

# **CORRELATION OF SOCIAL WELFARE WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF JAPANESE POPULAR CULTURE AFTER WORLD WAR II**

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## **Abstract**

Social welfare is a condition that humans strive to achieve a decent life in terms of material, social and spiritual aspects. After World War II, Japan was known as a country that experienced rapid economic and social welfare improvements. In addition, a wide range of Japanese popular culture products such as Manga & Anime, J-Pop, Video Games, and others have also grown and accompanied the established life of Japanese society. Therefore, Japanese popular culture has been supported and can spread to all corners of the world. This situation can indirectly improve the economy and existence of the Japanese state internationally, although, since the 1990s, Japan has experienced a lost decade. This study aims to discover in depth the correlation between the welfare of Japanese society and the development of Japanese popular culture after World War II. This study uses historical and descriptive qualitative methods with a multidisciplinary approach, such as history, social science, and culture. The results of this study show that social welfare is not a factor that can directly relate to or influence the development of Japanese popular culture. Other factors that lead to a marketing strategy and technology utilization, such as talented creators who have been good at finding opportunities, mass media culture, and Japanese government policies can influence the development of Japanese popular culture in domestic and abroad.

**Keywords:** social welfare, popular culture, mass media, Japanese society

## INTRODUCTION

### Social Welfare in Japan

Social welfare in a broad sense includes various actions humans take to achieve a better standard of living. This better standard of living is not only measured economically but also in social, mental, and spiritual aspects (Adi, 2018: 4). Midgley adds that social welfare is a condition in which various social problems can be adequately managed, when human needs can be met, and social opportunities can be maximized (1995: 5). The word social welfare can be viewed from various perspectives, namely as a condition, a science, a relation to sectoral development, and a service or service system.

In the context of Japanese society, social welfare can be viewed historically both in a condition and the service system, including the policies of the Japanese government in providing social security. This is because it cannot be separated from Japan's economic and political dynamics every decade. For example, recently, the Japanese government has focused on providing financial assistance to low-income people and launching several financial management programs after COVID-19. In March 2023, the Japanese government also spent more than 2 trillion yen from the state budget on low-income household assistance of 30,000 yen to ease inflationary pressure (The Japan Times, 2023).

After Japan's defeat in World War II, Japanese society experienced a downturn and was far from prosperous. The Japanese economy at that time had been devastated by the war. About 1.85 million people were killed, and as many as 5 million people, including soldiers and civilians, returned to Japan from the Asian region. Under the same circumstances, the Japanese face hunger, unemployment, and inflation (The Ministry of Health, Labor,

and Welfare, 2012). This situation is urgent if the Japanese society is assisted through social security. Although before World War II, the Japanese government had experience providing aid and several welfare programs. For example, assistance for the sick, disabled, and the elderly. In addition 1929, the Poor Relief Act was passed to reduce tensions between workers and investors (Tipton, 2008: 372).

At least, after World War II, the Japanese government made efforts to ensure the welfare of the people, in line with Prime Minister Yoshida's policy. In the following years, the Japanese government enacted the Daily Life Security Law in 1946, the Child Welfare Law in 1947, the Law for the Welfare of People with Physical Disabilities in 1949, and the Social Welfare Service Law in 1951. This is based on the Constitution of Japan, which has guaranteed the human rights and basic freedoms of the people through Article 25 of the Constitution, which reads, "*All people shall have the right to maintain the minimum standards of wholesome and cultured living, and in all spheres of life, the State shall use its endeavors for the promotion and extension of social welfare and security, and of public health*" (The Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, 2012).

In the 1950s, the Japanese economy recovered, and Japan entered a stage of rapid economic growth. This cannot be separated from the export increase and the United States support program called "the Dodge Plan". In line with this economic growth, Japan is moving toward becoming a model "welfare state" like the United States and European countries, where increasing national welfare is an important goal. Therefore, the standard of living in Japanese society is also increased.

In the 1960s, more and more families in Japan owned television sets, washing machines, refrigerators, and private cars. These items are symbols of increasing living standards, in addition to increasing public con-

sumption. On the other hand, new social problems have also emerged, such as urban overpopulation due to urbanization, lack of doctors in villages, pollution and damage to nature, and a shift in industrial structure (from agriculture to manufacturing). Therefore, the Japanese government gradually implemented more comprehensive social security (Odaka, 2002). One of them, the Welfare Law for the Elderly was enacted in 1963. Then it developed again with the creation of a system for providing medical care costs for the Elderly in 1973, along with the expansion of the health insurance and pension insurance systems (The Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, 2012).

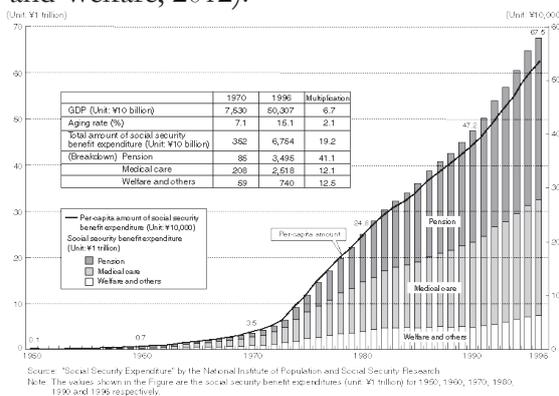


Figure 1. Changes in the Social Security Benefits Expenditure 1950 – 1996 (Source: The Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare Annual Report)

Based on the graph above, the social security benefit expenditure has increased, due to a rise in medical expenses for Elderly and pension payment standards. Since 1970, the aging population in Japan has increased, and the percentage of people over 65 years of age exceeds 7%. Until now, as we know, Japan shifted to an “elderly society”.

Despite this, the Japanese government’s welfare spending is minimal and among the lowest of all OECD countries (Cargill, Thomas F & Takayuki Sakamoto, 2008: 43). In addition, social se-

curity benefits provided to the elderly and unemployed are low by international standards. This is due to Japan’s career-based social welfare system due to the traditional belief that support for the poor and the elderly is provided by the family. Therefore, the welfare of the Japanese people is guaranteed by the company, such as welfare benefits for company employees. Those who are not covered by the system, such as being self-employed, are covered by the Japanese government. Hiwatari (1991) added that social welfare programs in Japan during a period of economic growth had several characteristics, namely: (1) an emphasis on the workplace, (2) fragmented and targeted program design, and (3) their savings orientation (Pekkanen & Saadia M. Pekkanen, 2022: 398).

Politically, since the early 1970s, Japan’s conservative LDP (Liberal Democratic Party) has initiated increased welfare programs in response to increasing electoral support for left-wing parties. However, the government and large companies still need to make savings due to oil price shocks. Private-sector unions support this policy. As a result, there is an imbalance where employees of large companies and government employees are entitled to big welfare support, while self-employed and small business employees receive less welfare support and are dependent on the government. This is because companies guarantee and play a major role in the average Japanese life expectancy. The social security system in Japan itself is divided into mandatory social insurance schemes based on the type or status of work (Abe, 2022: 402). This system works relatively well if Japan’s economic growth is still strong and unemployment rates are low or many people are employed.

After the 1990s, Japan’s economic conditions changed. The bursting of the

bubble economy, financial liberalization, and the rapid aging of the population have stripped the foundations of Japan's financial system (Abe, 2022: 401-402). In this decade, many people are unemployed or have precarious jobs that do not provide social security and health care (Cargill, Thomas F & Takayuki Sakamoto, 2008: 270). In addition, more and more elderly people are living alone where pension funds and social security are the only sources of income for them, along with the increase in nuclear families (parents no longer living with their adult children).

Nonetheless, income inequality and poverty in Japan are not as bad as one might think. In Japan, there are still more people with jobs than in other countries, where the unemployment rate in Japan is still low by international standards. Japan is still said to be a developed country and its people as a whole still have a high standard of living. In absolute terms, Japanese society, both unemployed and poor, are better off than unemployed or poor people in developing countries (Cargill, Thomas F & Takayuki Sakamoto, 2008: 272). Japanese society still have the opportunity and time to develop their hobbies and appreciate Japanese popular culture.

### Popular Culture in Japan

Popular culture refers to the culture created and consumed by society on a large and widespread scale. Popular culture is full of ideas, images, and perspectives, which the community indirectly agrees on in one stream or trend (Indandra: 2021). This trend continues to experience development and can be seen in its products, ranging from public entertainment, fashion, culinary, music, and films to works of art. During the Renaissance era in Europe, prominent figures such as Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Raphael produced works of

art that could create trends for the general public. This trend can be enjoyed continuously and developed through new artists born in the next period.

In the 19th century, information technology and mass media developed. This makes popular culture not only known by the public to be consumed continuously. But it can also be distributed to the community globally without certain limitations quickly and massively. Therefore, it cannot be denied that popular culture products can create a social class. Besides that, popular culture can also be used as a tool to strengthen the political identity of a particular nation or country (Duncombe & Roland Bleiker: 2015).

Japan is one of the countries that always carries its identity globally through its popular cultural products, such as *Manga*, *Anime*, *J-pop*, *Dorama*, and video games. In addition, Japanese culinary specialties such as *Sushi* and *Onigiri*, traditional sports such as *Karate*, *Ninja*, and even academic commodities such as *Sudoku* and *Kumon* show that all of them are initially from Japan. Without popular cultural products, Japan seems to be a country that doesn't exist, especially for the younger generation worldwide. This is evidenced by the large number of students outside of Japan who learn Japanese because they are motivated by the desire to be able to understand Japanese *Manga* or *Anime* without subtitles. In addition, Japanese cultural festivals abroad are still crowded with visitors, and some have lasted for years because they have a competitive advantage from a marketing perspective (Andhika P & Muslich: 2019).

The situation above shows that Japanese popular culture has a powerful influence on culture and economy. In 2013, the Japanese government established the *Cool Japan* promotion board to support and promote Japanese popular culture to boost Japan's

economy after natural disasters and lost decades. Products of Japanese popular culture are now considered necessary for trading as industrial commodities such as automotive and electronics (Sugimoto, 2021: 676).

Since the 1990s, mass media, both in print and electronic form, such as television, carried many popular Japanese cultural programs domestically and internationally. Cultural products such as *Manga*, *Anime*, *Karaoke*, and *Sushi* are even more global. For the younger generation born in the 1990s, it might not be strange to see one of the private television stations in Indonesia broadcasting Japanese anime from morning to noon on weekends. Until now, the younger generation in getting to know Japan is usually inseparable from the products of its popular culture. This is evidenced by the situations described in the third paragraph of this section.

Therefore, this study examines historically how the development of Japanese popular culture and the social welfare conditions of its society after World War II were divided into several phases. Then, this study analyzes the correlation between the two. This theme is interesting to study because there are things that are interrelated and paradoxical. For example, when the economic situation and social welfare have improved, Japanese popular culture has also improved. However, after the lost decades in which the welfare of Japanese society began to be questioned, their popular culture continues to exist and is increasingly global. This study will verify this in the discussion section. The hypothesis of this study also originates from Garcia's argument that since the early 1970s, Japanese society has achieved a high level of prosperity so that they have sufficient time to develop various cultural movements which then influence the whole world (2019: 86).

## METHOD

This study uses historical research methods. The historical research method is

a method that aims to systematically and objectively reconstruct the past (Herlina, 2020: 1). This reconstruction is carried out by collecting, assessing, verifying, and synthesizing data to establish facts and reach defensible conclusions.

The data sources for this study were obtained from literary sources such as journal articles, websites, and reference books related to social welfare in Japan and the development of its popular culture after World War II to the present. This study uses a qualitative descriptive analysis technique. This technique is one of the techniques used in qualitative research methods, where observation of phenomena, instincts, and sharp analysis from researchers is required. Qualitative research methods is a method based on the philosophy of postpositivism or interpretive, used to research natural object conditions, where the researcher is the critical instrument (Sugiyono, 2022: 9).

This study also uses a multidisciplinary approach, such as history, social sciences, and culture. Such convergence allows utilizing various scientific perspectives to solve a common problems. Given the rapid pace of social change that attracts the attention of experts in different fields of science (Burke, 2015: 26). Therefore, this study uses theories from different areas of science, namely the theory of social welfare and popular culture.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned in the introductory section, this study examines historically how the development of Japanese popular culture and the welfare of its society has gone through several phases, before a deeper analysis of the correlation between the two. The historical phases of post-World War II Japan, especially those related to the development of its popular culture, have different periods according to experts. For

example, some of the phases put forward by Matt Alt (2020) in his book entitled “Pure Invention”, divided the development of Japanese popular culture into three eras, namely the gloomy era of 1945, the 1990s, and the 2010s.

This study refers to the phase division according to Yoshio Sugimoto (2021) in which the popular image of Japan abroad in relation to the dominant Japanese studies model is divided into three phases, namely the first phase (1950s-1960s), the second phase (1970s-1980s), and the third phase (1990s-2020s). These phases are in line with the observations of Patricia G. Steinhoff who identified three paradigms in Japanese studies, namely language and regional studies (1950s-1970s), economic competition (1980s-1990s), and cultural studies (1990s-2010s). Most of the phase divisions according to the above experts are trichotomous, indicating several points that show the interaction between popular Japanese images and scientific models.

Criterion	Phase 1 (1950s-1960s)	Phase 2 (1970s-1980s)	Phase 3 (1990s-2020s)
Dominant social formation	Agrarian society	Industrial capitalism	Cultural capitalism
Dominant sector	Primary	Manufacturing	Quarternary
Japan's position in the international context	US occupation and recovery from World War II	Trade surplus, bubble economy, vertical integration	Globalization, cross-border migration, aging deflation, civil society

Table 1. Comparison of three phases in popular images of Japan abroad and predominant paradigms of Japanese studies (Source: Sugimoto, 2021: 685)

### The First Phase (1950s-1960s)

After World War II, Japan was indeed seen as a country that was unclear from a cultural and mysterious point of view. Scholars have tried to find Japan's incomprehensible uniqueness by focusing on traditional aspects, such as *Bushido*, *Kabuki*, *Noh*, *Judo*, and *Ikebana*. The people's unique and different cultural patterns have also been studied, as written by Ruth Benedict in her book entitled “the Chrysanthemum and the Sword”. In this phase, Japan is still primarily an agricultural country and most of the workforce still relies on the primary sector of the economy (Sugimoto, 2021: 689).

Nevertheless, since pre-war Japanese society has been very obsessed with art and material objects. This is evidenced by the discovery of a dynamic consumer economy that is not only useful for fulfilling their primary needs, such as the delivery of books, artwork, decorations, furniture, and fashion accessories (Alt, 2020: 20). For generations, department stores like *Mitsukoshi* have also carried luxury goods ranging from quality kimonos, jewelry, accessories, sweets, toys, and homewares. The citizens of pre-war Japan already sought and appreciated a little luxury.

However, the total collapse of the industrial sector as a result of World War II obliterated everything, especially the material goods and manufacturing industries. Therefore, the Japanese people have tried to get up, and have reminded themselves that one of the efforts made by the country to catch up is export (Alt, 2020: 22). At the end of the 19th century, Japan had experience exporting toy products such as Germany, Great Britain, and France.

Matsuzo Kosuge, a Japanese toy creator, is an example of a talented character who never gave up on circumstances and kept looking for opportunities, even though during World War II, the manufacture of metal toys had been banned by the Japanese government due to restrictions. Kosuge has re-established his toy factory named “Ko-

suge 'Toy Works' in Kyoto, though it was originally a former cattle shed. Even when the situation was challenging, Kosuge continued to create toy products from America's scrap pile, such as empty food and beer cans by hand. Starting from his inspiration from seeing Allied cars that often passed in Japan after the war era, Kosuge created a toy car product of the Jeep type. Thanks to the persistence and cooperation with the *Marubutsu* department store, the Jeep Kosuge toys have been selling well. In the end, Kosuge was able to develop his company called "Kosuge Toys" and exported toy car products that had become a trend at the time, such as the *1950 Cadillac Sedan*. In the post-World War II era, children were excited by new fantasies about new technology and prosperity, one of which is through toy cars. Thanks to toys, Japan was finally able to rebuild its export trade, even though it was marked "Made in Occupied Japan" (Alt, 2020: 17). This was in line with the direction of General MacArthur's economic team at that time where it was important to increase the production of toys for export, as a guarantee material for Japan to import food from abroad. With the existence of Japanese-made toy products, this situation began to show the turning point of Japanese popular culture which had risen in history.

In this phase, Osamu Tezuka also contributed to the development of Japanese popular culture. Tezuka, the founding father of Japanese *Manga* and *Anime*, attempted to absorb and compete with the animation techniques developed by *Walt Disney* (Sugimoto, 2021: 678). Tezuka's wealth has given him the freedom and inspiration to watch the *Takarazuka Revue*, *Walt Disney*, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* several times. Tezuka is the creator of the *Astro Boy Manga*, which tells about the life of a robot boy with super abilities. In 2009, the *Astro Boy Manga* was adapted into a 3D animated movie globally. Before *Astro Boy*, a Japanese *Manga* called *Atomu Taishi* was published by Tezuka in 1951. This *Manga* was inspired by American

animation, as the Allied occupation was still ongoing at this time. Nonetheless, Tezuka crafted the adopted animation into a main character with big eyes, and with a storyline featuring high-tech devices.

Besides that, Yoshihiro Tatsumi and Sanpei Shirato were good at creating a genre of *Manga* that was very relevant to the socio-cultural conditions at that time, more precisely in the 1960s. This *Manga* is called *Gekiga*, which depicts the darker side of human existence, complex stories, and mostly hatred and sarcasm toward the established order (Sugimoto, 2021: 679). This *Manga* suits an adult audience or young workers who oppose injustice amid Japan's rapid economic development. With his style of depiction through sharper contrasts of shadows and lines, *Gekiga* has not gone far in depicting anarchic actions such as the *Zengakuren* student rebellion in the 1960s that had opposed the military agreement between Japan and the United States. Although *Gekiga* had its origins in the rapid growth of film, radio, and television, it had become a cheap and convenient escape for laborers and students who have no money during mass media promoted the adoption of the "three c" (color television, air conditioning, and private cars), a trinity of the modern lifestyle of Japanese society in the 1960s (Alt, 2020: 65).



Figure 2. The illustration of *Gekiga Manga* (Source: bluejackal.net)

Here we can see that although the

1950s-1960s was a phase of economic improvement, prosperity, and comprehensive social security for Japanese society, there was still social inequality and the lower middle class was near to socialist movements such as *Zengakuren* (Dowsey: 1970). The development of popular culture in this decade was not only due to the appreciation of the prosperous middle class like Osamu Tezuka but also the lower middle class in Japan. The products of Japanese popular culture in this phase had reached various levels of Japanese society in a situational. For example, Kosuge-san sold his first Jeep toy car, priced at 10 yen each, which was affordable for poor customers, as Japanese children had lost their playtime due to the war (Alt, 2020: 32). In addition, *Gekiga* provided entertainment for laborers and students who have no money as mentioned above.

At least, this phase is the forerunner of the extraordinary commercial development of Japanese popular culture, thanks to the development of mass media such as television, the contribution of talented creators, producers, and distributors, and most importantly the large internal market (Sugimoto, 2021: 677). The *Manga* publishing industry has started to have a decent network of editors, advertisers, and bookstores. *Toei*, one of Japan's biggest studios, has also continued its animated TV series after Tezuka collaborated to make the anime *Boku no Son Gokuu* (My Sun Wukong) (Alt, 2020: 55).

### Second Phase (1970s-1980s)

In the 1970s and 1980s, Japan had transformed into a developed country with its global expansion. Changes in the pattern of life of Japanese society, which initially relied on the primary sector of the economy, have now changed to rely on the secondary sector of the economy. This sector is an

industrial sector where the processing of primary products into finished goods, such as manufacturing and construction (BPS, 2012: 12). Big Japanese companies such as *Toyota, Honda, Mitsubishi, Hitachi, Panasonic, Sony,* and *Toshiba* are global companies and are certainly not foreign to people around the world. In this phase, the world has witnessed real Japanese capitalism along with technological developments.

Because of this, the international community has begun to pay attention to aspects considered unique in Japanese culture, especially in the elite sector of the Japanese corporate structure (Sugimoto, 2021: 689). Practices such as *Shuusbin Koyoo* (lifelong work), seniority culture, and *Sarariman* (Salaryman or white-collar workers) are considered to be the driving force of Japan's economy. Automatically, in this decade, popular Japanese cultural products considered unique have continued to develop along with technological developments, although it also started as an entertainment or stress reliever for workers in Japan who became Salaryman. From music, film, *Manga, Anime,* and games, to TV series industries continued to grow commercially through the mass media in this phase. *Manga* in various genres, *Comiket,* and *Tokusatsu* TV series are concrete examples (Gracia, 2019: 96).

Daisuke Inoue is an example of a creator who contributes to Japanese popular culture in music. Inoue is the most famous *Karaoke* machine inventor since 1971, although there have been predecessors such as Shigeichi Negishi, renowned for his *Sparko Box* device. Inoue created a *Karaoke* tool called the *8 Juke*, a wooden cube housing an 8-track car stereo (Alt, 2020: 87). The advantage of the *8 Juke* has a form of audio processing that can help make up for the vocal deficiencies of an amateur when singing. At first, the *8 Juke* was unknown

to customers. But Inoue, also a *Hiki-Katari*, has always been resourceful and has promoted the device by paying some friends and pretty girls to attract attention, and has held impromptu duets in bars using the *8 Juke*. In the end, the *8 Juke* sold well in the market and was loaned out to bars for free for profit sharing. Since 1985, Karaoke has become a popular culture and a booming business trend in Japan and abroad. Major companies such as *Toshiba*, *Pioneer*, and *Japan Victor Company (JVC)* have also made some of their products. Until now, *Karaoke* wasn't just about singing. Its democratization of talent would have profound effects on the fantasy lives of Japanese and Westerners both (Alt, 2020: 93). In this phase, the development of music in Japan has also colored the development of *Karaoke*, such as *Enka* which is popular for the elderly, *Pop*, *Jazz*, and *Rock n Roll* music that has been introduced from abroad.

Besides *Karaoke*, other Japanese popular culture products have boomed such as the *Sony Walkman* and *Hello Kitty*, but are not discussed in detail in this study. The popular cultures that have emerged in this phase imply that innovative creators such as Inoue and the existence of mass media have played an important role in the development of Japanese popular culture. Plus the utilization of technology that has developed in this phase, is supported by the situation or condition of Japanese society which has been prosperous. This is evidenced by the number of Japanese people who already own laser disc players and stereos for Karaoke homes (Alt, 2020: 92). In addition, in this decade, demand for Japanese electronic goods also increased, even though Japan occupied half of the semiconductor market in the world along with America (Arnaldi, 2016: 15).

### **Third phase (1990s-2020s)**

Since the 1990s, Japan experienced a different situation. Success stories in the past. In this decade, Japan experienced an economic recession due to the bubble economy of the previous decade. This bubble economy refers to an economic crisis caused by increased Japanese consumption that led to increased asset prices. Basically, the increase in asset prices stemmed from the policy of appreciating the Yen against the US dollar under the *Plaza Accord* with the United States, Great Britain, France, and West Germany in New York City on September 22, 1985 (Fukao: 2003: 399). In addition to rising asset and stock prices, Japanese products became more expensive due to the appreciation of the Yen. This was certainly not good for the market and Japanese companies, given that Japan is a production country such as the automotive and electronics industries. The deterioration of the Japanese economy can be seen from the decline in Japan's GDP in this decade, known as the *Lost Decade*.

Many Japanese people, especially the younger generation, are now choosing to be *Furiitaa* (freelancers) rather than permanent workers in companies. The reason for this, apart from freedom and to develop hobbies, this situation cannot be masked as a result of the change in the management system of Japanese companies after the bursting of the bubble economy. Japanese companies have started to economize and reduce their welfare commitments by cutting employee benefits, and have hired more non-permanent workers - workers who performed the same tasks as the regular employees but were offered much lower wages with no benefits or employment security (Abe, 2022: 402).

Nevertheless, in this phase, the development of Japanese popular culture still exists. As mentioned in the introduction, cultural products from Japan such as *Manga*, *Anime*, *Karaoke*, and *Sushi* are becoming globalized. This is due to the existing technology and mass culture that has entered in the international sphere. Mass culture is a lively and powerful force that engages everyone through mass media. Today, Japanese mass culture includes several diverse elements such as; television and radio entertainment culture, popular press culture, fashion and trend culture, entertainment culture around amusement facilities, high-tech culture, and commercialized traditional elite culture (Sugimoto, 2021: 642). Television and radio have become popular choices in mass media. About 85 percent of Japanese people have watched television every day for about three hours and eighteen minutes on average on weekdays (Sekine, et al, 2016: 11).

In Japan, *Anime* is not a genre, but rather a medium (Alt, 2020: 204). *Anime* has targeted a wide variety of social groups with different identities, interests, and generations. For example, *Anpanman* and *Doraemon* for children, *Gundam*, *One Piece*, and *Evangelion* for teenagers, and *In This Corner in the World* for older audiences who still remember the World War II era. *Anime* has been so widely accepted that it has outperformed big-budget movies such as films from the *Box Office*. For example, the *Anime* entitled *Your Name* by director Makoto Shinkai was booming in 2016. Among many *Anime* from Japan, Hayao Miyazaki is an example of a successful creator in this phase.

Hayao Miyazaki is an animator, filmmaker, and co-founder of *Studio Ghibli*. Since 1963, Miyazaki has worked at *Toei Animation*, and created many famous *Anime* works, such as *Castle in the Sky*, *My Neighbor*

*Totoro*, *How Do You Live*, and *Spirited Away*. In 2003, *Spirited Away* held the record for best animation at the *Academy Awards* for the entire year, although it was surpassed by *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba* in 2020. Uniquely, Miyazaki's anime is not just entertainment, but is full of universality, interpretation, and even contains political protests, such as *Spirited Away* as an allegory of capitalism (Zhou, 2023). Miyazaki has also been a union organizer at *Toei* who has opposed the U.S.-Iraq war and the existence of nuclear power in Japan. Miyazaki has accessibility and universality and all-around virtuosity makes it unimpeachable the sort of thing that cuts across generational, cultural, and even political lines (Alt, 2020: 208). In other words, *Anime*, which is a form of entertainment or a product of Japanese popular culture today, can be a tool that has a comprehensive meaning. Now, Japanese popular culture is seen as having a powerful influence, both as social protest and diplomacy.

As mentioned in the introduction, in 2013, the Japanese government established the *Cool Japan* promotion board to support and promote Japanese popular culture to boost Japan's economy after natural disasters and lost decades. Although, Japanese people are still relatively prosperous and can still develop their hobbies through Japanese popular culture products. For example, a weekly *Manga* magazine called *Shuukan Shonen Jump* has sold around 1.6 million copies per week and was the best-selling magazine in Japan in early 2019 (*Nihon Zasshi Kyōkai*, 2019).

Products of Japanese popular culture are now considered necessary for trading as industrial commodities such as automotive and electronics (Sugimoto, 2021: 676). There is great hope that Japanese popular culture that can be exported can help increase not only Japan's prestige sym-

bolically but also its business and political interests materially (Sugimoto, 2021: 689). Even though there was a boom, popular Japanese cultural products experienced quite a hard blow due to competition from other countries' popular cultural products, such as *K-Pop* from South Korea. At least, Japanese popular culture products have created their trends for the younger generation, especially the 1990s generation, and have experienced their heyday.



Figure 3. Akihabara, a centre for electronics and Japanese popular culture in Tokyo (Source: Original Documentation from Author)

## CONCLUSION

This research has shown that social welfare is not the only factor that can explicitly relate to and influence the development of Japanese popular culture. Although it starts from the assumption that Japanese people in welfare or prosperous conditions can have enough time to develop hobbies, build communities, and create cultural movements to enhance the existence of Japanese popular culture. After the dynamics of Japanese society after World War II are historically examined into several phases, the actual development of Japanese popular culture is inseparable from other factors that lead to marketing strategy and technology utilization that can reach markets regardless of social class. For example, talented creators who have been good at

finding opportunities, mass media culture, and Japanese government policies. In addition, the relevance of cultural or entertainment products to the needs and trends of Japanese society in each phase has also accelerated the spread of Japanese popular culture both domestically and abroad.

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