

# Foreign Elements in Japanese Advertisements

YAMADA Michiko

愛知大学国際コミュニケーション学部

*Faculty of International Communication, Aichi University*

*michikoy@vega.aichi-u.ac.jp*

## Abstract

この研究では、日本のCMにおける外国要素（例：ヨーロッパ言語の使用、外国人、特に白人と黒人の使用、外国の風景）を1,606個のTV CMから分析した。結果、1,370（85.3％）のCMにヨーロッパ言語を使った話し言葉、あるいは書き言葉が入っていた。ここには、日本のCMにおけるヨーロッパの大きな影響が窺える。また284（17.7％）のCMに外国人が使われていたことが分かった。CMに使われた背景を見てみると日本人が使われた場合には背景も日本の方が多かったが、外国人が使われた場合には、背景も外国が使われることが多く、これは外国的な要素を強調するために外国人の場合には背景も外国を、という広告を作る側の意図が表れているのではないかと考察される。

This study examined the foreign elements that are currently being seen in Japanese advertisements. These elements include European written and spoken words, foreign persons, and foreign locations and sceneries. Based on 1,606 advertisements collected, it was found that 1,370 advertisements (85.3%) contained European written or spoken words. This indicates a belief that Europe has a strong influence on Japan. In terms of background, advertisements featuring Japanese people tend to use Japan as backdrop while those featuring foreigners use more likely to show foreign scenery. This indicates that advertisement companies tend to emphasize “foreignness” in Japanese advertisements.

キーワード：外国要素、CM、分析

## Literature Review

Japan has been spending large amounts of money on advertising with its 2015 expenditure reaching around seventy billion US dollars (calculated at the Dec 1, 2015's exchange rate of 122.85 yen per dollar) or about 6 trillion and 1.7 billion yens. This comprises 1.24% of the 2015 GDP in Japan (Dentsu, 2016). Advertisements show trends in culture (Potter, 1958), can influence culture and society, create what is considered to be a “hot” topic, and manipulate and create consumer demand (Kobayashi, 1996). TV advertisements, in particular, can convince consumers to want a new way of life by creating a trend (Kato, 1981). For instance, when an advertisement for whisky features an elegant and expensive-looking room, the advertisement is not just selling the product but also a way of life, one depicted as enjoying the whisky in the gorgeous room. Though consumers could resist the “reasons” to purchase an advertised product, the “image” portrayed in an advertisement proffers such a different way of life that is difficult to resist and are thus can penetrate the consumers’ minds easily (Dyer, 1982).

Advertisers employ various tactics to create effective advertisements. Sato (1997) claimed that an estimated 2,600 kinds of TV commercials are shown in the greater Tokyo area per month. There are many indistinguishable products, and every company attempts to differentiate itself from its competitors. Choosing to feature foreigners or some other foreign element in an advertisement serves that purpose. Yasutake (1983) claimed that the reason for using foreigners in Japanese advertisements was to attract attention, and Shiga (1990) attributes the use of foreign elements to the favorable images Japanese people have of foreigners. Hagiwara (1994) explained that it illustrates the stereotype (leading the lives of sophistication and luxury) Japanese people have of foreigners.

Rosenberg (1986) explains that this belief stems from an inferior complex Japanese people have when it comes to Westerners. Kitahara (1983) infers that this complex is due to the loss of World War II, and the subsequent admiration for the winners as commonly seen among Japanese people. The United States is perceived as a new, rich, and advanced society by the Japanese who lost so much due to World War II. The easiest way to portray the American lifestyle admired so much by the Japanese, is by using foreigners in the advertisements, according to Nakamura, a manager of the Dentsu advertising agency creative department (Tanzer, 1986). Here, foreigners are used as a synecdoche, which is an “important subcategory in which part stands for the whole or whole for a part” (Berger, 1991, p. 23). For example, people think of Egypt when they see a pyramid, thus serving as a synecdoche. In the same way, having a foreigner in an advertisement represents foreignness which, in turn, is indicative of

Western culture and countries that Japanese admire.

When reviewing the history of Japanese advertisements that feature foreigners, there has been a steady increasing the number of foreigners since the 1970s (Hagiwara, 1994). Yasutake (1983) found that out of 1,171 advertisements, close to half (46.2%) featured foreigners, foreign celebrities, or English/European words, or sceneries. The Forum for Citizens Television and Media (FCT) [*Shimin no media fooramu*] (1991) revealed that out of 1,191 advertisements examined, 29% included a non-Japanese person or foreign scenery. This difference could be attributed to the way in which each study conducted the survey. Yasutake's (1983) study included foreign words and phrases as foreign elements while FCT (1991) did not include them in its study.

In the 1990s Hagiwara (1994) examined foreign elements in 4,010 commercials in terms of foreigners, Western sceneries, European words, foreign voice-overs, and background music. The results showed that 2,324 advertisements (57.9%) featured European words, 686 advertisements (17.1%) contained foreign voice-overs, 532 advertisements (15.3%) showed scenery from Western countries, 599 advertisements (15.0%) featured foreigners, and 363 (9.0%) contained foreign background music. These foreign elements were seen much more frequently in advertisements for foreign products (44%) than in advertisements for Japanese products (16.1%). This trend particularly applied to transportation vehicles and clothing, both of which contained more than 45% foreign elements (45.7% and 45.2%, respectively). This result indicates the tendency for foreign product advertisements in Japan to utilize foreign elements (Manabe, 1994). This tendency may be considered ironical because Japanese people tend to avoid buying American cars, yet they admire foreign elements (WuDunn, 1995). Tanabe's (1994) study revealed that out of all the foreign images, American elements were utilized the most. Likewise, Yasutake's (1983) study revealed that two thirds of all foreign elements were either American or European elements.

Regarding background scenery, Hagiwara (1994) found that North America including the United States and Canada, and Europe were used most (30.1% and 32.9%, respectively). Asia and all other continents were found to feature much less frequently (12.4% and 24.6% respectively). Hagiwara's (1994) study found that more than half of the advertisements appeared to have been filmed in Europe or America. What is more is if sceneries that appeared to have been filmed in Europe or America were included, more than 70% of advertisements featured foreign elements.

Hiyoshi's (1997) study of 8,074 advertisements found that 1,449 advertisements (17.9%) had foreigners or foreign elements, though a group of people was counted only as one person. Yasutake (1983) found a similar result in his study, which contained 1,171 advertisements (16.9%) with foreigners. Ramaprasad and Hasegawa (1990) revealed

that 65 advertisements (15.9% of the total studied) had foreigners, specifically adult females. Through an analysis of 1,055 advertisements, Haarmann (1989) revealed that 24.8% featured foreigners, of whom the highest were White Caucasians, followed by a mixed-race of Whites and Asians. Blacks were not usually seen in the advertisements unless they were athletes or musicians (Hiyoshi, 1997). These studies all demonstrate the permeation of Western culture in Japanese advertisements.

### **Research Methodology and Sample**

This study was designed to outline the impact of the Western cultures on Japanese advertisements. TV advertisements were randomly recorded by the researcher and her siblings over a three-year period from August 1999 to May 2001 (746 advertisements in 1999, 550 advertisements in 2000, and 310 advertisements in 2001) in Tokyo and Osaka. Dates were also chosen at random within the 3 years comprising 250 Sundays, 266 Mondays, 125 Tuesdays, 310 Wednesdays, 173 Thursdays, 184 Fridays, and 298 Saturdays. A total of 24 days (72 hours) in Tokyo and 37 days (111 hours) in Osaka were randomly recorded. In sum, 61 days (183 hours) were analyzed. As a total possible days to record during these 3 years was 272 days in Tokyo and 580 days in Osaka, these data represent 8.82% and 6.38% of the total possible recording days and times, respectively. In total, 1,601 TV advertisements were analyzed for this study.

For the purpose of this study, the following categories of foreign elements were examined. First, European languages including English, French, German, and Italian, were analyzed and divided into written and spoken European words, both, or neither. At times it was challenging to categorize European written or spoken words in the Japanese advertisements. For example, a product had a package showing “orange jelly” in English, and the TV advertisement showed it on screen, but a Japanese voice pronounced it more like *orange ze-ree* with no emphasis on any syllable. Native speakers of English might not understand the word if they were to hear it. For cases such as this, the advertisement was still categorized as containing both European written and spoken words because it was still considered an English word, even though spoken by a Japanese person. In another case, a voice-over in a donut advertisement says, ドーナツ [donut], and again, this was considered to be an English word, spoken by a Japanese person. In this case, however, it was not written in English; and therefore, categorized as containing a spoken but not a written English word.

Second, those endorsing a product were categorized as Japanese, foreigner, or both. Foreigners were further divided into Blacks, Whites, and others. Third, the background of an advertisement was analyzed by and divided into the following categories: Japan,

foreign country, animation, both Japan and foreign country, others, and indeterminate. This background category was also seen from another differentiation: urban, rural, both urban and rural, or indeterminate. Fourth, the gender and age of the foreigners in the advertisements were also examined, and age was divided into young, middle-aged, old, and mixed (e.g., having both a young and a middle-aged person in the same advertisement). Finally, the type of product shown in an ad was also analyzed.

## Results

The result revealed that a large number of advertisements (1,370 advertisements or 85.3%) featured European spoken or written word(s), as follows; spoken European words (5.9% or 95 advertisements), written European words (41.8% or 671 advertisements), or both (37.6% or 604 advertisements). Only a small portion (14.7% or 236 advertisements) did not have contain either written or spoken European word(s) (Table 1).

Table 1 Usage of European languages

	<i>n</i> (%)
Written words	671 (41.8%)
Spoken words	95 ( 5.9%)
Both written and spoken words	604 (37.6%)
None	236 (14.7%)

The study found that 284 advertisements (17.7%) depicted foreigners. Regarding race, advertisements featuring only Whites were seen the most (109 advertisements or 38.3%), while none of the advertisements showed only Blacks, six advertisements (2.1%) showed both Blacks and Whites. Some of the advertisements included both Japanese and foreigners (48 advertisements or 16.9%), and 44 advertisements (15.5%) featured Japanese celebrities and non-famous foreigners. The percentage of foreigners other than Whites, Blacks or Japanese, such as non-Japanese Asians, Arabs, or Indians, was low (18 advertisements or 8.0%) (Table 2).

Table 2 Race or nationalities of a character in Japanese commercials with foreigners

Race or nationalities	<i>n</i> (%)
Whites	109 (38.3%)
Blacks	0
Whites and Blacks	6 ( 2.1%)
Japanese celebrities and foreigners	44 (15.5%)
Japanese and foreign non-celebrity people	48 (16.9%)
Races or nationalities other than Whites, Blacks, or Japanese	18 ( 7.0%)
Total	284

For those advertisements with Japanese people, 475 advertisements (34.4%) used a Japanese background while 70 advertisements (5.1%) used a foreign scenery as a background. For the advertisements with foreigners, 112 advertisements (39.4%) used a foreign scenery as a background, and 17 advertisements (6.0%) had a Japanese background. This showed a tendency for the Japanese advertisements featuring foreigners in the foreign backgrounds (Table 3).

Table 3 Background for commercials with foreigners or Japanese

Characters Background	Japanese	Foreigners	Western celebrities
Japan	475 (34.4%)	17 ( 6.0%)	
Foreign countries	70 ( 5.1%)	112 (39.4%)	29 (60.4%)

Another distinction of background (rural or urban) was also examined revealing 398 advertisements (28.8%) with Japanese endorsers had an urban background while 100 advertisements (7.2%) had a rural background. For the advertisements featuring foreigners, 100 advertisements (35.2%) had an urban background. A rural background was utilized in 30 advertisements (13.4%) containing foreigners (Table 4).

Table 4 Background (rural or urban) for commercials with foreigners or Japanese

	Japanese	Foreigners	Western celebrities
Rural	141 (18.7%)	30 (13.4%)	
Urban	398 (28.8%)	100 (35.2%)	28 (58.3%)

Furthermore, sex and age were examined in the advertisements with foreigners. There was no substantial difference between the sexes in a total of 284 advertisements featuring foreigners: there were males in 66 advertisements (23.2%), females in 59

Table 5 Sex for commercials with foreigners

	<i>n</i> (%)
Male	66 (23.2%)
Female	59 (20.8%)
Both males and females	99 (34.9%)

Table 6 Age for commercials with foreigners

	<i>n</i> (%)
Young	139 (48.9%)
Middle-aged	20 ( 7.1%)
Elderly	3 ( 1.1%)
Mixed generation groups	65 (22.9%)

advertisements (20.8%), and both males and females in 99 advertisements (34.9%) (Table 5). Regarding the age of foreigners shown in the advertisements, close to half (139 advertisements or 48.9%) depicted young people, while much fewer advertisements had middle-aged people (20 advertisements or 7.0%) or the elderly (3 advertisements or 1.1%). However, 65 advertisements (22.9%) showed a mix of different age groups such as young and old (Table 6).

The type of products featuring the highest number of foreigners was the automobile products (67 advertisements or 23.6%). This was followed by foods and shampoo (seen in 28 advertisements or 9.9% each), drink advertisements excluding coffee or liquor (27 advertisements or 9.5%), coffee (20 advertisements or 7.0%), company advertisements (16 advertisements or 5.6%) and electronics (11 advertisements or 3.9%). All other types of products had fewer than 10 advertisements each (Table 7). If automobile “company” advertisements and advertisements for automobile-related goods such as car seats were all categorized as automobile advertisements, the percentage increased to 71 advertisements (25.0%).

Table 7 Product being endorsed for commercials with foreigners

Category	<i>n</i> (%)
Automobile	67 (23.6%)
Foods	28 ( 9.9%)
Shampoo	28 ( 9.9%)
Drink (exclude coffee and alcohol)	27 ( 9.5%)
Coffee	20 ( 7.0%)
Company ads	16 ( 5.6%)
Electronics	11 ( 3.9%)
Others	87 (30.6%)

## Discussion

This study shows the strong influence of the West in Japanese advertisements. The rate of foreign elements such as spoken or written European words or foreigners in

the Japanese advertisements was much higher than the actual percentage of foreigners living in Japan. Foreigners made up 1.33% of the Japanese population in 2000 (*Houmusho* [Ministry of Justice], 2000), which is the period around which the data for this study was collected. This number did not increase much even 15 years later in 2015 when it was around 2.1 million (*Houmusho* [Ministry of Justice], 2016), 1.7% of the Japanese population (“*Imin ukeire*” [Accept immigrants], 2015). Thus, the rate at which foreigners were seen in the advertisements was disproportionately high.

Though the high percentage of foreign words or foreigners in Japanese advertisements indicates the filtration of Western culture into Japan, none of the advertisement featured only Blacks. This is indicative of Japanese admiration for Caucasians, but not all Westerners overall. Furthermore, this may indicate the negative bias that the Japanese have toward Blacks. In addition, when advertisements with automobile-related goods were included in the category of automobile advertisement, this category had the highest percentage of foreigner inclusions, implying that there may be a connection in consumers’ minds between foreigners and automobiles or technology.

In future, it is important to conduct a longitudinal *study to determine the difference over time. As this study was conducted from the late 1990s to the early 2000s, there is a chance that the trend may have changed.* Mueller (1992) collected a total of 202 advertisements in 1978 and 1988. She found that in 1978, there were eight advertisements (8.6%) starring Western models and two advertisements (2.2%) featuring Western celebrities, while in 1988, there were 13 advertisements (11.9%) with Western models and one advertisement (0.9%) with a Western celebrity. As indicated by this study, it seems that it is important to examine the relationship between the time difference and whether Japanese advertisements are showing more or less of Western culture in advertisements today.

## References

- Berger, A. A. (1991). *Media analysis technique* (Rev. ed.). Newbury park, CA: Sage.
- Dentsu (2016). 2015 nen nihon no koukokuhi [Advertising expenses in 2015] Retrieved on August 15, 2016 from [http://www.dentsu.co.jp/knowledge/ad\\_cost/2015/](http://www.dentsu.co.jp/knowledge/ad_cost/2015/)
- Dyer, G. (1982). *Advertising as communication*. London: Methuen & Co. E. F. Hutton’s spokesman idea a “cos” celebre. (1986, April 21). *Advertising age*, 1.
- FCT (1991). Terebi ga utsushidasu “gaikoku” to nihon no kokuzaika [“Foreign countries” on television and internationalization of Japan]. *Terebi Shindan Bunseki Chosa Houkoku Vol. 7*.
- Hagiwara, S. (1994). Nihon no terebi CM ni okeru gaikou youso no yakuwari [The function of foreignness in Japanese television commercials] *Keiougijyuku Daigaku Shinbun Kenkyujyo Nenpou*, 43, 19–38.
- Haarmann, G. (1989). Symbolic Values of Foreign Language Use: From the Japanese Case to a General Sociolinguistic Perspective (Contributions to the Sociology of Language). Germany: Mouton De Gruyter.
- Hiyoshi, A. (1997). Terebi koukokuni okeru “gaikokujin” toujou jinbutsuzou ni kansuru jissyouteki kensyuu



- [Analysis of foreigners in TV advertisements] *Nihon Masu Communication Kenkyu*, 51, 182–195.
- Houmusho [Ministry of Justice] (2016). Zairyu gaikokujin [Foreigners living in Japan] Retrieved on August 15, 2016, from <http://www.e-stat.go.jp/SG1/estat/Xlsdl.do?sinfid=000031399576>
- Houmusho [Ministry of Justice] (2000). Heisei 14nen-matsu genzai ni okeru gaikokujin tourokkusya toukei ni tsuite [Statistics shown about foreigners living in Japan in 2006]. Retrieved on Dec 20, 2015, from [http://www.moj.go.jp/nyuukokukanri/kouhou/press\\_030530-1\\_030530-1-1.html](http://www.moj.go.jp/nyuukokukanri/kouhou/press_030530-1_030530-1-1.html)
- Imin ukeire wo dou susumerubeki? Jinko gensho Gaikokujin hiritsu ha sekai 151 i. Genjyo wo gaikan [How can we accept immigrants? Population decrease. Percentage of foreigners living in Japan ranked the 151<sup>st</sup> in the world. A summary of the current situation]. (2015, March 3) Retrieved on August 15, 2016, from <http://newsphere.jp/national/20150303-imin1/>
- Kitahara, M. (1983). Popular culture in Japan: A psychoanalytic interpretation. *Journal of Popular Culture*, 17 (1), 104–110.
- Kobayashi, T. (Ed.) (1996). *Koukoku no kiso I* [The basics of advertising I]. Tokyo: Nikkei Koukoku Kenjyujyo.
- Manabe, K. (1994). *Koukoku no shakaigaku (zouho ban)* [The sociology of advertisements (Revised ed.)]. Tokyo: Nikkei Koukoku Kenjyujyo.
- Mueller, B. (1992). Standardization vs. specialization: An examination of westernization in Japanese advertising. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 32 (1), 15–24.
- Potter, D. M. (1958). *People of plenty: Economic abundance and the American character*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Rosenberg, L. (1986). Deciphering the Japanese cultural code. *International Marketing Review*, 3 (3), 47–57.
- Sato, K. (1997). Ima naze tarento koukoku nanoka [Why do we have many commercials with celebrities now?]. *Brain*, 37 (4), 21–25.
- Shiga, N. (1990). *Syouwa terebi housoushi* [The history of TV media in Showa era]. Tokyo: Hayakawa Syobou.
- Tanzer, A. (1986, July 14). The celebrity is the message. *Forbes*, 138, 88–89.
- Yasutake, Y. (1983). CM no naka no gaikoku bunka [Foreign cultures in CM]. In K. Kawatake (Ed.), *Terebi no naka no CM bunka* [CM culture in TV] (pp. 62–86). Tokyo: Nihon Housou Syuppan Kyokai.
- WuDunn, S. (1995, Nov. 7). Japanese prefer blondes (In their ads, that is). *The New York Times*, 145 (50238), A4.