

# Global Survey on Japan's Soft Power

Trevor Incerti, Changwook Ju, Daniel Mattingly,  
Colin Moreshead, Seiki Tanaka, and Hikaru Yamagishi

## 1 Executive Summary

With the generous support of the Consul General of Japan in Boston, a team of researchers at Yale University and the University of Groningen recently completed a 19 country survey examining Japanese soft power promotion efforts. This report summarizes the main findings of the survey.

The key findings of the survey include:

- **Global attitudes towards Japan remain strongly favorable.** Across the 19 countries surveyed, most respondents would prefer to cooperate with Japan on trade and security issues. Most respondents also agree with the statement that Japanese culture is “cool,” indicating that Japan’s “soft power” remains quite strong. Regionally, respondents in Asia and the Middle East have the most favorable views towards cooperation with Japan, while views in Africa and Latin America are somewhat less positive, although still positive overall.
- **Japanese government efforts to promote soft power are effective.** Our survey also examined whether recent efforts by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA) increase global exposure and understanding of Japanese policy and other contributions. We asked a random subset of survey-takers to watch videos created by MOFA promoting Japan’s cultural and economic dynamism, Japan’s efforts to strengthen maritime security, and Japan’s efforts to combat climate change. Each video led to significant increases in respondents’ interest in cooperation with Japan on trade and climate, and strengthened the appeal of Japanese culture.

In what follows we summarize the survey and describe its main findings.

## 2 The Survey Sample

To assess Japan’s Global soft power, we recruited 3,133 respondents through the survey firm Lucid. The survey sampled residents of 19 countries across 6 continents: Argentina, Australia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria, Peru, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and the United Kingdom. Figure 1 illustrates how the countries in our survey cover a wide range of levels of development, as measured by log per capita GDP.

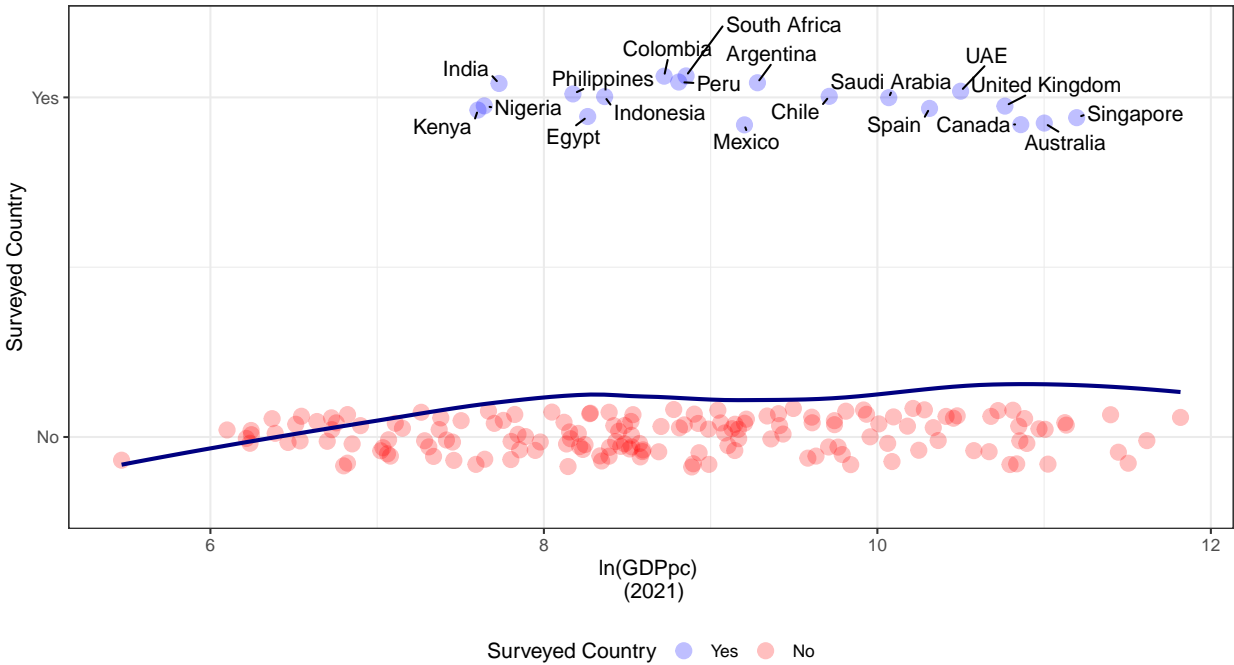


Figure 1. Log GDP per capita in 2021 for the countries in the experiment sample (top) and in the world (bottom). Note that GDP per capita for UAE is for 2020.

Our survey did not reach a random sample of residents, but targeted a more educated and urban audience than the global average. Since this is an important target of Japanese soft power promotion efforts, it was an important audience to sample. Our survey was balanced on gender.

### 3 Experimental Design in Brief

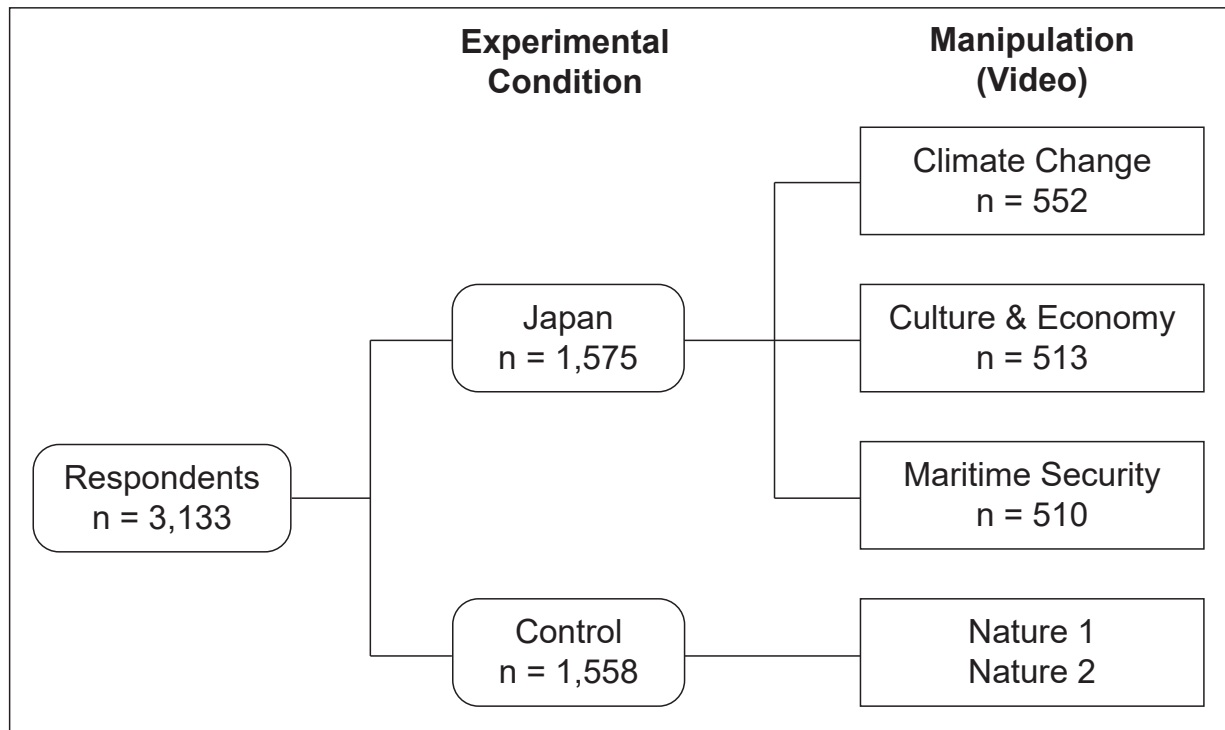


Figure 2. Sketch of Experimental Design

We embedded a survey experiment in our survey. [Figure 2](#) illustrates our experimental design. To ensure quality response, we only used respondents who passed two pre-treatment attention checks. The individuals represent 19 countries on 6 continents and were randomly assigned with equal probability to either a Japan treatment condition (*Japan*), or a placebo condition (*Control*), where respondents viewed two nature videos. Individuals in the *Japan* condition were again randomly assigned with equal probability to one of three video manipulations, each of which presents respondents with Japan’s roles in combating climate change (*Climate Change*), materializing its cultural values and economic opportunities (*Culture & Economy*), and strengthening maritime security cooperation (*Maritime Security*).

We chose the three videos using the following two criteria: 1) whether they are produced by the MOFA and circulated on its [YouTube channel](#); and 2) whether they are available in multiple languages (note that we administered our survey in English, Spanish, and Arabic). We also chose

a diverse range of topics that the MOFA videos cover: climate change, culture and economy, and maritime security. This setup allows us to examine whether *actual* efforts by the MOFA contribute to increased global exposure and understanding of Japanese policies as well as improving the global image of Japan.

After watching the videos, respondents were asked to answer three outcome questions: (1) respondents' agreement with their own country's close cooperation with Japan on trade issues, (2) their agreement with the idea that Japanese culture is cool, and (3) their agreement with their own country's close cooperation with Japan on security issues. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement to these matters based on a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 7 representing strong agreement.

#### **4 How Do Global Audiences View Japan?**

Before moving on to the experimental findings examining the effect of videos about Japan on respondent attitudes, we focus on baseline attitudes in this section. Without the experimental intervention (i.e., the additional exposure to the MOFA effort), what are baseline responses about each of our question? To calculate these quantities, we restrict the dataset to those who were in the control arm (the bottom group in [Figure 2](#)), who saw videos of natural landscapes. By focusing on those respondents who have not received any information about Japanese activities through the treatment videos, we approximate people's perspectives in a state with minimal manipulation relevant to the question at hand. Due to the generous support of the Consul General of Japan in Boston, we were able to conduct a high-powered experiment with 1,558 respondents in the control condition.

| Question                         | Responses       |                  |                    |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|--------------------|
|                                  | <i>Disagree</i> | <i>Neutral</i>   | <i>Agree</i>       |
| Cooperate with Japan on security | 6.3%<br>(n=92)  | 20.2%<br>(n=295) | 73.5%<br>(n=1,071) |
| Cooperate with Japan on trade    | 3.0%<br>(n=43)  | 16.0%<br>(n=234) | 81.0%<br>(n=1,182) |
| Japan is cool                    | 4.1%<br>(n=60)  | 17.4%<br>(n=254) | 78.5%<br>(n=1,144) |

Table 1. Baseline attitudes to three outcome questions among global respondents. (Distribution of responses among control where 1-3=Disagree, 4=Neutral, and 5-7=Agree.)

We find that the baseline attitudes of global respondents are positive for all three outcomes measures: cooperating with Japan on trade, cooperating on security, and their assessments of whether Japan is cool. [Table 1](#) summarizes the distribution of responses for each of the three questions. In each case, a supermajority of the control condition population responded that they “agree.” For the question of Japan’s soft power, the proportion of those agreeing that Japan is cool (78.5%) provides evidence that baseline attitudes are very positive.

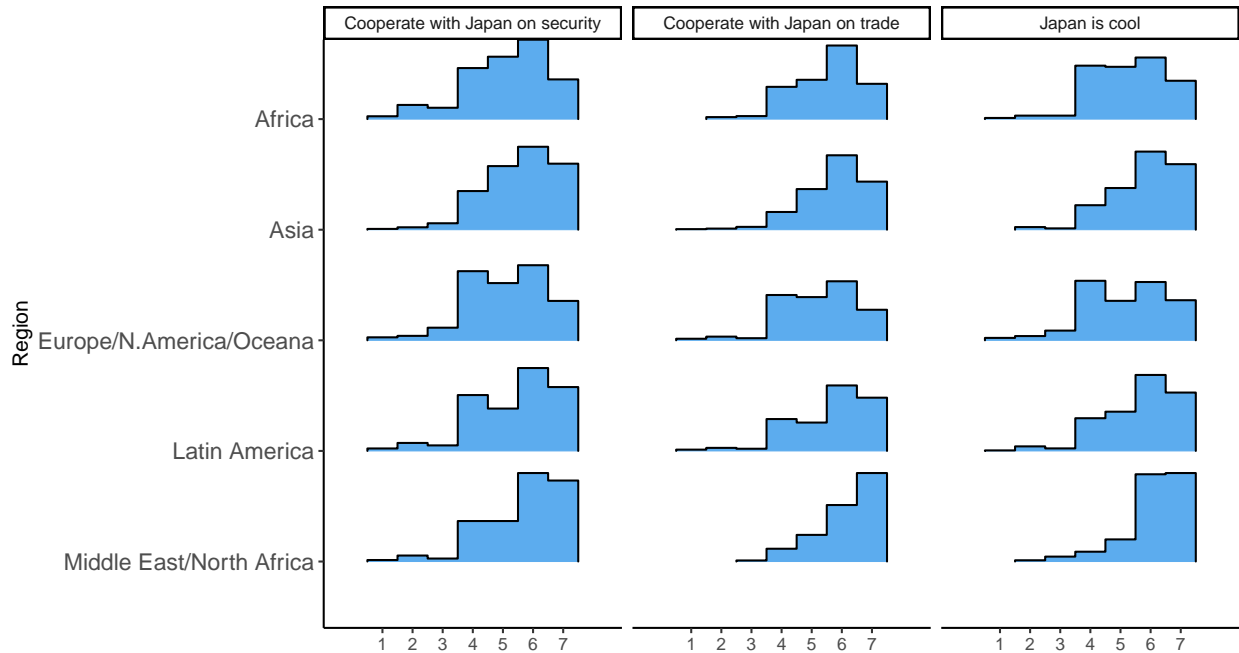


Figure 3. Attitudes towards Japan by region. 1=strongly disagree; 4=neutral; 7=strongly agree.

Baseline attitudes towards Japan varied somewhat by region, although in all regions views of Japan are broadly favorable. As Figure 3 shows, attitudes towards Japan are the most positive in the Middle East/North Africa and in Asia. Attitudes in Africa and in Europe are somewhat less positive, although still favorable overall.

## 5 Is Japanese Soft Power Promotion Effective?

Does exposure to MOFA soft power promotion efforts improve respondents' attitudes towards Japan? Figure 4 reports our main findings. Despite the fact that the baseline attitudes were already positive, the figure shows that across the three measures, after watching videos produced by MOFA, respondents increase their favorable attitudes towards Japan even further. Interestingly, the figure also suggests that watching *any* video improves attitudes towards Japan. For example, although watching the culture & economy video increases the willingness to cooperate with Japan on trade the most (i.e., *Trade cooperation* in the figure), it also increases their willingness to cooperate with Japan on security (i.e., *Security cooperation*) and perceptions that Japan is cool (i.e., *Cool Japan*).

Similarly, watching the maritime video increases the willingness to cooperate on security issues the most, but it also improves their views on economy and cool Japan. The perception that Japan is cool also increases the most by watching the economy & culture video. Although watching the other two videos are less effective, they still improve respondents' views about Japan.

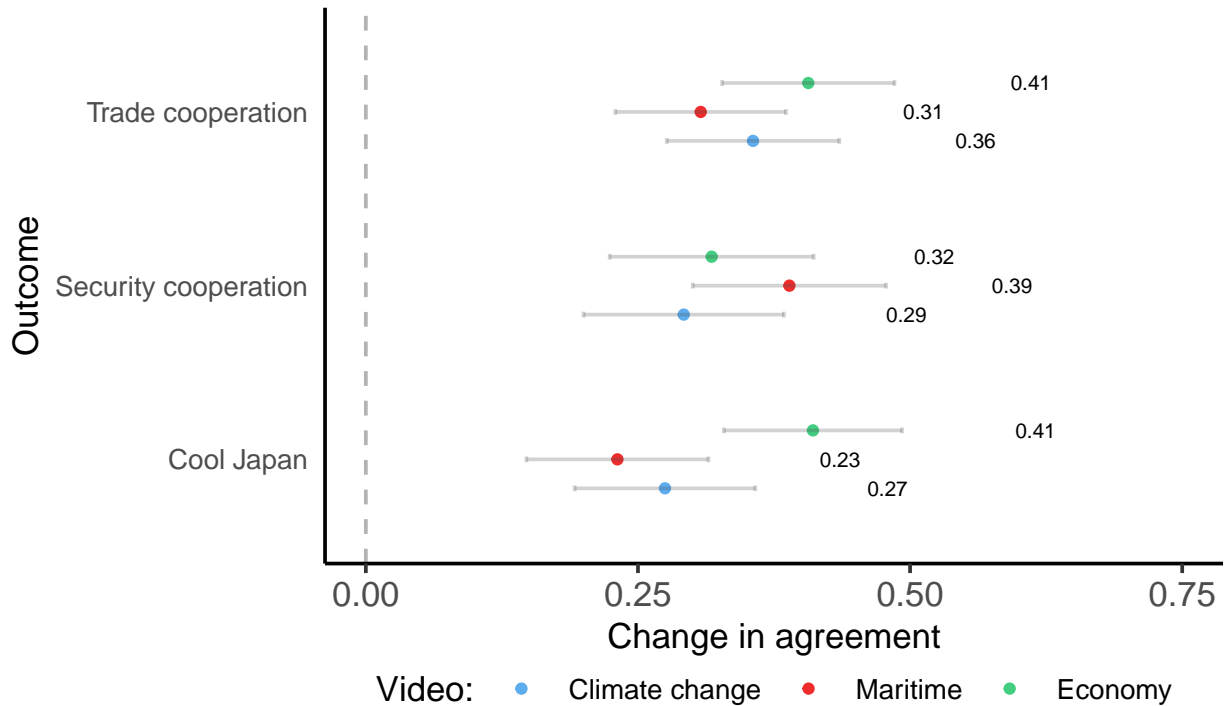


Figure 4. Treatment effect of individual MOFA videos on attitudes towards Japan. All MOFA videos led to improved attitudes towards cooperation with Japan and Japanese culture. 1=strongly disagree; 4=neutral; 7=strongly agree.

We also find that similar to the baseline attitudes, the overall positive effect varied by region. According to Figure 5, the positive effects of the MOFA videos we found above are the most pronounced in Africa, followed by Latin America, Asia, and Europe/Oceania, in different orders depending on the outcome measures. The only region in which the videos are not effective in improving Japan's image is the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Still, the no effect (not negative effect) can be in part explained by the fact that respondents in the MENA are already strongly positive towards Japan when we measure their baseline attitudes (see Figure 3). The relationship between the effectiveness of MOFA promotion efforts and existing views towards Japan

can be found in other regions – in Africa where we found less favorable attitudes towards Japan (recall Figure 3), respondents improve their views towards Japan the most by watching the videos (similar findings in Latin America albeit to a lesser degree). This may indicate that public diplomacy is more cost-effective by targeting regions with less favorable views than those with more favorable views.

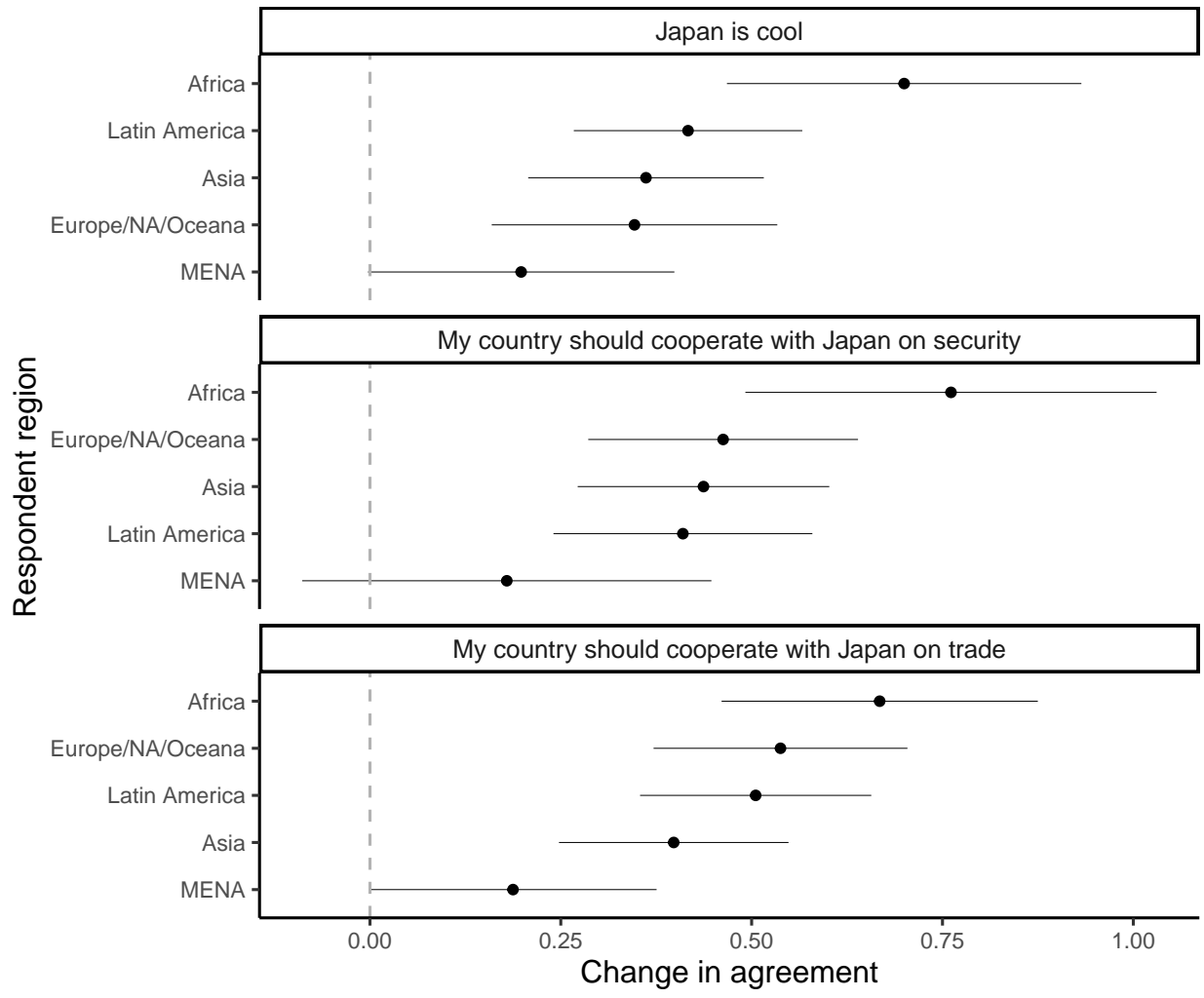


Figure 5. Treatment effects of MOFA videos by region, comparing all MOFA videos to the control group. MOFA videos were particularly effective in Africa. 1=strongly disagree; 4=neutral; 7=strongly agree.