

## **Understanding Japan's Role in the World Through Images**

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### **Overview**

Over the last two decades, interest in exploring our understanding of global politics through images and visual artefacts has steadily increased. This growing interest has been dubbed the aesthetic or visual turn in international relations and seeks to understand how images not only shape global events but also our understanding of them. It has manifested itself in a number of political, economic and security issue areas, and has employed a range of sources from still to moving images, the traditional to the digital. This four-day mini-course will explore our understanding of Japan, its role in the world and the ways in which it is perceived by focusing on media representations, logos, postage stamps and the long-running TV animation series *The Simpsons*.

### **Format**

This mini-course will consist of a four daily online classes from Monday 28 June to Thursday 1 July 2021. Each class will last two hours and will consist of a range of activities including lectures, breakout rooms, Jamboards and live polls. The classes will be delivered by Blackboard and a link will be sent to you for each day's class. You are expected to log in, participate and hopefully enjoy. I have also included some readings below that are not required but recommended. Finally, you are welcome to email me at any time at the email address above.

### **Day 1: Japan in the World**

This class will serve as an introduction to Japan's postwar international relations by focusing on its most important bilateral relations, including the United States and China, in addition to its interactions with multilateral institutions like the United Nations, Group of 7 and European Union. The objectives of this first day are to provide you with an understanding of Japan's role in the world as well as how this role has been shaped by and understood through various media images.

The following reading and video will give you a good introduction to Japan's postwar foreign policy:

- Dennis Potter (2009) *Evolution of Japan's Postwar Foreign Policy*. Available at: [http://office.nanzan-u.ac.jp/ncia/about-cia/item/pdf\\_09/kenkyu\\_03.pdf](http://office.nanzan-u.ac.jp/ncia/about-cia/item/pdf_09/kenkyu_03.pdf)
- Kenneth Pyle (2020) *Japan and the Postwar Order*, 25 August. Available at: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/video/japan-and-postwar-order>

## Day 2: Postage Stamps

Let me begin by stressing that I am not a stamp collector. However, stamps are officially approved government documents and provide a fascinating microcosm of the way in which a government wishes to be perceived in terms of the images displayed and those ignored. This class will provide a framework for making sense of the information contained in an image such as a postage stamp before then taking you on a world tour of postage stamps ending up in Japan.

The following two readings will give you an understanding of the connection between postage stamps and geopolitics (through the case of Finland), as well as the example of Japan:

- Pauliina Raento (2006) 'Communicating geopolitics through postage stamps: the case of Finland', *Geopolitics*, Vol. 11, No. 4, pp. 601-662. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233269249\\_Communicating\\_Geopolitics\\_through\\_Postage\\_Stamps\\_The\\_Case\\_of\\_Finland](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233269249_Communicating_Geopolitics_through_Postage_Stamps_The_Case_of_Finland)
- Douglas Frewer (2004) *The Social Agency of Postage Stamps: Japanese Postage Stamps in a Global Context*. Available at: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/341769207.pdf> Be warned that this is long PhD thesis and I'm not expecting you to read it! The most useful section is a review of Japanese postage stamps issued during the Showa era, which is included from pages 193-211.

## Day 3: Logos

This class will focus on another specific type of image – the logo. Although usually associated with companies, their branding and marketing strategies, a number of governments and multilateral institutions have adopted logos. The focus of this class is placed on the Group of 7 (G7) and Group of 20 (G20) summits, as well as Japan's role in these informal mechanisms of global summitry.

The following two readings will introduce you to the traditional role of logos in a corporate context before then exploring the role they play in a more political context:

- Peter Shadbolt (2015) 'How important is it for a company to have a great logo?', *BBC News*, 7 May. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-32495854>
- Eugenio Cusumano (2021) 'Private military and security companies' logos: between camouflaging and corporate socialization', *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 52, No. 2, pp. 135-155. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0967010620923586>

## Day 4: *The Simpsons*

To end the mini-course we will look at the long-running TV animated show *The Simpsons* and explore its representations of Japan and the Japanese. We will explore the humour employed by the creators of the show and ask whether the treatment of Japan is stereotypical, offensive or something else.

The following video and reading highlight occasions when *The Simpsons* has been accused of causing offense, often through its depiction of foreign cultures, as well as a number of enduring myths about Japan:

- Screen Rant (2018) '10 Times The Simpsons Played the Race Card', 18 May. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmy6\\_6MGVjA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmy6_6MGVjA)
- Chris Harding (2015) 'Three Western myths about Japan', 20 August. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-34005681>