Indonesian Youngsters’ Preference towards Japanese Pop Culture: 
What Makes Indonesian Pop Culture is Trailing in Popularity

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ABSTRACT
Pop culture or popular culture is the entirety of ideas, perspectives, attitudes, images, and other phenomena that are within the mainstream of a given culture. Japanese pop culture reflects both the present and the past, including cinema, cuisine, television programs, anime, manga, music, etc. It has become a well-known fact that Japanese pop culture is very famed in many countries, both western and eastern countries, including Indonesia. In Indonesia, Japanese pop culture plays a big role, bigger than Indonesian pop culture itself, for it can enthrall people of all ages, specifically youngsters. In the recent decade, Japanese pop culture’s popularity has skyrocketed from just a knowledge and entertainment to such a lifestyle for some Indonesians. Those Indonesians, or any person from any country, who excessively love Japanese pop culture, are often referred as otaku. Nevertheless, why do those Indonesians prefer Japanese pop culture than Indonesian pop culture? To figure it out, 50 random youngsters in Malang who love Japanese pop culture were asked to fill in questionnaire about the comparison of Japanese and Indonesian pop cultures and their preference on it. Likert scale was used to measure their answer on them. The results show that Indonesian pop culture is trailing in popularity mostly because of its lack of innovation. For that reason, researcher suggests Indonesian pop culture lovers or any Indonesian to develop and innovate it by using the 3-tier strategy; adapt, innovate, and grow.

KEYWORDS: Japanese pop culture, Indonesian pop culture, otaku, pop culture in Indonesia

Pop culture, or one may say it popular culture, is a quite prominent term nowadays. Even though it has become well known, many people still do not know about what pop culture truly is. Before discussing it further, it is a very majestic importance to understanding what culture exactly is. Williams in Storey (2009) said that culture is called as one of the two or three most complicated words in English
language. Williams suggests three broad definitions about this. First, culture can be used as a referral to general process of intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic development. What it means by those words is like what great philosophers, great artists, and great poets of the early and medieval European civilization create in order to feed humans’ hunger of any intellectual, spiritual, and even aesthetic need at that time. Second, culture also refers to a certain way of life, whether of a people, a period, or a group. It can be seen from daily lives findings, such as festivals, holidays, religious activities, etc. Third, Williams also says that culture is concerned as the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity. Using this definition, we can conclude that novels, opera, and fine art are also considered as culture.

Based on those three different-but-similar explanation about what culture means, John Storey concludes what Williams has stated before and correlates them with the term popular. Storey (2009) states that any definition of popular culture will bring into play a complex combination of the different meanings of the term “culture” with the different meanings of the term “popular”. Popular culture is simply culture that is widely favored or well-liked by many people. To be more specific, pop culture is the entirety of ideas, perspectives, attitudes, images, and other phenomena that are within the mainstream of a given culture. According to the given definition, pop culture reflects not only the current popular culture, but also the past popular culture. It covers many things, such as lifestyle, culinary, cuisine, entertainment programs, arts, etc.

Every country has its own popular culture, including Indonesia. And it is also extremely possible for a country to be strongly influenced by other countries’ pop cultures. In Indonesia, there are many pop cultures from many different countries, both from western and eastern countries, that leave their marks and even are predicted to
able to swap Indonesian pop culture’s popularity in Indonesia itself in the future. Japanese pop culture is one of pop cultures that penetrates Indonesia that can do so. Since several decades ago, Japanese pop culture has played a big role in Indonesian pop culture. “Indonesia has been Japan’s key partner in the region, for both cultural diplomacy and ODA (Official Development Assistance). The two aspects together have made Indonesia a Japanophile that is positive for the Japanese influence and favorable to Japanese culture” (Han, 2015).

In his paper in East Asia Journal, Lam (2007) states in a form of table that Indonesian people, respondents aged 18 and above, were ranked second in Asia, with the percentage of trust in Japan 87.8%, which puts Indonesia as the number 2 country that has faith in Japan after Thailand. He also states in different table that Indonesian young adults were placed 2nd in attraction towards Anime and Manga, 3rd in Japanese cuisine, 1st in Japanese Movies, 2nd in Japanese TV Programs, 5th in Japanese Fashion, 4th in J-Pop, 2nd in Sumo and Baseball (and other Japanese sports), and 3rd in Japanese traditional culture in East Asia. To see how strong Japanese pop culture’s influence in Indonesia actually is, there comes several research problems that can be answered in this paper. They are:

1) Do Indonesian people aged 18 and above, specifically in Malang, truly love Japanese pop culture that much?
2) Does Japanese pop culture that enters Indonesia really overwhelm Indonesian pop culture in Indonesia itself?
3) What are the factors that Japanese pop culture has which are able to skyrocket its popularity in Indonesia that Indonesian pop culture does not have?
RESEARCH METHOD

In order to prove the theory and hypothesis that have been stated before, quantitative research design is used to collect the necessary data. A survey in the form of a 16-point closed format questionnaire is utilized to gain some data. By doing this, the data that is collected will be easier to convert into table, statistics, or diagram. Moreover, this method costs minimum effort and time, but the result is objective and valid enough as long as there is no manipulation.

The data collection process is done by spreading the questionnaire into 50 people, aged 18 and above, in Malang who simply love Japanese pop culture and excessively fond of Japanese pop culture (otaku) on July 2016. They are asked whether they know and like Japanese pop culture first. If they say yes, the questionnaire is given to them to fill. Likert scale is used as the scale of measurement to collect the data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After doing the survey, they data is recapitulated and processed as follows:

Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Japanese pop culture’s popularity in Indonesia is gradually increasing each year.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Japanese pop culture tenders many things which are fresher, more creative, and more innovative to you compared to Indonesian pop culture.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Most of Indonesian pop culture tends to adapt and/or adopt Japanese pop culture.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The existence of so many Japanese</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>No.</td>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Culture festivals (bunkasai) makes you more passionate and interested to learn more about Japanese pop culture.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Japanese pop culture that is somehow packaged in a very sterling quality predisposes you to doing a deeper study on Japanese pop culture.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Japanese pop culture that regularly adapts to the current trends leads you to fond of Japanese pop culture more and more.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The packaging and the innovation of Japanese pop culture are indubitably better than Indonesian pop culture.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The lack of flexibility that Indonesian pop culture probably suffers in order to adapt to the swift flow of globalisation makes Indonesian pop culture is not developed well and does not interest Indonesian people anymore, specifically youngsters and young adults.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Indonesian pop culture obviously needs more improvement and innovation following the recent trend so that its popularity can skyrocket.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>No.</td>
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<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>is that Indonesian human resources themselves are not at the same level with Japanese human resources.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Indonesian pop culture is somehow not supported by the existence of events about Indonesian pop culture itself (e.g. festivals, carnivals, fairs, etc.).</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Indonesian pop culture is not creative enough mostly on its development and is suspected to contain many plagiarism.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Indonesian pop culture marketing strategy is considered ineffective in boosting Indonesian pop culture’s popularity itself.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>There is insignificant bravery in Indonesian pop culture in acculturating its old/ancient culture and its modern culture to become contemporary culture.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>50</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The government is concerned having less support in facilitating the emergence of Indonesian pop culture, specifically in several new aspects with several ideas and innovations, and often compels every single Indonesian pop culture to sustainably put educational and benevolent values even though the latest</td>
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<td>No.</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Indonesian pop culture mostly has no educational aspects and values.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For you, Indonesian pop culture itself does not ring a bell.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

According to the data, majority of the sample chooses mostly to be on the positive side although there are still a number of them who decide to be neutral. From those statements, it can be seen that there are some aspects that cause those respondents in Malang to be less interested in Indonesian pop culture. In order to know what truly makes Indonesian pop culture lost in popularity even in its very original country compared to Japanese pop culture, it is better to know what Indonesian and Japanese pop cultures’ conditions in Indonesia are.

**Indonesian Pop Culture**

Mursito (2012) said that pop culture actually lies around us this whole time. The number of its lovers is majestic, yet the period of its popularity is often short. Mursito also said that Indonesian pop cultures, the so-called culture that lives in and is lived by society, is supported by Indonesian number 1 mass media, Television. He thinks that pop culture and entertainment world meet on Television because there is a similarity between them, which is the focus on communicative aspect rather than on rating and quality. This statement is very contradictory to Irawan’s research about Indonesia Television programmes and the kind of Indonesian pop culture that Mursito has stated before. Irawan (2013) said that since 1980s, Indonesian TV stations always compete to acquire as many viewers as possible so that they can increase their ratings because rating will make them easier to obtain sponsorship. Unfortunately, TV stations often broadcast programs that have no educational, cultural, or moral values, yet contain plagiarism. These statements have correlation with the questions number 3,
12, and 15. Moreover, according to Vidyarini (2008), Indonesian TV comedy programs as one of Indonesia pop cultures mostly contain insults, which are considered as jokes. This means two things, the first is that insults have become seasoning of TV programs that relieve us from our frustration; and the second is that it is actually parts of our “cultures” because Indonesian people think that insults are better jokes rather than American “smart” humor.

In the last decades, Indonesia has a very vast development of pop culture. Many pop cultures from different sectors such as culinary, music, TV programs, animation, fashion, lifestyle, etc. keep growing. Aside from pop cultures in TV programmes that are already discussed in the previous paragraph, Indonesian music industries has also grown tremendously. One of them is dangdut. Sekewael (2016) stated that dangdut became very popular among a large part of the Indonesian population. It is proved by the fact there is an annual national dangdut competition named D’Academy in Indonesia. The rating of this programme is very high. Not only Indonesian pop culture that grows, but also many foreign pop cultures that grow rapidly in Indonesia. Many people will not forget the time when there was huge penetration of Korean pop cultures that stimulated Indonesian people to create their own boyband or girlband. This leads to a case when a particular boyband or girlband in Indonesia was spotted to plagiarise one of the most prominent boyband or girlband in Korea.

Japanese Pop Culture

In the recent decades, Japanese pop culture grows rapidly in the world. This has a correlation with a statement from Lam (2007) that says that in order to increase interest in Japan and further heighten the image of Japan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) is working with the private sector through overseas diplomatic establishments and the Japan Foundation to promote cultural exchanges while taking
into consideration the characteristics of each country. He also said that Japan is burnishing its international image through the popular medium of manga and anime. Heng in Han (2015) pointed a statement that Japan has been promoting its “normative soft power as global trouble-shooter”, in which means that Japan is not merely promoting and introducing its popular culture to the world, but also its universal values and influence in the world. In her article on Bad Subjects, Newitz (1994) stated a fact that in 1980 – 1981, animated programs, which accounted for 56% of total exports, led exports of Japanese television shows. From that excerpt, it can be concluded that nowadays, Japanese pop culture that is distributed through television programs since 1980 must be very huge. An excerpt by Chambers (2012) that said that Japanese animation, or anime, is a huge industry nowadays, even in United States supports it.

Japanese pop culture also hits Asian markets. Lam (2007) said that in April 2006, Foreign Minister Aso Taro proposed that manga and anime could be the way to China’s heart. The Foreign Minister also noted, “If you take a peek in any of the shops in China catering to the young otaku (nerdy-type manga and anime fans), you will find the shops’ walls lined with any and every sort of Japanese anime figurine you can imagine. …We have a grasp on the hearts of the young people in many countries, not the least of which being China”. Lam also states that in November 2006, the Council on the Movement of People across Borders, an advisory council to Foreign Minister Aso, proposed that Japan should tap on the rising popularity to manga and anime especially among the young abroad. Accordingly, Japanese pop culture, especially manga and anime in which they focus on to spread, must be very prominent in Asia. Wai-ming (2001) said that the popularity of Japanese animation in Singapore is booming, but it still has a long way to go. Adrian (2016) concluded that Japan is one of the countries that successfully develop cultural diplomacy with countries all over
the world, including Indonesia; this cultural diplomacy is included in Japan-Indonesia Partnership Agreement in 2012-2015. Venus and Helmi (2010) proclaimed that there are some variants of Japanese pop culture that gain popularity in Indonesia, such as movie, music, anime, manga, and fashion.

Aside from media and cultural diplomacy, Japanese culture and Japanese pop culture also spread through language class. Just like the theory of Grammar-Translation Method in the Teaching of Foreign Language, one can study their literature/literary works, which is the product of cultures, in order to master the language. According to Mahoney (2009), it is becoming widely acknowledged that communicative competence is not the only goal of language learning; culture is inseparable from language and it is only through an intercultural approach to language teaching and learning that effective communication and intercultural understanding can occur. Based on Wardana’s, Fasisaka’s, and Dewi’s (2015) research, there is a significant increase of the number of people who studies Japanese language all over the world from 2009 to 2012, and from those countries, Indonesia is ranked second from all the population. Moreover, there is also positive correlation on the number of Japanese language learners with the number of annual Japanese pop culture festivals, World Cosplay Summit. This vividly shows that Japanese pop culture can spread through any media, one of them is classroom.

**Indonesian Pop Culture vs. Japanese Pop Culture in Indonesia: a Comparison**

To know the comparison between the two pop cultures that are already mentioned above, the recapitulated questionnaire data will be analyzed with the help of the theory from previous research. For the first question, the majority of people says that Japanese pop culture always keeps growing here in Indonesia. But the reality contradicts with their opinion. Based on BBC World Service data about other
countries’ views on the Japanese influence in Han (2015), Japanese pop culture in Indonesia slowly has decreased in popularity since 2012 to 2014 even though Indonesia still ranked the first as country who thinks positively of Japanese pop culture.

Figure 1. Source: BBC World Service in Han (2015)
(Global average means the average country ratings of all the countries in the year)

Secondly, most of the people believe that Japanese pop culture offers many new things, which are fresher, more creative, and more innovative. According to Simeon’s research (2006), Japanese culinary is the most Japanese pop culture accepted worldwide; anime/manga, video games, and character goods/action figures are the second; The adjectives that are used to describe Japanese pop culture are positive, such as interesting, trendy, cool, and innovative. This research supports the statement number 2 and 6 that Japanese pop culture holds out different things that are seen positively.

Third, most of Indonesian pop culture tends to adapt/adopt Japanese pop culture. Some people disagree with this statement because they believe that Indonesia has its own identity in its pop culture. Still, the majority of people chooses that adoption or adaption from Japanese pop culture exists in Indonesia. Han (2015) said
that JKT48, an Indonesian idol group based on most popular Japanese idol group AKB48, is seen as a part of Japanese government’s Cool Japan Project. There is also a bi-monthly, now monthly, manga magazine in Indonesia namely Shonen Fight that is quite similar to Japanese Shonen Jump because the head editor is Japanese. Actually, those do not prove anything that Indonesia adapts or adopts Japanese pop culture because the initiators come from Japan; it also does not support statement number 12.

Next, the existence of Japanese culture festivals (bunkasai) makes most of the respondents interested in learning more about Japanese culture and pop culture. Take World Cosplay Summit as an example. World Cosplay Summit is an annual international Japanese pop culture festival. Based on a research by Wardana et al. (2015), there is a positive correlation between the number of Indonesian people who study Japanese language and culture with the number of Indonesian people who participate in WCG. This research is significant enough to support the statement.

The outstanding packaging of Japanese pop culture causes the majority of respondents to learn about Japanese pop culture. Most of the respondents agree with the statement number 5 and 7 about the better packaging of Japanese pop culture. Simeon (2006) concluded that Japanese business models are so successful that they manage to integrate the culture with the pop culture, and vice versa. Morishita in Simeon (2006) also said that Japanese popular culture products could soon be recognized as strong brands with enormous commercial potential. The good packaging leads to good marketing strategy too. Simeon stated Japanese pop culture marketing covers general promotion of national cultural activities as well as the active worldwide interest in the dynamic and trendy subcultures in Japan, which leads to strengthen Japan’s presence and influence in soft power in the world. On the contrary, Kurnianto (2015) stated that Indonesian pop culture, specifically animation, lacks of both quality
and quantity since 1980s. This condition affects Indonesian pop culture marketing strategy badly. Most of the respondents also agree with this statement, as already stated in the statement number 13.

In statement number 8, most of the people agree that Indonesian pop culture does not have the flexibility to adapt with the current condition and market. Actually, a research conducted by Jaszi (2009) said that Indonesian culture, in this case traditional arts, has the dynamism and flexibility. This statement has a relationship with statement number 14 which said that Indonesian pop culture has no bravery in acculturating its high culture with its pop culture; and most of the people also agree with this statement. But, according to Richter (2008), there is an contemporary culture, in this case music, in Yogyakarta which acculturate Jatilan, a kind of trance dance, with electronic music. There is also an emergence of Wayang Millenium in Yogyakarta, which combine the story of wayang with modern effect and music. Those proofs clearly prove that Indonesian actually has the bravery to combine its culture with its pop culture.

The next statement, statement 9, said that Indonesian pop culture does need improvement on innovation so that the popularity will rise again. This statement is related to statement 11. Most of the people agree to this statement. Kuswanto (2009) also concurred with the statement about the need of improvement in Indonesian pop culture, animation industry. He stated that animation industry in Indonesia needs to improve, mostly with the help of students majoring in animation. Kuswanto also said that there are some obstacles in developing animation industry in Indonesia; one of them is the limitation in Indonesian human resources. His statement is related with the statement in the questionnaire number 10 and number 15. Many people strongly agree with statement 15. It is clear that statements from other researches support this
statement. Vidyarini (2008) and Irawan (2013) considered the Television as the very essential media to televise positive pop culture, yet they choose to pursue ratings and forget to give something positive. From the statement number 16, there is not much thing that can be said. But based on the comparison between respondents who know and do not know Indonesian pop culture, Is it shown that there are more respondents who do not know Indonesian pop culture well.

CONCLUSION

Pop culture is the entirety of ideas, perspectives, attitudes, images, and other phenomena that are within the mainstream of a given culture. Every country has its own pop culture, but it is highly possible that pop culture from different country enters and even overwhelms other pop cultures. The penetration of Japanese pop culture in Indonesia has been fluctuating since 1980s until now. After analyzing the survey data with many theories and findings from previous researches, the answer to the research questions are as follows:

1) According to the research, the answer is yes. The respondents mostly love Japanese pop culture, but they do not excessively love Japan or anything related to Japan because their answers are very diverse.

2) Based on the research, the answer is mostly yes. Japanese pop culture overcomes Indonesian pop culture in Malang, but not completely overwhelming it. The answer of this question is not suitable to be applied to a bigger population, like all Indonesians, because Malang itself is considered as a big city in Indonesia. The result in different city, the small ones, can be different.

3) The factor that makes Japanese pop culture bests Indonesian pop culture in Indonesia itself is that it has better innovation, package and packaging, follow-up action/events, flexibility, human resources, and so on.
What I, researcher, can suggest about this research is that there must be another similar research with a wider scale and samples so that the acquired data will be more valid. What I can suggest for the development of Indonesian pop cultures is divided into three strategies, they are:

1) **Adapt.** Indonesia can adapt Japan’s strategy, or any other creative country, on how to make their cultures become popular. For example, to acculturate Indonesian culture and pop culture, Indonesia can mass-produce action figures/character figures of Indonesian wayang’s characters, folklore’s characters, or even characters resembling Indonesian traditional dance gestures. Indonesia can also adapt current technology to boost their pop cultures, for example, Indonesia can introduce some parts of their moral values, philosophies, cultures, and heritages through animation, movies, or comics. It can be very well known if it is packaged in a very great story, such as Japanese samurai, British knights, Chinese Shaolin, American cowboy, etc. But, first things first, DO NOT include all of them in just one story, it will erase the fun of the story.

2) **Innovate.** Innovation can be implied to existing Indonesian pop culture, for example for the events. To make Indonesian cultural events more sophisticated, those events obviously can be innovated into fresher ones. For example, we can acculturate *pagelaran wayang* in Indonesia with pop cultural events, such as comics expo. Moreover, Indonesians can innovate, or even do little changes all over the shops, to their TV programs. They can make it sophisticated and positive, rather than making it endless.

3) **Grow.** Indonesian people can grow communities about popular culture. Those communities can hold many events related with Indonesian pop cultures, so that Indonesian pop culture will not be overwhelmed by foreign pop cultures.
REFERENCES


