

COOL OPTIMISM

When the renowned political scientist Joseph Nye introduced his now-famous concept “soft power,” he was insisting on the prematurity of reports of US decline. By the late 1980s—with the struggling manufacturing base and the seemingly inexorable rise of commercial powerhouses such as Japan and West Germany—faith in American dominance had dimmed considerably, even as Ronald Reagan’s sunny optimism had ostensibly rescued the country from Jimmy Carter’s malaise and the despondent legacies of the Vietnam War. The problem was not the Soviet Union, visibly hobbled by calcified leadership, economic mismanagement, and the disastrous consequences of the Afghanistan war and the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. It was instead the dynamism of other parts of the globe—particularly those under US military protection—that seemed likely to displace US economic leadership. Throughout this era, top scholars such as Charles Kindleberger, Robert Keohane, and Robert Gilpin focused extensively on “hegemonic stability theory,” the view that a major power like the United States would pay disproportionate costs for the

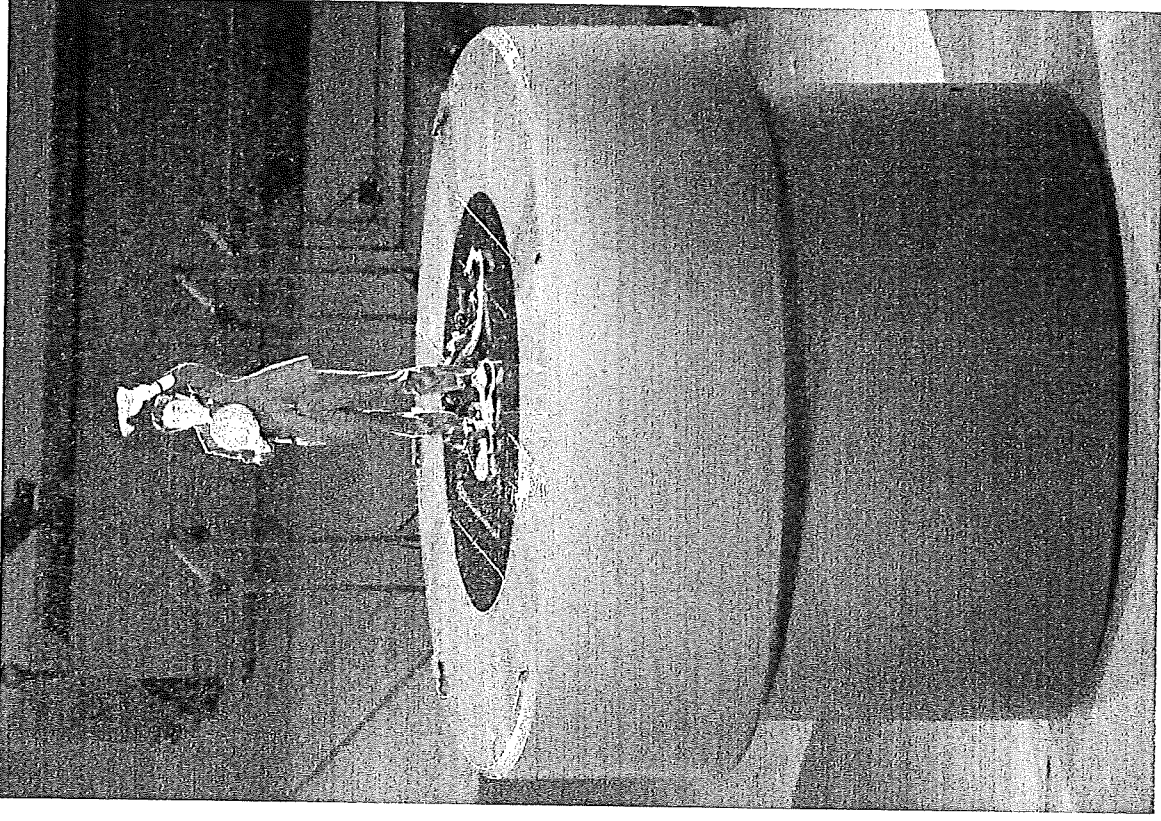


Figure 4.1. Prime Minister Abe Shinzō removing his Super Mario costume at the closing games of the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro

Source: The Mainichi Newspapers

maintenance of an open trading system that provided even greater benefits to other states. Paul Kennedy's sprawling and widely read popular history *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* nearly positioned America, then paying for a global military presence that preserved an international order advantageous to its competitors as well, to go the way of the Habsburgs and the British empire. Through retrospectively predictable miscalculation, the United States had, according to these influential observers, made itself vulnerable to the kinds of overcommitments to an old economic order that left it comparatively uncompetitive in the next.

This popular and academic concern with national decline prefigured, of course, Japan's later anxieties about the burst of the 1980s bubble and the lost decades that followed, and it is not entirely coincidental. After all, Japan loomed large in US images of national decline: the technologically advanced, economically nationalistic country whose power remained an "enigma"¹ and could fill the prodigious imagination of novelist Michael Crichton, whose novel *Rising Sun* (1992) depicted a Japan nearly as menacing as the dinosaurs in his 1990 book, *Jurassic Park*. International relations scholars themselves contributed to the impression of Japan as the beneficiary of American misjudgments, with Richard Rosecrance's 1986 book *The Rise of the Trading State* and Hanns Maull's widely cited 1990 article on "civilian powers" both routinely appearing on political science syllabi.² It is easy in retrospect to view these as misjudgments but important as well to remember the popular and intellectual pervasiveness of a story of US decline and Japanese ascent: a story that was deeply meaningful in both countries.

Nye, first in a 1990 article and then in his ominously titled 1991 book *Bound to Lead*, argued that the United States would avoid the predicted fate in part because of its rich endowment of a resource he called "soft power," the power to persuade rather than the power to coerce. For Nye, the issue was not just about the United States; it was instead about the nature of power in a radically changing global system. And so "soft power" would be a driving force in the future, and for the time being, only the United States had it in abundance. For Nye, part of this appeal derived from US cultural and commercial influences overseas, especially when they in some way encoded American values of democracy, liberalism, and tolerance. This resembled Yale political scientist Bruce Russett's earlier contention that US popular culture—the global role of blue jeans, rock and

roll, and the like—provided the United States with power resources that were blurry and yet very real.³ Nye specifically argued that Japan would not be able to compete with US power because it, unlike the United States, had limited military clout, had little control over global communications, and accepted few immigrants, an important feature of US power that not only convinced outsiders of America's benign intentions but also allowed easier cross-border pooling of ideas, good will, and common sense. For Nye, Japan was "deficient" in "global ideological appeal."⁴ In the face of Japan's emergence as a potential economic challenger to US hegemony, recognizing soft power was a way to recalibrate the expectation of US decline.

Nye's solution has long outlasted the initial problem. Even after the United States rebounded to become unquestionably the world's only superpower, was christened a "hyperpower,"⁵ and seemed to stand astride the globe as a colossus, the idea of "soft power" snowballed, continuing to animate domestic debates while finding itself increasingly embedded in the foreign policy proposals and initiatives of many of the countries against which US soft power was supposed to have worked. This development has attracted critical scholarly attention, including the recognition that soft power is unintelligible without some consideration of emotion or affect. After all, the power to persuade was not based primarily on superior US logic and deployment of evidence, or persuasiveness in the sense of an academic article; it was instead something akin to attractiveness, with other people liking the United States or its values and therefore accepting its foreign policy proposals because of their emotional connection to their source.⁶ And so the rapid uptick in the early 2000s in Japanese interest in soft power, a resource that some influential observers in Japan had previously argued would prove to be unattainable, bears scrutiny for what it might tell us about Japanese conceptions of the country's regional and global roles.

Although "soft power" remains a buzzword in Japanese international relations debates, particularly with regard to digital content industries and public diplomacy, its heyday was in the early 2000s, when a consensus began to emerge among myriad commentators and writers around the expectation that recession-struck Japan was about to turn a corner in terms of global status.⁷ In the latter half of the decade, scholars and writers sometimes celebrated Japan's transnational success in popular culture⁸ and frequently analyzed it dispassionately to

point out its effects and limits.⁹ Some then turned against the whole idea of “Cool Japan,” in part because of the gap between government enthusiasm over the concept and the ossified distribution systems and inadequate marketing that would limit its appeal to the hardest-core fans.¹⁰ One of the elements that makes Ian Condry’s 2006 book *Hip-Hop Japan* so successful and important is his imaginative treatment of cultural globalization in a manner that highlights the difficulty of ascribing artistic products to individual nations while also respecting the imminent creativity of the artists.¹¹

The most sustained and thoughtful work on the government’s handling of “Cool Japan,” Daniel White’s 2011 dissertation for Rice University’s Department of Anthropology, assesses the complex ways in which affective connections to national status and to pop culture commodities are transformed, through the organs of policy itself, into emotional concerns and declarations. White’s analysis covers a wide array of governmental and semigovernmental strategies, including the development of Japan’s “cute ambassador” programs in the 2000s. Shrewdly drawing from cultural theories of affect and emotion and from the sometimes bewildering, sometimes poignant efforts of Japanese bureaucrats to promote national status, he leaves little doubt that claims about soft power are designed at least as much to provide local emotional legitimacy as to analyze a country’s resources in terms of friends and foes alike.¹²

This chapter tackles the “soft power” debates of the early 2000s, using literary theorist Lauren Berlant’s conception of “cruel optimism” to offer clues that tie the emotional elements of soft power debates to a larger national narrative about Japan and its global status. In doing so, it links debates about international relations to obvious and transparent national narratives, focusing on their consequences for policy. The chapter’s goal is not to drive another nail into the analytical coffin of “Cool Japan” but rather to show how a national narrative not only infuses views of a country’s past but also shapes visceral and pervasive judgments of its future. After all, the Japan that became cool was the one that was in the process of shedding its uncool roots, even those ostensibly responsible for much of its vaunted postwar success. And it was because of this coolness, and the soft power it would provide, that Japan’s global status would return to its rightful place: a country not just respected but also loved.

Japanese Popular Culture in Asia

How influential had Japanese popular culture become internationally in the early-2000s heyday of “Cool Japan”? Because of the diversity of the industries involved—music, magazines, films, broadcast television, video games, and cellular phone content, to name but a few—no one has yet compiled a comprehensive statistical account, let alone provided a compelling way to disentangle Japanese cultural products from the many transnational flows emanating from other Asian nations, the United States, and Europe.¹³ Even the Japanese government has thus far been stymied in its efforts to determine precisely how large the trade in cultural goods has become. As a consequence, the information available is primarily illustrative and anecdotal, and usually slanted in a direction designed either to indicate that “cool” Japan dominates the region or that “passé” Japan has already been eclipsed by other sources of cultural power in the region.

For example, popular music was one arena in which Japanese artists clearly broke ground during the 1990s.¹⁴ Although the popular Japanese acts in the United States and Europe were usually alternative groups such as Shonen Knife, which had devoted cult but not mass followings in Japan, Asian markets rapidly embraced “J-pop” singers. In 1996 the trio Dreams Come True managed to sell 100,000 copies of its album *Love Unlimited* in Taiwan, where, like South Korea, Japanese popular music had actually faced legal restrictions for decades.¹⁵ In 1998 Singapore began a new FM station dedicated to J-pop (though mainly aimed at the city-state’s Japanese expatriates), and by 2000 the girl group Puffy (known in the US market as “Puffy Ami-Yumi” because of copyright concerns involving rap impresario Sean “Puffy” Combs) sold 200,000 albums in Asia.¹⁶ Already extremely successful in Taiwan and somewhat so in Hong Kong, the Japanese music industry was clearly delighted in 2000 when the South Korean government lifted a restriction against the sale of Japanese pop there, provided that the lyrics were not in Japanese,¹⁷ which presaged further liberalizing moves in 2003.¹⁸ Music industry experts, however, quickly realized that Korean popular music—which more seamlessly blends hip-hop influences and relies on authentically multilingual band members—would overtake J-pop in Asia.¹⁹

As they have for many of the past thirty years, Japanese video games faced mixed success in the Asia-Pacific region. Although Nintendo had become the global video game champion, originally riding arcade games such as *Super Mario Brothers* to success, it has faced intense competition in the crucially important home video console market. The Sony PlayStation and PlayStation2 (also Japanese) performed far ahead of competing console lines (such as Nintendo's GameCube and the Microsoft X-Box, America's main entry in the market), but sales were limited in Asia because of Sony's concerns with the probability of software piracy.²⁰ The money in video games usually comes not from the consoles—often sold at a loss—but rather from specific software lines or game franchises, so the threat of license and copyright violation is especially daunting to a fast-moving industry working on razor-thin margins.²¹ Moreover, the video game software was far from exclusively Japanese, with American firms Electronic Arts and Activision and France's Ubisoft playing important roles. Even where the hardware was available, the threat of software piracy was large enough to have restricted software distribution, so sales in Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan remained limited.²² Moreover, console games represented an expensive market even before the rise of streaming and mobile content ate into the dominance that Playstations, GameCubes, and Xboxes had briefly enjoyed. That also limited the appeal of Japan's leading console systems in most Asian nations, privileging less expensive online gaming in which Japan was competing with software developers elsewhere.²³

At times, Japan's live-action television programs have been extraordinarily popular in Asia. Japanese television dramas have played to large audiences in Southeast Asia, notably in Singapore and Thailand, but they left an especially large impression on China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Particularly in the mid-1990s, Japan's limited-run dramas (which usually continue for approximately ten to twelve episodes, as opposed to US programs, which generally go off the air only after wearing out their welcome) impressed Asian viewers with their high production values, the accessible beauty of their young casts, and the putative realism of their narratives.²⁴ Like J-pop, these dramas would largely be overtaken by Korean programs in the 2000s.

And so the undoubted champion in Japan's pop culture team around the world, especially in Asia, has long been anime. Although US animated films continue to dominate the American box office, television revenues in

the United States and around the Pacific Rim have painted a strikingly different picture. With *Pokémon*, *Sailor Moon*, *Dragon Ball Z*, and *Digimon*, Japanese animation creators had achieved extraordinary global success by the 1990s in part because of their ability to adapt their programs for overseas markets. By some estimates, Japan was the source of 60 percent of the world's animated television programming by the early 2000s, and annual sales of anime-related licensed goods (action figures, trading cards, etc.) were estimated in 2003 to be roughly \$17 billion.²⁵ Although anime has been extraordinarily popular throughout Asia, licensed goods sales were, by the early 2000s, especially heavy in the United States and Japan. Bandai, one of the leading licensed-goods manufacturers, wrote in 2002 that "our business activities in Asia center on the production of toys in Hong Kong, Thailand and elsewhere. . . . [These products are] destined for the parent company in Japan and overseas sales subsidiaries."²⁶ Of course, on the streets of Shanghai or Hong Kong, one could easily buy dolls and action figures modeled after Japanese anime characters, but these unlicensed goods resulted in no proceeds for Bandai and the other Japanese firms.

The changing composition of film cast and crew may be the best symbol of newly integrated entertainment markets in the Asia-Pacific. The earlier primacy of Hong Kong films in the region, especially with the long-term success of stars such as Jackie Chan and Andy Lau, long made the territory the regional industry capital, but Japanese and Korean firms have also clearly seen the possibilities afforded by joint productions featuring multinational casts. Director Wong Kar-Wai's use of half-Japanese, half-Taiwanese Kanchiro Takeshi in his *Chungking Express* and *Fallen Angels* certainly improved their marketability in Tokyo, especially with moments like the *Chungking Express* scene in which the multilingual charmer attempts to pick a woman up by using two Chinese dialects along with Japanese and English. Wong's 2004 science fiction film 2046 includes a performance by Japanese superstar Kimura Takuya alongside pan-Asian superstars such as Tony Leung and Zhang Ziyi. Kimura's bandmate from the group SMAP, Kusanagi Tsuyoshi, learned Korean specifically to break into the Korean television and film market, and he appeared in a Korean-language Japanese film, *Hotel Venus*, based on his popular television program, *Chonan Kan*.²⁷ And the Korean action film 2009 *Lost Memories* posits an alternate future in which Japan completely dominates Asia, but even in this brazenly nationalistic film we see Japanese star Nakamura

Tōru as one of the film's leads, which became a crucial marketing element for Tokyo theaters. Here, straightforward box-office considerations have pushed directors to reach across borders to attract recognizable talent, producers to find acceptable cross-border themes, and stars to learn new languages to help them stay on top.

During Japan's Cool Japan craze, the widely acknowledged zenith of the country's pop culture success overseas was the 2002 Academy Award victory for Miyazaki Hayao's *Spirited Away*. Having earned more than \$150 million at the Japanese box office, it became the top-grossing film in Japanese history, beating the record previously held by *Titanic*.²⁸ *Spirited Away* had a successful run in Asia, especially with more than a million tickets sold in South Korea, and ultimately earned more than \$260 million in global ticket sales.²⁹ Even more widely reported in Japan, however, was the film's extraordinary critical acclaim, symbolized by its winning the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature. Even so, in the United States its \$10 million in revenues was easily outdistanced by those of its competitors for the Oscar: *Ice Age* (\$176 million) and *Lilo & Stitch* (\$145 million).³⁰ Of course, box-office receipts and television ratings do not necessarily tell us much about influence in popular culture. As has been widely noted, many popular Japanese dramas and other commodities are popular as black-market, pirated discs, suggesting that the measurements themselves may be wildly imprecise.³¹ Pop culture markets, moreover, are extraordinarily ineffective at measuring the effect, let alone quality, of a given creative effort.

My point here is simply that Japan was and remains extremely important, though never hegemonic, in Asian popular culture, at least as far as the conflicting data allow one to determine. But one might have been forgiven for reading a great deal into the success of anime, video games, and J-pop, particularly in the late 1990s and early 2000s, in that moment when anime attracted substantial Western attention and K-pop was still a mostly national phenomenon. Significantly, the popularity of Japan's cultural products was internationally noted in a moment that Japanese seemingly had little else to cheer about. If Japanese entertainment industries really were remaking Asia and the world, they would have represented a ray of hope in an otherwise bleak landscape of national collapse. Japan's overall cultural weight from the era was open to debate, but Japanese excitement about it was understandable.

The Craze about the Japanese Popular Culture Craze

Until the Cool Japan wave hit, most of the theorizing about Japanese popular culture and entertainment came from researchers concerned with Japanese leisure practices that might shed light on everyday structures regarding gender, class, sexuality, and power.³² Japanese intellectuals and opinion magazines began to focus more assiduously on the spread of the country's popular culture in the 1990s. At the height of the *Power Rangers* craze, a 1994 issue of *Gaikō Foramu* (Diplomatic Forum), then published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, included an article on the increasing popularity of Japanese popular culture and the country's place as a leader of a "new Asian civilization."³³ In a 1997 paper, Saya Shi-raishi examined the cultural meanings of the popular anime *Doraemon*, which was shown throughout Southeast Asia.³⁴ And in a special collection on Japanese culture in a globalizing era, the left-leaning opinion monthly *Sekai* included studies of Japan's consumer society and its effects on artistic creativity, Japanese cultural products and their indigenization by Asian consumers, and Chinese audiences' use of Japanese television programs and magazines to learn about life outside of China.³⁵ In these articles the focus was not on Japanese influence *per se* but rather on patterns of globalization that can alter both the efforts of artists and the experiences of the audiences.

The *Sekai* issue, however, also includes a fascinating and instructive conversation between musician Kina Shōkichi (sometimes described to English-speaking audiences as an Okinawan Bob Marley because of his musical talent, his political messages, and his ability to blend popular music with "authentic" sounds from an exotic island) and the Korean-Japanese activist and commentator Shin Sugok. Covering gender relations, ethnic conflict, sexual fetishes for mothers (*mazakon*) and young girls (*yorikon*, although they do not use the term), Kina and Shin address the possibility that Japan's post-bubble economic funk will open up space for new diversity, creativity, and openness. Shin in particular stresses that the collapse of traditional authority structures in the post-bubble era may open up space for alternative voices that have implicitly been left out of long-standing rhetoric about what Japanese culture is.³⁶

Though expressing this in terms harsher than many subsequent commentators would use, Shin nicely captures a developing sense among

scholars and observers that Japanese popular culture has become exciting, fast-paced, and active specifically because the obliteration of "traditional" structures has somehow opened the floodgates for pent-up creative urges. And yet the main consumers of these urges were, until their sudden elevation in the midst of the Cool Japan craze, the least likely heroes for Japan: the *otaku* (nerds). Journalist Nakamori Akio has been credited with creating the term, which generally refers to hard-core anime and manga fans with few social skills and even fewer professional and personal prospects. In 1989 the term took on a sinister new meaning with the arrest of child molester and murderer Miyazaki Tsutomu in Kobe, where police found that he owned a vast number of pornographic comics and videos.³⁷ The term, however, has become more widespread, losing some of its stigma along the way, particularly with the publication of Azuma Hiroshi's justly famed cultural critique *Otaku*.³⁸

By all accounts, Japan's current cultural vitality would have been unimaginable without the *otaku*, the term's earlier pejorative connotations notwithstanding. The painter Murakami Takashi, perhaps the most important spokesperson for the contemporary aesthetic that fuels Japanese popular culture, famously allied himself with the *otaku*. Building an artistic movement based on his "superflat" conception, Murakami has argued that Japanese art is simultaneously two-dimensional and lacking in perspective, similar to Japanese visual traditions (flat), and also compressed, crowded, and devoid of meaning (superflat). Murakami's sculptures reflect this view with caricatured versions of Japanese pop culture icons, and his own *otaku*-staffed studio has famously blurred the line between high art and commercialized icons.³⁹ Just as he appears to be critical of an overly commercialized society that compresses meaning through the proliferation of mass-produced junk, he also embraces the contemporary aesthetic that it generates. The superflat conception is important not because it is in any sense self-evidently true but rather because it briefly became a unifying theme among many in Japan's contemporary arts business.⁴⁰

The Japan depicted in these accounts is a dissonant, postmodern mess, yet all the more appealing for it. Shin's view of the breakdown of traditional authority implicitly lies at the center because of the self-conscious way in which marginalized groups—*otaku*, ostentatiously sexualized schoolgirls, foreigners—play a role. And it calls attention to a central aspect of the Cool Japan discussions: that the postwar Japan of

state-industry collaboration for national growth, of idealized salarymen and their multigeneration families living in harmonious homes raising the next generation of loyal contributors to the shared fruits of Japanese development, had fallen like Icarus. In its ashes was a New Japan, a collection of free-spirited artists and creators who would have struggled in the salaryman landscape but were now celebrated for their iconoclastic vision and refusal to follow the established path. To an extent, of course, this general proposition dramatically overstates social change in Japan, just as earlier views of orderly, white-collar Japan badly missed how marginalized groups handled life in a society that ideally would not have them. But this celebration of Japan's seemingly anarchic popular culture appeared to be possible only because of wide consensus that there was something topsy-turvy in 1990s Japan. The losers were winning, and they were changing Japan along the way.

It was into this environment that journalist Douglas McGray stepped in 2001, working on a grant from the Japan Society. As a researcher in Tokyo, McGray spent time with the popular arts community, interviewing key figures (including Yamaguchi Yuko, designer of Sanrio's "Hello Kitty") and trying to understand how conservative, stodgy, and ultimately depressed Japan was responsible for vibrant and popular culture products embraced by consumers around Asia. Often overstating the extent of Japan's domination of Asian markets (after all, the success of one or two singers in Taiwan does not make for a regional J-pop boom, particularly when compared to K-pop's success), McGray argued in *Foreign Policy* that Japan was likely to remain powerful and important because it was a lifestyle leader, able to generate consumption and social patterns elsewhere because of its local artistic creativity. In his famous formulation, Japan would achieve a kind of soft power because of its "Gross National Cool."⁴¹

Clearly aiming to seize upon a trend that was catching the eye of its local readers, *Time* magazine's Asian edition published a special issue with the cover "Cool Japan." Referring frequently to McGray's thesis about post-bubble Japan's position as the cultural touchstone for the rest of Asia, *Time*'s feature story emphasized that Japan's facility in popular culture would be part of a larger shift toward service industries, thereby offsetting the hollowing out of Japan's manufacturing base and some of its less competitive sectors.⁴² In shorter pieces, *Time*'s writers provided glowing vignettes and studies of the creative forces behind Japan's transition:

construction magnate Mori Minoru, filmmaker Kore-eda Hirokazu, and Minister of State for Economic and Fiscal Policy Takenaka Heizō. Collectively, the *Time* articles address Japanese change, making punk bands, anime, skyscrapers, and neoliberal economics part of the same general trend toward Japanese rejuvenation. And all of it is “cool.”

Although Japanese scholars of international relations doubtless knew of “soft power” shortly after Nye coined the term in the late 1980s, few used it with regard to Japan until McGray’s article appeared. Only America, in the eyes of the few Japanese observers interested in discussing it, had soft power. In 2001, before becoming minister of state for economic and fiscal policy, Takenaka—then a professor at Keio University—edited a volume on the possible development of “soft power” for Japan. Takenaka’s introduction deals with soft power cautiously, arguing that for historical and linguistic reasons, the United States has soft power resources that would likely remain elusive for Japan. But he also suggests that Japanese economic reform can pave the way toward a more vibrant economy that will once again shape other countries’ plans and expectations.⁴³ Other authors in the collection address more straightforwardly the issue of popular culture and soft power. Kamiya Mataka of National Defense University takes seriously Nye’s judgment regarding the importance of shared values, not just the spread of American commodities; he argues that *Pokémon* and other Japanese anime exports will not lead to greater soft power. Instead, he locates Japan’s likely soft power in its ability to reform its economy and then take a more active and open role in global politics.⁴⁴ The renowned anthropologist Aoki Tamotsu writes nearly with despair about the uselessness of pop culture in promoting soft power; even though European children watch *Pokémon*, Japanese studies centers are shrinking, and Japan seems not to be in vogue as a topic or a country.⁴⁵ The book, in retrospect, provides little optimism, particularly when compared with McGray’s article only a year or so later.

And so the popularization of the term owes far more to McGray than to Takenaka and colleagues, partly because of McGray’s cleverness with his “Gross National Cool” phrasing but largely because he is American. Indeed, vocal approval from Americans seems to have been extraordinarily important to current Japanese discussions of the role of their popular culture, far beyond any measurable economic impact. The *Spirited Away* phenomenon—which coincided with McGray’s piece—captures

this perfectly. Although the movie’s American and even global box-office receipts were relatively modest, its Academy Award victory (which followed unanimous and rich critical acclaim) was widely used in Japanese policy discourse to suggest that Japan has arrived. Combined with the staggering popularity of *Pokémon* and other anime in the West, Miyazaki’s film generated growing interest in Japanese policy circles. Indeed, the Digital Contents White Paper, an annual report published by the METI-affiliated Dejitaru Kontentsu Kyōkai, uses *Spirited Away*’s transnational success as the first and most important example of the changing appreciation for Japanese popular culture.⁴⁶ And “Gross National Cool” captured the Japanese elite imagination in a way that few other recent American articles have. In November 2003, Japan’s leading business newspaper, the *Nikkei Shimbun*, even cosponsored a major symposium featuring McGray and titled “Cool Japan: Japan’s Cultural Power.” As *Time*’s special issue noted, the term “Gross National Cool” was known to virtually every bureaucrat in Japan, with “soft power” usually accompanying their comments.

Culture Policies as “Content” and Power

As a policy idea, improving soft power through cultural promotion empowered certain policy organizations to take steps they otherwise might not have, and also introduced a new potential criterion for evaluating policy success. This is not to say that the drive for soft power was solely or even primarily responsible for creating new policies; instead, it offered new opportunities and rationales for engaging in initiatives that many policy makers had already intended to pursue. After all, government strategies for cultural exchange, information technologies, and tourism hardly began with McGray’s article. As early as 1995, the Culture Agency (*Bunkachō*) created a working group on multimedia and then subsequently produced a 1997 report on “new media arts” for the twenty-first century.⁴⁷ But the sudden excitement about Japan’s “Gross National Cool” provided options for state engagement with recreation and entertainment industries, in some ways allowing administrators to put disquieting (and even frightening) forms of social and economic change to national purpose.

This would hardly be the first time. In the 1980s, with the rapid increase in the value of the yen and subsequent decrease in the cost of overseas

tours, administrators in the Ministry of Transport (later absorbed into the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, and Transport [MLIT]) had projected that Japanese outbound tourism would likely double in only a few years. In some ways, this might have been a terribly undesirable turn of events. After all, the increase in outbound tourism clearly came at some expense to the domestic tourism market, over which the ministry had jurisdiction; Hawaii's gain would be Ishikawa Prefecture's loss. The demographics were also worrisome; with Japanese business and family travel increasing only marginally, much of the outbound travel action came from groups of women—most disconcertingly, unmarried women—traveling overseas. In spite of occasional public outcry about the threat of AIDS and the rumor that Japanese women were traveling to Bali for sex, clever Tourism Bureau members recognized that this change in leisure patterns could just as easily be interpreted as Japan's willingness to redistribute the economic gains from its massive trade surplus, thus promoting international understanding, economic fairness, and open borders all at the same time. Therefore, in 1986 they created the "Ten Million Program," which "aimed" at doubling Japanese outbound tourism to levels that the administrators assumed it would hit with or without their encouragement. By doing so, they were able to justify more access to the national budget and the establishment of new institutions over which they had jurisdiction, two common goals of Japanese policy organizations.⁴⁸

The Gross National Cool/Soft Power initiatives shared with the Ten Million Program an eagerness to embrace social change, put it to national use, and support existing policy priorities. Clearly, I do not mean to suggest that Japanese ministries are incapable of change any more than I would argue that the collapse of the bubble acted as a light switch, automatically changing Japan from an economic dynamo to a bedridden victim. But institutions are important specifically because they define what people take for granted and therefore how they will understand new information, their environment, and their goals.⁴⁹ Derek Hall has argued that the large-scale drive toward economic "liberalization" in Japan is not in fact a retreat from institutionalized economic nationalism; instead, liberalization is defended and apparently understood in nationalist terms.⁵⁰ Similarly, government officials working with popular culture and "digital contents" were trying to do what they had always done: promote the development of industrial forces that can serve national goals.

Tourism once again provides an excellent example. Partly as an effort to demonstrate his support for local regions badly hurt by Japan's economic recession, and several years before the tourism boom Japan has enjoyed since roughly 2010, Prime Minister Koizumi in 2002 announced the establishment of the Tourism Policy Advisory Council. The goal of the group was to develop new ideas for attracting foreign tourists to Japan, policies that would likely be attractive to MLIT Tourism Bureau members aiming to maintain budgetary interest in their management of the nation's recreational travel infrastructure. Of course, with the continued high cost of travel to Japan, terrorism-related reductions in international air travel, and occasional Asian shocks such as the SARS crisis, the council almost certainly recognized that a rapid or even medium-term increase in tourism to Japan was extraordinarily unlikely. And so its final report emphasized not the economic returns to Japan of tourism but rather the political returns of increased exchange. Indeed, it explicitly linked cultural exchange, soft power, and the creation of "cultural security" (*bunka anzen hoshō*). It also cited McGray to point out that Japan's Gross National Cool had become part of the country's appeal.⁵¹

Similarly, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) also began to incorporate "soft power" into its lingo, although it remained cautious about any suggestion that Japan was trying to exercise power over its neighbors. In a 2002 speech to the Vancouver Board of Trade, Foreign Minister Yoriko Kawaguchi emphasized that Canada and Japan both share an idea of "soft power" in that they prefer to exercise their international authority through peaceful means.⁵² In an emblematic 2003 report, the Japan Foundation, closely related to MOFA, stressed the importance of cultural and educational exchange programs for Japan's diplomacy because of their contributions to the nation's "soft power." For a time, this language nearly supplanted earlier emphases on "mutual understanding." Citing McGray, the Japan Foundation referred to "Gross National Cool" and suggested that Japan's cultivation of its cultural resources could improve its "national image" and thereby strengthen its global hand. The report focused heavily on the role that "soft power" plays in a changing world, culminating in recommendations for MOFA and Japan Foundation activity that were still consistent with existing priorities, not new ones.⁵³

Japan's economic policy makers also seized on "soft power" as a crucial wedge for funding and supporting their efforts to promote Japan's

“content industries,” a term that refers largely to online content and could in essence incorporate new films, videos, games, published writing, and music. Because the money in information technology now appears to lie largely in the content itself and not necessarily in the infrastructure used to transmit it, there can be significant rewards for firms, individual artists, and perhaps even governments able to sell people what they want or perhaps influence what they want. The old Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications began to commission reports on information technologies in 1995, as did its research affiliate, the Posts and Telecommunications Research Institute.⁵⁴ Although these focused primarily on the types of infrastructure involved, they presaged an era in which the government would start to consider the importance of government intervention in the creation and not just existence of information or entertainment content.

Alongside the Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs, and Posts and Telecommunications, the organization most responsible for conceptualizing Gross National Cool became the Ministry of Economics, Trade, and Industry (METI). Although long dominated by an interest in manufacturing industries, the ministry began by the late 1990s to devote considerable attention to information industries. To some degree, the ministry's interest in defining virtually all artistic work as “content” involved a bit of historical revisionism; the METI-affiliated Digital Content Association published a timeline of digital content tracing the development of film in the late nineteenth century, music recordings in the 1920s, and the like.⁵⁵ Especially by 2002 and 2003, METI took an impressively ambitious approach to the issue, establishing working groups on comprehensive and specific aspects of media content governance, all aimed at generating recommendations for the ministry to generate long-term creativity in Japan, protect Japanese intellectual property rights in Asia, cross-fertilize different media industries, and so on.⁵⁶ As with its general industrial mission, METI aimed at ensuring that Japanese content creators and providers—anime, J-pop, film studios, game developers, toy producers, and virtually any other entertainment industry capable of catching global attention—would remain competitive over the long term. To that end, its study groups inquired widely about the nature of entertainment after the Internet revolution.

More remarkable than METI's new ambitions was the broad governmental acceptance of the “Gross National Cool” core: Japan had become hip and fashionable specifically because it had changed into something different. And so the Digital Content Working Group, part of a government advisory council, asked in 2003 about what kinds of firms would be needed in the future: large entertainment firms capable of professionally capturing the global market or small firms of near-amateurs who have ideas that rapidly catch fire? Would the market be driven by hip trendsetters or by the reclusive *otaku*, whose obsessiveness speaks to a particular character's or program's appeal? Should the government be focused on necessity (*pan*, or bread) or on the entertainment of its citizens (*sākasu*, or circus)?⁵⁷ In other words, and mirroring the commentary of cultural critics such as Shin Sugok, uncomfortable social changes (e.g., *otaku* empowerment) had become central to Japan, not just to its national cool but also to its economic resurgence. And so the question became how government industrial policy, very nearly the perfect symbol of pre-Cool Japan to many observers, could harness the power of developments attributed largely to a Japan in which ministries no longer call the shots.

Japan is far from the only country in which those in power have sought to co-opt the appeal of marginalized, or self-marginalizing, critical figures. After all, in its public celebration of social change that its owners would likely have opposed in an earlier era, the *Nikkei Shimbun's* 2003 ad campaign—“Women have changed. Now how about men?” featuring a beautiful, self-confident, *Nikkei*-reading professional woman smiling, with a sheepish young man watching her from behind⁵⁸—was no ghastlier than US corporate sponsorship of successive Woodstock concerts in the late 1990s or than Ronald Reagan's bizarre use of Bruce Springsteen's “Born in the USA” at campaign events a decade earlier. But this was not a corporation acting as the disinterested face of global capitalism, pulling at whatever icons could sell newspapers or soda to middle-aged consumers trying desperately to deny their surrender to The System, nor was it a politician already adept at deploying the language of the Left against itself. Instead, state actors in Japan seemed to accept that the creative forces they were seeking to employ could exist only in a system that did not aim to control or use them. Cool Japan existed because Uncool Japan collapsed; now Cool Japan would need to show that it was, after all, still Japan.

The Cruelty of Coolness

The semiofficial magazine *Gaikō Fōramu*'s special 2003 issue included nearly a dozen articles focused on Japanese soft power and the country's popular culture success overseas. Four of the articles were, in essence, short testimonials by anime-loving or J-pop-loving professionals in Thailand, China, Russia, and Australia, and with one longer article by the Guatemalan ambassador to Japan, who weighed in with a piece about the enduring popularity of Akira Kurosawa films.⁵⁹ And in May 2003, *Chūō Kōron*, a leading mainstream opinion journal, had a special collection on the same general topic, including a translation of McGray's article, an essay by Keio University law professor Tadokoro Masayuki about Japan's soft power, and a conversation between American scholar Susan Napier and anime director Okada Toshio described as a "show-down between Japanese and American anime *otaku*" (*nichibei otaku taiketsu*).⁶⁰

The use of the word *otaku* to describe the authors in a leading journal is instructive in that it signaled that the marginalized had entered the mainstream by dint of Japan's shift in national status. The *Chūō Kōron* and *Gaikō Fōramu* issues share something with *Time*'s special coverage: an understanding that "cool" Japan has emerged from the rapid and often disorienting social changes that were conventionally depicted as having been unleashed on Japan through demographic transformation and economic decline. And they provide reassurance about what these changes will mean. The articles paint a picture of a Japan in transition, though marked by important cultural legacies from the past. "Uncool Japan"—presumably the Japan of lifetime employment, examination hell, rigid gender differentiation, and obsessive deference to authority—would have been unable to have this kind of cultural effect on the rest of Asia because it simply could not have produced this kind of vibrant, diverse, and yet distinctive entertainment environment. In this view, Japan had experienced a phoenix-like rebirth from the self-inflicted wounds of rapid modernization; combined with its unique traditional culture, this had generated a new cultural milieu that is simultaneously viewed as surprising and yet somehow inevitable. But the hope went even further: because the world—particularly the Asia-Pacific—was catching on, with even the Americans rejecting their own mass-produced pop culture in favor of Japan's zanier

alternatives, Japan could stand to benefit politically, provided that it could figure out how to make the most of an auspicious moment.

The appeal of soft power was understandable—and very broad. For Japanese liberals, "soft power" has represented a way for nonmilitary Japan to have an effect on global politics. Journalist-turned-politician Nagatsuma Akira, for example, has positioned soft power as the appropriate expression of Japan's international contributions, eschewing military engagement as far as possible.⁶¹ For mainstream or more conservative observers, "soft power" could help Japan be seen as more "trustworthy," meaning that the global spread of Japanese popular culture could increase international friendship and trust. In this framework, "soft power" and support for the arts become a component of "public diplomacy," thereby helping Japan make more effective use of its "hard power."⁶² Indeed, Japan's expansion of its global security role during this era (e.g., the deployment of MSDF ships to the Indian Ocean in support of US military activities in Afghanistan) would have been impossible without government efforts to build trust with its Asian neighbors.⁶³ Because of its impressive elasticity, "soft power" appealed equally, though very differently, in Japanese policy—and to lawmakers of virtually all stripes.⁶⁴ Moreover, "soft power" may have represented to concerned Japanese what it had earlier to concerned Americans: that reports of their country's demise were premature.

This means that "Gross National Cool" and "soft power" were certainly politically consequential, though perhaps not in the way that the terms' users might suppose. If we think of "soft power" not as a category of power resources, but rather as an idea—a component of a cultural and ideological structure of governance—it might affect a country's policy even if the country does not really possess it in any meaningful way or, worse, if it does not really exist at all. Of course, whether Japan has (or had) soft power is almost certainly impossible to tell and is not in itself germane to policy. After all, the term "soft power" became popular in the United States not only because of Nye's writing talent and his important position in international relations theory but also because it sat well with Americans' views of themselves. Because US culture and values are constitutive of Americans, it is practically impossible for Americans to determine effectively whether their values are really shared or not. The same is likely true for Japanese.

One of my favorite things about living in Japan is my daily ability to chat with Japanese friends, colleagues, and acquaintances about life here

and overseas. Aside from being good practice for my Japanese, it also affords me the opportunity to try to understand the world as Japanese see it—phenomenology on the cheap. There is, of course, a certain amount of temporary intellectual dishonesty involved; during the time I speak with a Japanese person about some issue, I am likely to take that person's views as somehow representative of a larger community: Japanese women, Japanese conservatives, or, in moments of complete laziness, all Japanese. But when we speak about the United States and my counterpart says something with which I disagree, my tendency is not to accept the comment as possibly valid or as representative of something useful or important; it is quite simply wrong because I as an American understand my country, and he or she as a Japanese does not. Of course, as a researcher I struggle with this profoundly stupid impulse, but its existence speaks to a larger concern: other countries' (or, rather, people's) views of one's own country have no independent merit except insofar as they correspond to something we believe. In other words, when we speak about how other countries see us, we are almost certainly talking about how we see ourselves and using other nations as a kind of mirror to express our own pride, insecurity, anger, or sadness. Americans like myself are probably the worst judges of our own soft power because we cannot separate our cultural effects elsewhere from our own deeply ingrained views of ourselves.

Indeed, little noticed in the critical response to Nye was the extraordinary level of coincidence between the way *Bound to Lead's* other countries viewed America and American values and the way that educated American liberals understood America and American values. And so freedom, liberalism, openness, and tolerance of other cultures became the sources of America's soft power; they were the reasons that others admired the United States and were, conveniently enough, also the aspects of America of which Nye and his readers were proudest. Indeed, although the books aim in different directions and support quite divergent political agendas, Nye's view of American soft power bears more than a passing similarity to Francis Fukuyama's oft-noted *The End of History*. Although Fukuyama aimed primarily at developing a theoretical argument about liberal democracy's triumph over communism and fascism, his book has been used to provide a more hard-edged, conservative version of the universally desirable values that Nye recognizes in his own nation. Where Nye argued that these would earn America friends, Fukuyama maintained that time had run out for

alternative ways of understanding the role of the state: to quote the anime-influenced film *The Matrix*, "It is the sound of inevitability."

To be fair, Nye's later refinements of his "soft power" claims focused on the need for multilateralism in US foreign policy, and he soon downplayed the role of cultural influence. But this reflects different debates held at different times.⁶⁵ American "hard power" seemed, at least by the early 2000s, beyond any dispute, so there was little reason to focus on the cultural component of superpower status. Indeed, Nye's emphasis on "smart power" (combining soft power and hard power resources for national advantage, or what was once called "diplomacy" in archaic English) indicated that America could not achieve long-term security by alienating all of its allies. The claim certainly resembled his earlier point about the changing nature of power in the post-Cold War system. But the revised argument had teeth for different reasons: unlike soft power, smart power was not the compensation for a country with diminished hard power resources; it instead called for responsible governance for a country that should have been thinking in the long term. Soft power's instability and conceptual trajectory made this seem less like an argument for the strength of American cultural and political institutions and more like a plea for humility.

For this reason, the rapid increase in attention in Japan to soft power and Japan's cultural weight elsewhere probably has less value as a tool for evaluating Japan's regional importance than it does as a heuristic device for grasping how Japanese policy makers viewed their regional and global roles at the midpoint of Japan's two lost decades.⁶⁶ And the motifs discussed above—contemporary Japan's rise from the ashes of economic recession, the continuity between rebellious Japan's pop culture and earlier cultural traditions, and the political weight afforded by the wide acceptance of Japanese entertainment icons—were essential elements of the debate because of the way they reconfigured a larger national narrative in which Japan's rise as a peaceful, manufacturing/trading powerhouse had been thwarted. Japan's future global status would depend not on its "Japan-as-number-one" or bubble-era trajectory toward economic dominance but to something else, something new, something beautiful about the country in the eye of the beholder. Whether one wanted a nonmilitary and generous Japan or an assertive yet trusted Japan, the prescription was similar. Japan would need to support the spread of its popular culture overseas in order for other countries to see what post-bubble Japan really

was: a changed country, a country of originality and even individuality, a country that remembers its traditions even as it boldly meets the challenges of modernity. It was a country that would not hurt a fly.

Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism* provides an opportunity to rethink soft power within a larger set of modalities of contemporary international politics. Berlant, having made major contributions to affect theory because of her renowned "national sentimentality" trilogy, argues that a specific, perhaps even addictive, kind of buoyancy has become a dominant motif of life in advanced industrial countries, or at least in the United States.⁶⁷ Widely cited and debated, Berlant's elegant definition holds that "a relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing." This might have allowed a glib, condescending treatment of self-sabotaging poor and working-class Republican voters, watching television programs and films about the impossibly wealthy and holding self-destructively to an American Dream that is less likely to come true for them than would be being struck by lightning immediately after winning a Powerball lottery. Berlant's justly famed work, however, admirably focuses as much on the keenly felt illusion of political agency, even among avowed political critics and activists, as it does on the mercileless grind facing those aiming for a better financial future. After all, rogue performance art aimed at bringing the national security and surveillance state to heel is likely no less heartbreakingly delusional than are websites and magazines showing Jay-Z and Beyoncé's home, as if most of the viewers are likely to find themselves there someday and therefore need to know the layout.

Berlant's contribution provides an alternative way to read soft power's emotional power. Like happiness, like well-being, soft power has become its own cottage industry, with marketing researchers weighing in on "national brands" and policy makers from Beijing to Brussels⁶⁸ aiming to understand how to achieve or to maintain it. The stated goals are both commercial—helping one's own producers—and political, and their pervasiveness speaks to something that goes beyond the poignant insecurity of Americans and Japanese. Indeed, soft power's conceptual ubiquity, despite the absence of clear evidence that it exists or matters, suggests that governments and citizens get something important from its invocation; they receive validation of their global status as an attractive nation, one that is liked and respected. Indeed, even if one rejects the idea of status

as an ordering concept in international relations, as does David Lake in a thoughtful discussion differentiating status from hierarchy, its frequent invocation and its inseparability from people's beliefs suggest that it may be a crucial matter for domestic political debate and consumption.⁶⁹ The problem—as the United States has experienced in different ways in the whirlwind Bush-Obama-Trump eras, and as Japan experiences through the periodic and widely reported critiques of its handling of wartime history issues—is that the world seldom fully cooperates, rarely loving a country as much as the rhetoric of soft power might indicate. Although public diplomacy issues framed around "soft power" may not in themselves be harmful, they reflect a desire that is in the end nearly certain to be betrayed: to be valued globally as one values oneself. And the frequently disappointing search for that validation suggests that nothing can make Japan (like the United States, South Korea, Germany, and Brazil) stably and universally beloved or persuasive. Soft power's durability as a topic of conversation says more about the cruel unattainability of the future status a country is supposed to achieve than about its actual relevance to the substance of international relations.

What Kind of Power?

The unattainability of the future has often been diagnosed by Japanese officials as the result of the failures of their policies or of the products they aim to hawk overseas. As cultural studies scholar Koichi Iwabuchi notes, Japanese popular culture overseas often carries a *mukokuseki* quality, meaning that its national origin cannot easily be determined. With anime characters, stories, names, and titles designed for transnational audiences, Japaneseness has somehow been bled out of them. Iwabuchi, however, notes that in addition to the way in which *mukokuseki* actually becomes a signifier of Japanese origin, there are actually a number of Japanese entertainment products—bands, television dramas, etc.—that actually carry a clear Japanese "odor."⁷⁰ Obviously aiming to link the products and the country that produces them, Japanese policy makers, particularly in MOFA, have promoted the idea of the "Japan brand." The goal here is to improve "public diplomacy" by making other people more aware of Japan's contributions to global culture, design, and entertainment.⁷¹ Unless

people overseas know that Japanese artists created *Sailor Moon*, how can it confer "soft power" on the Japanese government?

Iwabuchi, though trying to show that Japanese popular culture has become part of a fragmented process of globalization, concedes that in certain cases, Taiwanese audiences have consciously identified themselves more closely with Japanese dramas and films than they have with Hollywood fare, which seems both more fantastic and more foreign.⁷² Using interviews with Chinese audiences in five different cities, Nakano Yoshiko and Wu Yongmei offer a similar finding. Yet they also reject the notion that this has become some kind of simple and unproblematic "cultural proximity," to use Iwabuchi's language. Instead, Nakano and Wu argue, this fascination arises from the yearnings of the new bourgeois classes in China and their dreams for a wealthier and more open lifestyle just around the corner.⁷³ In this view, Japan acts as a combination of a crystal ball and a mirror: it is one version of the future that the modernizing economies of Asia hope to achieve.

Well before Japan became the pop culture maverick that it purportedly is, it already served as a kind of cultural touchstone for its neighbors in Asia. Indeed, for many in 1960s Taiwan, South Korea, and elsewhere, Japan's technological achievements served as representatives of what they might themselves enjoy in their lifetimes if they worked hard enough and had enough good fortune. Set in 1962 Hong Kong, Wong Kar-Wai's masterpiece *In the Mood for Love* brilliantly evokes his characters' class positions, as well as the setting of his story, through clever references to the commodities they can purchase. When Mrs. Chan's husband returns from a business trip to Japan with an automatic rice cooker, it immediately becomes the talk of the apartment building, not because it is Japanese and exotic but rather because it is convenient and modern. Japan is ahead, and it serves as a symbol of what other Asians, even the Shanghaiese community in Hong Kong, might accomplish.⁷⁴ Many Japanese products overseas—whether they are Matsushita rice cookers in 1960s Taiwan or *Tokyo Love Story* in 1990s China—gain at least part and perhaps most of their meaning from their representation of modernity.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Japanese also looked abroad to find relevant examples of how their lifestyles might improve, although their models came primarily from the United States and Western Europe. To a degree, this tendency became a target of government policy as well. In a methodological discussion in their massive 1974 report titled *Yoka Sōran*

(Overview of leisure), published by the MITI (METI's predecessor) Leisure Development Office, advisory committee members explained that their research on appropriate leisure and lifestyle changes included a number of comparative case studies but that only the ones from advanced industrial nations (i.e., Western Europe and North America) would be relevant:

The various subcommittees focused on 15 countries from North America, Western Europe, the communist countries, and four other regions. But if one examines the structure of leisure in these different countries, one sees great diversity from the advanced countries that have already entered an era of a new leisure civilization (*atarashii yoka bunmei no jidai*) to the lesser developed countries that still have no fixed understanding of what "leisure" means.⁷⁵

This report, one of two major MITI-sponsored leisure studies at the time, became the intellectual cornerstone of government policies designed specifically to align Japanese recreation and entertainment industries with those of the United States and Europe.

This tendency to see the future through the current conditions of other nations continued well into the 1990s. The Leisure Development Center, a special foundation funded by MITI to provide policy-relevant research on recreation-related industries, used a combination of domestic research surveys and comparative studies to provide the necessary information on Japan's best approach. When I asked one official why the researchers focused on the United States and Europe rather than on, for example, Korea, Zimbabwe, or Brazil, he seemed stunned by the question and responded (very slowly, probably because he believed at this point that I had asked my question incorrectly or that I simply was not very bright), "because those are the advanced industrial nations." There was simply no alternative. The Western nations were valuable examples not because one liked or trusted them but rather because they were ahead.⁷⁶

In one line of argument, Japan might benefit by playing exactly this modern role, particularly in Asia, specifically because it has successfully negotiated between the demands of economic and political development, on the one hand, and the maintenance of a distinctive culture, on the other.⁷⁷ If countries aspire to be what Japan is, perhaps that could confer a kind of soft power—an ability to persuade or to attract rather than to coerce. But although the relevant sources from the 1970s through the 1990s suggest

that Western Europe and especially the United States provided Japan with a crucial guidepost for how the country would need to develop, there is neither gratitude nor admiration expressed in these documents. Instead, there is simple acceptance that this is the way things will be. To be sure, the United States likely benefited from this ambivalent relationship in a number of ways, but it is unclear that its leaders understood or even could have understood how to use it. And it is unclear that the place of Japanese development in other countries' narratives about their own has ever made it easier for the Japanese government—independent of the conventional hard power inducements and threats—to persuade them to behave in the way that Tokyo would wish. Much clearer, and more easily demonstrated, is the role that transnational consumption of Japanese products played when it fit into a proposed happy ending, even displayed weekly on the national broadcaster NHK's program *Cool Japan* with its panels of foreigners praising some aspect of Japan's cultural distinctiveness, for a national story that had, at least for a time, seemed to have gone off the rails.⁷⁸

The affective dimensions of "soft power" are essential to any thoughtful approach to the subject, but the emotions involved—for all their vibrancy, all their imminence—are less visible, less easily depicted than is the story of Japanese decline for which "soft power" can act as an intellectual, Harvard-validated *deus ex machina*. Despite the insistence of former diplomats and a number of foreign policy intellectuals, most political scientists have dismissed the idea of soft power as a meaningful resource, or measure of resources, in international politics. Their skepticism may reflect an inherent allergy to the word *soft* and may also bespeak an unattractive commitment to the quantifiable. But the problems associated with studying emotion and affect themselves—as noted in chapter 1—suggest the value of an alternative view of why soft power continues to haunt debates about diplomacy. If soft power matters, it matters at least as much because of what it demands from people's feelings about themselves and their nations as because of any justifiable confidence in its transnational importance. But these feelings themselves can be made intelligible only because of the stories that officials and compatriots tell one another about their countries—about their struggles and goals, and about what they must ultimately mean to themselves and to a welcoming world. In the next chapter we will consider more directly how those who tell stories repeatedly shape them to produce the desired emotional effects.

From:

EMPIRE OF HOPE

The Sentimental Politics of Japanese Decline

DAVID LEHENY

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4. Cool Optimism

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40. In addition to Murakami's own book *Superflat*, see, e.g., Yamaguchi Yumi, *Tokyo Trash Web: The Book* (Tokyo: Bijus Shuppansha, 1999); and Nagae Akira, *Tarase no Jidai: Otaku na Nihon no Supāfuratto* [The age of flatness: Nerdy Japan's superflatness] (Tokyo: Hara Shobō, 2003). Yamaguchi's book (in Japanese, English title notwithstanding) is especially effective as a cacophonous visual accompaniment to her central point about the horrid beauty of modern Tokyo: everything is trash, everything is equal, everything is part of the mix. Sociologist Adrian Favell's excellent *Before and after Superflat: A Short History of Japanese Contemporary Art 1990–2011* (Hong Kong: Blue Kingfisher, 2012) provides a critical and somewhat controversial overview.
41. Douglas McGray, "Japan's Gross National Cool," *Foreign Policy* (May/June 2002): 44–54, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/issue_mayjune_2002/mcgray.html.
42. Jim Frederick, "What's Right with Japan?" *Time Asia*, August 11, 2003.
43. Takenaka Heizō, "Nihon Keizai Saisei no Kagi" [The key to Japan's economic revitalization], in *Posuto IT Kakumei "Sofuto Pawā" Nihon Fūkken e no Michi* [Soft power after the information technology revolution: The road to Japan's rehabilitation], ed. Takenaka Heizō (Tokyo: Fujita Institute of Future Management, 2001), 14–30.
44. Kamiya Mataka, "Sofuto Pawā to wa Nani Ka?" [What is soft power?], in *Posuto IT Kakumei "Sofuto Pawā" Nihon Fūkken e no Michi* [Soft power after the information technology revolution: The road to Japan's rehabilitation], ed. Takenaka Heizō (Tokyo: Fujita Institute of Future Management, 2001), 31–64.
45. Aoki Tamotsu, "Miwaku Suru Chikara" to Bunka Seisaku" ["The power to fascinate" and cultural policy], in *Posuto IT Kakumei "Sofuto Pawā" Nihon Fūkken e no Michi* [Soft power after the information technology revolution: The road to Japan's rehabilitation], ed. Takenaka Heizō (Tokyo: Fujita Institute of Future Management, 2001), 146–76.
46. Dejitaru Kontensu Kyōkai, *Dejitaru Kontensu Hakusho* 2003, 24–25.
47. Uehara Nobumoto, "Kako no Seifu Hōkokusho ni Miru Kontensu Seisaku no Ronten" [Topics in digital content policy, as seen through previous government reports], Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs, and Posts and Telecommunications, June 11, 2003, www.ppp.am/digicon/archive/ueharipolicy4.ppt.
48. David Leheny, *The Rules of Play: National Identity and the Shaping of Japanese Leisure* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 133–73.
49. This is how I read Jepperson's definition of institutions, which holds that they are "socially constructed, routine-reproduced (*ceteris paribus*), program or rule systems. They operate as relative fixtures of constraining environments and are accompanied by taken-for-granted accounts." See Ronald L. Jepperson, "Institutions, Institutional Effects, and Institutionalism," in *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, ed. Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 149.
50. Derek Hall, "Japanese Spirit, Western Economics: The Continuing Salience of Economic Nationalism in Japan," *New Political Economy* 9, no. 1 (2004): 79–99.
51. Kankō Rikkoku Kondankai, "Kankō Rikkoku Kondankai Hōkokusho: Sundeyoshi, Otozureteyoshi no Kuni Zukuri" [Final report of the Japan Tourism Advisory Council: Building a country where one wants to travel and reside] (Tokyo: Prime Minister's Office, 2003).
- See also Awata Fusaho, "Kankōryoku" no Kōzō to Wa: Sofuto Pawā to shite no 'Nippon Burando Senryaku' o Kangaeru" (What is the structure of "tourism power": Considering the "Japan brand strategy" as "soft power"), *Unō to Keizai* [Transportation and economy] 63, no. 7 (2003): 53–62.
52. Yoriko Kawaguchi, "Common Opportunities: Japan and Canada in the 21st Century," June 14, 2002, http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/canada/p_ship21/fmspeech.html.
53. Kokusai Kōryū Kenkyūkai, "Arata na Jidai no Gaikō to Arata na Kokusai Kōryū no Yakuwari" [Diplomacy in a new era, and a new role for international exchange] (Tokyo: Japan Foundation, April 2003).
54. It has since been merged with the former Ministry of Home Affairs to become Sōmushō, which literally translates as the General Affairs Ministry but is officially known in English as the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications. See also Leheny, "A Narrow Place," 227.
55. Dejitaru Kontensu Kyōkai, *Dejitaru Kontensu Hakusho* 2003, 158–61.
56. See, once again, Tsujimoto Kenzō's comments in the "Kontensu Sangyō Kokusai Senryaku Kenkyūkai (Dai 1 Kai) Gijiroku," 5–7.
57. These questions appear in the general working group document "Dejitaru Kontensu WG no Kentō Jōkyō" [Investigative conditions for the Digital Content Working Group], produced by the Jōhō Tsūshin Sofuto Kondankai [Information Transmission and Software Discussion Council] (Tokyo: Sōmusho, 2003).
58. "Onna wa kawatta. Otoko wa dō da?" The writer Takeda Satsuru mocks the series in an online column about the state of the publishing industry: "Shinsho ya AERA ni umanijiru to iu koto" [What it means to reconcile yourself to booklets and AERA], *CINRA-Net*, September 21, 2010, <https://www.cinra.net/column/norika14-2>.
59. *Gaikō Forumu* 174 (January 2003), especially the international vignettes on 30–45.
60. Tadokoro Masayuki, "Sofuto Pawā to iu Gaikō Shigen o Minaoese" [Rethinking soft power as a diplomatic resource], *Chūō Kōron*, May 2003, 120–28; Susan Napier and Okada Toshio, "Gendai Nihon no Anime ga Amerika no Orona o Kaeru" ["Contemporary Japanese anime" are changing American adults], *Chūō Kōron*, May 2003, 142–48.
61. Nagatsuma Akira, "Sofuto Pawāto Hado Pawā: Heiwa o Tsukuridasu Chie Nihon wa Sofuto Pawā de Sekai Toppu o Mezase" [Soft power and hard power: Japan should aim its soft power toward leading the world in the knowledge to build peace], *Huffington Post* (Japanese), August 18, 2015, https://www.huffingtonpost.jp/akira-nagatsuma/soft-hard-diplomacy_b_7996122.html.
62. See Takashina Shōji, Fukukawa Shinji, and Fujii Hiroaki, "Nihonjin wa Sofuto Pawā o motto Katsuyō Subeki" [Japanese must make more use of their soft power], *Gaikō Forumu*, January 2003, 18–27, especially comments by Fujii on 20 and Takashina on 22.
63. Paul Midford, "Japan's Response to Terror: Dispatching the SDF to the Arabian Sea," *Asian Survey* 43, no. 2 (2003): 329–51.
64. Indeed, one could easily find references to "soft power" in the Web pages of the New Komeitō (<http://www.komeitō.jp/policy/detail/5-1.htm>), the Democratic Party's Hatoyama Yukio (<http://www.hatoyama.gr.jp/cont09/cont08.html>), and the long version of the Liberal Democratic Party's 2003 "policy manifesto," available at Lower House member Kosugi Takashi's Web page (<http://www.threeweb.ad.jp/~takosugi/manifesto>).
65. See Joseph S. Nye, *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Joseph S. Nye, "The Velvet Hegemon: How Soft Power Can Help Defeat Terrorism," *Foreign Policy* 136 (May/June 2003): 74–75.
66. Although their language and goals differ from mine, Janice Bially-Mattem, "Why Hayden's analyses of US soft power also reflect on narrative. See Janice Bially-Mattem, "Why

Soft Power Isn't So Soft: Representational Force and the Sociolinguistic Construction of Attraction in World Politics," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 33, no. 3 (2005): 583–612; Craig Hayden, *The Rhetoric of Soft Power: Public Diplomacy in Global Contexts* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2012). Solomon positions his article as a sympathetic correction of both works by focusing on affect and emotion.

67. See Donovan Schaefer's comments on addiction as a metaphor for cruel optimism in "The Promise of Affect: The Politics of the Event in Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness* and Berlant's *Cruel Optimism*," *Theory & Event* 16, no. 2 (2013).

68. Perhaps the most widely read example is Joshua Kurlantzick's fabulously alarmist *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power Is Transforming the World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007). For a more measured and sophisticated contribution that also reflects on the competitive dynamics of soft power initiatives, see Jing Sun's *Japan and China as Charm Rivals: Soft Power in Regional Diplomacy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012). There are also many works by prominent European scholars and policy makers on the topic of soft power. Former Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt's 2005 op-ed in the *Financial Times* is among the most elegant such statements. See Bildt, "Europe Must Keep Its Soft Power," *Financial Times*, May 31, 2005, <http://on.ft.com/1NxEWY>.

69. See David Lake's "Status, Authority, and the End of the American Century" in *Status in World Politics*, ed. T. V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson, and William C. Wohlforth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 246–69. This refers to concepts developed in Lake's widely hailed *Hierarchy in International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009). Also see Deborah Welch Larson, T. V. Paul, and William C. Wohlforth, "Status and World Order," in Paul, Larson, and Wohlforth, *Status in World Politics*, 7–13.

70. Iwabuchi, *Recentring Globalization*, 33–35.

71. See the articles in the January 2003 *Gaikō Fōranu* special issue on "Nippon Burando."

72. Iwabuchi, *Recentring Globalization*, 139–57.

73. Nakano Yoshiko and Wu Yongmei, "Puchiburu no Kurashikata: Chūgoku no Daigakusei ga Mira Nihon no Dorama" [Lifestyles of the petit bourgeois: How Chinese university students watch Japanese dramas], in *Gurōbaru Purizumu: 'Aijan Dorīmu' to Shite no Nihon no Terebi Dorama* [The global prism: Japanese television dramas as the "Asian dream"], ed. Iwabuchi Kōichi (Tokyo: Heibonsha), 183–219.

74. I thank Nakano Yoshiko for making this point in correspondence.

75. Tsūshō Sangyōsho Yoka Kaihatsushitsu [MITI Leisure Development Office], ed., *Yoka Sōran: Shakai, Sangyō, Seisaku* [Overview of leisure: society, industry, and policy] (Tokyo: Dayamondo, 1974), 315.

76. Leheny, *The Rules of Play*, 15, 179–80.

77. Takashina, Fukukawa, and Fujii, "Nihonjin wa Sofuro Pawā o motto Katsuyō Subeki," especially Fujii on 23.

78. On the program *Cool Japan*, see Alexandra Hambleton, "Reinforcing Identities: Non-Japanese Residents, Television and Cultural Nationalism in Japan," *Contemporary Japan* 23, no. 1 (2011): 27–47.

5. Staging *The Empire of Light*

1. Akiko Takeyama, *Staged Seduction: Selling Dreams in a Tokyo Host Club* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), chapter 1.

2. For an excellent study, see Jeffrey Ravel, *The Contested Parterre: Public Theater and French Political Culture 1680–1791* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), especially his arresting depiction of a 1724 performance of Voltaire's *Mariamne*, 126–31. See also Brian