

JAPAN IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT- (SOME) CHALLENGES IN THE 21st Century

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Abstract

This paper will look at some challenges that Japan faces in the 21st century. Starting first with a historical perspective, I will look at the role that the nihonjinron played in the global positioning of Japan, before elucidating Japan's position in Asia. By a critical assessment of the Cool Japan policy, I will then analyse to what extent it can be deemed successful, and in how far soft power can be a tool that can help overcome challenges, or whether it posits a challenge in itself.

1. INTRODUCTION

Global Connections- It is hard to deny that in our world today there are global interactions and connections on a scale as never seen before. Add an increased mobility of the people, and it becomes clear that even island nations, such as Japan, will find it very hard to 'pull up the drawbridge'.² Thus, the challenges the world faces in the 21st century are manifold, because global economic interdependencies and migration have become important characteristics. In this context, Japan also faces a number of challenges within the complex political surroundings of East Asia in the 21st century after the end of the Cold War and the rise of China as economic powerhouse. In order to elucidate some of those challenges, I would like to particularly look at Japan's relationship with the People's Republic of China and, to a smaller extent, with South Korea, as well as at how globalization and migration influence Japan, and how Japan represents itself to the outside world. To that end, I will look at the effects, or lack thereof, and dangers of the *Cool Japan* policy and Japan's soft power.

Japan has the reputation of being 'unique' in its combination of tradition and modernity, and this stereotype was sustained through various tourist campaigns as well as in some of the academic literature for most of Japan's post-war history.

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Politically, we tend to think of it as part of the West, but equally, somehow as not quite ‘Western’³ either. This perception of Japan as an ‘Asia-light’ dates back to Cold War *realpolitik*, you were either with the one bloc, or with the other, and although there were many different shades of grey in between, Japan was a firm ally of the Western bloc at that time and America exercised a decisive influence on Japanese domestic, and foreign, politics.⁴ Within Japan itself, cultural delimitation to the West, mainly the US, was one of the most important post-war projects.

The so-called *nihonjinron* (literally, theories on the Japanese), helped create a Japanese identity as significantly different from a dominant-hegemonic Other, the West. In the attempt to codify Japanese culture, both sides of the dichotomy were essentialised, and Japan was just as much homogenised as the West. While academia at some point did contribute to the writing of *nihonjinron*, particularly by explaining the Japanese post-war economic miracle, by and large they have faded out of fashion. However, as an attempt to homogenise Japanese culture, the stereotypes conveyed to the rest of the world remain intact and important to this day. In these *nihonjinron* of old, other Asian countries were of little to no significance. Vis-à-vis the West, Japan thus appeared as unique and without any cultural resemblance to its political partners. Cultural similarities that existed – and continue to exist – with other Asian countries such as China and Korea, were ignored, not mentioned, or downplayed (Befu 2001, Kirsch and Martinez forthcoming). Although Asian countries were the prime targets of Japanese imperialist desires during the Asia-Pacific war when Japan considered itself to be firmly “in, but above Asia”, to cite Iwabuchi Koichi (2002, p. 8), they were largely out of the public discourse within Japan in the post-war period. The orientation towards the West led in many ways to askewed representation of Japan even among Western academics, and it tended to be singled out of the Asian context. The most prominent expression of this notion to single out Japan can be found in Samuel Huntington’s “The Clash of Civilisations” which has become famous as Huntington controversially predicted a clash between the Muslim civilisation and the Western/Christian civilization (Huntington 1993). But he also gave Japan as the only nation-state the status of a civilisation, highlighting how far this myth of uniqueness, of cultural incompatibility with the rest of the world, so carefully crafted in the post-war period, had spread around the world. And, what damage had been done to Japan’s position in Asia (Antoni 2000).

³ I am using the terms West and Western in a constructivist way, well aware that they are politically constructed entities with liquid boundaries, however, both terms have yet to disappear from the academic discourse on Japan. Dichotomies between Japan and the dominant-hegemonic entity that is commonly called the ‘West’ continue to remain important. The West thus remains a powerful imaginary space for Japan – as role-model as well as antithesis.

⁴ See, for example, Hook et al. 2001 or McCormack 2007 for a detailed analysis of US-Japan relations.

But it is Asia where Japan's true challenges lie. And due to the *nihonjinron*-based obsession with the West, the emergence of 'Asia' in the 1990s hit Japan somewhat unpreparedly. Asian values that resembled Japanese values in the *nihonjinron* were discussed as contributing to the emergence of the Tiger states. Although by the late 1990s and the end of the Cold War, politicians in Japan – and academics abroad – spoke increasingly about Japan's potential 'return to Asia', Japan never quite made it there. Arguably many a politician in Japan who embraced this 'return' was situated on the right of the political spectrum in Japan, giving it a strongly pan-Asian flavour, so this may have severely hindered a sincere political and cultural rapprochement.⁵ In spite of the fact that Japan's political relations with the ASEAN states tend to be better than with South Korea and China, the Asian Values Debate has faded out of the political discourse across the board. However, in the wake of it, cultural, political and economic exchange between Japan and the Asian mainland also intensified in the 1990s. In Japan, this 'return to Asia' also manifested itself in a return of things Asian to the screens at home and in cinemas. Increasing representation of Asia in the media certainly helped re-imagining Asia after the long absence of real engagement with it (Kirsch 2015).

However, as this happened, Asia was beginning to prosper, and Japan was stuck in the first decade of its 'lost two decades'. Thus, China's emergence on the world market, its rise to being the second-largest economy in the world, was looked at with a nostalgic gaze, and dreams of modernisation in which Japan could lead on China, were dreamed in the media. Throughout the 1990s, China, and by extension also the rest of Asia, resembled a pre-modern imaginary space in the Japanese media, representations that permitted Japan, as I argued elsewhere, to "sleep through" (Kirsch 2015, p. 155) China's political and economic ascent, imagining it to be firmly located underneath Japan, in spite of Japanese investment flowing into China, and an increasingly important economic relationship.⁶ On the other side, Japanese popular culture was also increasingly received in Asia. As the landmark book *Recentering Globalization* by Koichi Iwabuchi (2002) has proven, throughout the late 1990s, Japanese television drama (and, by extension, also music) was willingly consumed in Taiwan. The FIFA Football World Cup in 2002, co-hosted by Japan and Korea, ended the censorship that South Korea had imposed upon Japanese popular culture, and South Korea became a target market for Japanese creative industries.

⁵ The body of literature on Japan's 'return to Asia' is vast – but exemplary see Antoni 1996 and 2003, Iwabuchi 2002, the papers in Saaler and Kotschmann (eds.) 2007 as well as Kirsch 2015. As an example of right-wing politicians and their involvement in the debate, see Ishihara and Mahathir 1993.

⁶ On Sino-Japanese relations and economics, see, for example, Hilpert 2002, Kokubun 2012 and Rose (ed.) 2011.

NissimKadoshOtmazgin argues that the falling of political barriers made Japanese popular culture more widespread across East Asia and contributed to its ascent (Otmazgin 2013). But that same World Cup also paved the way for Korean popular culture to be consumed in Japan – and the handful of Korean-Japanese co-productions prepared the Japanese television drama market for the hitting of the first wave of the Korean Wave only inadequately.⁷ But throughout the past twenty years, popular culture across Asia has become increasingly more transnational and the flows are usually in both directions. Yet in spite of the economic intertwining and engagement with Asia in Japan and with Japan in Asia in popular cultural terms, not all is that well.

The relationship with China poses one of the greatest challenges for Japan. Regardless of the close economic ties that both countries entertain, politically they are far from being out of troubled waters. Issues surrounding Yasukuni Shrine, a shrine belonging to the Imperial Household in which all war dead for Japan since the 19th century are revered, among them 14 Class-A war criminals, the perceived lack of apologies from the Japanese government, the Diaoyu/Senkaku issue (a group of islands that are disputed between Japan and China) and a perceived turn to the right in Japan which angers and worries China, are but a few problems that prevent an unclouded political partnership. The Japanese, on the other hand, are angered by anti-Japanese protests in China, flash mobs destroying Japanese property, and deeply critical about the political motivations of these outbursts of Chinese nationalism in the People's Republic of China.⁸

This leads us to the issue surrounding Japan's past in Asia. While in the past decades, Japan's closest ally, the USA, have not held Japan accountable for its wartime past to the same extent as Japan's closest neighbours have, particularly those that were at the receiving end of Japan's imperial aspirations, namely China and Korea, history continues to extend its tentacles into the present. And by no means is the past in the past. Because of a perceived lack of apologies and several statements that the current Prime Minister Abe Shinzō has made with regards to changing Japanese policies concerning Japanese atonement for the past in crucial detail, have

⁷It seems to have led to a visible decline in the number of domestic television dramas, while Korean dramas continue to be broadcast. Already in 2011, protesters marched towards the popular commercial broadcasting station Fuji Television, demanding that they stop broadcasting Korean productions and start doing own productions again (Brasor 2011). This highlights that the Korean Wave was a two-edged sword that brought diversity to the small screens on the one side (Gössmann and Kirsch 2014, Kirsch 2015), but had enormous impact on the domestic market on the other.

⁸ See, for example, Rose 2014 and the papers in Kokubun and Swanström (eds.) 2012.

caused uproar in other Asian countries. And Abe's speech on the 15 August 2015 was expected with anxiety and tension, leading to 187 mainly US and UK based historians signing an open letter asking him to accurately address Japan's wartime history,⁹ inclusive of all the dark sides. And when the statement was finally released, it was met with scepticism as well as criticism, as Abe acknowledged Japan's responsibility for suffering of other Asian peoples, but did not personally apologise.¹⁰ Due to these issues, if anything at all, China and Japan can be called uneasy bedfellows. While it is hard for both sides to cut back economically, politically the relationship seems stuck in a rut. Similarly, China also appropriates Japan to forge nationalist sentiments at home and the gap between the two countries seems to be widening, even though losing Japan as investor would be equally detrimental for China as losing China as production site would be for Japan. And that is not even mentioning bilateral trade dependencies.¹¹

Japan's foreign relations are thus multi-layered and complex; economy, politics and the creative industries all contribute to the challenges that Japan faces in the 21st century. Even with the USA, its closest partner, the relationship is far from unclouded. Issues surrounding American military bases in Okinawa are not only a source of much tension within American-Japanese relations, but also within Japan, to allude to just one problem.¹²

However, adding to the complexity of the issue is the fact that in spite of the less than ideal relationship with China and other Asian countries, Japan has seen a lot of migration from China since the 1990s, and the Chinese have replaced the Koreans as the most numerous group of foreigners in Japan. Thus, Japan, although having a percentage of only about 2% of foreign residents and less than any other developed country, is facing increased migration, pre-dominantly into urban communities from a country with which political problems continue to persist (Statistics Bureau, Ministry of the Interior and Communications Japan 2015a). For Japan, this means that the stereotypes of old, such as that of Japanese homogeneity, stemming from the *nihonjinron* of the 1970s, are being called into question, and its

⁹ For the letter see Japan Focus 2015a. As example for media coverage see Kingston 2015. As the letter made headlines (see, for example, Kingston 2015), the call was extended and in the end more than 450 scholars signed, including myself (Selden 2015, Japan Focus 2015b).

¹⁰ The statement can be accessed online. It was published a day ahead of the commemoration ceremony, and it can be accessed in Japanese, English, Chinese and Korean. See Abe 2015 for details. On the reception of the statement see, for example, Tiezzi 2015.

¹¹ Raw trade data can be accessed in the Statistical Yearbook of Japan. See Statistics Bureau, Ministry of the Interior and Communications Japan 2015b and Statistics Bureau, Ministry of the Interior and Communications Japan 2015c.

¹² See in particular McCormack 2007.

carefully crafted image of an ethnically homogeneous country is constantly being debunked. Japan has become more diverse in every possible aspect of its society.

Making Japan Cool

In this complex situation falls the creation of the *Cool Japan* brand which, essentially, goes back to an article by Douglas McGray of the year 2002, *Japan's Gross National Cool*, in which he elaborated on Japan's cultural coolness and its attractiveness abroad in spite of its ailing economy (McGray 2002). Using the terminology of political scientist Joseph Nye, soft power grants the ability to convince other countries of one's own superiority through cultural means rather than military power. Or, to put it into Nye's own words: "A country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries – admiring its values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness – want to follow it. In this sense, it is also important to set the agenda and attract others in world politics, and not only to force them to change by threatening military force or economic sanctions" (Nye 2005, p. 5). In that sense, Japan suddenly emerged as 'cool', as possessing a great deal of soft power, even though it took several years for the government to make this perceived cultural coolness government policy and set aside money to support the propagation of Japanese (popular) culture abroad (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry Japan (METI) 2011, Creative Industries Division, Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry Japan (METI) 2012 and Valaskivi 2013). The idea of soft power has been compelling for many a nation state and its politicians ever since its conception. Nation-branding, namely to convey a certain image of a country to the outside world in order to be more attractive for investors and tourists, has become increasingly prevalent in the 21st century. It is arguably also responsible for the consumption of popular culture of said country abroad (Valaskivi 2013, Iwabuchi 2015). *Cool Britannia*, in the case of the UK in the late 1990s, was one such attempt at branding a state to not just forge inner coherence, but also to represent oneself as cool. A country headed by a young, charismatic Prime Minister (Tony Blair), producing great popular culture and always worth a visit was what was being shown to the rest of the world. The rest of Europe was looking forward to a more inclusive Great Britain, happily consuming Britpop and British films. Whether it was this, or using the Union flag as a fashion icon, things British for a short while became more popular in the world (Freedman 1998). Similarly, the Japanese government is aiming to brand the country – and its popular culture – as cool. While, arguably, anyone and anything runs the risk of losing coolness if they self-proclaim to be cool (Graves 2011, cited from Otmazgin 2013, p. 176), at the moment, it is quite a buzzword, particularly with respect to the Tokyo Olympic Games in 2020. Purposefully cashing in on the popularity of Japanese popular culture around the globe, Japan appears as a fascinating country with a rich

traditional culture as well as a vibrant popular culture. Outputs of Japan's creative industries, mainly anime and manga are translated and consumed abroad, and stand alongside Japanese cuisine which is marketed as healthy and delicious, giving longevity. All this contributes to Japan's image abroad. Japanese cuisine has even recently found recognition in the UNESCO accepting *washoku*¹³ as World Heritage, giving it the same status as French cuisine. However, it is defined as follows: "Washoku is a social practice based on a set of skills, knowledge, practice and traditions related to the production, processing, preparation and consumption of food. It is associated with an essential spirit of respect for nature that is closely related to the sustainable use of natural resources. The basic knowledge and the social and cultural characteristics associated with Washoku are typically seen during New Year celebrations" (UNESCO 2013, n.p.). Although that definition of *washoku* does not include what most Japanese eat on a daily basis, it still is a major success for Japan. At the same time, this as well as *Cool Japan* as a whole helps people forget about the issues surrounding the Fukushima Dai'ichi nuclear power plant by showing only the glittering *tatema*, or forefront, of Japan (Kirsch et al. forthcoming).

But there are also other considerable disadvantages to *Cool Japan*, not just from the perspective of a critical academic, but also from a Japanese perspective. Once a cultural flow has become established, it becomes hard(er) to control. Looking again at Japanese cuisine, the number of Japanese restaurants around the world is increasing on an annual basis, and they promote more than just the narrowly defined *washoku* image. Yet in spite of the popularity of Japanese food, only a fraction of restaurants is actually run by Japanese nationals. Fusion with local tastes also invariably happens. *Cool Japan* and government guidance on 'authenticity' of Japanese cuisine notwithstanding, people will work with an idea, use it, craft it in their own way. And cash in on it.

The same can be said about the flows of Japanese popular culture. While the number of officially translated manga increases steadily, and more and more book shops around the world display them, the consumption of manga is also happening on the internet in a much less controlled and regulated way. While this is not to condone piracy, the role of not-so-legal outlets still cannot be underestimated. As Otmazgin argues, "piracy has diffused culture into the market and has avoided the state's protective shield, and it has been able to facilitate the dissemination of Japan's popular culture both into and within the market" (Otmazgin, 2013, p. 121). Self-published spin-offs of actual series, fanlations¹⁴ into English or other languages,

¹³*Washoku* literally means Japanese food, but is a term normally employed to distinguish Japanese dishes from Chinese, Korean or 'Western' cuisine. It is actually fairly broad in its day-to-day usage.

¹⁴Fanlations is a neologism consisting of the word fan and translation. The term fanlation thus refers to translations made by fans and published on the internet.

circulate freely, are negotiated by fans, looked at, scrutinised. It is not unusual for a young non-Japanese fan of Japanese popular culture to be writing a spin-off of a Japanese manga or anime series, and publish it online, for it to be disseminated, consumed and critiqued among like-minded fans.¹⁵ Murkier channels of the internet, as well as legal ones, do also popularise Japanese television dramas and music. In many respects, it would not be a bold statement to make that Japanese popular culture no longer is 'Japanese'. It has become a global commodity, it is consumed globally, sometimes adapted to local markets, sometimes not. And although websites hosting illegally uploaded Japanese popular culture are usually quickly shut down, they mushroom elsewhere. In any case, the consumption of Japanese popular culture steers mostly away from what the Japanese government can control with the *Cool Japan* brand. While *Cool Japan* might help trigger interest, human nature has it that the search for the ever increasing stimulus also leads away from the desired messages. It will, invariably, lead to people making sense of Japan in their own way.

This leads us to one of the outlets of the *Cool Japan* brand, namely NHK World, the only Japanese channel that can be watched around the world for free and online. Aside from informing audiences about Asia in general, a large share of its programmes does propagate the 'rest of the world's' love for Japanese popular culture. Formats like *cool japan* (which is also aired in Japan and dubbed into English for NHK World) and *Kawaii International* (which is not aired in Japan) do highlight precisely these notions. Young people around the world are represented as imitating the Japanese and consuming Japan. It is shown as desirable to a wider world, yet the binary of 'us Japanese' being consumed and made sense of by 'them foreigners' is not dissolved, but carefully maintained. It is almost as if you are welcome to consume *Cool Japan*, but not to become Japanese. This fits neatly within the concept of cosmetic multiculturalism that Tessa Morris-Suzuki established in the early 2000s, difference is valued and acknowledged as long as it stays within certain tightly circumscribed conditions (Morris-Suzuki 2002).

And here already problems with the concept of soft power in general, and *Cool Japan* in particular, do become apparent. While NHK World does show the sparkling, bright side of the consumption of Japanese popular culture abroad, it does leave out the actual channels of consumption of Japanese popular culture, the internet. *Cool Japan* also seems to be supposed to remain within certain tightly circumscribed conditions – in spite of it being a global commodity that is largely upheld by a global online community. While *Cool Japan* has been successful in putting Japan on a general mindmap of the world, student numbers in Japanese courses are increasing, and Japanese culture events are hosted around the world, this brings us back to the starting point, hard politics and the challenges that Japan is

¹⁵ For this, see particularly the research by Simon Turner – accessible on Academia.edu.

facing. Similarly to *Cool Britannia*, which quickly lost momentum in the wake of the *War on Terror*, and the end of Tony Blair's by then no longer 'cool' time in government,¹⁶ *Cool Japan* might face the same challenge – not to lose momentum in the face of hard politics. Immigration, and the way immigrants are being dealt with, historical and territorial disputes might easily 'cool off' Japan. Although the awarding of the Tokyo Olympic Games does give some recognition to Japan and will potentially also provide momentum for *Cool Japan*, the danger that hard politics might also take over is immanent.

Maintaining the Coolness

As if to counter those notions, the Japanese government is planning to open 'Japan Houses' around the world in which "Japanese culture such as 'washoku' cuisine, 'washi' handmade paper, manga and anime as well as traditional craft techniques and advanced technologies [are showcased]" (Anon 2014a, n.p.). Significantly, according to the *Japan Times*, London, Los Angeles and São Paulo are the first targets for Japan Houses, cities in countries with which Japan has no major disputes. Even though *Cool Japan* targets the whole world, including Japan's Asian neighbours that have, as Iwabuchi Koichi (2002, 2015) has elucidated, a long history of consumption of the Japanese popular culture, the Japan House seems to be a propaganda mechanism targeted at Western countries, at least in the initial steps. Or, to cite an unnamed ministry official along the *Japan Times*, it is "aimed at laying the groundwork for winning international understanding of Japan" (Anon 2015, n.p.). Should the initiative be successful, Hong Kong, Jakarta and Istanbul are next on the list (Anon 2015). Although the latter batch also includes Asian cities, arguably, Indonesia and Turkey have more friendly relations with Japan, and Hong Kong has long served as a gateway to China and thus proves perfect testing ground for this kind of initiative. Yet, it first has to be successful in Los Angeles, London and São Paulo.

That said, the Japan Houses might also serve the purpose of disseminating desired messages about Japan, linking them in with *Cool Japan* and providing another outlet for Japanese (popular) culture. This brings us back to the consumption of Japanese popular culture – while desired messages, much in line with the now derided *nihonjinron* of the 20th century, are definitely put 'out there', it does not always mean that the same stimulus leads to the desired response at the receiving end.¹⁷ While back then, some *nihonjinron* might have been written to explain Japan,

¹⁶ On the demise of *Cool Britannia* see for example Urban 2004 or Jones and Smith 2006.

¹⁷ The notion of stimulus and response was one of the key theories in media studies at the time of their conception. Harold Lasswell's paper "The Theory of Propaganda" (Lasswell 1927) defined the influence that the media had on a populace of a state in those terms, elucidating that the people could thus be guided. Since then, the theoretical approach to media influenced has changed and it

they also contributed to painting Japan as exclusive and hard to understand. These days, Japan might want to cash in on its perceived uniqueness, but because of the 'us and them' dichotomy, the admiration might fade in the face of hard politics. And other media around the world are also not as easily silenced – the way the Abe administration has been dealing with the Japanese media has led to the German chancellor Angela Merkel deliberately addressing Japan's issues with its wartime past at the headquarters of the left-wing *Asahi Shimbun* during her state visit to Japan in April 2015 – which could thus be perceived as a criticism towards the perceived suppression of Freedom of Press Japan.¹⁸ Also, the Japanese attempt to prevent an American textbook from including a supposedly inaccurate text on comfort women made headlines around the world (McCurry 2015, Yoshida 2015). All this paints a different picture from what *Cool Japan*, NHK World and the Japan Houses of the future may want the world to think about Japan. The Tokyo Olympic Games in 2020, *Cool Japan*, and, although for a different reason, Fukushima, have put Japan firmly on the global map. And being on that map means being subject to international examination. Like with the consumption of *Cool Japan*, messages and outlets cannot be controlled, and people within Japan and outside of Japan will continue making sense of Japan in their own way. As a result of losing a fairly exotic status, the world might stop 'loving' Japan if it does not stand up to scrutiny. And particularly other Asian countries might stop 'loving' Japan as historical and territorial issues pick up momentum. As soon as hard politics tries to influence soft politics, the soft power initiatives may run the danger of backfiring, risking that Japan might, eventually, become 'uncool'.

CONCLUSIONS

So, what are the challenges that Japan faces? In spite of the discovery of soft power, there is actually a soft power war going on, and many countries try to use it for their own ends. South Korea is not asleep either – and often much more relaxed when it comes to making use of the internet. For example, the song *Gangnam Style* by Psy became a world-wide phenomenon that spread initially through *YouTube* before reaching mainstream media, and it contributed greatly to the emergence of South Korea on the global map of popular culture.¹⁹ The internet thus poses challenge and opportunity at the same time. Just as the Korean Wave helps South Korea's image in the world and is welcomed, furthered and upheld by the economy

is now established knowledge that there is no direct influence on the audience through media consumption. However, the discourses of stimulus and response will recurrently come up again, particularly if the consumption of the media is seen to have led to criminal acts.

¹⁸ On Angela Merkel's visit to the *Asahi Shimbun* see Hanefeld 2015.

¹⁹ As of 13 September 2015, 11:52am, *Gangnam Style* has been watched 2,412,242,341 times on *YouTube* (OfficialPsy 2015). In December 2014, *Gangnam Style* also exceeded the click limit on *YouTube*, forcing the provider to up the highest possible number of views possible (Anon 2014b).

as well as the political establishment in South Korea,²⁰ *Cool Japan* could help Japan. Yet it is also essentially a nationalistic project,²¹ with the downside of freezing Japan at a certain point in time, highlighting some aspects of Japanese culture, omitting others, much like the *nihonjinron* of the past century, just with a slightly different image of Japan. While increased immigration provides the opportunity to engage with other Asian countries in a way never possible before, dichotomies continue to persist and remain carefully upheld in programmes such as *cool japan*. Cool or not, Japan remains an exotic, slightly incomprehensible Other.

In addition, historical issues, although so far largely outside of *Cool Japan*, continue to rule the present to a large extent. The world is an ever evolving place, societies change, priorities shift. And the creative industries as well as tourism are fast-moving markets. Should hard politics be too much in the way of soft power, allegiances of fans can quickly shift. *Cool Britannia* faded in the wake of the *War on Terror*. *Cool Japan* might be overshadowed by the historical disputes. South Korea is already at the heels of Japan, overtaking it by the sheer force of its own soft power. With Korea's glittering, modern, image, Japan's old temples and 2D animation may suddenly seem backward and outdated. When long before McGray's paper (McGray 2002), the fashion magazine *Elle Japon* titled in 1997 that "Asia love[d] Japan" (Iwabuchi 2002, p. 190, Anon 1997, p. 40) and meant the sudden increase in the consumption of Japanese popular culture (Anon 1997, Iwabuchi 2002) – this statement does no longer ring true, as the increasing prominence of Korean popular culture shows.²²

Even though Japan's interaction and position in the world also depends on its neighbours in Asia, it does remain in an insular position within the continent. Literally so, but also figuratively speaking. When Iwabuchi elucidated, "Japan's modern national identity has [...] always been imagined in an asymmetrical totalizing triad between 'Asia', 'the West,' and 'Japan'" (2002, p. 7), this remains true to this day. The target for *Cool Japan* seems to be pre-dominantly the West, and the biggest charm offensive – the Japan Houses will first be tested there. However, Japan's biggest challenge for the 21st century seems to be that Japan needs to first and foremost balance its position in Asia, vis-à-vis its giant neighbour China, and vis-à-vis South Korea that is running its own charm offensive. Japan no longer is the most advanced state within Asia, and neither China nor Korea will let it easily off the hook when it comes to tackling issues arising out of the Second World War, no

²⁰ On the impact of the Korean Wave in Japan see Mōri (ed.) 2004 and Hayashi 2005. On the Korean Wave around the world, see Iwabuchi and Chua (eds.) 2008, Kim 2013 as well as Hong 2014.

²¹ The notion that nation branding is as much a domestic project as it is an external relations one has also been raised by Varga 2013.

²² See Kim 2013 as well as Hong 2014.

matter how long the war is in the past. Because of Japan no longer being the most advanced country in Asia, tropes of superiority and the nostalgic gaze towards modernising Asia mentioned before, do no longer hold true and partners, or opponents, at eye-level will ask more of Japan. It thus needs to find its position in Asia, all the while straddling the gap between an increasing interaction with Asia on all levels and a political gaze into the other direction – the USA. The soft power of *Cool Japan* can help, but it cannot be the only way for Japan to live up to its own aspirations, within Asia, and in the global context.

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