

Japan on American TV

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7:00pm ET

0:11 Maura Cunningham

Okay, it looks like we have a good crowd assembled and I'd like to say hello, and thank you for joining us today. My name is Maura Cunningham. I'm the Digital Media Manager at the Association for Asian Studies. I'd like to say good afternoon and good evening to those of you tuning in from around North America. And good morning to the early risers joining us from Asia. I'm really thrilled to see so many people in the audience to launch our latest Asia Shorts book from AAS Publications, which is Alisa Freedman's *Japan on American TV: Screaming Samurai Join Anime Clubs in the Lands of the Lost*¹. This book is a lot of fun. But even more importantly, it prompts us as readers to think critically about depictions of Japan in the popular culture we consume from Bugs Bunny and Big Bird to *Saturday Night Live* and Marie Kondo. I'd like to thank the Henry Luce Foundation for supporting this series of AAS Digital Dialogues. The emergency response grant Luce awarded us in mid 2020 has enabled the Association for Asian Studies to pivot in a whole new direction, and broaden our offerings to the Asian Studies community. So thank you very much. Anyone watching this discussion who has their own idea for an AAS Digital Dialogue should contact me to put to talk about putting together a short proposal, we've had a wonderful series of events on important topics ranging from Asian Studies and Black Lives Matter to the ongoing events in Hong Kong to how to prepare a book proposal, and I look forward to many more engaging and useful conversations in the future. To give you a rundown of how this roundtable will go, I will serve as moderator, Alisa Freedman will speak first providing everyone with an overview of *Japan on American TV* and sharing some of the key points in her book. After that, we have three distinguished panelists who will comment on the book and how it relates to their own research and teaching interests. We'll move into a group discussion after which the panelists will respond to questions from the audience. You're all muted and have your camera's off. So please send your questions to the panel using the Q&A box on the Zoom screen. Before we start, I'll quickly introduce our speakers whose full bios appear on the event page at our website. First, we have Alisa Freedman, who is professor of Japanese Literature, Cultural Studies and Gender at the University of Oregon, and the editor in chief of the US-Japan Women's Journal. She is also a past chair of the AAS Northeast Asia Council. Anne Allison is professor of cultural anthropology at Duke University and author of several books perhaps most relevant to today's discussion is her 2006 Volume *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination*², which Alisa is holding up! Jan Bardsley is professor emeritus in the department of Middle Eastern Studies at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. And earlier this year, she published a new book, *Miko Masquerade*:

¹ Freedman, Alisa. [*Japan on American TV: Screaming Samurai Join Anime Clubs in the Land of the Lost*](#). United States: Columbia University Press, 2021.

² Allison, Anne. [*Millennial Monsters : Japanese toys and the global imagination*](#). Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

*Crafting Geisha Girlhood in Japan*³, which was published by UC Press. And Bill Tsutsui is an expert on Godzilla and Japanese pop culture, as well as chair of the AAS editorial board. And he's also very busy with his day job, which is as President and Professor of history at Ottawa University. With that introduction, I'd like to invite Alisa Freedman to begin our celebration of her new book *Japan on American TV*.

3:33 Alisa Freedman

Thank you, I'm sorry, Bill, your Godzilla books are over there on my bookshelf⁴. I'll hold them up later. And just I'm going to share my screen and just show very few PowerPoints. But I just want to give a thank you to AAS for all that you do. The book is it's been such an honor working on this book with a shout out to Jon Wilson for being such an amazing editor. And also, it's such an honor to be here with Jan, Bill, and Anne. I hope you know how much your work has inspired me and everybody else in this audience. So when we have a Q&A, I am so honored that my book could have the chance to bring everybody together. So the questions are not just for me, they could be for all of us because it's so rare to have all of us in one room and I hope we will be in one room again. Soon, not just on Zoom. But I'm going to take about nine minutes and go over some key points. I wrote this book based on my teaching and after discussions with students, I kept coming to class and televisions as social glue. And we kept sharing images that we saw on television and trying to work them out. And the book argues that American television from the 1950s with the present shows an alternative history of American fascinations and fears of Japan. Thanks to AAS for this, you've produced this book so quickly, and you designed it so well and so affordable, that I've made it to be shared with four audiences. This almost encompasses everybody, students, teachers, scholars and non-specialists. To do so I beta tested the chapters I gave talks, I created teaching materials and their discussion questions and in the book, and the purpose of the book is to explore the political, cultural economic processes that underlie depictions of Japan on US television comedies, and the more earnest programs they inspire, to quote Jan, the book asks viewers to take a second look at their favorite programs, not only questioning portrayals of Japan, but also TV depictions of cultures and histories more broadly. So I hope this book is a call to action to look at what we watch on television and to think critically about it. As Bill and Jan have said so generously, the book is what I intended to make you chuckle make you cringe, but ultimately make you think. So I asked about questions in this book. When we stop and think about images of Japan on American television, what can we learn about both countries? Should we take easily consumable television programs meant for entertainment seriously, does doing so ruin the fun of watching them? And just before we move to the next slide the cover, since I mentioned the book was inspired by my teaching, maybe all of you have had this experience because most of us are teaching during the pandemic, I had a student who kept doodling during my Zoom classes. So I asked him to design the book cover. So a shout out to Will Bowles for doodling during my classes and designing the book cover. So let me advance to the next slide. I put this image in for Bill of Godzilla. But since the start of regular programming in the 1950s, US programs have

³ Bardsley, Jan. [*Maiko Masquerade: Crafting Geisha Girlhood in Japan*](#). United States: University of California Press, 2021.

⁴ Tsutsui, William M.. [*Godzilla on My Mind: Fifty Years of the King of Monsters*](#). United States: St. Martin's Publishing Group, 2017.

taken the role of curators what I mean by this is television programs select aspects of Japan to show to a mainstream audience. Beneath this process lies beliefs in American superiority over Japan through the decades. So American television like that of other countries generally reaffirms that that country's belief systems of behavior or norms are the right ones even while poking fun at them. So TV can react to things in the public eye. But it can't subvert discourses as easily as other art forms like novels, fine arts due to the need for a mass audience. Advertisers, state-supported networks. I'm not going to read all of this. But if you go on and read the book, like all of us, when we write books, we have to think of a way to organize our materials. And how I decided to do so was to look at television discursively. For example, in the 1950s, I kept seeing a prevalence of characters of judo instructors that were sort of perpetuating this racist depiction of Japanese men from American propaganda cartoons from the 40s and tying it in with 1950s fads for martial arts. So these categories sort of reflect what's going on in the dominant discussions in the media escapes, and they also reflect what's going on in television broadcasting. And Bill can speak to this too. But you notice this disconnect between the kinds of American programs being imported from Japan, and the kinds of images of Japan that are being shown on American television, America tends to extend the Japanese-ness, if you will, well, a lot of these programs are appreciated because they're cheap filler, or they're especially campy. So the book is not meant as a companion with things wrong with television. But it's I hope models a new way that we can use Asian Studies to explore across cultural media. So my goal in this book is to encourage larger discussions about how we approach racism, cultural essentialism, cultural appropriation and other issues that are difficult to discuss. And television also sheds light on the role of cultural and national branding. So an ultimate question I hope the four of us can discuss today is, um, can American media have fun with Japanese culture or any other culture without advancing racist and sexist tropes or beliefs in American essentialism? So very quickly, a guiding principle of this book has been parody I know you all know parody. But what I mean by this is parody extends one aspect of something to make it funny, again, Godzilla for Bill. This is from *The Simpsons* in Japan, but parody only works when we get the joke. Like we look at this picture of Godzilla and we laugh because it's Godzilla and it's doing something out of context. Parody as I argue also makes our competitors seem funny and thereby non-threatening. It shows how different we are rather than uncomfortably similar. So when we look at American parodies of Japan, they tend to make Japanese people and culture seem incomprehensible wacky, non-threatening, diminutive, cute and small. And in most of these sketches, stories and skits, American characters try to make sense of Japan for audiences. So when you look at this picture, for example, from *King of the Hill*, you notice the sort of pastiche of things that represent Japan, the *torii* gate, the sakura blossoms, the shoji screens, the house, the beer cans, but they're all flattened and put together into this image of Japan for television or what I call this "land of the lost" where Americans will feel is lost in various ways. So this is not innocent behind all these depictions percolate some very difficult historical memories, as I mentioned, the 1950s Judo instructors that engage with this racist stereotype in Warner Brothers cartoons and Disney cartoons from the 1940s come back for children in the 1950s. And this, again we were having our practice session before it began, we were talking about like watching programs like this as children and a lot of this media when you're a child, you don't think, oh, this is a stereotype of Japan and for adults, but you consume this media as a child, and it sort of affects how we view the world subconsciously or

not. So I could give some examples, but I hope we talk about this more together. And I'll just take one more minute. In the first chapter I explore how the persistence of the stereotype of Japanese racist male soldiers comes back in 1950s Hanna Barbera cartoons and also in yellow face depictions in the 50s and 60s like this depiction, as you see at the bottom right of Vito Scotti, from, has anyone seen this *Gilligan's Island* episode? Where he plays a Japanese soldier who doesn't know the wars have ended. But I argue that also the same television producers who had created these cartoons are coming back and recycling these images in various ways. Has anyone seen the John Belushi samurai parodies from the 1970s from 75 to 77? There were 16 of them. But Belushi plays Samurai Futaba, who's not a Samurai coming into an unknown community. He's a samurai based in New York. And part of the joke is he does jobs based in New York, and he interacts with Americans. And he speaks samurai grunts is a screaming samurai in the title. And he always interacts with all of these shows that interact with Japanese and American characters. But in one episode that might resonate with us as teachers, to give you an example of how this comedy operates, Belushi is playing samurai Futaba who is failing school and he goes to Dean Bynum, in the episode, big man on campus and Dean Bynum says, "how can you fail Asian Studies, it's the easiest class on campus? All you have to do is show Asia on the globe and you could get an A." So Samurai Futaba slices off Asia and hands it to the dean. I'm bringing this up because we see some parodies coming out of a discourse on *jidaigeki*⁵ samurai films it's modeled directly on the Belushi's interpretation of Mifune's⁶ acting style. But in a way it's subverting it looking at how the Samurai is part of these not slashing Japanese things. He's slashing at American culture in various ways. Not to be violent, but to be funny, but when we stop and look at these things, we learn a lot. Again, I mentioned this disconnect with Sony televisions that are marketed to fit into the American landscape, *tokusatsu* which is being appreciated for seeming campy, or Japanese cartoons that are being globalized at the same time that summary at the top is airing, so I could go on and on *Big Bird in Japan* was produced at a time of Japan bashing but celebrates instead of bubble era Japan, this more cuteified kind of pastoral Japan, and animated cartoons always implicate Japanese war memory and at the same time show that Japan's incomprehensibly different one question I was discussing and in fact, on emails with Anne, and I'm glad you brought this up too, that gender does make a difference in these parodies. Like for example, when *The Simpsons* and other animated characters go to Japan, it's notably the men who get in trouble. The other genders like the women like Marge Simpson is always absent when when the Bart and Homer get themselves into scrapes. But I'm going to wrap up but if these programs again cover up a lot of memories, like here's the emperor in, the Japanese emperor and *The Simpsons* in *South Park*, and you could see that these episodes couldn't be shown in Japan. So I'm looking at how America is creating a Japan for American television. And when we get to the teaching part, I'd like to talk about this series. I don't know, has anyone seen *Saturday Night Live*? This is a wonderful four skits from 2011-2012 that show the effects of Japanese popular culture on students and teachers. This is a program in which Japanese students produce a fictional television broadcast and there uh, professor who has to be on site at the time is always telling them no, you're my loudest and worst students. But the program sort of, to me presents sort of a pedagogical lesson even though it's meant for fun, that we have to think about the hierarchies of

⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/art/jidai-geki>

⁶ [Toshiro Mifune](#)

knowledge, like the professor presumably has a degree in Japanese Studies from an American University. The students get their fan knowledge. The students listen to the professor, the professor doesn't listen to the students. But maybe when we teach our students to think about the kinds of images that they're consuming, and that the images have histories and come out of context, we can promote a broader learning of media in general. So again, I am going to wrap up after 20 slides we can go on and on Marie Kondo. Those of you who know me know that I would love to have lunch with her, I think she uses stereotypes in amazing ways of both Japanese and American women. And she really along with the program, Netflix *Queer Eye: We're in Japan* presents a sort of a barometer of how far American television has become. And the book constructs that one of the biggest changes in American views of Japan on television is the diversification of characters, the *Queer Eye*, Fab Five, the gay men who specialize in different areas come out of this kind of LGBTQ activism trying to promote being out loud and proud, which sort of resonates being a bit tone deaf in their program on Japan. But it's useful to watch and see how Kondo again how she manipulates stereotypes, extend what we see in *The Flintstones* that directly take a stereotype from one media to another. Here we have the sense of more agency going on and television. So I hope this nine minutes made sense. I'd be happy to come back and talk about these and a whole host of other programs. And I'd love to hear what all of you think about your experiences of watching, teaching and researching Japanese television and popular culture. Thank you. I'm going to stop sharing my screen.

16:30 Maura Cunningham

Great, thank you so much, Alisa. That was a really fabulous overview of a very engaging book. At this point, we're going to turn to our three panelists who will comment on the book and also share some thoughts about how it relates to their own work and teaching and so forth. We're going to go in alphabetical order. So we will start with Anne Allison.

16:50 Anne Allison

Thank you. So first, I'd like to thank AAS for putting on this fabulous, you know, venue and program and Alisa your book is fabulous. It is fun to read. It's a pleasure. It's political, it's biting, it's pedagogical, and it's moving. It was a real pleasure to read from beginning to end. And I at Duke, I don't teach classes, oddly enough on Japan or else I would be using it you know, right now in the classroom, but I'm sure it's incredibly teachable. So I had, you know, being able to do this gave me the opportunity to go back to my own book, *Millennial Monsters*, which Maura so kindly mentioned in her introductory remarks, thinking about a slightly different thing that I did there. I mean, you're doing, you're looking at media images, I love the trope of parody. I love the historicization that you do you know from the 50s/60s/70s and I was struck the- what I do so I look at you know, character merchandise. As you all know, I look at four ways of character merchandise starting with Mighty Morphin Power Rangers that when it was introduced in the US in 1993 had to be Americanized to get on the screen because no one thought that American kids would identify with Asian bodies on the screen. And it was Americanized and when I did my research on *Millennial Monsters* and interviewed someone at Saban, he had the audacity to call it a true American Classic even though of course they came from Japan. But of the other merchandise that I looked at *Sailor Moon* and then Tamagotchi and then *Pokemon*, you know, gradually things became acceptable Made in Japan was no longer a curse, was no longer

stigma, things, of course, continued to be Americanized, but less so. And, and a couple of things that I did in the book that I would love to ask you about. And we and we can maybe do this in Q&A or later is one is what are the conditions that produce that? I mean, in part what I what I argued is there was a particular moment of kind of globalization and also modernity, post modernity, post Fordism, Mighty Morphin Power Rangers with all the changeable you know, parts seem to be, you know, incredibly economic to mean there was something about changing your parts as if, you know, lean production. It felt like a, you know, a template for Lean Production that you play with and Sailor Moon to I mean, you move around your parts you customize yourself, you interact. And you know, the conditions of the 1990s-2000s really seem to breed that so I was just wondering, you know, what about the conditions of this particular moment, would you say are important for producing the reception that you that you're arguing is that as I understand you correctly, as still being a cutification of Japan? And then the other question that I would ask you is another thing that I tried to do in *Millennial Monsters* is I tried to say that the Made in Japan, you know why, in part, it was so attractive to American kids and global kids is because of a particular aesthetic that I call kind of a techno animism aesthetic, that it was punchy, and it was cool. And it wasn't black and white. And it was great. It was more ambiguous. And it was, and it was that aesthetic, call it Japan or not Japan, some people will call it Japan or just as global. It was that particular structure that you're calling parody, but I take a parody of things coming from Japan into America. But I'm wondering if there's something itself of, you know, what is, you know, Japanese media that becomes appealing to our students, you know, right, or to young people now? And what would that be? So those would be the two questions that I would put on the table for us to discuss is both what is this particular, you know, Made in Japan aesthetic, you know, Godzilla going on, on down, but also what are the conditions of this particular moment of the 21st century that are making, you know, Japan be held and received in particular ways in a country like the United States, but again, kudos, thank you. This was was a wonderful pleasure. And it's wonderful to be with Jan. And Bill, I haven't seen you guys for a long time. So thank you for inviting me.

21:11 Maura Cunningham

Thank you so much Anne. And can we move on to Jan Bardsley?

21:16 Jan Bardsley

Yeah. There now I'm okay. Okay. Thank you. Thanks for those comments too. Anne, and I have to say *Millennial Monsters* was really fun to teach, and got such a great reaction and discussion from students. So thank you for this wonderful book, Alisa, it certainly fits the goals of the Asia Shorts Series. That is it's a small volume with a big message, offering strong scholarship on a timely topic for a wide audience. So I'd like to start by talking about some of the things that impressed me about your book, just a few of the many things, and particularly its potential as a classroom text. I admired the way you build the context for each of these shows, from *Popeye* to Marie Kondo and John Oliver, you draw our attention to shifting historical context, changing relations between the US and Japan, what was happening in the TV industry, from its initial popularity in the 1950s, to the streaming phenomena today, you make useful comparisons between TV programming in Japan, and the US, and you know, areas of collaboration, some that worked, some that didn't. But I think it's very important the way you train us to zoom into

close readings of selected episodes, helping us to see the visual aspects of the frame, the use of language, Japanese, English, and some kind of language in between that in some of the shows, and of course, the gender and racialized dynamics. In other words, you guide the reader and how to watch TV critically, while remaining aware all the time that these shows intend to comfort and amuse, as you say, a mass audience and win sponsors, I was also struck by how well you explained terms, bringing all your readers aboard from the concept of *kawaii* to intertextuality. I mean, everybody can read this book and learn about these terms, and then follow the discussion. And throughout the discussion, you keep coming back to past shows. So it works very well as a whole and keeps everybody thinking about not just one particular show, but the flow of all the shows. The book is so approachable, but you never talk down to the reader. You offer a model of how we can be critical of these TV shows, but still respectful of their audiences and your readers. So it makes your book so inviting your reading *Japan on American TV*, I can almost hear you talking with your students about these shows as the way you do encouraging them to discuss to look closer to debate the issues. So I'd like to hear what kinds of assignments you give students in your class. For my own reading, of course, I had lots of fun with your watch list. So doing this gave me first of all new views of shows from my childhood like *The Flintstones*. And all I remembered about *The Flintstones* was his kind of funny creativity. But when I watched the show again and I saw the gender dynamics and the depiction of Rocky Moto, I was course horrified. But then I was even more horrified at the possibility that maybe when I was a kid, I didn't notice that at all. Your book taught me a lot about *The Simpsons*, *King of the Hill* and *South Park*. And I was so surprised. For example, among the very silliness of *King of the Hill*, for example, there was a very poignant episode about a World War II veteran returning to Japan despite his lingering PTSD. Reading about *The Simpsons* in your book motivated me to view some other ones outside of the Japan theme. I recently saw a clip of *The Simpsons* in France, walking up the Balenciaga show in Paris. And so your book also makes me more critical of how other national cultures are featured on American TV. And I have to admit, I was an early fan of Marie Kondo. I even read it in Japanese slowly. I still do some of the folding moves though I, I kind of had the pullback because I started to worry about my socks feelings. But I learned so much more about the show from your book about Kondo's education, her *nadeshiko*⁷ persona, about the difference in reception of her brand in Japan and the US and how those could interact. And how her Netflix show reinforces contrasting notions, as you put it of kind of the mystic Japanese and the confident emotional Americans. On the one hand, I was happy that Marie Kondo show exposed Americans to Japanese language. But, you know, as other Japanese studies scholars have pointed out, I was worried about how people would interpret her idiosyncratic rituals as actual Japanese religious practices. So as you point out in your book, that's where Asian Studies expertise can help us guide students to look at this issue knowledgeably. Reading about "J-pop [America] Funtime Now" I was struck by Sensei Mark Kaufman's caution which you quoted earlier, "If there's such a thing as a loving version, racism, I think you've found it". The line shows how, in these SNL pop sketches and in John Oliver's funny send up of the Japanese town mascots. These programs themselves carry a kind of internal critique. They do make the viewer aware of certain aspects of Japanese culture, while cautioning us about the dangers of embracing too narrow a view of Japan or even a wholly invented view of Japan. But I think they also suggest we can join in the fun of Japanese popular

⁷ [Yamato nadeshiko](#)

culture playfully too. I wonder, though, where this fun and this critique leaves students who are enthusiastic about Japan who are trying to use Japanese language and trying to use Japanese body language, how can language students avoid becoming parodies themselves? Where's the line? Lastly, you mentioned that you see your book as a gentle way to approach controversial issues. And that's something we sorely need in the US today. Clearly, we live in an environment where almost any mention of race can lead to heated rhetoric. School board meetings become violent. We know about the rise in anti Asian and Asian American violence. College classrooms are not immune from this contentious environment. Most recently, there's the case that University of Michigan where professors screened a black face performance in his Opera class, and that became a nationally debated controversy.⁸ So given that *Japan on American TV* grew out of a class you taught, and you're a great teacher. What advice can you offer instructors on how best to approach controversy in the classroom? How do you get everyone on board and building a climate of trust? That also risks moments of discomfort and contention? And how can we involve students in discussing what and what not to screen in class and how to view it? So I'll end there. Thank you again for the book.

28:40 Maura Cunningham

Thanks so much, Jan. And just like Jan, took a new view on *The Flintstones*, after reading *Japan on American TV*, I definitely have a different perspective on Bugs Bunny. So let's say your work is destroying childhood memories, but also really prompting us to think more critically about them. And then I think we are going to wrap things up with our final panelist, Bill Tsutsui.

29:05 Bill Tsutsui

Well thank you so much. Let me start by saying what a pleasure and an honor it is to be with you today in the company of scholars whose work is so influenced and inspired me, it is also just a joy to be celebrating the launch of Alisa Freedman's *Japan on American TV*, which I had the privilege of reading through multiple times in my former role as editor of the Asia Shorts Series at AAS. This is a marvelous, concise volume. And I'll share it's probably my favorite of the series, though I should not admit that publicly. And it's really one of those unusual scholarly works that is great for students and classroom use substantial and original and provocative. And that's great for academic experts too, and perhaps most appealingly of all, to me, extremely accessible to general readers. It is tremendous fun to read. It's very entertaining. And yet, as several of the blurbs on the back suggest, and I would just mention, this book has some of the most compelling blurbs I've ever seen from three individuals named Anne Allison, Jan Bardsley, and Bill Tsutsui. It is also as Alisa mentioned, consistently sobering a bit unsettling and genuinely cringe-inducing, as I think everyone today has affirmed once one starts unpacking the casual stereotyping, racism, sexism, othering, and hierarchical power relationships that suffuse popular culture, and especially TV series that so many of us grew up with, and have never felt deeply about. If this book ruined *The Flintstones* for Jan, and Bugs Bunny for Maura, than it ruined *Gilligan's Island* for me. It when you read that the sort of nostalgic fondness and retrospective chuckles one might have quickly give way to significant moral discomfort and embarrassment. Now, one of the things I appreciated most about *Japan on American TV* is the way that it empowers readers to take the perspectives presented here. The background and

⁸ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/15/arts/music/othello-blackface-bright-sheng.html>

cultural literacy that Alisa provides the approaches for reading popular culture, the encyclopedic treatment of American pop culture stereotypes of Japan over the past 70 years, and employ them as a kind of intellectual toolkit for exploring other media products that have flowed between Japan and the United States and for examining US-Japan relations in some novel and productive ways. I have tried to do just this in my own work on the Godzilla film franchise and its reception in the United States, and found so much resonance with the questions Alisa asks and the conclusions that she draws. In America, of course, the Godzilla films along with spaghetti westerns and Hong Kong martial arts flicks have come to virtually define cheesiness in the American popular imagination. Cheesiness being this kind of parodic consumption of a media product that is structured as inferior, cheap, simple-minded, low tech so bad, it's good. In the Godzilla movies, think the actor in the rubber suit walking through toy cities, the bad dubbing, the often absurd storylines. What I've discovered in my research is that the Godzilla films made in Japan were not somehow intrinsically cheesy, but that their cheesiness was largely manufactured in Hollywood by distributors eager to Americanize, and make palatable to broad US audiences in drive in theaters and on Saturday afternoon, double bills and imported product scrubbed clean of any political references, extracted from its Japanese roots, and made humorous in ways that demeaned those who made the movies and the cast Japan and the Japanese in highly stereotyped ways as physically small as weak as inferior in all aspects to the American spectators. Considering the Godzilla was the first pop culture export from Japan, to enjoy mass popularity in America starting in the mid 1950s, the patterns of depicting Japan in edited dubbed and cheese-ified monster movies was very much consistent with and perhaps even an important precursor of the spectacles of *Japan on American TV* that Alisa, so masterfully analyzes in this book, and I really hope that after reading this book, others both students in classes and scholars in their research will consider taking this toolkit that Alisa has provided us with and apply it to other forms. There is so much culture that has flown between the United States and Japan since World War II that despite all the interest in pop culture in the academy in recent years has not received the attention it deserves. So I will shut up now about radioactive monster lizards. And let us get on to the discussion. Thank you.

34:36 Maura Cunningham

Thanks so much, Bill. I can see we already have some questions from the audience starting to come in. And also please feel free to continue to suggest them. I'd like to get the discussion started with a pretty concrete question for Alisa and also anyone else who would like to chime in. But when you're teaching these very sensitive or racist even, texts to your classes, how do you introduce students to these class goals format for discussion? How do you prepare them to when you're going to be showing them these really demeaning depictions of Japanese characters? And then on a very practical level, what sort of assignments do you give to your students when they're looking at these media products? And how do you incorporate them into your teaching?

35:33 Alisa Freedman

I'll tackle this question first. And I just want to thank Anne, Jan and Bill, thank you so much for when you write a book, I mean, you put it out there we all know this, you put it out there in the world and then people read it and how they think about it really amplifies like it's just all of us.

I'm not being coherent with this but you know, that experience when someone like Bill you said a toolkit or Jan sort of amplifying the teaching aspects are or Anne, your work has inspired me so much about the Power Rangers behind this. And hearing how people use something that you wrote is truly amazing feeling. And I thank you so much for that. Thanks for these questions and Jan you said it really well. When we teach these uncomfortable disconcerting programs, how do we make sure that our students one, don't feel like we're attacking them, and two, the students themselves don't become parodies or the butt of the jokes. And I think those are things that I've been thinking a lot about, we did this book, and I've been looking at, and thank you to everybody who's here. I know some of you are most of you are teachers and, and some of you have had the experience of teaching these texts even at a real Michigan State University. And another figure that lies behind this book very much in my thinking is someone to whom this book is dedicated, which is Mark McLelland. Long winded I'll get to the answer, but I'd like to illustrate with examples. Like how I bring this book into the classroom was a book that came out of teaching. And I've been very interested as Bill said, in the way culture flows between Japan and the US. And this is inspired I've taught all of your works, Bill Jan, and Anne, my class loves all your books, *Godzilla on My Mind*, *Millennial Monsters*, Jan, you've spoken with my students twice, Bill, you too. But assignments, the good thing about teaching American television to students are that the episodes are quite short. The longest program analyzing this book is *Big Bird in Japan*, and that's 50 minutes or so. So these are very teachable texts. Legal is another thing, how we access these materials. I have to rely on bringing YouTube into the classroom. But that's a whole other discussion. But I make it clear to the students that when we look at these programs, we're not attacking them as students. We're looking at the programs as texts, and we're providing context to understand the text. So it takes the burden off of the students to like, oh, no, I'm like the students that Mark sensei keeps saying are racist and wrong. I'm like, no, but you can when you look at how these students are misinterpreting nonverbal gestures or misspelling Japanese, you could learn a lot about culture, how they're using these, their fan knowledge provides an instructive lesson of how we, you know can what popular knowledge of popular culture can teach us about society. So I'll wrap up by just saying to give one example how I would teach one text I've had great success in teaching is *Big Bird in Japan*. And I love teaching this for many reasons. One and many of you know that I am Sesame Street is something near and dear to my heart. And *Big Bird in Japan* is such a feel good film in many ways and my students come in there they were all born way [after] *Big Bird in Japan* aired in 1989. I asked the students the other day when they thought the modern period started, they said 2010! But *Big Bird in Japan* has a nostalgic value. So it leads us in several ways we can watch the program. The program has songs like every Sesame Street program, it has an emotional lesson to teach, but we pause it and we look at what's going on in the screen. How is Big Bird interacting as the so called "representative American" with the Japanese characters he meets Kagoya Hime from *Tale the Bamboo Cutter*. She's trying to get back to the moon, Big Birds trying to get back to the Japan Airlines Flight that'll take them to Sesame Street, one of the sponsors of the program. So it gives us a lot to talk about when we begin to unpack what the story's going on what image of Japan is showing, we contextualize it one step further by looking at that this is coming out of the discourse of Japan bashing at the time. So assignments, I even have the song- student in the past students have created a sequel Big Bird returns to Japan, what would be different? How big the students have created new songs to fit into the program. If

they were to interview Big Bird about the trip, just sort of take in different creative interpretations. But as Jan said, I, my background is in literary studies, cultural studies, we do a deep dive into this 15 minute episode and pick out scenes, pick out songs, and think back what is going on? Why, why is Big Bird in Japan? Sesame Street only went to two countries, China and Japan. What, how did that happen? So I just give that out as an instructive example. Sorry for the long winded answer. But I'd be happy to elaborate and I'd love to hear what other people do. Jan?

40:19 Jan Bardsley

That's okay. I think I just forgot what I was going to say. Except now I remember. Yeah, the part in your book, Alisa, that we were talking about showing J pop [America] Funtime now and some of the students are squirming in their seat, but then when they start to talk about it, and analyze it, then it's just like with, I am reminded of what Bill said with this idea of empowering readers, you know, they're feeling they have an intellectual toolkit, so you don't feel so under the gun, as it were, you feel more on top of it, that you can talk about it. And I think it is important for students to let people talk about nostalgic feelings about some of these I know, with *Millennial Monsters*, I remember students divided into groups dependent if they wanted to talk about Sailor Moon or Transformers. And part of the discussion was how much it had meant to them in their childhood, but then they seem very ready to adopt the college student perspective and look at it analytically.

41:21 Anne Allison

I mean, just to you know, follow up on that. It's so interesting, because with Sailor Moon and Power Rangers and Tamagochi and stuff that I looked at, you know, I have students who don't necessarily think of them as Japanese, you know, so that's another thing. So Alisa, you know, you're so you know, masterful and talking about these images that are so clearly, you know, stereotypes are so clearly, you know, cringeable. And, you know, because they're kind of recognizable on bodies. But then what happens that if it's something that is actually made in Japan, I mean, I guess this is Godzilla, too. It's, you know, or, you know, something that is made that isn't necessarily a human body. And, you know, and some people do see this Japanese and some people don't, you know, and I've even spoken to kids here who had no idea that Pokemon originally came from Japan. In fact, they assume it's American. And so maybe that's, you know, an inversion of what you're talking about, but it's kind of interesting to also think about the media itself. Um, you're talking about television, and I wonder if television is a very specific in a medium. And then if you talk about the interactivity of a Gameboy or a video game, or then maybe becomes something a little bit different. I mean, it's just, yeah, it's interesting.

42:42 Bill Tsutsui

Yes, I would just say back to the original question Marua, you know, I don't prepare my students. I might not be dealing with something quite as hot as the *Saturday Night Live* skit. But, you know, I find I think we all find the young people today are incredibly sophisticated consumers of popular culture, and especially of media products. So what I love to do is show clips from films and especially the original Japanese version of a Godzilla film, either one with responsible subtitling, or in many cases without the subtitling just the Japanese, so they get a sense of what the movie is like, and then show the US or the international version, and what has been

changed and the edits that have been made. I know a lot of people use the original 1954 *Gojira* and *Godzilla King of the Monsters*, the American version made in 1956. But my favorite is really *King Kong Vs Godzilla* from 1962, which is one of the most savagely edited films for the American market and it is just you know, the students get it right. The American distributor edited in these news segments in which American experts explain Godzilla, to the viewers that's like, oh, yeah, this is a big difference, that we have to have these white scientists telling us what's happening in Japan.

44:11 Alisa Freedman

Bill I just noticed those in the audience comment to you that you should read a book on cheesiness. I think you should! These are all excellent points too like, when I teach the *Saturday Night Live* skits, they make my students cringe because they see themselves in the students, in many ways as fans as students, but also makes me cringe as a teacher. Because I'm realizing how much I need to listen to the students not always because sometimes they say things, as we know, that are very student-like, which is not a bad thing. But they're I mean, the reason we are teachers is to guide students. But their insights also resonate with what Anne was saying, like when you think about it television before the digital age, and even now, it's still the most prevalent and accessible form of popular culture. Like before, when television sets became more affordable in the 50s/60s, and now we have streaming devices where we can binge, whatever we want, or find it on YouTube or, but still television as a media form that is so controlled by sponsors by audiences and state-controlled networks is still our most prevalent and accessible form of culture.

45:19 Maura Cunningham

Great, and actually, we have an audience question that directly speaks to that comment that Alisa just made. So I'm going to, I still have more questions on my paper, but we're getting so many good audience questions that I think I'm going to start pulling from that pool as well. So just on this, this final point about television as the particular medium that you're looking at. Nancy Hamilton asks, you mentioned that TV is less conducive to subversive works due to mass audience and advertisers. Would you say that the opportunities for subversive work has increased with the diversification of TV markets away from the three main networks and PBS toward cable TV and now live streaming YouTube, etc? If so, what programs do you feel are most successfully subversive? And how did they achieve that?

46:09 Alisa Freedman

Well, I can throw in some insights, but I'd love to hear what everybody else thinks about this. One of the fun things about publishing this book is when I present about it, many people share their favorite television programs. And it the list just keeps getting longer and more extensive and, and Netflix is a really fascinating example because Netflix for example, *Marie Kondo* was based on NHK World Series. And there was also proposed to NBC as a comedy sitcom, but became a highly edited non-scripted reality program, in part because that format sells really well in the US and fits into a landscape. And also Marie Kondo herself, the way she became an author to the best of my understanding as she won a prize, that her book was accepted by a self help press because the idea that she would become a television star, and her book was

promoted on Japanese television before it reached American television. So in so saying, um, Netflix has done adaptations and reboots of some very interesting Japanese programs. And like, for example, Japanese programs that were popular before the current generation was born, like dating programs, like *Ainori*, the *Love Bus* program on Netflix, or, or taking certain drama series. Netflix has ties to Fuji television, Amazon Prime to TBS, right, could be reversing them in my nervousness. But I agree, I think that was streaming television, also in America. And another thing that was complicated about writing this book as I had to assess my own television viewing patterns, like I wrote this book during the pandemic, when I was watching a lot of television and I choose like any other viewer, I have my own echo chamber of television. I choose programs that speak to me in certain ways, and I needed to step back and think about how I'm watching television to write this book, and Netflix, Amazon, they're still very controlled, and Hulu other and all these streaming sites have local versions. They have versions in Japan, Hulu is also tied in with Nippon television, MTV other networks. But they open the door to be more edgy in a way that *Saturday Night Live* did in the 1970s by circumventing certain hours on live television. But still there are limits and I think the pressing against those limits are where the instructive teaching points are. Where we see like for example, *Queer Eye: We're in Japan* was the only time that *Queer Eye* the reboot of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* from 2003 and four, traveled abroad is the first I was when they went to Yas, Australia because of the slang, "Yas, honey, yas queen" that said on the program. But why Japan? Why- I mean, we have programs on Netflix we have Mexican telenovelas, for example. We have other international programs, but how was Netflix curating a certain image of Japan through the selection process? So I love your point, because yes, I think that streaming television has expanded our purview. But at the same time, it's also curating, and it shows how the curation process is functioning now, that's just my perception. I'd love to hear what everybody else thinks. Jan?

49:18 Jan Bardsley

Yeah, the *Queer Eye* example in your book that was so interesting is where the where Karamo takes a young man who's worried about his relationship with his wife to an *ikebana* lesson to learn about flowers and then he's going to give flowers to his wife after this lesson and how on the one hand and of course you point out, *ikebana* it's not part of that I kind of give giving and, and but what's nice about it, on the one hand, is that shows Karamo and these other guys very interested in learning about Japanese culture and then there's a strange situation where they're reintroducing Japanese to Japanese culture almost as if they're not going to be colonialist, imperialist and yeah it's wrong. Yeah, I mean what they come up and what the show then promotes is not the way Japanese would look at *ikebana* so there's these things happening and in shows like that, on the one hand seem very positive, but have their slipped ups.

50:27 Alisa Freedman

And Jan, you said it really well, these programs continue to contrast the kind of mystical Japan versus the overly confident expressive American. Like we see this and Marie Kondo the eight California families were chosen for the program by Kondos husband who's the CEO of their company, which is based in LA Marie Kondo lives in Los Angeles, and she speaks English, but she doesn't speak English on the program that much. She has her cute gestures like I love mess. But I think she's brilliant and how she uses the stereotypes, but she's constantly the

presentation of the mindful rituals that she uses in her book. The piling of things make great television visuals, but they also affirm that she's a fairy godmother of Mary Poppins-like figure come from a foreign land through these California families. But the California families are meant to show the diversity of how many people can use Kondo's method rather than promoting American multiculturalism is my thought. Yeah.

51:30 Anne Allison

I mean, Alisa, do you mind if I asked you a question about gender? I mean, we had batted back and forth before we did this presentation about gender. And you had raised the question about Marie Kondo. You know, could she be so popular if she was the man? I mean, what is gender doing there? I mean, what are your thoughts about that? Or anyone else?

51:52 Alisa Freedman

I would love to have lunch with Marie Kondo. She's top of the list along with Naomi Osaka and other figures I would love to have lunch with because I think Marie Kondo has created this persona, and I can't speak for her of course, but just analyzing her television program and in the context of her own media escape that uses stereotypes of Japanese women and also at the same time use the stereotypes of American women. Like in her Japanese media, she's always shown with a toothy grin. She and her husband are holding up her latest book saying, aren't we so proud like things that don't usually happen showing Marie Kondos daughters and now their third child, I don't know if their son will be part of the program are shown angelically folding socks, things that don't usually happen in Japanese television where celebrities keep their private lives separate from their public personas. But yet in her program it for the United States sort of sells this image of the *Yamato Nadeshiko* if you will, the idealized Japanese woman but at the same time inadvertently perpetuate women and domesticity. Like we've talked about this as a class like even Marie Kondos dressing style, she wears a quintessential white cardigan, because as you know, I'd be very rude and giving this talk in Japan. They don't have a covering over my shirt that will be wearing this Bill looks perfect for this talk or if we were in Tokyo, but Kondo would look awkward if she showed up in someone's house in a business suit and her translator, Ida Marie dresses in a black cardigan, not to be black and white in the program but to blend more into the background I think but Kondo shows up and she doesn't yell at people she's the kind of teacher that's very soothing. She's not like she doesn't yell people Gordon Ramsay style she's not aloof like Martha Stewart, she presents this kind of teacher that is joyful when her students learn and that's very compelling. So we've unpacked the stereotypes with my students and we look at like, for example, I asked my students when Marie Kondo be successful, as she recalled on Kondo Marusuke, for example, or Mark Kondo, a Japanese American man, going into California households in the program, Kondo's new program, *Spark Joy*, which is selling her new book, *Spark Joy at Work*⁹, so everything with Kondo is amazing because it all sells product and sells her brand name. And in Japan, it's difficult to keep your maiden name the more than difficult if you're married, and Kondo kept her name, she's a brand. So you can think of the multilayers that go into creating this TV persona.

⁹ Sonenshein, Scott., Kondo, Marie. [*Joy at Work: Organizing Your Professional Life*](#). United States: Little, Brown, 2020.

54:19 Bill Tsutsui

Can I just add something to that Alisa? Because I too, am fascinated in a non-creepy way by KonMari. It because I think she's actually playing with some other stereotypes too, here that are also gendered but go beyond that. So I think what really is interesting to me about her is that she seems to be the first Japanese woman in American pop culture to take on that role of "the Oriental" and I say that with air quotations, "the Oriental sage," sort of Mr. Miyagi, or many of the characters in the recent American Godzilla movies, where the Japanese character seems there just to offer sort of timeless and slightly inscrutable aphorisms for the benefit of sort of an exoticism. You know, sort of these fortune cookie sayings that come out of them. So what's interesting to me is not just the gender dynamic, but also the youth dynamic that's at work here, that in the sort of media world today, it is not sort of an *obaachan*, who is giving this advice, but it's sort of the young, peppy, cute, tidiness expert.

55:30 Alisa Freedman

Yeah. Bill, I'd love to hear what you think, too, about the use of American - you mentioned *King Kong Vs. Godzilla*, and then the rematch last year.

55:39 Bill Tsutsui

Don't get me started. Okay, you're pulling my chain. On this one. I think what's really interesting with the American series is how in the Godzilla films made by legendary studios, the monster never actually goes to Japan. So the monster never is in Japan in those movies. And in fact, in the most recent movie, spoiler alert, it ends up in Hong Kong, which I think in some ways, is the sort of transference of Godzilla from being a Japanese monster read (declining movie audiences) to being a Chinese monster read, (increasing movie audiences,) and that it's all Asia. So it's pretty much the same.

56:26 Alisa Freedman

Interesting.

56:28 Maura Cunningham

I want to move on, we have a couple of questions about flipping the gaze a little bit and talking about how American culture is depicted in Japanese media. We have a couple of audience members who have asked, are you going to write a second volume? Looking at things the other way around. And one audience member proposes, you know, how might this dovetail with the themes of your book, i.e. don't both countries do the same thing when presenting the other country? And I know that there are certain places in your work when you do talk about not just *Japan on American TV*, but American TV in Japan or America on Japanese TV. So I wanted to give you a chance to talk about how it looks when we gaze in the other direction.

57:12 Alisa Freedman

Yeah, or Anne, Jan, or Bill, if you'd like to answer this to please weigh in. There's yeah, I mean, it's so amazing to have you all in one place. Like to give an example, I don't know if any of you have watched Japanese television dramas from the 90s like *Tokyo Love Story* from 1990 to 91. There's always when they want to show cosmopolitanism they put like a white American in the

background. Like even in the theme song sequence you could see sort of blonde Americans walking down the street of Tokyo is making the city look somehow cosmopolitan and making the actions seem very fashionable too but yeah, there's they're so interesting, like some of the programs like these uncomfortable Hanna Barbera cartoons were among the very first American television programs exported to Japan. *Sesame Street* in 1971 became the first program imported to Japan to teach English even though *Sesame Street* was not meant as an English language learning program. Like those of you who watch *Sesame Street* know that the characters muppets and humans alike talk incredibly fast. And they speak in New York City slang. So it's meant as a program to promote compassion and multiculturalism, not to teach English. So yeah, Japan does this too, in many ways, and Japan does this and in ways that we would feel incredibly uncomfortable watching in the United States with blackface and other depictions that we see on a variety of Japanese television programs, from dramas to music, television. So you can think about this kind of idea that how countries engage with other nations through their own media, and what does that reflect about their, you know, sort of as Anne writes effective, and political negotiations. Like, there's a whole host of comedies, for example, in Japan that don't overtly you can't really attack like the, of course, you couldn't attack the Emperor but or political figures, but would make fun of American politics. One step removed, or Japanese *Saturday Night Live*, seems odd to us to watch because it has the segments that we have in the US and it was a short-lived program. But it does- it's not political, in overt satirical way. And sort of comments more on the kind of comedy escape that you get in Japan and *owarai* programs like making fun of the character imitations, instead of just discussions about the news. And this is I think, part of the reason correct me if I'm wrong, maybe someone else has this insight why programs like *Sesame Street* and *Saturday Night Live*, *South Park*, and *The Simpsons* are not successful in a larger television landscape in Japan, they have their niche viewerships, but they haven't been able to attract large audiences, in part because comedy is hard to translate. But in part because they require a lot of cultural literacy to be understood. I don't know what do you all think?

1:00:03 Jan Bardsley

No, I don't think- I think that's fascinating. Yeah, to end that I could, as you're reading this book, you can't help but think, how would its companion book, what would it look like? You know, what about America on Japanese TV? So I think your explanations were very helpful. I could also see again, just going back to what I was saying earlier, it would be very interesting to have books or discussions where somebody talked about *Japan on American TV* and *France on American TV* and the Middle East, or, you know, when one of the countries there, you know, and what maybe there's certain ways that it would bring up more how Japan is cutified or Paris might be cutified, *Emily and Paris*, and maybe there's certain parts of the globe, that would not be cutified. I was thinking as, as I was reading your book about all the references to Russia, and in popular culture, whether it was action films, or even some TV dramas, whether it be some character who play Putin or Putin-like figure. And Putin, I don't I mean, they're not animated dramas. So it's, it's always portrayed as, as a very serious, devious figure.

1:01:28 Bill Tsutsui

Let me just say that I think the Asia Shorts would welcome a submission on China on American TV.

1:01:35 Jan Bardsley

Yeah. Yeah.

1:01:37 Anne Allison

I mean, this raises a really interesting question about geopolitics, right? I mean, when stuff came out in the 80s, and the 70s, and 80s, it was a completely different moment. And the 50s I mean, right after the war, Godzilla, all of that was a completely different moment. Now we're 2021. And, you know, how does that figure? I mean, do young people today even think about Japan and America? I mean, isn't it China? I mean, or Russia? Or, I mean, it isn't in other places. I mean, Japan isn't quite the threat that it was in, you know, to Americans. So how does that I mean, how does that play out and all of this?

1:02:16 Bill Tsutsui

You know, I think it's a great point Anne because I was struck by this, that I really wonder how many of the stereotypes that Alisa notices from the 50s and 60s, the *hari-kiri*, Judo instructor, really resonate with young people today, whether they would even get it in the same way. And I say this as someone my father actually was a judo instructor in Dayton, Ohio in 1960. What gives me hope on this, is that as tenacious as stereotypes may seem, clearly stereotypes change over time. You know, and that can lead us perhaps to a brighter future. I just heard a promo for a show on NPR. That said, why when we were kids, we were all scared of quicksand. And no young person now is scared of quicksand at all!

1:03:09 Jan Bardsley

I also wonder in all of the, you know, I don't know if you can have TV shows without types because any sort of character becomes a type is a very good shorthand to play with you get an immediate audience recognition. And you can, of course, you can kind of play with what's possible for that type. But I also can't help wonder with some of these things. If there's something positive in it just an even with the stereotypes. I mean, even with Marie Kondo, what does it intrigue people to then want to know more about Japan? Or to study Japanese? And so are these things, do they have some silver lining in that they can get people intrigued, like, I was thinking of the Japanese case where the *Rose of Versailles*, you know, manga that was so popular in the early 70s really did motivate some people to study French and learn about France and learn about the French Revolution. Many people did that. But I wonder if there's ways that it kind of pushes some people, intrigues some young people to one a study, and then they find out that there's a whole lot more than they expected. I mean, I remember going to Japan in the early 70s, my first view of Tokyo was the first time I'd been out of the country. And I was wondering, how come this doesn't look like the screen that I've seen on the walls? You know, and then at the same time, I wondered, well, where're the front yards? And I just had no view, but then the I don't know what quite intrigued me to go. But, but then you certainly learn. And I guess one of the takeaways for students after they studied in your class, at least, and read your book was

that they realized that they have to be aware of types, and also that there's a dynamic to a type. So even though they don't have their professor explaining, like the history of the reception of Japan abroad, for every subject, you know, when they're suddenly seeing Argentina on TV, that they would be cued into think now what here is probably the type and how is it? What's the dynamic of how it's working in the show? That may not be the whole view.

1:05:30 Alisa Freedman

Thank you for that. That's a really good point. And it dovetails with what Bill was saying about providing a toolbox, like giving these instructive tools of how to analyze types and stereotypes on television that are so persistent, that raises the other question, again, can there be television without stereotypes that you asked so well, and the role of television in subverting stereotypes can television, like in fact, I was teaching texts on Hiroshima yesterday in a freshman seminar. And one of my students, which was this was comic, it came so out of left field that I was taken aback, but at the same time intrigued, we were talking about depictions of *hibakusha*,¹⁰ and survivors in manga and the discomfort of being confronted with the stories. And my student, maybe knowing that I'm interested in television said, oh, that reminds me of *Bachelor in Paradise* on American television. I love Bill's reaction to that! That was my first reaction, why are they completely missing the point of my class? But then I backed up and said, yeah, that's speaking to one, we have this presentation of stories and who owns stories, like we're being confronted on *Bachelor in Paradise* the characters are forced to come back in the last episode and talk about their failed relationships. Reading these manga by survivors, we can't know we're forcing it. I don't know if the survivors are forced to come back on a network television and tell them stories in this case. But the student's analogy was this idea of ownership of stories and how they circulate. And I thought, oh, that's really interesting. Maybe I could harness the talent was another layer of this book is harnessing what students know, students talk about these, these television programs, they, even if they don't watch them, the way that maybe we watched them growing up, they watch them in other ways, but they know of them. I've been hosting a Friday night viewing series of classic programs you've heard of, but never watched much for the students. And it's been really it makes me feel really old. But it's interesting what they have heard of, and how they've heard about it. But using that as a part of the toolbox of drawing students into a more critical analysis of media in general China, on television, Russia on television, by getting them to think about what's going on what are the new via Roland Barthes, what are the mythologies that underlay the presentation of the middle- the viewership of these programs as being a unified nation and a unified populace? Even though these television programs are speaking to a mainstream, like when writing the book, I realized I was not talking about middlebrow culture, I was talking about popular culture, but they're having the impulsive middlebrow culture of trying to construct a kind of viewership and educate the viewership through these entertaining programs subconsciously or not. I hope I'm making sense but my student's way out of left field comment really made me think on many levels of what we do when we watch television, and how we use television to understand stories.

¹⁰ [Hibakusha](#)

1:08:24 Jan Bardsley

That kind of reminds me of a comment that Anne raised earlier in our discussion that sometimes Japan just seems so - people can react that it's just so strange. And this is somehow just Japan itself is pretty weird and, and even some of the things we study can seem really strange so so in a way some of these ideas like bringing up *Bachelor in Paradise*, I remember trying to compare some of the commodification of sexuality and host clubs to *The Bachelor*, and what kind of sexualities they perform and bromance they perform for our viewing. Maybe that can help take away from the idea of just Japan is so strange as kind of end of subject.

1:09:13 Anne Allison

Well, you know, another question that I would ask you Alisa, maybe for all of us, is, you know, cutification is a big trope in your book. And of course, for those of us who work in Japan, cute, *kawaii*. I mean, there's a whole literature, there's whole discourse, there's a whole politics, you know, but thinking about this event tonight made me think again, about cute and I was just flipping through my book again. And I remembered that the person who designed Tamagotchi, you know, the virtual pet, way back in 1996, had the idea that he wanted users. And again, I know this isn't television, this is a different medium. He wanted users to birth a pet. And he said the cuteness would not be just the image on the screen. The cuteness would come from the labor that you would expend the *mendo*¹¹, you would expend, you know feeding a plane that was raising it. And that's what would make it cute. And I remember researching thinking really wow. So that's like, that's a completely different idea. It's not just the visual, you know, look, it's something else. Again, it's something else. And, you know, that's so that's such an important theme in your book. I mean, after doing all this work, do you have a different notion of what even I mean, is cute, necessarily domestication? Is it necessarily subordination? I mean, is cute necessarily diminishment? Or is there another, you know, part to cuteness? That, I mean, maybe this is a follow up to your question, Jan. I mean, is there another way that we could think of this as maybe something's more constructive or even productive?

1:10:55 Alisa Freedman

That's such an excellent question Anne, and one chapter of your book that I've I mean, I love your book, *Millennial Monsters*. My students really work well with a chapter on *Sailor Moon*. One, because they're fans of *Sailor Moon* who have watched it on television or various forums, but they also really latch on to your idea of fierceness and cute and what's going on the various not just there's not just one unified *kawaii*, but there's many levels and subversions and *kawaii*, sort of this whole process. It's not like something becomes cutified like, Anne, what you were saying earlier was also very instructive about parody, like what parody these are parodies, but they're more than parodies on television, they're taking something and they're as Laura Miller has read really well into this, taking an image of Japan and sort of slapping it around, if you will, like appreciating it, but yet scratching at it to saying, you know, like we're gonna back, you know, hit it back in various ways, or in other words, taking an image and funneling it through various esthetic, political, and affective lenses. And it comes out the other side as being something that is almost sort of extending the Japaneseness in various ways to be cute. To give you a direct example, like when I was watching these television programs, I kept seeing characters like

¹¹ [Mendo](#)

Marie Kondo being sort of more lovable, if you will, because she was seen as a kind of stereotype of *kawaii* or, arguably not samurai or not *kawaii*, but this process of cuteifying, making them seem more vulnerable, less harmless, making them seem this idea that Japan is always often been consumed as a wacky, weird land of a certain kind of, we're used to a certain aesthetic depiction of Japan too through popular culture, especially post 90s the kind of popular culture that globalizes represents not just one kind well represents one kind of *kawaii* but as Laura Miller¹² argues really well it's not just the only *kawaii* there's various kinds that are more subversive than what we might be consuming on television. So *Sesame Street* Muppets are interesting because they don't represent in America a kind of Japanese *kawaii*, like Pikachu with the big head, the *kira kira* sparkling eyes that show live in emotion, the tiny nose, the squishable body, but they represent sort of have a different interaction have a character that's accessible and welcoming that *kawaii* characters that are approachable. For example, not just for children, but for adults. I don't know if I'm being coherent, but the function of cutification I kept seeing how this cutification is a lens through which Japan had to pass through to be put on television. Give it from the 1950s when Japan's being cultivated through middle brow media as Christina Klein¹³ argues really well. To be acceptable to Americans, why do we always have Americans trying to like in *The Simpsons*, why did Bart and Homer needs to be the ugly American tourists as foils for Japan are one of the *South Park*, or *South Park* kids have to explain Japan to not only the town of *South Park* but to Japan, but and the *South Park* children are drawn like Trey Parker studied Japan, and there's a lot of *kawaii* aesthetics in the actual screen and diegesis of *South Park*, notably the most cute characters of the most subversive in that case, and I love that. But I kept seeing this trope of Japan being beautified to be televised, maybe there's something I mean, there are programs that don't fit into that paradigm, of course, but in comedies, that was the case. And then in chapter two, I read this against the program *Shogun*, from the 1980s, to see a very different kind of samurai represents Japan, but to amplify my theory of how Futaba even though he's violently and child like slashing things represents that same kind of funneling process.

1:14:35 Anne Allison

Great, thanks. Good answer.

1:15:02 Maura Cunningham

We are unfortunately already at the end of our time, but I wanted to give all the other panelists 30 seconds if they have any final, any final thoughts or responses, Bill, anything to add?

1:15:14 Bill Tsutsui

Yeah, buy the book please! [overlapping laughter]

1:15:19 Maura Cunningham

It is an excellent, excellent book. And I think everyone watching tonight will appreciate reading it. Thank you. So apparently, we just made a sale someone popped into the chat. Thank you so

¹² <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Laura-Miller-6>

¹³ Klein, Christina. *Cold War orientalism : Asia in the middlebrow imagination, 1945-1961*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

much for to everyone for attending. Thank you very much to our panelists for contributing to this really lively and wonderful conversation. I apologize. We have a lot of questions in the chat that we haven't gotten a chance to respond to yet. And I'm really sorry about that. We just ran out of time, because there's so much to say about this, this wonderful book. But thank you very much again to our audience, to our panelists to the Henry Luce Foundation for supporting this series. And you can always check our website asianstudies.org to find out which Digital Dialogues are coming up next, and to see more about all of our other programs and our annual conference, which will be in [Honolulu, Hawaii in March 2022](#). So with that, I will say thank you again. Good morning. Good evening. Good afternoon, depending on which time zone you're in. And thank you very much for participating in today's AAS Digital Dialogue. Have a good night.

1:16:29 Overlapping Voices

Thank you. Thank you all. Thanks Alisa! Take care.

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>

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