Journal of Consumer Culture

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ARTICLE

The Production and Consumption of 'Japanese Culture' in the Global Cultural Market

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Abstract. This article presents an unusual angle for the study of consumer culture in a case study of an explicit process of the production and consumption of 'culture', or more specifically, of a product, which carries the label: 'Japanese culture', and which crosses national borders. The general context is that of cross-cultural consumption and cultural globalization. Globalization cannot be easily described anymore as having 'a distinctly American face'. There is more and more evidence for competing centers or multiple globalizations. Japan has no doubt become one of these centers. The case at hand is that of the re-production and consumption of 'Japanese culture' in Israel. The article emphasizes the significance of looking at local cultural discourses or discourses about culture both at the 'exporting' and 'importing' destinations in trying to have a deeper understating of the processes of cultural globalization. I show how the Japanese cultural discourse – largely through the extremely popular genre of writing detailing the essential qualities of what it means to be Japanese known as *Nihonjinron* – yielded a global cultural product known as 'Japanese culture', which is delivered to the world through contemporary 'global cosmopolitans'.

Key words
cosmopolitanism ● cultural consumption ● cultural difference ● cultural globalization ● Israel ● Japan ● Japanese culture ● *Nihonjinron*

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INTRODUCTION

'Culture and consumption have an unprecedented relationship in the modern world. No other time has seen these elements enter into a relationship of such intense mutuality', argues Grant McCracken in his *Culture and Consumption* (1990: xi). In the consumer society of the era of post-Fordism (Slater, 1997: 6), culture has been given an unprecedented importance (Featherstone, 1992: 270), to the point in which it has gained an almost autonomous standing (see Featherstone, 1995; Slater, 1997).

This article is concerned with the way 'Japanese culture' has become a product that crosses national borders, or in other words, a 'global cultural product'. There is now a vast literature concerned with 'cultural consumption' – practices of selectively borrowing, or even shopping, for cultural content (Possamaï, 2002: 199); cross-cultural consumption (Howes, 1996) and cultural globalization. Nevertheless, whereas the concern of many of such studies is mainly with products which cross borders while carrying with them 'cultural blueprints' (McCracken, 1990) or cultural 'codes' (Douglas and Isherwood, 1979: 5), this article is specifically concerned with 'culture' as a product which crosses national borders.

Globalization has been extensively analyzed in terms of economic or political world influences. However, mainly from the mid-1990s, there is much more emphasis on the cultural aspects of globalization (cf. Featherstone, 1990, 1995; Friedman, 1994, 1995; Hall, 1991, 1993; King, 1991; Lash and Urry, 1993; Robertson, 2001; Tomlinson, 1999). In other words, there is a growing understanding that 'globalization lies at the heart of modern culture [and that] cultural practices lie at the heart of globalization' (Tomlinson, 1999: 1).

This article follows the process in which the culture of the 'Other' as well as 'cultural difference' – which has itself become a highly saleable commodity in contemporary society (see Giroux, 1994) – are promoted as global products. The study is based on mainly qualitative research which included over 60 in-depth interviews with Israeli producers of representations of 'Japanese culture' in all areas, including Japanese art, calligraphy, ink painting, flower arrangement (ikebana), Japanese paper production, the art of paper folding (origami), ceramics, martial arts, dance, tea ceremony and Japanese food. One of the main aims of these lengthy interviews was to characterize the ways in which 'Japanese culture' is perceived by these cultural brokers.[1] Most Israeli producers of 'Japanese culture' have gained their 'cultural' expertise in Japan. They had visited Japan mostly for relatively long periods, and now they offer courses, workshops or lectures for the general public, organize artistic, cultural and commercial displays at

galleries, public centers or specialized shops as well as organize and contribute to local festivals of Japanese culture.

I suggest that the concept of 'Japanese culture' promoted through all these cultural ventures is strongly influenced by the way Japanese culture is presented by Japanese both in Japan and in the framework of organized international contacts. What is put on exhibit as 'Japanese culture' is mostly an officially endorsed 'traditional' culture (Guichard-Anguis, 2001). It is a culture purposively constructed to be displayed as exhibit, which in fact has little to do with contemporary Japanese urban society (Iwabuchi, 1999: 178–9).[2] This image of Japanese culture is closely related to the essential-ized and idealized view of Japan that emerged in postwar Japan, as it is manifested, for example, in the *Nihonjinron*, an extremely popular genre of writing detailing the essential qualities of what it means to be Japanese.[3] The cultural visitors to Japan, to whom I refer as *global cosmopolitans*, who look for new cultural adventures as well as for cultural difference, are easily attracted to this essentialized cultural image, which is highly consumed in Japan by locals and foreigners alike.

'Globalization' has become a widespread term, a fashionable or magical word, expected to unlock the gates to all current and future mysteries (Bauman, 1998: 1). In becoming a faddish word, 'globalization' is in danger of sharing the fate of all such words: 'the more experiences they pretend to make transparent, the more they themselves become opaque' (Bauman, 1998: 1). Cultural globalization has been too often described in faceless terms, such as that of 'flows' (see Hannerz, 1992; Lash and Urry, 1993). The image of 'culture' which may emerge from such descriptions is culture as free-flowing in the global arena just waiting to be seized by ('globalized') people 'with free choice' (Mathews, 2000). This article, which looks at 'globalization from below' (Burawoy, 2001), offers an anthropological phenomenological approach, which is aimed at understanding the meaning social actors give to the practices in which they are involved. Through this approach I intend to give face to, and to mark the clear agency of, cultural globalization processes.

JAPAN AS 'CULTURELAND': THE REPRODUCTION OF JAPANESE UNIQUENESS IN JAPAN

Most local cultural brokers had gained their 'cultural education' in Japan. 'Cultural education' refers to non-academic study, including Japanese culture and language and traditional arts such as calligraphy, ikebana, martial arts, and so forth (Bloch-Tzemach, 1998: 13). The Japanese government has institutionalized this kind of education in the official 'cultural visa',

which allows foreigners a longer stay in Japan for the period of their 'cultural studies'. During their stay the foreigners are introduced to the specific notion of 'Japanese culture', which emphasizes knowledge of traditional handcrafts. This knowledge may be acquired in Japan in cultural centers, which often offer the variety of traditional arts such as ikebana, calligraphy, tea ceremony and the art of kimono dressing under the same roof. Japan offers vast opportunities in this area, with institutions of various sizes; some of them private, some municipal or governmental.

Such assembling of cultural representations in one spot, which sometimes even carry explicit names such as *karuchā-rando*, meaning 'Culture Land' in Japanese, obviously leads to an essentialistic image of Japanese culture. A local flower arrangement artist used holistic terms to describe Japanese culture. She recalled that when she arrived in Japan another Israeli then living there, who is to this day very much involved with Japanese culture-related activities in Israel, gave her the advice he himself got from a Japanese professor, to take *any* of the Japanese traditional arts as a pursuit in order to get the essence of things. She later understood:

> He was right 200 percent, 1000 percent, that it doesn't matter at all in what [craft one is involved]; today I understand that . . . that is, I understood very quickly that it doesn't matter if it is in martial [arts], [or] if [it is] in ceramics, or in painting, if it is in poetry or dance. In essence, Japan is Japan is Japan. It doesn't matter at all.

It is not that surprising that it was a Japanese professor – who was described as a kind of cultural mentor – who initially promoted this essentialized image of 'Japanese culture'. Most Japanese are themselves very much interested in their national identity, or in the question: 'Who are we, the Japanese?', and have articulated their interest in a variety of ways, notably in published media. This is so much so that the *Nihonjinron* – which include 'presuppositions and presumptions, propositions and assertions about who the Japanese are and what Japanese culture is like' – may be called 'a minor national pastime' (Befu, 2001a: 2–3). Collaborators in this endeavor are not only intellectuals, but also business elites, who are not merely keen consumers of *Nihonjinron*, but also act as 'reproductive intellectuals' or 'cultural intermediates', popularizing academic theories of Japanese society and dispersing them to wider sections of the population (Yoshino, 1999: 19–20).

Yoshino (1999) describes how *Nihonjinron* ideas are used by Japanese companies when trying to improve intercultural understanding in the

global arena. Unlike in other cases of ethnicity, argues Yoshino (1999: 23), in which usually 'their' difference is emphasized, in the Japanese case as articulated in the *Nihonjinron*, 'it is not "their" differences but "our" differences that are actively used'. Another example of the 'global' spread of *Nihonjinron* discourse is given by Thomas (2001), who explains the popularity of Japanese photography in America on the background of the broad modes of understanding 'Japan' and the 'West' as organized by the discourses of Orientalism and *Nihonjinron*. According to Thomas (2001: 139) what aligns the view on Japanese photography in America with the discourses of both Orientalism and *Nihonjinron* is their insistence on *differentiating* Japan absolutely from the 'West'. This attitude towards 'things Japanese', even when they do not necessarily have a unique Japanese nature – as in the case of modern photography – carries with it the implication that Japanese values remain constant over centuries, or the notion of an essentialized culture.

The massive and vast concern in postwar Japan in the construction of a unified Japanese culture (see Gluck, 1985; Vlastos, 1998) has been coupled with the re-production of a genuine Japanese tradition. Some writers argue that in modern Japan, especially since the economic miracle of the 1960s, 'tradition', and its relationship with cultural identity, has become almost a national obsession (Ivy, 1988: 21). During the 1970s and 1980s Japan was literally possessed with waves of nostalgia and history crazes (see Ben–Ari, 1992; Bestor, 1989; Ivy, 1995; Kelly, 1986, 1990; Moeran, 1984; Robertson, 1987, 1991).

Japanese formal authorities have been vigorously involved in protecting and in fact in reproducing 'traditional' (*dentō-teki*) cultural properties (*bunka zai*). From the 1950s the Japanese government has been protecting intangible cultural properties such as traditional craft techniques and even the people who make them, who were designated by the government as 'human' or 'national' treasures (Moeran, 1984: 167). 'Traditional' locations are also protected by Japanese authorities, as in the case of the Japanese Folklore Society designating places with titles such as the 'most traditional village left in Japan' (see Martinez, 1990: 105).

This 'traditional' and authentic Japan is, in fact, easily discovered by foreign visitors. As observed by Pico Iyer (1989: 342), a major travel writer, who asserts that 'in all my travels, I had never encountered a race so desperately keen to make its sights available to the foreigner'. Iyer's conclusion that 'they [the Japanese] were not interested in selling postcards or antiques or local girls; they simply wanted to sell Japan' is analogous to the experiences I have heard about from visitors to Japan. A young woman who

traveled in Japan for several weeks described how she and her partner got tired of urban Japan and how they 'decided to find this Japan which can be seen in pictures'. She recalled how easy their task was made not only by following detailed guidebooks listing Japanese craftsmen and their specific locations, which can be obtained at any tourist office, but also by the help and guidance of the local people to the craftsmen's workshops. She also remembered how happy the craftsmen were for their visits.

Japanese craftsmen are not only hospitable to incidental visitors, they often open the doors of their workshops and houses to foreigners to live and study for long periods. An Israeli expert in Japanese paper who stayed with a Japanese master for over a year described how important it was for his master's village community that he would study the traditional craft:

> They were really happy that someone came to study because it is something that gradually vanishes. Also, in Japan it is important for them that the tradition will be preserved, even if it is abroad. . . . They told me: 'We hope that you preserve it . . . even if it is in Israel, so that it will have a continuance'.

'Japanese culture' has thus become not only an objectified product but also a product that can be detached from its original geographical location and marketed on the global cultural market.

GLOBAL COSMOPOLITANISM AND THE RE-PRODUCTION OF 'JAPANESE CULTURE'

> I, everywhere I go, I take what's possible. I also studied in Japan. I studied Japanese, and flower arrangement, calligraphy, and tea ceremony. From the moment I arrived in Japan, for half a year, I attended evening school twice a week . . . I came to take out as much as possible from Japan.

In the description above, as in similar accounts given by Israeli brokers of 'Japanese culture', Japan is portrayed as a 'Land of Culture'. The image that arises is of a vast shop, which offers 'culture' on its various shelves, from which each 'cultural visitor' takes whatever she or he needs and leaves. This 'grab as much as you can' orientation was so typical in the interviews that it crossed all occupational lines. Even in the cases in which the visitors came to Japan with motivations not directly related to Japanese culture, they seem to have left Japan with the need to bring the 'culture' back home. Local brokers of Japanese culture often highly regard their own role in conveying the culture, using strong terms to describe their task. A

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performer of Japanese dance and tea ceremony said, '[T]o show Japanese culture is often [my] mission; I really feel like a missionary'.

There is no doubt that this kind of missionary feeling towards delivering Japanese culture throughout the globe had usually developed in Japan. In fact, the motivations for visiting Japan for those who would become cultural brokers of 'Japanese culture' vary. For some of them 'Japan' has been a life-long dream. Others want to develop their artistic skills in one of the areas where Japan has much to offer, such as ceramics, the art of paper, martial arts or flower arrangement. Yet others had the chance of dwelling in Japan for a relatively long period, either as a perfect spot for working and saving money to continue their 'big journeys' (see Bloch-Tzemach, 1998), or for other reasons. They also cannot be easily characterized as a social group other than being largely young and middle-class, varying in age from their mid-twenties to their forties. However, they are distinguished by their attraction and dedication to Japanese culture and its promotion in Israel.

I suggest we consider this so-called missionary spirit in terms of *cosmopolitanism*. The cosmopolitan is a 'citizen of the world' (Tomlinson, 1999: 184). However, as Tomlinson rightly observes, this idea of citizenship clearly has specific implications in the context of globalization. These cosmopolitans operate in a new environment, which is 'cosmopolitanism minus modernism' (Friedman, J., 1999: 238). Friedman refers to this as 'postmodern cosmopolitanism', and I prefer to call it *global cosmopolitanism*. I believe that the term 'global' captures more accurately the same 'we are the world' perspective Friedman himself observes in relation to these new cosmopolitans. It is also more applicable to the way these people regard themselves and their own cultural pursuits as being on 'a trans-national or a trans-societal level' (Featherstone, 1990: 1). This kind of cosmopolitanism, which is best described as 'a perspective, a state of mind' (Hannerz, 1990: 238), is the kind of self-identification that can be observed, for example, in the self-definition of a local Japanese calligraphy expert who considers herself an 'artist in the universe, in the world, in space, in life'.

Whereas 'postmodern cosmopolitanism' highlights the hybrid characteristics of contemporary cosmopolitanism (Friedman, J., 1999: 238), 'global cosmopolitanism' underscores the competence that its carriers have in other cultures. The 'global cosmopolitan' may be described as having the unique 'personal ability to make [their] way into other cultures, through looking, intuiting and reflecting' (Hannerz, 1990: 239). This unique competence with the cultures of the Other often makes the cosmopolitan into an *aficionado*, who views these cultures as art works. Being an expert

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in any kind of Japanese art, craft, or other pursuit always involves much more than specialized competence. A performer of traditional Japanese dance puts it into words when she defines herself 'as a vessel, a vessel that transmits a picture of things, a vessel that transmits a picture of culture'. Like the cosmopolitans described by Hannerz, such 'vessels' carrying the culture of the Other often become brokers, entrepreneurs who make a profit (Hannerz, 1990: 248).

Presenting Japanese arts and crafts in organized representations of Japan and teaching Japanese calligraphy, Japanese black ink painting, or the making of Japanese paper are often about becoming brokers of 'Japanese culture'. When asked why she emphasized 'Japan-ness' in her promotional material, the same Israeli artist of Japanese calligraphy who regards herself in cosmopolitan terms responded: '[B]ecause I think that this sells well. I think it [the Japan-ness] has more demand'. The demand is in fact not only for Japanese aestheticism and exoticism, but also for cultural difference itself.

JAPANESE CULTURE IN ISRAEL

An increasing popular interest in Japanese culture in Israel can be observed from the 1980s. During the 1990s, Japanese Studies at universities also gained an unprecedented popularity, as did non-academic lectures on Japanese culture. In 1992, the book *Havaya Yapanit* (A Japanese Experience) was published and became an exceptional bestseller.[4] Japan has also become a destination for travel, mainly for young backpackers after their army service. Travel to remote destinations such as the Far East, which has been termed the 'big trip' (*hatiyul hagadol*), has grown into a large-scale phenomenon (Jacobson, 1987; Mevorach, 1997; Simhai, 2000). The growing accessibility of Japan has also made it a favorite destination for other groups in Israeli society, including people with a deep interest in Japanese arts and culture. These people to whom I have referred as 'global cosmopolitans' have been very instrumental in spreading 'Japanese culture' in Israel.

The difficulty in characterization in demographic variables like class, gender or age is true not only for local 'producers' of Japanese culture as explained above, but also for the cultural consumers. This is not surprising in light of the 'New Times', the postmodern, post-Fordist epoch we are said to live in, in which the production of goods is characterized by a specialized production, which is more specifically tailored for and targeted to precise consumer groups who are defined by lifestyle rather than by broad demographic variables (see Slater, 1997: 174).

'Japanese culture' is conveyed in a variety of forms including local cultural or commercial festivals, courses, workshops or lectures for the general public as well as artistic, cultural and commercial displays at galleries, public centers or specialized shops. Other entrepreneurs offer 'Japanese culture' at their own Japanese-style martial arts training centers or restaurants.

The emphasis on the marketing and consumption of 'culture' is well observed in all these ventures. Japanese restaurants, which are typically owned and managed by Israelis, are no exception. The latter are usually designed in a manner that will give the visitors a cultural experience in an accentuated Japanese-style design. In the first training session in a two-month course for the waitresses and waiters in a leading Japanese restaurant, the owner explained to his admiring young new employees that his intentions are actually to 'create a little Japan in Israel':

> You are selling culture. There is a reason why the food is served the way it is served. What is the logic behind serving [to Israelis] [in the same] way a Japanese is eating? What is the logic behind this culture? With all its contrasts, it has logic. It is important to understand why it is so. When we designed the place, the thinking was of entering a stage . . . this is the restaurant, a different world.

The same logic of '[W]e are not selling food, we are selling culture' has led this same restaurateur to initiate a 'customers' club' at his restaurant, which offered lectures on Japanese culture by leading Japan experts. The activities of the club were so popular during the mid-1990s that they often had to rent a bigger hall to contain the entire crowd.

The attempt to create a cultural experience is of course not the particular whim of this restaurateur who is very clear about his aim 'to instil the culture through the food'. There is certainly an ongoing demand in Israel for new cultural experiences. As it was explained by another restaurant owner who recently opened a specialized Japanese restaurant with the aim of reaching no less than the standards of 'a restaurant that could have been opened in the center of Tokyo':

> I am very pleased by the open-mindedness and the response of the Israelis. It is really a new food culture. It is different from anything else, with the shoes [that have to be taken off] and the preparation of food by oneself. And I am very pleased that they accept it; they try, and I am sure they all go out of here after

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having gone through a Japanese experience, which I wanted to convey.

Another young chef who was trained in Japan offers unique Japanese cuisine mainly on special occasions at the customers' homes. He defines his customers as 'rich people who had already tried many things, ate in many places . . . people who look for stimulations'. He is aware that at least part of the appeal of the dinners he offers is not gastronomic, especially since the food he prepares is not typical in restaurants and is often not very popular. As he explains: 'This culture is still very mysterious, and still there are many connotations that are related to the word "Japan."'

The promotion of Japanese culture is certainly not restricted to restaurants, nor is it aimed only at 'rich people who had already tried many things' like in the example above. The emphasis on 'culture' is shared by many others, including those engaged with various Japanese pursuits such as Japanese calligraphy, origami and ikebana, and who define their main occupation as related to 'Japan'. Local Japanese martial arts instructors also emphasize Japanese culture and manners and insist on using Japanese training outfits and Japanese terms in their training centers, which are called *dōjō* (as they are called in Japan). The example of practitioners of the game of Go is especially illustrative, as the game is simply a board game that can be played just like chess or checkers. Nevertheless, the leading Israeli expert explained that in Israel 'it is more related to Japanese culture'. He also defined the Israelis who are playing Go as '*Japanophiles* who play Go'. No doubt that one of the main means for such cultural endeavors is through local events dedicated to the representation and celebration of Japanese culture.

CELEBRATIONS OF JAPANESE CULTURE

Red against white, white against black.
The eruptive against the restrained
and the bright against the mysterious.
The sensations, the rituals and the exhilarations . . .
Scents of Japan.

These lines written in Japanese-style poetry opened the '*Deai*, a dialog between a dancer and an artist of the brush'. The dancer – an Israeli woman who specialized in Japanese dance – is dressed in kimono and performs on a stage covered with a straw mat and decorated with other symbols of Japan, a golden podium and a bonsai tree. On another lower stage covered with a dark red cloth stands a Japanese calligraphy artist who lives in Israel.

The 'dialog' includes a few Japanese dances, some of them performed with Japanese artifacts such as a paper umbrella and fans, 'responded' to by an on-stage calligraphy, having as a background a female voice reciting a few more lines of Japanese-style poetry in Hebrew.

'Scents of Japan in the Botanical Gardens – The Japanese Culture and Art Festival for the whole family' took place at the Jerusalem Botanical Gardens in October 2000. The grand opening included, apart from the '*Deai*', also a short formal part and a few more performances including 'the Sword Dance' and 'The Fan of the Palm's Bloom', performed by Israeli experts of Oriental martial arts. About 500 people attended this opening, which was planned to be in the festive spirit of the following Jewish holiday, and unfortunately ended up taking place in the midst of very unsettled political conditions.[5] Over 20,000 people attended the two-week event. Whereas this number was disappointing with regard to the estimate of 70,000, still, according to the marketing manager of the botanical gardens, it was a success in the unexpectedly grave circumstances.

Japanese events, which have become increasingly popular, may carry different titles, such as 'festivals', 'events', or 'happenings', and may vary in size as well as in orientation, ranging from more 'purely' cultural events to commercial ventures. They are not only very similar in structure but are also often organized by the same people, and they include the same representations of Japan. The latter are usually designed for 'the whole family', i.e. adults and children. Among the popular performances are those of martial arts, dance, tea ceremony and ikebana. Activities for children usually include origami and making and drawing on Japanese fans, kites, or dragons. Japanese food of some variety is also usually offered, often includ-ing sushi, yakisoba (fried noodles), and tofu prepared in experimental ways.

One of the main characteristics of these events is the absence of Japanese people. The visitors to such events are there to see and experience 'Japan' not through an interaction with Japanese people, who almost as a rule are absent from these organized representations of Japan, but through interaction with things Japanese produced and exhibited by other Israelis. In other words, the Japanese culture brought into Israel is a culture with no real living people. It is a *people-less culture*. Such a culture is more easily prone to essentialization as well as objectification. 'Japan' is understood and then displayed 'as a thing, a natural object or entity made up of objects and entities ("traits"), which gains its own reality and can be gazed at' (Handler, 1988: 14).

Attempts to create a unique Japanese experience as a cultural display are certainly not typical only of contemporary Israel. Beginning with the

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world fairs of the 19th century, 'Japan' was one of the major attractions both in American and European fairs (cf. Harris, 1990; Hotta–Lister, 1999). A western image of Japan as part of the 'mysterious Orient' has been developed through these fairs, especially through representations of Japan (and China) in the fairs' amusement zones. These representations were very popular and were discovered to be excellent 'money-makers' (Benedict, 1994: 34).

With the current high development of consumer culture it is not surprising, then, that the 'money-making' quality of the 'mysterious Orient', which had been discovered by local entrepreneurs in big cities' fairs in the late 19th century, has its appeal also for contemporary entrepreneurs in Israel, who find 'Japan' a favorite attraction for festivals and happenings. The 'Modern Living'[6] fair is the largest commercial annual event promoting consumer products in Israel. It is defined by its organizers as a 'big happening of events and presentations', appealing to 'the whole family'. The 1998 fair included furnishing, modern home and international pavilions. The fair attracted over 250,000 visitors in its seven days of activity. A unique attraction that year was the pavilion dedicated to creating an 'Authentic Japanese Experience'. The fair organizers were worried that attendance would be low, and they thought that a Japanese spot would be an attraction. As the general marketing manager of the 1998 fair explained, the logic behind this endeavor was that 'Japan is exotic, different and interesting'. In the call for participants, the organizers of the Japanese pavilion – a wood artist who specializes in the production of Japanese-style screens and furniture and the owners of a shop specializing in 'things Japanese' – explained the attraction:

> This year's Fair gives notable attention to the culture of the Orient, which lights the imagination of many Israelis, who open up to this culture, and who are keen to discover more and more. This will take shape in an entire pavilion that is wholly dedicated to Japan and will contain the majority of the cultural contents, products, ideas and food types that are related to this fascinating subject.

In a relatively large and defined area within the huge commercial exhibition, many Japanese arts and crafts were presented, including Japanese paper, ikebana, origami, calligraphy, ceramics, masks and cosmetics. There was enough space for on-the-spot shiatsu treatments. It goes without saying that performances of martial arts, tea ceremony, and Japanese dance were included, and there was the requisite 'traditional Japanese cuisine'. The

'typical Japanese decorative elements', including wood and paper screens and fans, were scattered all over the pavilion, and it contained a miniature Japanese garden made of stones and rocks. The background Japanese music, though hardly heard, especially during the hectic evening hours, was considered by the organizers as part of the unique Japanese atmosphere deemed necessary in order to create a 'real' Japanese experience.

Smaller-scale Japanese commercial festivals carrying titles such as the Festival of the Rising Sun, the Far East Festivities, or the Enchanting East, are held at local shopping malls. Adhering to the Orientalist image depicting the Orient in large collective terms or in abstract generalities (Said, 1991[1978]: 154–5), these events often include more than one Oriental attraction. For example, the Festival of the Rising Sun included a 'Thousand Nights Show' and performances of an 'Indian fakir' and a 'sword swallower' to add an additional Oriental flavor to the Japanese attractions, which included ikebana, 'a Japanese grocery store', and 'Japanese hosting with a hostess just like in Japan'. The organizers of the two-week festivities of the Orient at another shopping mall preferred to include a Thai Experience together with the Japanese Legend. The latter included the usual presentations of flower arrangement, a display of Japanese products and pottery, and sushi and noodle bars. The central stage offered performances each evening at the fast food plaza, including a Japanese Experience, mainly for children, featuring 'Japanese culture' through Japanese activities such as the use of chopsticks, fans and kimono.

These mainly commercial ventures typically have also some minor educational or more accurately 'edu-tainment' (Creighton, 1992: 49; Urry, 1990: 153) goals, through lectures about travels in the Orient, films and some Oriental music and literature. However, obviously, they tend to put emphasis on the consumerist aspects of the event. For example, the climax of the 'Far East Festivities' was a big raffle. Each shopper (spending above a certain sum) at any of the mall's shops during the festival days gained the chance to win a dreamy vacation in Thailand (as Japan is too expensive), or alternatively a minor prize such as an Oriental dinner; massage; aromatic oils; Oriental serving dishes and so forth. This lottery between 'cultures' can be regarded as the ultimate symbol of the way in which 'culture' and not less so 'cultural difference' have become such acceptable products for consumption in contemporary society.

JAPANESE CULTURE AS A DISTINCTLY UNIQUE AESTHETIC PRODUCT

With the global accessibility of cultures, 'culture' has increasingly become an accepted theme for leisure activity (Hendry, 2000: 9). In his book *Travels*

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in Hyperreality, Eco (1986: 152) describes this phenomenon as 'culture as show business'. Eco's description of the atmosphere at cultural centers in the late 1970s where 'the huge audience is unbelievably crammed in', utterly echoes the amazement experienced by one of the most popular lecturers of Japanese culture in Israel as he entered a lecture hall:

> It was in 1983 or 1984. [The lecture hall was] utterly exploding. People just crammed the hall. It was amazing. I did not realize. And most of them did not come for travel; people came for an interest in Japanese culture in general.

As Eco very clearly explains, the phrase 'culture as show business' is meant to denote something very specific in the light of an ideology of culture with a capital C. In other words, while displaying the culture of the Other as a 'spectacle' (Hall, 1997) is a well-known and well-explained phenomenon, this has always been within the boundaries of a colonial, or cultural dominance discourse. In such a discourse the culture of the Other is usually not defined in terms of high culture. 'Japanese culture' as produced and represented in Israel thus provides us an exceptional example of the spectacle of the Other (see Goldstein-Gidoni, 2003a).

The high-cultural value of Japanese culture is very evident in the way in which local cultural brokers see the culture. For example, the organizer of the Scents of Japan festival was very clear about the kind of Japanese culture she wanted to convey through the event:

> They [the managers of the botanical gardens] wanted to call [the event] 'Japanese Mystery', they wanted 'Japan Festival'. God forbid. . . . Also, I didn't see any reason to publicize it in all the newspapers and all around the city of Jerusalem. I didn't like it. I wanted it to be very much like. . . . The lesser people from my point of view was more appropriate.

The idea of Japanese culture of this cultural producer, who also said that she 'wanted it sterile', is very typical. An origami expert believes that 'by nature, Japanese art cannot be a common [or vulgar] art'. Other producers criticized other performers of Japanese culture, especially those who agree to perform at shopping malls. As it was put by one of the criticizers: 'if you want the event to be classic and with quality, you cannot do it in a vulgar way, at some kinds of shopping malls. It detracts from its value.' This distinctive image is shared by the connoisseurs and the general public alike. For example, when asked how they see Japan, over 65 percent of the respondents to questionnaires among the visitors to the Scents of Japan

festival used adjectives like 'aesthetic', 'fascinating' or 'impressive' to describe Japan.

Whereas Japanese culture is definitely distinguished from low, or even popular culture, its high-culture characteristics differ from those typical of western high culture. What signifies it more than anything is its unique aesthetic quality. Such a unique image of Japanese culture is certainly not new and can be noted in the writings of early visitors and scholars of Japan. To note just one example, Basil Hall Chamberlain, one of the most influential scholars of Japan of the late 19th century, classified the Japanese as 'the most aesthetic of modern peoples' (see Minear, 1980: 509).

However, the image of a unique aesthetic predisposition of the Japanese people has not been emphasized only by Others. It has been in fact reproduced as part and parcel of the collective cultural image of the Japanese by the Japanese themselves, as can be seen in various *Nihonjinron* writings. This unique admiration of beauty can be observed for example in the writing on the Japanese kimono, which is itself regarded as another eternal symbol of Japaneseness (Goldstein-Gidoni, 1999). This writing emphasizes the difference between Japanese and western culture. Western culture is described as calculated and having utilitarian goals whereas the Japanese culture 'prizes love, *admires beauty*, respects courtesy and fosters harmony' (Yamanaka, 1986: 7, quoted in Goldstein-Gidoni, 1999; my emphasis). The same image, which highlights unique aesthetics as well as the clear distinctiveness of Japanese culture, is displayed in literature produced by business elites. The latter are not only collaborators in popularizing *Nihonjinron* ideas (Yoshino, 1999: 19–20) in Japan, but also play a significant role in presenting Japan to the West (Iwabuchi, 1999: 178–9). Mazda, a leading car company, has published a series of pictorial books with lengthy introductions in English which includes titles such as: *Tsukuru: Aesthetics at Work*, or *Wabi, Sabi, Suki: The Essence of Japanese Beauty*. The introduction for the latter book is concluded by the following assertion: 'Whatever turn culture takes in the future, we can be sure of one thing: the people of the Japanese archipelago at least will never summarily discard the old concepts of *wabi*, *sabi* and *suki* nor the works of art that express them' (Itoh, 1993: 23).[7]

THE LOCAL MARKETABILITY OF 'CULTURAL DIFFERENCE'

The attraction of the 'culturally different' and the 'exotic' is no doubt prevalent in our globalized world (Howell, 1995: 167). Although 'things Japanese' do not share all the typical characteristics of the 'exotic' or 'authentic', which usually relate to the 'remote', 'primitive' or 'natural' (see Cohen, 1988; Crain, 1996: 125; Howell, 1995; MacCannell, 1976), they do

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share with other 'authentic' products the appeal of 'other cultures', 'other places' and 'other historical periods' (MacCannell, 1976: 3). Local Israeli brokers of Japanese culture readily participate in promoting this image of distinctiveness, which they in fact usually acquired in their relationship with cultural brokers in Japan.

A ceramic artist described how she was exposed to this deep cultural difference through participating in a workshop in which foreign artists live and work in Japanese artisans' houses for a month. She described the effect of this experience as opening 'a whole new Alphabet' for her. She then added her view on the difference between the two cultures: 'Japanese way of thinking? – if there is an Israeli [way of thinking] that is day, Japanese is night'. Another cultural broker, who performs presentations of Japanese culture, including Japanese-style birthdays for children at their homes, explained the special place of Japanese culture in the larger cultural reper-toire, which also includes Spanish, South American, and Middle Eastern cultures, which she has to offer to the general public:

> This [the Japanese program] is the program I particularly
> recommend, not only because I am trained in it best but [also
> because] there is something very, very different; everything is
> different, the clothing is different, the way of eating is different,
> the writing is different. It is not like Spanish or Italian that you
> write in Latin. Or, say, in other countries there are no costumes.
> In the Japanese program I perform dressed in a kimono, and I
> give my lectures dressed in a kimono, so it is very special. It is a
> country that children have no access to, nor their parents. . . .

The great difference between the Japanese and the Israeli cultures was very often used as the explanation for the great attraction of Israelis to the Far East in general and Japan in particular. This was true not only to the producers but also to the consumers of 'Japanese culture' in Israel. In over 120 questionnaires filled in by students of Japanese language and by students in non-academic courses about Japanese culture, over 90 percent replied that Japan and Israel are different; more than 60 percent replied that Japan is *very* different. Less than two percent replied that Japan and Israel are similar. Moreover, in over 450 questionnaires that were filled out by people with an interest in Japanese culture, open questions, which were not specifically comparative such as: 'How would you describe Japan?' or 'Japanese culture is . . .', were nevertheless answered in a comparative manner. Quite a few of the respondents used phrases such as: 'a different and unique culture', 'exotic and different', 'a different planet', 'a unique

culture, very different from the West', 'fascinating, mysterious and different than Israelness', 'very/utterly different from ours', 'an alien culture'.

What is there in the 'utter difference' that catches the imagination of the global consumer? Is it the consequence of the allegedly general human tendency to dichotomize, to construct differences and essentialize the Other, be it 'American' or 'Oriental', as suggested by Howell (1995: 171)? Possibly. However, as Howell would certainly agree, this cultural difference will have a specific significant content in each case of cultural appropriation.

Howell (1995) offers a new perspective for examining processes of cultural diffusion in the global environment. She suggests that the diffusion of cultural constructs often serves to provoke a latency or make manifest a lacunae (in a sense of 'opening' or 'interval') in the receiving community or group of people. It is obvious that any process of cultural borrowing is active as well as selective (Tobin, 1992). Different cultural elements may or may not strike a cultural resonance. These 'lacunae' are potentially present and may become apparent or provoked when a conjunction of circumstances arises. It is very significant to note that this search for lacunae is not to be taken as positivistic in any sense of assuming their pre-existence before the conjunction of circumstances takes place.

I would like to use Howell's idea of cultural resonance to suggest that the 'Japanese obsession with their own culture as unique' (Iwabuchi, 1999: 178) and in particular their emphasis on a unique aesthetics, resonates well with the contemporary local Israeli cultural discourse. This discourse is characterized by a striking local interest in the cultures of the world. More specifically it relates to an on-going cultural discourse on aesthetics or the lack of aesthetics as a marked local cultural attribute, which has been recently recognized as problematic.

A relatively new Japanese culture fan who just completed an eight-month amateur course of Japanese-style painting with a strong emphasis on general aspects of Japanese culture and aesthetics and now plans his first trip to Japan, explained the local attraction to unique Japanese aesthetics as closely linked with local culture:

> I thought about it for a long time, and, at least in my opinion, there is a very serious problem generally in [our] country that disturbs very many people and it is aesthetics. . . . In the Israeli culture there is no room for aesthetics, just like that.

Israelis used to be proud of not being particular about insignificant matters such as aesthetics and style. In fact, the ethos of the *Sabra* subculture – the subculture of native-born Israelis, mainly of European descent, which has

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been most influential – included a strong attitude of 'anti-style' (Katriel, 1986). With the growing up of the new nation the spontaneous principles of the *Sabra* ethos have become central ideas for inward 'cultural intimacy' (Herzfeld, 1997: 3), strengthening the social belonging on the one hand, while at the same time becoming a source for embarrassment outwardly. Nevertheless, as Katriel (1999: 210) shows in more recent research, these same *Sabra* values including anti-style are now often being criticized.

Recent social and cultural analyses of Israeli society emphasize the breach of the national borders and the opening to the 'culture of the world', which in earlier stages of nation-building was rejected or marginalized. Parallel processes including the 'privatization' of former Israeli values and dreams (Ohana, 1998: 53), the 'normalization of the war experience' (Lumsky-Feder, 1998), and more general practices of escapism (on the background of the intense and violent Israeli–Palestinian political conflict) together with the recent influence of general processes of globalization and postmodernism (see Eisenstadt, 1996; Ram, 1993), seem to have been powerful enough to create a local style of global cultural consumption in Israel (see Goldstein-Gidoni, 2003b).

These interrelated processes seem to have yielded a new type of identity, portrayed as 'New Israelness', which may typify mainly the middle and upper classes, but has certainly also influenced other layers of society (Herzog, 1992). Almog (2004), who labels the growing sector of society that carries new capitalist globalized ideas as 'cosmopolitans', also empha-sizes the wider influence of the changing values of the Israeli elite on Israeli society in general. As Herzog (1992), Almog (2004) and others have observed, this 'New Israelness' is characterized by a 'world-embracing avidity [and an] emotional involvement with all the nuances of the cultures of the world' (Rosenblum, 1996: 246).

CONCLUSION

Globalization cannot be easily described anymore as having 'a distinctly American face' (Friedman T.L., 1999: 39, quoted in Ritzer, 2000: 177). There is now a growing understanding that the notion of globalization, and more specifically cultural globalization, should be interpreted other than in its most common sense: as an encroachment of western products and values upon the rest of the world. There is more and more evidence for multipolarity, 'multiple globalizations' (Befu, 2001b: 4) or competing centers. Japan has been no doubt identified as one of these centers, however, largely in terms of flow of consumer goods and finance rather than images and information (Featherstone, 1995: 9). Moreover, it is often

suggested that the enigma of Japanese economic 'superpowerdom' lies in its disproportionately minor cultural influence upon the world, as compared to 'the West' (Iwabuchi, 1999: 178).

The enigma of Japanese power and Japan's alleged lack of global cultural influence have been related to the observation made by globalization theoreticians that in the postwar era 'the celebration of Japanese national identity, or *Nihonjinron*, has been muted or directed inwards' (Featherstone, 1995: 9). The Japanese are often accused of cultural closure. They are also blamed when 'they put Japanese culture on exhibit, in the framework of organized international contacts [they do it] as a way of displaying *irreducible distinctiveness* rather [than] in order to make it spread' (Hannerz, 1989: 67–8 quoted in Iwabuchi, 1999: 178, my emphasis). We have no doubt become familiar with this sense of 'irreducible distinctiveness' throughout this article, and with the ways it is promoted and in fact marketed both inwardly and globally. Hannerz (1989: 67–8) is also certainly right in suspecting that the Japanese 'find it a strange notion that anyone can "become Japanese"'. But, the question remains: Is globalization only about becoming alike?

Theories of globalization can be largely divided into globalization-as-homogenization and globalization-as-heterogenization (Featherstone and Lash, 1995: 4; Pieterse, 1995: 62). The alternatives to the homogenization theories have emphasized the mixing of cultures in concepts such as cultural hybridization (García Canclini, 1995; Pieterse, 1995) or creolization (Hannerz, 1987, 1992). The case presented in this article may be regarded as another version of globalization: globalization that highlights 'cultural difference'.

The attraction and consumption of the 'Other' has of course been observed. However, this Other has almost always been the 'exotic' inferior Other – even its authenticity comes from a western and not from an indigenous perspective (Classen and Howes, 1996; Crain, 1996; McGowan, 1993). Whereas this Other may be an active participant in self-exoticizing, this process is regarded as internalizing the West's exotic image of it (Classen and Howes, 1996: 187). It seems, then, that when the 'West' promotes western culture it is an act of self-importance, but when the same initiative is taken by the non-West, Japan included – Tobin (1992: 31) mentions Japan's old feelings of being laughed at as one of the reasons for self-exoticism – it is always considered an act of inferiority done for the sake of pleasing the West.

The case at hand which follows closely a specific process of cultural globalization 'from below' may be taken to question this almost axiomatic

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argumentation. We have seen how the cultural product labeled 'Japanese culture' is produced in Japan first and foremost for local consumption and then travels to the global arena. Yoshino (1999: 23) shows how in the case of business contacts with the world, a Japanese interest in improving inter-cultural understanding ironically ends up with cultural nationalism. This article shows how interested global cosmopolitans in contact with Japan willingly take part in consuming and then re-producing at home this same product known both in Japan and globally as 'the Japanese culture'.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. The research also included participant observations in Japanese art workshops and all major and some minor events representing Japanese culture, mainly in central Israel, from 1998 to mid-2001. Although the article is primarily based on qualitative data, it also includes analysis of over 450 questionnaires filled out by people interested in Japanese culture, such as visitors to Japan-related festivals, visitors to the Japanese museum in Haifa, students of Japanese language, and participants in non-academic courses about Japanese culture, aimed at characterizing the local concept of 'Japanese culture'.
2. This is not to argue that in the global cultural world – Israel included – there are no other prevalent representations of Japan. Whose child is not familiar with Pokemon, the Ninja Turtles, or Tamagochi and Sony Playstation? However, the concern of this article is limited to those aspects of Japanese culture which, at least until recently, have gained both in Japan and outside Japan the seal of 'The Japanese Culture'.
3. For a detailed discussion of the content of the *Nihonjinron* see Befu (1984), Dale (1986), Iwabuchi (1994), Yoshino (1992).
4. Shifra Horn's (1992) book is based on the author's personal experience in Japan and strongly emphasizes the Otherness of the Japanese culture and people.
5. The background is the Palestinian uprising known as *intifadat Al-Aqusa* that began in October 2000.
6. 'Modern Living' fairs have been held in Israel from the 1940s. The Hebrew name used to be *Adam Umeono* ('a person and his dwelling') but was recently changed to *Adam Veolamo* ('a person and his world') in order to 'create a more modern atmosphere'.
7. '*Wabi*, *sabi* and *suki*' symbolize the combination of rustic simplicity with the patina of the old and subtle elegance and are regarded as the most characteristic expressions of Japanese aesthetic principles.

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