

# Imagination, Media Literacy, and Global Agency in Japanese University EFL: Theory and Practice of an Integrated Approach

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While often invoked, “imagination” is rarely defined beyond vague notions of fantasy or creativity. Such colloquial usages do not capture how imagination as *a form of cognition* functions within our globalized and mediated societies. Without the “quotidian mental work” of imagination through which humans articulate “imagined worlds” within social and media forms, national and global collectivities would be impossible (Appadurai, 1996, p. 6). I have been developing an interdisciplinary concept of social imagination as a method of political-philosophical engagement with popular media representations in Japan (see Hack, 2020). However, this essay will focus on the application of imagination to pedagogical concerns. I have found an orientation towards imagination to be useful for organizing English as a Foreign Language (hereafter EFL) courses within the “global education” paradigm at Japanese universities. I argue that a focus on the cultivation of social imagination can serve to integrate these programs’ learning objectives of media literacy, critical consciousness of global issues, and agentic use of EFL. My essay will develop this thesis on the theoretical and practical levels. First, I will briefly summarize relevant theories of imagination. Next, I will connect imagination to media literacy education and global studies by developing concepts from previous research in these fields. Finally, I will elaborate on the practical deployment of these ideas by describing how I have utilized them in intermediate and advanced EFL courses taught in the iCoToBa Multilingual Learning Center at Aichi Prefectural University.

## Theories of Imagination

Imagination is most usefully conceived as a form of cognition, that is, as both a faculty and process of human thinking. Philosopher Jennifer Gosetti-Ferenci's broad definition describes it as "the presentational capacity of consciousness which can meaningfully transform what is thereby given" (Gosetti-Ferenci, 2018, p. 5). Imagination acts in different functional sites within individual and collective life. This section briefly outlines those which pertain to the concerns of this essay. The first is the capacity of the individual mind to form "vivid mental images" of things that are not immediately present (Peterson and Aaroe, 2013, p. 275). This action is not merely reflective but productive; imagination allows us to alter what we experience in our minds for both practical purposes and playful exploration. This latter function informs our colloquial definitions of imagination as fantasy, creativity, and/or escaping reality. However, as Gosetti-Ferenci argues, imagining should not be seen as rejection of reality but as "an experiential presentation of possibility, sometimes one toward which action can be directed" (2018, p. 27). Imagination lets us articulate new possible forms of being in the world, and is therefore connected to experience, to technological and social innovation, and to human freedom.

The second functional site lies beyond individual minds and within shared sociocultural objects and practices. In anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's classic formulation of global culture, "the imagination has become an organized field of social practices, central to all forms of agency, and is now a social fact" (1996, p. 31). Different disciplines have different ways of conceiving how cultural objects act on mental processes, for example, as *resources* (Orgad, 2012), as *cognitive anchors* (Mithen, 2000), or as *shared vocabulary* (Jenkins et al., 2020). However, the unifying observation is that imagination articulates forms not only in the mind but in objects, institutions, and practices. This material form of imagination is what allows humans to collectively develop common ideas about entities beyond our immediate perception. Art, ritual, and media representations all contain their own "array of cultural strategies and devices" to make globalized life "perceivable and

experienceable” and allow us to think and act as social beings on multiple scales (Heise, 2008, p. 67).

The third functional site is an encompassing framework of normative ideas and images which encourage people within it to “see the world” in a similar way, thus making large-scale collective activities possible. This is often referred to as a “social imaginary” (see Gaonkar, 2002). It is a shared horizon of expectations assumed by the members of a given society, a field of collective experience mediating between the automatic practice of our direct social lives and our conscious political and ideological worldviews. The “imagined communities” of nation-states are the most common examples, but within a given nation-state individuals might also inhabit religious imaginaries, transnational diasporic imaginaries, and the international imaginary of capitalist modernity itself. Philosopher Kathleen Lennon explains that a social imaginary “is internalized in and modifies the individual psyche, and the social imaginary is realized in, but remains independent of, individual psyches” (Lennon, 2015, p. 78). However, humans do not simply replicate the hegemonic images of their social conditions, as some theories of ideology assert. Imagination is always invested in possibility; our individual imaginations simultaneously perceive this normative framework and invent changes to it. Therefore, individual and collective imaginations are “both instituting and instituted, formed and forming, displaying both stability and creativity.” In other words, a social imaginary is a dynamic field where we collectively work to comprehend our material conditions and invent new relationships between ourselves, the world, and other people.

### **Imagination, Media Literacy, and Global Agency**

As the preceding outline has shown, imagination is a vital form of cognition. It is one which educators would do well to cultivate, especially when teaching media literacy in a global context. Imagination plays a central role in generating our image of a social “world” beyond our immediate experiences and therefore is active when we encounter the media representations, devices, and platforms which present us with potential pieces

of a “world-picture,” to borrow an old Heideggerian phrase. This section will therefore describe the theoretical value of integrating an orientation towards imagination into global media literacy education.

Media literacy is traditionally defined as “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media in a variety of forms” (Aufderheide, 1993, p. v). Media education scholars Jason Martin and Jason Zahrndt argue for a contemporary model of “media and digital literacy;” (Martin and Zahrndt, 2017, p. 39). Other scholars and organizations use a similar model of “media and information literacy.” “Media literacy” emphasizes critical and interpretative skills while “digital literacy” or “information literacy” emphasizes functional skills for accessing and participating in digital media networks. However, as Martin and Zahrnt acknowledge, these skill sets intersect and complement each other in countless ways. I therefore use “media literacy” as the umbrella term for the complex of media and digital skills necessary for navigating the information-rich societies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Media literacy education has come to be recognized as a necessary facet of higher education, and often acquires a political dimension. Educators and policymakers around the world have internalized the notion that “these modern forms of literacy are not only important for individual but also national success” (Martin and Zahrndt 2017, p. 34). In Japan, media and information literacy goals have been included in “global human resources” (*gurōbaru jinzai*) initiatives promoted by the Ministry of Education, Culture Sports, Science and Technology during the last decade (see MEXT 2012).

Despite the achievement of establishing media literacy as a priority in university education, prevalent models of media literacy have been limited by an overly instrumentalist approach. In his recent book *Civic Media Literacies*, media education scholar Paul Mihailidis describes a tendency to conceptualize media literacy as a value-neutral set of “skills, competencies, and approaches” (Milhailidis, 2019, p. 35). For critical capacities, this entails what Mihailidis calls a “deficit focus” in media literacy education, where students are encouraged to notice “how media manipulate, skew, or insert bias into information” (p. 41). Fellow media education scholar Julian McDougall (2014, pp. 7–8) calls this characterization of media literacy as

defending against bad information a “protectionist model.” For functional capacities, media literacy education at universities tends to focus on what McDougall calls the “employability discourse,” where proficiency with digital media tools is posed as necessary for one’s career. The employability discourse has been dominant in Japanese universities thanks to the “global human resources” initiatives, which were developed in conjunction with business leaders to increase Japanese competitiveness in the global market (Yoshida, 2017; Nitta, 2019). Media and information literacy were usually included in these programs under the rubric of the business-oriented “21<sup>st</sup>-century skills” concept (see Tōsaku, 2013).

While critical evaluation and digital proficiency are certainly important components of media education, they cannot by themselves engender active engagement with media as social conditions. Their effects are partial and often at odds with each other. The “21<sup>st</sup>-century skills” view of media literacy as a set of professional skills tends to subvert the civic prerogatives of media usage to those of career development. Mihailidis puts the issue well when he argues that current proficiency-based approaches “perpetuate a focus on vocational dispositions ... at the cost of cultural activism, worldliness, and civic value systems (Mihailidis, 2019, p. 39). In addition, protectionist emphases on objectivity and bias with regard to news and popular media can perversely reinforce a uncritical distrust of “the media” writ large (Boyd, quoted in Mihailidis, 2019). McDougall observes that the mixture of protectionist and employability discourses commonly used in educational institutions urges two contradictory attitudes toward media and digital literacy. Students are taught to increase their involvement with media in a professional capacity but to distance themselves from media in all other capacities (McDougall, 2014, 8). These two impetuses create mixed messages and can ultimately decrease students’ ability to act responsibly within mediated society as a whole. Without an overarching interrogation of what it means to be a mediated social subject of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, skills and proficiencies will have no direction.

This deficit of a civic or worldly framework can partially be seen as the result of as a misrecognition of the relationship between media forms and

contemporary society. At the core of instrumentalist approaches lies the unstated assumption of a “real” social world which different media represent in different ways and to differing degrees of accuracy. In this formula we are already-formed social subjects who encounter media piecemeal and interpret them according to an already-formed experience of “our world.” The problem here is that contemporary social worlds are vitally composed of experiences of large-scale, dispersed, or distant entities and events for which there is no premediated experience. In other words, instrumentalist approaches ignore how media genres are *constructive elements* of our “imagined worlds” (Appadurai, 1996). As defined in the last section, imagination is the type of cognition which makes non-present objects perceivable and extrapolates “the possible within the actual” (Gosetti-Ferenci, 2018). Imagining occurs not only in individual minds but across entire human collectives, and plays a central role in making the latter possible. Simply put, “society” always at least partially involves acts of imagination. Collective imagination is articulated in material artifacts and practices that allow us to infuse our shared experiences with possibility. In this sense news images, genres of music and fiction, social media platforms, and televised political events are all material forms of imagination. Within them, complex events or faraway persons are made visible and significant, while amorphous entities like governments and markets are crystallized into recognizable forms. We connect them to our daily social experience to make sense of our place, to compare ourselves to others and also to communicate our understandings and intentions, and to explore other possibilities of being and doing. Media forms are thus imaginative building blocks that make our current experiences of large-scale “society” possible. Of course, this does not mean that all these forms are accurate, valid, or beneficial. However, it does mean that we cannot cleanly separate them from other social phenomena to get at an objective “social issue.” In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, thinking about society inevitably means thinking *about* and thinking *through* media forms as pieces of imagination.

Attention to the mutual implication of imagination, media, and social being should inform not only media literacy education but also any attempt to cultivate global awareness. Mediations of international events and issues,

whether intentionally or not, invoke normative images of a subjective “global imaginary” as an unexamined background (Steger and James, 2013). Media literacy approaches which only focus on identifying media bias or analyzing journalistic framing tend to replicate this background even as they draw attention to ideological differences within it. Media education should therefore aim to help students realize how assumed political entities, cultural groups, social issues, and categories of knowledge are actively being constructed through media genres. By highlighting their functions as social practices of imagination, we can pose media images as not only revealing nor distorting particular global conditions but also participating in a dynamic and incomplete process of “imagining the global” itself. Globalization scholar Shani Orgad argues that “the essence of the work of media representations is the cultivation of *global imagination* through contestation” (Orgad, 2012, p. 47). Each media representation appears to the subject as a particular imaginative proposition about what the world looks like; moreover, it *appears in relation to* and *in competition with* innumerable similar propositions. Orgad’s concept of global imagination does not preclude questions of power and deception, nor does it mean there is no objective reality behind the representation. It simply highlights how visualizing and assigning meaning to collective life is an active and creative process in which we are all participating through our encounters with global media forms. An “imagination orientation” in media literacy education thus encourages students to approach global issues with a sense of agency because they have a role in this process of “seeing the world.”

The constructive role of media in the 21<sup>st</sup> century also has implications for social and political action. Especially since the rise of social media platforms, media participation and social participation have become inextricably linked. As Mihailidis explains, “how people learn to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act with and through media cannot be removed from the larger value systems that guide how individuals understand and approach their sense of place in the world” (Mihailidis, 2019, p. 13). Mihailidis proposes a model of “*civic media literacies*” which “refocuses media literacies from a set of skills and competencies to a set of value-driven constructs

that support civic intentionality in media literacy practice” (p. 107). He re-situates the so-called “process-oriented” media literacies—the traditionally conceived skills of accessing, analyzing, evaluating, creating, etc.—as operational methods within five larger “values-oriented” media literacies: caring, critical consciousness, imagination, persistence, and emancipation (p. 108). In this schema, being “media literate” means being able to enter the media-social sphere as a democratic subject with both the ability and desire to act upon it through media participation. As I interpret his position, the current fusion of society, politics, and economy with media networks means that any engagement with media will have social, political, and economic consequences. The reciprocal is also true; any engagement with society, politics, or economics will be mediated. Teaching students how to engage with media must therefore include opportunities for thinking and acting in these fields through media.

Mihailidis’s civic media literacies model interests me because it integrates a developed concept of imagination as a core tenet of an agency-oriented media literacy education. As described, Mihailidis includes “imagination” in his list of values-oriented media literacies. This part of his model owes much to the work of pioneering media theorist Henry Jenkins. In recent years, Jenkins and his colleagues have published case studies of youth activists who utilize tropes of popular media culture—superhero comics, street art, and young-adult (YA) novels—to articulate and act on their political beliefs. The new collected volume *Popular Culture and the Civic Imagination* highlights the role of these media forms in galvanizing “*civic imagination*,” which they define as “the capacity to imagine alternatives to current cultural, social, political, or economic conditions” (Jenkins et al., 2020, p. 5). Citing classic and contemporary theories, Jenkins and colleagues conceive imagination as a “set of cognitive processes” which “allow us to detach from reality to think of objects in the world in a new way.” Importantly, they emphasize not only individual cognition but also what I have referred to as the second functional site of imagination as embodied in material social practice. As they explain, “the imagination gains civic power when it is no longer personal or private but rather can be translated into a form that can be shared intersubjectively,”



and thereby functions as an orienting structure of feeling which can motivate social action (pp. 13–14). Their case studies show how popular media representations allow young activists to picture their own desired forms of social life and communicate these forms to others, thus demonstrating the potentially productive use of media for social change when infused with people’s collective powers of imagination.

Mihailidis adopts Jenkins’ pop-culture brand of civic imagination because it emphasizes the ways in which people can creatively use media to affect their social conditions. It also draws attention the positive role that popular media forms can play, especially for young people. This is in contrast to critical and protectionist approaches, which tend to either ignore or vilify popular culture. As Mihailidis explains, “media literacy that uses frames of deconstruction and demystification of texts often decreases the potential for imagination to spark creative approaches to participation and expression” (Mihailidis, 2019, p. 114). In his model, critical analysis is still an important part of media literacy education, but it must be balanced with “creative spaces” for students to “envision themselves as civic agents” and “explore alternative realities.” Rather than simply focusing on how we are affected *by* media, media education must also give attention to how and what we can affect *through* media. Through a focus on imagination, media literacy can include “creative approaches to participation and expression” and encourage young people to see their entertainments as potential tools for changing the world. While I disagree with Mihailidis and Jenkins’ exclusive conception of imagination as developing “alternatives,” I believe that their ultimate argument offers up indispensable theoretical and pedagogical potential. Cultivating imagination can indeed energize civic agency and give social purpose to media literacy education, provided that we also recognize imagination’s role in our perception of social being through media forms. Combining their vision of mediated civic imagination with my conception of the constructive role of media within the contested process of global imagination, I believe that we can posit an “imagination orientation” as a valuable focus of global media literacy education. Such an orientation can be defined as the cultivation of a reflexive and socially engaged cognitive ability

to apprehend, construct, and persuasively share world-pictures in a mediated public sphere in the pursuit of new collective arrangements. While a full-fledged pedagogical model remains a future prospect, in the next section I will show how this orientation has helped me integrate language, culture, and media literacy objectives within a global education program at a Japanese university.

### **Imagination in Global EFL Programs: Descriptions of Practice**

I have begun to apply these ideas in my intermediate and advanced EFL courses taught at the iCoToBa Multilingual Learning Center (hereafter iCoToBa) at Aichi Prefectural University (hereafter APU), where I have served as special instructor since 2017. Founded in 2013 by the School of Foreign Studies under funding from Global Human Resources Development initiative of the Ministry of Education, Sports, Science and Technology, iCoToBa underwent structural changes in 2017 to make its facilities available to all APU students. It has nonetheless retained its original mission of providing globally conscious multilingual learning at our regional university and constitutes part of APU's interdisciplinary Program for Applied Global Education. We offer a variety of language courses, intercultural communication opportunities, and collaborative projects with local and regional organizations. The center also has a multimedia library and some media production facilities. While the majority of iCoToBa EFL courses focus on communicative English and standardized test preparation, each semester features at least two offerings of content-based and project-based courses for intermediate and advanced learners. iCoToBa courses are uncredited and entirely voluntary, which means that a limited number of students are willing to commit to the more challenging courses. However, this voluntary nature also allows for a great deal of freedom to try experimental course concepts and designs. Furthermore, the students who do participate tend to be self-motivated and open to new challenges. I have therefore attempted to integrate my theoretical concept of media and social imagination in the design of these courses. Due to concerns of length, I will only treat the aspects of these

courses directly related to the concepts described in the previous section.

I have approached the EFL element of these courses from the paradigm of *multiliteracies*, which allows me smoothly integrate language instruction within courses primarily designed to develop global imagination and critical media literacy. Language acquisition is one of many “functional, visual, multimodal, and digital literacies” which should feed into broader educational goals of “transcultural competence, language awareness, and critical-reflective thinking skills,” as well as critical literacy and “multicultural and transcultural competences which exceed the knowledge of two languages and predefined cultural entities” (Elsner and Viebrock, 2013, pp. 13, 24–26). Applied to foreign language instruction, the multiliteracies approach treats the target language not as unified object of study but as an interconnected medium necessarily encountered in conjunction with the codes of audiovisual media and those of professional and sociocultural discourses. Assignments and classroom practice have students interface with the target language while accomplishing critical and communicative tasks within a multimedia environment. Direct language instruction occurs only when necessary for reducing barriers to participation and should be connected to the introduction of new critical concepts or of registers appropriate to achieving particular discursive goals. Students should otherwise be left to produce language freely in order to collectively engage with a particular multimodal object. Foreign language ability and media and digital literacy are trained together as intermediary processes working toward the larger goal of a critical, creative, and agentic understanding of one’s place in the world. The approach thus fuses well with my imagination-oriented approach to media literacy.

#### Course Sample 1—Refugees and the Global Situation: How We Can Help

Since its founding, the iCoToBa Multilingual Learning Center has regularly organized collaborative projects in which APU students work together with companies and organizations in Aichi and surrounding prefectures to produce multilingual promotional materials which serve the organization’s activities. The situation of refugees in Japan and abroad has been a popular concern

among APU students in recent years, and merges well with the goals of training global imagination. I approached Door to Asylum Nagoya (hereafter DAN), a local NGO specializing in refugee advocacy, with the possibility of a collaborative media project. DAN agreed, and in the fall semester of 2019 iCoToBa offered the collaborative project course “Refugees and the Global Situation: How We Can Help.” The end goal was to produce an English-Japanese video essay that presented refugee issues in an accessible way while also highlighting DAN’s activities in the Nagoya area. The participating students shared an interest in refugee issues but possessed limited knowledge about the topic. My objective in organizing the phases of project was to have them gain content knowledge while maintaining awareness of the media techniques they encountered while doing so thinking about how to apply them to their own articulation of the issue. The conceptual phase of the project lasted the first few weeks, during which students brought in articles, video links, and other materials that stimulated their interest in refugee issues. In this phase I overtly invoked “global imagination” as a starting point. We discussed what the common points of these materials were, and how best to conceive the issue of refugees on global, national, and local levels. Students agreed that news media tended to dehumanize refugees as either dangerous or as victims. Without explicit intervention from me, students admirably deployed a Jenkins-style “civic imagination” by imagining alternative depictions. They wanted to present a picture of refugees as individuals with unique histories, skills, and goals. Once their preliminary vision of “refugees and the global situation” had formed we moved onto brainstorming ideas about what we wanted to communicate in our video and what elements we might include to do so. We then met via teleconference with the DAN representative. Fortunately, DAN’s goals and the students’ vision largely coincided.

In the second phase of the project we moved on to media production competences. Using online and textbook resources, the students trained themselves in basic skills like camera shots and filming techniques, storyboarding, and editing. We watched clips of extant refugee documentaries to identify how they used live footage, graphics, and text to transmit their

messages. These clips were used as models to practice storyboarding. It was also during this time that we discussed issues of copyright and privacy. We finalized the overall plan for the video essay in this phase, so students could directly apply the techniques they were learning to the themes they had developed in the previous phase. The video combined shots of students speaking to the camera with photo images and interviews. I assigned teams of 2 or 3 students to different parts of the video. Each team were to perform the necessary research for their section, gather photos and other secondary sources, and produce a storyboard and English-language script. I met with the teams regularly for editing sessions of both these documents. Completed sections were placed in a collaborative folder for other groups to look at. Students required a lot of conceptual guidance in the earlier parts of this process, but once divided into teams they were able to focus on their respective sections and start building the kind of “civic media literacy” Mihailidis describes. The third phase of the project was the actual filming, which, although rushed, was able to be completed in time.<sup>1</sup>

As a final assessment, I feel that the class achieved its goals. Students were able to interpret and use media forms in tandem with their expanding knowledge of refugees, which seemed to increase their involvement. Responses to end-of-class surveys indicated that all students felt they had achieved the goal of deepening their understanding of refugee issues. One response said that they gained “the mindset of wanting to ‘do something’ in English” (*eigo de nanika shiyō ishiki*), representing a welcome connection between English as a foreign language and civic imagination. Another response said that the collaborative process of producing the video helped them notice “the strong and weak points” (*kyōjaku*) of their ideas. The responses to follow-up surveys indicated that at least some of them maintained interest in refugee issues and showed continued awareness of the way different media platforms portray refugees. As for negative results, the course had trouble with the timing of the project phases. Although the long time spent in the conceptual phase was fruitful, it meant that we had less than adequate time for the final phase of actual filming. Consequently, some practical production skills were glossed over, including video editing. One

student response noted the lack of time for editing. Others indicated that with the short time for rehearsal they felt awkward speaking in front of the camera. Future versions of the class will have to be more careful with overall timing.

#### Course Sample 2—Discussing the Coronavirus: Biology, Media, Culture

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, all classes at APU for the 2020 spring semester were moved online and restrictions were placed on campus facilities. In early April misinformation and panic was already rampant, and the reactions to the crisis in different countries filtering through Japanese news sources was a further source of confusion. In response, I put together an online news discussion course called “Discussing the Coronavirus: Biology, Media, Culture” which I hoped would serve as a space for interested students to think about the ongoing crisis as a global event. Developing constructive global imagination with regard to the Covid-19 crisis was my primary objective. I wanted to avoid preoccupying the class with “fake news” debates and comparisons of national policy. Instead, I wanted students to think about how “Covid” was taking shape in our minds as a new and powerful entity in the global imagination. I also wanted them to consider how Covid-19 and its disastrous effects were uniquely able to reveal the complex and interconnected structures of social institutions. I chose topics and reading materials with these two organizing questions in mind.

Regular units in the 13-week course were thematized according to a “Covid and ...” schema, with the readings connecting Covid-19 issues to a different discursive sphere: healthcare, political protest, news media, popular culture, philosophy, etc. I chose news articles that covered different Covid-related phenomena in various locations across the world. This was not only to exhibit diversity but also to present students with a decidedly disorganized array of peoples, events, and institutions. I wanted to discourage established categories of comparison and force students draw their own connections. Though the majority of articles came from US and UK sources, I also tried to include English-language sources originating in other countries as well. In keeping with the multiliteracies paradigm, I avoided overt EFL instruction

modules. However, I did use elements of a “language-embedded content program;” course materials contained language support so that students with “less than optimal proficiency” could still engage with the content objectives (see Coyle et al., 2010, p. 25). These included a weekly reading guide and a preliminary discussion-skills module which introduced Covid-related vocabulary and taught methods and phrases for self-managing discussions in English. With these language supports in place as a background, class time could be fully devoted to discussion and our media literacy and critical imaginative goals.

We had a small class of nine students, meeting weekly on the Zoom conference platform. The lesson followed the familiar Japanese seminar structure. Each week a single student summarized and contextualized the reading before extended discussion. I led the first two discussion sessions myself, during which time I introduced common strategies utilized by media sources to represent the coronavirus and its effects. In the last part of each class students reviewed their discussion while I offered conceptual terms and sets of questions about how to approach the global phenomenon of Covid-19. The final assignment was a one-paragraph speech on the theme “Lessons from the Covid Crisis.” Students were asked to isolate a key issue that the Covid crisis has highlighted, predict how the issue will continue in the future, and describe potential actions which specific actors might take. The diversity of topics chosen by the students was impressive: two students wrote about changes in daily life; two others focused specifically on sociocultural attitudes to media; others wrote about panic culture, lack of historical consciousness, expanding systems of surveillance, refugee awareness, and the precarious nature of contemporary capitalism. Students submitted drafts of their speeches to me and we went through a reviewing process. Students gave their speeches in the final Zoom session and afterwards had a critical discussion about each other’s ideas. The quality and variety of these speeches indicated to me that the class had been successful in encouraging the students to construct their own imaginative world-pictures through the lens of Covid-19. Survey responses, while uniformly positive, mainly expressed satisfaction with the course’s ability to improve their English. This is of

course a success, but I had hoped for clearer recognition of the media literacy aspects of the course. In future discussion courses I will evoke this more explicitly as a learning objective.

## Conclusion

Though the courses above provide only preliminary observations, I believe they demonstrate how an orientation towards imagination can organize and provide significance for the diverse learning objectives of international education programs in Japanese universities. Such an orientation also can provide students with attitudes for dealing with an uncertain future. Recent events have shown global systems to be increasingly unstable, and there is a chance that current students will be living through economic and social landscapes radically different than those envisioned by the older generation. If globally-conscious education—of which media literacy is a fundamental component—is to truly serve students after they graduate, we need to enable them to imagine worlds, conceive problems, and develop solutions that lay beyond our own fields of possibility.

## Note

- 1 The completed video is available on the iCoToBa Youtube page: <https://youtu.be/SHS3kVjZG60>.

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