

GSAPS THE SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL THESIS

CONSUMING JAPAN

- the consumption of Japanese cultural products in Thailand -

4003S020-0

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Keywords: Japan, popular culture, cultural products, ethnography, Thailand

As a study on the consumption of Japanese cultural products in Thailand, this thesis attempts to pursue two aims. One is to illustrate the consumption of Japanese cultural products in Thailand through ethnographies and empirical data. The other is to seek a mechanism that explains how and why Thai youth has a positive attitude toward Japanese cultural products.

Since the 1990s, many academic studies on Japanese popular culture have been published and the mass media often publishes articles on the consumption of Japanese cultural products outside Japan. In the previous studies on Japan's popular culture in Asia, however, I found three points which limit the scope and the depth to analyze the phenomenon and this thesis has been designed to complement the previous studies. First, the discussions in this thesis include observations and analyses of Japanese cultural products such as J-Pop fan club activities, cosplay activities by manga, anime and game fans, Japanese food, and Japanese kawaii (cute) fashion in Thailand while the previous studies mostly focused on media products such as TV dramas, anime and games. Second, this study is designed to take a qualitative approach, ethnography in particular, as the tool to collect empirical data while the previous studies had a tendency to take the approach of media and cultural studies which mainly used published data and information from the media industry. Third, this study focuses on Thailand as the field of study while the fields of study in the previous studies were mostly limited in countries and regions in East Asia, namely in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Korea. Although the phenomenon of Japanese cultural products being popular among Thai youth is mentioned in some studies, there is no comprehensive study which focuses on Thailand as the field of study.

The empirical data in this thesis starts with the results of the questionnaire research which examined the consumption of Japanese cultural products by Thai high school students. Data from collected questionnaires from 677 of seven secondary schools in Thailand has been designed to see which Japanese cultural products are vigorously consumed and to see how the students consume them in their everyday lives on an individual level. Subsequently, the four kinds of Japanese cultural influences found in contemporary Thailand are discussed with the ethnographies and the results of the questionnaire researches.

First, an ethnographic study of a J-Pop idol fan club in Thailand is presented. The ethnography of the fan club and the questionnaire research given to the members show the organization and the activities, which analyze how the J-Pop idol group has been accepted and how it is being consumed in Thailand. Second, cosplay activities in Bangkok are studied through ethnography and questionnaire. This study investigates the consumption of the Japanese subculture "kosupure" (cosplay) to view the consumption of manga, anime or video games from a different perspective than the previous studies. Third, the consumption of Japanese food in Thailand is examined. The ethnographies and the questionnaires of other cultural products have revealed that Japanese food is vigorously consumed by Thai youth. This study attempts to view the background of the Japanese food boom in Thailand and to analyze the reasons for the growing consumption. Fourth, Japanese fashion in Thailand is investigated.

Japanese magazines for young women have recently been translated and published in Thailand, which suggests an increasing interest in Japanese fashion among Thai women. With ethnographies, interviews and published data, this thesis examines why and how young women in Thailand have become consumers of Japanese fashion.

Both the findings and results in the four ethnographic studies on the consumption of Japanese cultural products have suggested the important role played by Japanese language education in Thailand in terms of Japanese cultural products. Using the questionnaire research given to the students in the Department of Japanese Language at *Chulalongkorn University*, this thesis attempts to establish the relationship between language study and the consumption of Japanese cultural products. The role of Japanese language education in diffusing cultural products and captivating Thai youth is also revealed by ethnographic analysis.

The discussions are further developed by the perspectives of "global and local factors," "the presence of Japan in Thailand," "cultural proximity" and "cultural affordance," which attempt to explain why Thai youth have a positive attitude toward Japanese cultural products and how they select their favorite cultural products from other cultural products. Pursuing the aims of this study, this thesis illustrates the mechanism of consumption of Japanese cultural products in Thailand and reveals why Japanese cultural products are attractive to Thai people. The thesis concludes with an epilogue which contains notes for future studies. In the last chapter, the issues of gender, urban middle classes and public diplomacy (cultural diplomacy) are briefly discussed as memoranda for future studies.

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