RESEARCH ARTICLE

AN OVERVIEW OF JAPANESE CULTURE AND ITS IMPACT ON THE WORLD THROUGH ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

Following the past few decades, the impact and influence of Japanese-based entertainment has been tremendously successful on a global scale. The number of people being drawn into the lore of Japan, as well as the language and culture it provides, has been steadily increasing. This rise can be attributed to different factors, such as the pop and rock idols of the Japanese Music Industry and the exotic cuisine of the country. But the massive deciding factors here tend to lean towards the options of Comics drawn in the Japanese Style called *Manga*, animated television series called *Anime* and the ever-famous movie titles of the Japanese Film industry such as *Rashomon*, The Ring, and quite recently – Demon Slayer: *Mugen Train*, which also happens to be a movie that is in the format and animation style of the popular *Anime* genre. Moreover, we see a lot of favouritism towards Japanese created games and novels, that influence minds of people young and old alike. These numerous contributions by Japan add into the interest created in people about the land of Japan on a global scale, which can be seen in the number of applicants who apply for the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) each year, as well as the rise in these numbers.

Keywords: Entertainment Industry, Japanese Culture, Pop culture, Music and Culture, Japanese Language Proficiency Test

Introduction

The action and suspense of *Shounen* cartoons, the *kawaii* pop stars and singers of the J-Pop genre, the globally acclaimed tastes of *Ramen* and *Bento* boxed lunches; the Japanese Culture is booming across the Globe at an astonishing rate. Japan, once renowned as an exotic destination with its *Geishas*, *Samurai*, *Dango* sweets and mysterious aura among many other factors, showed a completely different face when it came to the wars fought, showing steely determination and the might of the Japanese military. In today's world, though, Japan is internationally acclaimed as a large influence on the entertainment and food industry, with relevance to its comics, known as Manga; cartoons known as Anime and the tongue teasing varieties of Japanese cuisine such as *Ramen*, *Sushi*, *Tempura* and *Onigiri*.

It has elated to such a level that the accomplishments by the artists, writers and chefs at home base can be said to be lesser than out on the international stage. In recent years, many Japanese films have made their claim to fame by winning awards at stages such as Cannes and Vienna. TV Dramas, anime and Pop stars in particular, have influenced the youth of Western Countries, in particular the American countries. Known as *Otakus* and *Weaboos*, these fans take an interest in the differing cultural and entertainment views of the Japanese Pop culture, and hence, provide the base for these entities to grow and expand further.

When looking into the matter of shows, movies and cartoons produced in Japan and/or by the Japanese, there are several factors that contribute to the extravagant popularity of the same. One of these reasons is that Japanese Pop Culture embraces all of the life shown within its productions, giving full vivacity to each and every segment, from the background passing characters, to the nature shown and described. It does not hide any unpleasantness and seeks to display all the dimensions from within the soul of the story, while maintaining an optimistic view on the overall, in most cases. Another definitive reason for the popularity of Japanese Pop Culture is the manner in which it embraces and portrays the ideals, the imagination and a sense of a daring spirit that strives to achieve great things, in a string and firm manner. It manages to do all this while maintaining a feel of realism, a sense of the ordinary that makes the viewers feel that they can relate to the characters and the situations. For example, in Hiroshi Fujimoto's *Doraemon*, the character of *Nobita Nobi* is very much celebrated due to the plainness and the limit of his skills and his abilities, making him into a very relatable character into whose shoes the audience can place themselves into.

Moreover, great directors such as Akira Kurosawa have affected the film industry on bigger scales through hit releases such as *Rashomon*. Japanese Horror is nothing to smirk at, as blockbusters such as The Ring, The Grudge and *Ju-On 2* prove to be favourites among fans of the genre. Brilliant screenplay and direction are key elements of Japanese directors, giving their creations a touch of something that most other films in the world were not able to pull off. The influence of Japanese movies too, brings to light an infallible pillar to support the rise of Japanese Influence globally.

The objectives

- Explore the growing popularity of the Japanese Culture and Pop Culture
- Explore the reasons as to why the Eastern Influence is so strong on the world
- Study the influence of the Japanese Culture on a global scale

Literature Review

The Music Industry

The Music Scene in Japan is an ever-changing one, with various forms of original and Western-influenced music styles such as *Kayakyoku*, which encompasses all of Pop music, such as *enka*, idol songs, Japanese Rock and theme songs; *gagaku*, or elegant music which was usually played for the royal classes; even the lesser-known Japanese Blues, Jazz and Indies are major forms of the Japanese Music Scene today. *Enka* is a form of sub-genre of Japanese music that incorporates the styles of Japanese Country as well as Western elements. (Mōri, 2009) Idol songs basically comprise of Western Style songs such as light rock, metal, alternative, punk, or ballads, and these styles are most common among the Japanese youngsters. (Regev,2013)The Elder citizens enjoy the types of music that started out in the 1970s and are famous for the complexity of the melodies and harmonies that outclasses most modern mainstream genres, as well as the clever and interesting lyrics.

Japanese Pop Music has always been changing faces, especially when it comes to the topic of gender-based stardom. (Inaba, 2020) Female pop idols receive the biggest amount of pressure, as they are groomed right from the age of 12 up till the age of 17, when they are to debut their first album or song. (Shim, 2006). During the time period of 1970s till the 1990s, several women and groups, or bands, comprising of women started to make their mark on the Pop scene. *Nyanko Club*, *Seiko Matsuda*, PRINCESS PRINCESS, *Yuki* of the Judy & Mary Band and *Miki Imai* were some of the female stars who are known as the Milestones in Female Japanese Pop. This was the start of the Japanese Female Idol influence on the world, paving the way for artists such as *Nana Kondo* and *Yumi Matsuya*. Seiko Matsuda also underwent a transformation in her style, as she was still

going strong after 2 decades. One of the more known all-girl bands in Japan following the late 1990s was an alternative rock band known as *Shonen Knife*. They were instrumental in commercializing Japanese Pop idols completely at the international level, after they achieved international fame, following their opening act on a tour of the American group, Nirvana, in 1993. At present, singers and bands such as LiSA, Konomi Suzuki, ASCA, Mashiro Ayano, Eir Aoi and Sayaka Kanda have become the face of the Japanese pop industry, supported by the anime industry, as these artists perform theme songs and opening songs for such anime, that are viewed worldwide. This industry is expected to be an independent boomer in the coming decade, due to the of the popularity of the Japanese language, which in turn owes this to the popularity of anime, manga, and TV Drama series, especially in American countries and states. (Craig, 2000)

Japanese Music is incomplete without the mention of *Karaoke.* It is a term that is widely known, and yet such little is known about its true value. It is known to be the greatest contribution from Japan to the world, in terms of music. Even though it largely remains an Asian interest, the birth of Karaoke in the 1970s has led people worldwide to make use of it in one way or another. In the West, it is generally used as a medium of talent contests, which are not meant for the less musically gifted. It can also be deemed as a part of the modern pop culture. Though this can be one of its uses, the true spirit of Karaoke comes from the original reason of its invention – a mode of socialization and entertainment. In the East, particularly in Japan, Karaoke is used as an after-hours relaxation form of entertainment for all ages – be it students participating in a mixer, or salarymen out with their colleagues. This comes from the concept of *ringisei* that is practiced in the cultural context of Karaoke. It is a method of holding meetings wherein the goal is to reach consensus and group socialization, and not score points. What is stressed in Karaoke sessions is the importance of participation – it does not matter if a person is unable to sing well. Moreover, one who sings extremely well and dominates the room with his skills is mostly seen as a showoff. Karaoke is also known to be very useful for the common salaryman, as his chances of playing host to the superiors sometimes reach home base and is rewarded with hikes and promotions. Looking at it from a different perspective, the concept of Karaoke in Japan can be very profitable, be it in a direct or an indirect manner. (Craig, 2000; Lum, 2012)

The World of Manga

Manga, which are comics written and published in the Japanese style, have gripped the fictional world in quite a tight manner ever since the late 20th century. The fan base for the wide number of manga series that are present, consist of quite a large population across the world. It is deemed to be one of the most popular forms of comics in the global market. One of the most profitable factors though, can be attributed to the fact that manga is not just meant for children – unlike most comics sold. Manga contain genres and categories meant for a wide variety of audiences. Some of these categories, for example, can be named as *Shounen*, or 'Young Male'; *Shoujo*, or 'Young Female'; Ecchi, or 'Playful Suggestive Sexual Content'; Slice of Life, Comedy and Horror. Some famous examples of Manga in these categories are *Naruto* and *Dragon Ball Z* for *Shounen; Kaichou wa Maid-Sama* and *Ouran Koukou Host Club*. According to Ian Reader, who is a scholar of Japanese Religion and Popular Culture, "Manga are simply too fascinating, colorful, and rich a literary medium to be left solely to children." [1] In Japan, manga can be found pertaining to almost any theme or topic that can be imagined. Most of these manga are categorized to be delivered to a certain set of audiences – men, women, young boys, young girls – but there exists a large crossover readership at the same time. Manga books, volumes and bundle magazines are found to be sold or found at almost every place in Japan – bookstores, train station kiosks, vending machines, barbershops, trains, cafes and more. Studies in 1995 depicted that 40% of sales of all books and magazines in Japan were comprised of manga. This amounted to a total of 1.9 million copies, delivering sales of $6-$7 billion. (Brenner, 2007)

Osamu Tezuka was one figure who contributed to the immense sales of manga, through his works '*Budda*' and '*Hi no Tori (The Bird of Fire)*'. He, who was revered as the "God of Comics" in Japan, drew over 150,000 pages of manga, found in over 500 separate series. He is best known in the postwar period as the creator of *Tetsuwan Atom*, or *Astro Boy* comic series, thereby pioneering and making popular the concept of Story Manga – comic series that have lengthy plots in a novelistic format, over a big number of chapters. In doing so, Tezuka paved the way for future forms of story-based manga, as well as serializations that were based off religions, like his

manga "Budda", that was a story about Buddhism and the origins, woven into an adventurous tale that was made to be popular with the youth. Having extensive knowledge in the Buddhist scriptures helped Tezuka in transforming the story of the Buddha into a manga filled with not only adventure and action, but also giving the feel of a *kyoyo* or educational manga, as the occasional summaries of history and detailed maps of countries like India and Nepal can be seen in the panels. Tezuka's illustrations are noted to be closely parallel to the traditional images of the key moments of the Buddha's life, such as his birth, life as a prince, the Four Sights, his renunciation, his awakening, and more: as shown in the sacred texts. Yet, he kept true to his roots as a storyteller, and did not use Buddha to preach Buddhist doctrines or even explain them, unlike many others who tried using the boom of Manga to capture the religious image. Tezuka's Buddha is a masterpiece that offers an adventure story in a compelling manner, while at the same time, addressing the religious aspect and touching upon factors that Tezuka wanted the modern, competitive Japan to remember. At the same time, it can be noted that he added characters of his own, who play important roles in the story. So, we can say that Osamu Tezuka is first and foremost, a storyteller who uses his techniques to keep his readers enraptured and give them a beautiful experience. (Craig, 2000)

The Japanese Film Industry – Animated Films and Anime

The Japanese film industry has contributed a lot to influence young minds all over the world. Movies with the trademark of the Japanese Animation styles are becoming more famous all over the world with their mesmerizing art styles, eye-catching colour palettes, beautiful and stunning soundtracks and most of all, their remarkable and noteworthy stories. Animated Japanese Films, or 'Anime Movies', as they are more commonly known, have recently started to break records and become big hits and favourites in the Global Box Offices. While some still look down upon the rise of animated movies as being detrimental to the true vision of films and movies, the ever-growing fanbase, as well as non-anime watchers have proven them wrong by helping break Japanese film records in the recent Release of the movie *Demon Slayer: Mugen Train.* Garnering over $432.9M. Globally, it has become Japan's biggest blockbuster hit in worldwide sales. In North America, the movie surpassed the record of Chinese movie Hero to achieve the title of Highest Opening Weekend for a Foreign Film, earning over $21M to do so. The plot of this movie, which follows the tales of a boy named Kamado Tanjiro and his quest to help his sister return to normal from being turned into a demon, is filled with a rich historical vibe as it is set in the Taisho Era of Japan. While the original source for the movie, the Manga, had built quite the rapport for itself by establishing bestselling records in sales worldwide, the movie itself – animated by the famous studio ufotable, does not disappoint in the least. The trademark stunning graphics of ufotable, the brilliant screenplay, character writing, storytelling and voice acting combined with the beautiful, enrapturing soundtrack – Demon Slayer: Mugen Train is a movie that calls out to fans of anime and movies worldwide, regardless of their preferences. The prequel to this movie, an animated television series known as Demon Slayer, was also a very popular show which won the hearts of many people. One of the ways in which this series as well as the movie has impacted the vision of Japan in people's eyes, is the stunning setting of the Taisho period, and how the people of Japan in that era are depicted, in what is considered an action-drama based film. This type of depiction and character building is rarely seen in movies of this age and has succeeded in pulling fans of different genres to itself, as well as inadvertently making a name for itself. (Harding, 2020)

The immense popularity of Japanese animation does not come from movies alone. The hype of the Japanese culture in young people from different countries evidently comes from the craze over the aired television shows, such as Pocket Monsters (or Pokemon), Power Rangers and Sailor Moon, to name a few. (Allison, 2000).The love shown by the fans for such shows can be seen in the effort put in to create websites filled with "cosplay" or role-playing pictures, wherein fans dress up as their favourite characters, using these anime themes for costumes on Halloween, and much more. The globally acclaimed and loved franchise Pokemon was a huge hit in USA when it first aired in 1998 nationwide. (Davis & Yeh, 2019). The series became so popular that the Pokemon Movie that was released the following year, brought in a revenue that went above $85 Million. At the time, it had been broadcast in more than 70 countries in the world, with the Pokemon games by Nintendo for the handheld Gameboy consoles, and the Pokemon Trading Cards being sold everywhere. (Kelts,2006). The Pokemon Franchise reached its peak in the mid-2000s, with the introduction of the Nintendo DS and the next

seasons of the shows were airing. All of this helped the Japanese franchise obtain massive success, and it is currently believed to be worth $21 Billion. Similarly, another Television series, which was much more popular with young girls, was the Bishoujo Senshi Sailor Moon or the Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon series. (Cooper-Chen,1999) It was created by Takeuchi Naoko and released in 1991 on a worldwide basis. Till date, it is said to have garnered $13 Billion in sales of DVDs, Manga and Merchandise of the franchise worldwide. To add to these, the animation styles of the Japanese are so acclaimed that world renowned French Electronic Music Duo Daft Punk had used anime by Matsumoto Reiji in their videos and promos, while band such as the British group The Orb, used the famous anime series Doraemon as a character int one of their single releases.

All of this is excluding the ever-growing popularity of Japanese movies by themselves. While these franchises may have added into the influence of Japanese Culture, the famous movie directors, and creators such as Kitano Takeshi and Miyazaki Hayao have added to the Japanese fame through their critically acclaimed movies. (Stevens, 2008). 'Sen to Chihiro no Kami – Kakushi', or 'Spirited Away', by Miyazaki was the first ever animated film to win the Grand Prize at the Berlin International Film Festival. It also won the "Best Feature Film" title in the Academy Awards of 2003. Miyazaki's Film 'Tonari no Totoro' or 'My Neighbour Totoro' has become a family favourite in houses all over the world. (Cavallaro, 2015) Very recently, the movies of Makoto Shinkai, such as 'Kimi no Na Wa' or 'Your Name' and 'Tenki no Ko' or 'Weathering with You' have become renowned all over the globe for their Stunning Art Styles, beautiful soundtracks and enrapturing stories that always hold a slight hint of the supernatural. And this is not accounting for the immense contributions from directors such as Akira Kurosawa and Kento Shindo, whose real-life post-war movies created ripples in the Film Industry worldwide, paving the way for Japanese Influence on Western Films such as Star Wars.

Influence of Japanese Culture:

The Influence of Japanese Culture on the World has been steadily rising over the past few decades, with the passing years showing no dwindling in numbers. (Hsieh, 2020). The data from 1991 shows that the Japan Foundation received 58,00 applications for its annual Japanese Language Proficiency Tests. By 2002, this figure had gone up to 286,000, in a timespan of just a decade. And according to recent data, the number of applicants had reached 1,168,000 in 2018.

Table No: 1

Year	Total Number of applicants	% Increase
2010	261889	
2011	441796	68.69589788
2012	703685	59.27826418
2013	567417	-19.3649147
2014	681893	20.17493307
2015	750252	10.0248866
2016	866294	15.46706973
2017	1027111	18.56379012

Source: https://www.jlpt.jp/e/statistics/archive/201901.html

Compound Annual Growth Rate= 18%

Taking the observation of the above data taken from the official Japanese Language Proficiency Test website operated by the Japan Foundation and Japan Educational Exchanges and Services, we can see a steady increase in the total number of applicants per year. We observe a rise from 261,889 in 2010 to 441,796 in 2011, which is an approximate increase of 68.69%. And once again, we see a rise the following year in 2012, with a total of 703,685, which results in an increase of 59.27%. These factors may be attributed to the factors of rising popularity of Japanese animated series at the time, including very loved titles such as *Kaichou wa Maid-sama*, *Gintama*, The *Tatami* Galaxy, Angel Beats and *Anohana* - The Flower We Saw That Day. The ever-growing popularity of the Visual Novels side of the Japanese Culture may have brought in more of the masses into this

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spectrum with the introduction of the Fate Zero anime in 2011 by ufotable. But after this, we see a drop of 19.3% in the number of applicants in 2013, with a total of 567,417. We can assess this to be a factor of the increasing popularity of English-based shows and movies, that were taking the stage with hit after hit, even within Japan. We can notice after this, that the rates have been mostly consistent after that, having 20% with a total of 681,893 in 2014, 10% with a total of 750,252 in 2015, 15.46% with a total of 866,294 in 2016 and 18.56% with a total of 1,027,111 in 2017. To assume an overall image, the Compound Annual Growth Rate of the Total Number of Applicants for the JLPT from 2010 to 2017 has been calculated and has taken the result image of an approximate rate of 18%. These steady rates of growth may be attributed to not only the rising popularity of animated shows and movies, but also the games, comics, light novels, full novels, ideologies and so forth gushing from the heart of Japan's Culture. The olden movies and philosophies may have set the stone, but the modern-day influence of Japanese Pop Culture proves to be no less of a factor in impacting the people on a global scale.

Discussion

The number of people taking up Japanese Courses, including study of the language, or of the culture or even the history of Japan has also seen a tremendous increase due to the increased interest in Japan, in people. This has been brought about by the influence of Japanese pop culture globally, as many of these 1 million applicants have most certainly been intrigued by the language through the influence of Anime or Japanese Songs. We can notice an increase in the number of viewers of *Anime* and movies, providing a huge boost in sales to Japanese Studios. The same can be said for publishers as *Manga* and Light Novels are becoming increasingly popular in not only the west, but in other Asian countries as well. It can also be noticed these days that famous YouTube and Twitch celebrities and streamers take to games made in Japan or in the Japanese style and format, thereby bringing the genre of Japanese games and JRPGs to the limelight, if they already had not captured the spotlight. Japanese voice actors, in turn, receive numerous contracts not only for shows, but also for games and audiobooks. Directors such as Akira Kurosawa, Kenji Mizoguchi and Shohei Imamura have contributed in very different way by providing transcendental mediums of expressing stories and emotions through iconic methods of storytelling and cinematography. This in turn, has influenced filmmaking worldwide, impacting industries such as Hollywood, European Films (Cinecittà) as well as Russian Directors such as Andrei Tarkovsky. In the years to come, it is expected to see this number increase to at least 3 million. And as a result, Pop Culture from Japan does not seem to give up as the television shows, cartoons, movies, games, comics, and songs still make sure to capture the hearts of millions of people worldwide. We can expect to have more to discover in the coming future, as to what the Japanese Pop Industry has in store for the World.

Conclusion

Japanese Industry has influenced the world in a manner which nobody could have predicted back in the years of 1960s. As of today, Japanese Pop Culture amounts to at least a tenth of the total in the Entertainment Industry. Directors from Hollywood have been known to make use of Japanese style music numerous times, due to the exotic sounds and serene melodies. Famous music groups have made the Japanese scales and music styles famous on a global scale, leading to the interest and use of anthemic music chords in not only Western Music, but also movies, games and even advertisements. Companies worldwide, including McDonald's, KFC and Pizza Hut have already implemented the idea of using Japanese-styled characters and animation in order to advertise their products. The popularity of *manga* and *anime* is currently at an all time high, especially when watched in the original Japanese language clubbed with subtitles of the viewers' language. There is no lack of appeal and demand when it comes to this industry as can be seen with the number of shows being aired per month – which amounts to more than 50. Taking on a different note, famous directors from Japan have been very successful in realizing and relaying the emotions of the Japanese in the post-war era. This has directly affected the number of people taking an interest in the history and lore of Japan. Western directors such as Quentin Tarantino, Edward Zwick and George Lucas have openly referenced or used the teachings of Japanese directors as well as the cultural aspects of Japanese history in their movies, showing us the impact of Japanese Movies on Hollywood. Taking all of this into consideration, we see that the interest of people all over the world, in Japan and its contributions, has risen, by observing the numbers of JLPT applicants every year. We see a tremendous rise almost every year, with numbers of 860,000 in 2016 and 1,027,000 in 2017, giving us a high Compound Growth

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Rate of 18%. These observations point towards one inevitable fact – Japan has impacted the world on a large scale through its Entertainment Industry and the influence only continues to grow. In conclusion, the olden movies and philosophies of Japan from the years of 1940s and 1960s may have set the stone of Japanese Influence, but the modern-day influence of Japanese Pop Culture proves to be no less of a factor in impacting the people on a global scale.

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