

Soft Power, Orientalism, & Globalization

Lesson Plan: Soft Power, Orientalism, & Globalization

Created by: Erica Kanesaka, Emory University

Creation Date: November 1, 2024

Keywords: Soft Power, Globalization, Orientalism, Race, Diaspora, Kawaii, Cuteness



Target Audience:

Undergraduate students

Duration:

3 classes, 50–60 minutes long

Background:

This unit explores cuteness and its relationship to cultural and political power on the global stage.

Potential Courses to Include This Lesson In:

- Japanese Studies
- Global Asian Studies
- Asian American Studies
- Asian Diaspora Studies

Learning Objectives:

To help students understand cuteness as an affectual aesthetic that has ties to colonial and hegemonic legacies concerning power and race.

Core Readings & Films:

• Session #1: Globalization and Soft Power

"きゃりーぱみゅぱみゅ - つけまつける , Kyary Pamyu Pamyu - Tsukematsukeru." Posted December 6, 2011, by Warner Music Japan. YouTube, 4 mins., 30 sec.,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NLy4cvRx7Vc>

- Makiko Iseri, "Flexible Femininities? Queering Kawaii in Japanese Girls' Culture"
- Christine Yano, "Wink on Pink: Interpreting Japanese Cute as It Grabs the Global Headlines"

Session #2: Orientalism and Racial Fetishism

- Leslie Bow, "Racist Cute: Caricature, Kawaii-Style, and the Asian Thing"
- R.O. Kwon, "Stop Calling Asian Women Adorable"
- Bao Phi, "Love, Angel, Music, Baby"

Session #3: Techno-Orientalism and *Mukokuseki*

- Don Hall and Chris Williams, dir. *Big Hero 6*. 2014; Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures.
- Koichi Iwabuchi, "How Japanese Is Pokémon?"
- Erica Kanesaka, "The Mixed-Race Fantasy Behind Kawaii Aesthetics"

Assigned Materials:

Readings Listed Above

Optional Assigned Materials:

Kawaii goods and other objects to illustrate points of discussion.

Activity/Procedure & Discussion Questions:

Session #1: Globalization and Soft Power

Direct students to bring *kawaii* objects from home for show and tell. Have students share their items while describing why they have them and what they do or do not know about their origins. If desired, rewatch Kyary Pamyu Pamyu music video. Then discuss questions below:

1. Yano writes that "the soft-power position of Japanese cute comes with its own set of challenges" (684). What are some of these challenges? What are the potential risks and rewards of Japan's cute image for Japan as a nation? What are the potential risks and rewards for Japanese girls and women specifically and for Asian girls and women across the diaspora?
2. Iseri writes that *kawaii* femininity is flexible, exposing how gender and race are performed in everyday life. What do you understand this to mean? How are gender and race being performed in the Kyary Pamyu Pamyu music video? Where else do we see gender and race being performed in *kawaii*/cute cultures today?

Session #2: Orientalism and Racial Fetishism

Read aloud Phi's poem "Love, Angel, Music, Baby." If desired, accompany with news clips on Gwen Stefani and the "Harajuku Girls" controversy. Then discuss the questions below:

1. Bringing together Kwon's essay and Phi's poem, how is the popularity of

cute Asian and Asianized objects in the United States related to the racial and sexual objectification of Asian Americans? How interlinked are these two phenomena?

2. Bow's article explores how "cuteness... aestheticizes anti-Asian bias." Why then do you think that Bow and some other Asian Americans take pleasure in "racist cute" objects? How do you feel about the different images featured in Bow's article? Do you feel differently about some of the images than you do about others? Why?

Session #3: *Mukokuseki* and *Kawaii*'s Mixed-Race Fantasy

Pass around cards with *kawaii* characters printed on them (Hello Kitty, Mario, Pikachu, Doraemon, etc.) and have students get into small groups to discuss whether or not these characters carry a "cultural odor." Share these discussions with the whole group. If desired, rewatch select scenes from *Big Hero 6*. Then discuss the questions below:

1. Drawing from Iwabuchi's framework, which objects from *kawaii*/cute culture today do you think carry a "cultural odor" or "cultural fragrance"? Which are "culturally odorless"? Cite specific examples.
2. Would you consider *Big Hero 6* an example of techno-Orientalism? Why or why not? If you had to choose, would you say that San Fransokyo is a utopia or a dystopia? How do the readings from Iwabuchi and Kanesaka help you understand the ways cuteness is deployed in this film?

Evaluation:

Have students write a research paper focused on a single object or figure from *kawaii* culture. In this paper, they should cite at least two readings from the reading list and analyze their chosen object or figure in relation to soft power, Orientalism, and globalization.

Instructor Reference Materials:

Allison, Anne. *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

Bow, Leslie. *Racist Love: Asian Abstraction and the Pleasures of Fantasy*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022.

Fickle, Tara. *The Race Card: From Gaming Technologies to Model Minorities*. New York: NYU Press, 2019.

Kanesaka, Erica. "Yellow Peril, Oriental Plaything: Asian Exclusion and the 1927 U.S.-Japan Doll Exchange." *Journal of Asian American Studies*, 23, no. 1 (2020): 93–124.

Kanesaka, Erica. "Racist Attachments: Dakko-chan, Black Kitsch, and Kawaii Culture." *positions: asia critique* 30, no. 1 (2022): 159–87.

Ngai, Natalie. "Sugar and Spice (and Everything Nice?): Japan's Ambition Behind Lolita's Kawaii Aesthetics." *Media, Culture & Society* (2022): 1–16.

Shi, Jane. "Reimagining the Autistic Mother Tongue." Disability Visibility Project, June 13, 2021, <https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com/2021/06/13/reimagining-the-autistic-mother-tongue/>.

Tran, Sharon. "Kawaii Asian Girls Save the Day! Animating a Minor Politics of Care." *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S.* 43, no. 3 (2018): 19–41.

Yano, Christine R. *Pink Globalization: Hello Kitty's Trek Across the Pacific*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013.