

## JAPAN ON AMERICAN TELEVISION: SCREAMING SAMURAI JOIN ANIME CLUBS IN THE LAND OF THE LOST

BY ALISA FREEDMAN — ASIA SHORTS BOOK SERIES

### SUGGESTED COURSES:

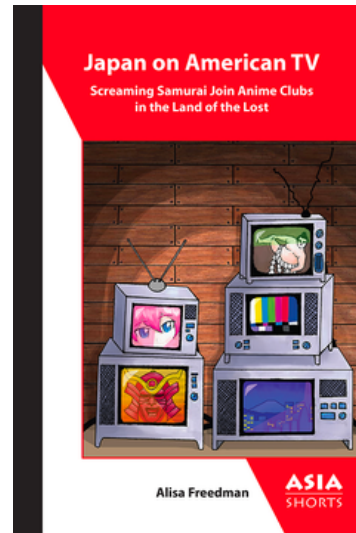
- Japanese Studies
- Cultural Studies
- Media Studies
- Popular Culture
- Gender Studies
- Asian Studies
- American Studies

### KEY CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS:

- Japan on American TV explores political, economic, and cultural issues underlying depictions of Japan on US television comedies and the programs they inspired. Since the 1950s, US television programs have taken the role of “curators” of Japan, displaying and explaining selected aspects for viewers. Beliefs in US hegemony over Japan underpin this curation process and other issues.
- Japan on American TV takes a historical perspective to understand the diversity of Japanese parodies. These programs show changing patterns of cultural globalization and perpetuate national stereotypes while verifying Japan’s international influence. Television presents an alternative history of American fascination with and fears of Japan.
- Written in an accessible style that will appeal to scholars, teachers, students, and anyone with an interest in Japan and popular culture, as well as an ideal text for classroom use, Japan on American TV offers a gentle means to approach racism, cultural essentialism, cultural appropriation, and issues otherwise difficult to discuss and models new ways to apply knowledge of Asian Studies.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Has *Japan on American TV* changed how you watch television? View parodies? Think about national stereotypes?
2. How do the TV programs analyzed in *Japan on American TV* portray dominant discourses on Japan during different turning points in US-Japan relations? How do they represent different patterns of globalization?
3. Why do US programs about Japan usually include American characters?
4. How has gender played a large role in television representations of Japan? Please give an example.
5. Should we take “playful” television programs seriously? Why or why not? Can television teach us things that other media cannot?
6. Can television lead to the cross-cultural understanding needed to initiate real political, social, or economic change?
7. Are there any advantages or dangers to learning about Japan only from watching American TV parodies?



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<https://www.asianstudies.org/store/japan-on-american-tv-alisa-freedman/>

## EXTERNAL LINKS & RESOURCES:

- Click here for the book introduction and full list of discussion questions:  
<https://www.asianstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/Japan-on-American-TV.pdf>
- <https://cupblog.org/2022/03/02/jon-wilson-in-conversation-with-alisa-freedman-on-japan-on-american-tv/>
- <https://newbooksnetwork.com/japan-on-american-tv>
- <https://www.japankyo.com/2022/01/japan-station-podcast-japan-on-american-tv/>

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AFTERWORD: AS PARODIED ON TV

*"Whether in Sesame Street or Gilligan's Island, The Simpsons or Tidying up with Marie Kondo, Japan has powerfully figured in the post-postwar US imaginary through 'cutification.' Freedman traces this lineage with an astuteness that is both sharp-edged and arousing, considering how these parodies and stereotypes of 'cute Japan' work as effectively as politically. This is a wonderful book to think with, teach with, or just enjoy."*

– ANNE ALLISON, Duke University

*"This smart and revealing study of the stereotypes of Japan created, circulated, and perpetuated on American television is fun and funny, eminently readable, and occasionally unsettling. Freedman's insightful analysis will ensure you never look at John Belushi or Marie Kondo, The Flintstones or The Simpsons, Sesame Street or Portlandia, in quite the same way ever again."*

– BILL TSUTSUI, Ottawa University

*"Exploring old favorites and new hits alike, Japan on American TV takes on Sesame Street, South Park, SNL samurai, Marie Kondo, and much more. Freedman has us chuckling, cringing, and most importantly, thinking critically. Original, fun to read, and superbly researched, this timely book leaves no doubt about the cultural power of TV."*

– JAN BARDSLEY, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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