

# Intercultural Popular Culture Classes

## 日本人と留学生のためのポピュラー・カルチャー授業

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### 1. Introduction

Popular culture can be defined as “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.

This presentation is about the proceedings and results of an “Introduction to Pop Culture” class held in the frame of Global Education classes as part of Tokushima university’s basic education for undergraduate students.

This class has been offered in the past two years as part of the Global Education section. Its intention was to raise the interest of Japanese students in “things foreign” via the study of aspects of international pop culture. Moreover, another goal was that by comparing aspects of Japanese and international pop culture students would also gain a better understanding of foreign cultures, leading to an interest in studying abroad.

This time the course was also taken by exchange students with a Scandinavian and Russian background. Due to this the course gained a wider international angle which will be the focus of this presentation: the exchange students added aspects of international/Scandinavian pop culture to the course. Moreover, in debates among all participating students the course participants could gain deeper insight into the culture of their fellow students.

### 2. Course Description

In the first part of 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 to raise Japanese students’ international awareness.

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 an efficient way to learn about the mentality of the general population and social and cultural concepts of this country.

I will give an outline of the proceedings and results of an “Introduction to Popular Culture Studies” course held in the winter semester 2018 in which only Japanese students participated. The same outline was also used in the 2019 class in which exchange students participated and on which I will elaborate in the second part of the presentation.

Although interested in learning more about popular culture studies, most Japanese students that participated in the 2018 and 2019 class showed a strong lack of even basic knowledge of international popular culture. While outside of Japan popular culture phenomena such as the “Star Wars” movies are common knowledge all the Japanese participants claimed not to be familiar with these movies, including their sequels 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 were dedicated to finding out what hides behind the term popular culture. In the following sessions students were then directed to reflect and present about Japanese popular

culture. They were 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?

In the second part of the course students then had to research and present in a similar manner about an aspect of foreign pop culture.

### 3. Presenting the Results of an Intercultural Pop Culture Class

The course in which exchange students participated was held in the same way. It turned out to be a very interesting and highly satisfying experience for all participating students. The foreign students could gain from their Japanese classmates deeper information about aspects of Japanese pop culture. Japanese students on the other hand were surprised to learn how much certain aspects of Japanese pop culture that even in Japan are not part of the general knowledge enjoy high popularity outside of Japan.

Furthermore, researching and presenting aspects of popular culture led to interesting debates about social issues in the Japan and the countries the exchange students hailed from: one class unit dealt with anime/comic series or popular programs that featured families. In this context programs such as Crayon Shinchan, Sasae san, Family Guy, The Simpsons or The Waltons were presented and analyzed. This again led to a

debate between students about the concept of family and family relations in which all students brought in their own cultural backgrounds.