NATION BRANDING THROUGH STIGMATIZED POPULAR CULTURE: THE "COOL JAPAN" CRAZE AMONG CENTRAL MINISTRIES IN JAPAN[*]

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Abstract

This paper investigates how and why various central ministries in Japan have adopted policies promoting Japanese popular culture such as *manga* (comic books), *anime* (animated films and TV shows), games, fashion and so forth, which had formerly been neglected by the state due to their stigmatized status. This paper analyzes documents released by bureaucrats and the results of interviews conducted with key persons from central ministries and institutions under their jurisdiction to shed light on institutional isomorphism observed in the central government of Japan.

Keywords: Cool Japan, popular culture, stigma, mimetic isomorphism, central ministries, soft power

This paper investigates how and why various central ministries in Japan have adopted policies promoting Japanese popular culture such as *manga* (comic books), *anime* (animated films and TV shows), games, fashion and so forth, which had formerly been neglected by the state due to their perceived lower status (Tomooka *et al*. 2002). By "Cool Japan Craze" I refer to the policy competition by central ministries to promote the "content industry" in order to enhance global competitiveness of the industry or Japanese economy and/or to enrich Japan's "soft power," (Nye 1990). The content industry (*kontentsu sangyo*) is a relatively new word in Japanese (Kawashima 2009). It is defined as "commercial industries that produce, distribute, and retail cultural and/or entertainment works such as music, pictures, games, manga, and anime as products" (Kawashima 2009: 3), or "the industries that deal with reproducible representation such as manga, novels, movies, TV, and music" (Deguchi *et al*. 2009: i).

Such policies were not triggered from within the country but from the US: a 2002 *Foreign Policy* article titled "Japan's Gross National Cool" (McGray 2002). This article states that although Japan's gross national production had been shrinking, it created a mighty engine of

"gross national cool" through the popularity of Japanese popular culture. This national cool is considered a "soft power," a non-traditional way for a country to influence another country's wants or its public's values (Nye 1990).

Armed with the theoretical background of this "Cool Japan" thesis, the government started to push the notion of "cultural diplomacy" through popular cultural products and insisted that the content industry could be the new leading industry of the Japanese economy (METI 2005; The Council for the Asian Gateway Initiative 2007a; Condry 2009). For example, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs now prefers to use manga, anime, and pop music in its cultural diplomacy, in addition to high brow traditional culture such as *kabuki* (classical dance-drama) and flower arrangement. The Japan External Trade Organization, an institution under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, now supports small firms to export Japanese popular culture products to foreign markets. In its "Visit Japan" campaign to attract inbound tourists, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism featured the female pop duo *Puffy AmiYumi*, who had a smash hit animation program on the Cartoon Network in the US. Competition between such ministries has even been described as "all-out war" (Oogi *et al*. 2010).

This paper analyzes documents released by bureaucrats and the results of interviews conducted with key persons from central ministries and institutions under their jurisdiction to shed light on institutional isomorphism observed in the central government of Japan (DiMaggio 1983; DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Interviewees are listed in the Appendix.

The structure of this paper is as follows. First, the historical background of the "Cool Japan" Craze is explored. Second, the theoretical frameworks of neo-institutionalism and the concept of stigma are reviewed. Third, "Cool Japan" policies by various central ministries are analyzed. Fourth, the reasons why such a craze occurred in the central government are explained. Lastly, the conclusion summarizes the paper and its contribution, and discusses the unanswered questions that require further pursuit.

I. *Historical Background of the "Cool Japan" Craze*

The phrase "Cool Japan" was coined by an American journalist (McGray 2002). In this sense, Japanese "coolness" was discovered and endorsed by the US, whose popular culture has had considerable influence on the Japanese for many years after their defeat in World War II. US cultural influence prevailed in Japanese society, though American popular culture such as Charlie Chaplin's movies had already been popular in Japan before WWII. Confronted with serious unemployment and shortages of food, clothing, and housing, the Japanese were attracted by the prosperity of the American way of life through their exposure to mass media. For example, a radio program broadcasted an episode called "The Electrical OK World," reporting that a husband in a typical American middle-class family wakes up to an electric alarm clock, shaves with an electronic safety razor; his wife washes sheets, towels, shirts, children's clothes, handkerchiefs, etc. in the washing machine in a corner of the kitchen, just by adding soap and flicking a switch (Partner 1999). The American comic strip *Blondie* appeared in the national newspaper Asahi Shimbun and TV situation comedies like Father Knows Best and I Love Lucy also impressed the Japanese with the affluence of the nuclear white family (Ishikawa et al. 1981a, Ishikawa et al. 1981b). The introduction of American popular culture was not limited to

material affluence. Diverse American cultural products from movies, music, and fashion to cartoons also gained popularity.

The influence of American popular culture, however, started to decrease from the 1970s. After its own exceptional rapid economic growth in the 1960s, Japan became an affluent society itself in the 1970s. With more and more Japanese enjoying overseas tours, Japanese consumers got the chance to experience consumer cultures of various countries. Japanese fashion magazines for youngsters and independent boutiques began to introduce European products (Matsui 2005; Akagi 2007). Consequently, Japanese popular culture became an amalgam of various foreign consumer cultures and American popular culture lost its privileged position. Especially during the 1980s, the gilded age of Japan, the worship of the US dissolved into a state of euphoria to celebrate Japan's own economic superpower. Japanese mass media and intellectuals proclaimed that Japanese products were indispensable in Americans' daily life and Japan could even be the role model for the US economy as shown in the title of Ezra F. Vogel's bestseller, *Japan as Number One: Lessons for America* (Vogel 1979).

But the collapse of its bubble economy at the beginning of the 1990s crushed Japanese self-confidence completely. In addition to the agony of the long recession, harsh competition with Korea in steel, automotive and electronics industries, the US's strong leadership in the "IT revolution" from the mid-1990s, and China's rapid economic growth in the 21st century also enhanced the depressed atmosphere of the "Lost Decade" after the bitter defeat in economic war.

However, news about the popularity of Japanese cultural products revitalized Japanese self-confidence. Names such as *Nintendo, PlayStation, Hello Kitty, Pokémon* and *Tamagotchi* emerged into children's everyday life both in and outside Japan. In the US, Japanese anime-style cartoons currently fill the majority of time slots for children's shows on US cable television and Pokémon even made the cover of *Time* magazine (McGray 2002, Nikkei Business 2005). In addition, Academy Award winning *Spirited Away* by Hayao Miyazaki proved that anime was no longer just children's entertainment but a kind of modern art that attracted mature audiences. This new self-image of Japan was endorsed by the striking news that *Miss ko2*, an 188-cm, cartoon-like figure created by Japanese artist Takashi Murakami, sold for US$567,500 at Christie's (fine art auction house) in New York.

The hypothesis on Japan as a cultural superpower was finally promoted by "Japan's Gross National Cool," a 2002 *Foreign Affairs* article written by a young American journalist Douglas McGray, which fueled a surge of cultural nationalism (Ootsuka and Oosawa 2005, Sakamoto 2007). In his article, McGray reported that Japan, which used to be an economic superpower in the 1980s and lost international presence in the 1990s due to its severe recession, now had global cultural influence. He stated that although Japan's gross national production had been shrinking, it created a mighty engine of "gross national cool." This national cool is a kind of "soft power," a term Joseph S. Nye coined to explain the non-traditional ways a country can influence another country's wants or its public's value (Nye 1990; Nye 2004). From pop music, consumer electronics, architecture to fashion, Japan now has strong cultural power in foreign countries.

McGray's article attracted Japanese attention after its Japanese translation appeared as one of the articles in the special issue "Theory on Founding Japan through Culture" in *Tyuokoron*, a leading opinion magazine, in May 2003. After that, the phrase *japan culu* and *culu japan* (loan words of "Japan Cool" and "Cool Japan," respectively) became buzzwords in Japan. In other

words, a new version of nationalism expressed in the "Japan Cool" thesis— Japan as a cultural superpower— started to be discussed widely as indicated by some of the titles published, such as *IT Revolution from Japan: Japan Cool Spreading over Asia* (Okuno 2004), *Imitated Japan* (Hamano 2005), *Japan's Pop Power: Real Image of Contents that Change the World* (Nakamura and Onouchi 2006) and *Cool Japan: Japan That The World Wants to Buy* (Sugiyama 2006).

Armed with the theoretical background of the "Japan Cool" thesis, the government started to push the notion of "cultural diplomacy" as described below. Although some critics condemned that the governmental intervention was just harmful and fruitless (Ootsuka and Oosawa 2005), it started new industrial policy to support the "content industry." This craze also caught on in the business and academic sectors. Nikkei BP, an influential business magazine publishing company, established a Japan Cool Award to celebrate persons who contribute to exporting Japanese culture as a new category of the Japan Innovator Award in 2004 (Nikkei Business 2004). Meiji University, one of Tokyo's major private universities, established the School of Global Japanese Studies to scientifically think about "Japan Cool" in 2007.

II.   *Theoretical Framework*

This paper investigates how and why various central ministries in Japan have adopted "Cool Japan" policies promoting Japanese popular culture, which had formerly been neglected by the state due to their perceived lower status. There are two issues that the paper focuses on: the homogeneity among central ministries and the stigmatized nature of popular cultural products. This paper, which follows sociological tradition, adopts neo-institutionalism and the concept of stigma to explain each issue.

1.   Institutional Isomorphism

One theoretical framework of this paper is institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio 1983; DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Isomorphism is a constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) asked why there is such startling homogeneity of organizational forms and identified three mechanisms through which institutional isomorphic change occurs: (1) coercive isomorphism that stems from political influence and the problem of legitimacy; (2) mimetic isomorphism resulting from standard responses to uncertainty; (3) normative isomorphism, associated with professionalization.

The process of homogenization of bureaucratic organizational practices in the Cool Japan Craze can be considered as a typical instance of mimetic isomorphism. According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983), when organizational technologies are poorly understood, when goals are ambiguous, or when the environment creates symbolic uncertainty, organizations may model themselves on other organizations. There are two hypotheses about mimetic isomorphic change at the organizational level. First, the more uncertain the relationship between means and ends, the greater the extent to which an organization will model itself after organizations it perceives as successful. Second, the more ambiguous the goals of an organization, the greater the extent to which the organization will model itself after organizations that it perceives as successful.

Also, at the organizational field level, similar mimetic isomorphism can be observed. Organizational field means organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life. For instance, in the business context, it is the aggregated cluster of key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products. In the case of the Cool Japan Craze, the *chuo kancho* (central government ministries) dominated by elite *chuo kanryo* (the bureaucrats of central government ministries), who are sometimes quite difficult even for ministers of the ruling party to control, constitute a recognized area of distinctive institutional life (Sakai 2007, 2008, Shuppan Kontentsu Kenkyukai et al. 2009). There are two hypotheses about mimetic isomorphic change at the field level (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). First, the fewer the number of visible alternative organizational models in a field, the faster the rate of isomorphism in that field. Second, the greater the extent to which technologies are uncertain or goals are ambiguous within a field, the greater the rate of isomorphic change.

2. Stigma and Popular Culture

Another theoretical framework of this paper is based on Erving Goffman's classic work, Stigma (Goffman 1963). Goffman argued that the social identity of a stigmatized person is discrete by the power of a single attribute such as being a prostitute or visually impaired. As he argues that stigma is a "special kind of relationship between attribute and stereotype" (Goffman, 1963: 4), stigma is not essential to individuals' internal quality, but is socially constructed. According to his observation, such stigmatized people are viewed as deserving of some sort of intervention, which affects self identity. Stigmatized people often experience shame, self-hatred, or self-derogation. Therefore, in order to prevent or minimize problematic interaction, stigmatized individuals adopt "stigma management." Such management includes general control over signs showing the stigma or control over personal information that can lead to being discredited. For example, blind people wear sunglasses to conceal their blindness.

Paul Lopes, who researched popular cultural products such as jazz and comics, applies the concept of stigma to the realm of popular culture (Lopes 2006; 2009). He argues that we can see the social construction of stigma in how "normals" and the stigmatized negotiate the meaning of stigma in popular culture, and showed the following eight-point framework for analyzing how stigma works in popular culture (Lopes, 2006). (1) Stigma can attach to various objects, including both forms and practitioners. (2) Stigma can be global or more specific to genres, or social roles. (3) Stigma is a process of discrediting forms and practitioners and making them problematic. (4) Stigma usually implies potential harm or pathology. (5) Stigma can lead to various forms of intervention. (6) Stigma elicits defensive claims, stigma management, or alternative theories. (7) Both stigma and stigma management can affect the development of a cultural form. (8) Stigma theories can change over time.

In spite of their huge impact on the Japanese economy, popular cultural products such as anime and manga featured in Cool Japan policies had been neglected by government for many years (Hatayama 2005). Both the forms and practitioners had been stigmatized in the organizational field of central ministries. However, the process of the Cool Japan Craze allowed central ministries to justify the utilization of stigmatized cultural products in their policies through stigma management.

III.   *How Did The Japan Cool Craze Emerge?*

In this section, "Cool Japan" policies by major ministries and institutions under their jurisdiction or their special bodies are analyzed: The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) and Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO); The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and Japan Foundation; The Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT) and Japan Tourism Agency; and Agency for Cultural Affairs. Although it is not a ministry, we start from the Intellectual Property Headquarters established by the Cabinet Office of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, which played an important role in allowing ministries to focus on Cool Japan policies.

1.   Intellectual Property Headquarters

The earliest attempt to promote Cool Japan was not necessarily related to McCray's *Foreign Affairs* article. The first appearance of the word "content" on governmental documents is the General Policy Speech to the 150th Session of the Diet in September 2000 by Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori, which proposed an "Internet Exhibition" to stimulate the diffusion of the Internet (Mori 2000; Sakai 2007). It was in July 2002 that governmental support of the content industry was seriously discussed for the first time. The "Intellectual Property Strategy Outline" drawn by the Intellectual Property Council, established by the Cabinet Office, in July 2002, proposed "support for the creation of excellent contents" and "promotion of protection and distribution of content creation" (Hatayama 2005). In the General Policy Speech to the 156th Session of the Diet in January 2003, Junichiro Koizumi, the Prime Minister and the President of the Liberal Democratic Party from 2001 to 2006, gave the following address.

> The artistic quality of the animated film "Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi (Spirited Away)" gained worldwide acclaim, garnering the Golden Bear for Best Film of the 2002 Berlin International Film Festival and the 2002 New York Film Critics Circle Award for Best Animated Film (Koizumi 2003).

It was the first time for a Prime Minister's address to mention popular cultural products such as anime (Hatayama 2005) and it showed that the Koizumi administration was serious about promoting Japanese popular culture to the world. Thus, the Fundamental Law of Intellectual Property went into force in March 2003 and the Intellectual Property Headquarters was established by the Cabinet Office in July 2003.

In his General Policy Speech to the 159th Session of the Diet in January 2004, Koizumi showed firm commitment to nurturing the content industry. He addressed the promoting of intellectual property businesses, such as anime and games, and development of an affluent country by capitalizing on culture and art (Koizumi 2004).

The Intellectual Property Headquarters established the Working Group on Contents to discuss issues regarding the promotion of the content business in October 2003 and nine meetings were held by 2007. In 2004, it released "The Policy for Promotion of Content Business: National Strategy in the Age of Soft Power" (The Intellectual Property Headquarters 2004). It argued that the content industry should be the "pillar" of national strategy because of its market size, economic impact on other industries and its powerful soft power. The problem

pointed out in the report was that Japanese contents were popular but the industry could not gain sufficient return. This was a more serious problem because the US manages to obtain huge profits from their content, European countries adequately support their content industry, and China and Korea had started to nurture their content industry as national projects. The final report released in March 2007 proposed the promotion of the export of Japanese content, the legislation for protection of intellectual property, the development of human resources and technology, and the financial support for production of contents (The Intellectual Property Headquarters 2007).

The Headquarters also established the Working Group on Japan Brand to discuss intellectual cultural resources that were not protected as intellectual property, such as cooking and fashion, in 2004. The final report released in 2005 gave emphasis to exercising soft power through food culture and fashion (The Intellectual Property Headquarters 2005).

The Headquarters was originally established to enhance Japan's international competitiveness through the creation and protection of intellectual property, so topics were diverse under popular phrases such as "soft power" and "content industry." Although the regimes changed successively after the Koizumi administration, the Cool Japan thesis was always emphasized by each administration in their policies. For example, Shinzo Abe, the Prime Minister from 2006 to 2007, endorsed the Asian Gateway Initiative in 2007, in which one of the objectives was "[t]o create a 'beautiful country' which is attractive, trustworthy and respected." (The Council for the Asian Gateway Initiative 2007a: 5). Its appendix "Japan Cultural Industry Strategy" argued that Japan needed to promote its attractiveness to the world through its popular culture including the lifestyles and values that created such culture (The Council for the Asian Gateway Initiative 2007b).

As shown below, the various ministries also started to propose policies related to Cool Japan and sometimes their policies overlapped each other and competed.

2. Industrial Policy: The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry

The primary goal of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) is to increase Japan's GDP (Sakai 2008). In the context of the content industry, METI now focuses on the export of Japanese content. METI started to commit to Cool Japan policies by establishing the Media and Content Industry Division at the Commerce and Information Policy Bureau in 2001 (Shuppan Kontentsu Kenkyukai *et al*. 2009). Although this division was originally created to focus on the diffusion of broadband Internet, its policy aims to expand the market for the content industry abroad and to create jobs in the domestic labor market (Sakai 2007). The former director of the Media and Content Industry Division, Ikuro Hirozane, said that METI's classic industrial policy applied to the manufacturing sector in the Showa 30s (1955-1965[1]) was also effective to nurture the content industry (Hatayama 2005).

> Yes, it is an old industrial policy, but it's quite useful. Institutionalization and support for overseas expansion is effective to help grow a business field into an industry. The Japanese content field had lacked unity as an industry. For example, the target markets and the

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[1] The Showa era is the period of Japanese history corresponding to the reign of Emperor Showa (Hirohito) from 1926 to 1989.

internal structure of the industry were vertically divided by various industries such as games and music and movies... Until recently, it was difficult to take the industry's opinion into policy considerations because they had been individually voicing their opinions (Hatayama 2005: 107-108).

As for the institutionalization, METI collaborated with the Japan Business Federation, the largest economic organization that has been the voice of big business in Japan (Hatayama 2005). JBF, which had been dominated by manufacturing industries and only accepted entertainment companies such as Yoshimoto Kogyo for the first time in 2002, established the Entertainment Content Industry Section Meeting in 2003 and submitted the report "Toward the Promotion of Entertainment Content Industry" to the government. This report was featured in the 2005 report by the Media and Content Industry Division as explained below (METI 2005).

As for the support for overseas expansion, METI promotes two policies: the protection of intellectual property and the promotion of license business in offshore markets (Sakai 2007). The Content Overseas Distribution Association was established in 2002. It is a private organization of Japanese content providers and copyright-related organizations, whose aim is to stamp out piracy and promote the legal distribution of Japanese content. CODA established the CJ Mark in 2005 to give content providers a way forward in protecting their intellectual property (CODA 2007).

The promotion of Japanese content overseas, especially those by small-sized companies, is supported by the Japan External Trade Organization, an organization under the jurisdiction of METI. The Los Angeles office of JETRO released the report "The Status Quo and Prospects of the US Anime Market" in 2003 (JETRO 2003). It was virtually the first JETRO report about the export of content; and since then, it has released such reports for various countries and areas around the world including Asia, Europe, and South America.

In 2003, the Media and Content Industry Division established the Content Industry International Strategy Study Group. Its interim guidelines pushed for the content industry to be the new leading industry to harness Japan's economy and to contribute to enhancing the nation's brand value in both economic and cultural aspects (Research Society of Content Industry International Strategy 2003). This seems to have been the first time that the Cool Japan thesis was incorporated in METI's documents. The theories that backup its argument are McGray's "Gross National Cool" (McGray 2002), Nye's "soft power" (Nye 1990; Nye 2004), and Van Ham's "The Rise of Brand State" (Van Ham 2001). Van Ham explained that a "brand state" comprised the outside world's ideas about a particular country. He argued that there was a shift in political paradigm from the modern world of geopolitics and power to the postmodern world of image, and therefore, smart states are building their brands around reputations and attitudes in the same way smart companies do (Van Ham 2001). The "Content Industry, Current Situation and Issues: Towards the Strengthening of the International Competitiveness of the Content Industries" released in 2005 follow these directions shown by the interim guidelines. (METI 2005).

The Global Strategy Study Group was established in 2006 to follow up the Content Industry International Strategy Study Group. Its "Contents Global Strategy Final Report" released in 2007 proposed directions for the Japanese content industry to have global reach (Contents Global Strategy Study Group 2007). One of these was the Japan International Contents Festival that was started in 2007 and is now called "CoFesta." It is a one-month

comprehensive content festival featuring games, animation, manga, characters, broadcasting, music, film, fashion and design. Big events such as the Tokyo Game Show, Tokyo International Film Festival, and Japan Fashion Week are incorporated in this festival. The CoFesta is now also held abroad. In 2009, it opened a booth in the Japan Expo in Paris and the Anime Festival Asia 2009 in Singapore. The CoFesta was also held in Brazil in March 2010 and is scheduled to have an exhibition in China's Expo 2010.

As demonstrated above, the goal of METI's Cool Japan policies is the global market growth of the content industry and is based on the classical logic of industrial policy that it is used to carrying out. The interesting point is that it utilized the logic of "soft power" and "brand state" in order to assert the importance of the growth of the content industry for a country, which resonates with MOFA's cultural diplomacy.

3.   Cultural Diplomacy: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Cool Japan policies by The Ministry of Foreign Affairs can be summarized with the keyword "cultural diplomacy," which is also based on the logic of "soft power." Its commitment to a Cool Japan policy started in 2003. A report by the Research Society of International Exchange, "Diplomacy in a new era and the new role of international exchange: Toward Japan's taking part in global public opinion formation," released in 2003, was one of the earliest governmental documents that cited McCray's *Foreign Affairs* article (Kokusai Koryu Kenkyukai 2003). The society was organized by The Japan Foundation, an independent administrative institution under the jurisdiction of MOFA. This report argued that the core of Japan's national image had been vital to the economy and the social systems that supported the former, but that these now created a negative image of a country that had missed chances. Thus, the report argued that in order to remove such an image, Japan needed to construct and promote a new national image by utilizing Japan's potential resources. The solution the report proposed as follows was to utilize Cool Japan's cultural products.

> For example, the modern Japanese society can promote its new attractiveness internationally if it can construct a national image that contains the social system that Japan has developed since the end of World War II, such as efforts toward environmental problems, construction and development of a democratic society, coexistence of the East and West, internationally featured Japanese modern culture, and internationally distributed attractive cultures such as fashion, manga, anime, TV games, TV dramas, J-Pop, and robots (Kokusai Koryu Kenkyukai 2003).

One of its early commitments to Cool Japan by MOFA was the support of the World Cosplay Summit, an annual international cosplay contest established in 2003. Cosplay is an amalgamation of "costume" and "play," and refers to the act of dressing up as a favorite character from anime, manga, or video games (Galbraith 2009). The event is hosted by TV Aichi and held in Nagoya. MOFA gives the winner a Foreign Affairs Minister Award.

The Cool Japan thesis was featured furthermore by Taro Aso, the Minister for Foreign Affairs from 2005 to 2007, and the Prime Minister of Japan and the President of the Liberal Democratic Party from 2008 to 2009. He is well known as an avid manga fan. He made a speech titled "A New Look at Cultural Diplomacy: A Call to Japan's Cultural Practitioners" at Digital Hollywood University in 2006 as follows (Aso 2006).

[W]e continue to get the word out on Japan's truly splendid traditional culture, and we are very fortunate that in addition to the items of *Noh* drama and *Bunraku*, tea ceremony and flower arranging, Japan also boasts many newer forms of culture that have a high degree of appeal.

This would be pop culture, including anime, music, and fashion among others, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is really going all out to "market" this, so to speak (Aso 2006).

One of Aso's ideas was the International MANGA Award. It was established in 2007 to honor non-Japanese mangaka (manga creator) who contribute to the promotion of manga overseas. The winners are invited to a ceremony in Japan and join a ten-day Japan tour, organized by The Japan Foundation, to visit legendary Japanese mangakas, manga publishing companies and so forth. The first winner was Lee Chi Ching from Hong Kong.

In 2008, MOFA appointed *Doraemon* as the nation's first "anime ambassador" (*anime taishi*). Foreign Minister Masahiko Komura handed a human-sized *Doraemon* doll an official certificate at an inauguration ceremony, along with dozens of the character's favorite dessert "dorayaki" (red bean pancakes) piled on a plate (Yamaguchi 2008). *Doraemon* is a robotic cat who travels back in time from the 22nd century, and its series has been a national bestseller for forty years. *Doraemon: Nobita's Dinosaur 2006* has been screened about one hundred times around the world as of March 2009 (Sakurai 2009).

In 2009, MOFA furthermore appointed three young females to be the nation's "ambassadors of cute" (*kawaii taishi*). Each of the girls wears a different style of cute fashion: Lolita, Harajuku, and schoolgirl (Galbraith 2009, Sakurai 2010). The main mission of the three ambassadors is "to transmit the new trends of Japanese pop culture in the field of fashion to the rest of the world and to promote understanding of Japan by their attending cultural projects carried out by the Japanese Embassies and the Japan Foundation" (MOFA 2009).

MOFA's cultural diplomacy through Cool Japan cultural products flourished because it found a suitable theory that justified its policies, "soft power." However, what we should not fail to notice is the fact that the manga loving politician Aso unexpectedly assumed the position of the minister of Foreign Affairs exactly in time with the surge in the Cool Japan thesis. In this sense, Aso's existence was very lucky for MOFA, but that was not the case for the Agencies for Cultural Affairs, which planned to create a new National Center for Media Arts during Aso's reign as Prime Minister. Before reviewing ACA's policies, I probe into the policies by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism to attract inbound tourists from around the world.

4. Visit Japan Campaign: The Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism

The 2002 Basic Plan for the Management of Economy and Finance and Structural Reform issued by the cabinet meeting called for MLIT to increase inbound tourists. Then MLIT developed its "Global Tourism Strategy" (MLIT 2002) in order to promote the "Visit Japan Campaign." This campaign was featured on media when MLIT appointed the female pop duo *Puffy AmiYumi* as its goodwill ambassadors to the US in 2005. Unlike other Japanese musicians, this duo has focused on performing in the US. An animated series featuring cartoon versions of Ami and Yumi, *Hi Hi Puffy AmiYumi*, was premiered on the Cartoon Network and helped gain fans in the US (Nikkei Business 2005).

In 2006, MLIT budgeted 67 million yen to conduct "Research on Regional Vitalization through International Tourism Exchange Using Japanese Anime" jointly with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MLIT 2006). The basic idea is to attract inbound tourists with globally popular anime. A similar idea is also apparent in the free "New Discovery of Akihabara Tour" jointly managed by the Tourism Industry Association of Japan and Akihabara Electrical Town Organization, and so forth. Recently, Akihabara, a downtown area in Tokyo also known as Akihabara Electric Town, has gained widespread recognition as the center of Japanese pop culture such as anime, manga, games and cosplay.

As the tourism industry was considered to be an important tool for stimulating the stagnant Japanese economy by each cabinet, the Japan Tourism Agency (JTA) was established as an extra-ministerial bureau of MLIT in 2008. The Tourism Nation Promotion Basic Law was enacted in January 2007, and the Cabinet decided on the Tourism Nation Promotion Basic Plan in June 2007 in order to promote a "tourism nation." JTA also utilizes Cool Japan cultural products in its promotion. For example, JTA exhibited Japan Expo, the largest convention on Japanese popular culture in Europe held in Paris, jointly with MOFA and METI in 2009.

5.   Media Arts: Agency for Cultural Affairs

Like other ministries, the Agency for Cultural Affairs, a special body of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), also committed to the promotion of the content industry. ACA has held annual festivals called The Japan Media Arts Festival since 1997. Chapter nine of the Basic Law of Promotion of Culture and Art defines "media art" as "art using computers and other electronic devices such as movies, manga, and animation" (Agency for Cultural Affairs 2001). Awards are given in four categories during the festival: art, entertainment (i.e. video games and websites), animation, and manga. ACA has also held the Symposium on Distribution of Contents to discuss distribution systems and contracts for intellectual properties since 2004.

In 2009, considerable controversy rose against ACA's plan to create a new National Center for Media Arts (NCMA) using 11.7 billion yen in 2009's supplementary budget (Corkill 2009). According to the plan, this center is aimed at being an international base for collection, preservation, exhibition, research, information gathering and offering, human resources development, and so forth regarding media arts (The Preparatory Committee of NCMA 2009). The opposition Democratic Party of Japan President Yukio Hatoyama told an audience in Aomori prefecture in May 2009:

> It's Taro Aso who likes anime. Now the bureaucracy has decided to build (a museum) for him. . . . It's nonsense and a terrible waste of money (Corkill 2009).

This speech criticizing Prime Minister Aso, the president of the Liberal Democratic Party, made the museum plan newsworthy. In addition, Hatoyama referred to the museum as the "State-run Manga Cafe" in his debate with Aso (Corkill 2009). This catchy phrase was used in media reports so many times that it formed the mass's critical attitude towards the plan. Although this was not the decisive factor in the elections, it is noteworthy that the DPJ won in a general election in August 2009 riding on a wave of public frustration and mistrust against the ruling party. The NCMA was a symbolic and visible part of this frustration. The DPJ became the ruling party in the House of Representatives for the first time, ending the more than

fifty-year long domination by the LDP administration.

IV. *Why Did The Japan Cool Craze Emerge?*

The Cool Japan policies first triggered by the Intellectual Property Headquarters spread over the organizational field of the central ministries (DiMaggio 1983; DiMaggio and Powell 1983). METI tried to apply its classic industrial policies to the content industry. MOFA utilized Cool Japan cultural products to expand its cultural diplomacy, while MLIT utilized it to attract tourists from abroad. ACA attempted to establish a museum for "media arts," although this failed because it unexpectedly became involved in the political strife that finally brought a regime change.

How can we explain the Cool Japan Craze observed in the central ministries? Until recently, Cool Japan cultural products had been so stigmatized that no bureaucrats thought that they deserved to be dealt with in their policies. Ikuro Hirozane, the former director of the Media and Content Industry Division at METI, recollected as follows.

> I think that the industry that is now called the content industry, though this may offend those in the industry, was formerly referred to as 'merely the content industry'…It was often said, 'Why should the nation bother with such a thing?' That's what people said for a long time (Hatayama 2005: 86).

Even after Cool Japan policies were adopted by ministries, such sentiments among bureaucrats were recognized by Masayoshi Sakai, who also belonged to the Media and Content Industry Division together with Hirozane. He explained why such policies by various ministries were conflicting and contradicting and why the government has been unable to organize them as follows.

> The biggest problem is that the media content industry is an entertainment industry in essence. The media industry is not directly connected to the rise and fall of a nation or to the life and death of its people, and it has a distance with authorities such as traditional art and imported art. Therefore, even if it increases GDP or even if it contributes to the development of the telecommunication industry, [bureaucrats] are not willing to tackle such policies seriously. I think such bureaucrats' psychological tendency not to recognize "the value of entertainment" lies hidden at the root of the problem (Sakai 2008: 38).

Such stigma meant that the central ministries ignored this area for many years, instead of providing intervention (Goffman 1963, Lopes 2006, 2009). However, the popularity of Cool Japan cultural products all over the world, especially *Pokémon*, provided a means of stigma management that enabled bureaucrats to commit to Cool Japan policies. The perception of stigma, as explained by the stigma theory, which discredited Cool Japan products, is no longer as strong as a result of the diffusion of Cool Japan policies, although it is still alive as Sasaki recognized (Sasaki 2008). Stigma management, in this case, is the invention of new theories that give credit to the content of Cool Japan products and the content industry. These theories can be summarized in two points: First, the content industry can harness the revitalization of Japan's stagnant economy. Second, the export of Cool Japan products contributes to building a new nation brand of Japan, which offers a strong soft power.

Such new theories seem to endorse ministries to adopt Cool Japan policies. Also, since elite *chuo kanryo* (the bureaucrats of central government ministries) are hired by and promoted in each *chuo kancho* (central government ministries), they tend to defend and expand their own turf by increasing their budget, the laws that they legislate, and the numbers of their personnel (Sakai 2007; 2008; Sakai *et al*. 2009). Such bureaucrats' behavioral tendency finally overcame their elitist "psychological tendency that cannot recognize `the value of entertainment'" (Sakai 2008: 38) through stigma management by these new theories.

From a neo-institutionalism perspective, this phenomenon can be recognized as mimetic isomorphic change at the field level (DiMaggio 1983; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). After the long recession, known as the "Lost Decade," there were not many alternatives for ministries to expand their own turf in a stagnant economy. Also, there was uncertainty regarding what would be an effective way to satisfy their interests. So, isomorphism among the ministries occurred at a rapid rate.

V.   *Conclusion*

This paper investigated how and why various central ministries in Japan have adopted "Cool Japan" policies promoting Japanese popular culture, which had formerly been neglected by the state due to their perceived lower status. This paper analyzed documents released by bureaucrats and the results of interviews conducted with key persons from central ministries and institutions under their jurisdiction to shed light on institutional isomorphism observed in the central government of Japan. There are two issues that the paper focused on: the homogeneity among central ministries and the stigmatized nature of popular cultural products. This paper, which follows sociological tradition, adopted neo-institutionalism and the concept of stigma to explain each issue.

This paper makes two contributions to the research tradition on cultural policy. First, it is virtually the first academic research into the "Cool Japan" policy. My previous analysis of the diffusion of manga in the US (Matsui 2009) found that there was no systematic research on this policy although it played a role in ending a half-century of virtually uninterrupted one-party rule in Japan. Also, cultural policy research has so far paid little attention to the field of external cultural policy (Paschalidis 2009; Sasaki *et al*. 2009). Second, it analyzes how a nation can commit to nurturing and utilizing stigmatized lower status cultural products, which can be considered childish entertainment and are sometimes censored by the state (Lopes 2006; 2009). This case is one of the best examples of the recent omnivore nature of cultural policies that promote both highbrow and lowbrow cultures (Peterson and Kern 1996).

There are many unanswered questions that require further pursuit. For example, how did the bureaucrats observe other ministries' Cool Japan Policies? Are there any direct interactions between ministries or not? As shown above, there is still antagonistic sentiment among some bureaucrats toward Cool Japan cultural products. How do bureaucrats who promote Cool Japan Policies, who are sometimes called "content bureaucrats" (*kontento kanryo*), persuade such people in their ministries? These questions will be answered in the future.

APPENDIX

The list of interviewees is as follows. Name, position, organization and interview date.

Kenshi Matsumoto, Program Director, Arts & Culture, The Japan Foundation New York (February 29, 2008), Chief Officer, Overseas Liaison Division, Overseas Policy Planning Department, Japan Foundation (May 27, 2010)

Tatsuki Kobayashi, Deputy Director General, The Japan Foundation New York (February 29, 2008)

Isao Tsujimoto, Director General, The Japan Foundation New York (February 29, 2008)

Yuki Machida Project Manager, JETRO Entertainment Office, JETRO Los Angeles Office (March 17, 2008)

Emily Ohno, Project Coordinator Entertainment, JETRO Los Angeles Office (March 17, 2008)

Ryutaro Mihara, Deputy Director, Policy Planning and Coordination Division, Nuclear and

Industrial Safety Agency, METI (April 3, 2010)

Masayoshi Sakai, Senior Analyst for Global Strategy, Information Economy Division, Commerce and Information Policy Bureau, METI (April 8, 2010)

Mami Toyonaga, Director in Charge of Overseas Market Research, Overseas Research Department, JETRO (May 6, 2010)

Hironobu Kitagawa, Director, Overseas Research Department, JETRO (May 6, 2010)

Tadashi Sudo, President, Anime Anime Japan Ltd. (May 8, 2010)

Masaaki Kaifu, Representive/Producer, Wowmax Meda! (May 26, 2010)

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