

The impact of Japanese sports animation on sports participation, cultural identity and economic awareness among Chinese and Japanese youth

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Abstract. This study scrutinizes the multifaceted impact of Japanese sports anime on youth in China and Japan in terms of three key dimensions: sports participation, cultural identity, and economic awareness. Through ten in-depth interviews on these aspects from Japan and China each, this study discloses that sports anime significantly motivates young people to engage in various sports activities and to stimulate values like teamwork and perseverance. The findings of this study also designate that sports anime enhances cultural identity by fostering a shared understanding of collectivism and sportsmanship among adolescents in both countries, although there are some differences between these countries. With regard to economics, the study accentuates the influence of sports anime on consumer behaviours among youth in these countries, as engagement with these shows increases awareness of sports brands and merchandise that is helpful for purchase. Overall, this study underscores the significant role of sports anime as a powerful medium for cultural exchange and economic influence in the formation of the identities, attitudes, and behaviours of youth in China and Japan.

1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background

In recent years, sports animation, or sports anime in Japan, as an idiosyncratic cultural form, has had a profound impact on the world, especially in Japan and China. How does this impact occur? In fact, what this genre of Japanese animation focuses on are sports and athletic activities, which underlines themes like competition, teamwork, and personal growth, the subject that teenagers cherish. Without these themes, youth might not indicate interest in it.

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This is also because anime combines various genres and themes [1]. For instance, there is almost 67% of participants who reported that sports anime educated them about the respective sports with the medium successfully conveying technical aspects and positively influencing how viewers appreciate the sport when they are watching [2].

Sports anime, one of the cultural products, also plays a pivotal role in shaping cultural and social dynamics among youth, regardless of their country. The cultural success of Japanese anime in different countries is largely due to production teams deliberately working to transcend boundaries of nationality, gender, and virtual reality [3]. For young people in China and Japan, sports anime, which goes beyond mere entertainment, subtly influences their sports participation, cultural identity, and even economic awareness. Given that cultural exchanges and economic cooperation between China and Japan are deepening, the significance of studying the cross-cultural impact of sports anime on youth has increased with the proliferation of this genre [4, 5].

1.2 Significance of This Study

The character creation and portrayal of sportsmanship in Japanese sports anime contributes to this cultural influence and inspires young people to participate in various sports activities. For example, well-known works such as *Slam Dunk* and *Kuroko's Basketball* encourage young people to engage in sports with a positive attitude and help them better understand the value of teamwork, fighting spirit, and personal growth in Japanese sports anime [6]. Furthermore, the fact that anime character design meets the aesthetic needs of young audiences while integrating modern fashion and traditional cultural elements makes it more appealing in cross-cultural communication [7]. Promoting sports participation and cultural appreciation appeals to teenagers who watch sports anime.

In addition, the impact of sports anime on cultural identity cannot be ignored. Studies have shown that since the beginning, Japanese anime as a part of cultural soft power has successfully attracted adolescents in China and Japan with its unique aesthetic and narrative style, which subtly shapes their understanding of cultural identity in East Asia when they view sports anime [8].

Moreover, the economic impact of sports anime is also worth exploring in depth to recognize this effect. Although lots of sports anime still centre on sports and culture, many works from Japanese anime have augmented young people's attention to sports brands and reshaped their consumption habits through integrating peripheral products, brand collaborations, and sports event promotions into this genre [9].

1.3 Purpose of This Study

Consequently, this study aims to explore the multi-faceted impact of Japanese sports anime on Chinese and Japanese youth over the past decade, specifically focusing on three dimensions: sports participation, cultural identity, and economic awareness. To attain this purpose, this study analyses how sports anime influences the behaviours, values, and consumption tendencies of young people in both countries through ten in-depth interviews on these aspects from Japan and China each, totalling 20 participants.

2 Literature review

2.1 The impact of Japanese sports animation on sports participation

The relationship between sports anime and sports participation is paramount because anime promotes the cultural relevance of various sports, galvanizes audience engagement, and increases participation. Obviously, when anime portrays table tennis or soccer, it does more than merely depict the physical movements; it captivates the imagination and subtly encourages viewers to participate in the activity themselves. The integration of sports like table tennis in Japanese anime, for instance, vividly conveys the excitement and skill of the sport through narrative and visual art and significantly contributes to its global dissemination [10].

The connection between sports anime and sports participation can also be understood through Social Influence Theory, which underlines how individuals' behaviours and attitudes, including those related to sports, are shaped by social pressures and the behaviours they observe in media like anime. According to Social Learning Theory, prolonged exposure to sports anime leads youth to absorb and imitate the behaviours depicted and fosters positive influences such as increased participation in sports [11]. The Social Influence Theory might be beneficial for the present study.

Consequently, Japanese sports anime attracts audiences as a form of entertainment while positively influencing young people's sports participation through its unique narrative and character creation. In sports anime, character creation often highlights positive values such as struggle, teamwork, and personal growth which youth value. As anime meticulously creates its characters, young audiences can experience characters overcoming challenges and pursuing victory in sports competitions, a spiritual transmission that subtly encourages youth to participate in sports in real life even teenagers have no interest in it [12].

2.2 The impact of Japanese sports animation on the cultural identity

Japanese sports anime serves as a conduit for articulating various opinions for young audiences. Japanese sports anime, particularly popular in France during the late 1980s and 1990s, substantially catalyzed youth enrollment in sports clubs despite cultural differences in how sports are viewed, and despite the difference of language between French and Japanese [13]. Japanese youth who have not yet encountered many of these experiences find themselves drawn to these narratives in their daily lives.

In recent years, Japanese anime has emerged as a significant form of cultural soft power, profoundly influencing the cultural identity of youth in both China and Japan [14]. Japanese sports anime is particularly effective in transmitting cultural values due to its incorporation of sportsmanship alongside traditional Japanese cultural elements, where sports anime subtly fosters a sense of cultural identification among young audiences [15]. The depictions of teamwork, personal perseverance, and interpersonal relationships in this anime often reflect the core values of Japanese collectivism and how the spirit of resilience develops.

2.3 The impact of Japanese sports anime on the economic awareness of Chinese and Japanese youth

Japanese sports anime has become a significant influence on the consumption patterns and economic awareness of Chinese and Japanese youth [16]. For many young fans, the appeal of sports anime extends beyond the screen to the purchase of related merchandise such as keychains, stickers, and figurines. There are growing trends that reflect a broader cultural phenomenon, where youth become immersed in collecting the peripheral products associated

with their favourite anime and often develop a near-addiction to acquiring every available item on the market.

Based on the above literature analysis, this study proposes the following research questions:

RQ1: How does Japanese sports anime influence the sports participation behaviour of Chinese and Japanese youth?

RQ2: In what ways does Japanese sports anime contribute to the formation of cultural identity among Chinese and Japanese youth through cross-cultural communication?

RQ3: How does Japanese sports anime shape the economic awareness and consumption behaviours of Chinese and Japanese youth, particularly in relation to sports-related merchandise and brand loyalty.

3 Research Methods

3.1 Participants

The interviewees are from China and Japan, including a diverse group of young individuals, chiefly high school and college students. In China, respondents ranged from 15 to 29 years old, with a mix of male and female participants, and most were high school students, except for two college students and one postgraduate. The Japanese respondents were exclusively male, aged between 17 and 21, with most of them being high school students, except for one college student. Respondents from both China and Japan represent a range of educational stages, which provided valuable insights into the impact of Japanese sports anime on youth from various cultural backgrounds. Procedure

Each interview lasted from 30 minutes to 1 hour, during which the interviews were mainly conducted through online video conferencing and offline sessions to facilitate participant engagement and data collection. The interview focused on the impact of Japanese sports anime on youth sports participation, cultural identity, and economic awareness. A semi-structured interview outline was used to encourage participants to fully share their personal experiences and opinions. The interview process was recorded and transcribed before content analysis was conducted to extract key themes and opinions related to the research topic.

3.2 Interview Questions

During the interview, the main questions were divided into the following parts:

3.2.1 Participation in Sports

Firstly, participants were asked how Japanese sports anime had influenced their interest in or participation in certain sports and encouraged to provide detailed examples of specific instances where this influence might have occurred.

3.2.2 Identity of Culture

Secondly, the interview questions explored how watching Japanese sports anime had fostered a sense of identification with Japanese or other cultures, during which participants were encouraged to reflect on how this experience had shaped their understanding of their own cultural identity.

3.2.3 Economic Awareness and Consumption Behaviour

Thirdly, another focus of the interview was on how participants had purchased related products after watching Japanese sports anime, during which they were also asked how these consumption behaviours had influenced their overall consumption habits related to sports anime and given detailed examples if they had.

4 Findings

Thematic analysis was conducted separately on the responses from Chinese and Japanese respondents to explore key themes.

4.1 Thematic Analysis from Chinese respondents

4.1.1 Sports Participation and Attitude Change

Sports animation plays a positive role in motivating young people to participate in sports. Many Chinese respondents said that by watching sports animation, they developed a strong interest in certain sports and changed their attitudes towards sports activities. For example, Chinese respondent 01 mentioned that after watching "Haikyuu!!", she became interested in ball sports that she was afraid of before, and even began to actively participate in activities such as tennis.

Chinese interviewee 03 was also influenced by sports anime. He developed a great interest in football through "Inazuma Eleven". He particularly mentioned that the fighting spirit shown in the anime made him more determined in actual competitions and inspired him to persevere in the face of challenges.

4.1.2 Cultural Identity and Values

Japanese sports anime attracts audiences through exciting sports stories while also enhancing young people's understanding and identification with Asian culture by showing the core values of Japanese culture, such as teamwork and fighting spirit. Chinese respondent 02 mentioned that the etiquette and team spirit in anime sparked his interest in Japanese culture and the broader Asian culture and deepened his sense of identification with these cultures. Similarly, Chinese respondent 04 emphasized that the spirit of perseverance shown in anime had profoundly influenced his understanding of Asian culture, especially Japanese culture. He further identified with the self-discipline and fighting spirit in Japanese culture by watching "Slam Dunk" and believed that this is an important quality leading to success.

4.1.3 Economic Awareness and Commercialization Impact

Japanese sports animation fruitfully attracts audiences through storylines, successfully promotes the promotion and sales of sports brands, and significantly affects the consumer behaviour of teenagers. Chinese interviewee 01 pointed out that although she had not directly purchased related products because of animation, she was aware that animation had great commercialization potential and believed that it was an effective way to promote sports brands.

Chinese respondent 09 mentioned that the cooperation between sports animation and brands (such as co-branded products) had successfully attracted a large number of fans and promoted the development of the sporting goods market.

4.1.4 The continued influence of animation values

Chinese respondents generally believe that the core values conveyed in Japanese sports anime, such as teamwork and fighting spirit, have had a profound impact on their sports participation and their daily lives. Chinese respondent 02 emphasized that the concept of coexistence of competition and friendship in anime had changed the way he handles interpersonal relationships, which allowed him to deal with competition in life more calmly. Chinese respondent 10 stressed that after watching sports anime, he learned to focus more on enjoying the process of sports rather than just focusing on the results. This attitude helped him maintain a positive attitude in life and positive interactions with others.

4.2 Thematical Analysis from Japanese Respondents

4.2.1 Sports Participation and Attitude Change

Japanese sports anime has greatly promoted sports participation among young people. Japanese interviewee 01 mentioned that after watching "Inazuma Eleven", he fantasized about becoming a player in the national football tournament and played football for five years.

As a result of watching "Kurokono Baske", Japanese respondent 05 joined the school's basketball club before practicing basketball more regularly. Japanese respondent 05 emphasized, "Kurokono Baske inspired me to join the school's basketball club and practice basketball more regularly".

4.2.2 Cultural Identity and Values

Japanese sports anime influences young people through its entertainment form, thereby shaping their values and cultural identity through its cultural connotations. Japanese interviewee 02 pointed out that the teamwork and fighting spirit in Slam Dunk made him better understand the core values of Japanese culture.

"Haikyuu!!" The collectivistic spirit in "Haikyuu!!" is highly consistent with the collective concept in Asian culture. Japanese interviewee 04 believed that animation helped him better understand the teamwork spirit in Japanese culture.

4.2.3 Economic awareness and commercialization impact

Japanese sports anime also has a significant impact on teenagers' consumption behaviour. Japanese respondent 05 bought basketball shoes after watching "Kurokono Baske" and said: "I bought basketball shoes, and now I always look for good sportswear when buying clothes". Japanese respondent 06 bought running shoes after watching "Kaze ga Tsuyoku Fuiteiru" and began to pay attention to sports equipment that can improve fitness habits. This shows the role of sports anime in promoting the consumption of related products through sports plots.

4.2.4 The continued influence of animation values

The core values in Japanese sports anime, such as fighting spirit, teamwork, and attitude towards setbacks, have had a long-term positive impact on young people. Japanese respondent 03 mentioned that the "never give up" spirit in "Haikyuu!!" made him more proactive in facing challenges in life.

Japanese respondent 10 learned the spirit of "endure" from "Hajime no Ippo", which helped him to be more resilient in life.

5 Conclusions and Discussions

5.1 Summarization of the findings

The study investigates how Japanese sports anime has impacted sports participation, cultural identity, and economic awareness among youth in China and Japan over the past decade. The findings of the study reveal that there is increased engagement in sports reported by many young viewers. Additionally, the anime fosters a profound comprehension and identification with Japanese and broader Asian cultural values. Economically, the influence of sports anime has propelled consumption behaviours in which young people purchase related merchandise and augment their awareness of branding and marketing.

5.2 Limitations of this study

The limitations of this study primarily stem from its methodological approach and sample characteristics. First, since the study relies on a qualitative method involving only 10 in-depth interviews per country, it might not sufficiently capture the diverse perspectives of all youth in China and Japan, and there is a strong focus in the research on high school and college students, which also limits the findings to a specific age group.

Another limitation is the geographical focus of the study—conducting interviews solely in specific regions of China and Japan may yield findings that do not generalize to the entire populations. The cultural, social, and economic contexts may diverge significantly across different areas, which can influence how youth engage with sports anime.

5.3 Future Research

The research should encompass a broader age range and demographic backgrounds. So, in the future research should consider expanding the scale of this study by incorporating a larger and more diverse sample size. Besides, longitudinal studies could be conducted to rate the long-term effects of sports anime in terms of youth participation, cultural identity, and economic awareness over time.

Moreover, future studies could explore how digital media—and social platforms—shape the engagement of youth with sports anime. It would also be beneficial to investigate the intersection of sports anime with other cultural products, such as video games and merchandise.

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