

## 《 論 説 》

*The Soft Power of Cool:  
Economy, Culture and Foreign Policy in Japan*

H. Steven Green

## Introduction

Bureaucrats and politicians in Tokyo hope that an image of Japan as “cool” will increase Japanese influence in international affairs. To this end, the government has begun spending billions of taxpayers’ yen. On November 25, 2013 the Japanese government launched the so-called “Cool Japan Fund” to promote the sale of Japanese cultural products abroad through the “Cool Japan” campaign. The campaign supports the advertising and public relations, among other activities, of Japan’s creative industries overseas. The fund began with JPY 37.5 billion, of which JPY 30 billion came from the government, and the remainder from 15 private companies. The government plans to expand the fund to JPY 90 billion by March 2015.<sup>(1)</sup> The idea for the fund is based on significant changes in the content of Japanese exports. Simply put, *manga* outsell Mazdas. Since the mid-1990s, Japanese cultural exports have been worth more than all other Japanese export products.<sup>(2)</sup>

Students of diplomacy and power can begin to track the Cool Japan campaign as a

---

(1) John Hoflieana, “‘Cool Japan’ initiative to use \$ 1 billion in public funds to push Japanese cultural exports,” *Japan Daily Press*, Nov. 25, 2013: <http://japandailypress.com/cool-japan-initiative-to-use-1-billion-in-public-funds-to-push-japanese-cultural-exports-2540012/> (Downloaded 01/04/15 at 11:20)

(2) See Figure 8.3 in Sugiura Tsutomu, “Japan’s Creative Industries: Culture as a Source of Soft Power in the Industrial Sector,” pp.128-153, in Watanabe Yasushi and David McConnell, ed. *Soft Power Superpowers: Cultural and National Assets of Japan and the United States* (M.E. Sharpe: Armonk, NY, 2008)

rare opportunity to observe the effects of a purported policy of so-called soft power. Twenty-five years ago, Joseph S. Nye, Jr. coined the term “soft power” to identify a country’s ability to reach its foreign policy goals through co-option rather than coercion.<sup>(3)</sup> Unlike hard power, which is based on threats and promises of rewards, soft power attracts others to “want what you want.”<sup>(4)</sup> The sales of Japanese comic books, animated videos, and pop music, indicate that millions of people around the world are attracted to Japan’s creative products. The Japanese government is banking on being able to convert people’s love of Japanese things into an attraction to Japan in general, which, it believes, will increase Japan’s soft power ability to “co-opt them to want what [Japan] wants.”<sup>(5)</sup> One of Japan’s newest national economic policies is also its one of its newest foreign policies.

The remainder of this essay will proceed in three parts: A review of the economic and political contexts (referred to below as the “bad” and the “ugly”) in which the creative industries emerged as the engine driving Japan’s economy (the “good”); a description of the ascendance of those industries’ combined power into what has been termed Japan’s “Gross National Cool”<sup>(6)</sup> and an analysis of the Japanese government’s stated soft power goals based on the growth of the creative industries. The essay concludes that, while soft power “contains a special charm for Japanese elites,”<sup>(7)</sup> the Cool Japan campaign is properly understood as an industrial policy and, therefore, an example of hard power. In this respect, the Cool Japan campaign raises the question of whether or not soft power is an actual power resource.

---

(3) Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (Public Affairs: New York, 2004) p. 2 Kindle file

(4) Ibid.

(5) Ibid.

(6) Douglas McGray, “Japan’s Gross National Cool,” *Foreign Policy*, Nov. 11, 2009.

<http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/11/11/japans-gross-national-cool/> (Downloaded 01/03/2015, 16:24)

# I. The Good the Bad, and the Ugly (With apologies to Clint Eastwood and Sergio Leone) : Culture, Economy and International Relations in the 1990s

The Bad- Japan's economy in the 1990s: By the 1980s Japan's post-war industrialization and redevelopment were so successful that it was considered an economic superpower capable of competing for global influence with the conventional military superpowers, the US and USSR. As shown in Figure 1, the "Japanese miracle" was characterized by per capita GDP growth that nearly caught up with US per capita GDP by 1990 despite having been nearly halved during the war.

According to Douglas McGray, "What made Japan a superpower, more than just a wealthy country," was that Japanese managers and Tokyo bureaucrats "drove the most dynamic economy of the era, and it was indisputably Japanese" in both its firm-level practices ("just-in-time" inventory management and "quality circles," which managers around the world tried to imitate)<sup>(8)</sup> and its industrial policies. Japan's rapid post-war growth was based on the global popularity of Japanese automobiles and electronic products, but the production of these was facilitated by a governmental policy of "picking winners." The former Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) presented generous loans to companies in industries considered vital for national redevelopment. Firms in the auto-, chemical-, electronics- and ship-building industries, in particular, were prioritized for consideration of government loans. To support companies that competed in global markets, the government restricted imports to guarantee local markets.

By the middle of the 1980s, the fast growth had fueled excessive demand for stocks

---

(7) David Leheny, "A Narrow Place to Cross Swords," in Peter J. Katzenstein and Takashi Shiraishi, ed., *Beyond Japan: The Dynamics of East Asian Regionalism* (Cornell UP: Ithaca, 2006) p.232

(8) Douglas McGray, "Japan's Gross National Cool," *Foreign Policy*, Nov. 11, 2009.  
<http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/11/11/japans-gross-national-cool/> (Downloaded 01/03/2015, 16:24)  
 Watanabe Yasushi and David McConnell, ed. *Soft Power Superpowers: Cultural and National Assets of*

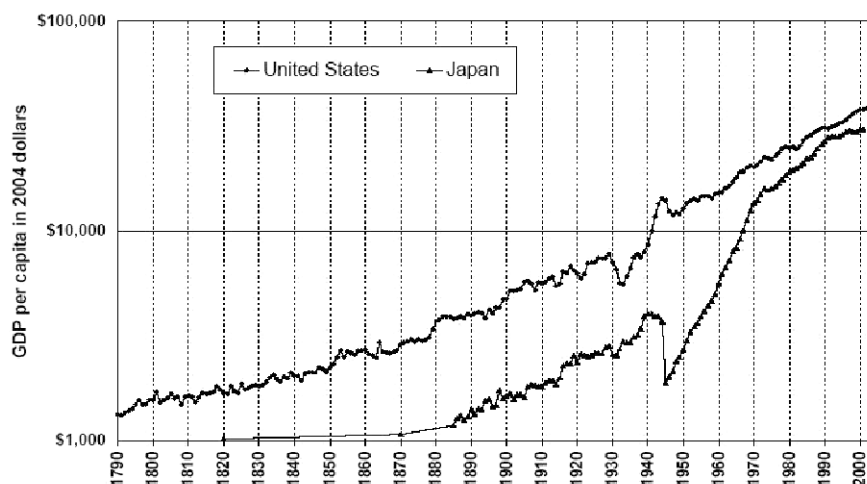


Figure 1 : Japan's Economic Miracle

Source: "Changes in Japanese Income Distribution," *Ben Muse*, Nov. 28, 2005

[http://benmuse.typepad.com/ben\\_muse/2005/11/changes\\_in\\_inco.html](http://benmuse.typepad.com/ben_muse/2005/11/changes_in_inco.html) (Downloaded 01/12/2015, 15:50)

and property leading to the infamous bubble years of 1986-1991. One apocryphal story of the period told of how the Imperial Palace grounds in the center of Tokyo were more valuable than all of France. Another said a JPY 10, 000 note dropped on a street in the Ginza district was worth less than the territory it covered. When the bubble burst, prices decreased by more than 80% in a two-year period and it was not until 2007 that Japanese real estate would be led by yields and not capital gains (for the first time since 1945.)<sup>(9)</sup> As Figure 2 shows, Japanese residential property prices returned to their 1983 levels in 2006, when the spiked upward until the financial crisis of 2008 brought them back down in 2010, despite near-zero mortgage rates.

Figure 3 shows the bursting of the bubble occurred during a gradual, but persistent, decline in manufacturing in Japan and other wealthy nations. The manufacturing share

(9) "Property in Japan: Back from the grave," *The Economist*, Oct. 11, 2007, <http://www.economist.com/node/9955765> (Downloaded 01/12/2015, 22:20)

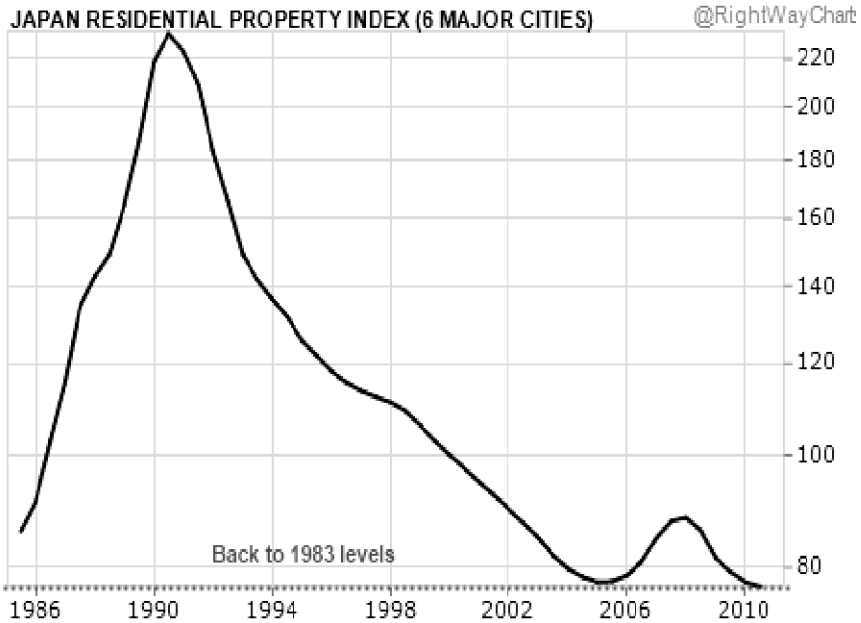


Figure 2: Real Estate Prices Before and After the Bubble

Source: "Looking into the Japanese real estate mirror: Residential home prices back to levels last seen thirty years ago in spite of near zero percent mortgage rates," *Dr. Housing Bubble*, Jan. 6, 2013

"<http://www.doctorhousingbubble.com/japan-real-estate-bubble-home-prices-back-30-years-zero-percent-mortgage-rates/>" (Downloaded 01/15/2015, 16:03)

in Japan is indicated in the top line of the graph and it decreased from 35% in 1970 to approximately 27% by the time of the bubble bursting and then to about 23% by the end of the 1990s. During the 1990s, Japanese firms began to relocate overseas, particularly to China, in order to take advantage of lower labor costs. In part, the off shoring was part of an inevitable transition toward service-industry-based economies in the advanced industrial nations. However, the slight upward tick of unemployment produced by it would combine with the collapse of real estate and stock prices, and a decline in real wage levels, so that the period 1991-2000 would become known as the "lost decade" (失われた10年).

## Manufacturing Share of GDP Current National Currency Units 1970 to 2010

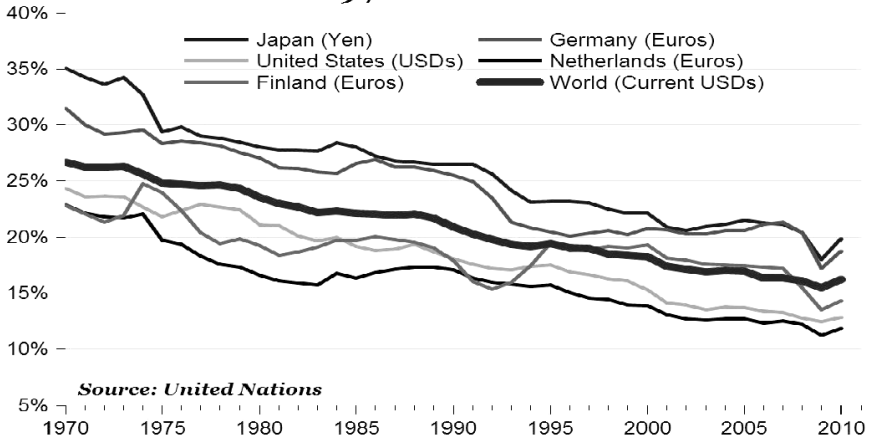


Figure 3: Decline of Manufacturing

Source: Mark. J. Perry, "Manufacturing's Declining Share of GDP is a Global Phenomenon, and It's Something to Celebrate," *US Chamber of Commerce Foundation*, March 22, 2012  
<http://www.uschamberfoundation.org/blog/post/manufacturing-s-declining-share-gdp-global-phenomenon-and-it-s-something-celebrate/3426> 1 (Downloaded 01/15/12, 16:08)

By the end of the 1990s, the policies that had created growth in the first four post-war decades were no longer effective. Technocrats at MITI could not guide the Japanese economy out of its downturn and there were no more industrial winners to pick in an economy that suddenly seemed post-industrial. As the next section will explain, at the same time that Japan's economic power began decreasing domestic and international tensions over Japan's role in the world began increasing.

The Ugly- Tensions over Japan's role in the world: With popular support, the government cultivated the image of Japan as a peace-loving nation focused on trade and industrial development. By the early 1990s the assumed consensus around this image would begin to change, and Japan would become embroiled in domestic debates

about its proper role in world, and disputes with its neighbors over territorial issues. Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru persuaded his ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to accept Japan's place under the umbrella of United States Armed Forces and focus on economic development. From the end of the US occupation, and the advent of the Yoshida Doctrine, to the 1990s, Japan's role in foreign affairs had been defined first and foremost by its so-called "peace constitution." Unique among nations, Article 9 of Japan's constitution renounces the right of the nation to wage war (paragraph 1) or to possess the means to wage war, i.e. war materiel (paragraph 2). Although a Japanese military would be created, the role of Japan's Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) was defined as strictly defensive. Even the JSDF's recruitment posters emphasized peace and avoided military imagery, as seen in Image 1. Here the popular all-female J-Pop singing group called Morning Musume (モーニング娘, "morning daughters") tell potential recruits that "It's cool to do your very best!" (一生懸命って、いい感じ) and "Go! Go! Peace!"

The Morning Musume poster perfectly reflects the government's desire to portray Japan as a peaceful nation with only benign intentions. Between the end of the war and the early 1990s, successive Japanese governments interpreted Article 9 as a prohibition against Japan's participation in international uses of force, including peacekeeping operations (PKOs). The national government also condemned nuclear weapons and the mayors of Nagasaki and Hiroshima to this day send official letters of protest to governments who conduct nuclear weapons tests. Throughout the post-war era Japanese policy



Image 1 : Go! Go! Peace! JSDF Recruitment Poster circa 2004

makers and politicians cultivated an image of Japan as a “peaceful state” (平和国, *heiwa-kuni*). The 1984 Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) bluebook states that Japan “should contribute to world peace and prosperity through economic cooperation” (経済面での協力を通じて世界の繁栄に貢献である) and that “the theme of Japanese diplomacy is positive diplomacy that contributes to world peace and prosperity” (世界の平和と繁栄に積極的な外交をもって貢献していくことが日本外交の課題である。)<sup>(10)</sup>

However, just as the bursting of the economic bubble in the same year would signal the beginning of the end of the Japanese economic miracle, the Gulf War of 1991 would mark a turning point in Japan’s pacifist posture. When Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990, with the intent to annex it, the United Nations passed Resolution 678 authorizing the military action against Saddam Hussein’s forces unless they returned to Iraq. When it became clear Hussein would not meet the deadline for removal of his troops, the United Nations Security Council approved the organization of a 34-nation coalition of military forces to prepare to liberate Kuwait in a campaign dubbed “Operation Desert Storm.” In accord with its official position that it was constitutionally prohibited from participating in military operations overseas, Japan did not join the coalition nor offer to contribute to the operation in non-military ways. The Japanese inaction was consistent with its refusal to become directly involved with either the Korean or Vietnamese wars, for which it was never criticized. This time, however, leaders and publics of the other countries of the coalition loudly condemned Japan. Many wondered why a country as dependent on foreign oil as Japan was would not share the risk borne by its allies.

Eventually, Japan would contribute \$13 billion and send minesweepers to the Gulf to help the US Navy dispose of mines left by retreating Iraqi forces after the short war

---

(10) 「外交青書 わが外交近況1984版 第28号」日本外務省 <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/bluebook/1984/s59-1010000.htm> Full text of Bluebook here: <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/bluebook/1984/s59-contents.htm> (Downloaded 01/13/2015 9:38)



concluded. However, the Japanese government, diplomatic corps and public were shocked by the initial outcry. Their shock only worsened after Japan's contributions were unacknowledged by the Kuwaiti government, which had bought a full page in the New York Times to publicly thank the coalition nations. Speaking to a journalist at *The Guardian* newspaper ten years later, one diplomat said, "In terms of how traumatic and formative an experience it was, the Gulf war was the Vietnam for Japanese diplomats...Even now, the ministry is divided between hardened veterans of that experience and others."<sup>(11)</sup>

After the Gulf War, Japan's interpretation of Article 9 would begin to change and, with it, the country's assumed consensus about its role in the world. The deployment of the minesweepers marked the first time since 1945 that Japanese military vessels or personnel had been dispatched on an overseas mission. In 1992, after fierce parliamentary debate, the government allowed JSDF troops to join UN PKOs in Cambodia, but on the condition that the Japanese soldiers not carry guns. The dispatch of unarmed Japanese troops on policing operations once again brought international criticism upon Japan. Speaking to the New Sunday Times, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore declared that, "Allowing Japan once again to send its forces abroad is like giving a chocolate liqueur to an alcoholic."<sup>(12)</sup>

As cracks appeared in the image of Japan as a trading nation that embraced its "peace constitution," the People's Republic of China and the Republic of South Korea began to make claims against Japan over issues most Japanese had assumed had been settled since the signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, if not earlier. South Korea claims ownership of what it calls the Dokdo Islands and what Japan calls Takeshima. South

---

(11) Jonathan Watts, "Japan revisits Gulf war," *The Guardian*, Thursday, September 20, 2001, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/sep/20/worlddispatch.afghanistan> (Downloaded 01/13/2015 11:06)

(12) Nathan Gardles, "Lee: US Military presence vital," *New Sunday Times*, December 15, 1991, p. 6  
<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1295&dat=19911215&id=MsFUAAAIBAJ&sjid=aZADAAIAIBAJ&pg=6760,5759178> (Downloaded 01/13/2015 11:26)

Korea has also demanded that the Sea of Japan be renamed the East Sea. China has claimed possession of what it calls the Diaoyu Islands and Japan calls the Senkaku Islands. Since the 1990s, activists and government officials in both South Korea and China have also routinely criticized the Japanese government for its perceived lack of contrition for its invasion and occupation of their nations (1910-45 in Korea, 1937-45 in China), and for specific acts against their populations during that time.

From its sudden economic misfortune to the unexpected change in international expectations about Japan's role in the world, and the harshly critical way in which those were sometimes conveyed, the 1990s seemed to go from bad to ugly for Japan. Consensus around its economic model and global role was dissolving, but good news for both was already emerging.

The Good- Japan's Pop Culture Boom: Despite the bad news economic news and the controversies swirling around Japan's new interpretation of Article 9 and the role of JSDF, Japanese pop music, *manga* and *anime* began an overseas boom in the 1990s. Anyone familiar with pop culture trends in the era will recognize singers such as Namie Amuro, Puffy, Kinki Kids, SMAP and Dreams Come True. *Anime* fans watched Dragon BallZ, Sailor Moon, and anything made by Studio Ghibli, while *manga* lovers devoured each edition of *Shonen Jump* when it was released. Japanese game software makers SEGA and Nintendo would also spread globally during the 1990s. Who knew then that these leaders of *kawaii* (cute) and cool would be seen as the key to national power in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

A review of the data below reveals that Japan's creative industries had become the engine driving the domestic economy by the mid-90s. By the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, it is not surprising that the government saw in them Japan's best hope for a revival of its economic power.

First, as Figure 4 illustrates, *manga* outsell Mazdas. The solid dark line indicates Japan's cultural exports. By 1996 the value of cultural exports had surpassed the value

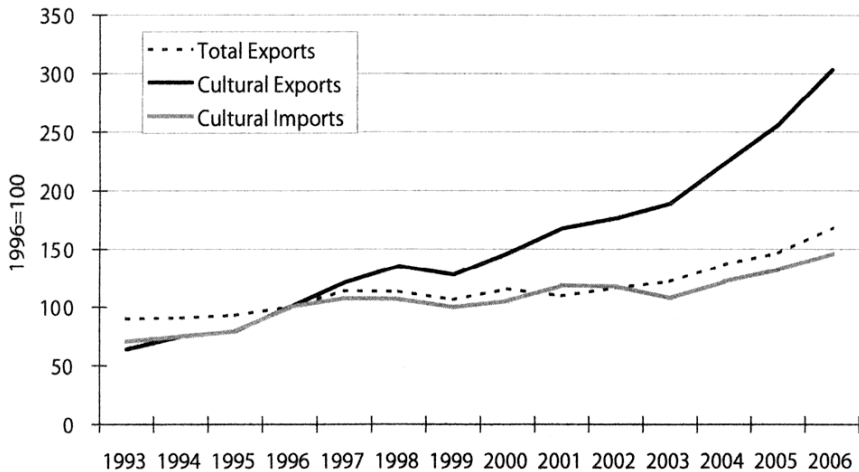


Figure 4: Manga outsell Mazdas: Japan's cultural exports are worth more than TOTAL exports.

Source: Figure 8. 3 in Sugiura Tsutomu, "Japan's Creative Industries: Culture as a Source of Soft Power in the Industrial Sector," pp.128-153, in Watanabe Yasushi and David McConnell, ed. *Soft Power Superpowers: Cultural and National Assets of Japan and the United States* (M.E. Sharpe: Armonk, NY, 2008)

of total exports and the gap between the two figures continued to grow. By 2006 we can see that cultural exports exceeded the combined total of total export and cultural imports.

Next, in Table 1 we can see the rapid growth of Japanese creative industries and the decline of other industries between 1989 and 1999. The total revenue from creative industries increased over 86% during the decade. Figures for revenue from all other industries are not available but the number of people employed in them decreased by more than 4 % while the number of employees in creative industries increased 16%. The largest increases in revenue came from movies and videos (70.5%), music and the performing arts (81.2%) and computer software, whose revenues more than doubled (221.1%).

Finally, in Table 2 we can see the increase in Japanese cultural exports to specific

Table 1 : Selected Japanese Cultural Exports since 1989

Industries	Number of employees			Revenue (\ million)		
	1996	2001	% Change	1989	1999	% Change
Advertising	149, 996	154, 381	2. 9	7. 175m	10. 199m	42. 0
Movies and video	65, 153	75, 288	15. 6	1. 160m	1. 811m	70. 5
Music and film recording, sales and lease	134, 842	119, 002	-11. 7	269, 166	445, 131	65. 4
Music and performing arts	79, 948	77, 542	0. 8	606, 856	1. 100m	81. 2
Publication	177, 569	169, 395	-4. 6	n.a.	n.a.	
Computer software	397, 886	584, 253	46. 8	3. 217m	10. 334m	221. 1
TOTAL CREATIVE INDUSTRIES*	1, 171, 803	1, 360, 898	16. 1	15. 143m	28. 214m	86. 3
Total ALL industries	60, 931, 256	58, 280, 751	-4. 3	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

\* Not all industries appear on the list so the totals not match the sums of the numbers above them.

Source: Cf. Table 8. 1 in Sugiura Tsutomu, "Japan's Creative Industries: Culture as a Source of Soft Power in the Industrial Sector," pp.128-153, in Watanabe Yasushi and David McConnell, ed. *Soft Power Superpowers: Cultural and National Assets of Japan and the United States* (M.E. Sharpe: Armonk, NY, 2008)

Table 2 : Cultural Exports to Asia Increase1994-2004 (USD 1 million)

	1994	2004	Multiple increased by (2004/1994)
Japan --> India	1. 5	11. 4	7. 6
Japan --> China	40. 0	144. 5	3. 6
Japan --> NIEs	271. 1	586. 6	2. 2
Japan --> ASEAN- 4	61. 3	73. 2	1. 2

Source: Cf. Table 8. 4 in Sugiura Tsutomu, "Japan's Creative Industries: Culture as a Source of Soft Power in the Industrial Sector," pp.128-153, in Watanabe Yasushi and David McConnell, ed. *Soft Power Superpowers: Cultural and National Assets of Japan and the United States* (M.E. Sharpe: Armonk, NY, 2008)

parts of Asia over a ten-year period starting in 1994. Sales of Japanese cultural products to India increased the most, by 760%, but net sales to China were the greatest at \$144.5 million. Sales to Asia's newly industrializing economies (NIEs) grew to nearly \$587 million and represent the highest figure.

As the data in Figure 4 and Tables 1 and 2 illustrate, international demand for Japanese creative goods took off from the mid-1990s, offering hope that the economy and Japan's image abroad were improving.

## II. Gross National Cool

As early as 2002 the Japanese government began to design a new industrial policy around the idea of Japan as "cool" that would become the "Cool Japan" campaign, a brand strategy launched in 2014. Cool Japan officials aim to do for the creative industries what METI experts had with the heavy industries in the post-war era, i.e. pick "winners" and then protect and promote them. The first step, taken in 2002, was the Intellectual Property Strategic Program (IPSP) designed to stimulate and revitalize intellectual creations as well as to protect and exploit the potential of these creations. The Strategic Council on Intellectual Property was established "to enhance the international competitiveness of Japanese industries and revitalize the economy" by establishing a "national strategy for intellectual property" and working to "powerfully advance the necessary policies."<sup>(13)</sup> Just as the technocrats of METI had directed funds to heavy industrial firms, the new Strategic Council would support the creative industries. In its "Intellectual Property Strategic Program 2004" the Council's stated aims included "Promoting the Creation of Attractive Designs" (Chapter 1, (3) 8.)<sup>(14)</sup> From 2005 the Japan brand strategy would expand its support from intellectual property, such as software, to

---

(13) "Strategic Council on Intellectual Property" at website of Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, [http://japan.kantei.go.jp/policy/titeki/index\\_e.html](http://japan.kantei.go.jp/policy/titeki/index_e.html) (Downloaded 03/08/2015 at 17:23)

(14) "Intellectual Property Strategic Program 2004" via website of Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, [http://japan.kantei.go.jp/policy/titeki/kettei/040527\\_e.html](http://japan.kantei.go.jp/policy/titeki/kettei/040527_e.html) (Downloaded 03/08/2015 at 17:29)

food, and fashion, as well as both traditional- and modern arts and crafts. Different Japanese products, reflecting a variety of periods and tastes in Japan, would be promoted under one label- “cool.”

In 2014 the Cool Japan campaign was officially launched with a budget of \$371 million to be increased to \$1 billion by 2015. Under the leadership of Ota Nobuyuki, CEO of the Cool Japan Fund, Inc., the campaign is a public-private initiative that will work closely with regional governments, towns, cities and banks to “pursue projects that show promise.”<sup>(15)</sup> Fund managers will seek marketable products throughout Japan and promote them overseas as well as build Japanese shopping centers and persuade foreign broadcasters to cover more Japan-related stories. The fund also buys and rents space throughout Southeast Asia to sell and promote Japanese cultural, food and fashion products. Ota stresses that the “The state has realized that [*manga*, *anime*, fashion and food] will play important roles in creating future growth opportunities for Japan.”<sup>(16)</sup>

Following the decline of domestic manufacturing, the Japanese government embarked on a policy to stimulate growth at home by promoting the sales of popular creative products abroad. Whether or not the Cool Japan campaign will succeed remains to be seen. However, the government is promoting it as more than just an economic policy. It also claims that Cool Japan represents a soft power resource that will increase Japan’s influence in world affairs.

### III. The Soft Power of Cool

The origin of the idea of Cool Japan as a soft power resource arguably lies with American journalist Douglas McGray. According to McGray, “Japan is reinventing superpower” because “Japanese culture has transcended U.S. demand or approval.”<sup>(17)</sup>

---

(15) Kauaki Nagata, “Cool Japan Fund chief says crafty marketing key to regional revivals,” *Japan Times*, Dec. 29, 2013.

(16) Ibid.

(17) McGray, “Japan’s Gross National Cool.”

Writing in *Foreign Policy* in 2002, McGray claimed that the global demand for Japanese creative products reflects Japan's "national cool," which he describes as "a kind of soft power"<sup>(18)</sup> that can persuade other countries to want the same things Japan wants.

Joseph S. Nye, Jr. coined the term soft power as an alternative to traditional hard power.<sup>(19)</sup> When states use economic or military resources to get other states to do what they would otherwise not do, they are exercising hard power. When states are able to persuade others to want to be like them they are using soft power. Hard power uses coercion and payment; soft power relies on attraction to the foreign policy of a state, the culture and norms of the society in which the state resides, and its domestic political system.

Nye believes that pop culture is a source that produces soft power, even if it takes years to produce the desired outcome of being emulated by others. McGray claims, "a country that stands astride popular channels of communication has more opportunities to get its messages across and to affect the preferences of others."<sup>(20)</sup> He believes that Japan's pop culture represents an excellent opportunity for Japan to attract people around the world to its foreign policy goals and "regain the role it briefly assumed at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, when it...became a military and cultural power on its own terms."<sup>(21)</sup>

Nye's conception of soft power is unilateral: While the resource itself is created by, and accumulated through, different media, the state remains at the center as the agent exercising soft power. The Japanese government embraces McGray's idea of "Gross National Cool" as the measure for Japan's new source for worldwide influence and promotes popular culture, food, computer games, art, literature, architecture, design, fash-

---

(18) Ibid.

(19) Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, New York: Public Affairs (2004)

(20) McGray, "Japan's Gross National Cool."

(21) Ibid.

ion, food and technology as all creating Japan's cool image.<sup>(22)</sup> The government claims both old and new cultural products share long-standing traditional, Japanese values that will attract people around the world. "Japan is a culture," says the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "that appeals to the general population and that anyone can enjoy...We approach the creation of objects with a love for their beauty...At the root of this approach lies a spirit of harmony, which is evident in our philosophy of co-existence with nature."<sup>(23)</sup>

The image the Japanese state wants to project to the world is one of a nation that loves beauty, enjoys a spirit of harmony and co-exists with nature. Such a nation hardly poses a threat to other people and, in fact, represents values worth emulating. Michal Daliot-Bul observes that the imagery promoted by the Japan Brand and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is "of a country with a 'clean record' in which the present has seamlessly emerged from a past with no shadows."<sup>(24)</sup> Left unstated, Daliot-Bul notes, is that policy makers believe they can persuade Japan's Asian neighbors to accept its political leadership in the region. Daliot-Bul does not address this fact explicitly, but one goal of any state's soft power strategy is to persuade other states to accept its role within their own perceived spheres of influence. The next question, then, is whether or not we see evidence for the desired effects of Japan's soft power.

#### IV. Global Attitudes toward Japan

Consider global and regional attitudes toward Japan in light of the rapid growth in sales of Japanese creative products. As Table 1 above shows, Japan's creative industries grew by 86.3% during the 1990s and, as Figure 4 shows, they surpassed all other exports from Japan. Nye says that it takes years for the effects of pop culture, as a soft

---

(22) Michal Daliot-Bul, "Japan Brand Strategy: The Taming of 'Cool Japan' and the Challenges of Cultural Planning in a Postmodern Age," *Social Science Japan Journal* Vol. 12, No. 2, pp.247-266, 2009, p.253.

(23) From Embassy of Japan in the UK, cf. Daliot-Bul, p.253, footnote 8.

(24) Ibid., p.254

(227)



power resource, to become evident. He does not specify how long or what counts as a measurable effect but, if we accept his general claim, then we might expect to see effects approximately 20 years since the global boom of Japan's creative industries began. Table 3 illustrates that, more than any other nation, Japan is seen as "mostly positive" in the BBC World Service Poll that measures global attitudes toward nations. According to the results, 58 percent of people view Japan positively compared to a mere 22 percent who see it negatively. Slightly fewer people (53 percent) view Canada positively, though fewer also view it negatively (14 percent), but Japan earns a

Table 3 : Japan Seen as "Mostly Positive"

	Mainly positive	Mainly Negative
Japan	58	22
Germany	56	16
Canada	53	14
United Kingdom	51	20
China	50	31
France	48	22
USA	47	33
Brazil	45	18
India	40	27
South Korea	37	27
Russia	31	36
Israel	21	50
North Korea	19	50
Iran	16	55

Source: "Views of US Continue to Improve in 2011 Country Rating Poll," *BBC World Service Poll*

[http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/mar11/BBCevalsUS\\_Mar11\\_rpt.pdf](http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/mar11/BBCevalsUS_Mar11_rpt.pdf) (Downloaded 01/15/2015 16:36)

higher positive and lower negative score than it's closest neighbors China (50% positive, 31% negative), South Korea (37, 27), Russia (31, 36) and, unsurprisingly, North Korea (19, 50.).

Data in Table 2 above show that Japan's cultural exports to ASEAN-4 nations grew by 120% between 1994 and 2004. Pew Center data from 2013 in Table 4 confirm that at least three of those nations hold a highly favorable view of Japan. In Malaysia, Indonesia and Philippines, 80%, 79% and 78% percent hold a favorable view of Japan, respectively. Only 6% of Malaysians report an unfavorable view of Japan, and less than twenty percent of Indonesians and Filipinos do.

Table 4: How Do Other Asian Countries Feel About Japan?  
Views of Japan in Seven Asian countries.

	Unfavorable	Favorable
Malaysia	6	80
Indonesia	12	79
Australia	16	78
Philippines	18	78
Pakistan	7	51

Source: Cf. "Japanese Public's Mood Rebounding, Abe Highly Popular," Pew Research Center, July 11, 2013, Pew Research Center Q 9 v, p. 5 <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2013/07/Pew-Research-Center-Global-Attitudes-Project-Japan-Report-FINAL-July-11-2013.pdf> (Downloaded 01/15/2015 16:47)

Taken together, do the figures from Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4 confirm Nye's (and the Japanese government's) hypothesis that pop culture is the soft power resource attracting people to Japan? Leaving aside the fact that Nye himself acknowledges the near-impossibility of measuring the effects of pop culture, the answer is probably "no" when we consider the case of Chinese attitudes toward Japan.

## V. Chinese Attitudes toward Japan

China represents an ideal test case for the soft power hypothesis in general and the persuasive power of the Japanese pop culture in particular. Not only is it one of Japan's nearest neighbors, its foreign policy goals have often been at odds with Japan's (esp. over territorial claims) as has its interpretation of what is known in the West as World War Two. However, beginning in the early 1980s, Chinese allowed Japanese entertainment to be broadcast on TV and sold in stores. In the 30-plus years since then, Hello Kitty products, and related theme parks and restaurants, have become popular.

Nakano Yoshiko cites former Japanese Foreign Minister Aso Taro, who claimed, in 2006, that, "We have a grasp on the hearts of young people in many countries, not the least of which being China" and she asks if Japan really is winning Chinese hearts and minds.<sup>(25)</sup> To answer this question, she interviewed university students in Beijing, Shanghai, Suzhou, Nanjing and Guangzhou to determine what, if any, influence Japanese pop culture has had on their thoughts toward Japan. Children growing up in the 1980s represent what she calls "China's first generation," owing to the fact that they were the first Chinese since the war who were allowed to enjoy entertainment "once condemned as poison for the minds and still treated as a possible threat to Chinese national identity."<sup>(26)</sup> This group, she notes, saw more Japanese children's shows than American ones.

Nakano's interviews reveal that Japanese pop culture did seem to inspire Chinese to try to emulate Japanese lifestyles and standards of living. Among her findings: Watching the *anime* "Doraemon", young Chinese, and their parents, were impressed by the modern, spacious homes depicted and reported to Nakano that they aspired to own similar homes themselves. (They also reported that they found the Japanese standard

---

(25) Nakano Yoshiko, "Shared Memories: Japanese Pop Culture in China," in Watanabe and McConnell, ed., p. 111

(26) Ibid., p.113

of living more attainable than the one portrayed in American TV shows and movies.) Television dramas, such as “Tokyo Love Story”, became what Nakano calls “how-to videos” for middle-class lifestyles and helped to update Chinese images of Japanese society, which had been frozen in time since the mid-1940s. A CCTV producer told Nakano that when Chinese students see Japanese animated stories, “they want to be like the characters.”<sup>(27)</sup> Nakano also points out that demand for Japanese music, movies and TV shows exceed the amount officially allowed into China so a black market for pirated Japanese goods has flourished.

Considering the popularity of Japanese pop culture in China (Table 2 shows that cultural exports from Japan to China increased 360% over a ten-year period) we might expect to see favorable attitudes toward Japan among Chinese, as we see among people other Asian countries. Data in Table 5 reveal that this is not the case. Table 5 is an expanded version of Table 4 above, from the same Pew Center survey of 2013, and shows that 90% of Chinese have “unfavorable” feelings toward Japan compared to just 4%

Table 5 : China and South Korea Have Negative Feelings Toward Japan

	Unfavorable	Favorable
Malaysia	6	80
Indonesia	12	79
Australia	16	78
Philippines	18	78
Pakistan	7	51
S. Korea	77	22
China	90	4

Source: Cf. “Japanese Public’s Mood Rebounding, Abe Highly Popular,” Pew Research Center, July 11, 2013, Pew Research Center Q9v, p.5  
<http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2013/07/Pew-Research-Center-Global-Attitudes-Project-Japan-Report-FINAL-July-11-2013.pdf> (Downloaded 01/15/2015 16:47)

---

(27) Ibid., p.115

who feel “favorable.”

The likeliest explanation for Japan's unpopularity in China is geopolitical and historical. Japan and China have both made claims on a series of small islands called the Senkaku Islands in Japan, and the Diaoyu Islands in China. Japan and China have also disagreed about the interpretation of specific events related to Japan's occupation of Chinese territory in the 1930s and the war between the two nations that ended in 1945 and about the sincerity of official statements of apology by Japanese leaders. Visits by Prime Minister Abe Shinzo to the Yasukuni Shrine in 2013, which many Chinese opposed, may have contributed to high “unfavorable” score in the Pew poll. (Table 5 also shows similarly bad feelings among South Koreans, though they have been allowed to consume Japanese cultural products since 1999. South Korea, like China, has been at odds with Japan over possession of small islands, and interpretations of the war.) In short, Japanese pop culture may be popular in China, but the Japanese state is not. We cannot say with any certainty that the relationship between demand for Japanese cultural products and positive attitudes in some countries is the effect of soft power. We can certainly say that the same soft power resources are not persuading Chinese to hold favorable views of Japan or accept its foreign policy goals.

## VI. Conclusion: Soft Power is Not Power

The failure of Cool Japan as a soft power tool has less to do with Japanese products, which are undeniably popular and generate wealth in Japan, and more to do with problems in the notion of soft power itself. First, as already mentioned, neither its effects nor its causes can be measured. While Nakano's interviews show that Chinese desires were affected by specific Japanese shows, it is impossible to measure how those desires may make Chinese more sympathetic toward Japanese policies. Second, soft power may make allies closer but it cannot turn enemies into friends. China and Japan are not enemies, but they are not friends, either, as the disputes over territory reveal. Soft power is unlikely to persuade either side to abandon its claim on the Senkakus/Diaoyus

considering their value as hard power resources. Third, the popularity of a country's culture does not make all of its policies popular, as any American who supported the Vietnam or Iraq Wars could tell us. Fourth, it is difficult, if not impossible to control the impact of culture outside of a state's borders. Japanese officials would very much like Cool Japan to be accepted in a particular way but Chinese obviously have not done so. Finally, soft power cannot be easily created or controlled by a state, nor can it be easily deployed. When addressing terrorist threats to Japanese citizens abroad, the prime minister of Japan cannot call up the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and order it to deploy Ghibli Studio movies and Doraemon in order to subvert ISIS. Cool Japan may become a successful economic policy. Economic power is hard power. Cool Japan is not a soft power resource.

—H. Steven Green · 法学部准教授—