



All interviews in this research were conducted as spoken conversations in Japanese via AI moderation on Quals.ai platform.

How Do Japanese People Feel About the Global Use of Their Culture in Pop Media?

In today's globalized world, elements of Japanese culture are widely featured in international pop culture—through media, fashion, branding, and entertainment. This study aims to understand how Japanese people perceive the global use of their cultural symbols and traditions. Using Quals.ai, an AI-powered qualitative research tool, we conducted in-depth voice interviews in Japanese, allowing participants to express their thoughts and emotions naturally. The insights reveal how media portrayals and cultural adaptations around the world affect the way Japanese individuals experience and reflect on their cultural identity.

The Global Reflection of Japanese Culture

"The world's eyes are on Japan!"

Japanese culture is becoming more visible in the globalized world day by day. Many elements such as anime, cuisine, music, and traditional values are welcomed with great interest across the globe. This study aims to understand how Japanese individuals perceive the representation of their culture abroad and how these representations reflect on their sense of identity. Participants' comments point to a complex spectrum of emotions that include both pride and concern.

"The recognition of Japanese culture is a source of pride, but misinterpretations are worrisome." (Male, 36)



Between Pride and Concern: The Spread of Culture

The worldwide recognition of Japanese culture evokes mixed feelings among Japanese individuals. On the one hand, the appreciation of their cultural values brings happiness, while on the other hand, incomplete or superficial representations are seen as a threat to their identity. With the increasing spread of their culture, the Japanese are paying more attention to how it is being shaped in other countries.

"If Japan's culture is misunderstood, it can affect our identity."
(Female, 39)

"It's pleasing that our culture is recognized globally, but we must be careful."
(Female, 35)

Seeking Balance in Cultural Representation

Representations of Japanese culture abroad evoke complex emotions among individuals. While participants appreciate the interest shown in their culture in some contexts, they also express concern that local adaptations in other countries may distort its authenticity. There is a widely shared view that Japanese identity must be reflected without being overly simplified. In particular, there's a strong emphasis on the need for balance in media and pop culture representations.

"To what extent other countries represent Japanese culture accurately is debatable." (Female, 44)

"Many countries reinterpret Japanese culture in their own ways, which can sometimes have negative effects." (Female, 32)

Commitment to Cultural Identity and Struggle with Change

While participants say they are open to the natural evolution of their culture over time, they attach more importance to this change happening within Japan itself. The evolution of Japanese culture abroad is met with more understanding, whereas the loss of traditions within their own country is seen as a more serious concern. This reflects a deeply internalized commitment to cultural identity.

"It's not a problem if our culture changes abroad; the real issue is if it changes within Japan." (Male, 36)

"Japanese culture must not lose its traditions." (Female, 46)

A photograph of four Japanese people of different ages, smiling. From left to right: a young man, a young woman, a middle-aged woman, and an older man. The text is overlaid on this image.

Generational Differences in Cultural Representation

According to the interviews, feelings about how Japanese culture is represented globally tend to vary across age groups. Younger generations view the global spread of their culture as an exciting and dynamic process full of opportunities for growth. In contrast, older generations are more likely to perceive this spread as carrying risks, particularly the potential distortion or erosion of cultural values.

"Preserving our traditions is important. We can be open to change, but we shouldn't cross certain boundaries." (Male, 43)

"I still think it's a good thing that the culture is spreading." (Female, 37)



Where Culture Meets Branding

Brands inspired by Japanese culture present both an opportunity and a test for consumers. Participants question whether brands that incorporate cultural elements truly understand them. They emphasize that culture should not be used merely as a marketing tool, but rather approached in a meaningful and respectful manner.

"Brands must use cultural elements correctly; otherwise, they can pose a threat." (Male, 34)

"Cultural affinity is important, but quality should not be overlooked." (Male, 34)

A photograph of a busy, dimly lit market stall. The stall is constructed with wooden poles and has a corrugated metal roof. Several people are visible, including a woman in a yellow and red patterned headscarf and a man in a red shirt. The stall is filled with various goods, including what appears to be food items and household items. The lighting is warm and focused on the stall, creating a sense of a bustling, traditional market environment.

Cultural Sensitivity in Brand Perception

Japanese consumers pay close attention to how brands use Japanese culture. For participants, a brand's approach is not just an aesthetic choice, but a criterion for whether it aligns with their values. While quality always comes first, cultural alignment also influences purchase decisions.

"A brand's relationship with our culture may affect my preferences, but quality is always the priority." (Female, 37)

"Brands inspired by Japanese culture may have a future full of innovation."
(Female, 46)



The Reflection of Culture on the Table

Japanese cuisine has gained global popularity. The reinterpretation of dishes like sushi and ramen in different countries is a source of pride but also a sensitive topic for the Japanese. The loss of originality or detachment from cultural context in flavors can cause discomfort among some participants.

"The global love for sushi is a source of pride" (Female, 44)

"There are different versions of ramen in foreign countries—some are really interesting." (Female, 37)



The Impact of Japanese Music and Cinema

J-POP and cinema also play a major role in Japan's cultural export. The growing global interest in these fields is welcomed by the Japanese. However, some believe that certain interpretations do not align with the spirit of Japanese culture or are inaccurately portrayed. Participants feel these representations should be approached with more care.

"It's great that J-POP is finding a place on the world stage." (Female, 46)

"It's wonderful that anime films are popular worldwide." (Male, 36)

"I simply have an interest, but if they are just using a Japanese name, I look at them with suspicion." (Male, 34)

Openness and Care in Cultural Sharing

While the Japanese express openness to the transmission of their cultural elements to other societies, they also stress that this should be done carefully and with understanding. They believe traditional content should be presented not just aesthetically, but also with meaning.

"The reinterpretation of Japanese cuisine in other countries is nice, but some versions deviate from the original." (Female, 35)

"Samurai movies are a wonderful reflection of our culture." (Female, 44)

A person's hand is shown painting a ceramic vase with a brush. The scene is set in a traditional Japanese room with a large window in the background. The lighting is soft and warm, highlighting the textures of the pottery and the brushwork.

Global Interaction = Opportunity or Threat?

The increasing global visibility of Japanese culture is seen by some not as a threat, but as a great opportunity. The Japanese believe that sharing their cultural values with the world will increase mutual understanding. Respect and accuracy in representation should be prioritized throughout this process.

"Global interactions offer new opportunities for Japanese culture." (Male, 34)



Preserve Culture, Open to the World

Japanese individuals believe it is important to protect their authentic identity while sharing their culture with the world. They emphasize the need for accurate narration, respect, and proper representation to prevent misinterpretations of their culture. They manage this process with both pride and a sense of responsibility.

"It's nice that our culture is appreciated worldwide, but misrepresentation is not pleasant." (Female, 37)



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Individuals' Budget Adjustments and Brand Loyalty

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Insights in a nutshell Interviews SmartAsk™ Report Research Design

Consumers are prioritizing essential expenses, switching to more affordable brands where possible, and maintaining loyalty to trusted brands perceived as high value, while adopting strategies to cope with financial stress and maintain mental well-being amidst inflation.

Prioritizing Essential Expenses

In the face of inflation and economic challenges, many consumers have strategically adjusted their budgets to focus on essential expenses. Rent, utilities, groceries, and children's education are consistently prioritized as non-negotiable. For instance, one participant noted, "Food and groceries are non-negotiable due to our family's health needs," highlighting the importance of maintaining essential living standards despite financial constraints. Many have avoided investments in property or stocks due to economic uncertainties, choosing instead to focus on immediate needs and stability.

Brand Loyalty and Cost-Effective Alternatives