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POLITICS, ARTS AND POP CULTURE OF JAPAN IN
LOCAL AND GLOBAL CONTEXTS

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ISSUE 5 – AUTUMN 2018

MUTUAL IMAGES

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POLITICS, ARTS AND POP CULTURE OF JAPAN IN
LOCAL AND GLOBAL CONTEXTS

EDITED BY
MARCO PELLITTERI & HERB L. FONDEVILLA

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ISSUE 5

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editorial

MARCO PELLITTERI & HERB L. FONDEVILLA (Shanghai International Studies University, China; Aoyama Gakuin University, Japan)1-4

POP CULTURE OF JAPAN

Repackaging Japanese culture: The digitalisation of folktales in the Pokémon franchise
ERIKA ANN SUMILANG-ENGRACIA (University of the Philippines, Philippines)5-30

Tradition vs. Pop Culture: Attracting tourists with the Cool Japan Campaign
NATALIE CLOSE (Sophia University, Japan)31-48

SPECIAL SECTION: ART & POLITICS

Special section editorial

ERIKO TOMIZAWA-KAY & MARCO PELLITTERI (University of East Anglia, UK; Shanghai International Studies University, China)49-56

Art and Remembrance:

Gima Hiroshi, the Marukis, and the representations of the Battle of Okinawa
ERIKO TOMIZAWA-KAY (University of East Anglia, UK)57-84

Master of Silence: Matsumoto Shunsuke's *Muon no fūkei* and his quiet resistance to *Sensōga* during the Fifteen-Year War

HOPE B. STEINER (Seizan Gallery, New York City, USA).....85-104

The Geopolitics of Ecological Art: Contemporary art projects in Japan and South Korea
EWA MACHOTKA (Stockholm University, Sweden)105-122

Anime and Nationalism:

The politics of representing Japan in *Summer Wars* (Hosoda Mamoru, 2009)
RAYNA DENISON (University of East Anglia, UK)123-142

REVIEWS

Japanese Animation: East Asian Perspectives – Yokota Masao & Hu Tze-yue G. (Eds)

MARCO PELLITTERI (Shanghai International Studies University, China)143-158

Paris' *Japan Expo* 2018 as way to understand what Japanese animation is going to face in Europe and Italy
MARCO PELLITTERI (Shanghai International Studies University, China); Transl. from Italian by **LUCA PAOLO BRUNO** (Leipzig University, Germany)159-161

Tradition vs. Pop Culture: Attracting tourists with the Cool Japan Campaign

Natalie CLOSE | Sophia University, Japan

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ABSTRACT

In 2008 the Japanese government set a goal of attracting 20 million foreign tourists by the Olympics in 2020. The country managed to achieve that goal by last year and has since revised their goal to 40 million tourists by 2020. A big part of the drive to increase tourist numbers has been the government led Cool Japan campaign. Attracting foreign tourists remains one of the mainstays of the Cool Japan campaign, as can be seen in the tourist-focused events and advertising witnessed overseas. One of the key aspects of the Cool Japan campaign has been to promote creative cultural industries, in particular businesses associated with anime, manga and gaming. This can be seen in such promotional activities as the closing ceremony for the Rio Olympics and the appointment of anime characters such as Doraemon, Atom Boy and Sailor Moon as ambassadors for Japan.

However, the campaign has been accused of lacking focus as it tries to simultaneously promote aspects of both traditional and modern Japanese culture. This can be seen in the Japan National Tourism Organisation's promotional campaigns featuring more traditional aspects of Japanese culture such as temples and festivals. In addition, there have been accusations that the Cool Japan campaign has done little to understand what foreign visitors are actually interested in and how best to promote the country. This paper investigates the success of the Cool Japan campaign and looks at the extent to which this fractured focus is actually attracting tourists. The research draws on data collected in Japan with those experiencing Japan as part of their vacation and interviews with tourists. The focus of this paper is on how the Cool Japan campaign influences potential tourists, and how effective the use of anime characters to promote Japan actually is.

KEYWORDS

Cool Japan; Tourism; Otaku; Anime; Tōkyō Olympics; Soft power.

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In 2002, the journalist Douglas McGray published a seminal paper entitled *Japan's Gross National Cool*. The article detailed how, rather than becoming obsolete following the economic crash of the late 1990s, Japan had become a “cultural superpower”. McGray argued that, while aspects of Japanese popular culture, including anime and manga characters, films, and art have made inroads into Western culture, little soft power impact was being made due to a reluctance on the part of the Japanese (2002, 53-54). Since then, the country, and more particularly the government, has been focusing on how ‘cool’ cultural aspects of Japan can be utilized to increase Japan’s soft

power. These popular culture aspects can be seen as closely related to otaku culture. Otaku culture includes a myriad of interests not limited to the collecting of anime and gaming figures, *dōjinshi* (fan created manga), gaming, idol group fans and card games (Ito et al 2012). Whilst traditionally viewed as being a counter-culture, and even as far as being thought of as deviant, otaku culture now enjoys a more mainstream appeal (Galbraith 2010). A recent survey found that 70% of young Japanese women self-identified as otaku, showing just how mainstream it has become (Japan Today 2018). The government is hoping to cash in on international interest in Japanese popular culture, and by extension otaku culture through its Cool Japan campaign.

Three main areas have been identified by the Cool Japan campaign for promotion internationally. The first area involves the promotion of Japanese culture overseas in order “to create a Japan boom’ in foreign countries” (Valaskivi 2016, 70). Activities in this category include the endorsement of Japanese culture events held at Japanese embassies overseas, and the promotion of Japanese TV overseas through the creation of sponsored channels. This is supported by the second area of focus, namely the promotion of Japanese goods internationally (Cool Japan Initiative, n.d.). This includes international market testing and support for the expansion of Japanese stores overseas. But it is the final area, that of promoting inbound tourism, that this paper is concerned with. This paper seeks to look at the relationship between the government’s Cool Japan campaign and its desire to increase tourists¹. This will be done by first clarifying what activities have been done under the auspices of the Cool Japan campaign, before moving on to look at some of the specific ventures aimed at attracting more tourists to the country, especially those connected to the forthcoming Tōkyō Olympics in 2020. Drawing on both published data and primary research data collected from interviews with visitors to Japan, this paper will conclude by analysing the efficacy of using otaku culture to attract tourists.

¹ This paper is not suggesting that the Japanese government is focusing entirely on otaku culture in order to attract tourism. Government documents suggest a varied approach, including trying to increase MICE tourism activities and increasing access to historic sites (MLIT 2016). Instead, the aim of this paper is to focus specifically on one part of Japanese culture, namely otaku culture, and the efficacy of using this as part of tourism promotion.

Cool Japan Campaign – Introduction

Throughout this paper I will refer to the Cool Japan campaign, however, this may mistakenly suggest that it is a unified government strategy. In fact, the Cool Japan campaign consists of a number of initiatives spearheaded by different government bodies, sometimes in conjunction but often with no connection to each other. One of the first of these initiatives was the creation and sponsorship in 2005 of the World Cosplay Summit by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT), the Ministry of Economy, and Trade and Industry (METI). Cosplay involves dressing up as characters from popular media, including anime and manga, and participating in social events (Winge 2006, 65; Lamerichs 2013, 167). The participants often pose or act out skits portraying their favourite character in both competitions and private gatherings. In recent years the activity has increased in popularity across the globe, with many cosplay competitions now held internationally (Lamerichs 2013, 169) Ostensibly a contest for enthusiasts of cosplay, the World Cosplay Summit is largely connected to the promotion of tourist sites within the Aichi area. The event brochure features advertisements from pop culture related tourism sites such as Laguna Ten Bosch, which is hosting an exhibition on *One Piece*, a popular anime aired both within Japan and internationally, and a guide to local contents tourism sites across the Aichi region (World Cosplay Summit 2017, n.p.). Internationally there has been a lot of interest in promoting tourism to sites featured in or associated with popular media including books, TV and film. The Japanese government has been increasingly interested in promoting sites featured in popular media, such as anime and manga, under the activity known locally as “kontentsu tsūrizumu (contents tourism)” (Seaton and Yamamura 2015, 2). It could be argued that events such as the World Cosplay Summit make a strong connection between the Cool Japan campaign and tourism.

Other activities include the appointment of Doraemon² as Anime Ambassador in 2008. Supported by MOFA, Doraemon toured embassies around the world promoting the opening of the film *Doraemon The Movie: Nobita's Dinosaur*. In addition to promoting the movie, using Doraemon as an ambassador was heralded as a means by which people could get to know Japan better. This is demonstrated by comments of the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kōmura Masahiko who said that he “wished people

² Doraemon, a children's anime that has been running since 1979, was voted as the most popular character in Japan by a recent poll (Japan Times 2018, n.p.)

around the world to know more about the positive side of Japan through Japanese anime that are universally popular” (MOFA 2008, n.p.). This demonstrates one of the subsequent aims of the campaign; to increase knowledge of and interest in Japan. However, very few people outside of Asia know anything about Doraemon (Cooper-Chen 2012, 53), so the efficacy of choosing such a character as an ambassador is questionable at best.

In addition, various Japanese government agencies have been engaged in a plethora of activities aimed at increasing the international awareness of Japanese culture. These activities range from MEXT and JETRO’s involvement in the Cannes Film Market to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Japan Foundation’s sponsorship of a kabuki show in Madrid. In recent years more than eight government agencies have been involved in the promotion of food, traditional culture, media content, fashion and design in more than one hundred and fifty countries across all continents (Cabinet Office, n.d.).

In order to enable the holding of these events the government decided to commit further to the promotion of Japanese culture with the creation of the Cool Japan Fund in 2013. The joint private-public partnership was initially given over sixty billion yen³ to promote Japanese interests overseas (Japan Spotlight 2014, 59). Projects chosen by the Cool Japan Fund receive funding from both the government fund and private enterprises associated with the scheme. Some of the projects they have been engaged in include developing venues for the export of Japanese food in Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, and the creation of a Contents Academy in Taiwan to train young people in anime, gaming and manga arts (Cool Japan Fund 2017, n.p.).

When looking at the projects sponsored by the Cool Japan Fund it is clear that their interests are varied and represent little cohesion in terms of an overarching theme. Perhaps the most important endeavour with regard to this paper is the number of projects aimed at promoting Japanese food. According to a 2017 JNTO survey, 68% of visitors to Japan cited food as being the main reason they were interested in coming to the country (JNTO 2017, n.p.) Although there is little evidence that the promotion of Japanese food internationally is directed at attracting tourists, instead the aim appears to be the advancement of sales of Japanese food internationally. The attraction of tourists would seem to be a happy side effect.

³ \$540 million as of August 2018.

Inbound tourism to Japan

Following a period of tourist stagnation in the 1990s when the average number of tourists stood at approximately 3.8 million, the Japanese government implemented an active campaign to increase the number of foreign visitors to Japan in the early 2000s (Henderson 2017, 90). In 2003, the Japanese government initiated the 'Visit Japan' campaign, with the aim of attracting 10 million visitors to Japan by 2010 (Soshiroda 2005, 1101). According to Henderson (2017), despite failing to achieve that goal due to the global financial crisis in 2008 and the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011⁴, the government continued with its aim of increasing tourist numbers and set a new goal of achieving 20 million visitors by the Tōkyō Olympics in 2020. This goal was revised again in 2015 to 30 million visitors when Japan achieved the initial target early (Henderson 2017, 91). Since then the government has once again revised their incoming tourist goal to 40 million by 2020 (Japan Times 2016). In addition, the government has particularly identified the US, the UK and Australia as countries they wish to attract tourists from. Attracting tourists from markets such as Europe and North America is important as a reliance on Asian tourists, Japan's current largest market, could pose problematic if they suddenly choose to go elsewhere. Therefore, a diverse source of tourists is preferable for long-term tourism stability and sustainability. (Andonian et al, 2016, 13). With the government specifically trying to attract tourists from the geographically further away countries like the US and the UK, events including the upcoming Rugby World Cup in 2019, the Summer Olympics in 2020 are being seen as a key resource. As these sporting events take place over a longer period of time so visitors from these areas may be more prepared to travel to Japan to witness the events (Kobori 2017, 19). It is also hoped that the foreign visitors will be more inclined to visit different areas of Japan due to the presence of the sporting events (Kobori 2017, 20).

On the face of it, the campaign to increase the number of inbound tourists to Japan has been highly successful. In the fifteen short years since the government pledged to increase tourism, the number of tourists has gone up from 5 million to more than 28 million in 2017 (JNTO, no date a). However independent research has shown that tourism has not been as successful as it could have been. Andonian et al (2016) state that whilst many people are attracted to Japan, not that many are coming. Only 40% of

⁴ The initial goal of 10 million inbound tourists was finally achieved in 2013 (Japan Times 2013, n.p.).

Western tourists who claim they wish to visit the country actually come (Andonian et al 2016, 13). Therefore, the government is at least partially failing to attract tourists from Western countries, something which, as noted above, is a main goal.

International tourism advertising

The advertising produced by the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) has shown an equally varied view of Japan as the Cool Japan campaign, however, the emphasis does not rely so heavily on the promotion of Japanese popular culture. The images used to advertise the country are as diverse as Mt. Fuji with springtime blossom, geisha and Maiko in Kyōto, theme parks and shopping districts. There is a nod towards the government's desire to use Japanese pop culture with a few information sources on contents tourism. For example, the JNTO has created a Japan Anime Guide map, which highlights some of the areas where tourists can take part in an anime pilgrimage. Anime pilgrimage is the act of visiting sites that have been featured in anime, or other areas deemed as important by fans of anime (Okamoto 2015, 21; Seaton and Yamamura 2015, 3). The brochure also explains a little about otaku culture and some places to visit to experience it such as Akihabara (JNTO no date b). In addition, the Anime Tourism Association was established in 2016 to enable the promotion of anime pilgrimage sites to fans of Cool Japan (Anime Tourism Association 2016, n.p.). This organisation solicited votes from anime fans in both English and Japanese to come up with the pilgrimage route of 88 anime sites. These are located across Japan and therefore adhere to the organisation's desire to increase the economic effects of tourism in diverse areas of Japan (Anime Tourism Association 2016, n.p.). Whilst these endeavours to attract tourists through the use of Japan's popular culture are by no means the only method being used by the JNTO and similar organisations, we can see that efforts are being made in this area. However, it must be noted that contents tourism is only a small part of what is being promoted by the JNTO; much of the advertising concentrates on sites of historical, cultural and natural significance.

Promotion of Tōkyō Olympics

One of the issues with attracting tourists to Japan is the contradictory way the country is presented and promoted to the world through campaigns such as Cool Japan and the associated tourism advertising done by organisations such as the Japan

National Tourism Organisation (JNTO). The advertising and promotion campaigns by the different agencies shows a rather fractured image of Japan being presented to the world. A look at the JNTO website reveals that the organisation concentrates on offering a traditional view of Japan, one that, based on my initial research findings, is appreciated and desired by Japan's current tourist market. On the other hand, the various aspects of the Cool Japan campaign aim to attract different people to Japan. However, we must question too much reliance on presenting popular aspects of Japanese culture, focusing in particular on anime, manga, and gaming. For example, events such as the World Cosplay Summit and the Japan International Manga Award, in which international manga artists compete for a chance to come to Japan to travel and meet with publishers, are mainly focused on those who already have an interest in Japan and its popular culture. As such, the events are not overly focused on attracting new demographics to the country. These events have the potential to spread aspects of Japanese culture, however, the tourists attracted will still be those who have an existing interest in certain cultural points such as anime and manga.

This rather limited view of Japan can also be seen in the way Japan is presented in the lead up to the upcoming Tōkyō Olympics in 2020. Starting with the original bid, the promotional events for the Tōkyō Olympics have shown a distinct bias towards Japanese popular culture, far in excess of the way popular culture is utilized in other Cool Japan activities.

The reliance on popular culture figures, especially anime characters, started with the appointment of Doraemon as the official Olympic ambassador in 2013. At this stage Tōkyō was still bidding for the event, however, Doraemon was involved from the start. Doraemon was an interesting choice given his relative obscurity in many countries, however, he was joined by nine other anime stars in 2017. These include more well-known characters such as Goku from *Dragonball*, Astroboy, and Sailormoon.

The dependence on popular culture characters was further reiterated in the closing ceremony of the Rio Olympics in 2016. A video showed Doraemon and Hello Kitty assisting Mario to help get Prime Minister Abe to the Olympics via a tunnel drilled through the Earth. The Prime Minister then appeared out of a game-inspired tube in the middle of the Olympic stadium dressed as Super Mario. The connection between the forthcoming Tōkyō Olympics and popular culture figures was firmly established. The Rio event was generally well received, as was particularly seen with private

enterprises such as Nintendo seeing a three percent rise in its stock price following the media stunt (New York Times 2016). The use of Mario and anime characters such as Doraemon during the Rio event has shown the government's commitment to using icons of Japanese popular culture to promote the country.

In addition, the Tōkyō Olympic committee has suggested that an anime parade will be held to promote the Games. The President of the Tōkyō Organizing Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, former Prime Minister Mori Yoshirō stated that whilst foreigners may not know sumō and kabuki, they do know anime characters and therefore they plan to hold an anime parade. Given that sumō is internationally regarded and known to be a famous Japanese sport, this comment is somewhat confusing. Instead of conducting market research on what people in other countries would respond to best regarding the promotion of cultural icons, the committee has once again relied on anime and gaming figures, but what research or theory this presumption is based on has not been made public. Even the siding at the construction site of the new Tōkyō Olympic stadium features scenes from the anime movie *Akira*.

As seen above, both the Cool Japan campaign and the Tōkyō Organizing Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games are heavily focusing on Japanese popular culture, especially anime and otaku culture to bring tourists to Japan. However, while the Olympics has clearly not been held yet, and the Cool Japan campaign is ongoing, it is unknown whether this focus on popular Japanese culture will bear fruit in terms of promoting the games and increasing tourism to non-Olympic sites. However, given the seeming lack of reasoning behind the approach, along with the data presented below, it seems unlikely.

What tourists want

In recent years, there has been a series of commentaries in the newspapers that the Japanese government is not consulting foreigners about why they come to Japan and what they want to see. It has been argued that the Cool Japan campaign has been telling foreign visitors what to see instead of responding to what they actually want to see (Chavez 2017 n.p.; Boas 2016 n.p.). An analysis of data collected from foreign visitors to Japan would appear to support this. The Japan Tourism Agency, a part of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism has conducted surveys of visitors to Japan as they arrive and leave the country since 2010. An analysis of these figures

reveals interesting patterns regarding Japan’s use of popular culture to attract foreign tourists. The data in Table 1 was taken from the survey carried out by the JTA in 2017. Multiple answers could be chosen in each case:

	What tourists wanted to do before they came to Japan	What tourists did during their trip	What tourists want to do next time
Eat Japanese food	70.6	96.0	55.0
Shopping	58.5	89.3	45.3
Nature/scenery sightseeing	51.2	73.6	43.4
Experience history/culture	17.3	25.8	25.2
Stay in a Japanese inn	21.0	33.6	27.7
Bathe in a hot spring	29.9	38.7	43.0
Visit film/anime settings	4.8	5.2	11.4
Enjoy Japanese pop culture (fashion, anime etc.)	10.0	15.4	15.0

Table 1. *JTA 2017 Survey Data.* Figures represent percentage.
Source: Japan Tourism Agency, 2017.

As can be seen, while Japanese food is the most popular reason for coming and returning to Japan, there is a high interest in Japanese nature and culture experiences. This interest is high before tourists visit the country and raises once they have visited. This is especially true of visiting hot springs, which saw nearly a 13% rise in interest before and after visiting Japan. Otaku culture, however, shows a different story. The interest in Japanese popular culture prior to visiting Japan is very low but rises dramatically once tourists have visited Japan. This intimates that the advertising promoted overseas is not achieving the aim of attracting foreign tourists. Nevertheless, the interest in this kind of culture is still fairly low even after the tourists have been to Japan.

Field Research: Tourist data obtained from interviews

From the autumn of 2016 to spring 2018, semi-structured interviews were carried out with 63 foreign tourists in Akihabara, Japan. Data was collected using purposeful sampling techniques; participants were selected based on the location they were visiting and the activities they were doing. Akihabara has been described as the physical manifestation for a community of interest focusing on otaku culture (Morikawa 2008, 125), and therefore is of interest to those wanting to experience

Japanese popular culture⁵. 21 of the participants (33.3%) were traveling around Japan independently, and 42 people (66.7%) were taking small group tours of the Akihabara area lead by myself. Since 2016, I have been engaged in conducting walking tours of the Akihabara area in which multiple aspects of otaku culture, including anime, manga and gaming, are discussed. Akihabara is seen as the hub for otaku culture as many enthusiasts gather to buy goods and exchange cultural knowledge. Approximately 80% of the tour group participants came from the US, with a few from the UK, Australia and France. Participants' ages ranged from 28 to 66, but approximately 40% were aged between 55 and 65, and 30% were between 30 and 35 years old. Due to the expensive nature of the tour, most participants were working professionals who had travelled quite extensively. I also approached 21 other foreign tourists in the area who had no guide. The age range of this group was lower than the tour group with a minimum of 27 and a maximum of 37 (mean = 33). 16 people (76%) from this group were from the United States, and 5 (24%) were from Australia. Interview and discussion questions mainly centred around what brought the visitors to Japan, and what their impression was of Japan both before they came and once they had had spent some time in the country (see appendix A for interview protocol). The participants were separated into three categories based on their pre-existing knowledge of Japanese otaku culture; those with no knowledge of otaku culture and no guide, those with no knowledge but who were taking a guided tour, and those who were enthusiastic consumers of anime, manga, gaming etc. and taking a tour. These three groups of tourists all had vastly different experiences and opinions depending on the circumstances of their visit.

Data discussion

The qualitative findings of the interviews conducted for this research seem to confirm the findings presented in the quantitative JTA data discussed in Table 1 above. In addition, the qualitative data gained from interviews adds new insights into the possible importance of Japanese popular culture in attracting foreign visitors to Japan⁶. The results can be best

⁵ The data collection location was chosen because it would likely provide participants most relevant to this study: foreign tourists who have some level of interest in otaku culture. As Akihabara is known as the 'home' of otaku culture, interviewing participants in this location was more likely to provide data regarding the impact and importance of popular Japanese culture in attracting foreign tourists to Japan.

⁶ It should be noted that due to the small sample size, this data is not claiming to be representative of the views of all tourists coming to Japan. It is instead a qualitative exploratory investigation into what factors have influenced the decision of some tourists to visit Japan, especially those who have some interest in

understood by dividing the participants into different categories depending on their level of interest and knowledge of Japanese otaku and popular cultures.

The first category of visitors was made up of 15 tourists who were visiting Akihabara by themselves (not taking any tours), but who had no or little knowledge of or interest in Japanese pop culture products. When asked about why they were visiting the area, just under 85% professed to not really knowing. They stated the main reason they came was just because Akihabara was listed in their guidebooks and was famous as a place to go. Two people (7%) stated that they came after seeing it mentioned in movies or travel shows, and one person stated that they knew Japan was famous for anime and therefore wanted to experience the culture. This data shows that participants in the first group had little knowledge of anime and most had not actually watched any, but their image was that Akihabara was a place associated with the industry. However, the tourists in question had little idea what they should be looking at or experiencing. Some commented that the area just seemed to be full of shops. Most walked around the streets but without knowing specifically which buildings to go into were left just taking photos of the large billboards sporting young girls from anime shows. Many aspects of the culture the tourists want to experience are abstract, for example, anime is to be watched but has little physical form, and therefore as a tourist destination anime is a difficult concept. If we discount anime pilgrimage there is little 'place' associated with the media, and for those not interested in purchasing anime, Akihabara has little to offer in terms of this kind of culture. Overall, based on analysis of the interview data, the general level of satisfaction with Akihabara in this group was quite low, and many were left feeling confused or put off by otaku culture.

The second group consisted of 42 people who, like the first group, had little knowledge or interest in anime, manga and gaming. However, participants in this group were all partaking in a guided tour of the Akihabara area. The tours included a potted history of the area and the development of the otaku sub-culture. The guided groups visited various stores, where they could learn about the different kinds of Japanese otaku interests. In addition, the tourists had the opportunity to visit a maid

otaku culture given they were visiting or taking a tour of a famous otaku area (Akihabara). This research aims to provide some qualitative data regarding the JTA quantitative data presented in Table 1. More rigorous quantitative data would need to be gathered in order to bolster the preliminary findings shown in this paper. The descriptive statistical data offered here is only intended to ease comprehension.

café⁷. Maid cafes represent one of the few activities that tourists can engage in as the area of Akihabara is largely focused around shopping. When questioned, the second group reacted somewhat differently. Whilst they had nothing further to add when it came to their motivations for coming to the area, their ultimate satisfaction levels were significantly higher. Based on the interview data, it seems that the higher knowledge of the Japanese culture they were experiencing led to higher levels of interest and satisfaction among the tourists. Whilst they may have had little initial knowledge almost all of the interviewees (95%) expressed interest in the culture once it was explained. However, it must be noted that most also left with an aversion to, or at least a somewhat negative view of otaku culture, particularly regarding the collecting of goods featuring obviously very young anime characters. Typical responses indicated a bewilderment with collectable products such as figures that presented a sexualized portrayal of woman, particularly the sexualisation of young girls. For many visitors, seeing these types of products for the first time, along with the images portrayed in the manga on display in the shops, lead to a wider discussion on the state of equality and women's role in society in Japan.

The third category consisted of six independent travellers who had prior knowledge of Japanese pop culture and had come to Akihabara specifically to engage with the culture. Most of these tourists had come to the area to buy goods related to their favourite anime or game, and to soak up the atmosphere of the place they had heard so much about. However, when questioned further, none of these tourists had come to Japan for the primary purpose of visiting Akihabara or engaging with pop culture. They were happy to spend an afternoon shopping for their pop culture goods, and some even knew about the Anime pilgrimage site at the Kanda Myogen shrine steps that was featured in the anime *Love Live*. But an afternoon was all the time they were going to spend there. The rest of their trip was to be spent doing similar activities to the rest of the tourists, *i.e.* visiting Kyōto and Ōsaka. In fact, their behaviour seemed in no way different to that of the tourists with no or little interest in Japanese pop culture, and they spent a similar amount of time indulging in the area. Their general levels of

⁷ "In these cafe's, waitresses costumed as maids serve food, pose for pictures and play table top games with customers. When not filling orders, the waitresses, called "maids" (meido), wander around the cafe' and engage customers in conversation." (Galbraith 2013, 1).

satisfaction were high, but once they left Akihabara, they were going to follow the same tourist path as the groups with no interest in pop culture.

The comments by the various foreign tourists interviewed reflect one of the main problems with using pop culture to try and attract tourists to Japan. Much of Japanese pop culture is intangible; anime and manga characters have little physical presence short of buying products, therefore it is difficult for tourists to actually experience anime, manga and gaming. Those with little interest will not want to buy the products, and as there is little else to do in places of pop culture such as Akihabara, the tourists end up being disappointed. This pattern is supported by other research;

[...] Korea, the United Kingdom, and the United States were the three groups most disappointed after visiting Akihabara. In 2007, Akihabara was the fifteenth most recommended place but the eighth most disappointing for visitors (Galbraith 2010, 225)

Even those who are enthusiastic about Japanese pop culture will only spend a short amount of time and money engaging with the culture. After an afternoon in Akihabara they proceed to follow the same tourist route as everyone else, concentrating on Japan's natural and historical sites. In fact, those with an interest in anime and manga don't spend any more time with pop culture, but they do perhaps receive a higher level of satisfaction from visiting Akihabara. Those tourists who had no prior knowledge, but who through the use of a guide could gain a greater understanding, may not have left disappointed, but the viewpoint they left with might not have the desired effect the government was looking for. Many merely confirmed their existing view of Japan being strange, weird or sexually disturbing. One British couple interviewed had come to Japan because of their interest in Japanese pop culture as presented in the media. They mentioned some of the popular images of Japan as having strange or disturbing cultural aspects, such as high school girl's underwear for sale in vending machines, and pornographic anime. Rather than their visit to Japan changing this opinion, their experiences in Akihabara merely confirmed it.

Conclusion

It can be argued that the Cool Japan campaign in general is succeeding in attracting interest in Japan. The varied nature of the activities appeals to many demographics potentially attracting a greater number of tourists. However, despite the variety of

projects supported much of the media attention focuses on the promotion of anime, manga and gaming, or so-called otaku culture. This is especially true for the advertising of the Tōkyō Olympics. The choice of anime characters, such as Goku from *Dragon Ball*, and Luffy from *One Piece* as Olympic ambassadors, coupled with various events featuring anime characters shows the Organizing Committee's bias towards otaku-related culture. The question must be asked as to whether this is the best way to represent Japan and the Tōkyō Olympics, especially given the fact that Japan is trying to increase tourist numbers in the run up to the event.

An analysis of the motivations behind a small sample of tourists coming to Japan reveals little impact from anime and manga. For most visitors interviewed, Japanese food, historical sites and areas of natural beauty are the main reasons for visiting Japan. Even those who have an interest in Japanese popular culture, come primarily for the three areas mentioned before. Very few came to Japan solely to engage in contents tourism and therefore, the data collected in this research suggests we have to question the efficacy of pushing otaku-related culture to such an extent. Even the tourists who confessed to an enthusiasm for otaku culture only intended to spend an afternoon in Akihabara, the home of otaku culture, during their entire trip to Japan. In addition, few if any had any intention on visiting other otaku sights around Japan, and none planned on engaging in activities such as anime tours.

Given international visitor's interest in traditional culture, it is surprising that so little of this has been utilised by the Tōkyō Olympic Committee. Advertising for the 2019 Rugby World Cup features aspects of traditional culture and nature. Posters featuring a stylised Mt. Fuji and traditional indigo prints are appealing to foreign tourists, and cater to their desires to visit places of natural and cultural significance whilst in Japan. It could be argued that Japan is trying to project a certain image with the promotion of anime figures. The creative director behind the Rio Olympics closing ceremony, Sasaki Hiroshi stated that in using anime and gaming characters in the event would present Japan as a fun peace-loving country (nippon.com 2017). However, in terms of tourism there is little evidence that otaku culture is attracting tourists and therefore the Tōkyō Olympics Organising Committee might be better spending their efforts elsewhere.

APPENDIX A: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Have you been to Japan before?
2. Why did you choose to come to Japan (please provide as many reasons as necessary)?
3. How long are you staying?
4. Why did you come to Akihabara/Why did you choose to take this tour?
5. What did you know about Japan before you came?
6. Have you heard of the Cool Japan campaign?
7. What do you know about otaku culture?
8. What was your image of Japan before you arrived?
9. Has this image changed since you have been here?
10. After visiting Akihabara, what are your impressions of otaku culture?

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