

Interview with Jane Wang, CEO, Shanghai Ninestyle E-Commerce Co. &amp; Shanghai StarWin Media Consulting &amp; Advertising Co.

# How Well Is Japanese Apparel Culture Accepted in China?

By Naoyuki HARAOKA

Along with rising Chinese interest in Japanese culture, Japanese fashion magazines are getting popular among Chinese women. Against that background, Jane Wang, CEO, Shanghai Ninestyle E-Commerce Co. and Shanghai StarWin Media Consulting & Advertising Co., talked about the topic in detail in an interview with *Japan SPOTLIGHT*.

## Japanese Fashion Magazines Amiable & Comfortable to Chinese Readers

Japanese magazines highlighting the trendy fashion of single Japanese women aged 'around 30 or 40,' recently in the spotlight as fashion leaders, sell very well in China, according to informed sources. Is this true? If true, why do you think it possible?

Wang: It is not only possible but the very truth. In China, when we talk about women's fashion magazines, the top three bestsellers are all Japanese magazines. According to our business survey, they are *mina*, *ViVi* and *Ray*, all targeted at young women between 20 and 35.

The reason behind it, I believe, is that we share a similar cultural background, which makes it easier for the Chinese to accept the style of Japanese fashion. Also, we have similar body shapes and that means the Japanese fashion style fits us better. Even the Japanese skin care products are better accepted by our Oriental skin.

Different from those European or American fashion magazines who always boast themselves as "fashion bibles," Japanese magazines are way more practical, more informative, more amiable

and (pose) zero distance to their readers.

In the case of *mina*, which targets young girls at 20-28, it seldom talks about fashion trends for the next season or next year. Instead it always tells you what you to wear next week, next month, and how you can mix the basic items you already have and the new items you are going to buy. It never uses "star" models. Instead it uses average models, even "reader models" a lot. They never put a cool look on their faces; they just let you feel like they are the girls next door. And it is very possible that you can look as pretty as the models when you really learn how to look that way. If you compare *mina* with other "high-end" fashion magazines, I would say *mina* is more like water while other European or American magazines are "coffee." It might not be so tasty, so outstanding, but you simply cannot live without it.

Four to five years ago when *mina* was launched, there were not so many Japanese-style magazines. All you could see were big names such as *Cosmo*, *Elle*, *Ray*, *Marie Claire*, *Bazaar*, etc., the so-called high-end magazines. I still remember there were a number of others launched almost at the same time, including *CanCam*, *Lucy* and *With*. In four years' time, we have already become the No. 1 women's fashion magazine while the above-mentioned are out of the market.

## Chinese Market Seen More Mature in Next Decade

Photos: Shufunotomo Co.



Chinese fashion magazines "Scawaii!" (left) and "mina" published in partnership with Shufunotomo Co. of Tokyo. "S" of "Scawaii!" symbolizes Super, Sexy, Superior, etc., and "cawaii" means "cute" in Japanese.

The reason why we succeeded is not because we did a better job than anybody else, although we tried hard to do so, but (because of) the market demand itself. In China, women's fashion magazines are only salable under 20 RMB. This means you lose money by selling magazines and the only way of making profits is through advertising. That's why all the publishers are more willing to publish high-end magazines since normally luxury brands are the ones with big budgets.

But when you look at the big market picture, the whole structure is a pyramid. The high end is only a small part on the top while the majority is middle-end and low-end as a base. When all the publishers go for high-end, they would turn the pyramid upside down. I still believe magazines shall be media first, and advertising comes second. That's the reason we focus on the readers'

side more than the advertisers' side.

In the whole world, circulation makes the advertising value of the magazine, and China is not different from any other market. In the next decade, as the Chinese market becomes more and more mature, the market demand will be stronger and stronger driven.

Japanese fashion magazines are doing a very good job on that side. I am very confident that in the near future, they will be the most powerful fashion style in the Asian market.

**Can we understand that voluminous sales of those magazines could lead to the increased sales of clothing themselves?**

**Wang :** Yes, we can. Fashion is an industry. It contains many aspects. When you buy a fashion magazine, naturally it's just a start. People need to buy clothes, shoes, accessories, beauty items, etc., to make themselves look fashionable.

With the increasing sales of Japanese fashion magazines, people will get more and more familiar with Japanese fashion styles. Japanese fashion brands will definitely become more and more powerful. And Japanese quality is a symbol of reliability. But to achieve solid recognition, Japanese brands still have a long way to go.

### **Japanese Culture Has Stronger Impact on Younger Generations**

**What do you think about the flow of Japanese culture including not only fashion but also animation or cuisine into China? Could there be a nationalistic response to it?**

**Wang :** In China, in general, the older generation is more influenced by traditional Chinese culture, the middle-aged are more influenced by Western culture besides Chinese. Japanese culture has a stronger impact on the younger generation.

My two little boys like to watch Japanese TV programs for children more than anything else. I always have a hard time to get their eyes off the television. I was told by one of their teachers that once they were asked to write a small article about the "most respected" hero, and my son wrote about "Ultraman."

The so-called "after 80s" generation grew up together with Japanese animation. When they grow up, they are more interested in the Japanese language, Japanese cuisine, and Japanese fashion. The result will come out gradually.

If you ask me, I would say it could be not only a nationwide but a global response to it. With the new invention of science, especially the Internet, the whole world is becoming smaller.

**In Japan, we now face increasing Chinese or Korean cultural influence as shown in the popularity of Chinese or Korean TV dramas. This cultural interaction among the three important Asian countries would eventually lead to further economic alliance in Asia and end up in Asian economic integration such as the EU, I believe. What do you think about this trend?**

**Wang :** This certainly could be one of the possibilities. But when we talk about the EU, I think they have similar languages, cultural, geographical and even economic backgrounds. In Asia, countries differ a lot. We have different languages, different cultures, different religions, different economic systems. Among Asian countries, the biggest problems are the huge economic gap

between developed and underdeveloped. So it is not that easy to end up in Asian economic integration as the EU.

**In thinking about so-called 'soft power' that is used in describing the character of the US Obama administration's foreign policy using the image of good and fair Americans as their tool to influence the game of war and peace, China's 'soft power' is also phenomenal. Chinese ancient poetry, theatrical pieces and literature must be sources of Chinese foreign policy influence. Unfortunately, we Japanese have never had such cultural power so far. Do you think our contemporary culture like fashion and animation could have such power?**

**Wang :** I think what you Japanese have is a power softer but even stronger. Your contemporary culture like fashion and animation can easily access younger generations. And by that, you are getting to the future of the whole world.

**Human interaction not only in business but also in academia, art and culture is very important in terms of learning to respect each other's historical inheritance. Do you think both countries' human interaction is sufficient? For example, should we try to increase the number of students studying abroad in each other's country?**

**Wang :** I think both countries should try harder to push human interaction, especially in culture. Mutual understanding is the base for every interaction. Even for business interaction, if you know the foreign market better, speak the language, understand the culture, then you probably know the market reaction better, and you have a bigger chance of being successful.

Increasing the number of students studying abroad in each other's country is a good start. But a more important thing is to gain the so-called "Chinese" experience or "Japanese" experience. Not only in culture, but in every aspect.

### **E-commerce Business Next Target**

**Finally, as one of the business persons engaged in the sales of Japanese fashion magazines, could I have your future plan and sales strategy, if possible?**

**Wang :** We will focus on introducing more Japanese fashion into the Chinese market and we will stay at what we are good at. We are now preparing to launch one to two new Japanese magazines into the Chinese market, both targeted at the young generation.

In the following years, we will pay a lot of attention to the e-commerce business we started earlier this year. We will work with Japanese fashion brands together to expand their market share in China. We believe luxury brands are only for a small number of wealthy people and for the majority of customers. Everyday wear is what they care about the most. We believe for most of the Japanese brands the e-commerce business is the most cost-effective and time-saving way of getting into a huge market like China.

Besides investing in the magazine business, we already started to build up our own Internet platform and we will develop new business models by linking together press media, the Internet, TV and much more.

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