor is popular culture often used as an educational tool in order to raise students' international understanding.

2. Course Description

In this presentation I am arguing that the use of pop culture in university education - especially in the frame of Global Education - is an important and efficient means.

Over the last few years, Japanese universities have intensified their attempts to motivate students to study abroad. This is an important move as in order for a future Japan to maintain a strong position on the international stage the education of internationally minded graduates is an utmost necessity.

Unfortunately among the present generation of Japanese students there is a strong lack of interest in the foreign matters, which mirrors in the disinterest in studying abroad.

In my opinion, one way to raise interest in foreign cultures and affairs is via teaching popular culture. Studying the popular culture of another country is in my opinion an efficient way to learn about the mentality of the general population and social and cultural concepts of this country.

In my presentation I am describing the proceedings of an ongoing "Introduction to Popular Culture Studies" held in the winter semester 2018. This course is held in the frame of Global Education and is intended to interest students in studying abroad and in preparing them for such an undertaking. This course is held exclusively in English in order to give students a feeling of what they can expect when they study outside of Japan.

Although interested in learning more about popular culture studies, most students

participating in this class lack any basic knowledge in this field. While outside of Japan popular culture phenomena such as the "Star Wars" movies are common knowledge all the participants in this class claimed not to know these movies, including their later parts that have been produced within the last decade.

In order to help students gain an understanding of what popular culture studies is about the first sessions are dedicated to finding out what hides behind the term 'Popular Culture'.

In the following sessions students are then directed to reflect about Japanese popular culture. They are asked to select one aspect/topic of Japanese popular culture and hold a presentation about this topic. In this presentation students should ask the following questions:

1. Describe this form of pop culture.
2. Who enjoys this form of pop culture?
3. How would you explain the popularity of this form of pop culture?
4. Does this form of pop culture involve a product that is sold commercially?
5. Does this form of pop culture involve patterns of interaction among people?
6. Does this form of pop culture reflect a perspective or belief? For example, video games might reflect a competitive perspective.
7. Is this form of pop culture popular in other nations?

Presenting about an aspect of their own cultural background is not only easier for Japanese students to talk about in English. It also is an important step in leading them to the main goal of the course: To research and gain an understanding of aspects of foreign popular culture.

After their first presentation about an aspect of Japanese pop culture, students then have to hold another presentation about foreign popular culture. This second presentation is then followed by addressing issues such as "gender", "influence of popular culture on politics"

or other topics presenters have raised during their presentations.

In my presentation I will show teaching materials developed and used in this course. I will also analyze and present the results of students' presentations. Finally I am going to address problems that turned up during the course.