

## **Indonesia, Japanophile: Japanese Soft Power in Indonesia**

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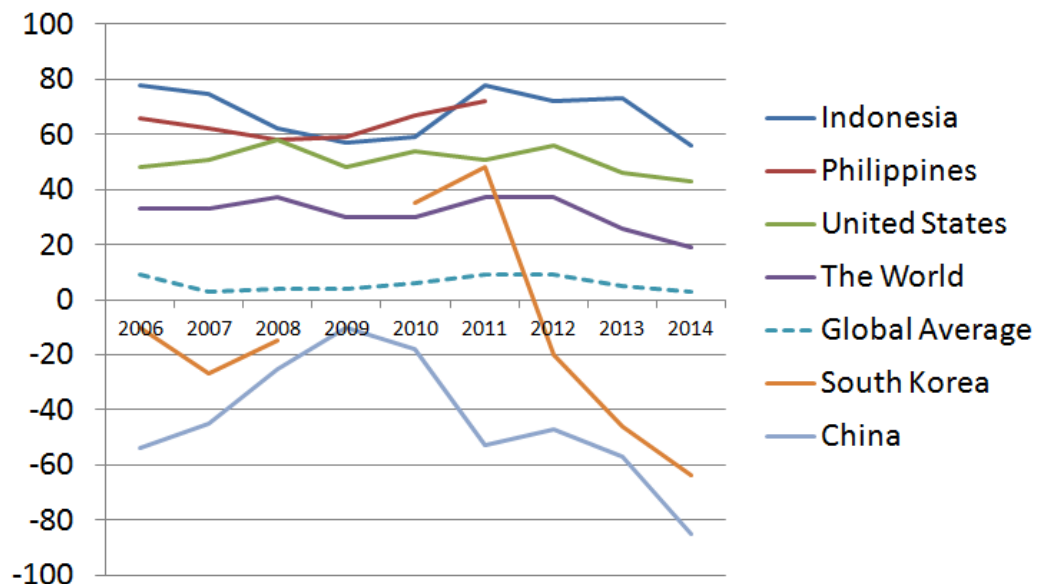
### **1. The Question: Why is Indonesia so Fond of Japan?**

Which elements of a country appeal to the people in other countries? What makes other nationals interested in, and become friendly to the country? They are questions on the practical applications of countries' "soft power" that attracts and co-opts others. As Joseph S. Nye observed, the importance of soft power has been prevailing since the end of the Cold War. Although this does not mean an eclipse of "traditional power" such as military force, "soft co-optive power" has been definitely making its way to the field of international relations. (Nye 1990)

From 2005, BBC World Service has conducted a series of global polls, asking for the views of different countries' influences. In these polls, the respondents were asked whether they evaluate each country's influence mainly positive or mainly negative. Then the percentage of respondents who answered they see a country's influence mainly negative subtracted from the percentage of positive views makes the country rating of that country ( $\% \text{ of positive answers} - \% \text{ of negative answers} = \text{Country Rating}$ ). According to the results of these surveys, Japan (included from 2006) has been among those whose influence has seen most positive. As summarized in Figure 1, while the global ratings on other countries' influence have fluctuated between three and nine (the dotted line "Global Average" in Figure 1), the influence of Japan has scored between 19 and 37 ("The World" in Figure 1), even ranking number one in 2012.

Then the next step is to take a look into the variations among countries. The Indonesians have rated the Japanese influence most positively (between 56 and 78), while the Chinese have expressed

that they are the most alerted (between -85 and -10) on it. The Koreans have shown the most dramatic fluctuation, but their evaluations on the Japanese influence have never been more positive than the Indonesians nor more negative than the Chinese. Why does such a big difference exist? What have made the Indonesians so favorable to the Japanese influence?



**Figure 1.** Other countries' views on the Japanese influence (source: BBC World Service)  
 (Global average means the average country ratings of all of the countries in the year)  
 (Data of the Filipinos after 2011 and the Koreans in 2009 are missing in the poll)

Here, in order to identify sources of the Indonesians' positive perspective on the Japanese influence, I am going to consider both cultural diplomacy and official development assistance (ODA). In this way, I expect to get some insights for the conditions of soft power, which would likely to provide implications for Indonesia, and further, Southeast Asia.

## 2. Japanese Cultural Diplomacy

Conventionally, the Japanese soft power has been considered to be composed mainly of cultural assets. As Douglas McGray suggested in 2002, Japanese culture has been appreciated by more and more people around the world, arousing a favorable atmosphere for the Japanese influence in the world.

This is how come the author coined the terminology “Growth National Cool.” To him, Japan seemed to have been reborn as a cultural, rather than an economic, superpower. (McGray 2002)

This line of analyses put a weighted emphasis on the degree to which the Japanese (popular) culture is accommodated in a certain country. For instance, people in the Western countries are more or less positive to Japanese influence, because they are curious on, impressed by, and actually enjoying, the Japanese culture. In contrast, the Chinese and the Koreans see Japanese influence rather negative than positive, because the attractiveness of Japanese culture has been undermined by historical or territorial disputes between Japan and them. (Lam 2007; Lee 2008)

The contents of Japanese culture, however, are not constrained only to the Japanese popular culture. This is a question on the Japanese national identity, a broader concept of culture. Japan has recently proposed *Ajia Kontentsu Inisiatibu* (Asia Content Initiative) to take a lead in the “Asian Content Community” where the values shared among Asian countries are emphasized. In this community, the Japanese government is expected to play a role of mediator between the producers of culture in Japan, and the (potential) consumers in other countries. (Kang 2011)

Yee-Kuang Heng recently pointed out a new development that Japan has been promoting its “normative soft power as global trouble-shooter.” (Heng 2014) This provides us with some insights for the future of Japanese soft power: Not only popular culture, but also the pursuits of universal values, the engagements in global problems, may work favorably for the Japanese influence.

This approach calls for attentions towards the politics. Yul Sohn argues that we need to see the Japanese foreign policy-making process as a political discourse among domestic actors, in order to understand the nature of Japanese cultural diplomacy. (Sohn 2009) In other words, the images of Japan that Japan wants to promote through cultural diplomacy are decided through a domestic politics.

Alexander Bukh takes a more critical position that the contents of Japanese cultural diplomacy have been embedded in the “international ideational structures.” That is, by joining the Western camp of liberal democracy, the capability of Japan to promulgate its own visions and values of its culture has become seriously limited. (Bukh 2014) This implies that the contents of Japanese cultural diplomacy, in a broad sense, might have been seriously limited.

For the next step, we should take a closer look into Japanese cultural diplomacy in Southeast Asia where Japanese popular culture has been accepted in variable forms, as Nissim Kadosh Otmazgin suggests. Not only Japanese cultural products are regularly translated into local languages, but also Japanese entertainment platforms have been regarded as a role model for the local show businesses. (Otmazgin 2008) When it comes to Indonesia, the main subject of this paper, the most popular Japanese idol group AKB48 even has her local sister, JKT48 (named after Jakarta).<sup>1</sup> Initially, producer Yasushi Akimoto's JKT48 project was seen as a part of the Japanese government's *Cool Japan* project.<sup>2</sup> And therefore, JKT48's role in promoting Japanese soft power in Indonesia is an important topic of a further study.

	Total	Indonesia	Malaysia	Myanmar*	Philippines	Singapore	Thailand	Vietnam
Japan as Trustworthy	44 / 57	44 / 71	45 / 55	NA / 55	52 / 60	29 / 36	21 / 60	73 / 65
Japan with a Cool Image	42 / 35	34 / 40	58 / 42	NA / 15	58 / 37	46 / 29	17 / 41	40 / 43
Interested in comics/anime	20 / 31	8 / 52	26 / 32	NA / 3	16 / 34	26 / 28	32 / 37	10 / 33
Japan as a peaceful country	57 / 35	50 / 34	62 / 42	NA / 19	60 / 48	45 / 33	47 / 31	78 / 38
Japan as a democratic country	45 / 18	28 / 12	50 / 21	NA / 13	45 / 22	39 / 21	50 / 21	59 / 19

**Table 1.** Opinion Poll on Japan in ASEAN Countries (% of people answered in 2008 / 2014)

\*Myanmar was not included in the opinion poll in 2008 (source: MOFA)

Table 1 shows the results of two opinion polls on Japan in ASEAN countries, summarized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA). Here we clearly see that the Japan is now regarded

<sup>1</sup> AKB48 can be considered to be one of the representative figures of J-pop. AKB48 had a performance at the gala dinner of the ASEAN–Japan Commemorative Summit in December 2013. (MOFA 2014) And their Indonesian sister group, JKT48, has been gathering popularity in Indonesia. (Jakarta Post, “Guess what?: JKT48 rules Indonesia’s iTunes chart” on 24 June 2014: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2014/06/24/guess-what-jkt48-rules-indonesia-s-itunes-chart.html>, accessed on 4 January 2015)

<sup>2</sup> International Business Times, “J K T 4 8 がインドネシアで新CMをスタート (JKT48 starts a new commercial in Indonesia)”, 2 April 2012: <http://jp.ibtimes.com/articles/316296>, accessed on 4 January 2015)

more trustworthy by the people in the region – especially in Indonesia and Thailand – than it was six years ago. Higher proportions of the Indonesians and the Thais answered that they see Japan as a country with a cool image, and they are interested in Japanese comics and anime. Although it requires further studies on whether popular culture can disseminate new images on a country beyond borderlines of nation-states, these outcomes suggest a success of Japanese cultural diplomacy in the Indonesia and Thailand, to some degree. As mentioned before, the taste for the Japanese popular culture in the two countries has been grown. On the contrary, in Myanmar and Singapore, less than average proportion of the interviewees showed their interests in Japanese “cool” or popular culture.

The proportion of the interviewees who answered that they perceive Japan as a peaceful country or a democratic country, however, has decreased in every country. This is likely to have derived from the recent foreign policies of Abe cabinet, which have increased the tension in East Asia. That is to say, the aggressive Japanese foreign policies that highlight Sino-Japanese rivalry have weakened the effects of Japanese soft power.

The results of opinion polls cannot be understood easily as the outcome of Japanese cultural diplomacy only. To explain why there exist different degrees of accommodation of the Japanese culture across the region, and how Japan has achieved so much popularity in Indonesia – our main question –, we need to look into another aspect of Japanese soft power in Southeast Asia: ODA.

### **3. Japanese Official Development Assistance in Southeast Asia, Competition with China**

Despite the lack of favorable conditions such as affluent number of aid experts and personnel, Japan has utilized ODA as a tool for its national interests, bolstering the economic networking between Japan and the recipient countries. MOFA articulated in its *Diplomatic Bluebook 2014* that “ODA has played a vital role from the perspective of cultivating trust in Japan among members of the international community and enhancing its presence.” (MOFA 2014, 33) While Japan was topping the global ranking of ODA during the 1990s, Southeast Asia was a major region for Japanese ODA, where innovations in ODA were brought about and practiced. (Sudo 2002)

Table 2 shows the past trends of Japanese ODA flows into Southeast Asian countries from 1960 to 2013. Japan increased its absolute amount of ODA into the region until the late 1990s. But since the early 2000s, Japan has decreased the ODA in general, while increasing the ODA flows into Myanmar and Vietnam. Until the early 2000s, Indonesia has been the greatest recipient of Japanese ODA, which implies a close tie between the two countries. (Still, Indonesia retained the biggest hold of Japanese ODA by 2012.)

Years	Total ODA	Indonesia	Malaysia	Myanmar	Philippines	Thailand	Vietnam
1960-1964	490	100 (20.4)	0.6 (0.1)	103.5 (21.1)	75.5 (15.4)	10.5 (2.1)	46.6 (9.5)
1965-1969	1,595.4	334.6 (21)	15.1 (0.9)	53.8 (3.4)	204.3 (12.8)	31.4 (2)	-2.1
1970-1974	3,716.9	704.9 (19)	79.3 (2.1)	170.9 (4.6)	367.2 (9.9)	82.88 (2.2)	92.6 (2.5)
1975-1979	8,569.4	1,001.2 (11.7)	249.3 (2.9)	351.6 (4.1)	332.1 (3.9)	419.7 (4.9)	125.4 (1.5)
1980-1984	1,7605	1,347.5 (7.7)	543.1 (3.1)	590.6 (3.4)	747.9 (4.2)	1,054.5 (6)	7.7 (0.04)
1985-1989	34,851.9	3,159.7 (9.1)	544.2 (1.6)	901.1 (2.6)	1,995.8 (5.7)	1,676.5 (4.8)	12.9 (0.04)
1990-1994	55,673.6	5,325.1 (9.6)	712.7 (1.3)	420.3 (0.8)	3,487 (6.3)	1,971.4 (3.5)	380.6 (0.7)
1995-1999	56,089.3	4,789.1 (8.5)	-374.9	214.5 (0.4)	1,860.1 (3.3)	3,238.3 (5.8)	1,592.1 (2.8)
2000-2004	50,439.8	3,191.7 (6.3)	426.9 (0.8)	240.9 (0.5)	1,660.9 (3.3)	9.5 (0.02)	2,857.5 (5.7)
2005-2009	51,025.7	112.7 (0.2)	628.1 (1.2)	117.6 (0.3)	473.1 (0.9)	-2,143.5	3,615.8 (7.1)
2010-2013	44,075.3	-2,273.1	-239.9	2,710.4 (6.1)	-1,474.9	-763.1	4,774.5 (10.8)
<b>Total*</b>		18,245.6	2,741.72	3,264.4	9,899.96	5,753.94	12,152.51

**Table 2.** Japanese ODA to Southeast Asian countries (million U.S. dollars (percentage to total ODA))

\*Total is the cumulative sum by country in 2012. (Source: OECD, MOFA)

We can see another intriguing pattern here. Jing Sun took a look into MOFA's Opinion Poll on Japan in ASEAN Countries issued in 2008, finding a "perfect divide" among ASEAN countries. That is to say, Singaporeans, Malaysians, and Thais answered that they consider China, rather than Japan, as "the most important" present and future partner, while Indonesians, Filipinos, Vietnamese chose Japan over China. (Sun 2012) Though such a clear-cut division did not appear on MOFA's another poll in 2014, still, the countries with less Japanese ODA were relatively more favorable to China than others were. And, the countries with more Japanese ODA showed a tendency of leaning less to China. (Burmese, not included before, ranked the United States the best, followed by Japan, and then, China.) Such a tendency can be

found in Table 3 which summarizes MOFA reports on Japanese ODA and Opinion Polls on Japan in ASEAN Countries in 2008 and 2014, with a deviant case of Thais in 2008 who chose China over Japan, despite that the country retained the fourth largest sum among the seven countries.

	Indonesia	Malaysia	Myanmar*	Philippines	Singapore	Thailand	Vietnam
Cumulative Sum of Japanese ODA (2007) (million U.S. dollars)	19,921.5	2,615.5	2,991.5	11,262.5	NA	7,222.8	6,874.5
(U.S. dollars per capita)	88.29	96.66	52.02	127.15	NA	109.37	81.63
(a) Japan as the most important partner (2008)	37.9	25.8	NA	32.7	3.6	25.3	42.7
(b) China as the most important partner (2008)	12.8	39.2	NA	8.6	57.8	42.7	16.5
(a) – (b)	25.1	-13.4	NA	24.1	-54.2	-17.4	26.2
Cumulative Sum of Japanese ODA (2013) (million U.S. dollars)	18,245.6	2,741.72	3,264.4	9,899.96	NA	5,753.94	12,152.51
(U.S. dollars per capita)	73.33	91.54	52.95	101.64	NA	89.04	135.46
(c) Japan as an important partner (2014)	70	65	44	76	50	74	77
(d) China as an important partner (2014)	52	63	40	32	60	60	32
(c) – (d)	18	2	4	44	-10	14	45

**Table 3.** Japanese ODA and Opinion Poll on Japan in ASEAN Countries

(% of people answered) (source: MOFA; ASEAN Secretariat and ADB for population data)

\*Myanmar was not included in the opinion poll in 2008

In fact, there are a number of limitations in this analysis. First, without identifying the source of Chinese influence in each country (historical ties or investment from China, to name a few), the analysis cannot go further than a one-sided story. This may be the reason why the correlation between the amount of Japanese ODA and positive views on Japan does not seem linear. Second, the number of observations problem exists. We can only know the preferences of ASEAN citizens depend on the results of opinion polls commissioned and published by MOFA, but so far there are not many of them. Moreover, the number of countries included in the surveys is limited, and the questions in the polls have changed over time. That is to say, the 2008 poll was done in six ASEAN countries (Myanmar

was later included in 2014), and it asked the respondents to choose “the most important”, not several important (as the case in the 2014 poll), partner.

Despite these drawbacks, one may still assume that, as Sun argued, the relations between the amount of Japanese ODA and the countries’ views on Japan can be understood within the frame of Sino-Japanese rivalry. Having different ideal types for their regionalism, the two countries have tried to use their soft power to attract the countries in East Asia. (Sohn 2011) The total amount of Japanese ODA and the ASEAN countries’ considerations on Japan as their important partner (over China) seem to have a positive correlation.

#### **4. Conclusion**

A couple of findings of this paper could be mentioned as the reasons of why the Indonesians are so positive to the Japanese influence. In terms of cultural diplomacy, Japan has been successful in Indonesia, drawing interests of the Indonesians to Japanese popular culture. The introduction of Japanese popular culture – for example, an idol group JKT48 – is likely to have built up tastes for Japanese popular culture among the Indonesians more than other ASEAN citizens. But when it comes to a broader concept of culture which includes universal values such as peace and democracy, the popularity of Japan has declined in Indonesia, just like in any other ASEAN country. The recent Japanese foreign policies seem to have undermined their own soft power.

As for the ODA, Japan has utilized ODA as an effective policy tool. More ODA in general has brought about more favorable views toward the Japanese influence. It is true especially when we take the popularity of Japan over China in each country into account. Indonesia has been the number one recipient of Japanese ODA, and this can explain why the Indonesians regard Japan, rather than China, as their crucial partner.

To summarize, Indonesia has been Japan’s key partner in the region, for both cultural diplomacy and ODA. The two aspects together have made Indonesia a Japanophile that is positive for the Japanese influence, and favorable to Japanese culture. Although MOFA’s 2014 Opinion Poll on Japan



in ASEAN Countries implies that Japan's image as a democratic, peace-loving country has been on the decrease, the Indonesians are likely to retain their favorable attitude toward Japanese soft power for the foreseeable future.

These findings can be expanded into other scholarly/policy debates. As the above analysis suggests, the Japanese ODA seem to have an effect of excluding China. But this does not look the case for the cultural diplomacy. Whether this is because of the different natures of diverse soft power resources or other historical contexts, is to be studied. The answer to this may provide a peaceful solution of Sino-Japanese rivalry in the region.

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