Why Do Americans Say No to Doraemon?: Examining Power Relations Between American and Japanese Popular Culture in Intercultural Communication through the Lens of Semiotics

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Abstract

The world has been familiar with the so called 'American popular culture' for decades. However, in recent years the U.S. popular culture is being challenged as Japanese Manga such as Dragon Ball, Sailor Moon, Saint Seiya etc. have enjoyed huge popularity in the U.S. Nevertheless, this is not the case with the well−known and loved Manga throughout Asian countries, Doraemon. The story of the blue cat is still far away from being well−received in the U.S. This research aims to address the questions around this phenomenon: (1) What seems to be the factors that have brought about the relative unpopularity of Doraemon in the U.S.? (2) Why is the reputation of the cat in Japan and in the U.S. so different? Based on Barthes's semiotics, this research argues that Power Relations, the concepts of Young Adult Literature and of the Iceberg Model of Culture, play crucial roles in Intercultural Communication between the U.S. and Japan.

Keywords: Doraemon, Japanese Manga, Intercultural Communication, Power Relations, Semiotics

บทคัดย่อ

ทั่วโลกต่างก็คุ้นเคยกับสิ่งที่เรียกว่า 'วัฒนธรรมสมัยนิยมแบบอเมริกัน' มานาน นับทศวรรษ แต่เมื่อไม่นานมานี้วัฒนธรรมสมัยนิยมแบบอเมริกันได้ถูกท้าทายด้วยมังงะ แบบญี่ปุ่น อย่างเช่น ดราก้อนบอล เซเลอร์มูน เซนต์เซย่า เป็นต้น ซึ่งมังงะเหล่านี้ต่าง ก็ได้รับความนิยมอย่างมากในสหรัฐอเมริกา แต่ทว่าไม่ใช่กับมังงะที่ทุกคนรักและรู้จัก เป็นอย่างดีในทวีปเอเชียอย่างโดราเอมอน เรื่องราวของเจ้าแมวสีฟ้าตัวนี้ยังคงห่างไกล จากการยอมรับในสหรัฐอเมริกา งานวิจัยนี้มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อตั้งคำถามเกี่ยวกับ ปรากฏการณ์ดังกล่าวคือ (1) มีปัจจัยอะไรบ้างที่ส่งผลให้โดราเอมอนไม่ค่อยได้รับความ นิยมในสหรัฐอเมริกา? (2) ทำไมชื่อเสียงของโดราเอมอนในญี่ปุ่นและในสหรัฐอเมริกา จึงต่างกันถึงเพียงนี้? งานวิจัยนี้ใช้แนวคิดสัญวิทยาของ โรลองด์ บาร์ตส์ เพื่อแสดงให้เห็น ว่า สัมพันธภาพเชิงอำนาจ แนวคิดเรื่องวรรณกรรมเยาวชน และแนวคิดเรื่องแบบจำลอง ภูเขาน้ำแข็งทางวัฒนธรรมนั้น มีบทบาทสำคัญในการสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรมของ สหรัฐอเมริกาและญี่ปุ่น

คำสำคัญ: โดราเอมอน มังงะแบบญี่ปุ่น การสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรม สัมพันธภาพ เชิงอำนาจ สัญวิทยา

1. Introduction

We are living in a world where we can access almost any information with just a click of our fingertips. Intentionally or unintentionally, all of us have been exposed to massive amounts of information through many forms of media. Martin and Nakayama (2010) point out that the kind and quality of information we all have through media experiences is influenced by popular culture. Ironically, despite the U.S. being the most influential producer of popular culture, its people are rarely exposed to popular culture from outside the U.S.

Japanese comics known as Manga have become a new challenger to U.S. popular culture. Manga, written with two Chinese characters [漫画], translated as irresponsible pictures, is a huge business, a main medium of entertainment in Japan. It is also exported to many countries. (Brienza, 2009; Ito, 2005; Prough, 2010). Although Manga has been popular in many countries for decades, its success has just blossomed in U.S. popular cultural market.

Since World War II, Japan has been strongly influenced by the U.S. in many aspects. For example, Kachru and Nelson (2006) point out that "English has become nativized in various respects and plays an important part in the communicative strategies of the Japanese." (p. 172). Ito (2005) also indicates that World War II had a great impact on Manga; during that period, the popular American comics such as Popeye, Mickey Mouse, and Superman were translated into Japanese and introduced to Japan. Consequently, Japanese Manga has western concepts deeply embedded within it through the process of the exposure to American popular culture after the World War II, and had been supposed to be well−accepted in the U.S. but in fact, it is not until recently that Manga has just started its popularity in the U.S. As a new comer in the market, Japanese Manga has been so successful that it was recognized by a journalist Roland Kelts in his 2006 book's

subtitle, "Japanese Popular Culture Has Invaded the U.S." (as cited in Brienza, 2014, p. 383).

Brienza (2014) might sound as if she is exaggerating, but the sales growth of Manga in the U.S. is the best indicator of Japanese Manga's accomplishments. In the early 21st century, the U.S. book market witnessed the most remarkable sales of Japanese comics (Brienza, 2009; Goldstein & Phelan, 2009; Poitras, 2008). Nowadays, several publishers are established in the U.S. in order to solely publish Japanese Manga such as VIZ Media, Kodansha USA, Tokyopop, and Dark Horse.

Despite all this good news, not all of the Manga are well received in the U.S. Among these is Doraemon, first published in 1969, a story about a robotic cat sent from the future, written by Fujiko F. Fujio (1974–1996). According to "All–Time Cartoon Hero "Doraemon" Joins Tokyo 2020 as Special Ambassador" (2013) and McCurry (2008), in 2002, Time Asia Magazine on April 2002 included Doraemon in a list of 22 Asian Heroes, in 2008, Japan's Foreign Ministry appointed Doraemon as Japan's first animation ambassador, and in 2013, Doraemon was also selected to be the first special ambassador for the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games. It would be fair to describe Doraemon as one of the truly iconic characters in the history of Japanese animation.

Despite Doraemon's iconic status in Japan and across Asia, the Manga is not so well–known in the West and has failed to find a comparable following in either European or the U.S. markets (Chen, 2011, 2012; Natsume, 2001). It has been a tough way for Doraemon to enter the U.S. market as Prough (2010) indicates that in the late 1970s, Shogakukan approached the U.S. companies in the attempt to market Doraemon but the result was a no. It was not until 2014 that Doraemon properly entered the U.S. market when Disney agreed to broadcast Doraemon in the U.S., but it is still on a long way to success in the U.S. market. How could this happen?

To address the questions around this phenomenon, Barthes's (1972) semiotics are applied to analyze both the Japanese and American versions of Doraemon. This research argues that Power Relations, the concepts of Young Adult Literature and of the Iceberg Model of Culture, play crucial roles in intercultural communication between the U.S. and Japan, and in the fate of Doraemon in the U.S.

2. Frameworks and Research questions

Semiotics (originated by Ferdinand de Saussure) is the study of signs. Since this research aims to discuss Japanese socio-cultural and ideological background embedded in Doraemon, Barthes's (1972) framework of semiotics was applied for the analysis.

Based on the fact that semiotics is concerned with anything which stands for or represents something else as a sign consisting of the Signifier and the Signified, Barthes goes beyond these two concepts. Barthes (1972) insists on the concept of 'myth' by arguing as follows that while the Signifier and the Signified are in the first order, 'myth', or a system of communication, or a message, exists in the second order: "myth is a peculiar system, in that it is constructed from a semiological chain which existed before it: it is a second-order semiological system." (p. 113)

He also clarifies the meaning of 'myth' that "We must here recall that the materials of mythical speech (the language itself, photography, painting, posters, rituals, objects, etc.), however different at the start, are reduced to a pure signifying function as soon as they are caught by myth. Myth sees in them only the same raw material; their unity is that they all come down to the status of a mere language. Whether it deals with alphabetical or pictorial writing, myth wants to see in them only a sum of signs, a global sign, the final term of a first semiological chain." (Barthes, 1972, p. 113)

Consequently, in Barthes's framework, there are two semiological systems of a sign (Figure 1):

1) A linguistic system, or the language−object
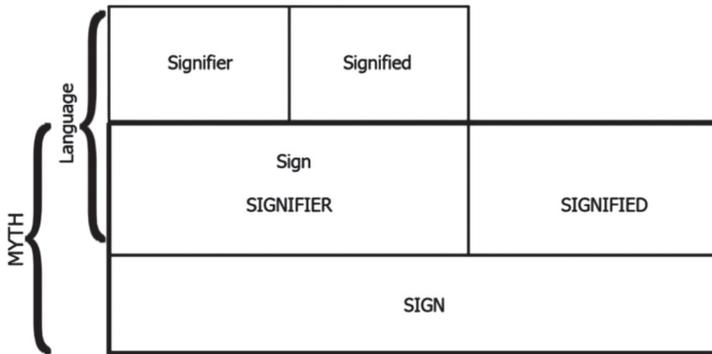
2) Myth, or the metalanguage

Figure 1 Two semiological systems in myth (adapted from Barthes, 1972, p. 113)

In the present, many people apply Barthes's concept of myth to analyze messages in the media. For example, Chandler (2007) understands Barthes's idea as the existence of two orders of significations. In the first order, there is a denotative sign consisting of a signifier and a signified. In the second order, the denotative sign is used as a connotative signifier and is attached to an additional connotative signified to create a connotative sign. In this framework, the denotation leads to a chain of the connotations.

In order to interpret the signs in the second order, Chandler (2007) recommends that we need to have socio−cultural and ideological background knowledge of the sign (Figure 2):

1st	Signifier	Signified

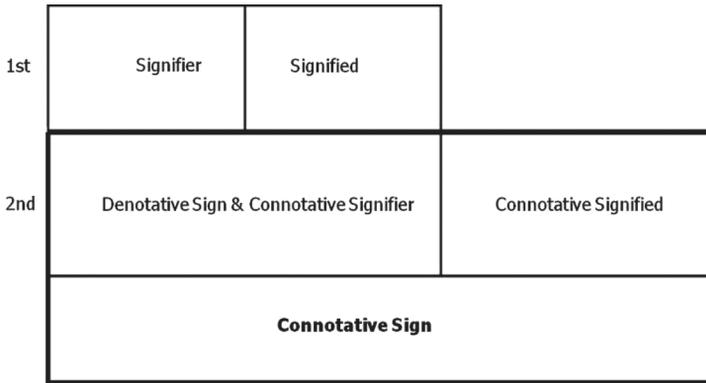| 2nd	Denotative Sign & Connotative Signifier	Connotative Signified
	Connotative Sign	

Figure 2   Orders of signification (adapted from Chandler, 2007, p. 140)

Gaines (2010) is another scholar who attempts to explain Barthes's idea. Although he does not mention the first order or the second order, he recommends that to analyze media, it is necessary to "distinguish between denotation (the literal meaning) and connotation (the implied meaning), considering the context of the signs in relation to social conventions, values, and beliefs" (p. 29). He also provides an example by comparing a car to the denotation as a means of transportation, and comparing a Lexus to the connotation as the person using the car is wealthy and has high social status.

In brief, Barthes's idea can be summarized as follows:

1) Signifier: the physical pattern of the sign

2) Signified: the concept of the sign

− Denotation: definitional, literal, obvious meaning of the sign. (A linguistic system, or the language−object of Barthes's)

− Connotation: socio−cultural, ideological, emotional meaning of the sign. (Myth, or the metalanguage of Barthes's)

The so−called implied meaning (the Myth, the metalanguage, or the socio−cultural, ideological, emotional meaning of the sign, or the Connotation, the Connotative Sign) of the second order is the focus of this research.

Semiotics was applied as the method of analysis based on the viewpoint of power relations in Intercultural Communication, in order to answer to the following research questions:

1) Why is Doraemon relatively unpopular in the U.S. while many other Japanese Manga are popular?

2) What are the factors that make Doraemon relatively unpopular in the U.S.?

3) How do these factors contribute to the insight of intercultural communication?

3. Stance of this Research

Ting−Toomey and Chung (2012) and Samovar, Porter, and McDaniel (2013) define intercultural communication as interactions between people from different cultural communities that focus primarily on how individuals from different cultural groups negotiate and manage their differences.

However, I would like to take a different stance in this research. It is widely accepted that approaches to or theories of intercultural communication have generally been interdisciplinary. Both Oetzel, Pant, and Rao (2016) and Martin and Nakayama (2010) integrate three different approaches of intercultural communication as follows:

1) Social Science approach: emphasizing cultural differences and how these differences influence communication. This approach considers intercultural communication as patterns of interaction and tries to explain and understand these patterns through quantitative methods.

2) Interpretive approach: emphasizing understanding communication in context. This approach believes that human experience, reality, including intercultural communication is subjective as it is created through human interaction. Researchers in this approach seeks to understand reality (or realities) and intercultural communication by exploring the perspectives of people who participate as members of cultural communities through qualitative data collection (ordinarily derived from anthropology and linguistics).

3) Critical approach: emphasizing the importance of power and historical context to understanding intercultural communication. Researchers in this approach also consider many assumptions of the interpretive approach but they are particularly interested in power relations in intercultural communication and in inequalities.

In this research, as the critical approach is taken to analyze the data, I would like to focus on power relations between American and Japanese popular culture in intercultural communication.

Regarding the target of interest of the critical approach, Martin and Nakayama (2010) clarify that "the (critical) scholars generally analyze cultural "products", such as media (television, movies, journals, and so on), as powerful voices in shaping contemporary culture, rather than observing or participating in face−to−face interactions or conducting surveys." (p. 66)

Besides, Pannuam (2012) and Prough (2010) indicate that the Japanese government is using Manga as the Soft power to enhance the Japanese economy in overseas market; this carries with it presumably

a conscious desire to penetrate the huge and culturally influential American marked. According to what Oetzel et al. (2016), Martin and Nakayama (2010), Pannuam (2012), and Prough (2010) provide, therefore, it is not a process, patterns, interactions, nor how people from different cultural groups negotiate different symbol systems, but it is 'media' that will be my target of interest, to examine power relations between American and Japanese popular culture. In this research, Doraemon is the target of my analysis.

4. Research methodology

There are 45 volumes of Doraemon in the original Japanese Manga version by Fujiko (1974−1996) excluding the side story, the cinematic, the fan−made, and other unoriginal versions. Each original volume consists of 190 pages which allow 15−19 episodes to fit in. On the other hand, there are 52 episodes of the American animation version each of which runs 22 minutes (there is no Manga version in the U.S. yet). As not all files in the American animation version of the blue cat are accessible, the data used for the analysis in this research are selected signs from the original Japanese version that are corresponding with the available signs from American version provided by Dramafever.com (Fitzgibbons, 2014) and by Doraemonwiki ("Doraemon in North America," n. d.). When Disney agreed to broadcast an animation version of Doraemon in the U.S. in 2014, it was the first time for the blue cat from Japan to enter the U.S. market. However, it was an altered version of Doraemon that made it to the U.S., not the original one. It remains unclear who should be credited for the alteration as Fitzgibbons (2014) claims that it is Disney while Doraemonwiki ("Doraemon in North America," n. d.) indicates that it is Fujiko Production and TV Asahi. Nevertheless, the fact remains that significant changes were seen in the animation.

Due to the limitation of accessibility, the focus of this research is on the corresponding signs from both the Japanese and American versions that would yield connotative meanings or the Myth (3), not just denotative ones.
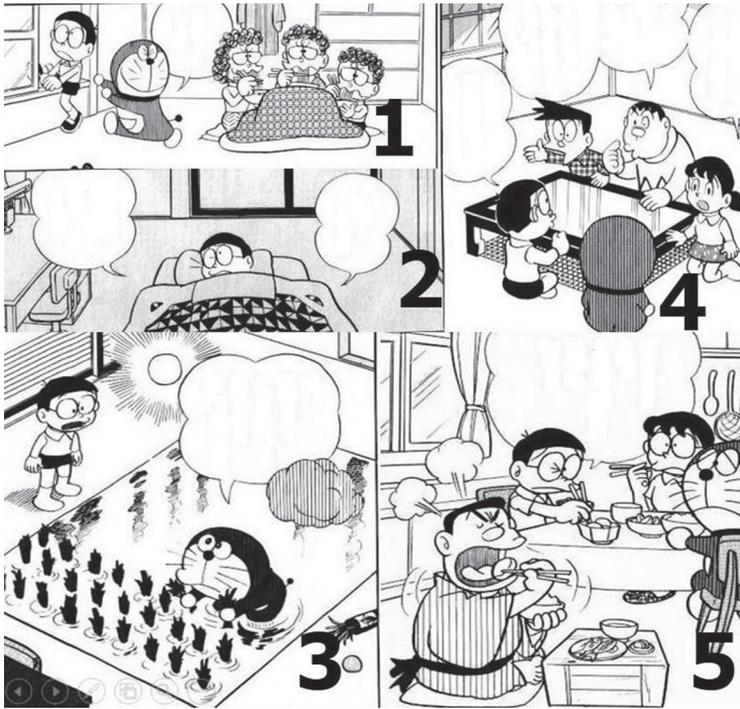
After the data collection, the processes of analyzing the data and of discussing the results, are conducted together. Both processes are presented in the 'Discussion' of this research. To analyze the data and discuss the results, from Figure 1 and Figure 2 above, I assign numbers (1−3) to the following terms as follows:

Denotative Sign and Connotative Signifier = 1

Connotative Signified (the language−object) = 2

Connotative Sign (the Myth)   = 3

5. Discussion

5.1 Doraemon in the Japanese Manga version

As dialogues in the speech balloons of some signs are not the target of interest, they are all deleted to avoid confusion. Only the crucial one was translated into English by me to better understanding of the signs.
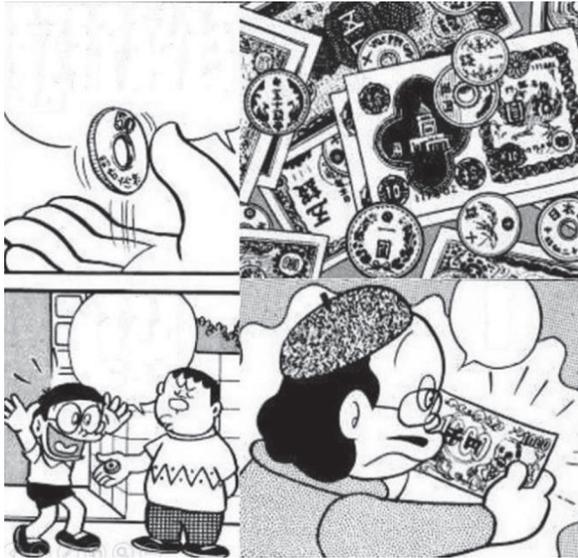
Picture 1

In picture 1, the analysis is as follows:

1 = a boy and an unidentified creature in a round shape with a group of people having some kind of noodle (No. 1), the boy sleeping (No. 2), the boy and the creature doing some kind of agricultural field in an indoor place (No. 3), the boy and the creature talking with other people (No. 4), the boy and the creature having a meal with other people (No. 5)

2 = the characters in Doraemon including Doraemon himself (the unidentified creature in a round shape is Doraemon), several kinds

of tables (No. 1, 4, and 5), a set of Japanese bedding (No. 2), and a rice field (No. 3)

3 = although some Japanese live in Western−style houses nowadays, many Japanese still live their life in the traditional Japanese style especially most characters in Doraemon do that. These images express the Japanese traditional lifestyle: having a light meal on the Kotatsu (炬燵) table (No. 1), sleeping in the Futon (布団) bedding (No. 2), welcoming guests on the Zataku (座卓) table (No. 4), using chopsticks (お箸) to eat rice (No. 5), growing rice in a rice field (No. 3); Doraemon's gadget set makes it possible to create the rice field in an indoor place. Readers who do not have any Japanese socio−cultural and ideological background knowledge will not be able to understand all the messages in these images (many people – especially those hailing from a western culture – might not even recognize the rice field). These various signifiers all contribute to the Myth – the Barthesian constellations of signs – of the beautiful and traditional "Japaneseness" (Prough, 2010; Brienza, 2009; 2014 also use the term "Japaneseness" to explain Japanese cultural concepts in Manga).

Picture 2

In picture 2, what can be seen is:

1 = physical images of people with various medals and documents

2 = the characters in Doraemon (but no Doraemon in these scenes) with Japanese coins and banknotes

3 = on these coins and banknotes, both Japanese and Arabic numeral are written but readers who do not have any Japanese socio-cultural and ideological background knowledge will not be able to read the Japanese parts and will not know the types of those coins and banknotes.
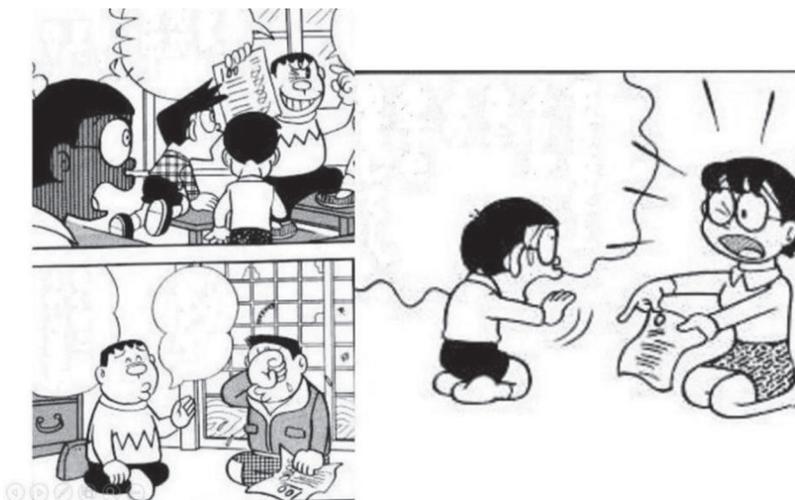
Picture 3

According to picture 3, we can analyze as follows:

　　1 = physical images of a boy writing something

　　2 = Nobita, the main character in Doraemon is writing something in Japanese

　　3 = Nobita is writing his diary using Japanese language. To type all necessary Kanji characters, thousands of the keys might be necessary. That is why ordinary Japanese people relied heavily on their own handwriting until recently with the popularization of word processor technology and personal computer. Consequently, the ability to write is highly valued in Japanese society. In particular, in order to master the writing of thousands of Kanji characters one needs significant training. Even nowadays many Japanese people value handwriting to the point

of preferring handwritten resumes/CVs and congratulations cards to printed ones. The readers who do not have knowledge of Japanese language will have no idea of why Nobita looks so happy to be able to write a diary with the help of Doraemon's gadget, and of what Nobita is capable of writing. Furthermore, it is a known fact that traditional Japanese language is written vertically and from right of the page to the left. This includes Japanese language in Manga writing. However, when any Manga is translated into other languages, only dialogues in the speech balloons are translated while any written signs in the background are not, readers without prior knowledge of Japanese will be able to grasp the meaning of these written signs only through the contexts of the story; in this case readers will know that Nobita is writing a diary only through the translation and the contexts. Somebody might argue that since it is Japanese Manga, it is normal that the characters use Japanese to communicate with each other. However, not all Japanese Manga use Japanese in that way. For example, in Fullmetal Alchemist by Arakawa (2002−2010), which has been very successful in the U.S., most characters were designed based on the presupposition that they are all Europeans; all written signs in the story including letters that they send to each other are in English although the dialogues in the speech balloons are in Japanese to communicate with Japanese readers.

Picture 4

Picture 4 represents:

　　　1 ＝ physical images of people with some kinds of documents

　　　2 ＝ the characters in Doraemon (but no Doraemon in these scenes) with Japanese−style quiz results

　　　3 ＝ Japanese−style quiz results generally rate from 0 to 100. In Doraemon, in order to express how bad he is, Nobita always receives 0 score (which means he knows nothing!) and always gets scolded by his mother.

　　　Moving on to an analysis of the sound patterns of the Connotative Signifier, the way that Fujiko named the characters can also be interpreted as the Connotative Sign. The Japanese−English translation below are based on Collick, Dutcher, Tanabe, and Kaneko (2002).

For the 1ˢᵗ character, Nobita (のび太), the analysis is as follows:

1 = the sound pattern of the 3−syllable−name in CV−CV−CV (C = consonant, V = vowel)

2 = Japanese male's first name

3 = Nobi−is a homophone of a verb Nobi−ru (伸びる) which can be translated as 'be exhausted, get groggy, flake out, lose consciousness', + suffix for male's name −ta = this boy is groggy or lazy.

The 2ⁿᵈ character, Shizuka (静香), her name can be interpreted as follows:

1 = the sound pattern of the 3−syllable−name in CV−CV−CV

2 = Japanese female's first name

3 = Shizu− is 'silence' + −ka is 'fragrance' = this is a nice girl (in Japanese cultural ideology, silence is golden)..

Moving on to the 3ʳᵈ character, Suneo (スネ夫), what can be analyzed is:

1 = the sound pattern of the 3−syllable−name in CV−CV−V

2 = Japanese male's first name

3 = Sune−is a homophone of a verb Sune−ru (拗ねる) which can be translated as 'be sulky, be peevish', + suffix for male's name −o = this boy always has a bad temper.

For the 4ᵗʰ character, Giant (ジャイアン), his personality can be seen as:

1 = the sound pattern of the 2−syllable−name in English

2 = person's English nickname

3 = his real name is Takeshi (武) but everybody calls him Giant because he is a bully and is bigger than average kids at his age.

Finally, the 5th character, Dekisugi (出来杉), what we know about him is:

1 = the sound pattern of the 4−syllable−name in CV−CV−CV− CV

2 = Japanese surname (he is the only one that everybody calls him by his surname to express social distance with him)

3 = Dekisugi is a homophone of a verb Dekisugi−ru (出来 過ぎる) which can be translated as 'too smart, too capable of' = this boy is an annoying perfectionist.
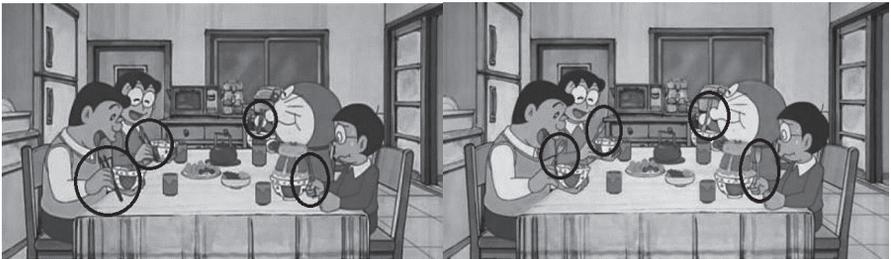

The findings from the semiotic analysis in this research are parallel with the study by Prough (2010) that Japaneseness is the very core of Doraemon. The story of Doraemon is full of Japanese socio−cultural and Japanese ideological signs in the second order: the language, the lifestyles, the society, and the values. People in Asian countries might share socio−cultural and ideological background with Japanese to some extent; for instance, rice cultures are more shared than they would be with bread cultures of the West. This is especially true for Southeast Asian countries where Japanese industrial sectors have a strong influence in their economy. As a result, people in those countries are quite familiar with Japanese cultures; food, lifestyle, values, attitudes etc. However, for the Western readers, Doraemon can be deemed so Japanese that they cannot understand nor value the ideologies underlying in the story.

Compared with other Manga that enter the U.S., Doraemon is not the only one with strong Japaneseness as plenty of Manga contain

obvious Japanese socio−cultural and ideological meanings but generally speaking the most popular Manga in the U.S. such as Dragon Ball, Sailor Moon, Fullmetal Alchemist, Saint Seiya are universal and exotic (Chen, 2011), hybridized (Brienza, 2009; 2014), and culturally odorless (Yamato, 2012). Doraemon just shows too much Japaneseness over other Manga in American market.

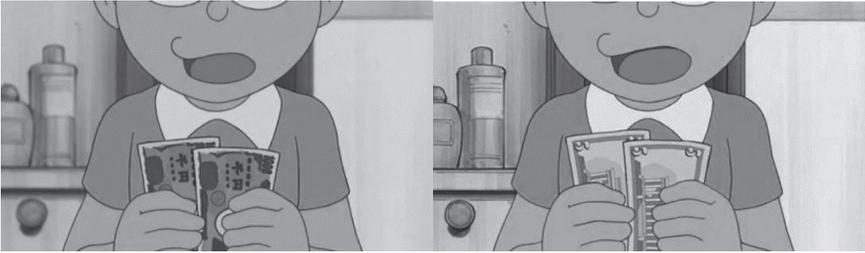## 5.2 Doraemon in American animation version

The picture of the left contains signs from the Japanese original version while the picture on the right contains signs from the altered American version.
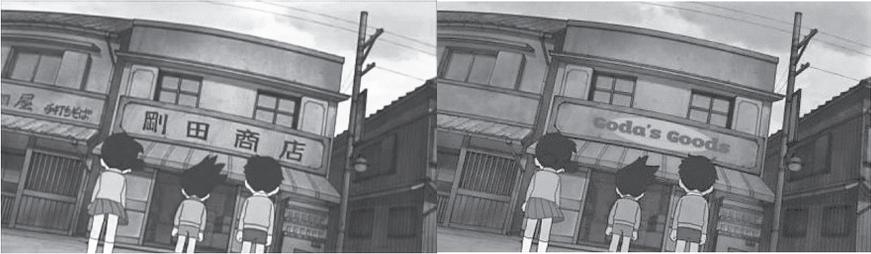

Picture 5

In picture 5, the analysis is as follows:

1 = physical images of people having a meal on a table

2 = Nobita's family is having a meal on a dining table; the chopsticks were replaced with forks in the American version on the right side

3 = Since they are using forks instead of chopsticks, this implies that the setting of the story is not in Japan but in the U.S.

Picture 6

According to picture 6, what can be interpreted is:

1 = physical images of a boy with some kind of paper

2 = Nobita is holding Japanese Yen banknotes; the banknotes were replaced by U.S. dollar in the American version on the right side

3 = As Nobita is using U.S. dollar, this indicates that the setting of the story is in the U.S.

Picture 7

Picture 7 represents:

      1 = physical images of a sign of a place

      2 = the sign of Giant's house (his house is a grocery) written in Japanese were changed to English in the American version on the right side

      3 = Since English is used here, it implies that the setting of the story is not in Japan but in the U.S.

Picture 8

In picture 8, we can analyze as follows:

1 = physical images of a kind of document with some checked marks

2 = the test result of Nobita's was changed to American grading system in the American version on the right side by adding the 'F' (in the Japanese version on the left side, the meaning of the tick ✓ mark is equal to the ✕ mark; it means 'wrong')

3 = As American grading system is used here, it implies that the setting of the story is not in Japan but in the U.S.

Regarding the sound patterns of the Connotative Signifier, the way that the names of all characters were changed can also be interpreted as the Connotative Sign.

For the 1st character, Noby (Nobita in Japanese version), the analysis is as follows:

1 = the sound pattern of the 3−syllable−name in CV−CV−CV was changed to CV−CV with stress on the first syllable

2 = Japanese male's first name was changed to English−like name

3 = the original meaning 'this boy is groggy or lazy' has been changed. The translators have tried to maintain its original meaning as 'groggy or lazy' by replacing it with Noby; implying 'Nobody'. Consequently, the meaning has been changed culturally from 'groggy or lazy' to 'nobody or loser'.

For the 2nd character, Sue (Shizuka in Japanese version), her name can be interpreted as follows:

1 = the sound pattern of the 3−syllable−name in CV−CV−CV was changed to just one syllable CV

2 = Japanese female's first name was changed to English−like name

3 = the culturally original meaning 'this is a nice girl' has been changed. Sue is the archetypal girl−next−door name; the name does not have the Japanese culturally approved of connotations of silence and demureness. Americans may feel that something is not right if Sue is silent and demure since she is supposed to be bubbly and energetic as she is the American girl−next−door. The translators have not changed the name randomly as they have tried to maintain its original meaning to some extent, but the meaning has ultimately been culturally changed.

Moving on to the 3rd character, Sneech (Suneo in Japanese version), what can be analyzed is:

1 = the sound pattern of the 3−syllable−name in CV−CV−V was changed to CCVC

2 = Japanese male's first name was changed to English−like name

3 = the original meaning 'this boy always has a bad temper' has been changed. The translators have tried to maintain its original meaning as 'bad temper' by replacing it with something even worse;

sneak and snitch = Sneech. Consequently, Sneech carries much worse connotations than the original Suneo.

For the 4ᵗʰ character, Big G (Giant in Japanese version), his personality can be seen as:

1 = the sound pattern of the 2−syllable−name in English was changed to another English word

2 = person's nickname was changed to English−like name

3 = the original meaning 'big body' was maintained while the original meaning 'bully' disappeared.

Finally, the 5ᵗʰ character, Ace (Dekisugi in Japanese version), his name can be interpreted as:

1 = the sound pattern of the 4−syllable−name in CV−CV−CV−CV was changed to VC

2 = Japanese surname was changed to English−like name

3 = the original meaning 'this boy is a perfectionist' was maintained while the original meaning 'annoying' was partially reserved.

From the semiotic analysis above, all physical images and all sound patterns of characters' names were changed to indicate that 'the setting of the story is in the U.S.'. That is the reason why other elements of the story were also significantly changed. These include but are not limited to the changes in signs, some aspects of characters, and certain decorations, for example; (1) all Japanese written signs were changed to English, (2) instead of being mistaken for Tanuki (a Japanese raccoon dog) as usual, Doraemon is mistaken for a seal, and (3) all scenes showing a Japanese Tatami mat were removed.

Although it seems like they (either Disney, or Fujiko Production and TV Asahi) have tried to maintain the original meaning of the characters' names, the original Japanese socio−cultural and ideological meanings were lost or changed during the process of cultural and linguistic translation. It is a fact that Doraemon is full of Japanese socio−cultural and Japanese ideological signs; Japaneseness is the very core of Doraemon as mentioned above (Prough, 2010). However, the production teams of the U.S. version of Doraemon altered the animation to make it more accessible to Americans. By doing so, they missed some points and ended up 'telling the audiences' that the whole story is about America. The story of Doraemon in the U.S. loses Japaneseness, including Japanese socio−cultural and Japanese ideological signs, which is the very core of Doraemon. That being the case, it seems like the blue cat from Japan is still far away from reaching a level of fame in the U.S. that can compare with that of Asia.

5.3 Supporting framework 1: Young Adult Literature Framework

Young Adult Literature framework is applicable to explain why Americans do not welcome Doraemon, Natsume (2001), Poitras (2008), Brienza (2009), and Prough (2010) argue that the characteristics of Manga popularity in Japan and in the U.S. are different; In Japan, Manga are consumed by all segments of Japanese society, with every demographic and genre represented, while in the U.S. and in other western countries its popularity is mainly among young adults.

In other words, the Young Adult genre of Manga that is popular in the U.S., can be considered a form of Yong Adult Literature for adolescents. Goldstein and Phelan (2009) make a similar claim that Manga can be an extension of Young Adult Literature. In terms of the themes of the genre, Chen (2011, 2012) suggests that 'the fantasy and

otherworldly' themes of Manga are favorites of the Western readers. Similarly, the themes of 'the fantasy and otherworldly' are commonly found in Young Adult Literature. In order to grasp the picture of what Young Adult Literature is, both Cole (2009) and Nilsen and Donelson (2009) are useful. According to their studies, the characteristics of Young Adult Literature are that (1) young adults are always the protagonists, (2) the story is told from the viewpoint of young adults, (3) the young adults have to struggle to resolve conflicts as their parents are absent in the story, and (4) themes of the story are always about coming−of−age issues (Cole, 2009; Nilsen & Donelson, 2009).

In brief, Doraemon is a Manga for children, not for young adults as it breaks most characteristics of Young Adult Literature. For Americans, Doraemon is perhaps seen as too childish for those young adults. Moreover, the great majority of the Manga market is for young adults in the U.S. (Natsume, 2001; Poitras, 2008; Brienza, 2009; and Prough, 2010). This is why Doraemon is not a favorite among Manga consumers in the U.S.

5.4 Supporting framework 2: Iceberg Model of Culture

Another framework that is applicable to explain the relative unpopularity of Doraemon in the U.S. is Weaver's Iceberg Model of Culture (Weaver, as cited in Boonnuch, 2012; Taylor, 2013). The iceberg model is useful for understanding the significance of the cultural elements that includes what you can or cannot see in cultures. It consists of two levels of culture:

1) Big C is the explicit culture, the culture that you can see, the culture that is usually focused on by tourist organizations or travel agents when they are promoting tourism:

    − Products: literature, art, music

    − Behaviors: dress, foods, leisure

    2) Small C (or Little C) is the implicit culture, the ideas or things that people believe, how people look at the world, what people value in life:

    − Ideas: beliefs, values, attitudes, opinions

    Prough (2010) points out that Doraemon was deemed 'too Japanese' for American children, in terms of its cultural elements. It can be argued that what is 'too Japanese' here is Doraemon's Big C. As Brienza (2014) clarifies that the coolness of Manga is because of its not–the–United–States–ness, not its Japaneseness, Yamato (2012) also suggests that the term culturally odorless was believed to be a key for the wide acceptance of Japanese popular culture outside Japan, therefore, the 'too Japanese' Big C of Doraemon must be changed to conform to the culturally odorless concept by concealing or eradicating its Big C's Japaneseness. In sum, it is much easier to change the Big C in Doraemon than to change the whole story into a more Young−Adult−Literature−like style. That is why all the physical images and the sound patterns in Doraemon were sacrificed to pound the pavement into American market.

    Somebody might ask, if the fact that Americans lack Japanese cultural background knowledge causes relative unpopularity of Doraemon in the U.S., why is Doraemon popular in many in Asian countries? The reason is because young people in Asian countries have had a very positive attitude towards, and have been exposed to Japanese popular culture for a long time; Asian countries have tremendous shared cultural background with Japan. Chen (2011, 2012), Iwabuchi (2002), Natsume (2001), and Yamato (2012) confirm the same. Especially, Natsume

(2001) clarifies that "(in East Asian countries) Japan is idolized as a leading developed nation (reminiscent of Japanese sentiment following World War II in which American culture was idolized)." (p. 96), while Iwabuchi (2002) also confirms that "Japan is beloved in Asia!", and that "the presence of Japanese popular culture in many parts of East/Southeast Asia no longer seems to be something spectacular or anomalous but rather has become mundane in the globalizing (urban) landscape." (pp. 1–2). In Thailand, we have seen the emergence of publishers publishing only Japanese Manga, and for the last thirty years a TV program dedicated to broadcasting Japanese animation and providing information on Japanese Manga. That explains why the situations of Doraemon in the U.S. and in Asian countries are different as Americans cannot really appreciate the Big C in Doraemon while Asians have been accustomed to it for a long time.

5.5 Answers to the research questions

The findings of this research provide a basis for answers to the research questions as follows:

RQ 1) Why is Doraemon relatively unpopular in the U.S. while many other Japanese Manga are popular?

As I take the stance of the critical approach − out of the three different approaches of intercultural communication that Oetzel et al. (2016) and Martin and Nakayama (2010) provide as mentioned above − to explain the relative unpopularity of Doraemon in the U.S., socio−cultural and ideological inequality was found in American version of Doraemon through the lens of the critical approach.

That is, the U.S. has been enjoying its socio−culturally and ideologically prestigious status for so long that Americans do not really welcome any forms of popular culture or any foreign ideologies from outside the U.S., especially if the Big C cultural features of the artifacts are too prominent. The Connotative Sign in Doraemon's unpopularity can be interpreted that in the average American's perception it is normal for the Americans to promote their own ideologies to the world while ideologies from other countries must be strictly screened, inspected, and even altered; the U.S. is still the most 'powerful' promoter of ideological artifacts of the world. If the most powerful Americans do not like it, no matter how popular it is in other countries, it has no future in the U.S. (while many other Japanese Manga are popular because the Big C cultural features are not too prominent and it complies with the Young Adult characteristics, Americans' preferences).

It can be argued that this kind of phenomenon is very common for any remade version of films, dramas, or comics. For example, in the Thai version of the popular Korean series Full House, or the Korean version of the well−known Chinese TV series Scarlet Heart, there was a loss of original socio−cultural features in these new versions, created as they were for audience with different cultural backgrounds. However, that is the case of the remade version. While other famous Japanese Manga in the U.S. such as Dragon Ball, Fullmetal Alchemist, Saint Seiya, Sailor Moon can be sold in the U.S. without any significant alteration (It should be noted that they are not the remade version, but merely the English translation of the original Japanese version published by American publishers; Dragon Ball, Fullmetal Alchemist, and Sailor Moon even share the similar book cover designs with the Japanese version) because their Big C cultural features are not too remarkable, only Doraemon is drastically screened and altered although it is not the remade version. It is understandable for Hollywood movies that are influenced by Japanese original Manga or animation like the

Matrix (influenced by the Manga Ghost in the Shell), Inception (by the animation Paprika), or the Lion King (by the Manga Kimba: the White Lion) to lose their original socio−cultural features but for Doraemon's case, it is not the remade version, nor the influenced version, but its original version was altered as if they were trying to remake it just for American market, which has rarely happened with other Japanese Manga in the U.S.

RQ 2) What are the factors that make Doraemon relatively unpopular in the U.S.?

Doraemon is deemed too Japanese. The physical images, the sound patterns, the story, the setting, the plot, the Big C cultural features, everything is extremely Japanese. Furthermore, it breaks most characteristics of Young Adult Literature that the Americans are fond of. In this case, Americans are simply incapable of accepting the almost hyper−Japaneseness of Doraemon. That is why Doraemon is still far from mirroring in the U.S. the kind of success it has had in Asian markets. However, it is important to avoid misunderstanding that Americans hate Doraemon. Doraemon is not so much unpopular as un−noticed. People do not dislike it actively; they just ignore it.

RQ 3) How do these factors contribute to the insight of intercultural communication?

From the viewpoint of the critical approach, based on the findings of this research, it is crystal−clear that power plays a crucial role in intercultural communication. People from different cultural communities have different preferences for popular culture. When they experience any cultural artifacts from different cultural groups, they will either try to adjust themselves to those artifacts, or adjust those artifacts

to their own preferences, depending on which side is more powerful; it is intercultural compromising through power. Even the legend from Japan can be just a plain and unpopular thing for Americans. In Doraemon's case, it is the U.S. that has always been more powerful, so powerful that Japanese Manga has been influenced by American culture after World War II. Although recently, Japanese Manga and Japanese popular culture is becoming more and more powerful in many Asian countries and has started its invasion in the U.S. market, it is still a long way to win American's hearts especially the one with prominent Big C like the blue cat.

6. Conclusion

This research argues that Power Relations, the concepts of Young Adult Literature, and of the Iceberg Model of Culture, play crucial roles in intercultural communication between the U.S. and Japan. As this research emphasizes the critical approach which focuses on media as powerful voices in shaping culture, I am aware of the fact that most critical studies do not work on face−to−face intercultural interaction because the media forms of communication have become the focus instead. For future research, different approaches of intercultural communication will be useful in exploring Japanese Manga as they will help shed light on the study of Manga in relation with the U.S. popular cultures, that is still not sufficiently researched.

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