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Cool Japan, Creative Industries, and Diversity

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Abstract: *This paper critically considers the operation and objective of Japan's 'creative industry' policy and suggests how to redesign it to align it with recent attention to cultural diversity. But the paper's scope goes beyond business and extends to defining 'creativity' as a means to enhance civic dialogue, sympathy, and inclusion, to imagine a better society. The 'creative industry' can include independent and non-profit cultural projects that promote diversity by involving artists, museums, non-governmental and non-profit organisations, public service corporations, local communities, volunteers, and researchers. Such a redesign is compatible with the creative industry policy's aim to advance social inclusion and democratisation by promoting grassroots creativity.*

*Keywords***:** Creative industries, Cool Japan, creativity and diversity, democratisation
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1. Introduction

The development of digital communication technologies and the intensification of transnational media culture flows have been marketising culture and highlighting the significance of media communication in national and global economies. The notions of 'convergence culture' and 'creative industries' have attracted wide policy attention (e.g. Hartley, 2012; Cunningham, 2011). One important feature of the discussion on creative industries is the promotion of grassroots creativity and advancement of social inclusion and democratisation, which 'suggests that everyone who wants a voice, has one; that all are free to add some sort of cultural contribution' (Paschal, 2017). The notion of creative industries contains the promising idea of 'the democratizing potential of new media, and it is sufficiently idealistic to hope that the new media enterprises that attract their interest will achieve something more socially useful than commercial success' (Turner, 2012: 696). However, the policy-related discussion on creative industries has attracted as much criticism as acclamation due to the endorsement of market-driven promotion of cultural production that engenders the economy's takeover of cultural matters (e.g. O'Connor, 2004; Hesmondhalgh, 2013). Many studies show the worsening of labour conditions, especially for young workers in creative industries, which are eventually controlled by media conglomerates (e.g. Miller, 2009; Ross, 2003). And the optimistic view that the search for creative talent enhances cultural diversity and lessens inequality in job markets (Florida, 2002) does not hold up well, as the socio-cultural hierarchy is even strengthened by the rise of creative industries (Oakley, 2006).

The policy discussion on creative industries has been advancing in Asian countries, including China, Hong Kong, Singapore, the Republic of Korea (hereafter, Korea), and Japan. In Japan, the economic significance of promoting the international circulation of media culture has been increasingly taken seriously, although other related terms such as cultural diplomacy, soft power, and content industries have been more commonly used. However, Japan's and other Asian countries' policy discussion hardly shows serious engagement with substantial development of the creativity of media and cultural sectors and its democratising potential.

I will first discuss how the post-war development of cultural policy in Japan has ramifications for the current policy discussion on 'Cool Japan', the key concern of which is selling Japanese culture by using a national branding policy model that utilises the strength of national cultural creativity. The policy focuses on the international showcasing of content industries and thus is powerless to enhance creativity and improve poor labour conditions. I will then consider an internationally shared question of enhancing creativity by promoting cultural diversity and offer suggestions to redesign the cultural policy to reconcile enhancing creativity and promoting diversity in Japan.

2. 'Cool Japan' and Creative Industries

In Japan, there is no single governmental institution that plans and implements a coherent cultural policy. Several terms such as 'Cool Japan', soft power, national branding, content industries, and creative industries have been used, and various ministries have been involved, such as the Agency for Culture; Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA); Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI); Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunications; and Cabinet Office. Whilst METI is mainly responsible for developing a creative industry policy, its involvement with cultural policy in post-war Japan is relatively recent and marginal. After the war, the negative evaluation of the state's pre-war repression of media and culture prevented the government from developing substantial cultural policies. Cultural policy in post-war Japan has been limited to protecting and encouraging traditional culture by constructing infrastructure and an incentive evaluation system of artistic activities (mostly handled by the Agency for Culture), and refraining from being involved in cultural production. There has thus been no substantial policy to promote media cultural industries, but they rapidly developed after the 1960s due to their own innovation and support from the affluent domestic market. It is important to note that the post-war cultural policy had a strong interest in introducing Japanese culture to the world. In the 1970s, the Fukuda doctrine systematically implemented cultural diplomacy and cultural exchange programmes by setting up the Japan Foundation, affiliated with MOFA, to soften mounting anti-Japanese sentiment in Southeast Asia.

With policymakers' increasing attention to the potential of media culture to enhance national interests, METI is increasingly taking the initiative in developing a creative industry policy. But the post-war features of developing cultural policy have impacts on the recent discussion on creative industries in Japan.

Hartley et al. (2012) pointed out that several Asian countries such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore have adopted a United Kingdom model policy of creative industries in local contexts, but the idea of creative industries has not had a significant impact in Japan or in Korea and India. The authors explain why:

> '[T]hese countries already have significant 'soft power', a term referring to potent media and communication sectors with evidence of export capabilities. In Japan, the term 'gross national cool' has captured attention while in nearby Korea the term 'Korean Wave' exemplifies regional soft power.' (Hartley et al., 2012: 125)

This observation is suggestive of the above-mentioned features of Japan's cultural policy. It might be true that Japan's soft power – Japan's media culture production capacity – has deterred the discussion of a creative industry policy, but this should be understood in relation to the post-war absence of cultural policy in general. The reference to 'soft power' and 'gross national cool' also illustrates an enduring concern with promoting cultural diplomacy and raising Japan's international standing. Whilst a concern with the economic benefit of exporting media culture is growing, the discussion of creative industries in Japan still tends to consider the need to enhance national images in the world. And it is Cool Japan that has become the catchphrase integrating both political and economic objectives of cultural policy and is used by the Cabinet Secretariat and the Agency for Culture as well as by MOFA and METI. The Cabinet Secretariat set up the Council for the Promotion of Cool Japan in 2013 and METI established the Cool Japan Promotion Office in June 2010, for the first time adopting the term 'creative industries' for English translation.

The notion of 'Cool Japan' has attracted wider attention since the early 21st century to denote the celebratory global spread of Japanese media culture. Although the spread of Japanese media culture into the US and Europe has been gradual since at least the

1980s, Euro-American media coverage gave credence to the notion of a 'Cool Japan'. Several commentators have attested to Japan's growing cultural influence and some journalists even proclaimed the rise of Japan as an international cultural superpower, coining the term GNC (gross national cool) (McGray, 2002). The rise of Japanese media culture in global markets has engendered a narcissistic discourse on the global (i.e. crucially including Europe and the US) spread of Japanese media and consumer culture in the 1990s (Iwabuchi, 2002), but Japan's embrace of Cool Japan is not just limited to nationalistic euphoria. It has been accompanied by active national policy discussion and implementation to further enhance Japan's cultural standing in the world.

A key term here is 'soft power'. US political scientist Joseph Nye (1990) argued that 'soft co-optic power' is a significant factor in attaining global hegemony. The US's use of media culture to advance public diplomacy is not new, but Nye considers it imperative that the US government develop a soft-power policy to make strategic use, in the post-cold war era, of a globally diffused media and consumer culture, of symbolic icons and positive images and values associated with the US. A decade later, the concept of soft power attracted renewed attention in the context of the Bush administration's hard-line policies, especially after 9/11, and this time many countries other than the US adopted soft power as a cultural policy. The Japanese government also began publicly announcing its policy orientation towards enhancing soft power. MOFA used the term soft power to promote cultural diplomacy, especially under then Minister Taro Aso (2005–2007). The significance of the uses of media culture for cultural diplomacy was much stressed as a means to enhance Japan's national brand in the international community. Soft power and a good national brand are assumed to be something that Japan has already cultivated and should make a show of in the international arena.[1] This has led to an opportunistic policy discussion of the

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*[1] Referring to the 2006 BBC survey of national images, Aso boasted that Japan was amongst the most favourably perceived nations and proposed to further promote the national brand by exporting more media culture (especially manga and anime, as far as he was concerned). However, he did not mention the fact that survey respondents in China and Korea had negative responses to images of Japan.

expediency of media culture: all that is needed is the international circulation of already existing attractive culture to enhance Japan's national brand.[2]

This posture seriously limited the policy discussion on creative industries. The discussion on promoting media culture also assumes that Japan's main concern is how to promote an already existing attractive culture internationally. There is still no substantial policy discussion to promote cultural production. Inspired by the Korean success, METI has become keener to generate a bigger boom by expanding Japanese content internationally, which should lead to more sales of already appealing consumer goods such as fashion, food, technologies, and crafts. METI's key policy strategy focuses on supporting international expansion of creative industries rather than planning a comprehensive cultural policy to develop the media culture industry in Japan. The goal is how to make the best use of appealing media culture and export it and enhance the national brand. The key strategy is creating a platform, a distribution network, and exhibitions that promote Japanese content overseas, which will lead to more tourists coming to Japan. The Council for the Promotion of Cool Japan, set up in 2013 with a minister in charge, takes a similar direction. It was announced that ¥50 billion would be included in the 2013 national budget, mainly to set up infrastructure to advertise the charm of Japanese culture worldwide, not just media but also food, fashion, traditional crafts, and ways of life.

Japan's vision diverges from both the profit-driven US model and the public-minded European model. As Urrichio (2004: 83) pointed out, as the US model 'lacks all but the vestiges of culture as a common good, there has been no serious governmental attempt to stimulate a public culture', which is at least part of cultural policy discussion in Europe and Australia. The Japanese case appears to be more along the lines of the highly market-oriented US model. METI now uses the notion of 'creative industries', most commonly meaning 'content business/industries', which include film, animation, comics, TV, music, and games. The term 'content' suggests not

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[2] The Japanese version of soft-power discourse diverges from Nye's in the use of media culture in international image politics. For Nye, media culture is just one of three possible resources to enhance a nation's soft power, the other two being respectful foreign policy and attractive democratic values established in the relevant society (Nye, 2004). He warns against conflating the international appeal of media culture with soft power, stressing that soft power will not be enhanced if the other two resources are not properly developed. However, this conflation is a prevalent operational principle of cultural policy discussions in Japan.

much concern with the 'cultural' – symbolic and aesthetic – quality of media culture, which echoes Garnham's (2005) point that the idea of creative industries is an extension of the information technology (IT) industry discourse. Content is considered a commodity and the concern is developing international distribution channels, including digital platforms generated by advancing IT, to circulate content. In the Japanese case, however, the measures taken for this purpose are rather unsatisfactory as they do not include market deregulation and intellectual property re-regulation (Garnham, 2005) and no serious attempt has been made to develop international distribution channels, which are controlled by US-centred global conglomerates.

The impetus to maximise profit is hampered by the aspiration to enhance the national image by using existing media culture. Yet, this cultural concern is different from the European model, which considers culture as a common good and aims to stimulate a particular national vision of culture (Garnham, 2005). The Japanese national vision is not related to the public good at all but is merely the nationalistic desire to improve Japan's international brand. Overdetermined by the post-war (un)development of cultural policy, Japan's content/creative industry policy is lackadaisical: neither fully committed to developing content industries nor to fostering public goods; neither paying attention to nurturing creators nor potentially democratising society by using digital media. Japan's case is a national branding model whose key aim is to opportunistically utilise the established appeal of national media culture to promote a good image internationally. The policy is not concerned with how promoting content industries would benefit creators and help new kinds of cultural creativity flourish. Rather, the main concern is to sell 'the Japan brand'.

Japanese content industries are sceptical of the state's ability to promote the export of media cultural products, partly because the Japanese media industries developed due to creators' and corporations' great efforts alone, without government help, in the post-war era. For example, foreign TV programme imports have not been regulated (as is also the case in Hong Kong), but the domestic TV market became nearly self-sufficient by the early 1970s. Media cultural industries in Japan are proud of their achievements, are cynical of the state's capacity to understand media culture production, and even have some antipathy towards being incorporated into the Cool Japan strategy. They are also sceptical of how the Cool Japan fund is used. Most imperative for the

industries is the improvement of the domestic production environment to foster the creative competence needed to win against international rivals, through state subsidy of training of creators, improvement of notoriously bad labour conditions and clarification of copyright matters. But these issues are not yet seriously considered in the Cool Japan policy discussion whilst policymakers shower with praise the creativity of Japanese animation and games, which they believe significantly elevate Japan's brand. The Cool Japan fund has been used to promote the export of already popular cultural products. The failure of the Cool Japan policy to push other cultural exports and the ineffective investment of the Cool Japan fund became publicly evident in 2018 (e.g. *Nikkei Shinbun*, 2018). It was reported that 'the programme has invested JPY52.9 billion ($481.24 million) in public and private funds into 25 projects, but it operates at a loss of JPY4.4 billion ($40.02 million)' (Teffen, 2018).

3. Creative Industries and Cultural Diversity

Another crucial issue in enhancing creativity is related to promoting cultural diversity. Creative industries should not discriminate against people and should offer more access to production and consumption of culture to socio-culturally marginalised people than to other sectors. This ideal is questioned because it emphasises talent and excellence, which eventually leads to the reproduction of social exclusion based on the existing social and cultural hierarchy within the nation (Hesmondhalgh, 2013). For example, the UK's Creative Industries Federation (2015) report on 'Creative Diversity: The state of diversity in the UK's creative industries, and what we can do about it' identifies diversity and inclusivity as drivers of creative growth, but creative industries have been and still are mainly composed of white, university-educated males in London. Promoting diversity has become more urgent as we have witnessed growing business concerns with promoting diversity in workplaces to enhance creativity to survive international competition.

Although relevant data is not available, it is reasonable to say that promoting diversity has not been much considered in Japan's policy discussion on creative industries. Japan still claims to be racially and culturally homogenous and is reluctant to

take in immigrants. Elsewhere, I have argued that there is a huge discrepancy between the rapid development of the Cool Japan policy and the strong unwillingness to accept migrants and foster cultural diversity within Japan (Iwabuchi, 2015). The Cool Japan initiatives even suppress existing cultural diversity: nation branding essentialises the nation in market terms and disengages with cultural diversity. Cool Japan's pursuit of narrow national interests propagates the idea that the nation functions as a unit of cultural diversity in the world, but does not seriously engage with socio-cultural democratisation of the kind that does justice to hitherto marginalised voices and differences in society (Iwabuchi, 2015). It has been much pointed out that Japan has been open to indigenising cultural influences from other parts of the world (especially the US) whilst being closed to ethno-racial diversity (e.g. Iwabuchi, 1998). If tolerance of symbolic cultural diversity has been the strength of Japanese content industries, whether and how tolerance of ethno-cultural diversity will be enhanced for them to become more creative and win against global rivals is a significant issue that we need to carefully examine.

Recently, businesses have become interested in promoting diversity in workplaces in Japan, following the global trend. Demand is growing for a globally competitive labour force equipped with linguistic and intercultural capabilities. Such interest is initially corporate-driven, and the main objective is enhancing national economic interests by globalising higher education, which has ramifications for creative industries. METI proposed easing the granting of long-stay visas to overseas creators as part of Cool Japan, and one key member of the Cool Japan strategy committee also argued that 'one of our most important recommendations is promoting immigration of creative industry professionals. This is the perfect time to open Japan up to the world with a focus on two keywords – culture and creativity' (Umezawa, 2015). This discussion aligns itself with the global tendency to reformulate immigration policy to accept talented and skilled workers useful to the national economy. And the Japanese government accordingly promotes the skilled-migrant policy by granting them permanent residency status much more easily and quickly. However, it needs to be noted that the policy seeks diverse talents from outside and tends not to do so from the existing ethno-racial diversity within the nation. Ideally, it is suggested, in a global creative city with high-tech infrastructure, talented, creative people gather and work

together irrespective of socio-cultural background – class, ethnicity/race, and gender/sexuality – thus constructing a social environment more tolerant of cultural diversity (Florida, 2002). This ideal has not been realised as the prevailing ethnic, racial, gender, and sexual hierarchy dominates creative labour. Thus, the above-mentioned British discussion shows that enhancing creativity by promoting diversity must take existing culturally diverse groups and their inclusion and contribution more seriously. In Japan, existing ethnically diverse groups and their cultural contribution should be publicly acknowledged. As the Japanese census shows the composition of the nation only as 'Japanese' and 'foreigners' without indicating ethnic background, ethnic diversity is ignored or even suppressed.

It should also be recognised that the nation's creativity can be enhanced by fostering diversity in the workforce *and* in society as a whole. Promoting cultural diversity to enhance creativity in workplaces cannot be detached also doing so in society as whole. This point is related to the idea I referred to at the beginning, that creative industries can advance socio-cultural democratisation: 'Everyone who wants a voice, has one; that all are free to add some sort of cultural contribution' (Paschal, 2017). I suggest that the scope of 'creative industries' be reconceived by including public and semi-public sectors and organisations. All organisations, groups, and social actors such as governmental organisations, public institutions, public service organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), non-profit organisations (NPOs), and citizens' groups that strive to promote expression and activities that foster cultural diversity and advance multicultural co-living should be recognised as key players in creative industries, and a cultural policy that supports them needs to be developed. Projects include artistic practices, museum exhibitions, independent creators' audio-visual expressions, ethnic and migrant media, and citizen's media – all of which should be facilitated by transnational collaboration. Whilst discussion on creative industries tends to focus on supporting domestic industries against international rivals, promoting grassroots creativity to enhance diversity can be transnationally shared.

I have been engaging in such projects through cross-border collaboration. Trans-East-Asia Multiculturalism (TEAM) concerns trans-Asia human mobility and

accompanying multicultural diversity in Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. TEAM's key objective is to facilitate cross-border collaboration and dialogue amongst social actors such as local communities, NGOs, NPOs, civic organisations, and migrant subjects who strive to advance multicultural inclusion. TEAM promotes cultural and artistic expressions of migrants' stories to embrace and empower migrants and foster cultural diversity. The project thus involves artists, museums, NGO, NPOs, people of migrant backgrounds, educators and researchers, as well as policymakers. To encourage social actors to learn from and collaborate with each other, EthniCities: Embracing Cultural Diversity in East Asia has been organised annually since 2016 (Taipei in 2016, Seoul 2017, Tokyo in 2018).[3] The event includes filmmakers, singers, and performers with diverse migrant backgrounds, as well as NGOs and NPOs, which support their activities and organise film festivals. Many participants were excited to hear about similar and different experiences in other East Asian societies, which gave them a fresh perspective on their own multicultural activities. Some participants have forged new partnerships and cross-border projects, and researchers learn through action how they can help facilitate dialogue across borders and divides. Migrant Diplomacy: Australia–Japan Exchange to Promote Cultural Diversity Through Museum Practices, promotes exchange and dialogue between the Immigration Museum in Melbourne and related museums, artists, and organisations in Japan.[4] As migration and cultural diversity have been attracting the attention of museums and artists in Japan due to the increasing number of migrants, this project embraces their presence and experience and fosters diversity in both countries. Since 2016, the project has organised exchange and built up collaborative relations between the Immigration Museum in Melbourne and the Immigration Museum Tokyo, a pilot project whose establishment was inspired by the former, and the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum. Another interactive workshop will be organised in April 2019 to embrace diversity through cultural and artistic expressions, together with institutions that promote multicultural inclusion in Hamamatsu (Hamamatsu International Cultural Exchange) and Nagoya (Nagoya International Centre), which are major multicultural cities in Japan.

Such endeavours are significant as they link the current dominant diversity paradigm to democratic contention by tackling social inequality and inclusion beyond the business-driven conceptions of diversity and creativity (Faist, 2009). The two projects are not directly related to the conventional practice of creative industries and they might not increase economic profits in the short term. However, encouraging grass-roots promotion of diversity and cultural and artistic expressions will significantly increase the possibility that creative industries' will democratise society by amplifying grass-roots creativity and diversity. Such projects to foster grassroots cultural expressions and artistic activities merit policy support.

4. Concluding Remarks

Turner (2012: 112–113) argued that 'the cultural policy studies agenda was largely in accord with the core activity of Cultural Studies …in that it had its eyes firmly fixed on the public good – this, understood as distinct from the political objectives of governments or the commercial objectives of the cultural industries'. The attention to the public good is reminiscent of Raymond Williams' (1984) distinction between cultural policy proper and cultural policy as display. Cultural policy proper is concerned with social democratisation as support for art, and media regulation designed to counter the kind of penetrating market forces that tend to marginalise unprofitable cultural forms and the expressions of various people. Cultural policy as display is 'the public pomp of a particular social order' (Williams 1984: 3). This form of cultural policy is typically put on display by a given national event and ceremony to achieve 'national aggrandisement'. Cultural policy as display also takes the form of 'economic reductionism of culture' that promotes business opportunities and economic growth. A growing interest in national branding through Cool Japan shows how the two forms of cultural policy as display have been expediently integrated for the sake of the national interest, which does not correspond to and even suppresses the public interest as it disregards crucial questions of who benefits and what the democratising potential is of promoting media culture.

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Critical examination of market performance and its impact on labour conditions and copyright issues is imperative. No less challenging is how we can associate fostering cultural diversity with discussing creative industries. This is not just relevant to the creative industries but to society as a whole: in the age of digital media communications, all consumers/citizens are active creators, and citizens' mundane participation in cultural production is important for the pursuit of democratisation. To advance this vital objective, a well-designed training and education programme should be developed to cultivate critical and reformist insights into the existing power relations over the issue of social inclusion and cultural diversity. Judging from the current policy discussion of Cool Japan, however, there is no sign that promoting creative industries is accompanied by recognising and dealing with ethno-racial differences. As the Tokyo Olympics 2020 approaches, the time is ripe to put its slogan 'Unity in Diversity' into action. If it expands and redesigns a creative industry policy by taking the promotion of diversity seriously and including social actors and organisations that creatively aspire to enhance diversity, Japan can proudly offer the world a new democratising model of creative industries.

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