Western Meets Japanese Culture Essay, Research Paper

Western meets Japanese Culture What happens when the western way of doing something is brought into Japanese popular culture? There are many western influences visible in modern Japanese society. However, different types western influences are treated differently. This process is often referred to as recontextualization. .This recontextualization comes in two distinct forms. Some maybe enculturated into Japanese life through assimilation, in which, the Japanese take something foreign and make it their own. In this senario, the Japanese take the best attributes from something foreign and find a new meaning or context for it that applies to the Japanese view of doing things. The other form of recontextualization is when something is exciting because it is new or exotic. This excitement that comes from being exposed to these rare and exotic things which is the reason things important to the Japanese. Therefore, they keep these things as exotic as there were and don’t try to treat them as Japanese or look at them in a traditional sense. Both of these methods of importing other cultural aspects into popular Japanese culture are quite common. It is evident that there are certain guidelines for when to use each method. For example, if it is interesting because it is better than something one already has or is more useful, then that person would assimilate it into their culture so that they could use it. However, if one was excited by or intrigued by something foreign, only for the reason of it uniqueness, then that person would keep it unique because that is what the relationship is based on. This is best exemplified by examples in modern Japanese life. The first method of recontexulization is when a culture assimilates other useful aspects from different cultures into their own. One of the best examples of this is western architecture. The Japanese love western style and design in building from Italy, to America, to the French. Western design signifies style and class amongst upper Japanese. However, even the Japanese television shows have segments for the average housewife and “cheap” decorating tips to make their house more western and therefore prestigious. However, An aspect to this assimilation is the new context in which the foreign object must be given to be in function with Japanese views and traditions. Many people respect the ancient Japanese style of house layouts and floor plans. The symmetry and position of every piece of furniture is very important by incorporating these traditional practices in western style then the Japanese make it their own. This is often referred to as the cuckoo model due to it resemblance to the bird that steals another bird’s eggs and hatches them for itself. It is this very “hatching” process in which the Japanese make it relate to them. Sometimes the Japanese like a popular western theme for different reasons than why it is popular here. This is an example where the Japanese context is much different than the western one but the both view it as popular. For instance, The popularity of the cowboy in Japan was not due to a passion of riding horses or of camping out roping cows but instead of the idea of camaraderie, hard work, and dedication that due Japanese men to the cowboy motif. One of the best examples is that of American baseball and it’s introduction to Japan, as well as Japan’s influence on it. When the Japanese started becoming fascinated with baseball is when they realized how much baseball had in common with

Japanese traditions and values. The Japanese take baseball much more seriously than Americans do, sure it is the national past time but the players don’t nearly spend the same amount of time training as the Japanese do, nor due the feel that training is more important than the actual game. However, these things are inherent in Japanese though: If you work hard you will become better, don’t try too hard or else you will make a mistake. The Japanese play baseball a lot more cautiously than Americans do. No one wants to loose face and so the game is based on slow thought out strategic moves and plays. This demonstrates how the Japanese can hold baseball just as popular as we do but for different reasons. The second type of recontexulization is to keep the exotic just as it is: exotic. This means the one does not try and reinterpret something strange to fit their cultural views but instead keep it foreign and intriguing. The Japanese did this with the importation of Disneyland into Tokyo. They didn’t want it to be redesigned to look Japanese and so that it related to the Japanese people better. The Japanese wanted it to look like the one in Anaheim. This is because to the Japanese, Disneyland represented something purely American and they wanted to experience that over and over again at home. They wanted it to be as close to the original as possible. This is because it is not useful for them to integrate it into their society, but rather it is entertaining and exciting to be exposed to such foreign things. If these “foreign” thins were to become familiar to the Japanese they would loose their attractiveness and serve no other purpose to the Japanese. That is why the Japanese do not give new meaning to everything that they like from abroad but just the useful ones. This is exemplified in the use of foreign actors in Japanese television. Japanese still find humor in the appearance, language, and habits of the foreigner. If the Japanese see and view foreigners as different, it helps them to feel more Japanese. This was the case on the Japanese “Trivial” game show where there was a foreigner named “muscles” who jumped around and tried to lip sync Japanese. This use of the stereotyping is seen throughout television. It is important for the American new anchor on a Japanese show to pronounce his Japanese with a foreign accent. They tend to cast blonde hair, blue eyed people in the role of a foreigner to perpetuate the differences between them and the dark eyed and haired Japanese. American goods are viewed as a seen of wealth or prestige. On article quoted that a bag of glacier ice cost $12. This is not to imply that these products are superior to Japanese products. Those that are have a better-redesigned Japanese version already in production. What it means is that for these items the Japanese value the fact that it’s foreign, different, or exotic more than the actual itself. All of these examples shows how the Japanese deal with the outside forces acting on them. In certain cases were it is useful, They absorb it and translate it into a Japanese point of view. In other cases where the interest is more about rareness than actual utility, the Japanese tend to keep it as close to its origins as possible. They do these two different things for different reasons, but they both accomplish the same thing. The Japanese realize what a small world it is and how they can not just ignore it. However, they are aware of how easy it is to loose their roots and their heritage in this modern connected world.