

# Effect of American Commercialism on Japanese Picture Books

—Children's Life Style and Japanese Culture

日本における絵本のアメリカ商業主義の影響  
—子どもの環境と日本文化

Naomi Asagi

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## Summary

After 1980's, Globalization influenced all over the world. New words of Americanization, Desneificaton or McDonaldism(1) came and got common, and an age of a kind of new culture has spread over the world.

Children's culture, culture of picture books, has been also influenced, and Miffy, Pooh, etc. are accepted as lovable characters. As the answers from students to the questionnaires shows that their way of selecting picture books are strongly influenced by the globalization, it is important to strengthen their ability to evaluate Japanese traditional culture or Japanese picture books and characters of them.

**Keywords** Americanization, globalization, picture book, Japanese culture

## Introduction

Since 1980's, the Japanese lifestyle has changed rapidly. A striking difference is the change of life and interest of Japanese which has been influenced by Americanization. Americanization has gradually diminished Japanese tradition. We should point out what globalization including Americanization is. Because Americanization has influenced Japanese young people through McDonald's, Disney and more. The concern in this paper is to examine how Americanization has influenced Japanese culture especially picture books and changed people's mindset.

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## Global Modernity – Americanization

The wave of globalization could be taken to imply increasing global-spatial proximity. Some of the most powerful arguments for the globalizing properties of modernity are found in Anthony Giddens' work, beginning with his influential essay *The Consequences of Modernity*<sup>i</sup>. There Giddens introduced the concept of globalization into his social theory defining it as 'the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way those local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa'<sup>ii</sup> ' Giddens continued as below;

The first phase of globalization was plainly governed, primarily, by the expansion of the West, and institutions which originated in the West. No other civilization made anything like as pervasive an impact on the world, or shaped it so much in its own image.....Although still dominated by Western power, globalization today can no longer be spoken of only as a matter of one-way imperialism.....increasingly there is no obvious 'direction to globalization at all and its ramification are more or less ever present. The current phase of globalization, then, should not be confused with the preceding one, whose structures it acts increasingly to subvert<sup>iii</sup>.

Necessarily, globalization has given a strong impact in economy, politics and culture even through local areas of the whole world. Tomlinson pointed as below:

Proximity has its own truth as a description of the condition of global modernity and this is generally of either a phenomenological or a metaphorical order. In the first case it describes a common conscious appearance of the world as more intimate, more compressed more part of everyday reckoning-for example in our experience of rapid transport of our mundane use of media technologies to bring distant images into our most intimate local spaces. In the second, it conveys the increasing immediacy and consequentiality of real distantiated relations metaphorically.<sup>iv</sup>

Consider now the Implications of globalization related to cultural industries for children. From the standpoint of economy, it is clear that the markets of contents industry may be helpful to earn big money. Zipes summarized the

industry's equation as follows:

The entertainment industry (toys, games, books, films, advertising, videocassettes, television) begins to influence infants soon after they are born, and commercial films have successfully entered schools, private and learn about selling themselves as products and to emulate stars through the adoption of masochistic attitudes<sup>v</sup>.

Speaking specifically about the results of this influences on children's cultural industries, Denby stated that it was difficult for children to avoid them while developing.

The culture industries reach my children are every stage of their desires and their inevitable discontent. What's lost is the old dream that parents and teachers will nurture the organic development of the child's own nature<sup>vi</sup>.

The additional two studies provide detailed discussion of development within homogenization. First is Taxel's argument, 'The increasing hegemony of giant corporation is an essential feature of the consumer culture that lies at the heart of fast capitalism<sup>vii</sup>'. The second is Zipes' argument, as follows:

Whatever skills are gained through television, movies, and videos are gained at the expense of humanitarian values. Though the narratives of the various television shows, movies, and videos may seem to differ, they all tend to homogenize child viewers through narrative constructs that frame their lives as "precocious consumers<sup>viii</sup>".

The reason why we think about globalization in this paper is that it gives us greater influence not only economically, but also educationally. But I am not concerned here with globalization. The scope of this paper is to argue the input theory in detail. The question I have to ask here is 'What is Americanization?', is to describe it further. This term is a part of globalization. Especially, American culture has influenced the whole world as everyone noticed. This phenomenon has been strengthen by network of personal computers and worldwide advertisements.

Americanization has produced the new vocabulary such as CocaColonization

and Disneyfication. Disneyfication is a new word taken from the name of Walt Disney Company. Sharon Zukin used this term in her book, *The Cultures of Cities* in 1996. Later, Alan Bryman popularized it in her book *The Disneyization of Society* in 2004. Herman and McChester's writings in 1997 stand squarely in the tradition of Shiller's Work. Their book, *The Global Media*, signals this in its subtitle, *The new missionaries of global capitalism*. (1995) In it they offer convincing evidence of the accelerating concentration and integration of the ownership and control of global media system in the hands of a few main transnational corporate players: Time Warner, Disney, News Corporation, Viacom, Bertelsmann and so on. We define Disneyfication as the way of principles of Disney theme parks which are spreading throughout society.

Cultural diversity mirrors the biological and geographical diversity of our planet. 'Disneyfication' like economic globalization, tends to ride roughshod over variety. So baseball hats, blue jeans and running shoes become the uniform of teenagers in both Budapest and Bangalore while Western TV shows promote the illusion of limitless wealth. This process is not the same as different artistic traditions learning from each other and sharing ideas freely<sup>ix</sup>.

Disneyfication has brought the results on which most young Japanese women made alterations in their taste for the US. It is a fact that many Japanese women are completely absorbed in Disneyfication. Let us begin discussion considering Americanization including Disneyfication in terms of picture books.

### **Contents industry in Japan**

We would like to make everyone aware of what the masses have become and prompt not to succumb to the culture industry. As far as we believe that they were pretty and original, while celebrating, anyone could belong to the masses. We are afraid it was the problem. Zipes says as below.

Here, of course, was the problem: the capacity of the culture industry to make masses of the people believe that they were unique, different, and original while compelling them to conform to market conditions and subscribe to

political a systems whose major role was to explore every possible way to endorse and spread the capitalist production of commodities<sup>x</sup>.

Contents Industry of picture books has been extended, and Events and Promotions which have a relation to characters are held for families at many department stores or museums in various cities in Japan. For example, *Risa and Gaspar* which comes from France have been popularized, since Cosmo Merchandise Co. has got merchandize agreement in 2004. The companies of Licensee have increased to about sixty in order to sell goods. They have been creating goods using its character image, their goods, for example, bone china, stationeries, towels and so on. They earned about 250 Million yen in 2005 and are planning for 400 million yen in 2006. As for *Moomin*, since its original text was written 60 years ago, its 60th anniversary events were held in 2006.

In Japan, as animation is more popular than original text, picture books and novels have been able to be popularized by these events. Miffy also has become 50 years old, 50th anniversary exhibition had a tour all over the country. At Tokyo, in 13 days, about 130,000 people gathered, and a lot of character goods were sold satisfactorily. Especially, generations of Miffy fans are mothers and babies, because Miffy gives not only peace of mind, but also freedom of care. That's these phenomenon prove Miffy has become popular in Japan.

Best 100 shows the ranking of popular characters. (See 'The Title for survey of pretty picture books').

The top rank is Winnie the Pooh, second is Hello Kitty, third is Mickey Mouse, fourth is Anpanman, and fifth is Pocket Monster. Anpanman is the animation character which is written by Takashi Yanase, the number of its character goods have increased more than 2000 items, since it has been well known in the world. Chara Biz, the result of Bandai research in the 170 character markets, the business size of their estimation is about 1610 Billion yen. As the result, it has been decreased comparing to 2004.

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## Disneyfication

John Tomlinson argues about Disney in his essay *Globalization and Culture*.

To give this example, the merger of Disney corporation with ABC in 1995 promoted a piece in the Guardian By Martin Woolcott which reflects the

implications of the creation of a media conglomerate' as big as the entire media sector of a large European country'. But from this question, Woolacott goes on to discuss the dominance of global culture by American culture: 'What will it be like when the entire globe is Disneyland<sup>xi</sup>'?

The concern in this paper is to examine how Americanization had influenced Japanese culture especially picture books and changed people's mindset. And so, the following was used to collect the information. The samples were collected from one hundred and forty women of 4 universities in 2006. The women were to choose characters which they think pretty among 36 items of 34 picture books from the list on *Konohonyonde* by Chofu Library<sup>xii</sup>. This purpose is to estimate the extent of Americanization among Japanese youths. As I expected the feeling for lovely images would be related to characters.

The result of the survey was as follows: the most popular "lovely image" from the picture books was "Miffy" (9.8%); the second was "Winnie the Pooh -Disney Version" (8.9%); and the third was "Curious George" (8.1%).

This simple survey has vast ramifications beyond Americanization especially Disneyfication of character business in Japan. The commodification of American style can be extended not only to literature, but also to films, stationeries and fashion for example. In a 2005 consumer report of Chara Biz, the result of Bandai researched in the character markets for the most favorite character was Winnie the Pooh, the second was Hello Kitty, and the third was Mickey Mouse. (See 'The Title for survey of pretty picture books').

I have been interested that the best three pictures are related to character goods. Though Miffy's author is Dick Bruna who is a Dutch, the tremendous number of character goods from Miffy have been produced in US. In case of Winnie the Pooh, Pooh has been changed into infantile style wearing a red vest. It is different from its original Pooh's style. It can be used more broadly to describe the repacking of it in a sanitized format. By sanitizing the character, it becomes more lovable.

Japanese market is convenient and effective for American commodification. Five points were found in *The Image Factory*<sup>xiii</sup> by Donald Richie. First, it is easy to deliver information in a small country. Second, layers of purchaser are from babies to young ladies, third the Japanese has impulse revolution for childhood, forth they are apt to intend for harmless and innocent things, and last they have

an intention to appease. Because American methods of commodification are also speedy and cause mass-consumption and mass-production, the enormous goods made in the US have been filled to the brim in Japan.

We have two biggest characters-Pokemon and Hello Kitty which the Japanese companies, Nintendo and Sanrio have produced (See, illust.1 and 2). These characters have similarities with Richie's 4 opinions. I'm going to analyze the relations between Richie's opinions and Japanese youths.

1. It is easy to deliver information in a small country

In a small country like Japan, wherever we go, we can easily find Pokemon and Kitty goods even at a country side far from urban area. Because they have wide economy and advertisement system, these character goods have been delivered rapidly everywhere.

2. Layers of purchaser are from babies to young ladies

As a matter of fact, it is taken for granted that the consumers from babies to young women buy such character goods naturally. As the adult purchasers have no resistance against buying them, there seems to be boundaries in target marketing.

3. Japanese have an impulsive revolution for childhood

The reason why adult buyers are apt to be familiar with character goods is Richie's third opinion. Japanese have impulse revolution for childhood. In USA, it's told Kitty goods can't be sold to those in their teens. This is because in Western countries, people feel a shamed with childish culture after growing up. On the other hand, Japanese, especially young women intend to maintain childish mindsets like Peter Pan. They don't seem to be ashamed with wearing the character goods.

Why do Japanese youths love pretty goods? I guess they have been getting used to a lot of lovable character goods around them since their childhood. That is why they feel familiar with the pretty picture books the same as character goods.

If we extend this tendency, I guess they have another intention for harmless and innocent spirit like a child.

4. They are apt to intend for harmless and innocent things.

At the same time Japanese youths have a tendency to keep a child's mind, they would like to be protected to be harmless and innocent like a child. They seem to keep away from the trial toward the adult world, because they watch a lot of hopeless and tragic accidents like corruption, murder, and terrorism on

television or newspaper every day. On one hand, as to family, a lot of couples are divorced, on the other hand it would not only cost a lot, but also so many predictions for troubles to bring up children. That's why they won't be able to have a dream in the future.

5. They have an intention to appease

In the modern decade, there seem to exist so many stressful things around youths, even if they have grown up in good circumstances since childhood. Most people love to be appeased by music, dramas, movies, aroma, and stuffed animals and so on. Picture books are without exception. People would like to require the picture books which would remind childhood with healing effects. So if at the same time they buy picture books, they can get their character goods, it would double the effect for healing.

As it is mentioned, major part of the students are grown up with “lovely” goods, and the images of “lovely” are their base experience, then, it cannot be denied that “lovely” mean them favorite, comfortable and close. Further study of Richie's analysis is the next subject.

### Characterized Picture Books

As we have analyzed Japanese youths' personal properties, it is the proof that Japanese picture books also have been characterized recently. For example, this is the popular picture book in Japan, *Bamu and Kero*<sup>xiv</sup> which have been sold in 3 volumes as series since 1994. (See, illust.3) *Bamu* is a bull-terrier who takes care of a little frog *Kero*, but the relationship is not of parent-child. In the story, they play together whole day, while taking a bath, making donuts, going up to the loft and reading the book. The adult readers as well as children are satisfied with both story and characters.

I think the popularity of *Bamu and Kero* has three reasons as follows.

1. *Bamu and Kero's* Stories are harmless and innocent.

The first point is that the stories have been made harmless and innocent in order to appease. Because the characters are lovely and childish, there are no struggles or conflict.

2. We can enjoy looking for details in the illustrations.

The second point is that Characters have become clean and cute like a child. As the author has illustrated a lot of details such as dog shaped bathtub as well as soaps, towels and cups, we are able to enjoy the details whenever we find a new



item.

3. The illustrations are colorful and bright like animation pictures in order to stand out on screen and pages.

Third point is that the illustrations have appeared colorful, bright and striking like animation pictures in order to stand out, so that it can grab the attention of its consumers. There are no wasteful spaces, main colorful characters and thing are closely packed with the other bright characterized goods.

Also they have the character goods from *Bamu and Kero*. As they are sold on the internet, we can easily get these goods while enjoying the picture book. We have other contents industries such as a kind of commercial system that make use of picture books to sell its products.

For example, *Soramamekun* series, *Rirakkuma* (See, illust.4), are also not only published for picture books but also produced for character goods. Though they have original stories like Winnie the Pooh, the character is becoming well known as a series as well as a character in Japan.

As Japanese young women love characters, there is a tendency for them to choose these picture books for children. They would be influenced by these picture books for children without really knowing the content of the story.

Children can have adventure without colorful and bright characters, because of their capacity of imagination. Sometimes even a simple, neutral picture book is sufficient to fuel a child's curiosity.

We would like for young ladies and children to admire and enjoy a lot of kinds of picture books not only in narrow, but also in broad view points.

### Typical Japanese Picture Books

Before turning to a close examination of characters related to picture books, it will be useful to discuss the typical Japanese picture books.

We can see the Japanese picture book, about *Guri and Gura* who are two mice (See, illust.5). Since *Guri and Gura* has been published in 1963, it has been read more than forty years by children even adults. The author, Rieko Nakagawa has refused to sell the character of her own picture as character goods for a long time. Despite that, *Guri and Gura* was the most popular picture book in a consumer marketing report of 1000 people by Chara Biz.

What has been demonstrated is success of long seller like *Guri and Gura* that children are able to be enjoying without commercialized characters. There is no

doubt that character goods can facilitate communication among children, however, picture books on its own has deeper meaning for a child's development. Spitz has pointed as below.

My initial hunch is that the popularity of classic picture books derives from their remarkable capacity to be ongoing issues of deep emotional significance for children. The picture books that because classics do so, I suspect, because they dare to tackle important and abiding psychological themes, and because they convey these themes with craftsmanship and subtlety..... My response to quite superficially with difficult real-life situations<sup>xv</sup>.

We are afraid the characterized picture books might be superior the appearance to its contents. Children need not only deep emotional significance, but also psychological themes.

#### **Japanese traditional picture books**

We need to introduce two important persons, when we discuss the history of Japanese picture books. The first person is Ms. Momoko Ishii, who was the pioneer translator of western children's books in Japan. She is responsible for translating Peter Rabbit and Winnie the Pooh. She has cultivated the pioneering of new creator in Japan, at the same time she adopted and translated. She was also the editor of children book's branch in Iwanami Publishing Company. As the literary works titled Iwanami Children Books was remarkable, they have influenced a lot of people. This is the reason why we can enjoy a lot of well translated western children books. In addition, we have a lot of traditional picture books and wonderful culture around them. The second person and important editor is Mr. Tadashi Matsui who established Fukuinkan Shoten, a company for children's books, and published Kodomono Tomo monthly fifty years ago. Kodomono Tomo has rendered a tremendous distinguished service to Japanese picture books, and, it can be seen in the fact that a lot of picture books of Kodomono Tomo have been read by children for long time. And also, Mr. Matsui has trained and developed so many writers and illustrators.

Among them, Suekichi Akaba, Risako Uchida, Satoshi Kako, Rieko Nakagawa<sup>xvi</sup>, Churyo Sato and so on are nationally famed in the field of children's books. And, no one has permitted to sell the character goods of their own picture

books. Even now, children enjoy these worlds without characters. But, to take an example, Suekichi Akaba is one of the most famous illustrators who won the Hans Christian Anderson Award in 1980. He had succeeded in Japanese heritage and created his own world in Japanese ink. Akaba world kind of *Daiku to Oniroku*<sup>xvii</sup> has been less popularized by children and youths (See, illust.6). Because they have been got used to characterized pretty world like Disney, I guess it would be hard for them to have interest in the neutral worlds like Japanese traditional picture books.

## Conclusion

So far we have discussed the problems of picture books which have been published recently. In concluding, we should note that we need to think about children's development more. We are not going to deny Americanization of picture books. It will cause us to invite more interests about picture books, which we have to take into consideration. But picture books of only entertaining cannot develop children's minds. Kline described about the condition of childhood:

Childhood is a condition defined by powerlessness and dependence upon the adult community's directives and guidance. Culture is, after all, as the repository of social learning and socialization, the means by which societies preserve and strengthen their position in the world. The forms of children's cultural expression are therefore intimately bound up with changing alignments that define a community's social beliefs and practices of cultural transmission<sup>xviii</sup>.

From the stand point of the education, we have a belief and custom way of giving the picture books that have more thoughtful philosophy of life. This traditional way was not only educational, but also conveyed our culture and view of life. Also original culture is essential for creating children's image.

As it is known, children are creative in their way to use given goods, and the meanings they make with these are not necessarily and not completely in line with the provider's original intention. Children create their own meanings from the original stories and symbols of consumer culture.<sup>xix</sup>

We would like to emphasize that we should maintain our cultural legacy in picture books while enjoying Americanized picture books.

We hope more awareness and understanding of the relation between economic forces and the kinds of books that are available to teachers, and hope media specialists and parents to enlighten these important matters and make greater input into market decisions<sup>xx</sup>.

In this study, the main stress falls on taking consideration for children's development of imagination. Children recognize very early how we are instilling them and caring for them. Soon after they are born, they feel what value we place on their lives, and it is this personal and social value that will influence their development of values. In this regard, it is a good sign that the children recognize the cultural homogenization which they are facing. The difficulty is that they will not be able to escape from the constant pressure to obey market demands and to retain their creative perspectives if we ourselves do not keep alive alternatives and change our daily cultural practices<sup>xxi</sup>.

It is important we need to promote children to grow the understanding and insight into complexity of society. For that reason, educators, parents, and librarians should resist such a publishing way.

## Note

- 1 : McDonalidization is a term used by sociologist George Ritzer in his book *The McDonalidization of Society* (1995). He describes it as the process by which a society takes on the characteristics of a fast-food restaurant.

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# The Title for survey of pretty picture books

	Title of Picture Book	Illustrator	Publisher	Answers	%
1.	Miffy	Dick Bruna	Fukuinkan	64	9.8
2.	Winnie the Pooh (Disney)	Disney	Kodansha	58	8.9
3.	Curious Geoge	H.A.Rey	Iwanami	53	8.1
4.	Hot cake of Shirokumachan	Ken Wakayama	Kogumasha	52	7.9
5.	Kon and Aki	Akiko Hayashi	Fukuinkan	51	7.8
6.	Guri and Gura	Yuriko Yamawaki	Fukuinkan	45	6.9
7.	Parent and Child of Animals	Masayuki Yabuuchi	Fukuinkan	40	6.1
8.	Corduroy	Don Freeman	Kaiseisha	37	5.6
9.	Lirrlle Bear	Holmelund Minarik	Fukuinkan	36	5.5
10.	Eleven Cats	Noboru Baba	Kogumasha	31	4.7
11.	Bamu and Kero	Yuka Shimada	Bunkeidou	31	4.7
12.	The Tale of Peter Rabbit	Beatrix Potter	Fukuinkan	27	4.1
13.	Buzzy Bear goes south	Dorothy Marino	Fukuinkan	27	4.1
14.	Badger's Parting Gifts	Susan Varley	Hyoronha	14	2.1
15.	Winnie the Pooh (original)	E. Shepard	Iwanami	13	2
16.	Small Kitten	Jyo Yokouchi	Fukuinkan	12	1.8
17.	Bedtime for Frances	Garth Williams	Fukuinkan	10	1.5
18.	Parent and Child of Animals (Bear and Bunny)	Masayuki Yabuuchi	Fukuinkan	9	1.4
19.	Gloves (Bunny and Mouse)	Ruchof	Fukuinkan	7	1.1
20.	Two Hungry Mice	Helen Piers	Fukuinkan	6	0.9
21.	Willy the Wimp	Anthony Browne	Hyoronha	6	0.9
22.	How do I put it on?	Shigeo Watanabe	Fukuinkan	5	0.8
23.	Loud Mouse	Reiko Okoso	Fukuinkan	4	0.6
24.	Golilla	Anthony Browne	Hyoronha	3	0.5
25.	Teddy Bear Coalman	Phoebe& Selby Worthington	Fukuinkan	3	0.5
26.	MerryChristmas, Ernest and Celestine	Gabrielle Vincent	Book Loan	2	0.3
27.	The Happy Day	Ruth Krauss	Fukuinkan	2	0.3
28.	Ask Mr Bear	Marjorie Flack	Iwanami	2	0.3
29.	The Fire Cat	Esther Averill	Bunka Shuppankyoku	1	0.2
30.	Okaeshi	Kyoko Orimo	Fukuinkan	1	0.2
31.	Teddy	Roger Duvoisin	Kogumasha	1	0.2
32.	A glove	Ruchof	Fukuinkan	1	0.2
				654	100

## Illustrations



illust.1 : Pokémon  
The Pokémon Company  
<http://www.pokemon.co.jp/goods/index.html>



illust.2 : Hello Kitty  
<http://sanrio.co.jp>



illust.3 : *Bamu and Kero no Sora no Tabi*  
Yuka Shimada, *Bamu to Kero no Soranotabi*, Bunkeidou, 1995



Bamu and Kero  
<http://www.bunkei.co.jp/bamkero/mousikomi04.html>



illust.4 : *Rirakkuma Seikatsu*  
Aki Kondo, *Rirakkuma Seikatsu—Daradara Mainichi no Susume*,  
Shufu to Seikatusha, 2004



Rirakkuma





illust.5 : *Guri and Gura*

Rieko Nakagawa. Yuriko Omura, *Guri and Gura*, Fukuinkanshoten, 1963



illust.6 : *Daiku to Oniroku*

Tadashi Matsui. Suekichi Akaba, *Daiku to Oniroku*, Fukuinkanshoten, 1967