Exhibiting Cool Japan

The effect of Japanese soft power on the Netherlands through museums

MA Thesis: East Asian Studies

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Over fifteen years ago, Pokémon became *the* phenomenon of my childhood. The latest episode was discussed by almost everyone in class in primary school, and some had an extensive Pokémon card collection as well. The cute monsters even infiltrated my family when almost everyone owned their own version of the Pokémon game to "catch 'em all" on the Gameboy Colour. It even led to tournaments on holidays, mostly because my cousin was convinced his Pokémon were unbeatable (they were not and he came in last). This was my own first encounter with Japanese soft power even though I did not realize it at the time, and people in all parts of the world have similar stories to tell.

In academic circles, there has been plenty of discussion on Japanese soft power, though thus far the focus has been on the United States. There are some scholars who have written on Europe as well, though these often only cover France and Germany. The Netherlands is one country that has not been discussed, even though it has an active fan community. Another aspect that has not been researched is Cool Japan from a museological perspective. If one is trying to spread a message, reach more audiences, and make one's culture appear as unique, exhibitions are a great tool to accomplish that. After all, exhibitions are an educational environment and perfect for reaching diverse audiences.

Therefore, in this thesis I want to look at the effect of Japanese soft power and the Cool Japan program in the Netherlands through exhibitions. My main research question is "to what extent is Cool Japan a successful endeavor in the Netherlands if we look at the use of exhibitions in their efforts to increase Japanese soft power?" To answer this question, several sub questions will be necessary as well. Firstly, "to what extent are Japanese (governmental) institutions involved in the making of these exhibitions?" Secondly, "what is the visitors' experience in the exhibition and do they actually learn anything new?" And finally, "do these exhibitions have any commercial effects on Dutch consumption of Japanese popular culture?"

My hypothesis is that Cool Japan actively tries to spread its message to the world through exhibitions that provide a general positive image. This is not to say that I believe Japanese institutions use museums as propaganda machines, but I do hypothesize that they can exert a substantial amount of influence on how their popular culture is represented to stimulate Japanese soft power and foreign consumption of their popular culture. To remain within the scope of a MA thesis, I have selected three exhibitions on which we will focus: *Cool Japan* (2017, National Museum of World Cultures), *Kingdom of Characters* (2014, Japanmuseum SieboldHuis), and *Hello Kitty-Hello Holland* (2011, Japanmuseum SieboldHuis).

To answer the above research questions, I have divided my research into three chapters. The literature review focuses on establishing a theoretical background of soft power, analyses the history of Cool Japan, and discusses its effect worldwide. The third chapter covers my methodology and data set. Finally, the fourth and most important chapter analyzes my data set, and consists of three analyses: a discourse analysis that looks at each exhibition to gauge what the actual message is towards visitors, an interview analysis with the makers behind the exhibitions, and a content analysis of my visitor survey of the *Cool Japan* exhibition. Complete overviews of all data have been included as appendices.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Soft power and nation branding

Before we look at what is missing in research on Japanese popular culture and soft power, I first want to briefly establish a theoretical background. Nation branding is rooted in soft power, a concept which was first coined by Joseph Nye in his 1990 book *Bound to Lead* in which he argued America's power was not in decline. Nye asserted that America was not only the strongest nation when it came to militaristic and economic power, but also in what he called "soft power". As the opposite of "hard power", which coerces other nations with military means, soft power instead uses culture and ideology as a diplomatic method of coercion. (Nye 1990)

This concept has since been used in many studies on the concept of nation branding, but what is that exactly? Aronczyk describes it as "the creation and communication of national identity using tools, techniques, and expertise from the world of corporate brand management." (2013, 15) In other words, nation branding is a communications strategy that creates a certain image of one's nation and brings international awareness to that image. According to Aronczyk there are three dimensions or functions to nation branding. The first is to (re)generate capital, which helps the nation to compete economically internationally. Secondly, it gives the nation more legitimacy and authority in diplomatic arenas, both proactively to dodge unfavorable attention and reactively to repair damaged reputations. Finally, nation branding also influences the nation itself, as leaders hope a favorable international opinion will also generate pride and patriotism among the population. (Aronczyk 2013, 16-17)

The fact that nation branding also influences the nation's population and not just international opinion returns in the works of Valaskivi and Iwabuchi. Valaskivi argues that nation branding consciously tries to influence the social imaginary through the local practices of branding efforts. After all, the people have to "live the brand". By circulating new representations, values, meanings and practices, Valaskivi asserts that the community's own values and shared understanding of identity get reformulated in the social imaginary as well. (Valaskivi 2013, 486) Iwabuchi's argument is similar, but instead of nation branding influencing the social imaginary, he asserts that it plays a role in the reconstruction of "imagined communities" as people are called on to participate in the renewed representation of the nation. In other words, the people become the ambassadors of the nation branding campaign. (Iwabuchi 2015b, 18) He continues with the fact that nation branding as well as market-driven globalization engender a process he calls "banal inter-nationalism", which he stresses is cause for concern. National cultural borders become reinforced through this process as nations clearly want to present some cultural aspects as "theirs". This means multicultural questions are suppressed due to the large amount of cross-

border cultural flows that try to convey a certain national image. Therefore, any multicultural issues that do not fit into this image may be repressed, leading to new forms of "us" and "them" and exclusionary politics. (Iwabuchi 2015b, 9-10+20)

But how does a nation go about the branding process itself? According to Valaskivi, there are four essential properties of any brand that also apply to nations. First, there is the brand identity, or the 'core meaning' of the brand. Secondly, there is the brand image, or the perception of the brand in the minds of consumers. For nations this refers to international perception. Thirdly, there is brand equity, or good will that is generated by a good reputation. Finally, a brand also needs a brand purpose, which comes down to 'living the brand' and 'shared values'. By following these brand properties, Valaskivi asserts that the nation starts to behave similarly to a corporation. (Valaskivi 2013, 490) However, Aronczyk does note that very few nations can be considered as successful in their endeavors with measurable results. (2013, 80)

Finally, before moving on to Japanese nation branding efforts, it is important to stress that Japan is hardly unique in attempting to project a certain image of itself. For example, Estonia adopted the slogan 'E-stonia' due to their large computer industry. Other examples, all like the Cool Japan pattern, include 'Incredible India', 'I feel sLOVEnia', and 'Srbija: sounds global'. (Valaskivi 2013, 489)

2.2 Nation branding and Japan: Cool Japan

Pre-Cool Japan era

When we look at what has been written on Cool Japan so far, there is a consensus among scholars that Japan's interest in using its media culture as a means of nation branding started in the early 2000s. However, there are several authors who argue that Japan already promoted itself in much earlier stages.

Valaskivi argues for the earliest first manifestations of Japan attempting to influence international opinion by reaching back to the Meiji Restoration (1868), of which the reinvention of the nation was a project of reimagining Japan. She continues with Japan's participation in World Expositions starting in 1863, a few years before the Meiji Restoration officially occurred. These types of expositions were the easiest way to present one's nation to a large international audience at the time. (Valaskivi 2013, 487) Napier adds that Japan used these fairs as an opportunity to prove they had a right to be considered as one of the "civilized" nations. By the early 1900s, Japan had become accomplished exposition participants and adept at promoting their state and culture. (Napier 2007, 56-57) The fact that Japan used these types of expositions as a form of early nation branding is significant, as it begs the question whether it could be using a similar strategy today

through museological exhibitions. Unfortunately, this avenue has remained unexplored by academics.

On the other hand, Iwabuchi states that Japan began to enhance its image in the 1920s and 1930s, which was part of their aspirations to be seen as equal to Western colonial powers, but that this stopped after the Second World War. (Iwabuchi 2015a, 420) Tsutsui briefly covers the 1950s, during which the Japanese government continued to support the export of high and popular culture, but that it did so through limited means. It was also more comfortable with exporting elite cultural forms rather than mass entertainment. (Tsutsui 2010, 61) Iwabuchi continues with the 1960s, when the question of how to represent the nation's image returned as Japan's economy grew exponentially. This led to a renewed cultural diplomacy during the 1970s when this economic boom caused friction with the United States and stirred up anti-Japanese sentiments in Southeast Asia. To repair this damage, the Japanese government initiated methods of cultural exchange. This approach was called the Fukuda Doctrine, which also resulted in the establishment of the Japan Foundation in 1972. This Foundation is an extra-departmental organization of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and focuses on presenting Japanese culture overseas to improve Japan's international image. Furthermore, during the 1980s, Japanese TV programs and pop idols became increasingly popular in East and Southeast Asia, which led to a growing interest in using Japanese media culture to improve Japan's reputation. (Iwabuchi 2015a, 420)

Lasting into the 1990s, popular culture was considered by the Japanese government as simple entertainment at best, or as vulgar and infantile at its worst as *otaku* or obsessed fans had a bad reputation at the time. The main reason for this were a string of murders by a man who identified as *otaku*, after which the media labeled all fans as deranged and dangerous. (Daliot-Bul 2009, 250) (Brenner 2007, 194) Furthermore, Matsui writes that the 1990s also meant the collapse of Japan's bubble economy that had been fueling Japanese industries since the 1960s, which crushed Japanese self-confidence. (2014, 83) Of course, *anime* animations and *manga* comics had already reached the United States and other regions, but this was almost entirely due to private sector institutions and enthusiastic individuals in the West who set up private organizations and active fan networks. (Tsutsui 2010, 61) As the 1990s rolled into the 2000s, Japan became known in the West as the 'Empire of Cool'. (Daliot-Bul 2009, 250) It is this development that snowballed into the Cool Japan program as we know it today. However, considering the Japanese government did not focus on popular culture until *after* it had already become popular internationally, one wonders to what extent Japan itself needs to be involved for them to be viewed positively. It is possible that as its popularity and fan community grew, local corporations and institutions as museums became more inclined to tap into that market and cater to the audience by presenting

Japanese media culture positively and uncritically. Therefore, we will take a look at Japan's involvement in its own representation later on.

Cool Japan in the 2000s and beyond

Cool Japan has developed through different policies over the past two decades, though whether they are effective (or perhaps even necessary) has largely been left out of academic discussion. As stated before, the true beginnings of Cool Japan as a government program were actually not of Japanese origin. It was one article by American journalist Douglas McGray titled 'Japan's Gross National Cool' (2002) that is said to have sparked government interest in using modern media culture for nation branding. In this article, McGray described how the rest of the world had rediscovered Japanese culture and began to consider Japan as 'cool' once again, while Japan was focused on its economic problems after the collapse of its economic bubble. He dubbed this newfound global cultural influence Japan's 'Gross National Cool'. (McGray 2002) This article garnered much attention in Japan after it was translated and published in opinion magazine *Chuokoron* in May 2003. (Matsui 2014, 83)

However, there are two scholars who assert that the first government references to using content products were not related to McGray's article. Daliot-Bul states that Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi announced that a national policy of intellectual property would be developed in February 2002 (Daliot-Bul 2009, 250), stating: "Japan already possesses some of the best patents and other intellectual properties in the world. I will set as one of our national goals that the results of research activities and creative endeavors are translated into intellectual properties that are strategically protected and utilized so that we can enhance the international competitiveness of Japanese industries. With that in mind, I will establish the Strategic Council on Intellectual Properties, and powerfully advance the relevant necessary policies." (Koizumi, Policy Speech by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi 2002) Indeed, one month later this Council was established, and quickly drew up an Intellectual Property Strategy Outline. (Daliot-Bul 2009, 250) (Matsui 2014, 86) Matsui goes back even earlier to a speech by Prime Minister Yoshirô Mori in 2000, who was the first to use the word 'content' for governmental purposes. (Matsui 2014, 86) (Mori 2000) McGray's article was not published until May 2002, with the Japanese translation not following until 2003, so Matsui and Daliot-Bul may be correct that the first sparks of Japanese interest in spreading its media culture (though probably a different media culture than what we associate with Japanese nation branding today) were not related to McGray, but *Japan's Gross National Cool* certainly jumpstarted more elaborate strategies.

However, the first time 'popular culture' was mentioned in a Prime Minister's address was after the publication by McGray, though before the translation had come out. In January 2003, Prime Minister Koizumi acknowledged several international prizes that had been awarded to Japanese

citizens during the previous year. Alongside Nobel Prize and King Faisal International Prize winners, Koizumi also includes Studio Ghibli's film *Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi* (*Spirited Away*, 2001) which won several international awards. (Koizumi 2003) According to Matsui, this demonstrated that the Koizumi administration was serious about promoting Japanese popular culture globally. (2014, 86)

As mentioned above, the Intellectual Property Council was established in 2002. The council's newly developed national policy focused on intellectual property, and featured media content as *anime*, *manga* and games at the forefront. (Daliot-Bul 2009, 248) (Matsui 2014, 86) Daliot-Bul writes that this Policy consisted of two phases, each with their own short and long-term objectives. Phase I lasted from approximately 2003 to 2005 and focused on institutional reforms, setting up collaborative projects between the creative industry, academia and the government. Valaskivi adds that the Japan Brand Strategy was introduced in 2004 as part of the annual update of these Intellectual Property Strategic Programs, which marks creative industries as the core of the Japan Brand. (Daliot-Bul 2009, 251) (Valaskivi 2013, 486) Phase II began in 2006 and was given the goal of 'making Japan the most advanced intellectual property-based nation in the world' by Koizumi, but this was later reworded as 'strengthen[ing] an intellectual property strategy that watchfully target[s] the world' after there had been a marked decline in Japan's international competitiveness in various ranking systems in 2008. (Daliot-Bul 2009, 251) While these phases unfolded, the slogan 'Cool Japan' was adopted around 2005. (Valaskivi 2013, 485)

Over the course of these phases, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) both committed to Cool Japan policies. Matsui writes that MOFA began in 2003 and with 'cultural diplomacy' becoming a keyword in their policies. One of its earliest commitments to Cool Japan was its support of the World Cosplay Summit, an annual cosplay competition for cosplayers worldwide. Furthermore, in 2007, MOFA began hosting the annual International MANGA Award competition to honor non-Japanese *mangaka* or manga authors. (Matsui 2014, 89-90) In 2008, popular animation character Doraemon was appointed as Anime Ambassador, followed by three young female fashion leaders as 'Ambassadors of Cute' who would travel the world to promote Japanese popular culture. (Iwabuchi 2015a, 424) (Iwabuchi 2015b, 29) (Matsui 2014, 90)

METI got involved much earlier than that. Matsui writes that the start of their commitment to Cool Japan policies was the establishment of the Media and Content Industry Division at the Commerce and Information Policy Bureau back in 2001. Initially this Division focused on the diffusion of broadband internet, but its aims changed over time to expanding the market for the content industry abroad as well as creating jobs in Japan itself. (Matsui 2014, 86-87) Years later in 2010, METI officially established the Cool Japan promotion office, naming it after the 2005 slogan.

(Iwabuchi 2015a, 423) (Iwabuchi 2015b, 29) Finally, in 2013 the Council for the Promotion of Cool Japan was established and in the same year 50 billion yen was dedicated to the promotion of Japanese content and culture overseas in the national budget for infrastructure. (Iwabuchi 2015a, 423) Iwabuchi also remarks that the ministries engage with Cool Japan in different ways. Whereas METI is mostly aiming for market promotion, MOFA believes the focus should be on enhancing Japan's cultural standing in the world. (Iwabuchi 2015a, 424)

However, there has been little discussion on the effectiveness of these policies, let alone whether foreign institutions have not been inclined themselves to positively and uncritically present Japanese popular culture to tap into a lucrative market. This includes the increasing number of museums hosting exhibitions on various aspects of Japanese popular culture in both Europe and the United States, making one question to what extent the policies enumerated above are actually truly necessary and whether Japan itself even needs to get involved to ensure a positive image of itself, as we will discuss in coming chapters.

2.3 Worldwide spread of Japanese popular culture and soft power

The United States

Most literature on the spread and effects of Japanese popular culture and soft power in the West has been written on the United States. However, long before the Japanese government initiated the Cool Japan program, Kelts writes that there were already several waves of interest in Japanese culture in the West. The first wave occurred during the 18th and 19th centuries in the fashion of "Japonisme", which spread from artists who were inspired by the Japanese aesthetics and intellectuals to the upper and middle classes. (Kelts 2006, 5) (Napier 2007, 24-25) The second wave began during the 1950s and 1960s and lasted through the 1980s into the 1990s. This is also where most scholars zoom in on America and stop mentioning Europe. Tsutsui writes that American citizens' affluence and leisure time increased, which led to an ever-growing demand for entertainment. The American media industry therefore needed products of reasonable quality to fill television airtime and movie theaters, and Japanese animation was cheaply available. From the 1960s, *anime* imports were embraced as cheap entertainment for younger viewers. Tsutsui asserts that these imports are an important reason Japanese popular culture has become so readily available in the United States. However, imported material was hardly ever shown in its original form, as *anime* and live-action movies were heavily edited and dubbed. This gave American viewers the impression that Japanese filmmakers were unskilled, and stereotypes such as Japan being weak and dependent on America seemed to be confirmed. (Tsutsui 2010, 40-41+52) However, whether younger viewers realized these products were Japanese is questionable.

Starting in the 1970s, *anime* and *manga* became part of American underground culture. This was made possible purely by fans who wanted more *anime*, movies and eventually *manga*, but the coveted original or unedited versions were difficult to obtain. (Brenner 2007, 11) Napier asserts that technological advances as the introduction of VCRs helped Japanese animation reach its fans during this period. Video tapes allowed for greater distribution, and it became common for fans to get together during conventions and watch tapes together, as well as swapping or copying them. (Napier 2007, 134-135) As the Japanese economy continued to surge in the 1980s, the reputation of Japanese popular culture also gradually increased from cheap and laughable to technically sophisticated and desirable. (Tsutsui 2010, 52) Japanese popular culture finally became more mainstream when the film release of *Akira* (1988) had a major impact on American audiences. (Brenner 2007, 11)

It was not until this *anime* boom during the second half of the 1980s that *manga* also began to take off in the West. *Anime* fans began to import *manga* without being able to read Japanese, which led to a rise in 'scanlation' or the act of scanning and translating manga by fans. Companies that imported *manga* in the United States generally went for genres they considered a safe bet such as science fiction that did not seem too "Japanese", so fans imported other genres they wanted to read themselves. 'Scanlators' also translated differently than the official commercial translators. Instead of localizing the product and removing Japanese elements, they instead stressed *manga*'s exoticness by keeping cultural differences intact. (Rampant 2010, 222-223) Napier writes that like *anime* in the decades before, the impact of *manga* in the West could not have been achieved without technological advancements as translations would have been difficult without the rise of the Internet. (Napier 2007, 206)

During the 1990s, it became increasingly apparent to American corporations that the fan base for Japanese mass entertainment products had become substantial and that there were profits to be made in the importing, translating and distributing of *manga* and *anime*. (Brenner 2007, 11-12) During the beginning of the *manga* boom, American distributors adapted the material for Western audiences by "flipping" the pages so that they would read left to right. However, when it became apparent that fans preferred the original versions, publishers began distributing *manga* in its original form in the early 21st century. Increased popularity also opened the *manga* market to previously untapped audiences: teenage girls and young women. (Couch 2010, 214) (Brenner 2007, 12)

In the 21st century, American consumers have generally embraced entertainment goods from Japan and Tsutsui adds that American creators have also begun to imitate these products, such as Disney. (Tsutsui 2010, 54) Today, fan culture greatly consists of a community feeling. Brenner writes that American fans have proudly claimed the term '*otaku*' to denote their fanhood. As

mentioned before, "*otaku*" attracted horrible connotations in Japan, and it is still not a flattering term. Therefore, it is noteworthy that in the United States 'being an *otaku*' has become a proud moniker of fanhood. It must also be noted that nowadays fans of Japanese popular culture come from all walks of life and cannot be labeled. (Brenner 2007, 194-197)

However, it is questionable to what extent all these waves of interest are due to Cool Japan policies and how successful Japan's popular culture would have been if it were not for these fans themselves. It seems the Japanese government and corporations did not think of Western regions as a viable market until the fan community had grown substantially, and the focus on Japanese popular culture as cool in branding policies did not occur until the West already saw it that way. Local corporations also tapped into the market soon enough to cater to the growing audience of fans, and when reading about these waves I cannot help but wonder whether Western corporations and institutions (including museums) are not inclined to portray and market Japan in a positive light regardless of Japan's branding strategy. The example we will be looking at is how museums portray Japan with or without influence from Cool Japan.

Europe

Unfortunately, literature on Europe is much less detailed, though how *anime* and *manga* first appeared there seems to be a similar story to that of America as scholars seem to lump them together as "the West". The few details that have been written mainly focus on France and Germany. Köhn writes that in Germany the popularity of *manga* contributed to the flourishing of the comics market and to a revaluation of comics which had been socially disregarded in Germany for a long time. Whereas at first *manga* were only available in specialized shops, many regular bookstores began to stock them as well in the early 21st century. (Köhn 2006, 127-128) Dolle-Weinkauff adds that in Germany most fans are between 14 and 25 years of age according to two independent surveys that were held during the 2000s. These fans generally first encountered *anime* during the late 1980s or 1990s after which they were increasingly exposed to the growing number of available *manga*. Older fans are not as numerous, but they did play an important role in the popularity of Japanese popular culture as "*manga* pioneers" who imported foreign language *manga* due to a lack of good German versions, and they were the ones who founded widely circulated fanzines and began to organize events for fellow fans. (Dolle-Weinkauff 2008, 216-218) Interestingly, it appears that German fans are also predominantly female, whereas in other countries there is a more even division between the sexes. (Bouissou, Pellitteri, et al. 2010, 254-255)

In France, Bouissou writes that *manga* for younger audiences have been the most successful, and that *shônen* and *shôjo manga* (or comics for boys and girls respectively) were the reason it succeeded in the French market. Much like Germany, *anime* also played a role in the broader

popularity of Japanese popular culture. Of course, France has its own strong comics culture in the form of *bandes dessinées*, and Bouissou identifies several reasons for how *manga* managed to penetrate this national market. In France, *manga* are cheaper as they are produced on a more massive scale. Furthermore, Japanese *manga* series provide more material and series last longer than most of their French counterparts with a new volume being published every two months for several years. This also allows for a broader selection of genres, whereas French comics generally attempt to appeal to everyone. (Bouissou 2006, 150-154)

Hardly anything has been written on other European countries, though Bouissou, Pellitteri, Dolle-Weinkauff and Beldi do give some insights in one article. Italy used to be the largest *manga* market in Europe, even though that relies on guesswork as there are no official sales figures. In 2000 Italy published five times as many *manga* as France, though over the years the French publishing scene grew exponentially and caught up to them. Spain's market for Japanese popular culture, on the other hand, started slowly as publishers first altered manga to a traditional comic book format and sold them for high prices. After the market stagnated, the publication of cheaper unaltered *manga* began with successful results. For Belgium there are no official figures available, but Bouissou et al assert that by simply looking at the amount of available *manga* in bookstores, the market there has also steadily grown since the 1990s. Interestingly, they also looked at two Eastern European countries: Poland and Russia. In Poland, *manga* struggled to gain a foothold, mainly because of a bad reputation of comics in general and government censorship. However, it became increasingly successful largely due to Japanese entrepreneurs who started publishing ventures there. In Russia, manga were introduced accidentally by diplomats who visited Japan and returned with *manga*, and their children became the first fans. The market in Russia was extremely limited and relied on underground circulation among a small group of fans until it became more well-known in recent decades. Interestingly, Russia is one of the few countries where *manga* preceded *anime* instead of the other way around. (Bouissou, Pellitteri, et al. 2010, 254-256)

As we have seen in the United States previously, it is questionable whether Japanese popular culture would have experienced such success in many European countries if the fans had not brought it there first themselves. However, compared to the vast amount that has been written on America, there has hardly been any research on Japanese popular culture in Europe, let alone on Cool Japan's effectiveness in the Netherlands and tools used to promote it such as exhibitions.

Reasons for worldwide fascination

There are varying opinions on why Japanese popular culture grew into this phenomenon, but a true reason is difficult to pinpoint. As Kelts rightfully asserts, different fans of different subcultures will give a wide variety of reasons. Young consumers of Pokémon for example

confirmed the success of Japan's marketing campaign with merchandise, *anime*, and games, whereas older fans of Godzilla gave reasons ranging from the aesthetics to uncomplicated good-versus-evil storylines. (Kelts 2006, 44-45) Napier has also conducted extensive research focused on college-aged fans, who were also not of one mind. She did identify two general aspects the reasons had in common: the highly interactive nature of this fan culture and "subcultural capital", or knowledgeable or creative fans gaining respect and admiration from their peers. (Napier 2007, 149-150)

However, there are three main and sometimes contradictory reasons that are frequently mentioned. Firstly, Iwabuchi argues that Japanese popular culture enjoys such success because it is "culturally odorless" or "*mukokuseki*", by which he means that the products lack any nationality and seem culturally neutral. As opposed to the United States, whose products have a "good fragrance" associated with positive attributes, Japan is not seen the same way. Therefore, the only popular products that have been successful globally are the ones that do not remind people of Japan. According to Iwabuchi, these products can be put into three categories: consumer technologies, comics and cartoons, and computer games. To remove any "cultural odor", Japanese elements are removed by for example making characters appear non-Japanese, and products are localized. A clear example of localization of a successful global product is the renaming of Pokémon in different markets. Japanese media industries came to see this removal of "cultural odor" as imperative to success. (Iwabuchi 2002, 27-28+94) (Napier 2005, 24) (Bainbridge and Norris 2010, 241-242)

On the other hand, Bouissou and Allison argue that it is partially the unique style that is recognized as Japanese which attracts a worldwide audience. (Bouissou and Allison 2008, 27-28) Others directly contradict Iwabuchi, such as Napier who writes that it can be argued that some worldwide popular characters do possess Japanese characteristics, like "cuteness". Furthermore, according to her own research, a substantial number of fans is attracted to Japanese popular culture because of its "Japaneseness". (Napier 2007, 137+209) This recognizable Japanese style also sets the products apart from their American counterparts and the Japanese variety is seen as more polished, sophisticated and less predictable. (Tsutsui 2010, 35) Most of Napier's survey respondents also indicated that they considered Japanese anime as superior to American products, whose plots seem stale, characters feel one-dimensional, and visuals seem unimaginative and unaesthetic. (Napier 2007, 137)

Finally, there are also academics who seek its success in history. Bouissou and Allison write that the atomic bombings, Japan's defeat after World War II and its subsequent occupation by the United States deeply affected the collective imagination, in which postapocalyptic universes and monstrous entities feature frequently. (Bouissou and Allison 2008, 26-27) It is this trauma that

eventually grew into the popular culture we know today. Kelts connects this to the popularity of Japanese popular culture in the United States. He argues that the 9/11 terrorist attack was the first time Americans experienced a traumatic event on their own soil, which could be why Japanese popular culture began to appeal to American youngsters. (Kelts 2006, 39-40) However, Tsutsui considers this approach to be problematic as the events were of entirely different scales. It also does not explain popularity before 9/11, nor its continued popularity now that the trauma is not acute anymore. (Tsutsui 2010, 43-44)

In sum, the popularity of Japanese popular culture worldwide cannot be attributed to one cause. Not only do global markets have different reasons to enjoy it, each fan has their own reasons as well. What is apparent, however, is that once again discussion on how these fan communities influence representations of Japan and to what extent their presence prompts institutions to promote positive images of Japan in their own countries is absent. We will address these gaps in academic literature in the following chapters.

Chapter 3: Methodology

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Cool Japan is a prime example of nation branding rooted in soft power and the program has been actively developed by Japanese officials for over fifteen years. Now that we have established a theoretical background and established questions that have not yet been addressed in academic literature so far, it is time to have a look at Cool Japan in the Netherlands from a museological perspective. In this chapter, I will first briefly introduce the exhibitions I chose to study, followed by a discussion of my data gathering methods and how I will analyze them.

The exhibitions

The focus of my research will be on *Cool Japan: Worldwide Fascination in Focus* by the National Museum of World Cultures as it was the most recent of the three. It originally ran from April 14th 2017 until September 17th 2017, but its run was extended until October 29th. The exhibition displayed international icons of Japanese popular culture by highlighting several facets, such as warriors, horror, clear lines, essence (design), *kawaii* cute culture, and *otaku* fan culture.

The other two exhibitions were both by Japanmuseum SieboldHuis. *Kingdom of Characters* ran three years before *Cool Japan*, from July 4th 2014 until August 31st 2014. This exhibition was mainly concerned with the concept of "characters", and showcased famous characters as well as their function in Japanese society. *Hello Kitty – Hello Holland* ran from September 10th 2011 until November 30th 2011. This exhibition was part of a special *kawaii* year in the SieboldHuis and mainly focused on Japanese cute culture by looking at Hello Kitty and her impact on Dutch consumers.

Data gathering and analyses

To answer my research questions, I have gathered three different types of data. These are information on the museum exhibits themselves, a visitor survey I conducted among visitors of the *Cool Japan* exhibition, and two interviews with the people behind these three exhibitions. These will be used in three analyses, as discussed below

The exhibits: Discourse analysis

Firstly, I will make a discourse analysis of the museum exhibits themselves to see what kind of message the institutions are trying to convey, what kind of content on Japan they are offering, and whether visitors learn anything new. This discourse analysis will be written according to the method of Rose in *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials* (2016). Rose discusses two different types of discourse analyses, but the one I will use here is what she calls "discourse analysis II". This type of analysis is not as concerned with visual objects

or images themselves, but rather it is used to "look at the ways in which various dominant institutions have put images to work", or in other words with how objects are presented by institutions to spread their message. She defines two important terms: institutional apparatus and institutional technologies. The institutional apparatus is "the forms of power/knowledge that constitute the institutions", whereas the institutional technologies are "the practical techniques used to practice that power/knowledge". Of course, discussing the institutions as a whole is out of the scope of this thesis. For this reason, I will interpret the institutional apparatus as the message the institutions were concerned with during the exhibitions, and the institutional technologies as the ways this message is conveyed through the exhibits. Rose enumerates several technologies aside from the objects themselves to be considered in a discourse analysis, including labels (both of objects and entire rooms), display methods, layout, visual technologies such as photographs or audiovisual material, decoration, and textual information. (Rose 2016, 220-251)

However, there are some limitations to this method. *Cool Japan* is the only exhibition for which I have been able to gather all necessary data as exhibitions are temporary, and I could not predict I would need this data during the run time of the other two exhibitions. Therefore, I can only write an in-depth analysis for *Cool Japan*. For *Hello Kitty – Hello Holland* and *Kingdom of Characters* I have had to rely on second-hand information, namely official publications the SieboldHuis posted online themselves, information Sieboldhuis Coordinator Museum Affairs Dick Raatgever was kind enough to provide me with during our interview, and audiovisual material on the exhibitions.

The makers: Interview analysis

Secondly, I conducted two interviews with the makers of the exhibitions. The first was with Dr. Daan Kok, curator of Japan and Korea at the National Museum of World Cultures, which took place on December 13th 2017. The other was with Raatgever and took place on February 27th 2018. The analysis will focus on choices that were made behind the scenes, how this affected the exhibitions, and on cooperation with Japanese institutions and the Dutch fan community.

The interviews will be analyzed according to Packer in *The Science of Qualitative Research* (2011), but the interviews themselves were conducted according to Kvale and Brinkmann in *InterViews* (2009) as well. Both interviews were semi-structured. I had prepared a list of questions beforehand, but there was opportunity for interviewees to address other topics as well or for me to ask additional questions if they arose. (Packer 2011, 43) (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, 124) Each interview began with a quick briefing, thanking the interviewee for taking the time and briefly explaining what the data will be used for, as according to Kvale and Brinkmann. (2009, 128) However, as these were not anthropological interviews but rather expert interviews, I did deviate slightly from Kvale and Brinkmann regarding the questions I prepared as they write that an interview script usually only lists themes and some suggested questions. (Kvale and

Brinkmann 2009, 130) As I had a clear idea of the questions I needed answers to for my research questions, I did prepare a full list of questions, but these did still allow for discussion of topics other than the questions I had prepared.

The analysis itself will based on Packer (2011). However, since these interviews are expert interviews to analyze the behind the scenes workings of the exhibitions and not anthropological ones to be used to create new theories on social constructs, my approach to analyzing the data does differ slightly. The interviews are transcribed and coded into conceptual categories. Examples of categories include 'cooperation with Japanese institutions', 'involvement of fan community', and 'audience response'. The statements then become what Packer calls a 'property' of the category. These properties are analyzed to discover commonalities and differences between the exhibitions and the institutions' approaches and decisions. (Packer 2011, 61-65)

Visitor survey of *Cool Japan*: Content analysis

Finally, the visitor survey will be analyzed to see what kind of effect the exhibitions had on the visitor. The survey was conducted by myself on October 26th and 27th 2017 among visitors of *Cool Japan*. It was a quantitative study and was conducted according to the methods of Neuman in *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (2014). When it comes to measuring, Neuman writes that two major processes are used: conceptualization and operationalization. Conceptualization concerns "taking an abstract construct and refining it by giving it a conceptual definition", which in this case is the visitor's image of Japanese popular culture. Operationalization "links a conceptual definition to a set of measurement techniques or procedures", which is covered by the visitor survey here. (Neuman 2014, 205-207) When it came to sampling, I decided to do random sampling, or what Neuman calls 'systematic sampling' to ensure the data I gathered was as representative as possible. I waited outside the exhibition space, and every third person to exit the door was asked whether they wanted to participate in the survey. (Idem, 254-258) In total, 62 visitors agreed to answer the survey and 21 declined. While constructing the questionnaire, I also followed Neuman's guide on formulating the questions. Most importantly, terms that visitors might be unfamiliar with were clarified or avoided (for example, 'animation films' was used instead of '*anime*'), as well as leading questions. (Idem, 322-325) The survey consisted of twelve questions in total, of which six were closed questions, four were partially open questions, and two were open questions.

This data will be analyzed through a content analysis to gauge what the visitor's experience in the exhibition was like. Prior has written on analyzing interviews through content analysis to avoid distorting the importance of that answer within the group of data. Analyzing a data set by selecting certain remarks that were made by a few interviewees out of over sixty in total is not representative of the whole data set. Content analysis mollifies this problem, by placing these

responses in the context of the entire data set. (Prior 2014, 363-366) To do this, I have coded the variety of answers to open (or in the case of this study, some semi-open) questions to get a clear overview of the actual frequency of the different responses. For example, different responses of the same theme like 'food' and 'sushi' are coded as 'Japanese food culture'. In case one visitor answered with multiple different responses, these have been coded as separate answers. Of course, there is a limitation to this as six questions were closed. Therefore, the responses to closed questions will not be coded in the above manner.

Chapter 4: Data analysis

4.1 Discourse analysis: The exhibitions

In this analysis, we will look at what the exhibitions show of Japanese popular culture and what story the exhibits tell to answer the research question: what do visitors actually learn about Japan while they're visiting the exhibitions? The focus of this analysis will mostly be on choice of topics and objects and how these present Japan to the audience.

National Museum of World Cultures: *Cool Japan*

Before taking an in-depth look at each room individually, we will look at the different room labels and the exhibition's routing. The exhibition consists of eight exhibition spaces, and seven of these rooms are labelled after a different aspect of popular culture. Aside from the first exhibition space which I have labelled the "introduction room", other spaces are labelled as Warriors, Horror, The Line, Robots, Essence, *Kawaii* (cute culture), and *Otaku* (fan culture). These labels are quite standard aspects of Japanese popular culture, and instead of introducing new or lesser known aspects that are less familiar to Western visitors, these can already be said to confirm the image visitors may have already had of Japan. The spaces do not follow a certain routing, and a visitor could visit any room they want in any order and not feel like they are missing anything. However, this also means that one has the option to simply pick and choose subjects one finds interesting and skip over the rest, once again possibly leading to an incomplete or reaffirmed image. We will return to these assertions further on. However, these assertions would be incomplete without critically looking at each room individually. As it will not be possible to mention every object in each room, I have included maps of each exhibition space for a complete overview. Also included in the maps are the color codes I used for the different elements in the rooms: blue for objects, yellow for textual information, orange for audiovisual material, and cyan for interactive elements.

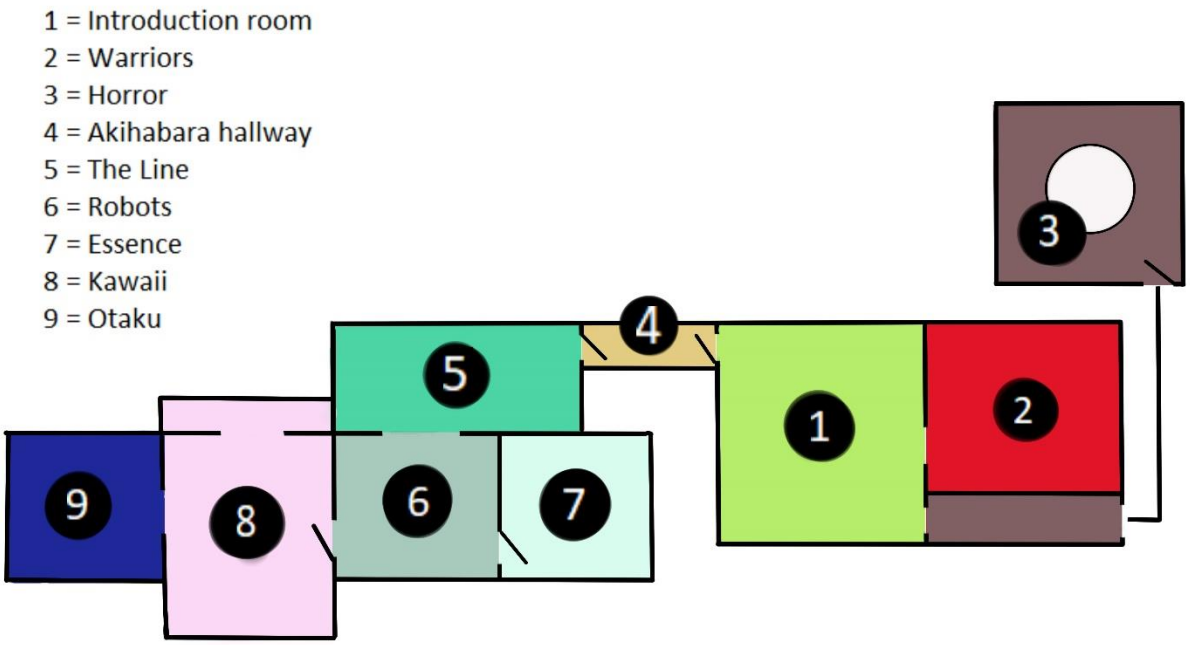


Figure 1: Overview map of Cool Japan

Upon entering the introduction room (figure 2), it is obvious this exhibition differs from the regular exhibition spaces. The room is bright, colorful, and one is faced with a large screen showing excerpts from different animation films such as *Paprika* (2006) and *Akira* (1988). In front of the cinema-like screen, there is a large rotating platform with figurines of well-known characters including Hello Kitty and Astroboy. Other figurines included characters of popular series among fans such as *Shingeki no Kyojin* (*Attack on Titan*) and *Death Note*. Other objects in the room demonstrate Japanese style icons as the recognizable manga-style and world famous *Great Wave off Kanagawa*. This is also the room in which the worldwide fascination aspect is most obvious, as among the back walls behind the cinema screen, the makers included two large overviews of worldwide fascination and a historical overview of fascination with Japan from the 17th century until the present. The purpose of this room is to introduce famous icons of Japanese popular culture and show visitors that everyone recognizes something, be it a character or the style. However, this room also sets the tone for most of the rest of the exhibition, namely of pleasing the fan audience by showing them what they want to see without including more obscure examples or analyzing the objects presented more critically as we will see below.

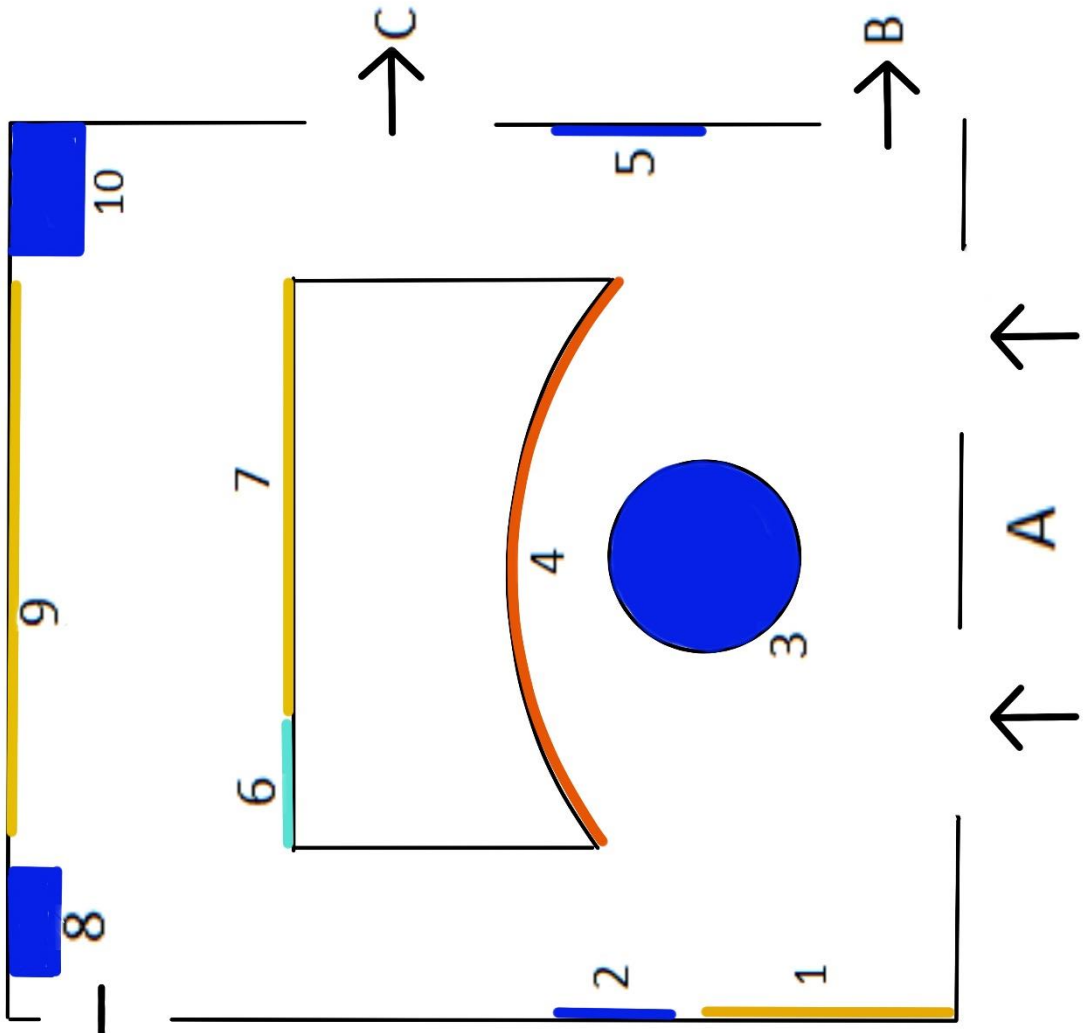
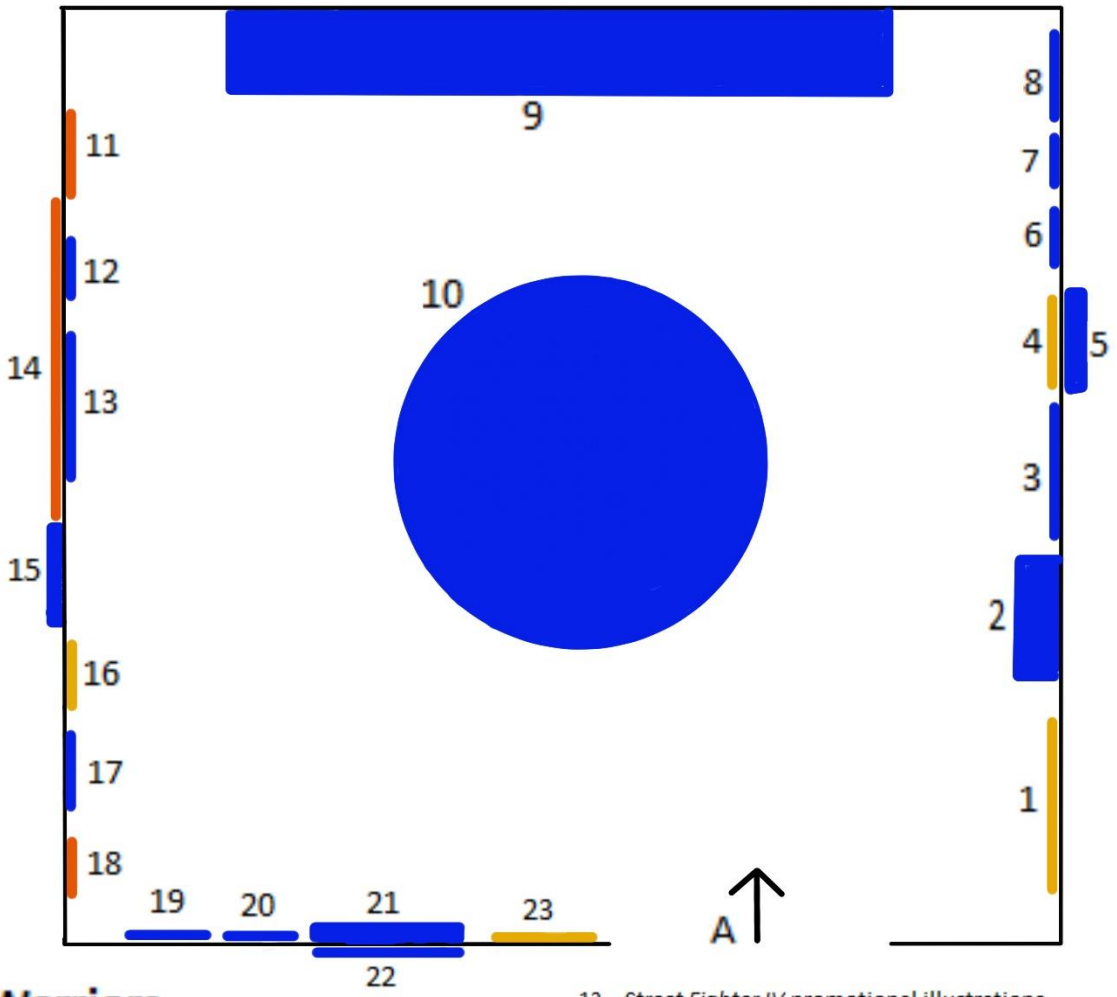


Figure 2: Map of the Introduction room

The first thematic room most visitors encounter is Warriors (figure 3). The main story of this room is that there is a long history of heroic warrior tales and legends in Japan, as well as that popular culture contributed to the mythical status of *samurai* as many stories were inspired by them. When taking a more critical look at the room, however, objects and audiovisual material are only loosely connected to each other and correlations made between are ambiguous. Firstly, the exhibition space poses certain modern series as a continuation of the long history of warriors in Japan, but one can question whether series like *Naruto* or games like *Street Fighter IV* actually exist because of this historic *samurai* culture, or whether *Sailor Moon* and *Pokémon* have any relation to Japanese warrior history at all, though the addition of female warriors who are mainly considered cute in this space must be appreciated. Secondly, even if one argued that they were, one can question whether Japan is unique in that respect as the exhibition space appears to suggest. For example, America's history of cowboys is still frequently used in Hollywood media as well, as are many European warriors in their respective popular cultures. Furthermore, only internationally highly well-known icons feature in the room, and these will mostly feature as recognition points for many fans rather than something new. More obscure examples could have provided a more complete image instead of showing the fan audience what they expect to see.

Above Warriors, visitors over the age of twelve can enter the Monsters room (figure 4). This exhibition space demonstrates how traditional ghost stories and monsters (*yôkai*) reemerge in popular culture in new forms, and it features a couple of interesting choices. Much like the Warrior space, only current famous icons are featured as *Death Note* and *Shingeki no Kyojin*, catering to the target audience of fans who come to see their favorite characters. Game icon *Final Fantasy* was also included; an interesting choice as the y*ôkai*-inspired creatures in these games are not meant to be frightening themselves. This aspect, however, is not mentioned, and adding other examples of unfrightening and sometimes even "cutified" versions of *yôkai* could have added a more critical layer. This room also features several historical objects as prints and books featuring *yôkai*, though they seem only loosely related to the modern examples. On the other hand, the man-made monsters are a good addition as they demonstrate a more unique and obscure aspect of the history of Japanese monsters that will be new to many visitors, even though there is no real connection to the other objects. Another object that seems unrelated to the story of the exhibition space is the artwork *Harakiri Schoolgirls*, which depicts a group of schoolgirls committing *hara-kiri* or ritual suicide. As this practice is associated with warriors, this artwork could have added more depth to the Warriors space as it demonstrates *samurai* history in modern art quite well (though it is understandable that this work may have been deemed too graphic for children and therefore not included in Warriors).



Warriors

1 – 'Warriors' room information

2 – Photo of tattooed man, *kabuki* tatoo jacket, tatoo camouflage sticker

3 – 19th century *musha-e* warrior prints by Kuniyoshi

4 – 'Cool or uncool: tatoos'

5 – Gilded dragon and sake cup with *koi* carp motif

6 – Chinese lions and peonies painting on hanging scroll

7 – Scroll painting of dragon in clouds

8 – 19th century *yakusha-e* actor prints

9 – Pair of screens showing a scene from Taheki

10 – *Samurai* armor and weapons arranged in battle pose

11 – Footage of various *Pokémon* animations

12 – *Naruto* original production sketches

13 – *Street Fighter IV* promotional illustrations

14 – Overview of modern warriors in Japanese popular culture

15 – Original *Sailor Moon* animation cels, illustrations, and merchandise

16 – 'Female warriors'

17 – Print triptych by Kunisada of the fifteen best known female warriors

18 – Footage of *samurai* films from the 1950s until present

19 – Ink drawing of a horseback fight by Hokusai

20 – 19th century print *The Night Attack of Kumasaka* by Yoshitora

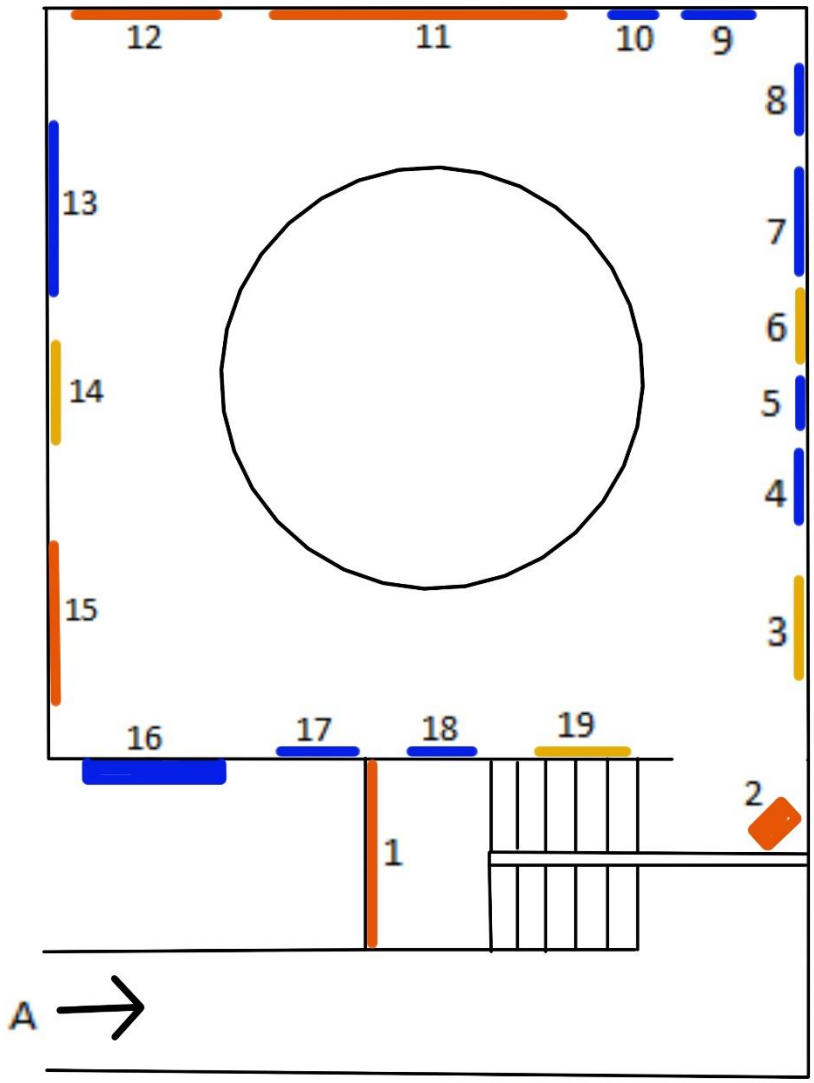
21 – Unmounted *samurai* sword with certificate of authenticity

22 – *Kabuki* theater poster

23 – 'Samurai, the ultimate warrior'

A – Introduction room

Figure 3: Map of the Warriors exhibition space



Monsters

1 – Image of a *rokurokubi* monster

2 – Television showing footage of *The Ring*

3 – 'Monsters' room information

4 – Ink and pigment drawing of *The spirit Kasane*

5 – 19th century wall scroll showing a spirit with long hair

6 – 'Spirits: wandering souls out for revenge'

7 – Three prints by Hokusai of the series *100 Ghost Stories*

8 – 19th century print of a man-eating apparition

9 – *Harakiri Schoolgirls* by Aida Makoto

10 – Sketches from *Death Note*

11 – Giant image of a monster from *Shingeki no Kyojin*

12 – Footage of various horror video games

13 – Overview and comparison of creatures from the *Final Fantasy*

14 – 'Final Fantasy: game art inspired by *yôkai* monsters'

15 – Footage of various (animation) films with Tokyo Trauma theme

16 –19th century manmade monsters, illustrations of demons

17 – Print *Nightmare* by Kuniyoshi

18 – Ink drawing of demon Ibaraki

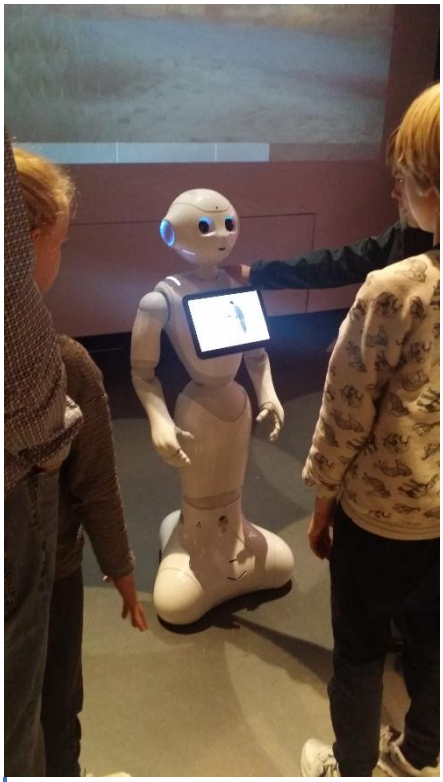
19 – '*Yôkai*'

A – Introduction room

Figure 4: Map of the Monsters exhibition space

The next section most visitors will encounter is The Line (figure 5), for which they will need to pass through the Akihabara hallway. This is a small hallway featuring a huge photo of an Akihabara street and speakers with recorded sounds to simulate a busy Japanese street. In comparison, The Line is a calm space focused on similarities between traditional masters and modern *mangaka* or *manga* artists. This room is one of the few that does not feature world famous icons for the fan community and mostly focuses on historical objects. While the makers do stress that they do not consider the masters to be *mangaka's* predecessors, Japanese historical drawing conventions seem presented as a chronological progression and the mini-documentary in the room's center could suggest otherwise to visitors. Compared to most other spaces, this room offers little for fans of the modern icons but visitors can access footage of four masters at work (among which one Dutch illustrator Michael Dudok de Witt who worked for Studio Ghibli to also indicate worldwide fascination) and a few production sketches at the beginning of the room. Overall, this room does not lend itself as much to cherry-picking for the fan audience and provides a fresh critical look: instead of relying on famous icons to draw visitors attention, this space zooms in on a more critical look at the style with stronger correlations between historic and modern objects especially when combined with the textual information provided.

The Line leads directly to Robots (figure 6), where the obvious main attraction is a real robot called Pepper. He interacts with visitors and can for example dance on command. Pepper serves as an example of robot technology in Japan as a technologically advanced country, but otherwise it is mostly there for entertainment purposes. The main story of this space is that no other country is associated with robots as much as Japan, where both real and fantasy robots are produced. Demonstrating the history of robots in Japan through the addition of a *karakuri ningyô* or traditional mechanized puppet adds a good historical layer to Pepper, though these seem only loosely connected to the popular culture examples, which are included as a general overview of what is available when it comes to robots and *mecha* in *manga* and *anime*. These examples serve mainly as points of recognition with well-known series as *Gundam* and *Evangelion* playing on the large screen and one wall dedicated to a line-up of popular robots and *mecha* in these and other series. Overall, in spite of the strong historical layer, we are again presented with a general positive image when it comes to modern Japanese popular culture.



Children interacting with Pepper

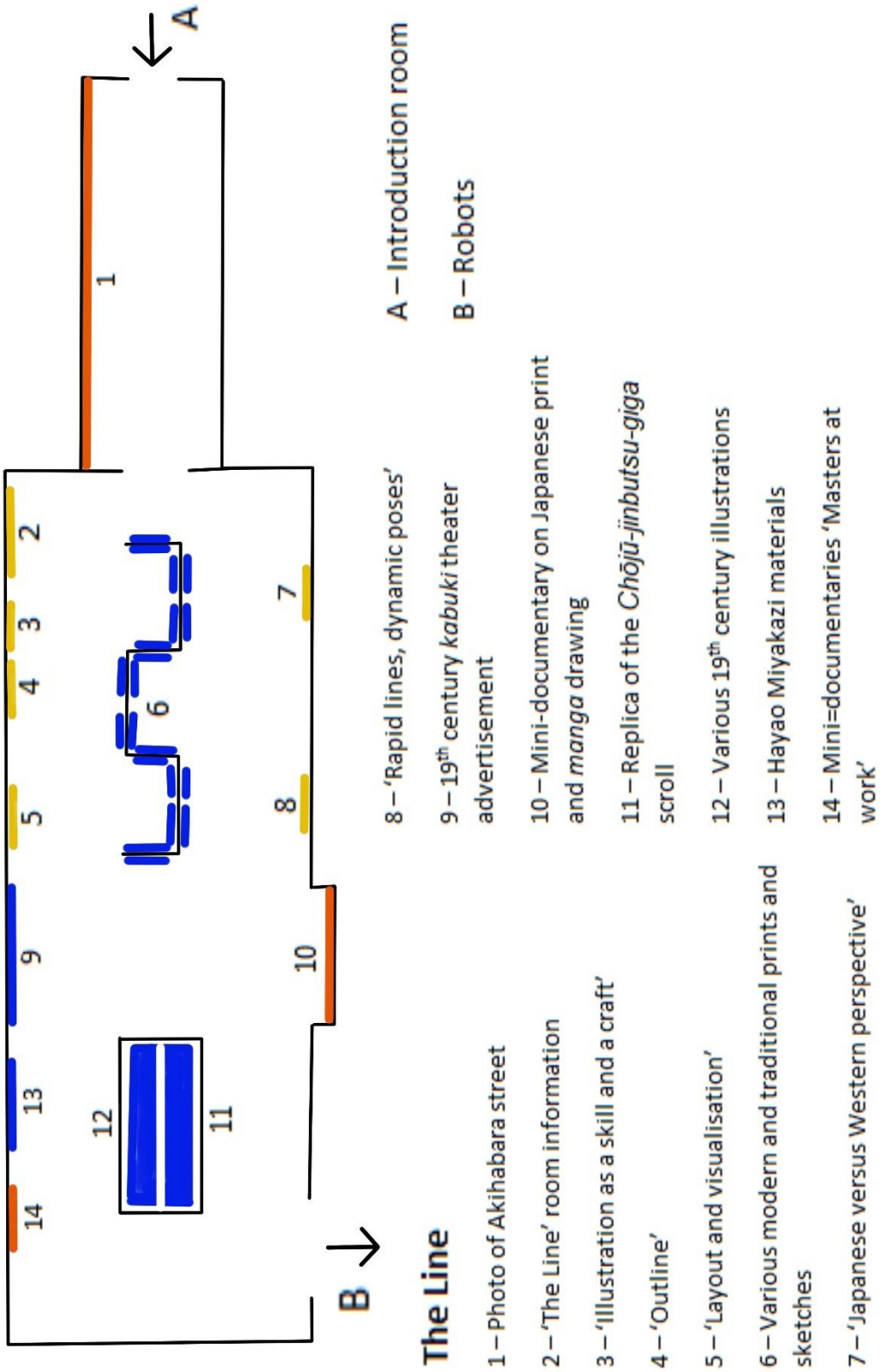


Figure 5: Map of The Line exhibition space

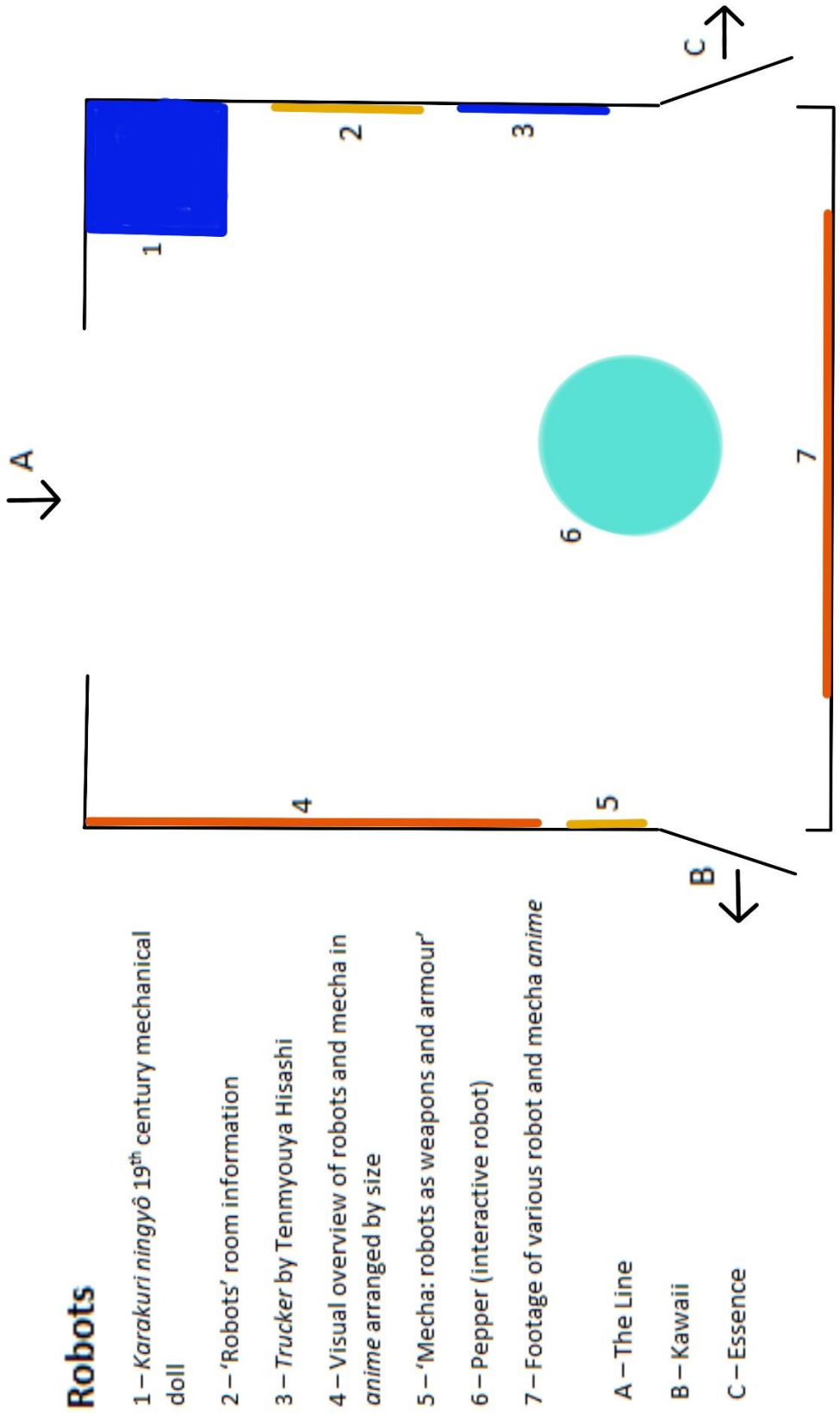
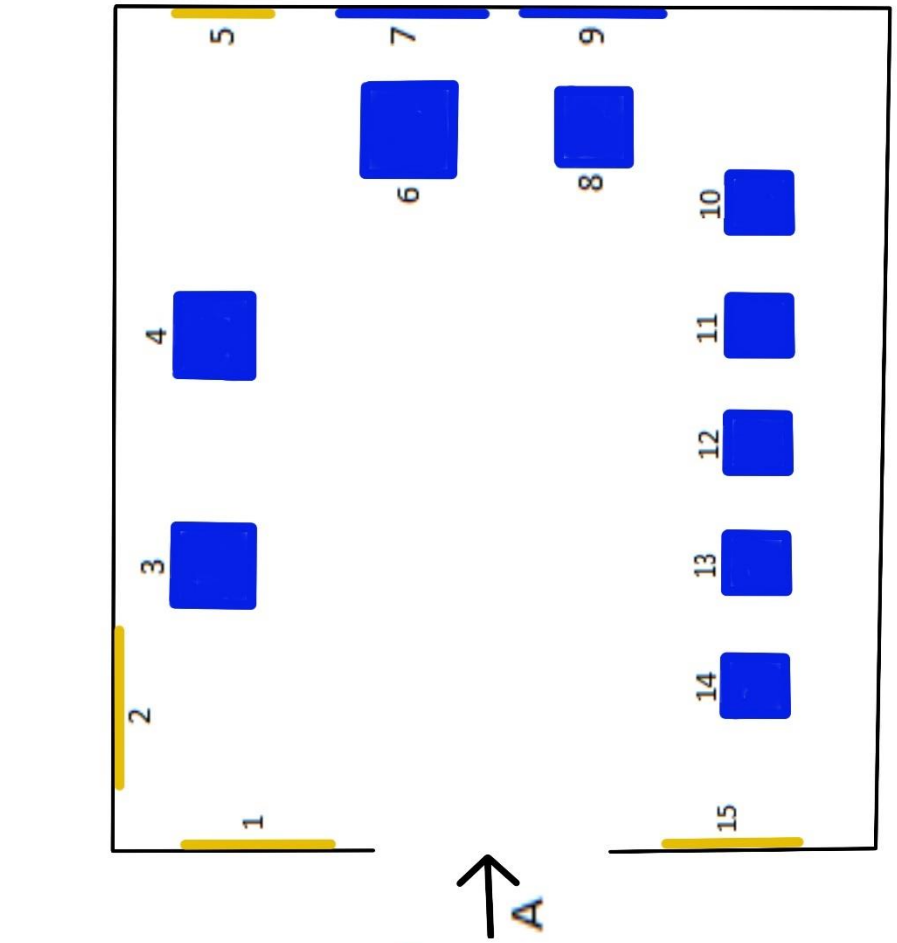


Figure 6: Map of the Robots exhibition space

Essence (figure 7) is the calmest exhibition space, with pure white decorations, bright lighting and no audiovisuals. The story is that characteristics as simplicity, perfection, and purity are associated with Japanese design and high fashion but questions whether that idea is true. Other spaces also display sides of Japanese design after all. The room showcases different historical and modern design objects, whilst demonstrating that these characteristics may have inspired non-Japanese designs as well. Unfortunately, these international designs may be difficult to spot for the average visitor, as they can easily miss the fact that one bowl is Danish and one haute couture design is actually Belgian. This room does not feature examples of popular culture, and instead demonstrates universal appeal of Japanese design. Contrary to most other exhibition spaces, the objects here connect to each other through recurring motifs such as *asanoha* and *sayagata* as well as similar designs to illustrate the space's story.

Kawaii (figure 8) is a much busier exhibition space and is split into two halves by dividing the room in two different colors. The bright pink side to the right showcases modern examples of *kawaii* as street fashion and characters, while the soft white side displays *kawaii*'s history and modern art. The story is that *kawaii* began as a protest movement among women, but that it grew into a worldwide commercial success. Unfortunately, *kawaii*'s rebellious side is not present in any objects or audiovisual materials, reaffirming a general positive image of *kawaii* while ignoring the duality of its history and foregoing a critical look at it. Objects also do not seem related to each other, other than the fact that they can all be considered cute. For example, it is questionable whether the historical objects of little statues and prints featuring dogs and cats are really related to modern day *kawaii* objects as the My Melody plushies and girl figurines, and to what degree these objects were considered cute the same way the modern objects are. This exhibition space also provides a variety of icons, once again providing more of an overview instead of also critically looking at the darker side of cuteness in Japanese popular culture or how it is used in society. Instead visitor's positive and merely playful image of *kawaii* is confirmed and the fan audience gets to see their favorite characters in an uncritical view.

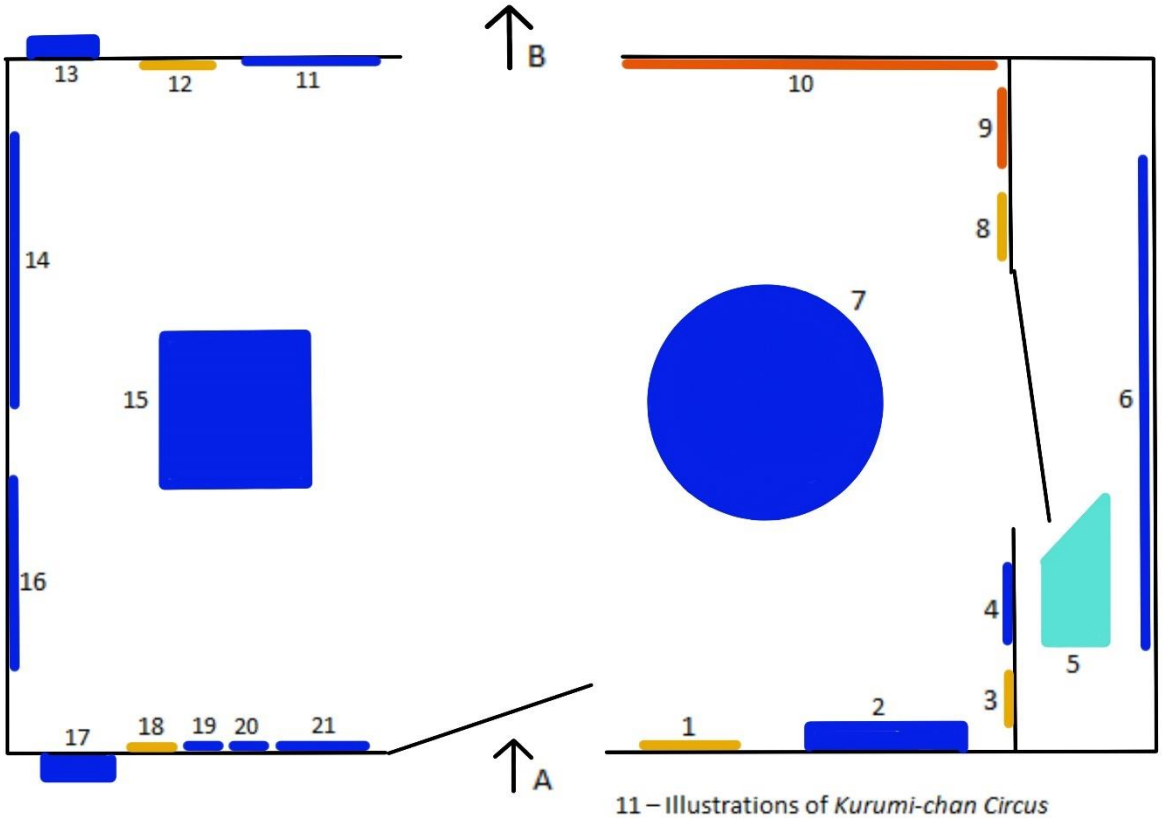


Essence

1 – 'Essence' room information
2 – 'Typically Japanese isn't always from Japan'
3 – Three 19th century Japanese design objects
4 – Two Japanese design objects, one Danish bowl
5 – 'Obviously Japanese: motifs and patterns'
6 – Stencils and objects with *asanoha* and *sayagata* patterns
7 – 19th century winter *kimono*
8 – Print showing specimen patterns
9 – 19th century under-*kimono*
10 – Ladies' ensemble by Yohji Yamamoto
11 – Ladies' sweater by Comme des Garçons
12 – Ensemble by Comme des Garçons
13 – Woman's trouser suit by Issey Miyake
14 – Dress by Ann Demeulemeester
15 – 'Progressive fashion from Japan'

A - Robots

Figure 7: Map of the Essence exhibition space



Kawaii

1 – 'Kawaii' room information

2 – Lady Gaga Hello Kitty shoes, figurines, plushies

3 – 'Franchises and merchandise: cashing in'

4 – Large *My Melody* plushies

5 – Photo moment

6 – Background for photo of art work by Sebastian Masuda

7 – *Kawaii* street fashion in Lolita and Decora styles

8 – 'Cute street fashion'

9 – Footage of Kurebayashi composing one of the exhibition's outfits

10 – Examples of cute series and their characters

11 – Illustrations of *Kurumi-chan Circus* (1940s/50s), *Petit Ia* (1960s), Girl with geisha doll (1910s/20s)

12 – 'Kawaii art: not entirely innocent'

13 – *Sleepless Night* by Yoshitomo Nara

14 – *No title* by Rokkaku Ayako

15 – *Windy Bunny* (Black) by Hiroyuki Matsuura

16 – *Michisugara* by Yamaguchi Ai

17 – 17th century models of puppies

18 – 'Forerunners of kawaii'

19 – *The House Tiger* by Kuniyoshi

20 – Print featuring cats by Kuniyoshi

21 – Large hanging scrolls featuring cats and puppies

A – Robots

B – Otaku

Figure 8: Map of the Kawaii exhibition space

Finally, the Otaku room (figure 9) is designed to be highly interactive and loud. The story of this final space concerns the fans themselves and how they contribute to popular culture by producing themselves, though it is questionable to what degree this space illustrates actual fanhood. Whereas this would have been a good place to critically look at what fandom entails, how it is viewed in Japan, and how Western fanhood differs from that of Japan, these sides are all absent. Instead, this space is mostly designed for playing around with what Japanese popular culture has to offer such as arcade games and *manga* in the form of a *manga* café with reading table. Overall, the room is dark and dominated by a huge screen on the back wall which plays several *anime* openings and Japanese music videos of iconic hits within the community. Edo period *kabuki* fans are also compared to modern day fans of idols as AKB48, and while one can question whether the fanhoods are comparable, it is an interesting comparison when it comes to the historic and modern merchandise. This is also the only room that briefly mentions sexualization in Japanese popular culture, but it is quite literally hidden in a corner while it is a substantial element, even in some previous themes as well. This is probably one of the best examples of ways the exhibition attempts to present a positive image while not critically looking at more negative sides.

In sum, we can conclude that in general objects and subtopics chosen for each subject are generally loosely connected to each other, and most rooms mainly appear to serve as an overview of examples of what is available for each sub-fan culture. In most spaces the exhibition prefers to focus on famous aspects and icons on the surface, leading to an incomplete or reaffirmed positive image, especially in Kawaii and Otaku. However, an occasional critical note is there, most notably in The Line. Furthermore, Japanese popular culture is presented as being unique, though in some instances one can wonder whether that is truly the case as we saw above. The exhibition did illustrate the worldwide fascination question well by including non-Japanese objects that demonstrate the use of Japanese popular culture abroad, even though some may be too difficult to spot for the average visitor. Whereas it must be noted that it is by no means a bad exhibition or not well-made, it must be acknowledged that it does cater to its fan audience to a large degree by generally looking at the subjects in their most positive light instead of offering a more critical look.

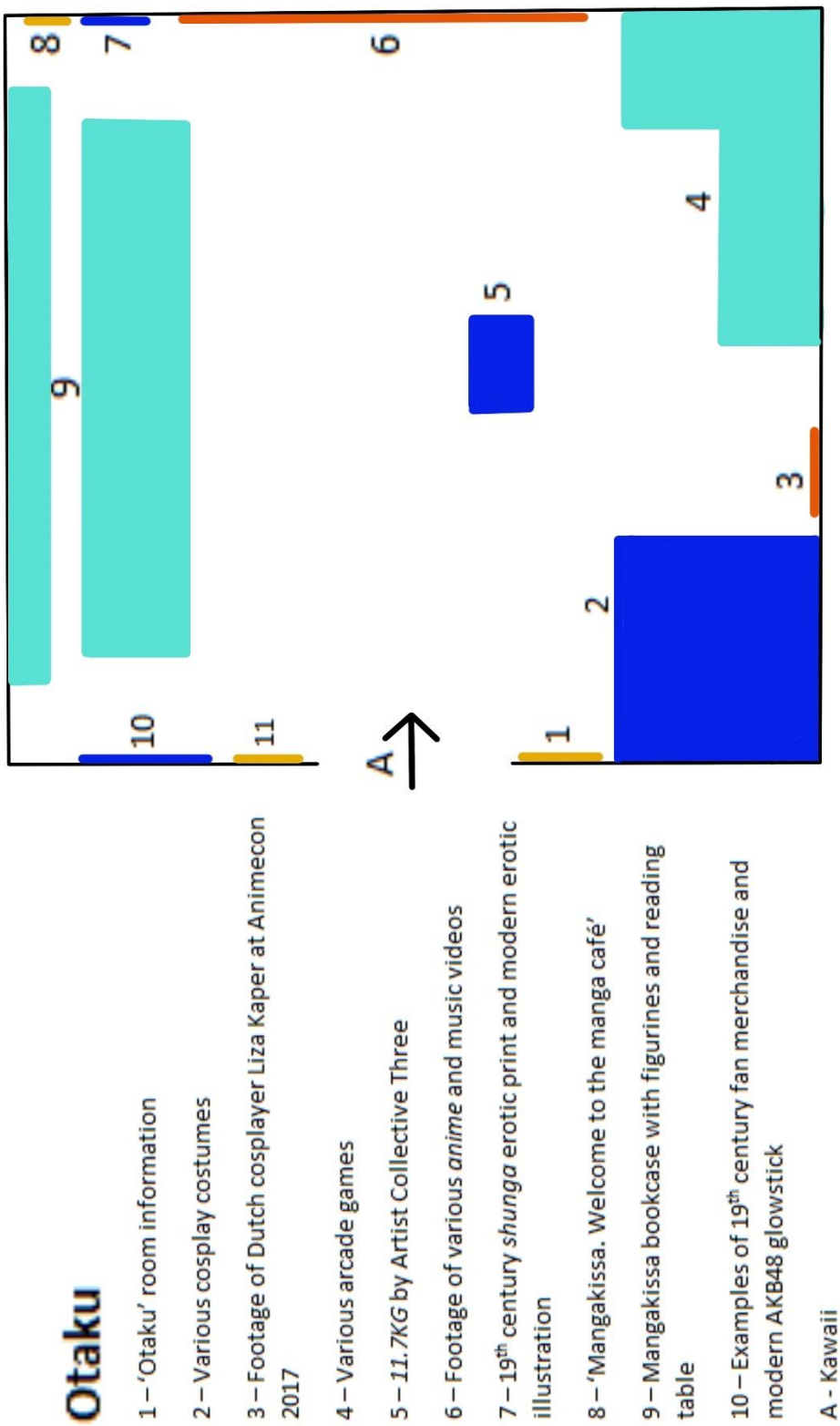


Figure 9: Map of the Otaku exhibition space

Japanmuseum SieboldHuis: *Hello Kitty–Hello Holland* and *Kingdom of Characters*

This brief analysis unfortunately differs from the one above and is based on my interview with Dick Raatgever, documents provided to me by Raatgever en SieboldHuis Director Kris Schiermeier, and information the museum published online. In 2011 and 2014 the SieboldHuis had one large room for temporary exhibitions with moveable walls to create a route. Both *Hello Kitty-Hello Holland* and *Kingdom of Characters* took place in this space.

Hello Kitty-Hello Holland was aimed at families with children and attempted to provide a fresh look at this icon for both adults and youngsters. The temporary exhibition space contained several elements. Firstly, it presented four collections by Dutch fans, showcasing Hello Kitty's presence and appeal in the Netherlands. These collections illustrated different ways of collecting *kawaii* products, as the collectors ranged from a teenage girl who bought a Hello Kitty wherever she went and an adult male collecting Hello Kitty luxury products specially imported from Asia. The objects on display varied wildly, from an electronic dictionary and wine glasses to a toaster and headphones. Footage was also included of some collectors on their love for Hello Kitty.[1] One could say that this only presents Hello Kitty in a positive and fun light. However, the museum wanted to put Hello Kitty into a broader context as well, and to that end included a segment of BBC documentary *Japanorama* on Hello Kitty in Japan[2] and a condensed version of American journalist Ken Belson's lecture on Hello Kitty's success[3]. Whereas *Japanorama* merely adds to a general positive view of Hello Kitty in Japan, the addition of Ken Belson's lecture in which he analyzes why Hello Kitty is successful adds a refreshing critical note for older visitors to the exhibition that was lacking in Cool Japan's approach towards *kawaii*. The same room also displayed fifty vintage products on loan from Hello Kitty's mother company Sanrio, as well as a five-meter informational wall on Hello Kitty's design and product history below which a variety of products from 1974 to 2011 were displayed. Lady Gaga's famous Hello Kitty dress was also on display here. According to the project plan, there were also interactive elements, such as a specially designed photo corner with cardboard cutouts where visitors could pose for their own portrait with Hello Kitty. Most other interactive elements were aimed at children, such as an art corner and option to write Hello Kitty a fan letter. *Hello Kitty-Hello Holland* also spread to one of the museum's regular exhibition spaces. Hello Kitty products for the Asian market were shown next the regular exhibition's displays of 19th century objects to demonstrate Kitty's ties to Japan and the variety of consumers for whom Hello Kitty are available. Whereas this exhibition does provide the most varied and even slightly critical look for adults of all three, this can easily be overlooked and it must be

[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WibGHl1E1rI
[2] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1swSsb_TYKQ with Hello Kitty's segment lasting from 2:26-5:51.
[3] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C5CaIcSlUEc

acknowledged that the overall outlook is one of positivity and fun, mostly generated through the sheer variety of products featuring the icon.

Kingdom of Characters was also advertised as a family exhibition and consisted of two parts. One part consisted of an overview of famous characters from the 1950s until present day, and the other illustrated how characters are used by different Japanese institutions. The famous characters included modern icons as Doraemon and Pikachu, and historical ones as Gundam and Astroboy. The objects in the exhibition consisted of large dolls of the different characters and smaller figurines. The exhibition also included a life-size example of a Japanese teenage girl's Hello Kitty bedroom. The main interactive element in this exhibition were onesies of different characters. Visitors could dress up as Doraemon or Pikachu for example and have their own photoshoot. In short, audiences get an uncritical look at their favorite characters.

During this exhibition there was also a call for collectors, but in this case for Dutch fans of characters or comic book heroes. In the end, two collectors were selected and their collections were on display at the museum. One collection consisted of special radios that were either made in Japan or referred to Japan in their design, and the other consisted of Japanese toys. The link to the exhibition's overall topic of characters is not entirely clear, however, and it mainly appears to have been a supplementary mini-exhibition that is loosely related to *Kingdom of Characters*.

Looking at these two exhibitions, we can draw similar conclusions to that of *Cool Japan* even with limited information. Incorporating collections and showing different ways of collecting in *Hello Kitty-Hello Holland* is a fresh way of presenting the topic, and there are more critical undertones than in the other two exhibitions. However, even though it is the most critical exhibition, its overall view of Hello Kitty is still one of positivity and fun where visitors can enjoy the many products and interactive elements to play around with the beloved icon , though this is unsurprising considering the target audience of families with children. In case of *Kingdom of Characters*, it provides an overview of characters that are famous worldwide, but this will not be new information to many visitors, though arguably the function of the character in Japanese society will have provided new insights. Overall, the exhibition provides an overview of examples of what is available and allows for interaction and playing around with it, once again mostly aimed at families with children. That does not mean that these are bad exhibitions or not enjoyable, but it must be acknowledged that a critical view is limited and both exhibitions generate a mostly positive view on the subjects.

4.2 Interview analysis: The makers

To gain insight in the making of these exhibitions, I conducted two interviews as mentioned before. The most important issues we will look at in this analysis are the role of Japanese institutions and the Dutch fan community, and decisions that were made during the making of the exhibitions.

Firstly, why were these exhibitions held and why at that point in time. For *Cool Japan*, Kok explains that it stemmed from a plan at the Tropenmuseum (Museum of the Tropics) to do an exhibition on manga before the museum merged with Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde (National Museum of Ethnology) and the Afrikamuseum (Africa Museum). However, the exhibition was postponed as *World of Manga* opened in the Wereldmuseum (World Museum) in Rotterdam. Consequently, it was decided to broaden the scope of the exhibition and the project was rewritten into *Cool Japan*. The reason why the Tropenmuseum started the project in the first place is unknown to Kok, but the curator for fashion and popular culture had always been interested in the topic and it is a current and popular phenomenon back then and even now.

At the SieboldHuis, Raatgever states that the project team had the ideas for the Hello Kitty exhibition a while before the project was realized. To include it in a complete *kawaii* year around different kinds of cute culture seemed like a good project, which was originally planned for 2009 but due to the amount of preparations it became 2011. Hello Kitty was a fitting topic for this thematic year. Raatgever does not recall any particular reason why the *kawaii* year was held in 2011, other than that was the year in which the project could be realized. *Kingdom of Characters*, however, differs from the other exhibitions in that it was not curated by the museum itself or a guest curator selected by the museum. It was a Japan Foundation exhibition, which travels the world to museums and other institutions who sign up for it. The Embassy of Japan in the Netherlands provides an overview of available exhibitions and if desired one can apply for them. Therefore, *Kingdom of Characters* was selected in 2013 for the 2014 exhibition schedule. The exhibition was also partially selected because *Hello Kitty-Hello Holland* had been successful three years earlier and it seemed like a good time to rehash a similar topic.

The fact that *Kingdom of Characters* was curated by the Japan Foundation does lead to the question: to what extent were Japanese institutions involved in the making of the exhibitions? Unsurprisingly, they were most involved in *Kingdom of Characters*. Firstly, contact with the Japan Foundation is done through the Embassy of Japan in the Netherlands through the head of Cultural Affairs. Secondly, the exhibition is curated by a Japanese institution, the Japan Foundation. Of course, nobody is forced to apply for an exhibition and Raatgever stresses that one can adjust the exhibition to their audience however they want. However, in my opinion it must be acknowledged that the main storyline and most important elements are decided upon by the Japan Foundation, an institution that is connected to improving Japan's soft power as mentioned in the literature

review. These are not propaganda exhibitions as Raatgever stated above, yet exhibitions like these could be useful tools to spread a positive and uncritical image of Japan. During the making of *Hello Kitty-Hello Holland*, on the other hand, there was hardly any cooperation with Japanese institutions. According to Raatgever, the exhibition was completely curated by the SieboldHuis itself. This did require cooperation with Sanrio, the company that created Hello Kitty. As a famous global brand, their image is important, so extensive talks were necessary for the exhibition on how the topic would be handled. Of course, one could argue that this can also be used to ensure a positive image, but in this case Sanrio would be more concerned with preventing damage to their brand than them being concerned about Japanese soft power.

There was also relatively little cooperation with Japanese governmental institutions in the making of *Cool Japan*, contrary to my expectations due to its title. There were conversations with the Dutch Embassy in Japan to discuss exhibition plans and whether they had advice as they can help with establishing contacts with third parties. They also contacted the Japanese Embassy in Netherlands to keep them updated on the project's progress. However, even though the exhibition shares its name with the Cool Japan program, there was no cooperation with this institution. Kok also states that no request for funding was made to them for several reasons, but the primary cause was that the makers feared they would lose a certain amount of independence and that the exhibition might be influenced in ways they did not want. Another practical reason is that the timeframe allotted to make the exhibition was extremely tight for an exhibition this size, so making a request would not have been easy. Finally, since the makers received funding from Dutch cultural foundations, it was not necessary to also approach the Cool Japan Fund. Kok also states that even though the exhibition was named *Cool Japan*, the Cool Japan program had practically no role in the exhibition's story either. In the introduction room it is mentioned once that Japan employs the Cool Japan strategy and actively promotes their popular culture abroad. Kok states that they did decide to explicitly mention it there only because they did not want to mislead visitors who may have known about that government program. He continues by explaining that the title was chosen for two reasons, namely that the phenomenon of "Cool Japan" predates the government program and the subject of this exhibition is that phenomenon, and secondly the title was used because it was marketing friendly (though perhaps the fact that the title is so marketing friendly and to the point also suggests success of the Japanese government's strategy as they invented the term). It is immediately clear it is about Japan, "cool" is a positive term that attracts visitors, and the title is bilingual. Therefore, in the case of Cool Japan, the only cooperation with Japanese governmental institutions took place in the form of contact and talks with both Embassies.

On the other hand, governmental institutions are not the only stakeholders. How much did the Dutch fan community contribute to the exhibitions as non-Japanese stakeholders? In *Kingdom of*

Characters they had no active role as the exhibition was curated by the Japan Foundation. Raatgever does state that they did adapt it to what they thought might be interesting for the fans, as they are an important target audience for these kinds of exhibitions. The SieboldHuis had much more interaction with fans for *Hello Kitty-Hello Holland*. The collections on display were from fans who were chosen out of many submissions to a public call for Hello Kitty fans through social media. Fan interaction also played a unique role in the making of *Cool Japan*. The makers consciously chose to involve fans as much as possible as the exhibition is also about them as an important vehicle for spreading the Japanese popular culture around the world. As Kok says, "there is a sort of saying in ethnological museums that goes 'Not about them without them', and we felt that that did not only apply to Japanese partners, but to Dutch partners, those fans of Japanese pop culture, as well." Not only did these fans provide the team with the latest news and knowledge on what was popular at the time but they also provided object loans, such as the *mangakissa*, figurines, and cosplay costumes. The museum also organized a one-day workshop with a representative group of fans through Anigenda, a nationwide organization for fans of Japanese popular culture. Around twenty people from several fan organizations attended, and they actively thought along with the project team of what needed to be added to the exhibition. Though of course this fan involvement is important for the reasons Kok stated above, this is also an example of the catering to the audience we have established in the previous analysis as they are shown what they expect to see in a general positive light.

I was also curious what choices were made during the making of the exhibitions regarding story and objects. What storyline did the makers have in mind while working on the exhibition? Was anything left out on purpose or were there ideas that did not come to fruition in the end? Decisions like these greatly influence visitor's experiences and what they learn about the subject. As we saw above, *Kingdom of Characters* was not curated by the SieboldHuis but by the Japan Foundation, though Raatgever says they did adapt the exhibition's contents for a Dutch audience. In other words, "…the Japan Foundation provides everything, and we used that to tell our own story". Texts and information plaques came with the exhibition, but they were adapted to make the exhibition more accessible to a Dutch audience though these changes were minor. When it came to the objects themselves, the concept by the Japan Foundation was deemed to be quite solid and nothing was added. However, it was decided to leave one object out as it was not suitable for the target audience: families with children. The original concept by the Japan Foundation included one *kawaii* doll aimed at adult men, or more specifically senior businessmen. As this was clearly made as a sex object and deemed unsuitable for children by the staff, it was decided to leave that doll out. Interestingly, the fact that this doll was left out also indicated the museum itself is interested in maintaining a positive view of this side of Japan, as elements that do not contribute to the overall positivity of the exposition are left out. Perhaps it would also have been possible to display

this object in such a way that it was only accessible to adults, keeping this more critical side of the exhibition intact. Of course, other selections had to be made as there are many characters in Japan and it is impossible to show them all, but this pre-selection was done by the Japan Foundation and the SieboldHuis was not involved.

Hello Kitty-Hello Holland was curated by the SieboldHuis staff themselves, and here they were able to realize all plans as well. As Raatgever said, "we curated the exhibition ourselves, so you make a plan and consider what's doable and in the end everything we came up with was realized". Of course, the fans' collections were an important part of the exhibition and these had to be selected from a large amount of applications. The collections that were selected all had their own characteristics, ranging from everyday objects to luxury products. These collections all had their different appeals and the makers did not make any value judgements as they asserted one cannot compare collections that are this different from each other. It was decided to present them as showcasing different ways of collecting Hello Kitty objects alongside a historical overview and several interactive elements.

Kok described *Cool Japan*'s story as trying to make visitors aware of that what people consider to be 'cool' about Japan also says something about people worldwide as much as it says something about what is really produced by Japan. Japanese visual culture travels around the world and everybody picks out certain elements they like and uses it however they want. As Kok puts it, *Cool Japan* is an odd exhibition in that one could say "it is about how the world looks at Japan" and not "it is about what Japan is like" (though one can question how many visitors experience it this way). Naturally selections had to be made and Kok acknowledges that it would be impossible to completely represent everything about Japanese popular culture in one exhibition, which is why they attempted to present the subject in a way that allows visitors to draw their own conclusions rather than stating "this is what Japanese popular culture entails". One thing the makers did try to show visitors was that Japanese popular culture is very much rooted in visual culture, which is a broad spectrum that takes all shapes and forms, not just *manga* comics.

When it came to *Cool Japan*'s topics and lay-out, choices depended on the restrictions of the building as well. The museum's space for temporary exhibitions is designed as several separate rooms in no particular order, which automatically led to a compartmentalizing of subjects. Which topics ended up being used in the exhibition was largely decided on by a preliminary visitor study which questioned what people thought of when they heard 'Cool Japan'. Overall, there were quite consistent answers to this, so deciding on the different room subjects was not too difficult. The final selection of deciding which topics fit into the overall concept of the spread of Japanese popular culture through visual and fan culture was more difficult. One of the topics that had to be left out was Japanese food culture, and this was a difficult decision according to Kok. Food culture

was considered as too broad, not a part of "visual culture", and not that popular in the Netherlands, and the same went for Japanese music. However, one can also consider this a way of catering to the audience and showing them what they expect instead of providing a more complete view of the subject matter. Other aspects such as popular culture in daily life and Japanese society were not shown in the exhibition either as it was simply not part of the subject. However, Kok also asserts that there are thousands of stories that could have been told in the exhibition, but that not everything fits entirely into the overall topic. In the end, "visual culture" and "fan culture" were the main foundations on which the exhibition was built. When the final topics were selected, it was decided that the order in which they appeared did not matter too much except that Horror needed to be a separate twelve years and up room and the loud and interactive Otaku room needed to be at the end. Furthermore, as it is not possible to keep visitors to a particular route, the order of the topics did not matter and Kok compares the experience to walking through Tokyo where you can encounter completely different situations in every other street from a calm temple to loud shopping streets.

Of course, there were also objects that did not make it into the exhibition in the end. One example Kok provided is a work by Murakami Takashi, but the artist himself did not want it to be a part of the exhibition. Changes like these affect parts of the storyline as well, as this object would have allowed for more discussion sexualization in Japanese visual culture; a topic we established to have been conspicuously absent but which the makers would have liked to address more. However, Cool Japan will return to the Tropenmuseum in 2019, so some choices may be reconsidered and topics that got too little attention could become more prominent.

4.3 Content analysis: The visitors

Finally, I would like to take a brief look at the visitors' response to *Cool Japan* to gauge their experience, their views on the topic and whether they learned anything new. Among the 62 respondents, gender and age category are fairly evenly distributed. In total, 58% was female and 42% was male. The youngest visitors of 24 years or younger consisted of 16%. Around 31% of respondents were between the ages of 25 and 44, and 37% was aged between 45 and 64. The oldest visitors of 65 years and over made up 16% of the total. A complete overview of all codes and pivot tables used in this analysis are included in the appendix.

To gauge their overall experience, I asked the respondents to rate their experience on a scale of one (most negative) to five (most positive). Most visitors were positive about their overall experience with a majority of 58% rating their visit a four, and 26% responding with five. Only three visitors (5%) answered two or lower. Interestingly all visitors who responded negatively were females over 55. The age categories that responded most positively on the other hand were youngsters under 18 years of age and adults between 45-54. Overall, we can conclude that the visitors' experience was good.

To see what their view on Japanese popular culture was, the respondents were asked whether they were already familiar with it before visiting the exhibition. An overwhelming 90% answered "yes" and only 10% answered "no". If the respondent answered "yes", they were asked what they had thought of Japanese popular culture before they visited the exhibition. This resulted in very different responses. The response, however, was positive, and approximately 29% used general positive terms to describe it. The second most frequent response (18%) were visitors who described it as "different" but they emphasized they meant it in a positive sense. Comparatively, only 9% used general negative terms. The visitors who indicated their knowledge was superficial or only based on manga or anime or considered themselves to be neutral constituted a total of 18%. Surprisingly, only approximately 4% indicated that they were fans themselves. These responses conclude that a significant majority had at least some knowledge about the topic, and that most viewed Japanese popular culture positively or neutrally. To gauge which aspects of Japanese popular culture the visitor was most familiar with and which topics are the most well-known in the Netherlands, I also asked respondents which thematic room was the "most Japanese" to them. A majority of 24% answered "Warriors", followed closely by 22% who answered "Kawaii/Cute culture". A clear third place went to "Otaku/Fan culture" with approximately 18%, establishing these three topics as the most well-known to Dutch visitors. Interestingly, these three are themes that featured most objects associated with *manga* and *anime*. On the other hand, themes that were least associated with Japan were "Monsters" (6.5%) and "The Line" (8%).

However, what is more interesting for this study is whether the visitor learned anything new. To gauge this, respondents who had responded "yes" to whether they were already familiar with Japanese popular culture were asked whether their view changed after visiting the exhibition. A large majority of 73% indicated it had not, meaning they are unlikely to have learned anything new. The 27% who indicated their view did change, provided multiple reasons why. 73% indicated that their view had broadened, while 20% stated that they learned more about the origins and history of Japanese popular culture. Other reasons included that their view had become more realistic or more positive. These responses indicate that these visitors do consider that the exhibition expanded their knowledge on the subject, however it must be acknowledged these are the minority. As a follow-up, respondents were asked whether they thought anything was missing they had expected to see what might have added more depth to the exhibition for them. A slight majority of 58% did not think anything was missing, whereas 42% did. For those who answered "yes", the most frequently occurring answer was "more on history and traditions". The second most mentioned answer was "Japanese food culture", and a shared third place went to "Japanese society" and that they simply expected "more depth". Adding topics like these could therefore have allowed for more learning opportunities in the exhibition, though a majority agreed that it was fine the way it was.

Finally, I wanted to gauge whether exhibiting Japanese popular culture had any commercial effects on Dutch consumerism. Of all respondents, 56.5% (35 respondents) did not consider themselves to be consumers of Japanese popular culture, whereas 43.5% (27 respondents) did. Of the 35 visitors who responded "no" to whether they were consumers, only 6 (17%) answered "yes" when asked whether they would want to be after visiting the exhibition. Of the 27 visitors who did consider themselves consumers, 15 (55%) answered "yes" that they were more likely to consume more aspects of Japanese popular culture. Therefore, visitors who already saw themselves as consumers were more likely to invest more after viewing the exhibition. Therefore, there is a commercial effect, but not to the extent I previously thought it would be. However, it must be noted that age also influenced the answers given to this question. Visitors over 55 answered "no" much more frequently than younger visitors. Below 34 years of age, the answer ratio between "yes, I want to consume (more)" and "no, I do not want to become a consumer" is 50/50. Between 35 and 54 this becomes 60/40 in favor of "no", and for visitors over 55 this ratio becomes 80/20. Therefore, we can additionally conclude that the slight commercial effect we established above mostly affects visitors in the younger age spectrum.

From the above results, we can conclude that an overwhelming majority of visitors were already familiar with Japanese popular culture to a larger or lesser agree, with overall opinions on it being mostly positive or neutral. The most well-known aspects that were most associated with Japan

are also the rooms that related to *manga* and *anime* the most, namely Warriors, Kawaii, and Otaku. Among the visitors who were already familiar with the subject, a large majority indicated their views had not changed, meaning that indeed it is unlikely that many visitors learn anything new during their visit as hypothesized in the discourse analysis. We can also assert that exhibitions that spread a positive image of Japanese popular culture like *Cool Japan* can have a commercial effect and inspire visitors to consume aspects that appeal to them, even though this effect is much slighter than I expected. The visitor's age also plays a large role in deciding whether they would want to become a consumer or not. However, this is based on a limited sample and it must be noted that this could have influenced results.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to look at a detailed visitor response for the SieboldHuis exhibitions. I attempted to find visitors during my *Cool Japan* survey who had visited exhibitions like *Cool Japan*. However, only four visitors (6%) remembered visiting SieboldHuis exhibitions, of which two (3%) visited one of the exhibitions relevant for this thesis. Unfortunately, as they visited these years ago they were only able to describe their experiences as "different". During the interview, Raatgever was kind enough to answer some questions on visitor responses, though admittedly this is not the same as a visitor survey. He indicated that overall responses to the exhibitions were positive with some side notes by visitors of recommended improvements. *Hello Kitty-Hello Holland* had attracted visitors who usually do not go to museums but who came to the exhibition because their children wanted to see Hello Kitty. These visitors also came to *Kingdom of Characters*, but Raatgever asserts there were fewer.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

At the beginning, I asked whether Cool Japan can be considered as a successful program in the Netherlands when it comes to exhibitions as a vehicle for increasing Japanese soft power. To answer this question, we will first need to answer our three sub questions.

Firstly, to what extent are Japanese institutions involved in the making of these exhibitions? Contrary to expectation, there was no cooperation with Japanese soft power institutions for *Cool Japan* and there was only neutral contact with both Embassies to establish contacts with third parties. Kok emphasized that the project team had consciously chosen not to collaborate with institutions as Cool Japan as they feared losing independence and that the name "Cool Japan" was chosen for marketing reasons. The same can be said for *Hello Kitty-Hello Holland*, where there was no cooperation with governmental institutions at all but there were extensive talks with Sanrio. In both of these cases, cooperation with the Dutch fan community was much stronger. However, the fact that these exhibitions mostly presented Japanese popular culture positively, does prove that perhaps indeed Japanese institutions do not need to be involved at all for a positive image to be spread as the local museums will do that themselves for their target audience, the fan community. *Kingdom of Characters* on the other hand was made by a Japanese institution and slightly adapted by the SieboldHuis, meaning there was a high level of involvement by an institution that benefits from projecting a positive view.

Secondly, what is the visitors' experience in the exhibition and do they actually learn anything new? Through the discourse and interview analyses we can conclude that *Cool Japan* mostly provided an overview of different aspects of Japanese popular culture that were decided on through a preliminary visitor survey with only the occasional critical note here and there. Therefore, topics discussed were already well-known in the Netherlands. Instead of showing anything truly new, *Cool Japan* mostly provided visitors that are new to the topic with a general and positive view of Japanese popular culture that catered to the target audience of fans. This is also corroborated by the content analysis of the visitor survey, where an overwhelming majority was already familiar with the topic to some extent and where less than a third of the visitors indicated their view had changed because they had learned something new about it. Of course, this is not to say the exhibition was bad, as in fact visitors enjoyed it immensely overall. Unfortunately, my analyses of the SieboldHuis exhibitions were more limited, but we can conclude that similarly to *Cool Japan* these exhibitions did not show much news to the visitor in terms of popular culture, though especially *Hello Kitty-Hello Holland* did include more critical tones as well. Once again, a positive view is stimulated and visitors are able to interact with it.

Thirdly, do these exhibitions have any commercial effects on Dutch consumerism of Japanese popular culture? Unfortunately, this question can only be answered for *Cool Japan*, where we could indeed establish that visitors were likely to begin consuming or consume new sides of Japanese popular culture. This mostly pertained to visitors who already saw themselves as consumers and especially those in the younger age categories. However, while we can establish that there is an effect, it is not as strong as previously hypothesized and affects only a slight majority of visitors.

With these conclusions in mind, we can conclude that indeed Cool Japan can be considered as successful in the Netherlands, but not to the degree that I hypothesized in the introduction. Whereas it is apparent that these exhibitions mostly provide a positive overview of what is available, it is apparent that Japanese soft power institutions are not as involved in the making of the exhibitions as I conjectured. In fact, for two out of three exhibitions discussed, these institutions were hardly involved at all. On the other hand, we can corroborate the hypothesis that Japan does indeed use exhibitions as a tool for spreading positivity about their (popular) culture as exemplified by the Japan Foundation's *Kingdom of Characters*. Finally, the hypothesis that these types of exhibitions influence foreign consumerism of Japanese popular culture has also been confirmed, though once again as we have seen this effect is not as strong as originally estimated.

Naturally, this conclusion is limited by the scope of this thesis, and the true extent to which Cool Japan is successful in the Netherlands when it comes to exhibitions is difficult to determine without a mode of comparison to other countries or regions. However, these conclusions could serve as a starting point for future research that may consider Cool Japan from the same museological perspective. If we want to reach a more definite conclusion in future, more exhibitions on Japanese popular culture will need to be analyzed in a wider variety of countries to compare the effect on consumerism and visitors' learning experiences. This will also allow us to place the Netherlands in this spectrum to gain a clearer view of the true extent of Cool Japan's success.

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