

Childhood, Media, and Japanese Society

(Instructor: Stephen Choi)

Course Description

Japan has a rich history of publishing books for children spanning hundreds of years. Collectively, they reflect how children have been viewed in Japanese society over time. With the worldwide popularity of Ghibli films, anime, and manga, people living outside of Japan are currently able to access and enjoy a significant part of Japanese children's culture. However, the wealth of products such as magazines, books, toys, clothes, and snacks that have impacted the lives of children in Japan are yet to be widely introduced abroad. This course explores range of historical and cultural developments surrounding children in Japan, providing a comprehensive look into many different aspects of childhood in Japanese society. The ultimate aim is to facilitate a deep understanding of Japanese culture and history through the unique perspective of childhood.

During the semester, students will gain hands-on experience with Meiji period children's books, toy films, *kamishibai* (paper play), or even *randoseru* (backpacks specifically for use by elementary students). In addition to lectures and discussions, students will actively engage with the topic through field trips, interacting with shop owners, curators, and scholars in Kyoto, and making their own *kamishibai*. Through this exploration of children's books and culture, students will gain an understanding of some of the most fundamental aspects of Japanese society, as well as gain exposure to various styles of the Japanese language. It will provide an opportunity for students to investigate the interconnections of culture, society, identity, and language.

Expected Outcomes

Students are expected to gain the knowledge and ability to articulate the characteristics, role, and position of childhood in Japanese culture and society. They are also expected to advance their awareness of how society defines, interacts with, and utilizes childhood for various purposes under different historical conditions. Furthermore, exposure to the diverse linguistic styles used in children's books will raise the students' understanding of the social functions of language and how language changes over time.

Course Requirements and Evaluation

Attendance (10%): Daily attendance is mandatory. In case of absence, please notify the instructor.

Participation (20%): Students are expected to do the readings and prepare weekly responses in

preparation for each class. The responses will be used for in-class discussion. Both the responses and active participation in the in-class discussions will count toward the participation grade.

Field Trip Reports (20%): We will make a number of field trips during the course. Students will write short reports on the experience, what they learned, and how it relates to the topics raised in the class.

Group Project and Presentation (20%): Students will form groups to compose a short *kamishibai* and present it to the class.

Final Paper (30%): Students are expected to choose a topic related to a specific aspect of childhood in Japan and write an essay reflecting on their understanding of its history and social function.

Schedule for the Semester

Week 1: Introduction to the Course and the “Child” in Japan

This introductory week will provide an overview of the notion of childhood in Japan, how children were represented in media, talked about in discourse, and administered under public and private institutions. For the second part, we will look at Edo period woodblock-printed children’s books called *akahon* (red book), and also Meiji period books that resemble them called *chirimenbon* (crape paper book), as a way of exploring early developments in publishing for children in Japan.

Class 1 – Introduction to the course: what is the child?

Class 2 – Early picture books: from *akahon* to *chirimenbon*.

Supplementary Reading:

Child’s Play: Multi-Sensory Histories of Children and Childhood in Japan, ed. Sabine Frühstück and Anne Walthall (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017)

Keller Kimbrough, “Bloody Hell! Reading Boys’ Books in Seventeenth-Century Japan,” *Asian Folklore Studies* 74, Issue 1, (2015).

Week 2: Japanese Children’s Books

There are many children’s book stores in Kyoto with different themes and tastes. Some double as cafés and some are inside a traditional Kyoto house. We will visit a few bookstores in the vicinity, get acquainted with Japanese children’s books, and interact with the store owners. In the second part, we will discuss the beginning of modern children’s literature in Japan.

Class 3 – Field trip: children’s bookstores in Kyoto.

Class 4 – Iwaya Sazanami and the beginnings of modern Japanese children’s literature.

Supplementary Reading:

Laura Moretti, *Pleasure in Profit: Popular Prose in Seventeenth-Century Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020).

Melek Ortabasi, “Brave Dogs and Little Lords: Some Thoughts on Translation, Gender, and the Debate on Childhood in Mid Meiji,” *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* 20, (December 2008).

Week 3: The American Influence

American missionaries had a significant influence in the development of publications for children in Meiji Japan. We will discuss the impact of missionary education surrounding the first Japanese translation of Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. Professor Kakimoto Mayo (Kyoto Kacho University), an expert on this topic, and Doi Yasuko (International Institute for Children’s Literature, Osaka) will show us some very early iterations of Japanese children’s publications and share their thoughts.

Class 5 – Japanese children’s literature and translation: Wakamatsu Shizuko’s *Shōkōshi* (Little Nobleman).

Class 6 – Guest lecture by Professor Kakimoto Mayo and Doi Yasuko.

Supplementary Reading:

Sybille Jagusch, *Japan and American Children’s Books: A Journey* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press in association with the Library of Congress, 2021).

Week 4: Children and Spirituality

Contemporary Japanese society still upholds many traditions regarding children, such as *okuizome* (first meal), *shichigosan* (ceremony at ages 7, 5, and 3), *hatsu zekku* (first Sekku ceremony), that celebrate children’s growth at different ages. Many of these traditions regarding children have some relation to the gods. For example, children play an important role in the Kyoto’s famous Gion Festival as *chigo*, who perform rituals as representatives of Shinto gods. We will discuss issues of gender (in restricting *chigo* to boys) and the incorporation of Shinto imagery in animated films.

Class 7 – The role of *chigo* in the Gion Festival.

Class 8 – Shinto in Miyazaki Hayao and Shinkai Makoto’s films.

Supplementary Reading:

Iijima Yoshiharu, “Folk Culture and the Liminality of Children,” *Current Anthropology* 28, Issue 4 (August 1987).

Week 5: Unifying Japanese Childhood

The establishment and advancement of a national education system was essential in providing children in different parts of Japan, living under very different conditions, to acquire basic knowledge and language ability. By the 1920s and 30s, it was common for children in any part of Japan to complete at least elementary school education. Hence, it became possible for children across Japan to share the same culture, such as magazines. This week, we will think about how such developments unified and normalized the experience of childhood.

Class 9 – Education and childhood in Japan.

Class 10 – Taishō period children’s magazines: *Akai tori* (Red Bird) and *Shōnen kurabu* (Boys Club).

Supplementary Reading:

Nona Carter, *A Study of Japanese Children’s Magazines 1888-1949*, PhD Dissertation (2009).

Week 6: Field trip to the Kyoto Municipal Museum of School History

The Kyoto Municipal Museum of School History is a historical site in itself. It is housed in what used to be the Kaichi Elementary School, founded in 1869, which is even before the school system was promulgated in 1972. The school gate, built in 1901, is registered as a cultural heritage. The exhibitions including a wide variety of educational tools used from the Meiji period will provide a comprehensive look into how children have been educated in modern Japan.

Class 11/12 – Field trip to the museum and chat with the curator.

Supplementary Reading:

The History of Education in Japan (1600-2000), ed. Masashi Tsujimoto and Yoko Yamasaki (London; New York: Routledge, 2017)

Week 7: Gender Roles in Girls’ Magazines and Schoolgirl Culture

This week will focus on the female child and the gender roles ascribed to them at a young age. The term *shōjo* (girl) will be familiar to those with an interest in Japanese culture. The identity of the *shōjo* developed alongside magazines dedicated to them which took shape in the early 1900s. We will look specifically at *Shōjo no tomo* (Girls’ Friend), where some of the most prominent writers and illustrators of the *shōjo* genre published their works, and explore its relation to *shōjo* manga of contemporary Japan, especially in terms of how *maiko* (Kyoto’s geisha apprentices) were depicted.

Class 13 – The romance, fashion, and schoolgirl language in *Shōjo no tomo* (Girls’ Friend).

Class 14 – Depictions of *maiko* in *shōjo* manga.

Supplementary Reading:

Hiromi Tsuchiya Dollase, *Age of Shōjo: The Emergence, Evolution, and Power of Japanese Girls’ Magazine Fiction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019).

Masami Toku ed. *International Perspectives on Shojo and Shojo Manga: The Influence of Girl Culture*, ed (New York: Routledge, 2015).

Week 8: Parent-Child Relations in Performance

Children are almost always depicted in relation to the adults around them, especially their parents. In this week’s Noh play and film, not only can we see characteristics of the parent-child relationship, but we can also gain insight into broader socio-cultural issues. Through the popular trope in traditional Japanese theater of a crazy woman lamenting her child’s death, we can explore the religious worldview surrounding women and children. In Ozu Yasujirō’s 1932 film about two young boys and their father, *Umarete wa mitakeredo* (I Was Born, But...), the social hierarchy of salarymen

becomes starkly apparent.

Class 15 – The “mad mother” in the Noh play, *Sumida-gawa* (Sumida River).

Class 16 – Depiction of prewar children in Ozu Yasujirō’s *Umarete wa mitakeredo*.

Supplementary Reading:

Woojeong Joo, “I was born middle class, but...: Ozu Yasujiro’s shōshimin eiga in the early 1930s,” *Journal of Japanese & Korean cinema* 4, Issue 2 (2012).

Week 9: Generations and Aging in Postwar Children’s Culture

The abrupt ideological shift in the immediate post-WWII Japan, as well as the complex and severe conditions of the aftermath of war, brought about some significant changes in publishing for children. Now, the generations who experienced these postwar shifts constitute the elderly demographic, making the children’s culture of that era a space of nostalgia for the older generation. This week will introduce the work of translator, Ishii Momoko, whose career spans from the 1920s to the 2000s, as well as a 1937 children’s novel that regained popularity in recent years through adaptation to manga and film, to discuss the long life of cultural artifacts and their relationship to issues of age.

Class 17 – From Ishii Momoko to *Sekai meisaku gekijō* (World Masterpiece Theater) .

Class 18 – The longevity of *Kimitachi wa dō ikiru ka* (How Do You Live?)

Supplementary Reading:

Maria Chiara Oltolini, “Children’s Fiction and Anime: The case of *Shōkōjo Sēra*,” *Journal of screenwriting* 12, Issue 3 (2021).

Week 10: Stories as Toys

Before most households could afford to buy books for their children (especially during and after the war period), candy sellers brought stories and books to children in their home neighborhoods. *Kamishibai* (paper theater) story tellers would gather children, tell them a story, and sell them candy. We will first visit the Toy Film Museum to experience visual storytelling that you can play with, and then discuss the craft and culture of *kamishibai*.

Class 19 – Field trip to the Toy Film Museum.

Class 20 – *Kamishibai* and children’s stories that come to your neighborhood.

Supplementary Reading:

Sharalyn Orbaugh, *Propaganda Performed: Kamishibai in Japan’s Fifteen Year War* (Leiden: Brill, 2015)

Tara McGowan, *Performing Kamishibai: An Emerging New Literacy for a Global Audience* (New York: Routledge, 2015)

Week 11: Politics in Manga and Anime

Although manga and anime are integral constituents of children’s culture, many works reflect socio-

political issues in profound ways. This week, we will begin by reading one of Tezuka Osamu's most famous works, *Tetsuwan Atomu* (Astro Boy), which repeatedly deals with issues of war, gang violence, and weapons of mass destruction. The second class will focus on Kyoto's own animation studio, Kyoto Animation, to explore politics behind the production, distribution, and reception of anime.

Class 21 – Tezuka Osamu, *Tetsuwan Atomu*.

Class 22 – Various anime productions by Kyoto Animation.

Supplementary Reading:

Mizuko Ito, "Migrating Media: Anime Media Mixes and the Childhood Imagination," in *Designing Modern Childhoods: History, Space, and the Material Culture of Children* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2008)

Week 12: Kyoto International Manga Museum

This week, we will visit the Kyoto International Manga Museum, where we will also be able to view a *kamishibai* performance. After the visit, students will form groups and begin making a *kamishibai* of their own. The groups can continue to work on it until the final week, when they will perform the *kamishibai* in class.

Class 23 – Field Trip to the Kyoto International Manga Museum.

Class 24 – Group *kamishibai* workshop.

Supplementary Reading:

David Anderson, Shimizu Hiroyuki, Iwasaki Shota, "Memories of Manga: Impact and Nostalgic Recollections of Visiting a Manga Museum," in *Curator* 60, Issue 4, (2017).

Week 13: Technology of Daily Life

The Kyoto Railway Museum is akin to a theme park for many children in Japan. Trains are more than just a means of transportation, but an integral part of children's popular culture. It is a kind of contact point where technology and everyday life intersect. Pokémon (in the form of games, cards, anime, and good) is another great example of how innovations in media technology pervades people's everyday lives.

Class 25 – Transportation technology and children's daily lives.

Class 26 – The global multi-media phenomenon of Pokémon.

Supplementary Reading:

Nakazawa Shin'ichi, *The Lure of Pokémon: Video Games and the Savage Mind* (Tokyo, Japan: Japan Publishing Industry Foundation for Culture, 2019).

Week 14: Concluding Week

In this final week, we will sum up the course and each group will perform their *kamishibai* to the class.

Class 27/28 – Group presentations and overview of the course.