

# Pop Culture-Links Among Asian Nations

By Naoyuki Haraoka

It is difficult to achieve mutual understanding among nations with different languages, religions and cultural backgrounds. Common economic and political interests could create good foreign relations without a deep appreciation of each nation's culture.

Culture is often considered soft power in foreign policy and can be important for a nation to exert some influence in gaining favor with the rest of the world and securing advantages in the global economy and geopolitics. However, in reality, superpowers with huge economies and political influence can take full advantage of their strengths to secure their interests, and population also plays a key role in acquiring the status of a big power.

But power can be used not only for a nation's own interest but also to contribute to global governance in an effort to secure peace, stability and prosperity. Can cultural influence play a part in such power? Perhaps both yes and no. Culture as a soft power is key for small and medium nations to raise their influence in the international community. Japan, as a middle power, has limited economic and political influence and thus its contribution to global peace and prosperity is also rather limited. Middle and small powers today face the critical risk of security against the backdrop of geopolitical risks brought about by conflicts among superpowers.

They need to find a way to contribute to global governance for peace and prosperity, which would also be helpful for their national security. Cultural influence may not work in this regard immediately but could work in the long run. Long-term efforts to achieve deep understanding of another country's culture and keen interest in it would pave the way for closer links and good relations among nations, which could have a positive impact on economic and political relations.

Japan, with its long history, has been developing and reflecting its own sense of beauty in art works like animations and games, and what we call J-Pop. It has been developing a unique story-telling capacity independent from particular values or philosophy, but creating a variety of human stories not only about powerful heroes but also about ordinary citizens. Japanese are not strong in logic but rather good at artistic expression, and today this does seem to work well in achieving links and collaboration in Asia. Asian pop culture could lead to regional peace and prosperity and thus national security.

The cover story highlights Asian cooperation in pop culture. We must not forget that pop culture could not only produce friendship but also wealth, as cultural industries such as animation and games provide growing earning opportunities. Young people, the principal beneficiaries of pop culture, should feel privileged to be

entrepreneurs in the culture industry. We are likely to see rising entrepreneurship in this area, which is a good prospect for a nation's growth strategy. It is important to note that the rest of Asia is also experiencing a flourishing pop culture and cooperation among all these nations could further raise Asia's growth potential.

We have a Roundtable on the cover story's theme with experts moderated by JEF Chairman Toyoda. The discussion highlights the potential of Japanese pop culture, whether it can work as a link in Asia, and the implications of policy to support cultural and creative industries in Japan.

The crucial role of international cooperation in Asian pop culture industries is noted in four articles. The Anime Festival Asia (AFA) Singapore 2025, Southeast Asia's largest anime event is highlighted in two interviews – one with Daisuke Horiguchi, CEO of Secret Sessions Pte. Ltd, a Japanese supporter of this event, and the other with Shawn Chin, a Singaporean supporter. They talk about the growing potential of animation and other pop culture as a link in Asia with cooperation among themselves.

Second, India-Japan friendship resulted in the recent success of a co-production animation film "Ramayana: The Legend of Prince Rama" that was presented at the Indian Film Festival at the Indian Embassy in Tokyo in March 2026. The interview with the producers in Japan, Atushi Matsuo and Kenji Yoshii, showcases the implications of co-producing films to overcome the challenges of possible misunderstandings due to cultural differences.

South Korea is another big country in pop culture in Asia. The Korea Creative Content Agency (KOCCA) is the public organization in charge of promoting K-Pop. Lee Hyeon, the director of KOCCA Tokyo Business Center, contributes an article highlighting the implications of Korea-Japan cooperation in promoting their pop cultures. Finally, we can see the good outcome of successful cultural exchanges between the United States and Japan. Their close alliance in the postwar period has produced enormous cultural influence on each other. While American films are greatly loved in Japan, Japanese cuisine is popular in the US. In spite of significant difference of language, this alliance and close cultural ties have made it possible to have a magazine of translations of Japanese contemporary literature, MONKEY. Our editorial committee member Jillian Yorke highlights the brilliant story of this magazine. Other Asian countries may find a similar path to overcome language barriers.

Soft power cannot replace any economic or political alliance, but in the long run it may help to promote beneficial foreign relations.

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