

A short research report by Marco Pellitteri for JSPS Alumni Association in Europe

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My main research topic and goal has been to survey, analyse and measure the relationships between the success of Japanese contemporary media- and popular cultures in the European context, and the ways in which the notions on Japan as a nation and as a people (in the public opinion and the mainstream media) have possibly changed, under the influence of the spreading of Japanese contemporary media- and popular cultures.

By “Japanese media- and popular cultures” I mainly refer to Japanese comics (*manga*) and Japanese commercial animation (*anime*). By “European context” I refer to a group of selected countries which my research has been focusing upon: Italy, France, Spain, Germany, Switzerland, Slovenia, Poland, and Hungary. In these countries, with different but comparable time lines (roughly, from the mid-1970s to nowadays), Japanese anime first, and manga afterwards, have been marketed and have prospered. Their success among youths has been remarkable, especially since the 1980s. Their media coverage has also been an interesting phenomenon, and this has had a certain impact. The “flavour” of such influence varies from country to country and involves a quantity of cultural factors.

Another aspect of my research was to record and measure the mutual influences between the images of Japanese popular culture at large and Japan as a national context. I measure such differences both among manga- and anime fans from one side, and among a more general population (people who are not at all into manga and anime) from another side.

Through this research, I will also be able to say something on the concept of “soft power”: a notion that is very popular today among people in the Japanese government and especially at MEXT, and that has been one of the reasons why the Japanese government has decided to ignite the “Cool Japan” initiatives of cultural promotion overseas. One of my major points here is that Japan’s alleged “soft power” is, in practical terms, much lower and limited than many tend to (or want to) believe. Practically speaking, this means that probably the “Cool Japan” committees could or should consider, for the close future, using different cultural strategies and sections of Japanese national culture if they want to make good use of the immense cultural heritage of Japan. I am inclined to think that the consultancy of foreign experts could only do good to these policies.

As for what concerns life in Japan: I would suggest to be prepared to the fact that Japan lives well also without you, and that you must accept that, with some humility. My advice is: if you realize that you are mostly complaining about Japan, you have two solutions, either you leave and go back to your country, or you change your attitude.

That said, I would suggest to learn some Japanese before and during the research period in Japan, and trying to have as many Japanese acquaintances (colleagues, friends, drink buddies) as possible, so to improve your language skills.

Also, assume a *zen* attitude towards bureaucracy and paperwork. They can be frustrating at times, and administration staff do not speak English as a rule. But if you are kind and patient, and follow the rules thoroughly showing respect for the system (however complicated and “twisted” it can at times appear to a foreigner), the administration people will become a great asset for your research to proceed smoothly in all the technical aspects: travel reimbursements, budget allocation, and so forth.

Final tip: if you come from a country where manners are very casual, please consider that in Japan manners are taken into great consideration. “In Rome do as the Romans do”. Be kind and polite, both in substantial and in formal terms, even if sometimes you think you are in a hurry or a sick of these apparently complicated social formulas. Your Japanese colleagues and friends will appreciate this very much, and will remember.

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