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Contesting soft power: Japanese popular culture in East and Southeast Asia

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Abstract

During the last two decades, Japanese popular culture industries have massively penetrated East Asia's markets and their products have been

widely disseminated and consumed. In this region, Japan has recently emerged as a cultural power, in addition to representing an industrial forerunner and model. The aim of this article is to explore the connection between popular culture and soft power by analyzing the activities of the Japanese popular culture industries in East Asia, and by examining the images their products disseminates. This study is based on export data, market surveys, and interviews with media industry personnel and consumers in five cities in East Asia, arguing that the impact of the Japanese popular culture lies in shaping this region's cultural markets and in disseminating new images of Japan, but not in exerting local influence or in creating Japanese-dominated 'spheres of influence'.

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