

COMPLETION REPORT

Redefining National Culture: Unintended Consequence of 'Cool Japan' for Japan as a Nation

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The word 'Cool Japan' for Japanese people is an imported word. It is not a Japanese who invented the word, but an American – Douglas Mc Gray – in his article titled 'Japan Gross National Cool' published in 2002 edition of *Foreign Policy*. Therefore it is only natural that foreigners (non-Japanese) living outside of Japan as well as those who are living in Japan, are more familiar with the word 'Cool Japan' than the Japanese themselves in Japan. As more than one decade has passed since the word appeared in public for the first time, Japanese people in their daily life begin to realize the significant power of the word outside of Japan, and its impact on domestic economy.

This research aims at probing the impact of 'Cool Japan' not on Japan's domestic economy, but on national culture. This research depart from the assumption that the 'Cool Japan' boom will trigger efforts to redefine Japanese national culture based on the 'cool'ness of the pop culture. When a nation is facing the fact that parts of their culture is being massively consumed and adored outside of their country, there will be various reactions concerning redefinition of one's own culture, from the level of everyday life, to the level of decision makers of the state. The result of this research confirms this various reactions. However, in the case of Japanese people facing the acceptance of Japanese pop culture as 'Cool Japan' abroad, this research finds that the reaction is more of reaffirmation of national culture which is separated from what is 'cool' in the eyes of foreigners abroad, rather than redefinition of national culture based on what is 'cool' in the eyes of those foreign people.

To better understand the result of this research, it is necessary to know the massiveness of 'Cool Japan' abroad. Mc Gray in his article points to the shift of Japan's economic performance abroad, and summarizes it as a shift from 'Gross National Product (GNP)' to 'Gross National Cool (GNC)'. Following this, 2003 edition of French's *Le Monde* mentioned 'Cool Japan: le Japon superpuissance de la pop', and Washington Post used the word 'Japan's Empire of Cool'. In numbers, 'Cool Japan' is shown as: Anime such as Pokemon was being aired in 65 countries whereas Sailor Moon in 20 countries in various languages; while the Game Pokemon enjoyed 1 trillion Yen of profit in Japan and 2 trillion Yen abroad. Japanese fast-food cheap restaurant chain such as Yoshinoya has 82 outlets in the USA and 50 in Taiwan, more chain restaurants coming in Southeast Asian countries. Hello Kitti annual sale once hit 100 billion Yen, and Doraemon was acknowledged as Asia Heroes by Time Magazine in 2002.

While the 'Cool Japan' pop culture fascinates the rest of the world, the decision makers at the level of the government and the national television and radio network the NHK decides to let the business worlds take care of the 'Cool Japan' abroad and profits from the fever. Both the government and the national media network sticks to

their understanding of Japanese national culture, and put some efforts in broadening the meaning of ‘cool’ to not only popular culture but also Japanese centuries-old traditional culture and habits. While in the everyday life level, Japanese people are not disturbed by the heavy flow of ‘Cool Japan’ abroad, and in line with their government and national media network, they maintain their perception of national culture as their centuries-old traditional culture and habits, and socialize this perception from early age.

In other words, this research shows that, ‘Cool Japan’ does not lead the Japanese unto redefining their national culture, but the Japanese reaffirm their perception of national culture, and take effort in broadening the perception of ‘cool’ in the ‘Cool Japan’.

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

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