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IMPORTING THE AMERICAN DREAM: JAPANESE HARDWARE AND SOFT POWER

By Kenneth S. Klein

The deep and penetrating impact of Japanese products, whether economic or cultural, challenges America-centric assumptions about globalization.   While most people think of globalization as something America did to the world, globalization can also be defined as what Japan did to America.[1]   The value of studying Japanese imports can also be seen in their continued and ubiquitous presence in American life: from Nintendo Games; to Honda Civics; to character goods such as Pokemon and Hello Kitty; as well as the rising interest and respect enjoyed by Japanese animation. In fact, the purchase and use of Japanese goods in recent American history became so common that when public awareness spiked in the early 1990s, it created a widespread sense of anxiety now known as the "Japan Panic." For over three decades, consumers had failed to notice, or chose not to care about, just how many of their goods came from Japan. Suddenly, they panicked. But clearly, something had convinced them to buy. Therefore, the strategies Japanese companies used to reach American markets, as well as the changing nature of the goods and services themselves, are all worth considering.

Japanese products and services succeeded in post-war American culture and business through a focus on adaptation that downplayed their origins and emphasized, whenever possible, quality above all else, redefining what Americans expected from Japanese imports. Throughout this process, two major trends nuanced it.   First, Japanese products initially struggled to be taken seriously, and Japanese companies only embraced their national identities after their products had been sufficiently associated with quality. Secondly, Japanese imports evolved

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[1] Andrew McKevitt, *Consuming Japan: Popular Culture and the Globalizations of 1980s America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 38.

from being associated mostly with hardware to being equally, if not increasingly, associated with software. This represented a major shift in what Americans assumed a Japanese import could be.

At this point it is important to define software since there is a social and technical definition. For example, as games industry expert Casey O'Donnel argues, game making involves far more than computer software, so much so that she titles her essay "This is not a Software Industry."[2] However, she clearly intends a technical definition, and O'Donnel's main point seems to be to clarify that game making is more than computer coding. Meanwhile, Japanese cultural expert Frederick Schodt's use of the term is social in intent and refers to products of culture like art and entertainment. In arguing that Nintendo excelled in software and changed opinions about Japan's ability to produce software, this paper assumes the social definition.

The story of the American consumption of Japanese goods can be told from any object or service that started in Japan and found its way to the United States. This paper will focus on a few major items, from the late 1950s to the turn of the millennium, with special focus on the 1980s and 1990s. These items include the Japanese monster icon Godzilla, the early import animation *Astro Boy*, Japanese electronics giant Sony, Nintendo video games and game systems, and Japanese baseball players Hideo Nomo and Ichiro Suzuki's careers in Major League Baseball (MLB). Though it may seem odd to include Nomo and Suzuki in a list otherwise made up of material goods, the idea is that it was their skill as athletes as a service and as entertainment that was imported. Likewise, it will be shown that their careers were part of the same economic and cultural contexts that effected all Japanese imports.

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[2] Casey O'Donnell, "This is Not a Software Industry," In *The Video Game Industry: Formation, Present State, and Future,* edited by Peter Zackariasson and Timothy L. Wilson, 17-33 (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012), 17-18.

As Japanese cultural expert William Tsutsui makes clear, creating a place for Japanese media within American culture has been a long-term process.[3] Godzilla and other early imports set the stage, "unnoticed," for later influxes of Japanese culture.[4] This is important because it supports the larger idea that many Americans did not always know they were consuming Japanese culture and that when they did, they did not take it very seriously. It also creates a wide time frame that acknowledges Japanese pop culture imports as far back as the 1950s instead of beginning with more recent trends such as games and anime.

A CBS poll in 1985 asked 1500 Americans to name a famous Japanese person. The top three answers were Hirohito, Bruce Lee, and Godzilla.[5] How did this happen? By 1985 Godzilla had literally become a household name, but his strange journey into American pop culture also warped him into something funnier than intended. This in turn, meant that many Americans first experienced Japan as a source of entertaining, but laughably cheesy culture.[6]

In 1958 the Japanese horror movie *Gojira* came to American theaters as *Godzilla: King of Monsters*. To its credit, the original *Gojira* was made to be legitimately scary. It also hoped to say something about public concern over nuclear proliferation, environmental decay, and the shadow of WWII.[7] While *Gojira* drew significant inspiration from American films like *King Kong* (1933) and *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953), it set itself apart with a more nuanced story, unique special effects, and emotional intensity.[8] After its domestic premiere,

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[3] William M Tsutsui, *Japanese Popular Culture and Globalization* (Ann Arbor, MI: Association for Asian Studis, 2010), 38.

[4] Tsutsui, *Japanese Popular Culture,* 39-40

[5] William M. Tsutsui, *Godzilla on My Mind: Fifty Years of the King of Monsters*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2007), 6-7.

[6] Anne Allison, *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination* (Berkely, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 51.

[7] Tsutsui, *Godzilla,* 14.

[8] Ibid., 20.

Japanese commentators celebrated, with one saying "Gojira makes me proud that Japan can produce something of this quality."[9] Unfortunately, this particular perception of quality did not translate as it relied on serious themes that were cut from the American version.

Unsurprisingly given its dark, post-war nuclear themes, the uncut version of *Gojira* contained some anti-American elements, such as war-time Rising Sun flags and a soundtrack that evoked imperial war marches. Likewise, the finale of the film firmly establishes that Japan, and not the world, has triumphed over the threat.[10] Yet when *Godzilla* premiered at Loew's State Theater in 1958, Americans audiences received a heavily edited retelling. Themes of nationalism and war were removed.[11] Goofy dubbing that failed to sync with Japanese actors was added.[12]

This did not stop Godzilla from bringing money to American businessmen and cheap fun to American audiences. Thanks to the suburbanization of America, which hurt downtown cinemas, and anti-trust laws against big studios in the 1950s, smaller studios began to flourish by spinning out cheap B-movies to fill drive-in theaters.[13] *Godzilla* and its numerous sequels proved the perfect match for the drive-in and its core audience of working class families with kids and teenagers. Neither the drive-in owner nor the fans worried much about the cheesy quality of the films.[14]

In fact, theater owners often played up the wacky reputation Godzilla had gained in the United States. Publicity stunts, like posting movie ads next to demolished building or giant footprints leading up to the theater, flourished.[13] And yet, precisely because of the gimmicks and cringe-worthy translations, Godzilla created its own kind of success.

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[9] Allison, 48.

[10] Tsutsui, *Godzilla,* 35.

[11] Ibid., 40.

[12] Ibid., 122.

[13] Ibid., 118-119.

Terrible dubbing even became integral to the experience.[14] This was a good early example of "localization," or the process of adapting and presenting a product in the best way possible for its new market. Interestingly, it was the American version that was sent to Europe and other global audiences. In this way, the lousy edits actually helped the movie spread by linking it to American distribution channels.[15] In the end, clever adaption helped Godzilla transcend its lost-in-translation cheesiness by presenting its goofiness as a good thing.

      Television syndication was also vital to Godzilla's early spread. As Henry Saperstein, a veteran of Godzilla localization, attests, a Godzilla film had been on the air somewhere in America every week from 1960-1995.[16] And in this way, Godzilla found a permanent place in the American psyche. This same Saturday television spot would also give life to what would become one of Japan's most important media exports: animation.

      On September 7, 1963 NBC premiered *Astro Boy*, an animated show for kids about a boy-like robot who adventured and battled villains. Animation expert Susan Napier argues this made 1963 "perhaps the most important date in Japanese animation history."[17] It was the first weekly Japanese television show, animated or otherwise, to ever be shown in the United States.[20] While it eventually became a ratings success, most children watching it had no idea it was Japanese.[18] Meanwhile back in Japan, people were thrilled that a small piece of Japanese culture was

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[14] Ibid., 122

[15] Allison, 51.

[16] Ibid., 120.

[17] Susan Napier, *Anime: from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Griffin, 2005), 16. [20] Frederick L. Schodt, *The Astro Boy Essays: Osumu Tezuka, Mighty Atom, and the Manga/Anime Revolution* (Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 2007), 87.

[18] Ibid., 88.

well-received abroad because to them, that meant Japan was beginning to recover culturally and economically as a nation.[19]

Astro Boy was the brain child of Japanese artist Osamu Tezuka, best known for his work writing and illustrating Japanese-style comics called manga. Though he lived off the success of his comics, animation was his passion. Disney works such as Bambi and Snow White stood among his favorites, and by the end of his life he had seen them 90 and 50 times respectively.[20] However, the harsh cultural and economic conditions of post-war Japan forced and inspired Tezuka to create works quite different from his inspiration.

During the occupation years, the heavy emphasis on rebuilding through technology encouraged Tezuka to explore questions about man's relationships with machines.[21] So in late 1962, when Japan's Fuji Television made Tezuka an offer to animate his comic *Astro Boy* for a weekly show, Tezuka jumped at the chance. Yet widespread austerity measures left Tezuka and his colleagues with few resources to work with. These severe conditions also affected the animation itself. To make up for both time and money, Tezuka's Mushi studios chose to make their show in a style known as limited animation.[22] In short, artists used about half as many drawings per second of film as normal. Realism suffered, but as Schodt argues, Tezuka and his team, without fully realizing it, pioneered the unique priorities and tactics that would later define Japanese Animation. To overcome lost realism, Tezuka put extra effort into story-telling, developing characters, and emotional impact.[23] This caused the development of Japanese animation to take a different path than its western inspiration via more mature content, and complex plots

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[19] Ibid., 90.

[20] Allison, 59.

[21] Allison, 55-56.

[22] Schodt, *Astro Boy,* 66.

[23] Ibid., 71.

with long running stories.[24] Though *Astro Boy* quickly became a nationwide success in Japan, narrow contracts kept Tezuka from making much profit off the show. However, there was one giant "untapped" market: the United States.[25]

Fred Ladd, the man who localized the show for NBC, recalls that he was first attracted to show because it reminded him positively of Pinocchio. Likewise, he thought a story of boy trying to find his place in the world could resonate with American viewers.[26] However, the version of the show that NBC viewers enjoyed, much like Godzilla before it, was heavily edited. Ladd eventually travelled to Japan to explain some of the changes to the Mushi staff. He wanted them to know that *cultural differences* were being edited out, not mistakes. Censored content included violence, cruelty to animals, depictions of African Americans, drugs, religious content, and nudity. According to Ladd, the hardest part of localization was downplaying the violence.[27] For example, if Astro walked up to a body on the street and said "look, he's dead" in Japanese, he would say "He's unconscious, get him to the hospital!" in English. So while some content was lost in translation, *Astro Boy* was able to introduce American viewers to the format and unique quality of Japanese animation, even if they didn't know why it was different.

While Godzilla and *Astro Boy* were filling TV space, Sony was quietly setting up shop in New York, planning for the day when Japan would be known for quality above all else. Unlike *Godzilla* which never truly escaped its comic role, or *Astro Boy*, whose Japanese identity remained obscure for years, Sony would find a way to deliver unironic quality that became associated with Japan.

In 1953, Sony leader Akio Morita set out on an international business tour to study foreign markets. While in Germany, he was teased

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[24] Napier 17.

[25] Schodt, *Astro Boy,* 75.

[26] Ibid., 80.

[27] Ibid., 84.

by a waiter who pointed to a miniature umbrella on a plate and said, "this was made in your country." Morita later claimed that this moment motivated him to use Sony to push Japan beyond being associated with "cheap imitations and trinkets."[28] Yet the early leaders of Sony also assumed they could not effectively compete in old markets, especially back in Japan where their rival Matsushita dominated domestic electronics sales.[29] Sony's goal then became to bring high-tech goods to foreign markets, not just because that made good business sense but also because Morita was determined to prove "made in Japan" was a good thing and "not a badge of shame" like he felt it had become.[30]

Morita created the name Sony specifically to help the company reach international markets. Morita explained that he wanted a name without any existing meaning, a word that could be intermixed with any language. He was also inspired by the old Latin meaning of "sonus" or sound. He then combined that sound with the Japanese slang turn sōnny-boy, which communicated youth and cleverness. Between the two, he created Sony with its characteristic long ō sound.[31] Furthermore, as Morita himself often admitted, Sony's early goal was not to make runaway profit but to establish a long-term market in the United States.[32] His goal was simply to get Sony up and running in America and to begin building a positive brand image.

In 1957, Sony found a partner, Delmonico, to distribute goods out of New York.[33] This endeavor required Morita to adapt to life in New

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[28] John Nathan, *Sony: The Private Life* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 51-52.

[29] Richard J. Barnet and John Cavanagh, *Global Dreams: Imperial Corporations and the New World Order* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 44.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid., 85.

[32] Nathan, 67.

[33] Ibid., 55.

York, and more importantly, American business life and culture. To this end, Morita became especially effective in business confrontations. His confidence and strong will in negotiations surprised and subverted the then current stereotype that assumed Japanese businessmen always avoided direct confrontation.[34]

When the powerful American company Union Carbide (UC) threatened to sue Sony for selling their batteries bundled with Sony's radio imports, Morita stood his ground. Facing UC's agent, he bluntly pointed out that one battery a radio did not mean anything next to the all the batteries people would buy to replace it once it went out. The implication: Sony was creating demands for UC's batteries, and the obvious choice was to drop the issue. After that discussion, Union Carbide dropped the suit.[35]

Sony continued to grow its American base throughout the 1960s, yet it rarely relied on meeting established consumer demands. Instead, as Morita often explained, the goal from the start was to create new demands and markets that only Sony's innovative products could meet.[36] This strategy meshed well with larger market trends as consumer products after WWII began to transition from saving time to filling it.[37] Consequently, Sony built its success around doing just that.

According to business historian and translator John Nathan, while Morita presented the Walkman concept to his colleagues as something that had come to him on a whim, the goal was clearly to offset Sony's recent losses in the Video Cassette Recorder (VCR) format war. While there are many accounts of the Walkman's origin,[38] Nathan reports that the idea was inspired by

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[34] Ibid., 63.
[35] Ibid., 64.
[36] Barnet and Cavanagh, 48.
[37] Ibid., 52.
[38] Du Gay, et al., 41.

Sony's master technician Ibuka's desire to listen to classical music on an international flight.[39]

The formal development of the product was rushed for maximum market impact, and many of the Walkman components were taken from existing Sony products. No market studies were done initially. The whole process was supported entirely by Morita's personal confidence and will power. Many at Sony were skeptical at first. But after a month of stagnant sales, the Walkman took off in August 1979. Japanese sales were so strong that production was unable to create enough extra machines for export until 1980.[40]

Importantly, the Walkman (and its headphones) were marketed as youthful, fashionable, and active. Advertising demonstrations were done in parks to show how everyday hobbies could be mixed with the Walkman experience.[41] As the Walkman began to dominate the market, it made itself a central part of international youth culture. As a part of this new youth culture, the Walkman also made headphones attractive. Sony carefully associated them with style and energy.[42] Before, headphones were only associated with medical problems and engineers, not versatility and leisure.

And yet, in all these new positive associations, it became unclear whether "made in Japan" was essential or incidental. The Walkman was designed to be cheap and portable, so as to appeal to students and other young people. As mentioned, it was marketed as youthful and mobile. But as Japanese culture and media scholar Koichi Iwabuchi argues, there was not anything particularly Japanese about this lifestyle.[43] Sony's international success lay in its ability to adapt a positive image for Sony itself that was then only later grafted on to people's image of Japan. This

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[39] Nathan, 150.

[40] Ibid., 154.

[41] Ibid., 155

[42] Ibid., 153.

[43] Koichi Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 28.

can be seen in the success of Akio Morita's 1986 autobiography, *Made in Japan*, which presented Sony's success, at least in part, as a product of its Japanese business strategies.

It is also worth stressing that Sony did not fit in well with the rest of Japan's corporate system. Sony lies outside of the inner circle of the "keiretsu," that is, the formalized cliques of corporations that dominate Japanese business.[44] Regardless, their international success eventually earned them certain advantages at home. For instance, Matsushita, their main domestic rival, has even said they would never let Sony go under, because Sony had come to represent "the good name of Japanese electronics" abroad.[45] And yet this sums up the Sony paradox perfectly: a company completely at home neither in Japan or America that became the poster child for the positive reputation of Japanese goods.

Despite Sony's success, Japanese quality became one-dimensional. Well into 1990s Japan was often seen as only capable of producing hardware like VCRs, while software such as the movies on the tapes inside them remained squarely in the domain of the United States.[46] For example, even with Japanese hardware like Walkmans and VCRs flooding the American market, by 1985, sixty percent of all VHS tapes in global circulation were American in origin.[47] However, in the case of Japanese games system like the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES), the games inside were increasingly made in Japan as well, and their runaway success would eventually challenge the notion of hardware-only Japan.[48]

The Nintendo Entertainment System was arguably the most important piece of Japanese gaming hardware in history. Equally

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[44] Barnet and Cavanagh, 62.

[45] Ibid., 61.

[46] Frederick L. Schodt, *America and the Four Japans: Friend, Foe, Model, Mirror* (Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 1994), 166.

[47] McKevitt, 150.

[48] Schodt, *Four Japans,* 168-169.

important, it was also the vehicle for one of the most influential pieces of export software Japan had yet produced: Super Mario Bros.

By 1986, after months of small-scale deals in New York, Nintendo had established a broad enough market for a national American release of their new game system, alongside its most famous game, Super Mario. The NES would go on to sell 34 million units in the United States alone. Super Mario Bros.'s impact went beyond sales figures though. It inspired the numerous games that followed to emphasize explorations and complex gameplay: the two qualities that made *Super Mario Bros.* so entertaining. More importantly, it helped create the still growing world of gaming culture, a culture built not only on hardware but also on software.[49]

This culture was born at the popular level. As such, mass market magazines such as *Nintendo Power* offer good information about both gaming culture and people's relationship to it, but there are limits to such sources. As Michael Newman relates in *Atari Age* quoting Lynn Spigel, popular sources cannot tell us what people, "do, think, or feel" but they can tell us what people "read, watch, and say."[50] Yet, since fan magazines often feed off reader consensus and input such as letters to the editor, it may also be fair to say that sources like *Nintendo Power* do in fact present at least what some people thought and felt. With that caveat, *Nintendo Power* stands out as particularly helpful as it offers evidence not only of how Nintendo presented itself to American audiences, but also how readers experienced the Nintendo brand.

Mia Consalvo, an expert on video games and game culture, claims that Nintendo worked hard to strike a balance when presenting import games, to make sure they were not seen as too different or too

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[49] Jeff Ryan, *Super Mario: how Nintendo Conquered America* (London: Portfolio, 2013), 78-79.

[50] Michael Z. Newman, *Atari Age: The Emergence of Video Games in America* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2017), 13.

foreign.[51] She mentions that any conversation about Western perceptions of Japan must inevitably consider questions of orientalism, such as the long-standing stereotypes and assumptions that color the West's understanding of the East. Yet she nuances these claims by explaining that "such imaginings are not always negative or false. The realities are usually much more complex."[52] An example of this complexity shows up on the cover of Issue Five of *Nintendo Power*: a blue-eyed ninja representing the top story, a new game called Ninja Gaiden.[53]

While cultural critics might find it easy to slight an image like this, Consalvo argues that simple anti-orientalist readings of games are extremely limiting, and often forget that depicting difference does not have to be othering or negative.[54] With *Nintendo Power*'s coverage of Ninja Gaiden, this seems to hold true. For while it exploits the simple "cool factor" of ninjas and magic, it portrays the main character, with an obviously foreign name, Ryu, positively.
Additionally, an authentic Japanese language subtitle is included under the English one. According to the article, "Ryu is the ultimate Ninja" and as such he is portrayed as heroic and competent.[55] Interestingly, Japan is never mentioned explicitly in his back story, only that Ryu is from the very Japanese sounding "Hayabusa clan."[56]

Equally odd, page 28 of the article claims no one knows the true origin of the ninja arts. It suggests they might have evolved from the training of ancient Chinese monks while others believe it was developed in Japan 500 years ago, but mystery and not Japanese culture is

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[51] Mia Consalvo, *Atari to Zelda: Japan's Video Games in Global Contexts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2016), 10.

[52] Ibid., 11.

[53] Cover, *Nintendo Power,* March/April, 1989, Retromags – The Vintage Video Game Magazine Archive.

[54] Consalvo, 13.

[55] "Ninja Gaiden," *Nintendo Power,* March/April, 1989, 20, Retromags – The Vintage Video Game Magazine Archive.

[56] Ibid., 22-23.

emphasized. The emphasis remains more focused on difference itself as something fun and exotic rather than on relating any specific culture's history.[57] In these ways, Nintendo distances
the game from reading as bluntly Japanese.

In other early issues, foreign themes are presented with plenty of Americanization. While Issue One's coverage of the game Double Dragon also includes a Japanese language subtitle, its meaning or the fact it is Japanese is not explained to the reader. So while the hero, Billy Lee, is depicted as heroically-built with a noticeably Asian face, all readers learn about him is that he is a martial arts expert determined to save his girlfriend. Of his nationality, nothing is said.[58] Instead, the advertisement focuses on communicating excitement, action, and grittiness: the qualities of a good action game.

Later in the same issue, an ad for the action game Contra shows two men back to back with assault rifles firing away. While one appears white, and the other Asian, nothing else is suggested about them except that they are "guerilla warriors" on a mission to stop an alien onslaught that started in New Zealand.[59] While admittedly, early games such as Double Dragon and Contra were not technically sophisticated enough to support dense stories within the gameplay itself, many early *Nintendo Power* articles existed solely to give players the narrative background the games could not provide for themselves. In these articles, the Japanese companies Technos, Tecmo, and Konami, all made noticeable choices to present heroes whose charisma and competence mattered more than their ambiguous origins.

Here it is important to note that this process worked both ways. In the final pages of Issue One of *Nintendo Power*, the editor Howard Phillips writes a special column about the runaway success of the game

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[57] Ibid., 28-29.

[58] "Double Dragon," *Nintendo Power*, July/August, 1988, 62-63, Retromags – The Vintage Video Game Magazine Archive.

[59] "Contra: Now Playing," *Nintendo Power*, July/August, 1988, 74-75, Retromags – The Vintage Video Game Magazine Archive.

Dragon Quest in Japan. He tells readers that oddly enough, ninjas and samurai are falling out of style in Japan. Instead, games about medieval swordplay and sorcery with a western flavor are enjoying increasing success. He notes that Dragon Quest's success makes sense, as it delivers, "good graphics, good programming, and good sound all in one single game." Yet, he wonders why "American born sword and magic games" are "making such a splash" in Japan. (Though created by the Japanese company Enix, Dragon Quest did in fact resemble many American role-playing games.) He then teases readers to look out to see if and when Nintendo might bring the game to the United States.[60]

As Dragon Quest did, upon its eventual American release as Dragon Warrior, many games actually came out of a three-stage exchange, in which American concepts reached Japan only to be sent back over to the United States. In the case of Konami's Castlevania series of vampire-hunting adventure games, this is exactly what appears to have happened. On the front cover of Issue Two, the hero of the Castlevania series, Simon Belmont, is depicted as a classic Western medieval hero armed with Dracula's decapitated head in his grip.[61] In the coinciding article, vaguely Shakespearean language is used to introduce Simon and his quest to hunt and destroy Dracula.[62] By working with and adapting well-known Western legends and tropes, the Japanese company Konami was pre-positioned to present its game to an understanding audience.

Nintendo Power also provides several interesting examples of how video games functioned in the hardware vs. software dynamic of Japanese imports, as alluded to earlier. In fact, video games themselves

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[60] Phillip Howard, NES Journal, "World News," *Nintendo Power*, July/August, 1988, 92, Retromags – The Vintage Video Game Magazine Archive.

[61] Cover, *Nintendo Power,* September/October, 1988, Retromags – The Vintage Video Game Magazine Archive.

[62] "Castlevania II: Simon's Quest," *Nintendo Power,* September/October, 1988, 24-25 Retromags – The Vintage Video Game Magazine Archive.

were one of the central turning points in this regard. But in the beginning, it seems Nintendo first wanted to prove to its American market that the game console and its accessories, the hardware, were themselves top notch.

In the earliest issues of *Nintendo Power*, much of its limited ad space went to offers for game controllers and accessories, items clearly in the hardware camp. For example, on the back cover of Issue Two, an ad reads "Power Tools" and shows a tool box of different Nintendo licensed controllers. The rest of the text boasts how players will experience total control with these products with the one exception being, "out of control high scores". Alongside the commercial push of this extra hardware, early issues also introduced to readers "the Nintendo seal of quality."[63] The back cover of Issue Four tells reader plainly, "Look for the Nintendo Seal," then adds "It's your guarantee that you've pushed the button for top-playing fun and games – only from Nintendo."   In the next issue, the back cover goes further "If it's [the seal's] not there, it's not backed by Nintendo…This seal is our pledge of top quality." Another advertisement in Issue Four entitled "Power Supply" features a shelf of Nintendo controllers with lightning arcing around them. Though some of the goods shown have been licensed off to third party sellers, text at the bottom reassures readers, "each one carries the quality seal that tells you it's part of the Nintendo family."[64] The connection *Nintendo Power* wanted its early readers to make was clear: Nintendo meant quality hardware.

Five years later in 1993's Issue Fifty Four, this trend continues. On pages 84-85, a sneak peak style article gives the reader a look at Nintendo's new upcoming game system dubbed "Project Reality." It announces that Nintendo would be partnering with Silicon Graphics, Inc.

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[63] Back Cover, "Power Tools," *Nintendo Power,* September/October, 1988, Retromags – The Vintage Video Game Magazine Archive.

[64] Back Cover, "Hot Buttons," *Nintendo Power,* January/February, 1989, Retromags – The Vintage Video Game Magazine Archive.

(an American company).[65] At that moment, Nintendo seemed to be
bound by the then-current trend of Japanese companies having to rely on
American companies to develop games. However, over the following
years this dynamic would be challenged by Japan's ever-increasing
competence in the world of game making, as Schodt deftly observed.[66]

　　　The June 1996 issue of *Nintendo Power* featured a 33-page mega
feature on the Nintendo 64 (N64), the system previously advertised as
Project Reality. From the start, the article makes it clear that the
Nintendo 64 is worth the reader's time and money not because of
technicalities, but because of the sheer fun packed in the software
available for it. While boasting that when it comes to the N64's
hardware, "Let's face it, it's incredible," fans are reminded, "You don't
buy a system because it has z-buffering, you buy it for the games."[67]

　　　Yet above all, the gaming experience itself as created by both
hardware and software enjoys the greatest attention. In a special stand-
out quote box, Nintendo executive, Minoru Arakawa claims that "you
can see the difference from the first moment you plug in Super Mario
64."[68] Then, almost as if to directly deliver on Nintendo of America
Vice President Howard Lincoln's earlier comment that "Project Reality
dissolves the current limits of video play, causing the world to challenge
its notion of what a video game can be,"[69] the article turns to several
international companies slated to bring high quality software to the N64.

　　　Explaining that the N64 has attracted talent from Japan, America,
and Europe, the article presents a globalized network of game makers

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[65] "Project Reality," *Nintendo Power,* November, 84-85, 1993,
Retromags – The Vintage Video Game Magazine Archive.

[66] Frederick L. Schodt, *America and the Four Japans: Friend, Foe,
Model, Mirror* (Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 1994), 168-169.

[67] "The Fun Machine," *Nintendo Power,* June, 12, 1995, Retromags –
The Vintage Video Game Magazine Archive.

[68] Ibid., 14.

[69] "Project Reality," *Nintendo Power,* November, 84, 1993, Retromags
– The Vintage Video Game Magazine Archive.

and computer scientists all centered around and driven by Nintendo's effort to give consumers the absolute best. In this network, Japan suddenly stands as an equal, as the flagship software for the system, Super Mario 64, is explicitly linked to Japanese creator Shigero Miyamoto. Readers are told that Super Mario 64 caused a sensation at the "Shoshinkai" trade show, as fans around the world applauded its premier and that it represents, "nothing less than a revolution in games."[70] It must also be noted how confident *Nintendo Power* had become with exposing its readers to linguistically difficult and obviously Japanese names and places. Unlike in 1988, readers are expected to be excited, not confused, by these names, for Japan has become a creator of great games. Unlike Ryu the blue-eyed ninja, these are real people and places that readers now know had a direct hand in the creation of their favorite games. "Made in Japan" has been made noticeable because now it was positive.

While video games were Japan's first real chance at exporting quality software, they were also then associated with youth culture more than general culture. But in the 1990s, Japan would get a chance to export into a market that touched all Americans: Baseball. In 1995, Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles began serving sushi in honor of their rising rookie, the Japanese player Hideo Nomo.[71]

In this way, international baseball had come full circle because forty-six years ago, in 1949, an American team called the San Francisco Seals had travelled to Japan as part of a goodwill mission during the American occupation.[72] In addition to the entertainment itself, each

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[70] "The Fun Machine," *Nintendo Power,* June, 12, 1995, Retromags – The Vintage Video Game Magazine Archive.

[71] Bob Nightingale, "How Big is Hideo Nomo," *Los Angeles Times,* September 17, 1995. Accessed September 22, 2017. ProQuest Central.

[72] Sayuri Guthrie-Shimizu, *Transpacific Field of Dreams: How Baseball Linked the United States and Japan in Peace and War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 213.

game also brought Japanese fans into contact with American ballpark food. According to Japanese American sports historian Guthrie-Shimazu, Coca-Cola and popcorn provided more than new flavors to the Japanese. They were symbols of democracy and a prosperous American life style.[73]

In 1995 many wondered what pieces of Japan Nomo would bring with him. However, in the face of intense press attention, Nomo grew frustrated with being a curiosity, telling *Sports Illustrated* in May of 1995, "The American interest in me is because I'm from Japan. Now I'd like to let them know I can compete on this level as myself, as Hideo Nomo."[74] Just like Sony and Nintendo, Nomo was determined to define his brand by quality above anything else.

An extended length story in the LA times from September 17, 1995 highlighted the tension between American media's fascination with Nomo's Japanese identity and Nomo's own preference to shrug it off. The article begins with a few examples of Nomo's successful assimilation into American culture. Sports writer Bob Nightingale mentions that Nomo takes special pride in his driver's license, in being able to order "the usual" at his favorite pizza place, and in going to Venice Beach with his wife and young son. The article often returns to Nomo's many Japanese fans and his difficult relationship with the Japanese press. Quoting the Japanese serial, *Sports Nippon Newspaper,* the article mentions that back in Japan, Nomo had become more famous than the legendary home run king Sudaharu. Oh, perhaps even than Prime Minister Murayama.[75]

In addition, Nomo's American success was seen as a much needed good news amidst domestic turmoil. As Nomo's interpreter Kent

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[73] Ibid., 222.

[74] Tom Verducci, "He's Over here." *Sports Illustrated,* May 15, 1995. Accessed September 22, 2017. Academic Search Complete.

[75] Bob Nightingale, "How Big is Hideo Nomo," *Los Angeles Times,* September 17, 1995. Accessed September 22, 2017. ProQuest Central.

Brown related, "My friends from Japan tell me, 'Things are not going good. We have recession, we have terrorists…in our subway, but you know something, we still have Nomo.'"[76] In this way Nomo's press reception created a paradox, where his legitimacy as a player in MLB kept being tied back to his warm following in Japan. While the article bluntly states that Nomo proves Japanese players can finally compete in the Major Leagues, mentioning that American scouts are already looking for the next Nomo, it also made it difficult for Nomo to represent himself without representing his country.

Sports historians Guttman and Thompson emphasize Japan's long-term baseball ambition to be able to compete as equals with the United States. Yet, writing in 2001, they claim, "that no student of the game believes this has happened." They did, however, credit Nomo as a "harbinger" of Japanese progress to come.[77] That progress would come in the form of Ichiro Suzuki.

In a Seattle Times articles from November 10, 2000 covering Ichiro's likely entry into the MLB, there is a noticeable difference in tone from Nomo debut 7 years earlier. For one, there is no question that Ichiro is capable of playing excellent baseball. While the Dodgers were previously described as taking a gamble on Nomo,[78] the Mariners reportedly threw "smart" money at the chance to field Ichiro. The article even references Nintendo's earlier buyout of the Mariners, saying, "Japan has saved the Mariners once, perhaps it can do it again."

In addition to greater confidence in his skill, Ichiro also seemed to have enjoyed a little bit more room to define himself by his play instead his nationality. As Mariner executives explained to the Seattle

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[76] Bob Nightingale, "How Big is Hideo Nomo," *Los Angeles Times,* September 17, 1995. Accessed September 22, 2017. ProQuest Central.

[77] Allen Guttman and Lee Thompson, *Japanese Sports: a History* (Honolulu, HW: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 171.

[78] Tom Verducci, "He's Over here," *Sports Illustrated,* May 15, 1995. Accessed September 22, 2017. Academic Search Complete.

Times, they would have been interested in him whether he was from "Brooklyn or Borneo." What mattered was that he could play well, and he didn't cost them a draft pick.

Alluding to previous tensions over Nintendo's ownership of the Mariner franchise, the article also mentions that people "feared the club would be moved to Tokyo or, worse yet, serve sushi at the ball park." The article then jokes about how the sushi part came true, and how the Mariners had become the most popular team in Japan, and yet, as the article emphasizes, they still play in the United States. Overall, the article sends a mixed message. In one part it argues that Japanese ownership of the Mariners had changed more about Japanese baseball than it had changed Seattle. It finishes by mentioning that Suzuki represents a new kind of player for Japan, who negotiates and demands better conditions and pay. "They've become more like Americans, while Seattle has become more like Japan."[79] In this way, like Sony and Nintendo, Ichiro didn't mind a bit of Americanization in order to do his job.

A later *Seattle Times* story from May 3, 2001, covering Ichiro's first MLB game facing Hideo Nomo, reveals an additional concern of the time, that the MLB was becoming too attractive to strong Japanese players. While Japanese commentator Poncho Ito admitted that Nomo versus Ichiro was the greatest story in his career since Nomo's own debut, another Japanese voice, Kota Ishijima openly worried that Japan was becoming a mere feeder system for the MLB, a de facto minor league like Puerto Rico or the Dominican Republic. So, while the Nomo-Ichiro face off confirmed that there was "no question that the inferiority Japan has felt as a baseball playing nation eased a bit," the article has less confidence that it had or ever would go away completely. The article closes, "On a night when cameras clicked and a Japanese flag

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[79] Blaine Newnham, "If Ichiro Signs, Japan Will Save Mariners Again," *Seattle Times,* November 10, 2000. Accessed November 29, 2017. Ebsco.

flew high in right field, it was hard to tell whether this was the beginning, or the end."[80]

More recently, excitement over Japanese Pitcher Shohei Otani,[81] as well as the Nintendo Switch's (along with its quality games) record breaking sales,[82] suggest the success story of Japanese imports in America is far from over. It is to be seen whether adaptation will be forever necessary, or if the perceived quality of Japanese goods will continue indefinitely. Yet up until now, Japanese imports have always been connected to these ideas, whether seen in *Godzilla* and *Astro Boy's* history of adaptation, the quality first strategies of Sony and Nomo, or the international identity of Nintendo and Ichiro. Japanese goods and services succeeded in post-war America because they prioritized adaptation and quality over national identity and in doing so elevated what it meant to be "made in Japan."   Their example may yet inspire other rising economies, as their history deepens our understanding of globalization. At the very least, their story helps show how Japanese imports, in a generation's time, went from being ignored or feared to an integral part of American life and culture.

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[80] Blaine Newnham, "Suzuki Meets Nomo," *Seattle Times,* May 3, 2001. Accessed November 29, 2017. Ebsco.

[81] "Shohei Otani: 'Hope to do my best in America from next year on,'" *ESPN*, Nov 13, 2017, http://www.espn.com/mlb/story/_/id/21359530/japanese-baseball-star-shohei-otani-made-available-mlb.

[82] Jean Baptiste Su, "Cyber Monday Hits New Record At $6.6 Billion, The Largest Online Shopping Day In U.S. History," *Forbes,* Nov 28, 2017, https://www.forbes.com/sites/jeanbaptiste/2017/11/28/report-cyber-monday-hitsnew-record-at-6-6-billion-over-1-billion-more-than-2016/#75b5ed803662.