

# The Impact of Japanese Popular Culture on the Singaporean Youth

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## Abstract

‘Cool’ is out, ‘Kawaii’ is in. While the word ‘cool’ originates from the American culture, the word ‘Kawaii’ means ‘cute’ in Japanese. This ‘cute’ culture has swept across Asia like a tornado, challenging the once almighty Western culture for popularity.

If the trend continues, will it cause callous denial of the local culture? Will the consumption of the Japanese media and popular cultural activities teach youngsters from other Asian countries a common worldview, roles and values, the Japanese way? How does it affect the lifestyle and behavior of other Asian youth?

To find out the answers, this study surveyed 620 students from secondary schools and polytechnics in Singapore to explore the influence of the Japanese popular culture on the respondents in terms of their perception of the Japanese and their products as well as their desire to own Japanese goods.

## Introduction

Japanese cultural products are molding a new generation of consumerism in Asia. From *Noriko Sakai* to *Ayumi Hamasaki*,<sup>1</sup> from anime<sup>2</sup> *Crayon Shin-chan* to drama serial *Beach Boys*, and from the cutie street fashion to color-dyed hair, products of the Japanese popular culture prove irresistible in modern Asian cities, where the teenagers not only are mad about *Hello Kitty* and *Pokemon*,<sup>3</sup> but also sport hairstyle and lifestyle the Japanese way. Language does not pose a barrier to the invasion of the Japanese culture; neither does the history of Japanese wartime brutality bother the fans of the “kawaii” culture.

The emergence of Japanese cultural presence in Asia could be traced back to the mid-1980s when Japan became one of the economic powers in the world.

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Although the American mass culture still dominates the world, the influence of the Japanese culture is primarily constricted to Asia (Leo, 1996). As Japan develops into a highly urbanized, well-educated society with well-developed media, mass marketing and mass consumption become important elements of the Japanese popular culture (Bestor, 1984).

As the marketing of Japanese cultural products expands beyond its own shores, the impact of the Japanese popular culture begins to be felt overseas, especially in Asian countries that share cultural similarities with Japan. Singapore, which has historically been subjected to foreign influence through immigration and colonial control, is naturally hard hit by the invasion of Japanese popular culture. Singapore's multi-ethnic and multi-lingual population plus its status as an entrepot for international trade have all resulted in its quick embrace of foreign cultures.

The impact of the Japanese culture is especially obvious on young Singaporeans. A normal weekend for many of them is spent on Orchard Road where the Japanese shopping center Takashimaya is located. Sporting trendy hairstyles and clothes, these young people enjoy window-shopping Japanese brand-name products, frequenting sushi bars and playing games like *Daytona* and *Photo Play* at the arcade.

In 1996 when the Tamagotchi<sup>4</sup> craze swept Japan and other parts of Asia, Singapore's teenagers formed long queues to buy new models of the virtual pet. Even though the fad has subsided today, there are still websites devoted to this virtual pet. Then there was the Hello Kitty craze in year 2000, when McDonald used this plushy toy from Japan to promote its value meals. Long queues were formed outside the fast-food restaurants, with some even staying overnight in the queue to be among the first to own the toy.

Critics are concerned that the spread of the Japanese popular culture would strip away the self-identity of young Singaporeans today. Such concerns are by no means groundless since studies on the impact of popular culture could be traced back to the 1960s with the rise of amusement parks, movies, recorded music, radio and television. This was followed by a movement for popular culture studies in the 1970s, culminating with the formation of the Popular Culture Association in the United States (Powers & Kato, 1989).

Concerns have naturally been raised about the impact of the Japanese popular culture on the Singaporean youth. Although the Japanese popular culture may have an Asian dimension, it may also carry with it values that contradict the local ones. Is the popularity of Japanese cultural products simply a fad or will it stay to exert more profound influence over the Singaporean youth? Will the love of Japanese culture affect the perception of Japan and its products among the Singaporean youth and teach them a common worldview? How does the craze for Japanese cultural products affect the lifestyle and behavior of Singaporean youth? What is more important, will the love of Japanese cultural

products make the Singaporean youth despise their own culture? This study aims to answer these questions.

## Literature Review

The impact of international cultural exchanges has always been a major concern in communication research. During the past few decades, several theoretical approaches have been proposed to examine such impact, including cultural imperialism, asymmetric cultural development, cultural dependency, dependent cultural development, and cultural globalization (Willnat, He & Hao, 1998).

Globalization became the catchphrase in the 1990s. Giddens (1990, p.64) defined globalization as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa”. The globalization process naturally allows greater roles for communication and information in creating the new world order. The media are said to be playing a central role in shaping the socio-economic structures, cultures and development dynamics (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1991).

Through globalization, the world may share the same media perspective, and eventually form a homogenized ‘global village’ envisaged by McLuhan (1964). As the media increasingly link up more and more people in various parts of the world, they are also changing cultural and political views worldwide although the real power of media rests in the hands of those with economic power (Rowe, 2000).

Some people may see globalization as a trend in cultural development, but others would argue that it is impossible for a global culture to exist (Smith, 1990). The fact that the globalization process is dominated by the developed countries led to the proposition of the “cultural imperialism” theory, which argues that the international flow of cultural products has furthered the dependency of the Third World, resulting in cultural homogenization and synchronization (Hamlink, 1983).

Cultural imperialism suggests the “hypodermic needle” model for media impact, whereby foreign values are supposed to be injected into the audiences’ mind. Adorno (1971) claimed that TV entertainment drums false consciousness into viewers, ‘injecting’ them with ideology. Other scholars (Liebes & Katz, 1990), believe that the meaning in foreign television programming is not imported, but created by different cultural sectors of audience in relation to their cultural attitudes and political perceptions.

Oliveira (1990) asserted that advertising reinforces capitalist consumption values and globalization portends homogenization, producing a bland culture.

Dofman and Matterlart (1975) argued that American cultural products, which are imbued with a capitalist ideology, help to normalize and naturalize the social relation of Western capitalism in the less developed countries.

In studying the Cree culture, Granzberg, Steinbring and Hammer (1977) concluded that the local people experienced social conflicts and personal disruptions from watching Western television. In a study investigating the relationship between South Korean college students' cultural values and their viewing of U.S. Armed Forces Korean Network (AFKN), Kang and Morgan (1988) found that viewing the network led the audiences to both oppose and accept attributes of Western culture. In another study conducted in the Philippines, Tan, Tan and Tan (1987) found that American television could influence the values of local high school students, who experienced internal struggles when they found themselves embracing foreign values over their own

Tsan (1989), who studied the Japanese cultural presence in Taiwan, pointed out that the Japanese cultural dominance is subsuming China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and other parts of Asia. However, he noticed that the Japanese cultural products are gradually and increasingly discarding the shade of traditional Japanese culture and ethnic characteristics. Products that are perceived as Japanese could be of American or British origins. A more recent study (Zhang, 1999) showed that Singapore teenagers are susceptible to accepting foreign cultures. In fact, they look upon Japan as an elite model, and desire to emulate the Japanese and display icons of the Japanese culture.

Many researchers expressed concerns about the negative effects of cultural synchronization, alienation, homogenization and dominance. Hamlink (1983) wrote that imported media products are "prescribed" to the passive audience who are expected to register and store them in their archives. These media products are seen as instruments of alienation and cultural disorientation. Matterlart (1980) saw the import of foreign media products as a creation of false needs and consciousness.

The cultural dominance approach to studying the effects of media globalization was questioned by others scholars. Hoskins and Mirus (1988) argued that media dominance follows naturally from the characteristics of television programming, its production and trade. Others (Noam, 1991; Pool, 1974; Read, 1976) saw the uneven flow of cultural products mainly as a result of free-market laws, combined with the characteristics of different home markets. Read (1976) contended that the market-place system enables the mass media exporters and importers (thus the foreign consumers) to enjoy different but useful benefits.

Hoskins and Mirus (1990) proposed the concept of 'cultural discount', which assumes that a particular program rooted in one culture would have diminished appeal outside the environment and hence viewers find it difficult to identify with the styles, values and behavior patterns in question.

The notion of powerful media users has been more and more accepted as the importance of mass media grows in societies. New audience studies such as

reception analysis assert that foreign programs are not slavishly received, since the recipients actively transform the foreign messages. Audiences are active producers of meaning out of media messages. Herzog (1986) claimed that viewing foreign fiction programs can have an escapist function, and Ang (1985) contended that foreign programs work as a catalyst for more conversation, reflection and introspection on one's own social and emotional world.

Fiske (1987) opposed the assumption that people are 'cultural dopes', and any text conveys the same message to all people. Katz and Liebes (1984) demonstrated in their study of Israeli audiences of the Western program *Dallas*, how viewers entered into a complex active negotiation with the media text, bringing their own values and beliefs firmly to bear on their readings.

De Certeau (1990) also felt that it is wrong to assume that the public is shaped by the products imposed on it. He saw ordinary people as 'poachers', pinching the meanings they need from cultural commodities offered to them. The way the audience construct their own meaning depends on the use made of those products.

Liebes and Katz (1990) proposed the concepts of 'domestication' and 'familiarization', whereby viewers undergo the process of selection and transformed appropriation of the message. Schiller (1991) wrote that people do not mindlessly absorb everything that passes before their eyes. Curran (1990) demonstrated in his study that audiences construct highly individual readings of media texts. They are selective in their exposure to the media, and the meanings they get from the media are influenced by their attitudes, experience, peer groups, membership of sub-cultures and so on.

Hitherto, there are three different positions towards globalization. The happy post-modernist sees globalization as many kinds of cultural texts circulating internationally and people adopt them and integrate them in creative ways into their own lives. The less optimistic political economists see globalization as pervasive reach of the multinationals and question if distinctive cultures can outlast the onslaught of foreign cultural industries. The in-betweens visualize it as possibilities to revitalize local identities (Sreberny-Mohsammadai, 1991).

Despite the argument for an active audience, media are still seen as a powerful instrument for cultivation, by which Gerbner (1969) contended that television drama has a small but significant influence on the attitudes, beliefs and judgment of viewers concerning the social world. Despite many criticisms (cf. Boyd-Barrett & Braham, 1987; Hawkins & Pingree, 1983; Hirsch, 1980; McQuail & Windahl 1993), cultivation theory has been widely applied in studying the mass media effects.

The increasing personal and mass-mediated interactions across cultural boundaries have led many researchers to examine the formation of perception towards others. The term stereotype was first introduced into social sciences by Walter Lippmann (1922), who claimed that stereotypes, promoted by the mass

media, are a necessary feature of modern society. Katz and Braly (1933) pioneered a study on “verbal stereotypes and racial prejudice”, which helped to develop a technique in determining and measuring the contents of the stereotypes. Edwards (1940) later defined the four dimensions of the stereotype as “contents - the traits making it up”, “uniformity - the amount of agreement on these traits”, “direction - their favorable or unfavorable quality”, and “intensity - the degree of favorableness”.

Tan, Li and Simpson (1986) found that American TV was a major source of social stereotypes of Americans in Thailand, Taiwan and Mexico among respondents who were more exposed to the American TV. The effect was especially pronounced when the TV images were clear and consistent, and when information about Americans was lacking from other sources.

Ware and Dupagne (1994) found small but statistically significant correlations between exposure to American entertainment programs and attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of foreign audiences. Their findings indicate stronger correlations between media exposure and preference for American goods and programs.

A study on Israeli adolescents (Weiman, 1984) showed that heavy viewers tended to paint a better picture of life in the United States, in terms of wealth and standard of living. Hawkins and Pingree (1980) reported that Australian children who were heavy viewers held television-like beliefs about the world. In another study, Tan and Suarchvarat (1988) suggested that the characteristics of Americans portrayed in the U.S. programs shown in Thailand were accepted by the local audience, and this cultivation effect was extended to social stereotypes.

Zaharopoulos (1997) found that Greek high school students who watched American programs more often tended to have more positive perceptions of the Americans. In another study on foreign media exposure and perceptions of Americans in Hong Kong, Shenzhen and Singapore, Willnat, He and Hao (1998) found that foreign TV consumption is related to negative stereotypical perceptions of and feelings toward Americans.

In sum, past research has not only theorized about the potential impact of media globalization and foreign cultural imports but also produced evidence to show that foreign cultural products do affect the local people in terms of their perception, attitude and behavior towards the foreign cultures. Although the effects may not be universal due to cultural resistance among the recipients of foreign cultural products, they are nevertheless significant across various cultures.

## Hypotheses

According to the literature review, exposure to foreign media and other cultural products tend to affect people's perception, attitude and behavior in favor of the countries that produce them even though different viewers may assign different meanings to the same messages. To test such an assumption, we drew the following hypotheses:

- H1: Subjects with higher level of exposure to the Japanese media would perceive Japanese products as superior.
- H2: Lovers of Japanese popular cultural products would perceive Japanese products as superior.
- H3: Subjects with higher level of exposure to the Japanese media would have more positive feelings towards the Japanese.
- H4: Lovers of Japanese popular cultural products would have more positive feelings towards the Japanese.
- H5: Subjects with higher level of exposure to the Japanese media would perceive the Japanese as superior to Singaporeans.
- H6: Lovers of Japanese popular cultural products would perceive the Japanese as superior to Singaporeans.
- H7: Subjects with higher level of exposure to the Japanese media would have a stronger desire to own Japanese things.
- H8: Lovers of Japanese popular cultural products would have a stronger desire to own Japanese things

## Methodology

The survey method was employed to test the above hypotheses. The sample consists of 620 Singapore teenagers studying in secondary schools (244), junior colleges (38) and polytechnics (338). Since the objective of this study is to find out the presence rather than the extent of the influence of Japanese cultural products on the Singaporean youth, we did not go for a nation-wide representative sample. Instead, we selected a few schools where we have contacts to help us conduct the survey. Permission to survey their students was granted by these

schools and a four-page questionnaire was distributed to all the students in randomly selected classes in October 2001. The overall return rate was 84 percent.

The respondents averaged 16.2 years in age, ranging from 13 to 21. There were more girls (65.7%) than boys (34.3%). About 85% of the respondents are Chinese, 7% Malays, 5% Indians, and 3% classified as “others”. The financial situation of respondents’ families varies a lot as indicated by the type of houses they live in.<sup>5</sup> Among the respondents, 165 (26.7%) have Japanese friends, and 80 (13.0%) have been to Japan. Most of them (87.5%) expressed the desire to go to Japan if given an opportunity.

The standardized questionnaire also asked the respondents to indicate the amount of exposure to Japanese TV programs, music, magazines, comics, VCDs, movies and animation, as well as the frequency of playing Japanese arcade games, collecting flash cards, taking photo-stickers, dancing para para, eating Japanese food and so on. A four-point scale (1=Always, 2=Often, 3=Seldom, 4=Never) was used to measure such exposures.

The Television Affinity Scale (TAS) (Rubin, 1977, 1979) was used to measure the respondents’ perception of the Japanese and their products. Using a five-point Likert scale, we asked the respondents to indicate their level of agreement to a few statements, such as “I would like to dress like Japanese idols”, “I look for news on my Japanese idols through the Internet and magazines”. They were also asked to indicate their level of desire, ranging from 1 (very strong) to 4 (not at all), to own products that are “made in Japan”, such as LAN game, Pikachu and Hello Kitty soft toy.

The respondents’ stereotypical perceptions of the Japanese were measured by a list of 20 attributes. The respondents were asked to indicate the appropriateness of each attribute in describing the Japanese in general, on a four-point scale, ranging from 1 (extremely well) to 4 (not well at all).

## Findings

Exposure to Japanese media is quite common among the respondents. Nearly half (44%) of the respondents either always or often watch Japanese television programs, while 32.1% of them watch Japanese VCDs (see Table 1 for details). It should be noted that the Japanese media accessible to the Singaporean youth are all popular in nature. They are mainly in the form of TV dramas and readings on fashions and trends. However, the content of such media tends to be based on real Japanese characters rather than the abstract and virtual characters in comics and animations, which were categorized as popular cultural products in this study to contrast with the media products that depict the Japanese and their products in a more realistic manner.



Table 1: Frequency of Japanese Media Use by Singaporean Youth

	Always	Often	Seldom	Never
Watch Japanese TV programs	10.4	33.6	36.8	19.2
Read Japanese magazines	2.8	7.3	26.2	63.7
Watch Japanese VCD	9.9	22.2	32.9	35.0
Watch Japanese movies	2.9	12.0	42.7	42.4

In addition to exposure to the Japanese media, the respondents are also quite active in consuming products of the Japanese popular culture, such as listening to Japanese music, reading Japanese comics, watching Japanese animations, playing arcade games, taking photo-stickers and eating sushi. Please see Table 2 for details.

Table 2: Consumption of Japanese Popular Cultural Products by Singaporean Youth

	Always	Often	Seldom	Never
Listen to Japanese music	9.2	20.9	38.8	31.1
Read Japanese comics	14.4	16.7	25.7	43.3
Watch Japanese animation	13.8	25.0	31.0	30.3
Play arcade games, etc	18.3	19.1	33.8	28.9
Shop for Japanese street-wear	1.6	7.8	32.1	58.5
Dance para para	2.3	3.2	14.1	80.5
Collect flash cards	1.5	4.7	13.3	80.5
Take photo-stickers with friends	8.9	24.1	43.7	23.3
Eat Sushi, etc	18.1	34.6	35.9	11.5

Since the use of a particular medium or commodity has to be frequent enough to generate some observable impact on the subjects, two new variables were formed by including only variables with at least 30% of the respondents “always” or “often” using them. The two variables on the frequency of watching Japanese TV programs and Japanese VCDs were combined to form a new variable — Japanese media use, while the variables measuring the frequency of listening to Japanese music, reading Japanese comics, watching Japanese animations, playing Japanese arcade games and taking photo-stickers were combined to form a new variable — “love of Japanese popular culture” or “Japanese pop lovers” for short.

The two new variables correlate not only with each other but also with a number of dependent variables used to examine their impact. Please see the following table for details.

Table 3: Correlations among Various Variables

	Japanese Media Use	J-pop lovers
J-pop lovers	.60**	1.00
Japanese media use	1.00	.60**
Shop for Japanese wear	.41**	.38**
Desire to own Pikachu	.22*	.29*
Desire to own Game Boy	.23**	.40**
Desire to own LAN Game	.20**	.40**
Desire to own para-para dance machine	.30**	.29**
Desire to own posters of idols	.50**	.38**
Desire to own collection of comic characters	.32**	.41**
Desire to own fashion magazines	.37**	.31***
Desire to own handphone accessory	.25**	.24**
Desire to own street-wear	.22**	.22**
Would buy Japanese magazine if there is money	.52**	.42**
Would like to dress like Japanese idol	.46**	.31**
Would learn Japanese language	.47**	.35**
Would look for news on idols	.53**	.38**
J-movie/TV better than Singapore movie/TV	.45**	.26**
J-products are better	.29**	.21**
Feels elite when owning Japanese products	.34**	.25**
Would like to be born in Japan if given choice	.34**	.26**
Japanese are smarter than Singaporean	.12**	.14**
Japanese are more creative than Singaporean	.22**	.25**
Japanese are prettier than Singaporean	.22**	.18**
“Intelligent” describes Japanese very well	.09*	.14**
“Promiscuous” best describes Japanese	.08	.09*
“Reserved” describes Japanese very well	-.05	-.08*
“Cool” best describes Japanese	.21**	.17**
“Elegant” best describes Japanese	.12**	.10*

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

To further test the impact of exposure to Japanese media and popular cultural products, multiple regression was used to test the relationships between the use of Japanese media and popular cultural products and the respondents' perception of the Japanese and their products as well as their desire to own certain Japanese products. As Table 4 shows, Japanese media use is significantly related to the respondents' perception of Japanese products. Those teenagers who spend more time with the Japanese media are more likely to rate Japanese movies and other products favorably, feel elite to own Japanese products and prefer to be born in Japan if given a chance. No significant relationship, however, was found between the love of Japanese popular cultural products and the perception of Japanese products. Such findings lend support to Hypothesis 1, which predicts that subjects with higher level of exposure to the Japanese media would perceive Japanese products more favorably, but not to Hypothesis 2, which predicts that lovers of Japanese cultural products would perceive Japanese products more favorably.

Table 4. Regressions Predicting Respondents' Perception of Japanese Products (standardized beta coefficients)

	Age	Housing	Jap media	Gender	Visit Japan	J-pop Lovers	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Standard Error	F
Japan movies better	-.050	-.050	.503***	.071	-.025	-.046	.219	.98	27.2***
Japan products better	-.080*	-.001	.307***	.054	.024	.024	.101	.84	11.5***
Owning Japanese products make me feel elite	.074	.052	.335***	.099*	.055	.005	.127	.90	14.6***
Would like to be born in Japan if given a choice	.127**	.034	.315***	.061	-.020	.048	.136	.99	15.8***

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Hypothesis 3, which predicts that subjects with greater exposure to Japanese media would have more positive feelings towards the Japanese, and Hypothesis 4, which predicts that J-pop lovers would have more positive feelings towards the Japanese, did not find full support by our data. Although the use of Japanese media and Japanese popular cultural products do relate to some stereotypical perceptions of the Japanese, their relationship with other stereotypes was not found. What is more, the use of Japanese popular cultural products might have actually led the respondents to see the Japanese in a negative way, contrary to our original assumptions.

Table 5. Regressions Predicting Stereotypical Feelings of Respondents (standardized beta coefficients)

	Age	Housing	Jap Media	Gender	Visit Japan	J-pop Lovers	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Standard Error	F
<b>Positive or Neutral Stereotypes</b>									
<b>Diligent</b>	-.009	-.031	.003	.075	.008	.042	-.002	.79	.86
<b>Naïve</b>	.027	.077	-.047	.066	-.017	.035	.004	.83	1.4
<b>Honest</b>	.106*	-.013	-.005	.056	-.078*	-.047	.010	.73	2.0
<b>Intelligent</b>	.032	-.025	.017	.058	-.076	.143	.024	.76	3.3**
<b>Polite</b>	-.094*	.003	.046	-.049	.017	.030	.004	.9	1.4
<b>Reserved</b>	-.003	.005	-.014	-.029	.24	-.070	-.003	.87	.8
<b>Modest</b>	.020	-.004	.041	.020	.012	-.050	-.009	.81	.2
<b>Generous</b>	.106*	-.008	.003	-.012	-.011	.056	.005	.77	1.4
<b>Elegant</b>	-.036	-.029	.129*	.052	.002	.023	.013	.85	2.3*
<b>Cool</b>	.099*	-.028	.190***	.019	-.046	.051	.052	.87	6.1***
<b>Negative Stereotype</b>									
<b>Flamboyant</b>	-.144**	.006	-.054	.010	-.034	.121*	.020	.85	2.9*
<b>Rude</b>	-.017	.029	-.100	.057	.002	.131*	.008	.71	1.8
<b>Cold-hearted</b>	-.012	-.021	-.031	.073	.001	-.018	-.003	.81	.7
<b>Selfish</b>	-.033	-.063	-.010	.069	-.032	.063	.002	.75	1.2
<b>Arrogant</b>	-.169***	-.079	-.059	.056	-.031	.092	.033	.83	4.1***
<b>Boastful</b>	-.098*	-.003	-.025	.066	.052	.168**	.033	.82	4.2***
<b>Lazy</b>	.076	-.013	-.036	.112*	-.034	.021	.010	.67	1.9
<b>Stupid</b>	.080	.086*	-.113*	.130**	-.090*	.029	.034	.66	4.2***
<b>Promiscuous</b>	-.040	-.078	.028	.009	-.026	.097	.007	.73	1.7
<b>Shy</b>	-.060	.007	.034	-.042	.046	-.049	-.001	.87	.9

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Our findings indicate some significant relations between age and the stereotypical perceptions of the Japanese. It appears that the older the respondents, the more likely they would see the Japanese as “arrogant”, “flamboyant” and “boastful”. On the other hand, young teenagers are more likely to think that the Japanese are “honest”, “generous” and “cool”.

Hypotheses 5 and 6, which predict that respondents with higher level of usage of the Japanese media and popular cultural products respectively would perceive the Japanese as superior to Singaporeans, were partially supported. Those who are more exposed to Japanese media are more likely to see the Japanese as more creative, prettier or more handsome than the Singaporeans, and those who love Japanese popular cultural products are also more likely to think that the Japanese are more creative. The two variables, however, seem to have no effect on the respondents’ perception of the Japanese as smarter than Singaporeans.

Table 6. Regressions Predicting Respondents' Perception of the Japanese in Comparison with Singaporeans (standardized beta coefficients)

	Age	Housing	Jap Media	Gender	Visit Japan	J-pop Lovers	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Standard Error	F
<b>Smarter</b>	.039	.050	.103	.080	-.010	.057	.024	.96	3.2**
<b>More Creative</b>	-.073	.044	.140**	.022	.011	.132*	.057	1.07	6.6***
<b>Prettier/More Handsome</b>	-.012	.051	.201***	.019	-.042	.040	.047	1.04	5.6***

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Hypotheses 7 and 8, which predict that the respondents with higher level of usage of the Japanese media and popular cultural products would have a stronger desire to own Japanese things, were supported. While the exposure to Japanese media was found to be a factor to explain the desire of the subjects to own six of the nine items on the list, the love of Japanese popular cultural products explains the desire to own all the nine items on the list. The findings also show that the younger the respondents, the stronger their desire to own Japanese things. Males are more likely to desire LAN Game, while females are more likely to desire fashion magazines and handpone accessories.

Table 7. Regressions Predicting Respondents' Desire to Own Japanese Goods (standardized beta coefficients)

	Age	Housing	Jap Media	Gender	Visit Japan	J-pop Lovers	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Standard Error	F
<b>Pikachu soft toy</b>	.199***	.178***	.028	-.059	.020	.253***	.145	.58	16.9***
<b>Game boy</b>	.128**	.059	-.040	-.031	-.019	.428***	.181	.83	21.6***
<b>LAN game</b>	.170***	.045	.022	.376***	.073	.315***	.318	.80	44.5***
<b>Para para dance machine</b>	.218***	.055	.164**	-.060	.023	.217***	.173	.70	20.4***
<b>Posters</b>	.133***	.052	.387***	-.029	.046	.134**	.258	.77	33.5***
<b>Collections of comic characters</b>	.112**	.065	.107*	.008	.049	.358***	.209	.72	25.8***
<b>Fashion magazines</b>	.061	.036	.279***	-.105**	.080*	.131**	.160	.64	18.8***
<b>Handpone accessories</b>	.131**	-.012	.128*	-.110**	.014	.208***	.115	.87	13.1***
<b>Street-wear</b>	.026	.033	.117*	-.041	.042	.128*	.045	.87	5.4***

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

In addition, the use of Japanese media may also affect certain behaviors of the teenagers. Those who spend more time with the Japanese media are more likely to buy Japanese magazines, dress like their Japanese idols, learn the Japanese language, and look for news about their Japanese idols. On the other hand, love of Japanese popular cultural products is more likely to lead the subjects to buy Japanese magazines and learn the Japanese language, but unlikely to create idols for the youngsters. Please see Table 8 for details.

Table 8. Regressions Predicting Respondents' Behaviour towards Japanese Things (standardized beta coefficients)

	Age	Housing	Jap Media	Gender	Visit Japan	J-pop Lovers	Adjusted R2	Standard Error	F
<b>Buy Magazine</b>	.034	.002	.439***	-.051	.003	.160***	.301	.95	41.3***
<b>Dress Idol</b>	.133***	.073	.383***	-.052	.076	.047	.206	.91	25.2***
<b>Language</b>	.007	-.030	.381***	-.089*	-.049	.130**	.219	1.07	27.2***
<b>News</b>	.095**	-.004	.481***	-.061	-.012	.083	.297	1.06	40.5***

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

## Conclusions and Discussion

In general, this study provides fairly strong support for some of the general assumptions about the impact of foreign media and cultural products on local consumers. Although we cannot generalize from a sample of young Singaporeans to the whole Singaporean population, our findings indicate the potential impact of foreign media and popular cultural products on a sector of the population which are not only the most active in absorbing foreign media content and consuming foreign cultural products but also represent the future of a country.

As far as the Singaporean youth are concerned, the usage of Japanese media and cultural products by them has already reached a stage that could affect young people's perception and feelings towards the Japanese and their products in a substantial way. In general, the Japanese media and popular cultural products tend to lead their consumers to think of the Japanese and their products favorably and prompt them to buy Japanese products.

In terms of Japanese products, exposure to the Japanese media is likely to result in a more favorable perception of them, not only in the sense of the quality of the products but also in terms of the elite status attached to their ownership. On the other hand, consumption of the Japanese cultural products is unlikely to lead the youngsters to think that way. One possible explanation for this may lie in the fact that the media are more likely to exert stronger effect in branding products than popular cultural products such as video games and flash

cards because images presented by the media are seen as more realistic. For the same reason, exposure to the Japanese media also tends to have stronger effects than the consumption of popular cultural products in creating idols for the youngsters.

Moderate support was found for hypotheses regarding the impact of exposure to Japanese media and consumption of Japanese cultural products on the subjects' perception of the Japanese in comparison with the Singaporeans. Although we do not have conclusive evidence to prove that exposure to Japanese media and popular cultural products will make young Singaporeans think of the Japanese as superior, our data seem to point towards that direction. More exposure to Japanese media is more likely to lead the subjects to consider the Japanese as more creative and better looking than Singaporeans while youngsters who consume more Japanese cultural products are also more likely to see the Japanese as creative. Such a phenomenon naturally leads us to question if this will result in an inferiority complex among the Singaporean youth.

Only a few of the stereotypes examined in this study were found to be associated with the usage of Japanese media and popular cultural products. Those who watch more Japanese TV programs and VCDs tend to consider the Japanese cool, elegant and not stupid. The consumption of Japanese popular cultural products, on the other hand, tends to lead the youngsters to perceive the Japanese as boastful, flamboyant and rude. The reason that most of the stereotypes were not significantly related to the usage of Japanese media and popular cultural products may lie in the fact that such stereotypical portrayals of the Japanese may not exist in the media content or activities involving popular Japanese cultural products. Since the stereotype terms were borrowed from previous studies about the Americans (Willnat, He & Hao, 1998), they may not represent the way the Japanese are actually portrayed by the media or popular cultural commodities. Despite such limitations, it is interesting to note that the two kinds of activities may lead to different sets of stereotypes. Media audience are more likely to see the Japanese in positive but superficial stereotypical ways, but consumers of the popular Japanese cultural products, especially the games, are more likely to see the Japanese in some negative albeit superficial stereotypical ways. Future studies should examine if such differences really exist in the portrayal of the Japanese by the Japanese media and popular cultural products.

As far as the behavioral impact of the usage of Japanese media and popular cultural products is concerned, we only examined the likelihood of the youngsters to buy certain Japanese products and model after the Japanese. The results show that the Japanese media are more likely to exert a modeling effect on the youngsters, making it more likely for them to dress like and seek news about their Japanese idols. The popular Japanese cultural products, on the other hand, are more likely to drive the youngsters to the Japanese fads. In other words, the popular cultural products may have a wider but more superficial impact on the

youngsters than the media. Both types of influence, however, are more likely to increase the youngsters' desire to learn the Japanese language and buy Japanese magazines to facilitate the pursuit of their interests in the Japanese products.

Overall, Japanese media exposure has a much stronger relationship with the dependent variables, as compared to the love for Japanese popular cultural products. One possible explanation is that Japanese media may better describe the Japanese explicitly in a way people are able to associate with. On the other hand, Japanese popular cultural products, such as sushi, para para dancing, flash cards, video games and photo-stickers, do not help youngsters form a perception of the Japanese identity. Unlike the Japanese media, which present value-added content to the teenagers, many youngsters may not even know that these popular cultural products originate from Japan.

As the world becomes more and more globalized, all countries are inevitably experiencing greater informational and cultural exchanges with the rest of the world and therefore subjecting themselves to foreign influences. Like previous studies, this study shows that the usage of foreign media and popular cultural products do affect people's perception of and behavior towards the countries concerned in a favorable way.

One precondition for a country to succeed in meeting the challenges of globalization lies in knowing the outside world. For that purpose, foreign media and cultural products definitely play an important role in allowing people to see the outside world. It has to be admitted that few of the foreign media and cultural products available to us are made especially for propaganda purposes. They tend to be the same products produced for the domestic audiences. However, media and popular cultural products are not created specially to portray social realities. To attract the audience and consumers, they tend to sensationalize and dramatize. That may not be a problem for the domestic audiences since they can use other sensors for social realities, but it could be quite problematic for foreign audiences and consumers who use such products to perceive and understand people of another country, especially when such audiences and consumers are young.



## NOTES

1. *Noriko Sakai* and *Ayumi Hamasaki* are Japanese popular singers.
2. *Anime* is a Japanese term for animation film.
3. *Hello Kitty* and *Pokemon* are Japanese comic characters.
4. Tamagotchi is a small, egg-shaped simulation-game unit with liquid-crystal screens that depict various types of animals in different stages, including that of being raised from a pre-nascent state inside the egg.
5. Instead asking the respondents to indicate their family income, which is beyond the knowledge of most youngsters, we used the type of housing to indicate the financial situation of their families. In Singapore, about 80 percent of the people live in government-built housing estates, known as the Housing Development Board (HDB) flats. Different sizes of these flats cost different amounts of money to buy and serve as good indicators of the buyers' financial capability. Those who live in private housing in the form of condominiums and landed properties represent the richest sector of the population.

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