

COMPLETION REPORT

Japanese Cultural Appreciation Communities in Southeast Asia: Anime, Cosplay and Attitudes towards Japan among Young Southeast Asians

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As a result of interviews with members of cosplay and anime communities in Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia, and bibliographic research, this project discovered that there is a regional ‘ecosystem’ of cosplay and anime societies and events in Southeast Asia. This research also revealed the ways in which young people from different cultural backgrounds in Southeast Asia have adopted cosplay and anime as a means of self-expression and even finding meaning in life.

Among the key findings are those that relate to i) the ways in which Japanese culture is received in Southeast Asia; ii) the sentiment of young Southeast Asian cosplayers and anime fans towards Japan which has cultural diplomacy and soft power implications for Japan

i) A clear finding from this research is that Japanese culture in the forms of anime and cosplay has a surprisingly large and dedicated presence in Southeast Asia. We discovered small but passionate businesses in Indonesia which provide services to people seeking cosplay costumes, and also publishers of localized versions of anime. These businesses depend not only on fans, but also on an ‘ecosystem’ of events and communities in Southeast Asia that include costume competitions and fan events.

ii) These communities and events lead to a fostering of positive sentiment towards Japan amongst the Southeast Asian cosplayers. Some of the cosplayers come from countries with difficult histories with Japan, however, the presence of this history seems not very present in these young people’s minds who would seem to prefer “to let bygones by bygones” [to leave it in the past].

Therefore, as a vehicle of cultural diplomacy, or ‘soft power’, cosplay and anime play an important role in fostering positive sentiment, even respect, towards Japan which may have continuous benefits to Japan in the long term and in ways which would not be measurable or detectable without the on ground research undertaken in this project. The research conducted for this project provides important concrete examples of the fostering of Japanese ‘soft power’ in Southeast Asia today.

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

Verbal Presentation (Date, Venue, Name of Conference, Title of Presentation, Presenter, etc.)

At present, a YouTube documentary is being prepared. Details of it will be made available to the Sumitomo Foundation when it is complete.

Thesis (Name of Journal and its Date, Title and Author of Thesis, etc.)

Book (Publisher and Date of the Book, Title and Author of the Book, etc.)