

Teaching Culture in a Multicultural Environment

Interview with Professor Yoshida Kaori

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Part 1: Introduction

Q: Could you please introduce yourself and the courses you teach?

A: I'm Yoshida Kaori. I've been a professor in the College of Asia Pacific Studies since 2009. I teach content that crosses Media Studies and Culture Studies or combines the two. This includes introductory courses as well as classes on pop culture, film, and other media.



Q: If you could enter the world of anime, which anime would you choose?

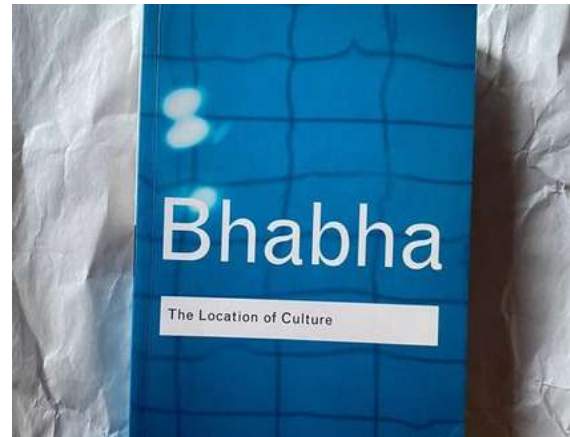
A: I would choose the world of the anime *Heidi, Girl of the Alps*. It's a space where I can relax and regain my sense of humanity. I've watched it since I was a child, and even as an adult, I own the complete collection and watch it when I feel worn out. Everything in Heidi's world exists in a pure state, delivering the message that "we only need to look forward", making me want to visit that world.

Q: Is there a book or film you believe all students should experience before graduating?

A: There are many works I would recommend, but for films, I suggest classic Japanese works. It's common for Japanese people to realize that they're unfamiliar with Japanese works when they go abroad. I actually felt this myself while attending graduate school overseas, where I thought, "As a Japanese person, I need to watch Japanese films." For example, Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* and *Ikiru*, or Yasujiro Ozu's *Tokyo Story*. For books, I recommend Tessa Morris-Suzuki's *For the Critical Imagination* and Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*.



Professor Yoshida
during the Project Q interview.



The Location of Culture
by Homi Bhabha

Q: What sparked your interest in mass media studies and cross-cultural comparison during your master's studies?

A: Originally, I planned to become an English professor and went to an English language school in Canada after graduating university. Interacting with people from various cultures and backgrounds piqued my interest in communication at that time, leading me to pursue research in communication during my master's studies. I also noticed differences between the Japanese *Sailor Moon* series and its Canadian broadcast version, such as seatbelt usage in scenes depicting riding in cars. As seatbelt usage wasn't regulated in Japan at the time, seatbelts were not added, but they were added to the Canadian version. There were many similar instances of cultural adaptations in Japanese products, and such experiences were fascinating and became my entry point into Media Studies.

Q: Did you face any challenges while studying abroad for your master's degree?

A: Language. As a university student in Japan, opportunities to hear authentic English were far fewer than today. When I suddenly found myself abroad, I couldn't understand what people were saying. I struggled to communicate well with my English language school classmates and dorm mates and felt increasingly isolated and stressed. Even after completing the English language school program, I couldn't speak fluently in graduate school, which filled me with sadness and self-doubt. Without translation tools or AI at the time, I relied on dictionaries to write reports. I also gradually adapted by listening to the radio or watching films. However, the two-year master's program I initially planned was insufficient, and I went on to do a PhD. As demonstrated, language issues are not simply solved, and it took a lot of time to cope with it.



Students during a group discussion.

Part 2: Approach to Teaching

Q: How do you teach the cultural background of Japanese animation to students from diverse backgrounds?

A: In today's world, products from different countries have aspects that are for better or for worse indistinguishable. When teaching the media discipline in that context, it is puzzling whether special rights should be given to Japan for animation or anime. When I came to APU, international students could intuitively grasp which products were Japanese. However, as current animation is not an entirely independent cultural product, teaching its cultural background has become incredibly complicated due to the influence of globalization in aspects such as ideas, production, and distribution. Based on these circumstances, I now focus on teaching understanding of the work itself, such as linking the animation to the historical context in which it was created, reflecting various changes in Japan and the surrounding world over the years.



There are many chances for students to have discussions in Professor Yoshida's classes.

Q: How do you evaluate student learning and provide feedback? Additionally, how do you encourage active learning among students?

A: In large lectures, I set up five themes over the course of fourteen classes, with quizzes at the end of each theme. I then revisit and reexplain concepts if students receive low points on those quizzes. I also use Moodle to provide a free comment section where students can share their own opinions and respond to one another, allowing students to carry out meaningful dialogue and providing opportunities for them to examine concepts critically. I correct any misunderstandings in the free comment section at the start of the lectures. During the seminar classes as well, students give feedback to one another when presenting. This method is effective for active learning as students must listen actively to content which they are not particularly familiar with to provide meaningful feedback on others' presentations.



Q: With the media and society changing so rapidly, how do you keep up to date with the latest research and information and incorporate that information into your classes or provide it to your students?

A: Keeping up with constant changes in media and culture is challenging. While I also make an effort to obtain new information from academic societies and professors in the same field, that effort alone is limited. For this reason, I make sure to ask students and people who are directly involved in the latest research results and phenomena. Regarding my personal latest research results, it would not be useful if I were to present these results only within academic societies that I belong to, so I introduce them to my students in a way that connects to my classes.

Although I initially mentioned that it is difficult to keep up with changes, in fact, not all phenomena are new and changing, and in many cases, the theoretical aspects remain the same. I try not to incorporate only new information but appropriately weave in information from the past and confirm through discussions with students whether there are issues with aspects in theories that have changed or remained the same. Through such dialogue, opportunities emerge for effective intergenerational learning.

Q: How do you facilitate discussions on complex and sensitive topics such as war and gender studies in a way that helps all students feel safe?

A: Since we must now be sensitive to these topics, I think this is a challenging matter. In being sensitive, it's important to share the rules for learning with students to become prerequisites in addressing such issues. For example, I present a premise such as: "If you look at the issue from this aspect, you can see it in this way." In other words, a change in perspective inevitably leads to changes in perception. While I occasionally tell students in class that an aspect is significant, it is ultimately important as a point of view introduced in class and not necessarily the sole correct approach. Furthermore, because I teach from the limited perspective of a single individual, I believe there is no definitive answer.

**Q: What are the most important values that you hope students gain through your classes?**

A: As the movie *Rashomon* I mentioned earlier conveys, I want students to uphold the idea that there are as many answers to everything as there are human experiences and backgrounds. To acquire this idea, students need to humble themselves. There is no one in particular who does not know about the "culture" covered in courses offered by the College of Asia Pacific Studies. That is precisely why each student should have their own

voice regarding culture. However, students learn to logically understand what they know based on theories, and as they deepen their understanding, listening to others' opinions and questioning their own opinions without denying them is important. I think that this mindset is valuable for both students and faculty members. There is no one truth, so continuing dialogue and thinking without necessarily putting out an answer is important.

Part 3: Advice for Students

Q: There are many students at APU who are interested in attending graduate schools overseas. Do you have any advice for them?

A: First, they should develop communication and conversation skills and build knowledge. I advise conducting research on any topic of interest, even in Japanese. The idea is to first input knowledge and have language follow. Even if there are some challenges with language, these students can still give it their all if there is something they are interested in. Regardless, basic language proficiency is of course essential. In my experience, I was often stressed as I did not have the confidence to speak competently. Second, these students should thoroughly consider what it is that they would like to accomplish. Something like, "For now I'll just go to graduate school and think about it from there," is insufficient.

I don't think it will be beneficial unless students consider what they want out of which graduate school and do all the necessary research.

Q: What advice do you have for students aspiring to do research in the field of Culture or Media Studies to understand the interdisciplinary nature of these fields?

A: Aiming to question what seems conventional or normal and considering how to resist it (even without actually resisting it) is a common theme among Media Studies and Culture Studies. Furthermore, because these two studies apply a variety of disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, and philosophy, they are not entirely original. Therefore, it is essential to widely examine various fields. These two fields also have the trait of identifying issues rather than solving them. Identifying the issue in and of itself is meaningful.

Q: Do you have any projects or future initiatives that you would like students to know about?

A: While not a specific project, given the current conflicts and wars going on in the world recently as well as the fact that Japan is eighty years post-war, I think we have an important chance to think about these issues. I suggest that students view war-related films such as the recently released *Oppenheimer*. In Japan eighty years after the war, there will be many more reports and features to come, and I believe 2025 is a chance to widen our perspectives on such topics.

Q: Lastly, what message would you like to tell students about student life and studies at APU?

A: I would like students to endeavor with a humble attitude to see beyond the surface of what others are saying, into the hidden and inner aspects. Instead of quickly dismissing differing opinions, I would like students to appreciate differences and be open to them. Additionally, I would like students to experience in-depth discussions while debating with other students on a variety of topics. Although not talking or disputing is peaceful, it is not useful. APU offers a unique environment where mixing is naturally likely to occur, so I would like students to take advantage of the environment on campus to maximize their learning and growth.



Professor Yoshida during the interview.



Professor Yoshida in a discussion with students in her seminar class.



Professor Yoshida and Seminar Students, Fall 2024.

Seminar Students' Impressions

Cordova

APS
5th Semester
Indonesia



Professor Yoshida Kaori stands out as an amazing teacher for her ability to create an inclusive and welcoming learning environment. One of my most memorable experiences with her was during my first presentation in our seminar class. I remember feeling extremely nervous and anxious about facilitating my classmates' understanding of the reading material. However, Professor Yoshida's openness and supportive teaching style created a relaxing and encouraging environment for me, especially as a first-semester student in the seminar. We often found ourselves laughing together, particularly when tackling challenging discussion material, which helped ease the tension. She encouraged everyone to share their interpretations during discussions, making the class feel dynamic and collaborative.

Yui



APS
6th Semester
Japan

The best thing I learned in the seminar was how to do media analysis. I have studied linguistics, but media analysis analyzes images while using linguistic analysis methods to objectively analyze what is trying to be conveyed and media that relies on people's knowledge, which is an incredibly interesting process.

Interviewers' Impressions



Aine Ishikawa

Through this interview, I was able to reaffirm that media such as films are representations of culture. In an increasingly globalized world where it is getting harder to distinguish the countries where media works are produced, it is fascinating to see how we learn about the media of various countries. Professor Yoshida taught us the importance of feedback among students in class, and I believe that going forward, we should always approach problems actively rather than passively.

Shiori Tsutsui

I'm a student in the College of International Management (APM), so the information I learned about Culture and Media Studies through this interview was new and fascinating. I was particularly taken aback by the idea that identifying a problem is significant in and of itself as opposed to offering a solution, which differs greatly from what I often study. Furthermore, the most remarkable word in this interview was "humility". When I have had disagreements with people in the past, my top concern was how to explain my viewpoint. Therefore, I believe that what I need most right now is Professor Yoshida's advice to look at one's opinion from an outside view with a humble attitude without quickly determining what is "different" or "wrong" and question it if necessary.



What is Q?

At APU, there are many professors who put together wonderful classes, and if we could get to know how these classes are planned, it would contribute to the improvement of other professors' classes. For that purpose, we have begun doing interviews in order to learn about class planning. These articles have been entitled [Q], comprising a variety of meanings such as: increasing the [Q]uality of classes, answering [Q]uestions to increase quality, and forming a [Q]ueue, or line, of class improvements. We would be very happy if these articles could contribute to the [Q]uest of APU professors' class quality improvement.

ALRCS Q Team Member Profile

Translator



Mitu
Country: Vietnam
College: APS

It's so special to learn how our professors create classes and bring amazing learning experiences to us through Q Articles!

This is my first time doing an interview. I was feeling so nervous, but it was a great experience.

I'm a new member of ALRCS. Even though there were many "firsts", I could learn a lot here.

I'm very grateful to the Q Team for their hardwork! I'm also very excited for our future projects together.

Shiori
Country: Japan
College: APM



Reporter

Reporter



Aine
Country: Japan
College: APS

Isabelle
Country: Brazil
College: ST



Designer

