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My Inspiration: Japan

Reflection of culture and heritage in Japanese children's books and toys

(short abstract)

In this dissertation I describe Japanese mentality, and forms of behavior that differ from the Hungarian. I examine the ancient Japanese art forms, and outline how writing and calligraphy were born. I give a short description of the historical and geographical circumstances, with the aim to facilitate sound understanding of the ways in which Japanese arts evolved. I outline the main characteristics of Japanese mythology and tales, and the principal concepts and characters. I propose an overall idea of the Japanese children's books, identify characteristics of the visual representation and examine some excellent illustrators based on a subjective selection.

I investigate the role of traditional Japanese child's plays, by examining artifacts and objects still in use, that have a major impact on Japanese toys of our days as well as on contemporary Japanese design.

The analysis of traditional Japanese plays is followed by an outline of the principal elements to the XXth and XXIst century world of Japanese toys and games and the most incisive processes influencing technological development.

The description of my DLA project briefly analyzes the genre of bilingual children's books and illustrated dictionaries, followed by insights into the creative processes and decisions that have led to the final result.

Thesis Statement

During my research on the world of children in Japan, I have often asked myself the question: What could be done to improve the current situation of children's book publishing and toy manufacturing industry in Hungary?

It is self-explanatory that it is not the child him/herself to buy a book or a toy. In most cases he or she will not even be granted the right to choose, his/her choice might not be taken into consideration, and an eventual choice of the child will possibly be influenced by its parents or other adult relatives. Whoever the child receives it from, the filter through which he or she will relate to a toy or a book especially, will always be that of the parent. The enthusiasm and joy over a present can easily be triggered by the enthusiasm of the parent, and vice versa, it can easily be dispirited by negative attitude of the intermediary, especially at very young age.

Therefore **if we want to render children's products of outstanding visual quality commercially marketable, it is indispensable to enhance and form parents' taste and visual perceptiveness.**

As my research points out, the Japanese strategy clearly indicates that specialized periodicals, internet contents and forums dedicated to the world of children, play a key role in forming and fine-tuning the taste of adults and parents. Appropriate presentation, visibility on shop displays and effective advertising are highly important.

Children's enthusiasm as well as adults willingness to purchase, can be facilitated by extending the range of products offered. More specifically: in a small country where there are no giant enterprises that would unite every segment of an industry in one hand, collaboration between groups of representatives of the singular branches will enhance the efficacy of reaching the common target.

If publishers, editors of children's magazines, toy and school equipment manufacturers, distributors – bookshops, stationery stores, toyshops – carry out individual campaigns with a view to their own profit exclusively, they may risk major losses, often by mutually 'knocking out' each other.

If they collaborate and build a common strategy around product lines, it will boost their efficacy both in achieving the target, as well as in terms of profitability, and at the same time will diminish the risk of loss.¹

Thus, **cooperation is the optimal strategy for creating a lucrative market for Hungarian children's books and toys of high quality.**

The above cooperation is necessary for the preservation, and auspicious future progress of the national culture and manufacturing industry as well.

The Japanese example illustrates, how important it would be to be able to preserve the traditional values and craftsmanship, and their transposition to the technologies of the XXIst

1

¹ Thus the rules of the Equilibrium Theory as set forth by *John F. Nash in Game Theory*, apply to this case. (for more see: <http://www.komal.hu/cikkek/nash/nash.h.shtml>)

century. We had and still have extraordinary artisans: carpenters, curriers, bookbinders... etc. but today these arts and crafts serve as mere tools for executing spiritless, dull commissions, such as production of blockboard panels or binding thesis-papers. It is rare that they are exposed to challenging commissions or projects, in which they could meet expectations for state of the art design.

Antique toys and objects are another fantastic pool of hidden treasures of the national culture. Hungarian toy manufacturing has become almost nonexistent by today, and publishers tend to commission Chinese enterprises too.

However, in case there were more, and higher quality commissions, these industries would generate profits, which would further boost technological development to enable the production of higher quality products. Paralelly, the craftsmanship of old artisans would be recovered and applied, which could attribute to Hungarian products a touch of uniqueness.

The above described development is a tool for job creation, and provides opportunity and inspiration for designers to re-think the traditional values in the light of possibilities of implementation and enhanced market capillarity.

High quality and exclusiveness drives professional acknowledgment within the trade, which would motivate young generations to acquire the mastery of traditional arts and crafts and choose this vocation.

In the preservation of a given national culture, the cultivation of traditional arts and crafts plays an indispensable role.

Knowing and growing fond of the values of our national culture and environment, should be emphasized already in the course of education – as well as appreciating that of other nations. To achieve this goal, it is indispensable to consider the aptitudes and possibilities of the child in transmitting information. Personalized development helps identifying the appropriate social status and facilitates social integration, due to which the individual will perform better as part of a group, which facilitates the functioning of group.

Differentiated development helps the individual to achieve the best of his/her potential performance within a group, thus the performance of the group can reach its maximum.

Export and international communication are indispensable, for reaching cultural and industrial prosperity of a given nation, which requires a sound knowledge of foreign languages. Differentiation is key to language learning. Without knowing the culture of a nation it is impossible to fully acquire its language, therefore before starting to learn a language or at least at the same time, one should start getting to know the people and their customs.

Various languages should be acquired in various ways, according to the various aspects of the attaining customs. Without familiarity with the culture, the knowledge of the language will remain a mere 'code', but if we do not know the rules, we will not be able to decipher and interpret it, neither will we express ourselves unequivocally.

In conclusion we can affirm, that **perfect knowledge of a language is not possible without studying and understanding the culture as well.**