Popular Culture: Islands of Fandom in East Asia

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Abstract

This paper investigates and evaluates pan-Asian exports of Japanese TV drama in a variety of formats within the domain of popular culture. This component of media trade has allowed Japan's image to become attractive constituting a shift away from the negative image of an aggressor nation. The study argues that the regional distribution of Japanese media popular culture has contributed through fandom, to regional harmony in East Asia. Audience research has been applied, utilising questionnaires and ensuing focus group interviews to ascertain the extent of media influence of television drama in Taiwan, Japan and Korea, representations of Japan, and cultural proximity. Participants in the research comprised Taiwanese, Japanese and Korean university students studying in Australia. The study further argues that political changes in South Korea has created a step change in regional media flows towards the Korean Wave and its antecedent Hallyu, further reinforcing the process of regional fandom. The findings provide a gauge to ascertain the longer-term prospects for a consolidation of emerging regional harmony driven by a commonality of interest and values juxtaposed by historical antipathy.

Keywords: Japanese TV drama, popular culture, fandom, East Asia, Korean wave, regional harmony

Introduction

This paper investigates and evaluates pan-Asian exports of Japanese TV drama in a variety of formats within the domain of popular culture. This component of media trade has allowed Japan's image to become attractive constituting a shift away from the negative image of an aggressor nation. The ensuing audience reception and fandom has a positive sociological impact in the region. The study searched for representations of Japan and cultural proximity and argues that Japanese popular culture has contributed to regional harmony in East Asia. Harmony, in the context of this paper, is a sharing of cultural values across national divides with mutual respect and empathy. Audience research utilising questionnaires and focus group interviews has been used to ascertain the extent of media influence on a cohort of participants. The impact, within the confines of the study, is measured by the extent of shared values derived from cultural exchanges.

The study further argues that political changes in South Korea (hereafter Korea) has created a step change in regional media flows towards the Korean Wave and its antecedent Hallyu, further reinforcing the process of multilateral cultural exchanges. This counterpoise to the dissemination of Japanese popular culture has similarly reinforced the interaction of media trade in popular culture to the cross-cultural enjoyment of media content. Cultural flows and politics are not necessarily harmonised. Korean Japanologists, Lim and Park, interviewed in 2014 brought forward a conjoint opinion that cultural influences and political influences are treated on different platforms (Lim, 11 July 2014, interview; Park, 11 July 2014, interview). This opinion provides a gauge to ascertain the longer-term prospects for a consolidation of emerging regional harmony, driven by commonality of interest and values, juxtaposed by national political imperatives of the day overlaid with historical antipathy.

Japanese popular culture

Japanese popular culture is very diverse and in a constant state of flux. Television drama is a small but significant part of media trade within the Japanese content industry [1]. The domestic media industry, known in Japan as content industry (*kontentsu sangyô*) belongs to the realm of cultural entertainment, or accomplishment, created through human activity. Content includes television programs, films, music, drama, literature, photographs, *manga*, animation, computer games, lettering, shapes, colours, sounds, movements or visual images, or the combination of these, or information on them (METI, 2014). Popular culture has played a significant role in Japan and across Asia in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. A number of scholars have written about the 1990s, suggesting that this decade was important in the development and distribution of Japanese texts in a plethora of content and formats (Chua, 2012; Nakamura & Onouchi, 2006; Sugiyama, 2006). Iwabuchi, in posing the question: 'Waning affection for Japan?' (Iwabuchi, 2002, p. 122), reflects on the pessimism of Japanese media industries in that period while noting that the pessimism was ill founded, a view which is supported by many researchers and commentators. He drew on the Taiwanese-American scholar Leo Ching, who noted

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[1] The definition of content industry, from a Japanese legal perspective, is in the Act on Promotion of Creation, Protection, and Exploitation of Content (*Content Promotion Act* promulgated in June 2004).

'throughout Asia, Japan is in vogue' (Iwabuchi, 2002, p. 123). Ching points out in the late 1970s and early 1980s, that Japan's popular culture was becoming influential in the East Asia region. This influence has proved to be a precursor to the 1990s decade, the period in which Japanese popular culture grew and increasingly crossed international borders. This early development can be observed as the platform which has created the opportunity from which islands of commonality, through the process of fandom, across East Asian national borders has emerged. Iwabuchi points out a 'gradual tilt towards Asia' (Iwabuchi, 2004, p. 151), the extent of this characterisation is arguable. Hara (2004) brings forward statistics from research carried out by the NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute that illustrates, in the segment of television programs exported from Japan, that television output towards Asia was more dramatic than a tilt. The statistics showed 4,600 hours of television programs exported in 1980, growing to almost ten times the 1980 exports in the early twenty first century, with almost half directed to Asia (Hara, 2004). In 2001, 82 per cent of the output was in animation and drama, with animation predominant at 59 per cent (Hara, 2004).

Iwabuchi notes that globalisation in the 1990s resulted in asymmetrical cultural relations between Japan and other Asian nations coming into focus (Iwabuchi, 2002). Japan was aware that its growth rate in commercial media was greater than its East Asian neighbours. The dramatic growth in the export of television programs from Japan at the time added to this asymmetry. Since then there has been a rebalancing with counter flows from Korea into Japan, in particular the Korean Wave and, with music in the genre of popular culture increasing the volume of media trade. An example of this is 'Seven South Korean popular artists took top spots in the list announced by the Recording Industry Association of Japan (RIAJ) for the Japan Gold Disc Awards 2013, an annual award started back in 1987 to highlight the best-selling artists in Japan for the year'("K-Pop stars shine in Japanese music awards," 2013).

Historical impediments to media trade: An awakening.

The official distribution in Korea of Japanese popular culture has not always presented itself in the second half of the twentieth century. Taiwan also imposed restrictions on media transfers; this landscape has now changed dramatically. During the early part of the second half of the twentieth century, Korea actively discouraged friendly relations between itself and Japan. Japan annexed Korea in 1910 and maintained occupation until 1945. At the end of Japanese imperial policies in 1945 and since the partitioning of Korea into two countries in 1948, residual ill feeling between Japan and Korea has kept relations at a distance. As a result, there was little interaction between Japanese and Korean media for four decades. Prior to the 1990s, Korean government legislation restricted the import of television, music and film productions. However, from the 1990s, government legislation responded to technological changes and recognition of unofficial consumption of Japanese popular culture in Korea.

In 1973, during a visit to Japan, the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA), taken back to Korea and imprisoned, seized Kim Dae-Jung (Kim), who later became the President of Korea from 1998-2003. In his publication *Jail Correspondence*,

written while he was in prison, he formulated his three *hans*[2]: 1) Opposition to adverse feelings towards the Japanese; 2) Opposition to the use of military force, and 3) The use of a harmonious approach towards Japan (Maeda, 2007). I interviewed Maeda Yasuhiro, a former correspondence of Daily Mainichi in Seoul and an international journalist. He confirmed the significance of Kim Dae-Jung's vision to move from antipathy to acceptance of Japanese culture (Interview with Maeda, 2011). Kim was instrumental in leading the way to improved relations between Korea and Japan. He instigated four steps to open up the Korean door to Japan, leading to the entry of Japanese popular culture into Korea for the first time in 1998, and progressively in 1999, 2000 and 2003/4 (Ishii, 2001; Maeda, 2007; Yasumoto, 2013). This initiative has proved over time to be revolutionary in changing the balance of authorised media trade between Japan and Korea, progressively allowing the legal importation of Japanese media and cultural products into Korea for the first time. Kim was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2000, confirming international recognition of the significance of his political leadership. Kim was a visionary with regard to the relationship between Korea and Japan confirmed by the outcomes deriving from his progressive trade initiatives.

In 1995, the then Japanese Prime Minister, Murayama, released his statement 'Apologies to Asian nations who suffered under the Japanese military'. This was a singularly important announcement from Japan and was an important precursor to the thawing of relations between Japan and its regional neighbours. Arguably this statement should have been made much earlier by the Japanese government but it did confirm that Japan was facing up to the consequences of its past colonial and military excesses.

Methodology: Audience analysis

Texts without an audience may be seen to have no attributed meaning. I have conducted a survey of age segmentation drawn from blog analysis in respect to the Japanese television drama *Hana Yori Dango*. This drama was selected because it retains ongoing audience appeal in Asia and beyond, confirmed by successive remakes for national audiences (Yasumoto, 2013).   This information provided a measure of relevance of my selected cohort for audience analysis in respect to age in the context of the study. The predominant age group expressing their thoughts and views on *Hana Yori Dango* via the internet constitutes those in the age range of 10-14 years-old. The number of samples, with minor variations, decreased steadily from this age group to the oldest age group. Almost 25% of blogs were by people in the age group 20-29 years old. Gender was heavily weighted to females; of the 429 blogs, only three were male.

The research framework is illustrated in Diagram 1. Some of the data collected was beyond the scope of this paper and is not included in the findings. The research procedure comprised two stages.
• Stage 1: summaries of findings from the research questionnaires completed by three participant groups and ensuing focus group interviews.
• Stage 2: Discussion and conclusions drawn from questionnaires and focus group interviews.

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[2] Korean expression for a feeling of oppression or isolation.

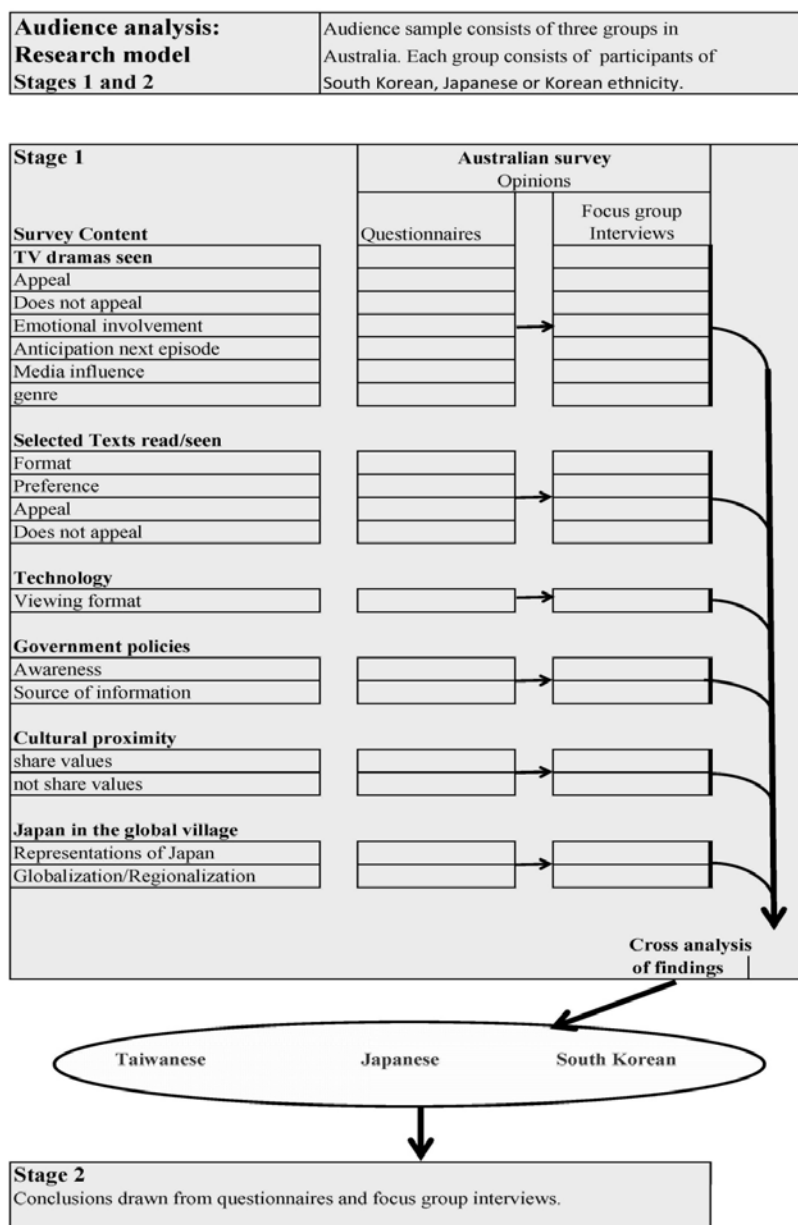| Audience analysis: Research model Stages 1 and 2	Audience sample consists of three groups in Australia. Each group consists of participants of South Korean, Japanese or Korean ethnicity.

Diagram 1 Research framework for audience analysis.

I administered the audience analysis by survey questionnaires, and focus group interviews. I was moderator for all data collection and focus group interviews forming the kernel of the methodology. Participants in the research comprised three tranches, being respectively Taiwanese, Japanese and Korean university students studying in Australia. Focus group interviews were commenced shortly after completion of the questionnaires. The age of the participants in the surveys and focus group discussions ranged from 18 to 30 years old falling across the 25% blog profile previously outlined. All participants remained anonymous.

Participants within each group shared a common ethnicity, the differentiation used was male and female participants who were coded M and F respectively. A

questionnaire was provided for each of the group participants at the commencement of the investigatory process. Each group was given forty-five minutes to complete the questionnaires; they were allowed to make notes if they so wished, as an aid for the subsequent focus group discussions. The participants in the focus groups were encouraged to talk freely, I asked questions from time to time to maintain continuity.

Morgan, Krueger and Vaughn et al, informed the structure of each focus group. They suggested that the ideal number of participants in focus groups should be no fewer than six and no more than ten. (Morgan & Krueger, 1998; Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996). Sternberg notes that it is better if participants know each other before the interviews so that they feel relaxed and can talk freely during the limited time of the interviews (Sternberg, 2005). I used the natural social setting of my study for the interviews, enabling a relaxed and intimate environment in order to solicit a natural response.

It is important to use focus groups if only to ascertain how people make sense of programming. Livingstone and Lunt note:

A common assumption is that people are not critical of television programmes in any informed or informative sense. They may be either accepting or rejecting, but not critical. However listening to ordinary people watch television programs shows that they routinely make a wide range of critical comments about what they see. (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, p. 71).

Findings from audience survey

Group one: Taiwanese

The surveys elicited views about Japan and Japanese popular culture. Eight of the ten participants (3M + 5F) were fans of Japanese television drama and were regular viewers of it; the other two male participants were not fans but had seen Japanese television dramas. One of the female respondents claimed to be an avid fan: 'I watch heaps of shows such as *Nodame Cantabile, Hana yori Dango, Hanakimi, Gokusen, Nobuta,* etc.' Another female respondent had watched *Hana yori Dango, Meteor Garden* and *Nobuta*. What was striking about the television drama series, in whatever format they were viewed, watched by the participants was that they were mostly derived from *manga* that were remade into the television dramas. Some examples were *Nodame Cantabile, Hana yori Dango, Hanakimi, Meteor Garden, Gokusen* and *Team Medical Dragon.* The Taiwanese participants had access to the Japanese *manga* as well as the first remake, *Meteor Garden*, and subsequent remakes, the Japanese *Hana yori Dango* and the Korean *Boys over Flowers*. Seven of the participants had seen remakes of the *manga Hana yori Dango,* closely followed by *Nodame Cantabile.* Six participants said they had seen this. One male was not interested in Japanese television dramas and had only seen the Korean television drama *Winter Sonata*. All participants, with one exception, declared that they watched dramas on television. Two of the participants had seen *Hana yori Dango* on film, computer and video/DVD.

In determining elements of fandom for popular culture emanating from Japan, a number of core elements emerged. All participants were attracted to the story; they also deemed humour and characters as important. There was clear overall enthusiasm

for the dramas. Some participants expressed negative opinions, such as the dislike of particular actors, predictability of story, unpersuasive plots and fake dialogue, exaggerated storylines and rushed endings. Another response, illustrating the transfer and sharing of feelings from Japan to Taiwan, was how the audience became emotionally involved with the content and that they discussed it with their friends. All participants who had watched *Hana yori Dango* confirmed their emotional involvement with the story. One respondent said that she regularly talked about dramas with her friends. Discussion between friends was reported by other participants, which supports Livingstone and Lunt's finding that audiences are critically engaged with the content of television dramas (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, p. 71).

When questioned about representations of Japan, both regionally and globally, a wider appreciation of the relationships between Taiwan and Japan emerged. Female participants, in particular, noted the positive effects of popular culture including the influence of television programs and *anime* on multiculturalism and current social issues. Other comments included: 'Japanese popular culture has been influential for a long time, not only in Asia': 'Japanese culture is in every culture'. There was less focus by males on popular culture and identified Japan's electronic products, its cinema, and even a perception of a 'positive strong country playing a significant role'. The ensuing focus group interview reaffirmed findings from the questionnaires.

Group two: Japanese

The eight participants in the survey (5M, 3F) were all consumers of Japanese original and remade television drama. From the surveys, I found that all had seen *Hana yori Dango,* while *Nodame Cantabile* and *White Tower* were also popular. The male respondent had viewed *Meteor Garden*, the Korean remake of *Hana yori Dango* and the Korean television drama *Winter Sonata*. The primary appeal of the dramas was the interesting stories, with characters also noted. Factors considered unappealing to the female respondents were: 'Too structured, can guess how the story ends'; 'I can guess the story development' and 'More focus on the celebrities than the story'. The male respondent did not like vague endings to television drama. Despite the negative views, audience engagement with the dramas was significant. The two female respondents reported emotional involvement with television dramas. One female noted 'Interesting stories makes me feel close to the characters'. They all looked forward to ensuing episodes, with the end of an episode drawing them in to watch the next episode. The male respondent commented on *Hana yori Dango* that he had become obsessed and emotionally engaged with the drama, always awaiting the next episode. Interestingly, he was not interested in other dramas.

The focus groups brought out more findings about cultural proximity. Participants were engaged with the East Asian region. One female responded: 'Yes, I feel friendliness towards Taiwanese because they watch Japanese dramas and know Japanese celebrities and we can share conversation'. Another said: 'I think an ideal character of a heroine is culturally proximate. The dedicated gentle women's type is likable in Japan and other Asia countries'. The male respondent drew attention to a global perspective in a regional context: 'Compared to American and European dramas I feel much closer to Korean and Taiwanese dramas'. One of the female respondents noted a lag in Korea compared to Japan in respect to television drama

content, from a cultural perspective, perhaps reflective of media regulation in Korea compared with contemporary Japan. She stated 'Parents often interfere with sons' and daughters' love relations in Korean drama'.

In respect to regional deregulation of popular culture trade, the survey comments recognised that Korean government policy had accepted a regional reality, with unauthorised media flows already occurring. Cultural exchange was viewed positively in improving regional relationships. A female respondent noted 'Cultural exchange brings mutual benefits. I think it is playing an important role in improving the historical negative image of Japan, from a Korean perspective'. She also drew attention to the importance of Japanese drama in creating regional harmony, noting the audience that it is created to serve: 'There is a generational gap between audiences for Japanese popular culture'.

The surveys mentioned representations of Japan viewed from outside of Japan in media content and production quality. A female respondent commented on "cute culture", such as the Sanrio character and *anime* and how production uses high quality technique for the creation of media content. The male noted how Japan has diversity in entertainment media production. Views were expressed in respect of Japanese popular culture affecting the regional and global markets, how Japanese culture is maintaining its identity among Japanese overseas through *anime* and *manga* and how Japanese media products portray Japanese society and social issues. The male respondent raised a significant issue in respect to the potential for television drama to contribute to the reshaping of a society: 'Japanese society is too formed, structured, and is a group society. With television drama, people can use their imagination and express their dreams. Scriptwriters and producers can create a world of utopia in their stories'.

The ensuing focus group, despite the non-attendance of the male participant, was reinforced by latecomers – one female and two males. The focus group confirmed the range of interest in Japanese original television drama as well as *manga* remade into television drama. One female respondent mentioned an example of media trade from Korea to Japan, 'The Korean *Winter Sonata,* it's my mother's influence. I got tired after a while and I didn't think it was as good as people say'. One male respondent illustrated the influence of *Winter Sonata* in Japan by saying, '… it's very much talked about and my mum liked it very much'. When participants watched television dramas, they became emotionally involved. A male respondent said, 'Yes, I get totally gripped; I cannot stop watching'. A female respondent agreed:

I start watching a drama because it is a topic of conversation with my friends or it is because of the actors and entertainers who appear in it. I start getting emotionally involved, if I feel empathy with relationship problems and the way they view love.

An emotional response to television drama was evident in both female and male participants, witnessed by the reactions to *One Litre of Tears* by a female respondent: 'I couldn't stop crying', and by one of the males who had joined in: 'It's embarrassing to admit, but I cried'. Humour is also an important ingredient of television drama. One female respondent said: 'Many of the dramas I watch are comedy; they all have something in them that makes me laugh'.

The discussion then turned to representations of Japan through popular culture. The female responses included: 'My American friend said that because Japan excels in robot culture and robotic technology there are many animation movies with a robot, such as *Doraemon* and *Astro Boy'* and 'I think it is wonderful that Japanese culture, such as animation movies, go to other countries for exchange of different cultures and international mutual understanding'. Finally, from the female viewpoint:

I also feel very happy about the way people outside of Japan accept Japanese culture.

Now that we have these cultural exchanges, the young people (outside of Japan) hold a very good image about Japan. Countries like Korea, especially among the older people, have a bad image about Japan, so I think there is a gap there. When we have cultural exchanges, we can have a good image towards each other's country.

The male participants were less forthcoming but one male respondent said, 'I feel very happy when a non-Japanese friend knows about Japanese productions'.

Group three: Korean

The six female Korean participants were all fans of Japanese television drama. The surveys found there were overall positive opinions of dramas; for example, in response to *Hana yori Dango* one of the respondents nominated the 'luxurious lifestyles that all audiences admire. In addition, their age is from 16–18 years, high school, which enhances fresh young concepts.' Another respondent said: 'It wasn't another love story but contained academic struggle and classical music. Cinderella emerged in the context of *Hana yori Dango*'. Another called it 'a modified version of Cinderella in modern times.' One respondent stopped watching *Hana yori Dango* towards the end of the drama because 'it strayed too far from the *manga*'. Another was somewhat critical of the Korean remake *Boys over Flowers* saying, 'They put too much scenes on the love story. Many boring parts'. The responses point towards emotion as an important element of the drawing power of drama. One respondent commented, 'The humour contributes to comical relief but also is a true reflection of our lives, in that there are always moments of relief between periods of tension.' Another replied 'I did get emotional. I cried when the heroin, Tsukasa, was bullied and assaulted by people'. Television was the participants' prime viewing source, and showed a mixed audience preference for the Japanese and Korean versions of *Hana yori Dango*.

Cultural proximity was evident; for instance, in the portrayal of romance in Japan and Korea, and respect for the elderly. I detected a softening attitude towards Japan from the focus group participants, though there were still unresolved issues between Japan and Korea, which participants saw as important.

There are many cultural flows, but I am aware that Japanese history textbook issues exclude many issues that have left Koreans hurt and frustrated. I believe forgiveness and a hope in the future is the only attitude that can change this.

It can be changed; political relationship is based on cultural history. Unless there is an official announcement about history, political relationship cannot improve.

I am in favour of the cultural exchange. Korea has been known to be the prey of "Japanisation", but with *Winter Sonata* and popular idols like *Toho Shinki* the cultural exchange is becoming bi-lateral and it is good to see, as a Korean.

Representations of Japan and Japan's standing in the regional/global arena from a Korean viewpoint were very clear and positive.

Japan's impressive display of technologies and popular culture, such as *anime*, *manga,* sends a very clear message that, such things advance the country, [which] is becoming more confident and more embraced by others. They represent themselves as stronger, enthusiastic and confident, [with] an active interest in entertainment. Some cultural displays involve the integration of technologies in normal day-to-day lives and views on romance, [which] have [been] dramatically transformed.

Other comments were:

It is amazing that Japan focuses on media to show their beauty and culture to other nationalities. Their oriental tea, *manga*, traditional cultures, all came towards us [as an] extremely fresh, new thing. In Korea, despite the fact of awkwardness in terms of political issues, teenagers love Japanese culture.

I think Japanese popular culture plays a big role in both globalisation and regionalisation, but in different ways. *Manga* and *anime* are major exports on the global stage, but these are texts that have been diluted of Japanese culture and values to appeal to a wider audience. On the other hand, dramas, TV formats and movies have been popular in the Asian region predominantly, as they portray Japanese values and ways of thinking, customs, etc., that are similar to those of the Asian countries, thereby strengthening the regional culture and relationship through consumption of similar products.

The focus group interviews confirmed interest in Japanese television drama. Further discussion covered differences in Japanese and Korean stories, such as those that portrayed homosexuality and bullying; Korean dramas tend to avoid such issues. These aspects were subject to editing through the remaking process to contextualise the issues in accordance with current Korean standards. As one participant said, 'I was supportive of Japanese popular culture content as it is more detailed'. However, when commenting on Korea media censorship said, 'Every time it's remade, they always water down or cut down something. It takes away a lot of things that I appreciate in the original'.

Japanese cultural values also excited discussion and drew out the significant role of Japanese culture in global and regional markets.

Manga and *anime* are not specifically culturally Japanese, like… all the hair is blond. They do not depict Japanese values… They appeal to the global audience, whereas dramas (TV) and movies are more culturally specific.

Even though *anime* and *manga* do not specifically talk about culture, they imply the interest in culture. I know many fans of *anime* and *manga* and they want to know

where all this is coming from. It means that as they are more interested they will end up liking Japanese culture.

Reception and Influence of Japanese Popular Culture

Replies to the survey questionnaires and focus group interviews were analysed in the light of Livingstone and Lunt's perspective that people 'are' critical of television programmes. Cues were also observed from non-verbal communication to better understand the discourse during the focus group interviews (Hall, 1990). Replies to the survey questionnaires and focus group interviews were analysed in the light of Livingstone and Lunt's perspective that people 'are' critical of television programmes. Cues were also observed from non-verbal communication to better understand the discourse during the focus group interviews (Hall, 1990). As Chua has noted from the perspective of Japan: 'It has a tendency to place the rest of Asia at a culturally-historically "backward" position' (Chua & Iwabuchi, 2008, p. 80). This view is reflective of a historical reality fuelled by the benefits to Japan derived from the Meiji Restoration 'being in Asia but not part of Asia' (Chua, 2008, p. 80). Looking to the future, from the findings in the present, the majority view of the Japanese research participants was more pragmatic and regionally embracing, discounting the notion of superiority. Chua's observation is that 'a cultural-historical temporality defined by the level of development in capitalist modernity' (Chua, 2008, p. 80) is becoming evident in Japan. The research findings confirmed that the temporality is now finite and Japan is re-engaging with Asia. The spectacular modernisation of Taiwan, Korea has contributed to respectful perceptions of each other and the development of capital into a regional commonality.

The study confirmed the popularity of Japanese popular culture in Korea and Taiwan and illustrates a commonality of regional core values. 'Japaneseness' is not readily defined but its characteristics are understood by receptive audiences confirmed by opinions expressed through the research process.

In the focus group interviews that further explored issues arising from the questionnaires, it was apparent that the participants from Taiwan and Korea wanted to know more about Japanese culture and were very interested in what was happening among Japanese youth.

The study found remarkably similar opinions among the participants. This supports the idea that people in these countries share a sense of modernity that is linked to cultural proximity. The participants saw positive commonalities of interest in storylines and actors in television dramas. Some viewers saw predictability as a negative outcome. Koreans liked Japanese humour, which was not so evident in Korean drama productions. Emotional involvement in the popular television dramas was commonplace in the region. However, the Taiwanese appeared to be more circumspect, as their involvement depended on the story.

Fandom was strongly evident in all groups; viewers eagerly awaited the next episode in a drama and sustained a common interest in peer conversation. The Koreans particularly liked the freshness of Japanese television dramas, and the fewer episodes and faster moving stories. The influence of popular culture on participants was more significant and was evenly distributed across ethnicity. This, in part, confirms the

point made by Chua: 'This empirically highly visible cultural traffic allows for the discursive construction of an East Asian Popular Culture' (Chua, 2004, p. 202).

Advertising, usually on the internet, influenced the viewing habits of the Japanese and Koreans. In one Korean example, blogs were a prime source of information. Television was the preferred means of viewing drama. There was a consensus on cultural proximity. About popular culture products, the change in government policy in Korea was seen as beneficial. The Koreans saw it as a positive for cultural exchange and as confirmation of illegal and unauthorised access to Japanese media products. Later in the interview process, one of the Taiwanese respondents volunteered the view that Korean dramas were in Taiwan and that they had been placed in a later time slot to protect Taiwanese dramas. This may be seen as an adverse decision from a regional perspective given the progressive elimination of restriction on media culture flowing into Korea. As one Korean respondent commented, 'leave politics to the politicians'. The Japanese textbooks issue was a concern for both Korean and Taiwanese respondents, both pointing to the need for Japan to review this matter for the sake of regional harmony. The word forgiveness was used. The acceptance of the Korean production *Winter Sonata* by Japanese respondents was a very positive outcome for improved relations between Korea and Japan.

Impressions of Japan by the Korean and Taiwanese respondents included such concepts of cute culture, popular culture, technology, electronic products, beauty and cultural traditions, politeness and respect for seniors. Their perception of Japanese people was strong, enthusiastic and confident. There was a common opinion that Asian popular culture had piqued global interest. The responses suggest that the youth of three cultures are willing and open to embrace change and move on from historical prejudices.

Ang states that 'popularity is an extremely complex phenomenon.' (Ang, 1985, p. 5). The respondents demonstrated enthusiasm for Japanese popular culture. In this regard, popular culture is having beneficial outcomes in harmony, cultural exchange and mutual goodwill in the region. Youth acceptance of East Asian popular culture has brought a new awakening in Japan; the Japanese government has slowly appreciated the prospects for Japanese culture, not only in East Asia but globally.

Conclusion

One of the findings was that the combination of replies to questionnaires, allied with subsequent focus group interviews, was a valuable methodology for researching the influence of Japanese original and remade media in East Asia. The questionnaires elicited individual views, and the focus group interviews allowed for free flowing discussion which, while predominantly confirming the survey findings, drew out additional insights for me in what was discussed and also in non-verbal communication. These findings were not only popular culture related but also touched on regional issues.

There are two primary factors at work in Asia in respect to the dissemination of Japanese popular culture. One factor is the historical impact on consumers' perceptions of Japan in Taiwan and Korea as a result of past Japanese colonisation

passed on through generations. This has left unresolved issues which surface from time to time. The second is the attractiveness of Japanese popular culture in Taiwan and Korea and regional composite counter flows. Based on my findings the cultural milieu in East Asia is undergoing a change process where the move is from regional acrimony towards regional harmony bound by cross border influence of popular culture. The main finding of the study is the similarity of critical comment across the ethnic spectrum of Taiwanese, Korean and Japanese participants. This outcome confirmed Livingstone's view (2005) that audiences are not trivial and passive. Shared cultural elements far outweigh contrasting ones while not exhibiting a diminution of national identity. There was a commonality of enthusiasm for Japanese original and remade television serial drama and cultural interchange, particularly with female participants, although much less so with the males. There is a definitive reinforcement of Japan's identity in East Asia.

Overall, positive feedback on representations of Japan in Taiwan and Korea far outweigh the negative ones. Popular culture confirmed by study outcomes has an innate capacity for reducing prejudice based on nationality. The overall opinion of male participant opinions, bound by stereotypes of past Japanese military excesses, differentiated themselves from female opinion. Female participants, while not disregarding history, put past Japanese militarism and all that is good about contemporary Japan into a holistic perspective. Japanese popular culture positively influenced females, more so than males. The female research participants exhibited a more embracing and forgiving regional view. They also have a strong desire to move forward rather than dwelling in the past. I would argue that women would reshape East Asia in the future. East Asia is rebalancing, from not only media trade, and the Japanese need to revaluate their East Asian neighbours.

Japanese popular culture is an important component of the Asian century, and television drama can provide an important contribution to regional harmony, particularly when reinforced by regional media trade and, in particular, counter flows into Japan. The paradigm shift in relations between Korea and Japan was a key ingredient in freeing up media trade in East Asia and enabled a regional rebalancing of production resources. Much of the credit for this rests with Kim for progressively instigating four steps to open up the Korean door to Japan, leading, in 1998, to the entry of Japanese popular culture into Korea for the first time. The counterpoise benefits for Korea have been significant and have enabled the Korean Wave to prosper in Japan and migrate to the world. The rapidly increasing success of South Korean popular music sales in Japan, particularly from 2009, can only serve to improve cultural relationships in East Asia and in turn contribute to regional harmony. Online media networks are reinforcing the opportunity for enhancing this process and separating the political and cultural platforms.

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