Ca' Foscari
University
of Venice

Master's Degree in
Languages, Economics and
Institutions of Asia and North Africa

Final Thesis

National and Regional Branding in East Asia: A Comparison of Fashion Brand Strategies Between the Metropolis and Peripheral Areas of Japan and South Korea

Supervisor
Ch. Prof. Hirofumi Utsumi

Assistant Supervisor
Ch. Prof. Toshio Miyake

Graduand
Camilla Petroni
Matriculation number 876075

Academic Year
2023/2024

INDEX

ABSTRACT 4

要旨 6

INTRODUCTION 8

CHAPTER 1: GLOBALIZATION AND SOFT POWER THEORY 11

Globalization 11

Soft Power 18

Intersection between Globalization and Soft Power 23

CHAPTER 2: NATION BRANDING, CULTURAL DIPLOMACY AND FASHION 28

National Branding and Regional Branding 28

2.1. Definition of National Branding 28

2.2. Concept of brand and key factors for national branding 29

2.3. Controversies about nation branding 34

2.4. Definition of regional branding 35

Examples of nation branding in East Asia 44

Impact of culture and fashion 52

CHAPTER 3: CASE STUDIES ON FASHION BRAND STARTEGIES 59

Case study on Japan 59

3.1. Luxury and non-luxury fashion brands strategies in central areas 60

3.2. Examples of National Branding in Japanese Non-Luxury Brands UNIQLO and MUJI 63

3.3. Examples of regional branding through apparel companies' strategies in Aomori Prefecture 77

Case study on South Korea 86

3.4. The Evolution of Fashion in Seoul and the Influence of Fast Fashion Brands 87

3.5. Urban Regeneration Strategies through the Revitalization of Fashion Streets in Mokpo 94

Global Perception of Asian and Western Fashion Brands 100

CONCLUSIONS 107

BIBLIOGRAPHY 110

FIGURE INDEX 114

WEBSITES AND PORTALS 115

ABSTRACT

Globalization, with its intensification of economic and cultural exchanges, has generated complex dynamics that deeply influence local identities and policies (Wallerstein, 2004 cited in Griffiths & Imre, 2013; Meyer, 2007; Sassen, 2004). On the one hand, there is economic interdependence and greater cultural connectivity (Appadurai, 1996); on the other, local societies are faced with global cultural norms, often with consequences for community cohesion (Sassen, 2004).

In this context, soft power emerges as a crucial tool for nations that wish to exercise influence through intangible resources such as culture, ideology, and institutions (Nye, 1990). Nation branding, understood as the ability to promote an effective "national brand," and regional branding, which aims to build and promote the identity of a specific region by highlighting characteristics such as traditions and culture, become essential for building trust and attracting interest toward a country (Anholt, 1998; Lury, 2004; Vigolo, 2009; Hakkala & Lemmetyinen, 2013; Oliveira & Ashworth, 2017; Biletska, 2021).

This thesis analyses nation branding and regional branding strategies in the fashion sector in Japan and South Korea, two countries that have effectively used soft power to enhance their influence (Harada, 2010; Vigolo, 2009). The research focuses on the dynamics between global urban centres and peripheral areas, where there is a revaluation of local traditions and craftsmanship.

To achieve this, the thesis first analyses both the benefits and drawbacks of globalization in conjunction with the use of soft power by nations, focusing on the socio-economic impacts and evolving dynamics of cultural exchange and technological development.

In the second chapter, the importance of a strategic and conscious construction of the nation brand is emphasized, highlighting the multiple cultural, social, and economic factors that contribute to the success of nation branding and regional branding. In this context, examples of nation branding in

various East Asian countries will be analysed, along with the impact that cultural diplomacy and fashion have in shaping global dynamics and, thus, influencing the collective perceptions of nations and their products.

In the third chapter, which is the focus of this thesis, case studies on the fashion branding strategies of Japan and South Korea are discussed through a comparison between central and peripheral areas, specifically the Aomori prefecture in Tōhoku and the city of Mokpo in South Jeolla.

In conclusion, through the analysis conducted, this research aims to provide answers to the questions that have led to the development of this thesis and offer considerations for future studies regarding the increasingly relevant theme of regional branding in East Asian countries.

要旨

グローバリゼーションは、経済的および文化的な交流の強化を伴い、地域のアイデンティティや政策に深い影響を与える複雑なダイナミクスを生み出しました（Wallerstein, 2004, Griffiths & Imre, 2013; Meyer, 2007; Sassen, 2004）。一方で、経済的相互依存と文化間の結びつきの強化が見られ（Appadurai, 1996）、他方で、地域社会はグローバルな文化規範と向き合うこととなり、それがしばしば共同体の結束に影響を与える結果となります（Sassen, 2004）。

このような文脈において、ソフトパワーは、文化、イデオロギー、制度などの無形資源を通じて影響力を行使したいと考える国々にとって、重要な手段として浮上します（Nye, 1990）。ナションブランディング（nation branding）は、効果的な「国家ブランド」を促進する能力として、また、地域ブランディング（regional branding）は、特定の地域のアイデンティティを構築し、伝統や文化などの特徴を強調することを目的としており、国への信頼を構築し、関心を引き寄せるために不可欠な要素となります（Anholt, 1998; Lury, 2004; Vigolo, 2009; Hakkala & Lemmetyinen, 2013; Oliveira & Ashworth, 2017; Biletska, 2021）。

本論文は、日本と韓国のファッション業界におけるナションブランディングおよび地域ブランディングの戦略を分析します。これらの国々は、ソフトパワーを活用して影響力を拡

大してきました（Harada, 2010; Vigolo, 2009）。研究は、グローバルな都市圏と周辺地域のダイナミクスに焦点を当て、地域の伝統や工芸品の再評価が行われている様子を考察します。

この目的を達成するために、まず、グローバリゼーションとソフトパワーの併用における利点と欠点を分析し、文化交流や技術開発の進展に伴う社会経済的影響と動態に焦点を当てます。

第 2 章では、ナションブランドの戦略的かつ意識的な構築の重要性を強調し、ナションブランディングおよび地域ブランディングの成功に寄与する多様な文化的、社会的、経済的要素を明らかにします。この点において、東アジアの複数の国々におけるナションブランディングの事例を分析し、文化外交やファッションがグローバルダイナミクスを形作り、国々やその製品に対する集団的な認識にどのように影響を与えるかについて考察します。

本論文の焦点である第 3 章では、日本と韓国のファッションブランド戦略に関する事例研究を取り上げ、中心地と周辺地、具体的には東北地方の青森県と韓国の南全羅道の木浦市を比較します。

結論として、行った分析を通じて、本論文の発展に導いた問題への答えを導き出し、東アジアの国々における地域ブランディングというますます重要なテーマについて、将来の研究に向けた考察を行います。

INTRODUCTION

'Information becomes power, especially before it spreads.

The ability to respond promptly to new information is therefore a key power resource.' (Nye 1990)

With globalization, the use of soft power has been increasingly reinforced, as nations constantly strive to improve their global image and cultural credibility, demonstrating how these phenomena shape modern societies in an increasingly interconnected and digitalized context. While Western countries have long invested in soft power initiatives, leading to broad global influence starting from pop culture, in the last decade some East Asian countries, including Japan and South Korea, have gained significant prominence on the international stage using these strategies (Harada, 2010). Indeed, the creation and promotion of national brands and cultural aspects with television, internet, and technological media (computers, smartphones, etc.) have enabled Asian countries not only to strengthen their competitive value in foreign markets but also to foster a deeper reception of their national image from a tourism perspective, leading to an increase in investments and collaborations (Vigolo, 2009). Japan, which according to Monji (cited in Heng, 2009) derives its cultural strength from the ability to absorb foreign influences without losing its traditional modes, has focused more on popular culture and values, primarily promoted by the private sector rather than the public (Heng, 2009). In this way, in addition to cultural and intellectual exchanges and the creation of its global news channel NHK, Japan also supports its culture and pop subculture through a public-private approach, investing in music, manga, animation, video games, and fashion (Newcomb, 2008, cited in Heng; Iwabuchi, 2015). South Korea, on the other hand, achieved international success following the first Korean Wave (in Korean 한류 Hallyu, "Korean wave"), during which the production of K-

dramas emerged, gaining viewership particularly in the Asian context through multichannel broadcasts. More recently, with the second cultural wave, it has also captured Western interest through the promotion of idol groups within the K-pop music industry and through its fashion, gastronomy, and tourism sectors (Yasuno & Enomoto, 2020; Yoo, 2022).

This paper focuses on a comparative analysis of national and regional branding in the fashion sector in Japan and South Korea, with particular attention to the dynamics between global cities, where national and international brands coexist, and peripheral areas, where there is a re-evaluation of local traditions and craftsmanship.

The research aims to answer the following questions:

1. What soft power strategies have Japan and South Korea adopted to compete globally in the fashion sector?
2. How have Western brands, particularly luxury ones, influenced the fashion market in East Asia?
3. What regional branding strategies are being implemented by local clothing companies in Japan and South Korea to promote their brands, combining tradition and innovation?

The primary goal is to gain a deep understanding of the interconnection of countries in the international landscape following globalization processes and how, paradoxically, countries that have inevitably undergone cultural contaminations over time due to openness to exchanges, telecommunication links, and the passage of information from one side of the world to the other (world wide web), are now attempting to reassert their national identity based on culture, traditions, and the values of the people (Vigolo, 2009). In this context, alongside cultural diplomacy, fashion, as a cultural element and symbol of identity, becomes a tool of power, shaping global dynamics and influencing collective perceptions of nations and their products.

Thus, this research aims to provide a new analytical framework to deepen the marketing strategies implemented by medium and small clothing enterprises in East Asia, following the influence of large fashion brands within East Asian markets. Not only does it reference the extensively discussed literature regarding globalization theories, soft power, and national branding, but it also seeks to present arguments that have been less explored concerning local realities and regional branding (Ikuta et al., 2007; Oliveira & Ashworth, 2017), specifically in the Tōhoku region in Japan and the South Jeolla region in South Korea, showcasing various studies and academic discussions on the re-evaluation of regional brands and urban regeneration of fashion streets. This methodology spans the fields of sociology and economics, specifically marketing research, to conduct a comparative analysis of the East Asian countries under examination, in correlation with Western countries (Yasuno & Enomoto, 2020; Choi & Kim, 2021; Sasaki, 2023).

The research begins with recent global developments in three interconnected fields: the technological field, with the constant development of technological tools and, consequently, the creation of innovative social platforms; the financial and marketing fields, with a focus on investments and collaborations, specifically in fashion brands from both large and small enterprises, to communicate their brand message; and finally, the media field, through the reception of consumer brand image and brand awareness, i.e., how they learn about and perceive a particular brand through sponsorship by so-called brand ambassadors and the visibility of the brand in mass media and social media.

CHAPTER 1: GLOBALIZATION AND SOFT POWER THEORY

Globalization

Globalization is a process that has resulted in an increasing interconnection between the economies, cultures, and policies of different countries. Although cultural and economic exchange phenomena have existed since ancient times, during the past century these ties have intensified in recent decades, fostered by technological advances, market liberalization, and trade opening policies. However, globalization stays controversial. Although it has contributed to economic growth and improved living conditions in many regions of the world, it has also raised concerns about social inequality, loss of cultural diversity, and negative impacts on the environment.

In his 2007 essay *Globalization: Theory and trends*, John W. Meyer proposes two meanings to explain the concept of this phenomenon: "globalization as exchange" and "cultural and institutional globalization." In the first case, he emphasized the expansion of interdependence and increased flow of transactions worldwide, particularly referring to economic exchange. This view includes aspects such as "international trade, global production and supply chains, flows of technology and intellectual property, labor movements, and transnational investment patterns" (Meyer 2007). Thus, it highlights the growing interconnectedness between economies and the importance of global transactions while emphasizing how internal economic interdependencies within individual countries often trump international ones. The second case, however, shifts the focus from mere economic exchange to the growing cultural awareness of global interdependence and the understanding of local and national societies in the context of an interconnected world. It emphasizes the emergence of a global consciousness that affects how individuals and societies structure their lives and policies in relation to global standards and norms. This approach emphasizes the cultural and institutional processes that

shape national and local policies, leading to increased conformity to global patterns (Ibid.). Within the discourse, Meyer also analyzed the core-periphery contrast aspect developed by Immanuel Wallerstein during the early 1970s. According to that theory, as shown in Figure 1, Wallerstein differentiates three types of countries: the "core," "semi-peripheral," and "peripheral" ones. The former are the most economically developed and powerful nations, characterized by advanced industries, advanced technology, and significant political influence. They tend to have strong financial markets, high wages, and a well-educated workforce, positioning themselves as centers of innovation and control over global trade. They receive help from exploiting peripheral countries by importing cheap raw materials and exporting high-value manufactured goods, thereby accumulating wealth. Semi-peripheral countries occupy an intermediate position. Although they exploit industrial and agricultural economies with technological capabilities, they still face problems such as inequality and economic instability. They can function as intermediaries and experience exploitation and capital accumulation. On the other hand, peripheral countries are the least developed, dependent on agriculture and raw material extraction, and often experience high levels of poverty, low wages, and weak political institutions, making them vulnerable to control by core countries. Indeed, they provide cheap labor and resources to core countries, but remain trapped in a cycle of dependency, which hinders their development. This hierarchy contributes to global inequalities, with wealth and power concentrated in core countries at the expense of peripheral nations, perpetuating cycles of poverty and underdevelopment (Wallerstein 2004; cited in Griffiths and Imre 2013).

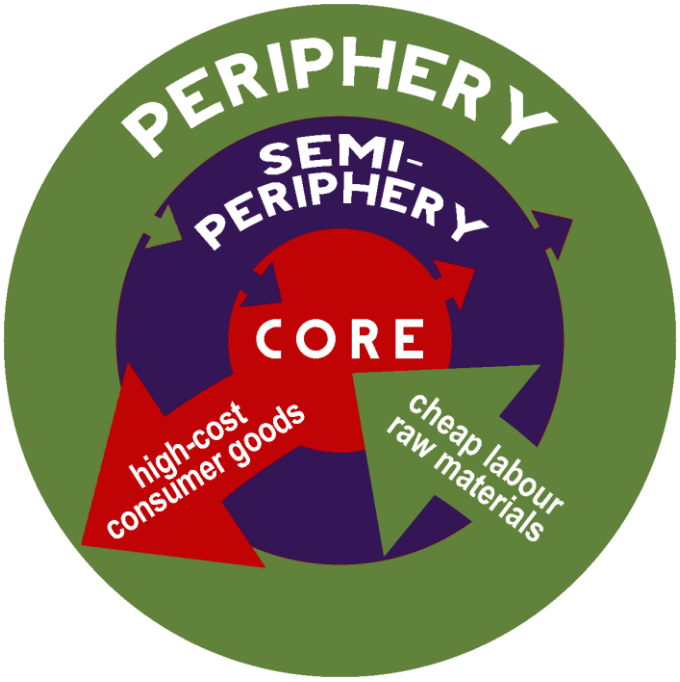

Figure 1: Wallerstein World Society System

Therefore, Meyer highlights the inequalities resulting from globalization and points out how increased economic interdependence can have different effects on core and peripheral regions. Indeed, while core regions tend to benefit more from global trade, peripheral areas, on the other hand, often experience increasing dependence and vulnerability, accentuating existing inequalities. He then argues that the relationship between core and periphery is not only economic in nature but also involves cultural and institutional aspects. Indeed, cultural awareness of global interdependence shapes the way societies perceive their role in the world system, and this attitude may push toward the adoption of policies that reflect global standards, but it also risks intensifying inequalities, as peripheral regions struggle to conform to the dominant patterns of core areas. In addition, the political context is emphasized: the absence of a strong global political system makes the relationship between central and peripheral regions more complicated, and without a central authority to regulate global interactions, peripheral regions may find it difficult to manage their relations with centers of economic and political power, further exacerbating marginalization (Meyer 2007).

Despite the difficulties presented, Meyer also recognized that peripheral regions are not simply passive in their dependence. In fact, movements of resistance and adaptation are present where local communities look to assert their rights and preserve their identities in the face of the challenges imposed by globalization. This reflects a complex interaction between global influences and local contexts, in which peripheral regions try to navigate and, in some cases, rebel against the homogenization imposed by global models. In this sense, the influence of global models can lead to an increasing amalgamation of national policies; to align with central models, peripheral areas tend to adapt their policies to international standards. Such an attitude runs the risk of not adequately meeting the specific needs and conditions of each country, even though it may seem like a step toward global integration (Ibid.).

Another aspect to be taken into consideration concerns the role cities play in the global context, which Saskia Sassen defines as "global cities" within her 2004 essay *The Global City: Introducing a Concept*. By this term, Sassen shows that "global cities" are not simply urban centers, but rather key players in the global landscape. In fact, they play a central role in the world economy, serving as hubs for finance, specialized services, and sectors such as telecommunications and media, thanks to their integration into transnational networks that ease global economic activity. In addition, they are increasingly detached from national economies and surrounding territories, forming transnational urban systems, where their relevance derives from their role in global networks rather than traditional national contexts. Within these cities, increasingly glaring inequalities have appeared, with significant disparities between the wealthiest and most deprived areas, highlighting the power dynamics that influence the configuration of urban spaces. They are also characterized by great cultural and social diversity, which enriches their urban fabric and promotes cultural exchange, as well as being strategically positioned to manage and serve the global economy, serving as nodes in a complex network that transcends national boundaries (Sassen, 2004). Moreover, the rise of global cities is linked to the current global economic situation and historical context. Sassen points out that "each

stage in the long history of the world economy raises specific questions about the particular conditions that make it possible. One of the main features of the current phase is the rise of information technologies and the consequent increase in the mobility and liquidity of capital" (Ibid.). Therefore, U.S.-based sociologists argue that global cities play a crucial role in helping transnational connections and encouraging the flow of ideas, practices, and cultural products across national borders. This interconnectedness not only gives rise to global cultural trends but also allows local cultures to influence and redefine global narratives, thus enriching the global cultural landscape. In the dynamic environment of global cities, there is a significant impact on the formation of individual and collective identities. Residents of these cities are often exposed to a variety of cultural influences that cause them to navigate between local traditions and global trends, resulting in hybrid identities. This fusion of local and global elements enriches cultural expressions but at the same time can also generate challenges related to defining a sense of belonging and community cohesion (Ibid.).

Finally, the discourse on globalization and global cities also fits the theory of anthropologist Arjun Appadurai.

Appadurai and Sassen highlight how trans local processes are crucial in the context of the global cultural economy, as they illustrate how cultural interactions shape identities, influence economic exchanges, and contribute to the continuous evolution of cultural practices in a rapidly changing world. They highlight how cultural interactions transcend local boundaries, enabling the exchange of ideas, practices, and identities across different geographic and social contexts. One of the main effects of this phenomenon is cultural hybridization, which leads to the fusion of elements from different cultures, creating new forms of expression and identity, and thus generating innovative cultural practices that reflect the influence of globalization and give rise to cultural identities that go beyond traditional local contexts (Appadurai, 1996). In addition to cultural aspects, trans local processes have economic implications, fostering the flow of goods, services, and cultural products across borders. These exchanges contribute to the global cultural economy, in which cultural goods are produced,

traded, and consumed in ways that reflect local and global influence. In fact, according to Appadurai, there are five streams of globalization, which he refers to as "landscapes" (ethnic, technological, financial, media, and conceptual). It is precisely because of the high-speed global configuration of technology that it is possible to have a wider range of action for money flows, political possibilities, and labor availability (Ibid.). Thus, while modern technology enables instantaneous communication and travel, greatly expanding the scope and speed of cultural exchanges, global capital becomes de-territorialized and unpredictable through investments, currency exchanges, and financial transactions that occur on a global scale, enabling a wide-ranging distribution of media content that can reach diverse audiences, influencing perceptions, identities, and interactions globally. Thus, cultural transactions occur in a more complex and multifaceted environment, influenced by global media, digital communication, and transnational networks, which enable a more diverse range of interactions. In a modern context, cultures are in a state of flux, with identities and practices constantly evolving through transnational communication and migration. And in this scenario, the advent of mass media and digital platforms has transformed the way cultures interact, allowing cultural exchanges over vast distances without the need for direct personal interactions, thus leading to communities that may have no "sense of belonging" to a single place (Meyrowitz 1985, cited in Appadurai 1996).

Although these landscapes are extremely interconnected, Appadurai highlighted the following: "People, machinery, money, images, and ideas now follow increasingly nonisomorphic paths. Of course, at all periods in human history, there have been some disjunctures in the flows of these things, but the sheer speed, scale, and volume of each of these flows are now so great that they have become central to the politics of global culture. The Japanese are notoriously hospitable to ideas and are stereotyped as inclined to export (all) and import (some) goods, but they are also notoriously close to immigration, like the Swiss, the Swedes, and the Saudis" (Appadurai 1996).

Finally, the U.S. anthropologist focuses attention on the aspect of global production and consumer, highlighting the Marxist concepts of "production fetishism" and "consumer fetishism."

The former refers to the phenomenon in which the processes and relationships that are global production are obscured or distorted, creating an illusion of local control. In this context, local production sites such as factories are seen as the main centers of productivity, masking the reality that they are part of a global and transnational network involving complex interactions between capital, labor, and management. It creates a disconnect between workers and the global forces that decide their conditions and can affect consumer perceptions, causing them to focus on local brands or products without considering the global flows of capital and labor that make them possible. The second concerns how consumers attach symbolic meanings to products, often ignoring the real production conditions and the social and economic dynamics that figure out them. Influenced by advertisements and images, consumers see products as autonomous objects, separate from the labor and global inequalities that make them possible. Therefore, the value of a product is not only functional, but also cultural, constructed by media representations. This phenomenon masks the social and economic implications of consumption, making people believe that consumption is an act of personal choice, when in fact it is the result of a global system that exploits resources and labor. Thus, it contributes to the construction of consumption-related identities, fueling a vicious cycle of desires that sustains global capitalism (Ibid.). Therefore argues that: "The globalization of culture is not the same as its homogenization, but globalization involves the use of a variety of instruments of homogenization (armaments, advertising techniques, language hegemonies, and clothing styles) that are absorbed into local political and cultural economies, only to be repatriated as heterogeneous dialogues of national sovereignty, free enterprise, and fundamentalism in which the state plays an increasingly delicate role[...]" (Appadurai 1996).

Soft Power

The term "soft power" coined by Joseph S. Nye, Jr, refers to a nation's ability to influence others through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or financial incentives. It is derived from the attraction exerted by a country's culture, political values, and foreign policies, which can foster goodwill and cooperation among nations. In the book *Soft power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, published in 2004, the Harvard professor best defines the key components of soft power that relate to cultural appeal, which is the attractiveness of a nation's culture (art, music, literature and lifestyle) that can attract other countries and create a positive image; political values such as democratic ideals, human rights and the rule of law adopted by nations that, by embodying these values, are often seen as legitimate and trustworthy to build alliances and partnerships more easily; and, finally, foreign policy that emphasizes diplomacy, multilateralism and cooperation through engagement in international organizations and meeting global challenges collaboratively. These factors, therefore, enable a country to improve its image and position on the world stage, thus influencing its perceptions by other nations (Nye 2004).

About the mechanisms of soft power, it is necessary to consider the role of these three aspects. The first concerns public diplomacy, which consists of engagement with foreign audiences through cultural exchanges, educational programs, and medical campaigns, helping build mutual understanding and respect. The second concerns global institutions and participation in international organizations, such as the United Nations and the World Health Organization, which enable countries to project their values and influence global norms. The third relates to non-state actors, namely NGOs, cultural institutions, and even individuals who can play a role in shaping perceptions and spreading a nation's values (Ibid.).

As Joseph Nye argues, therefore, the resulting impacts are found to be increased by nations with strong soft power who are thus able to shape global agendas and influence the behavior of other

countries without resorting to military force; in conflict prevention through the promotion of ideals designed to help reduce the likelihood of the use of violence and military force; and in the enhanced cooperation of countries that use their soft power effectively and are, therefore, often in a better position to collaborate in addressing global challenges, such as climate change, terrorism, and public health crises (Ibid.).

However, as enunciated by Ivan Bakalov in his article, it is necessary to consider some aspects formulated by the theoretical-centric and practical-centric schools of thought of soft power to better understand both its formulation and operation (Bakalov 2019).

From a theoretical point of view, the model formulated by Kroenig et al. suggests a mechanism consisting of three steps: first, there must be a functioning "marketplace of ideas," that is, an environment in which there is a marketplace of ideas that allows for open communication and the continuous exchange of thoughts. Indeed, the authors argue that for soft power to be effective, there must be competition among ideas that allow for diverse exchanges that can influence public opinion. This highlights the importance of information flow and the presence of competing narratives in shaping people's perceptions. Second, "attitude change" is necessary, and the political environment must be such that individual attitudes can influence foreign policy or international relations. In this way, the attitudes of the target audience must be altered and, at the same time, be able to influence broader political dynamics. In fact, the article analyzes the conditions under which individuals are most likely to change their beliefs, such as the emotional context in which the messages are received and the credibility of the source, against the principles of social psychology that emphasize how understanding human behavior and attitudes is crucial to effectively exercise soft power. Third, finally, "credible communication," meaning that the state must be able to communicate through a credible source that can deliver a consistent message, and this message must resonate emotionally with the target audience. This concept is in line with the principles of communication theory, according to

which message delivery and audience engagement are essential to persuading individuals (Kroenig et al. 2010).

From a practical perspective, however, Bakalov specifically points to the theory formulated by Pestsov and Bobylo as a benchmark for the effective operation of soft power. In fact, Pestsov and Bobylo focus on the importance of distinguishing between two types of outcomes in soft power research: "outcomes as attitude" and "outcomes as behavior." The former are measured through opinion polls, which reflect people's perceptions, while the latter refer to concrete changes in target countries' behaviors. This distinction is crucial, as it prompts researchers to move beyond simply collecting opinions, but to consider the tangible effects of soft power on states' actions and decisions. In this context, researchers propose to shift the analytical focus from the main actors, that is, the states or entities that exercise soft power, to the processes that define the interactions among these actors (Bakalov 2019). By considering, in this way, soft power as a dynamic process, it is possible to better understand how first conditions and antecedent circumstances influence final outcomes, offering a deeper insight into the dynamics that find the effectiveness of soft power. This approach makes it possible to analyze not only opinions but also how they translate into real and observable changes in state behavior (Pestsov and Bobylo 2015, cited in Bakalov 2019).

Furthermore, within his article *Soft Power: the evolution of a concept* written in 2021, Joseph Nye clarifies key aspects by arguing that "Soft power depends on enough voluntary choice to allow an analytic observer to meaningfully describe the target as being positively attracted" and that therefore "soft power does not depend upon being true, but on the agent’s intentions of presenting true or false information. The intentions of an agent can be benign or hostile, and soft power can be used as a weapon against third parties or by setting one part of a target against another. The softness of the power behavior depends upon the degree of voluntary attraction by the targeted actors." (Nye 2021). In this sense, since soft power represents only one component of power in international relations and is unlikely to be sufficient on its own, it is also necessary to consider another element

that Nye refers to as "hard power," which is the use of coercive tactics, such as military force, economic sanctions, and threats, to influence the behavior of other nations or groups. It depends on tangible resources and the ability to comply through force or pressure. Although on the one hand it can offer short-term solutions to conflicts, it is less effective in addressing the root causes of disputes, which can lead to long-term instability. Therefore, it can cause resentment and resistance from targeted nations, escalating conflicts, or deepening hostility. It also entails significant costs in resources and human lives, with military interventions sometimes leading to unintended consequences, such as protracted conflicts or regional destabilization (Nye 2004). Therefore, he argues that in the modern era countries cannot rely solely on either power but rather use what he calls "smart power": the intelligent integration of hard and soft power dynamics to create winning strategies in which the two powers reinforce each other rather than hinder each other (Nye 2021).

A final consideration is the actors who use this power within the international landscape. In fact, as Associate Professor Mario De Martino argues within his article *Soft Power: theoretical framework and political foundations*, while at one time this role was played exclusively by states and international organizations, it is now instead multinational corporations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), terrorist groups, and sometimes even individuals, whose emergence has been facilitated by advances in science and technology, which was defined by Professor Nye as "democratizing technology." Such developments have, therefore, lowered the costs of communication and transportation, making technologies, including military tools, more accessible and less expensive for the general population, thus enabling their use not only by states but also allowing civilians access to powerful weapons, leading to what Nye calls a "privatization of warfare" (Nye 2004, cited in De Martino, 2020).

De Martino also argues that another relevant trend in the contemporary world that highlights the importance of soft power is the growing role of public opinion: the spread of democracy and the digital revolution have greatly contributed to strengthening its influence, both domestically and

internationally. Technological advances have made it possible to issue information more quickly and cheaply than in the past through an ever-developing international virtual network. In this new scenario, states pay greater attention to public opinion, and soft power turns out to be a key element in contemporary politics to achieve goals more strategically, as it is a phenomenon that manifests itself in various areas, including technology and education. Thus, "the transformation from industrial to post-industrial economies implies that power is increasingly based on a nation's ability to create and manipulate knowledge and information" (Wilson 2008, cited in De Martino 2020). He suggests that "innovation and creativity are key to stimulating progress in all other sectors, including the military" (De Martino 2020) and that new target populations, as they have become "smarter" due to increased access to education, even in developing countries, need to be treated differently than in the past (Ibid.).

Intersection between Globalization and Soft Power

As seen from the statements provided thus far, with the expansion of globalization, the influence of soft power exerted by countries has also increased. In a global context, nations look not only to promote their image, but also to enhance the credibility of public opinion and traditional and cultural aspects to influence perceptions and global relationships. This is largely made possible by technological and digital developments that have facilitated the establishment of an increasingly interconnected global landscape. However, as Judit Trunkos and Philip G. Cerny argue in their essay *on culture, soft power, and globalization*, there is no global governance framework to oversee the use of soft power in the digital age (Trunkos and Cerny, 2019).

According to the two scholars, "since there is no global internet police, state and non-state actors alike are trying to take advantage and control the global information flow and promote their own interests" (Ibid.). They further state that the success of soft power is closely tied to trust and relationships built between countries. Cultural exchanges, although potentially positive, can sometimes generate conflicts, particularly when perceived as neocolonial or dominating. In many cases, the effectiveness of soft power depends on how the target audience perceives the messages that are conveyed. If these messages are viewed as threatening or invasive, their impact may be diminished.

Following the Third Industrial Revolution, digital technologies played a key role in democratizing access to cultural products, allowing a wide range of voices and perspectives to reach a global audience. Social media, streaming services, and other online platforms have become highly effective tools for countries and organizations to promote their cultural heritage and ideologies, thus enhancing their soft power. In this way, both non-state actors, such as entertainment companies and social platforms, have gained significant influence in shaping global culture, and state actors compete to influence the global landscape (Ibid.).

In this context, the role of brands in influencing consumer behavior, culture, and power dynamics is also relevant. Scott Lash and Celia Lury, in *Global Culture Industry: The Mediation of Things*, highlight that brands go beyond exchange value by creating distinct identities, differentiating themselves through uniqueness and building lasting relationships with consumers, which form a cultural memory over time. Brands are dynamic and constantly evolving; each product reflects the brand's identity and contributes to shaping it, being part of an abstract system of power. Their value depends not only on the products they stand for but also on the relationship consumers develop with them. This concept of "symbolic value" is connected to the theories of philosopher Jean Baudrillard, who argued that the value of a product goes beyond utility or price, merging with the meaning it assumes within the context of consumer identity and experience (Baudrillard 1994; cited in Lash and Lury 2007). According to their perspective, brands become dynamic forces of power, control, and influence in global markets; however, this also involves inequalities and deceptive practices, raising questions about dominance and power in the contemporary cultural industry.

Thus, Lash and Lury focus on a fundamental concept about the evolution of the cultural industry in the context of global capitalism and information. They first analyze Horkheimer and Adorno's theories on the commodification of culture and explore how, in a later period, culture and media became increasingly "material," as physical goods, and how this process transformed the relationship between culture and commodity. While Horkheimer and Adorno described culture as a commodified product in the context of industrial capitalism, where culture was "homogenized" and reduced to a means for economic purposes, in the contemporary period, this process of commodification has evolved: culture has not only become an integral part of the economy but has also become "material," with media (such as film, art, and music) turning into tangible items, with both use and exchange values.

Whereas media initially represented culture (as in the case of art), today, media have become objects to interact with, rather than simply interpret. Culture, therefore, is no longer just a

phenomenon of meaning but also a field of operation, where users do not "read" or "interpret" media but "make" them, as in the creation of brands themselves. Additionally, there is a fusion between media and commodities, creating a new form of "global cultural industry," where the flow of things and media is intertwined, as Arjun Appadurai suggests, and where cultural value merges with economic value (Appadurai 1996, cited in Lash and Lury 2007).

Finally, they find that in the global cultural industry, brands are not merely physical objects but virtual experiences and intensities. Brands manifest through emotions and feelings, rather than through the concreteness of a physical product. Citing Walter Benjamin, Lash, and Lury argue that while one perceives an object, what is experienced is the intensity of the experience, like the color of a painting. Brands, therefore, are experiences that materialize in various products, but the feeling associated with the brand is still unchanged. They also refer to Charles Peirce's semiotic theory, distinguishing between symbols, indices, and icons, to explain how brands function as icons, with a more abstract and qualitative connection rather than being tied to a physical object. This concept also extends to urban spaces, where architecture is no longer just a collection of objects but becomes a "space of events," a place where experiences and intensities intertwine. The global cultural industry is characterized by a culture of events, where the brand and urban experience are more than static objects.

Thus, they compare the dialectical culture described by Horkheimer and Adorno with the contemporary cultural industry, which is based on metaphysical materialism, where difference and multiplicity replace classical oppositions, such as spirit and matter (Lash and Lury 2007).

This chapter first discusses globalization, seen as a process that, due to technological advancements and market liberalization, has intensified economic and cultural exchanges, influencing local identities and policies. Within this context, global inequalities appear, as highlighted by Wallerstein's distinction between "core," "semi-peripheral," and "peripheral" countries, and by the growing disparities in "global cities" discussed by Saskia Sassen, which, while concentrating economic and cultural power, also show significant internal inequalities. Consequently, two views of globalization are analyzed: economic interdependence through exchange and the adaptation of local societies to global cultural norms. The cultural dynamics are also examined, where local cultures interact with global influences, leading to hybrid identities but also posing challenges for community cohesion. Appadurai's perspective on production and consumerism is then explored, showing how globalization shapes identities and perpetuates inequalities.

Within this framework, the discourse on soft power is introduced, described by Joseph Nye as the ability to influence other countries through cultural and political attraction rather than coercion. Digital technologies, particularly social media and streaming services, have amplified soft power, enabling nations to enhance their international image. However, the absence of global governance to regulate the use of soft power in the digital age leads to conflicts of interest and new geopolitical challenges.

Thus, the chapter explores how globalization strengthens soft power, as nations look to improve their global image and cultural credibility, illustrating how these phenomena shape modern societies in an increasingly interconnected and digitalized context. Linked to this discourse is the evolution of the cultural industry within global capitalism, which, starting from Horkheimer and Adorno's theories on the commodification of culture, is further addressed by Lash and Lury, demonstrating how, in the contemporary context, culture has become a "material" element, with the media transformed into objects to be used rather than simple representations. Brands are now emotional and iconic experiences, not just physical products, and are intertwined with urban spaces, creating an "event

culture." The global cultural industry replaces traditional oppositions with a more fluid vision, focused on experiences rather than tangible objects.

The overall analysis highlights both the benefits and drawbacks of globalization in conjunction with the use of soft power by nations, focusing on the socio-economic impacts and the evolving dynamics of cultural exchange.

CHAPTER 2: NATION BRANDING, CULTURAL DIPLOMACY AND FASHION

National Branding and Regional Branding

2.1. Definition of National Branding

Within the discourse related to soft power, the widely discussed concept of nation branding also plays a significant role. Nation branding is understood as a strategic approach that extends traditional branding and marketing practices, typically applied to products and services, to tells and nations as well.

Before analyzing the concept of nation branding, it is necessary to distinguish between nation branding and nation brand. Specifically, nation branding is described as the process through which a country seeks to build and promote a positive international image through communicative and perceptual processes (Vigolo 2009; Biletska 2021). Researcher Vania Vigolo argues that this process is primarily based on two fundamental aspects. First, there exists an interdependent relationship between the image of a country and the brands of products originating from it: the national image can influence the feeling of its products, while product brands can contribute to the construction of the national image. This connection is crucial for the effectiveness of international marketing strategies and for enhancing economic competitiveness. Second, nation branding plays a central role in the tourism sector, as a positive representation of a country can function as a driving force for attracting tourist flows, with positive effects on the local economy (Vigolo 2009).

The nation brand, on the other hand, is the set of perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs that consumers associate with a country (Hakkala and Lemmetyinen 2013; Biletska 2021). Even without specific

branding efforts, every country has an image, but branding strategies aim to improve and make this image more attractive to visitors and consumers. Hakkala and Lemmetyinen argue that a key element of nation branding is the awareness of a country's existence: strong awareness is necessary to develop positive attitudes toward a country and encourage people to visit it (Fan 2006, 2010; Rainisto 2003, cited in Hakkala and Lemmetyinen 2013). The two researchers refer to the theory developed by Pappu and Quester regarding consumer awareness, which operates on two levels: a macro level, concerning general associations and beliefs about the country, and a micro level, regarding perceptions linked to its products (Pappu and Quester 2010, cited in Hakkala and Lemmetyinen 2013). They also highlight how a person's travel history significantly influences their perceptions of a country: frequent travelers tend to be more open to discovering new countries, thus increasing their understanding of the image of those countries. Another characteristic of the nation brand is its multidimensionality, influenced by various factors such as the visibility of brands and the image of celebrities who can serve as ambassadors for the country. The article, therefore, explores how the perceptions of individuals who have not visited a country can vary based on their nationality. This aspect complicates the construction of an effective branding strategy, suggesting that the awareness of a country is a key indicator of its image, and that branding strategies must consider how this awareness is built (Hakkala and Lemmetyinen 2013).

2.2. Concept of brand and key factors for national branding

Therefore, in the wake of this argument comes the main concept of a brand, which is analyzed by Celia Lury in her book *Brands: The logos of the global economy*. According to the English professor, a brand can be seen as a complex object defined by a series of characteristics that go beyond its mere existence as an entity.

In line with this discussion, the primary concept of "brand" is analyzed by Celia Lury in her book *Brands: The Logos of the Global Economy*. According to the British scholar, a brand can be viewed as a complex object defined by a set of characteristics that go beyond its simple existence as an entity.

Primarily, a brand is a network of relationships between products or services, rather than an isolated entity, and its identity is shaped through a web of connections that evolve over time. It is not a static element, but a dynamic one that appears through interactions and social relationships, meaning that its identity can change depending on circumstances and consumer interactions. From a psychological perspective, brands look to set up emotional connections with consumers, building loyalty through shared values. Brands not only offer a product but also allow consumers to identify with a particular worldview. In this way, brands are not merely functional objects but vehicles of meaning that influence choices and behaviors.

Secondly, brands are mediated objects, influenced by practices such as marketing, design, and law, which decide how they are perceived and valued in the market. These practices guide consumer emotions and actions, making brands symbols of goals and aspirations. Legally and economically, brands stand for a form of "social currency" with legal implications, such as intellectual property, which contribute to defining their uniqueness and protecting their value. They function as mediators between producers and consumers, transmitting values through visual representation and the strategic management of experiences. Legal protection of the brand thus increases its commercial value and keeps a distinction in the market.

Thirdly, brands are intricately linked to interactivity with consumers: brands evolve and adapt through continuous feedback and engagement from consumers, ensuring their relevance in the market. Marketing plays a crucial role in managing consumer experiences and expectations, which are critical for product differentiation. One interesting concept introduced by Celia Lury is that of "attribute brands," which are not linked to specific products but rather to universal values such as quality, innovation, and enjoyment. This perspective allows brands to transcend product categories and focus

on building a strong reputation. Within this context, consumer movements also appear, challenging the control of large corporations and promoting ethical consumption, as seen with Fair Trade. These movements signal a shift in consumer expectations, as they seek a more meaningful relationship with brands that reflect their values and beliefs (Lury 2004).

Lury suggests that the concept of a brand lies at the intersection between the tangible and the intangible: while physical elements, such as logos or packaging, enable visual recognition, the intangible aspects relate to perceptions, emotions, and individual experiences associated with the brand. These symbolic meanings are difficult to measure but are essential for consumer loyalty. Moreover, they embody cultural and social meanings that make them significant within the broader context of a community (Ibid.).

As discussed by Hardt and Negri in Lury's book, the concept of "commonality" is also tied to branding, as the very construction of a brand is a collective process. It depends on the intelligence and actions of the multitude, and only through collaboration and engagement with a community can meaningful and relevant concepts be developed for contemporary society. Concepts are dynamic and evolve, influencing not only the market but also consumer behavior and expectations. Therefore, everyone plays a role in creating concepts that shape their lives, promoting a sense of responsibility and active participation (Hardt and Negri 2000, cited in Lury 2004).

In *Brand as Assemblage: Assembling Culture*, Lury also proposes conceiving brands as assemblages, meaning complex entities that are not limited to being simple products, but arise from a series of heterogeneous processes and practices, including marketing, design, law, and consumer participation. At the same time, the integration of both quantitative and qualitative methods in brand management is key, using computational techniques and data analysis to examine both numerical aspects (market trends, consumer behaviors) and qualitative ones (cultural meanings, individual experiences). Therefore, the creation of value in branding is described as a dynamic process, where the value of a brand evolves in response to interactions through "optimizing" strategies.

Finally, Lury explores the concept of "the mass" in branding, arguing that it does not stand for specific social classes but rather a dynamic influenced by branding efforts. The value of a brand is formed through interactions within cultural and historical contexts, as the main feature of "the mass" is its ability to be reorganized and influenced by different forces, which shape its development. Lury draws upon the Frankfurt School's thought, with theorists like Adorno and Horkheimer, who criticized mass production and its impact on culture, arguing that it leads to the standardization and commodification of cultural products. The author suggests that contemporary branding reflects a similar dynamic, where brands are not only products but cultural assemblages that influence and are influenced by consumer culture. However, unlike the Frankfurt School's view, which emphasized the passive role of consumers in the face of mass media, Lury sees consumers as active participants in the branding process, contributing to shaping the identity and value of the brand (Lury 2009).

In the 1998 article *Nation-brands of the twenty-first century* written by Simon Anholt, several key factors that decide a country's ability to create global brands are outlined, including various aspects, starting with its national image. Anholt argued that countries with a strong and positive international image can use this to increase the visibility and appeal of their domestic brands. To do this, economic stability is also necessary: a healthy economy fosters entrepreneurship and investment in brand development, helping countries to develop successful brands even after periods of instability. In addition to this, government support also plays a key role, as active policies that incentivize export and branding development can push local companies to invest in marketing. Furthermore, a country's cultural richness and heritage provides opportunities to create brands with unique identities that can resonate with consumers globally, increasing the perceived value of products (Anholt, 1998).

As far as the marketing industry is concerned, countries with advanced advertising capabilities can effectively tell stories of their brands to international audiences. In this global scenario, product quality must be high to meet global standards and gain consumer trust. Successful brands are also characterized by their ability to adapt to different cultural preferences and global markets, which

makes them more easily accepted internationally. Furthermore, innovation and investment in R&D are essential to distinguish brands in the global marketplace. Countries that emphasize innovation are more capable of creating successful brands. Indeed, he argues that: “in today's global village, where geography counts for so little, countries become like factories, competing for the same broad groups of consumers” (Ibid.).

Anholt also addresses the concept of *brand equity*, which he argues is intricately linked to national identity, as the image of a country can have a significant impact on the perceived value of a brand. According to his line of thought, a strong national identity can increase brand equity by associating products with positive characteristics, such as quality, tradition, or innovation, which consumers attribute to the nation of origin. He cites as an example product from countries with an established reputation, such as Switzerland, which receive help from the intrinsic value of the’ Swiss’ brand. In addition, national cultural identity plays a decisive role; brands that emphasize local cultural associations tend to gain more recognition. This aspect also eases the building of trust and loyalty among consumers, as a brand perceived as an authentic representative of its country can prove an emotional bond, especially in emerging markets where a positive image of the nation stimulates trust in local brands. It also enhances international visibility and the success of brands. Brands that identify with their country-of-origin benefit from a competitive advantage, distinguishing themselves from their competitors, as is the case with Italian brands in fashion and design sectors. Finally, it is a crucial element in arousing emotions in consumers, increasing the overall brand value, as brands that connect with national pride or local culture create deeper connections with the public (Ibid.).

2.3. Controversies about nation branding

On the other hand, there are discordant theories on the concept of nation branding, such as the one presented by Nadia Kaneva in her article *Simulation Nations: Nation brands and Baudrillard's theory of media*, highlighting some critical aspects.

Kaneva argues that nation branding often fits into a 'trap of representations', where the branding process is seen as a simplification of the essence of a nation, reducing it to a desirable image for the global market. According to the author, the essentialist approach limits the possibility of a critical reflection on the complexities of national identity and branding practices. Indeed, she argues that 'Nation branding is nothing more than a tool or a technology, which can be used by 'responsible governments' to ensure 'fair, true, powerful, attractive, genuinely useful' representations of their nations' (Kaneva 2018).

In the first instance, as was also pointed out by Celia Lury and Simon Anholt, authenticity, according to Kaneva, plays a central role in nation branding: indeed, nations seek to gain recognition for their identity, both internally and externally, and this process often revolves around national values and characteristics, which are presented in a stylized manner to reflect an 'authentic' image of the country. Thus, she argues that these branding dynamics, including the interactions between the media, identity, and representation, transcend the boundaries of a single country (Anholt 1998; Lury 2004; Kaneva 2018). However, the author also draws criticism by noting that the authenticity presented by national brands is often constructed and packaged to resonate with specific audiences rather than authentically reflecting the social and cultural fabric of the country. To support her argument, Kaneva introduces Jean Baudrillard's media theory to understand how nation branding works as a process that prioritizes marketability and image at the expense of the complexity and authenticity of the nation.

This theory allows us to explore how national brands construct images that influence perceptions of national identity, which are related to the concepts of simulacra, that is, representations that no longer

have an original to refer to. According to this line of thought, therefore, national brands become simulacra, creating a hyperreality, i.e., an image of the nation that is more ‘real’ than reality itself. Within this dimension, branding looks to simplify and concentrate the essence of a nation's culture, history, and identity into an image or message that is easily recognizable and understandable to a global audience. However, this process can lead to simplification and sometimes distortion of the complex and multifaceted reality of a nation. To adapt to the tastes and needs of the global market, only some aspects of its identity are emphasized, leaving out others. Therefore, branding would tend to present a more ‘accessible’ and marketable version of the nation, sacrificing its complexity in favor of a representation that would appeal to an international audience (Kaneva 2018).

Moreover, according to Baudrillard, the media is crucial in the creation and dissemination of these simulacra, and the author emphasizes how nation branding largely depends on the media to convey the nation's constructed identity. Indeed, the media acts as a platform to promote the idea of a national essence, presented both domestically and internationally. In this context, nations seek recognition that does not reflect their true reality but relies on a selected and stylized image to align with global market imperatives (Baudrillard 2003, cited in Kaneva 2018).

2.4. Definition of regional branding

The term "regional branding" refers to "one of several ways to promote rural regions and support the development of socially, culturally, and environmentally oriented economies in areas that are interesting due to their natural and cultural heritage" (Margarisová and Vokáčová 2018). According to this strategy, building the value of a regional brand requires a thorough strategic analysis, considering consumer trends, motivations, and segmentation structures. This process enables the identification of the most effective methods for adapting the brand to the specific needs of the target audience. Subsequently, it is necessary to assess the positioning of competing brands to find strengths

and weaknesses within the competitive landscape. This understanding helps discover differentiation opportunities that can provide the regional brand with a distinct advantage. At the same time, it is essential to develop a strong brand identity that reflects the essence of the region and its unique characteristics. This process involves creating associations that highlight both parity with competitors (through similarities) and difference (through distinctive features) (Keller 2007, cited in Margarisová and Vokáčová 2018).

In the regional branding process, it is crucial to actively involve various stakeholders, including local producers, consumers, and community members, to foster a sense of belonging and authenticity, thereby grounding the brand in the local context. Additionally, the integration of sustainable and inclusive practices through targeted marketing programs is essential, as the growing focus on sustainability significantly influences consumer buying decisions, enhancing the brand's appeal and strengthening its positive perception. In this regard, technological advances play a significant role in how brands interact with customers. Regions with high technological penetration can receive help from advanced digital marketing strategies, while areas with limited access to technology may need to rely on more traditional promotional methods (Margarisová and Vokáčová 2018).

A 2007 study by Japanese scholars Takafumi Ikuta, Kou Yukawa, and Hiroshi Hamasaki on regional branding in Japan highlighted how regions faced various challenges about their branding efforts, following the "Japan Brand Development Assistance Program" adopted by the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry in 2004. As stated in the article: "it consists of four proposals: (1) to approach regional branding strategically through collaboration between producers, tourism operators, universities, etc., (2) to develop and disclose standards concerning agricultural, forestry, and fishery products and to create regional brands that are trusted by consumers, (3) for local governments and producing areas to combine efforts in relaying information effectively, and (4) to develop systems for the protection of regional brands" (Ikuta et al. 2007).

One of the most significant issues at the time was the discrepancy between specific aims and broader goals of branding. Indeed, in many cases, branding goals such as increasing local product sales are not adequately aligned with broader goals such as improving regional image or fostering economic development (Fig. 2). This disconnection can cause confusion about the effectiveness of the measures taken and their overall impact on regional identity.

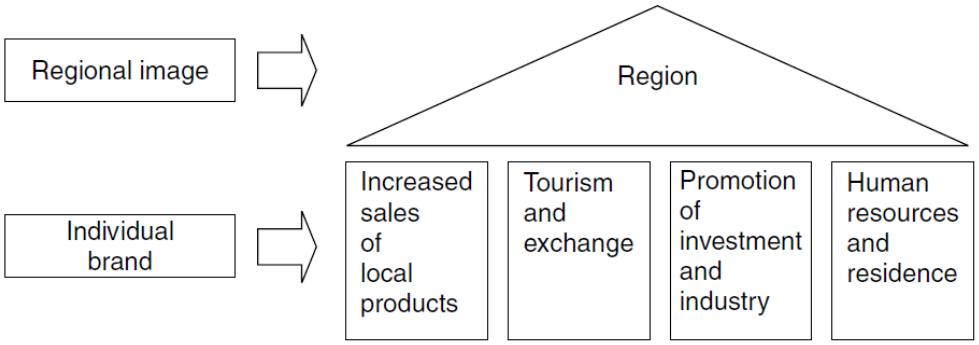

Figure 8: Concepts and measures of regional branding

Figure 2: Ikuta, Yukawa and Hamasaki's table of concepts and measures of regional branding

The authors explained the diagram in the following way:

> "In the diagram, prepared in line with conventional brand theory, regional branding corresponds to the 'roof' (the region) as opposed to the 'supporting pillars' (increased sales of local products, tourism and exchange, promotion of investment and industry, and human resources and residence). In other words, it shows that the region itself is the target of branding. Many regional branding measures that are currently being implemented, however, target not only the branding of the 'roof', but also that of the 'supporting pillars'. In some cases, meanwhile, the desired purpose of the measure is to brand the 'roof' by branding the 'supporting pillars'." (Ikuta et al. 2007)

Additionally, the implementation systems were considered insufficient, with a lack of coordination between the different departments within local governments. The absence of adequate interdepartmental cooperation hampers the execution of integrated and cohesive branding strategies,

limiting the effectiveness of interventions. The diversity of branding goals, arising from the promotion of various individual brands, was also highlighted, as it can lead to difficulties in creating a unified regional brand identity. Regions, trying to incorporate a variety of elements into their branding efforts, risk diluting the brand's distinctiveness, creating confusion among the target audiences.

The conclusions of their study suggested three main solutions: First, the need to develop a solid theoretical foundation to create effective strategies, as research on regional branding was still in its early stages and had not yet fully aligned with the practical initiatives launched by the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry. Second, the distinction between product branding, aimed at increasing local sales, and regional branding, aimed at enhancing the overall image of the region. The authors argued that these two forms of branding are often confused, but it is essential to clearly differentiate them to avoid the measures not meeting their aims and effectively contribute to regional development. Third, because the variety of local characteristics requires tailored approaches rather than universal solutions, it was necessary to create branding strategies that reflected the specificities of each region, while maintaining a level of manageability for local governments so they could be implemented effectively and sustainably (Ibid.).

According to the Brand Research Institute (ブランド総合研究所 *Brand Sōgō Kenkyūjo*), six strategic areas are currently considered for regional branding in Japan:

- Product development and the creation of region-specific industries
- Revitalization of commercial districts and restaurants by using local foods (such as regional dishes)
- Promotion of tourism by combining play, food, and products

- Increasing residents' attachment and improving their motivation through increased satisfaction among residents
- Promoting cooperation between regions and industries, and the formation of human resources and collaborations to develop local leaders
- Promoting the city to convey the region's attractiveness

For each of these areas, the current situation of the region is analyzed, and strategies are developed based on this analysis to help its revitalization. Specifically, as shown in Fig. 3, five steps are followed: understanding the current situation through surveys, organizing for strategy, formulating a long-term strategy, planning specific actions, and implementing strategies and actions.

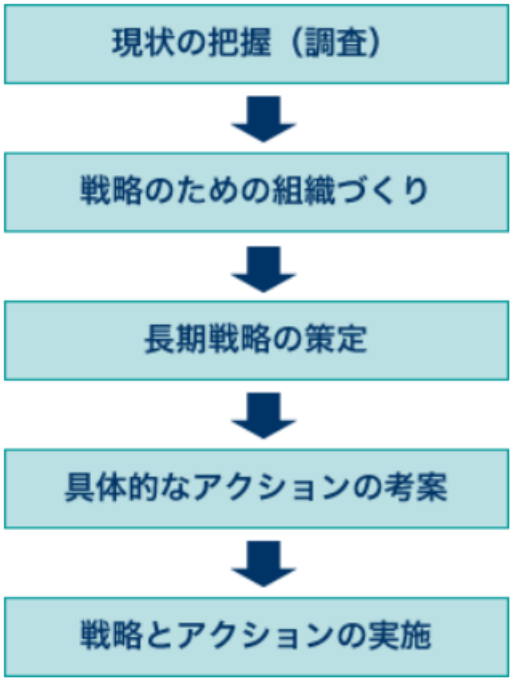

Figure 3: Japan Brand Research Institute's strategic plan

In 2017, in the paper *A Strategic Spatial Planning Approach to Regional Branding: Challenges and Opportunities* by Eduardo Oliveira and Gregory J. Ashworth, it is highlighted that there are still few studies conducted on regional branding in comparison to national branding, which has been

extensively explored over the years. National branding, with its focus on large cities and how they are shaped according to mainstream branding theories and models, has been widely studied (Andersson 2015, cited in Oliveira and Ashworth 2017). However, the two scholars propose alternative solutions to address the difficulties raised by Ikuta *et al.* studies about regional branding, by using strategic spatial planning. This approach involves a long-term and integrated method of land management, aimed at addressing the socio-economic and environmental challenges of a specific geographical area. It is characterized by a shared vision for the future, a participatory process that involves various stakeholders, and flexibility that allows for adaptation to changing conditions. The approach integrates several sectors, such as the economy, transport, and the environment, promoting sustainable and fair development. Furthermore, it relies on analysis and evidence to make informed decisions about priorities and resources, aiming for coordinated and effective growth.

First, the importance of adopting the perspective of strategic spatial planning is emphasized, integrating its concepts into territorial branding frameworks. In this context, such planning is seen as a useful tool to improve the branding process, as it allows regional actors to align and effectively address social, economic, and spatial challenges. They also suggest expanding the scope of research on territorial branding, including a broader range of geographical perspectives and theoretical foundations, as this could contribute to a deeper and more robust understanding of regional branding.

Second, the importance of active engagement from civil society and local stakeholders is highlighted. Specifically, Oliveira and Ashworth argue that community involvement is crucial to ensure that territorial branding efforts reflect the needs and identities of local communities. A participatory approach, in fact, can help foster a sense of belonging and promote the alignment of branding initiatives with the expectations of the local population. In addition, they underline the necessity of interdisciplinary collaboration between spatial strategic planners and branding experts. Such collaboration could lead to the creation of innovative strategies that combine vision, creativity, and a

deep understanding of local dynamics, thus enhancing the branding process (Oliveira and Ashworth 2017).

Several theories on nation branding have been explored, with it being a strategy aimed at creating and managing a positive image of a country on an international level. A distinction has been made between nation branding, the process of constructing a nation's image, and the nation brand, a multidimensional concept that is the beliefs and values attributed to the nation. A central element of this discussion is the impact of consumer perception on the image of a country. As Hakkala and Lemmetyinen emphasize, this feeling is influenced by factors such as travel experiences and interaction with the country's products. People who have visited a country tend to develop a more positive view of that nation. A nation's image is also built through social and cultural awareness, which varies depending on the national context.

The concept of branding is then discussed, with Celia Lury suggesting that it must be analyzed from various perspectives. A brand should not be seen as a static entity, but rather as an evolving network of relationships between products, services, and consumers. Its identity develops through interactions over time, emphasizing emotional connections and loyalty built on shared values. It includes tangible aspects, such as logos and packaging, as well as intangible aspects, such as beliefs and emotions evoked, which are essential for consumer identification and loyalty. Additionally, branding is a collective process, influenced by community actions and social and cultural dynamics, rather than solely by marketing strategies. The "mass" is shaped and transformed by branding efforts as well as cultural and historical forces, proving how brands can evolve in response to these dynamics.

This highlights the active role of consumers in the nation branding process, in contrast to earlier theories that viewed them as passive recipients. In this context, consumers actively take part in shaping the identities and values associated with brands, including national brands. A key aspect for the success of a nation brand, as emphasized by Simon Anholt, is the presence of a strong national

image and economic stability that fosters the development of global brands. Furthermore, strong governmental support and advanced advertising capabilities are crucial for effectively promoting domestic brands internationally.

However, Kaneva critiques the construction of national brands, pointing out how authenticity is often more constructed than real concept. The author references Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacra to argue that national brands can create a hyperreality that distorts the complexity of a country's identity. She criticizes the simplification of a country's culture and identity into easily recognizable messages, a process that leads to a distortion of reality and uses branding strategies that tend to overlook cultural and historical complexity in favor of more marketable images. In this context, the media plays an essential role in creating and issuing simulacra, with nation branding depending on them to present a selected image of the nation, adapted to the imperatives of the global market.

On the other hand, the concept of regional branding is analyzed, which is a strategy for promoting rural regions by enhancing their natural and cultural heritage. As suggested by Margarisová and Vokáčová, to build a successful regional brand, an analysis of consumer and competitor trends is necessary, followed by the development of a strong and distinctive identity. It is essential to engage local stakeholders to ensure authenticity and grounding within the context, while integrating sustainable practices that meet consumer needs. Advanced technologies and digital marketing can enhance effectiveness, depending on the region's technological resources.

Finally, Oliveira and Ashworth highlight that research on regional branding is still limited compared to national branding research, which primarily focuses on large cities. They propose the adoption of strategic spatial planning to address the challenges of regional branding, integrating various sectors such as the economy, transport, and environment in a sustainable and participatory approach. They stress the importance of involving the local community to reflect its needs and identity and suggest interdisciplinary collaboration between spatial planners and branding experts to create innovative

strategies. Furthermore, they propose expanding research on territorial branding by including various geographical and theoretical perspectives.

Thus, in this subchapter, the importance of a strategic and mindful construction of the nation brand is emphasized, highlighting the multiple cultural, social, and economic factors that contribute to the success of both nation branding and regional branding, including the intelligent use of national and local brands, which will also be addressed in the next subchapter.

Examples of nation branding in East Asia

> "The idea of place branding in Asia is commonly associated with tourism today, since many Asian countries are now discovering that a healthy economy depends on a broad spread of risk: the countries that have traditionally relied on exports for their foreign revenues, such as Japan and South Korea, are now urgently attempting to build their visitor numbers, whereas the countries whose economies — and images — have tended to focus on their appeal as a destination, such as Thailand and the Maldives, are equally keen to broaden their image to embrace foreign direct investment, exports and other sectors" (Anholt 2008)

In 2008, Simon Anholt addressed the issue of the rise of Asian countries in the international arena, emphasizing the difference between the concepts of destination branding and nation branding from various perspectives, analyzing the differences in terms of definition, scope, promotional techniques, impact, and aims.

He argues that destination branding is primarily oriented towards promoting a specific location as a tourist destination, using commercial techniques like those employed in the marketing of products and services. These techniques include the use of public relations, advertising, and graphic design, with the primary goal of attracting visitors and developing the tourism sector.

In contrast, Anholt asserts that nation branding focuses on the overall management of a country's reputation and image on a global scale, aiming to influence the perception of the country, rather than focusing on the promotion of a single product or service. As such, it involves broader and more complex goals, encompassing cultural, political, and economic dimensions, and requires a long-term vision.

From a promotional technique perspective, destination branding tends to use direct strategies, focusing on increasing the number of visitors, with the primary goal of stimulating tourism and related economic activities. It centers on tourism and promotes the promotion of a specific location. Nation

branding, on the other hand, adopts a more nuanced approach, extending beyond simple marketing communication. It looks to reshape the global perception of the country, influencing sectors such as trade, investments, and diplomatic relations. Nation branding employs a global and integrated approach to managing the entire reputation of a country (Anholt 2008).

East Asian countries have increasingly developed their soft power and enhanced national identity, not only to promote their territory but also to export their national brands in an international context, which is at times predominantly Eurocentric. Indeed, as Koichi Iwabuchi argues:

> The globalization of soft power discourse, combined with the techniques of nation branding, displaces a differentiation between public/cultural diplomacy and creative/content industries and puts the focus further on the projection of appealing images of a nation. It is in this context that many Asian countries have also been keen to promote their own cultural products and industries to enhance the image of the nation internationally (Iwabuchi 2015).

In the article *Heritage as Soft Power: Japan and China in International Politics* written by Ryoko Nakano and Yujie Zhu, the construction and branding efforts of Japan and China are explained. In using their heritage to strengthen national identities and assert their cultural and moral presence internationally, they use different strategies from different perspectives. As highlighted so far, the use of a country's heritage in international politics is not only a process of cultural promotion but is also intrinsically linked to political motivations. Both Japan and China have relied on this aspect to influence regional and global historical narratives, inserting themselves into power dynamics and geopolitical rivalries. In particular, the rise of non-Western countries has generated new opportunities for cooperation as well as international competition, especially for global recognition of heritage, as in the case of UNESCO.

On the one hand, the Japanese approach is characterized by a desire to position itself as a point of cultural synthesis between the East and West, reflecting the need to regain self-esteem after controversial historical periods and focusing on strengthening national unity and cultural heritage.

On the other hand, China frames the promotion of heritage around themes of harmony, longevity of civilization, and modernization, with the intention of asserting its position as a global player through the enhancement of historical depth and cultural continuity.

Both countries have been confronted with international standards, particularly through their interaction with UNESCO, however, while Japan has promoted a more inclusive vision of "authenticity" in heritage conservation, emphasizing intangible cultural heritage, China has instead developed specific principles for conservation, such as the "China Principles", which emphasize the distinctive aspects of Asian cultural heritage. By implementing these strategies, they have been able to merge their sense of nationalism and influence both domestic politics and international relations.

Furthermore, while the promotion of Japanese heritage aims to enhance the country's cultural distinctiveness and showcase its unique contributions to global culture, China tends to use its heritage to spread its official historical narratives beyond its borders, adopting a more assertive stance in the context of regional competition, particularly with Japan (Nakano and Zhu, 2020).

Koichi Iwabuchi, echoing the theory proposed by Ying Fan in 2008, argues that: "many governments including Japan are interested in more expedient ways to use media culture to establish appealing images of the nation, smooth international political negotiations and boost the economy: in effect the soft power paradigm has actually been superseded by the imperatives of nation branding" (Fan 2008; cited in Iwabuchi 2015).

Indeed, pop culture diplomacy is part of a broader governmental strategy of cultural diplomacy, officially recognized and supported by the policies of the Japanese government, particularly by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). Its evolution traces back to the post-war era, with several key milestones marking its development. After World War II, Japan faced the challenge of altering the negative perceptions, particularly prevalent in Southeast Asia. In response, the Japanese government acknowledged the importance of cultural diplomacy as a tool for improving its international image

and fostering greater mutual understanding through cultural exchange. From the 1970s onward, Japan set up various organizations, including the Japan Foundation under the MOFA, with the aim of promoting cultural dialogue and strengthening its presence on the global stage. This initiative formed part of a broader strategy to address anti-Japanese sentiments, fueled by economic tensions and historical grievances. In the years that followed, particularly from the late 1980s, Japan saw a significant shift in its approach to cultural diplomacy, with an increasing reliance on media culture as a primary tool for international projection. The rising popularity of Japanese media, especially television programs and pop music, captured the attention of policymakers, ultimately leading to the official launch of "pop culture diplomacy" in 2006, as part of the "Cool Japan" strategy implemented during Prime Minister Jun'ichirō Koizumi's administration (Iwabuchi 2015).

In his article *Repackaging National Identity: Cool Japan and the Resilience of Japanese Identity Narratives*, Professor Taku Tamaki offers a thorough analysis of the concept of "Cool Japan," building upon Iwabuchi's earlier ideas. He reveals that the narratives associated with it are not entirely new but are rooted in historical constructions of Japanese identity dating back to the late 19th century. Specifically, the idea of Japan as a unique entity, distinct from both the West and Asia, continues to have a significant influence on contemporary national identity narratives. This process of identity construction is thus marked by historical continuity, reflecting how Japan presents itself today. Tamaki emphasizes the economic motivations behind the Cool Japan initiative and how the Japanese government prioritizes economic interests, focusing on promoting exports and tourism rather than the authenticity of identity narratives.

The main aim of the initiative, therefore, is not so much to offer an exact cultural representation but rather to revitalize Japan's economy by strengthening its international image. In this way, the tension between public diplomacy and the hierarchical structure of the initiative, which is primarily managed by political elites and state advisors rather than by the cultural practices of the population, is examined. Tamaki argues that this top-down approach can create a disconnect between official narratives and

the authentic experiences of the people, limiting the effectiveness of public diplomacy in presenting genuine Japanese culture. The reliance on familiar historical constructions suggests that contemporary branding efforts are inevitably intertwined with established historical perceptions, leading to a certain ambiguity and indeterminacy in the messages being transmitted. Therefore, this process of layering historical meanings onto modern cultural forms keeps a connection between contemporary cultural exports and past identity constructions, thus reinforcing a vision of Japan that stays fundamentally linked to historical narratives of uniqueness (Tamaki 2019).

Despite the declared goal of promoting international cultural exchange and respect for cultural diversity, pop culture diplomacy (such as anime, music, and fashion) does not always meaningfully engage these concepts. On the contrary, it tends to reinforce a homogenized view of Japanese culture, overlooking the internal cultural diversity within Japan itself, and demonstrating a predominantly one-directional nature, aiming to spread Japanese culture without fostering genuine intercultural dialogue or reciprocal exchanges with neighboring countries like China and South Korea. In this process of cultural promotion, Iwabuchi argues that this diplomacy is directed not only outward but also inward, functioning as a tool to convey a national narrative and a sense of collective belonging. As philosopher Somogy Varga asserts, citizens are expected to actively participate as “representatives, stakeholders, and clients” of the brand and are called upon “to live the brand,” thus becoming ambassadors for the brand in the nation branding campaign (Varga 2014, cited in Iwabuchi 2015).

On the other hand, Juliette Schwak proposes several key goals that characterize South Korea's national branding strategies.

Primarily, the author points to the creation of a highly competitive national image in the global context, to attract international capital, including tourists, investment, and skilled labor. In this way, Korea aims to position itself as a relevant and dynamic player in the global market. However, at the same

time, it also emphasizes the transformation of Korean citizens into true national brand ambassadors, implying the promotion of attitudes and behaviors that reflect Korea's image as a global, multicultural, and dynamic nation. Thus, citizens are called upon to embody and represent the values and aspirations of modern Korea, helping to build a link between individual and national identity.

A key aim is to improve the international perception of Korea, which has historically been influenced by negative stereotypes related to the conflict with North Korea and its status as a nation dependent on international aid, particularly from the United States. In response to these perceptions, the South Korean government has directed its branding efforts towards promoting an image of a technologically advanced, democratic, and vibrant country, capable of responding to the challenges of modernity and globalization.

The South Korean strategy, therefore, is not limited to external aims but also responds to internal political needs: indeed, it plays a crucial role in restoring government legitimacy and resolving political and social crises within the country. In this sense, international branding efforts are intertwined with the local political context, reflecting a strategy that not only aims to project a positive image of Korea abroad but also to set up a solid domestic consensus base.

According to Schwak, this strategy is deeply connected to the historical path of South Korea's economic development initiated in the 1960s by General Park Chung-hee, who aimed to transform the country into a leading nation on the global stage, to elevate it to a major international economic power (Schwak 2016).

So far, the theories concerning the various methods of nation branding and cultural diplomacy implemented by some of the key players in the East Asian context have been introduced, addressing the topic on a nation-by-nation basis. However, it is also necessary to address the key concept of cultural interaction between Asian countries, which Shuling Huang analyses in his article Nation-

branding and transnational consumption: Japan-mania and the Korean wave in Taiwan, analyzing transnational cultural flows and emphasizing how cultural exchanges are not unidirectional but rather involve dynamic interactions between media texts and social contexts that transcend national borders.

Huang challenges the traditional idea that cultural consumption depends exclusively on the production of a sender country or the consumption of a receiver country, suggesting instead a more complex and reciprocal vision involving a process of hybridization of cultures. This occurs when local cultures assimilate and rework foreign cultural elements, giving rise to unique cultural forms. It is a phenomenon that is interpreted as a response to globalization, preserving the resilience of local cultures in the face of cultural homogenization imposed by global flows. In this sense, hybridization allows local cultures to support their specificity while interacting with external influences. Indeed, he argues that: "National cultures are not necessarily washed away by a powerful foreign culture. Rather, encounters with foreign influences can stimulate local innovation" (Huang 2011). Within this discourse, the impact of media consumption and how these phenomena influence consumer desires and cultural production also becomes emblematic.

Just as Anholt had argued, Huang also points out that Japan was the first 'Asian model' that started a different development of the national image of other neighboring countries such as South Korea, China, Taiwan, etc.

Indeed, it emphasizes how the phenomenon of 'Japan-mania' in Taiwan, fueled by the popularity of Japanese dramas, set a precedent that paved the way for the later rise of Korean culture. Indeed, this success helped form a cultural environment that made Taiwanese audiences particularly receptive to Korean media products, creating a base of cultural openness that helped the adoption of Korean culture. The author notes that the 'Korean wave' (or *Hallyu*) can be seen as an evolution of Japanese cultural exports. Indeed, Korea has emulated Japan's production strategies to increase its cultural exports, and this emulation process is not limited to a simple exchange of models but implies a kind

of cultural dialogue between the two nations, from which Korea has been able to draw inspiration from Japanese success to design its own cultural production and dissemination strategies.

He also dwells on the marketing strategies used for the marketing of Japanese and Korean cultural products in Taiwan and argues how this strategic approach has made it possible to attract an audience already sensitized to Asian culture, thus easing the introduction and dissemination of Korean culture. In this scenario, consumer response reflects a process of hybridization, where one does not simply choose one culture over another, but rather integrates different aspects into a new mixed form.

Huang explores the connection between transnational marketing and local media promotion practices, suggesting that effective national branding goes beyond the mere exportation of cultural products and requires careful management of the marketing and consumption of these products within local contexts. This raises the question of the tension between cultural autonomy and commercial manipulation, questioning whether the hybridization of foreign influences in local cultural practices stands for a victory for cultural autonomy or, rather, a result of commercial manipulation. This query highlights how media consumption can strengthen local identities, while simultaneously posing the risk of leading to the commodification of culture, where commercial interests overshadow authentic cultural expressions (Ibid.).

Impact of culture and fashion

As initially highlighted in the chapter on soft power, national heritage and cultural elements, as well as fashion, are part of the definition of soft power, aspects that can be used to attract other countries and at the same time promote one's own national image within the global context.

Therefore, it is also necessary to focus on the impact and dynamics that culture and fashion have on a nation’s branding process.

Lise Skov's 2011 article, *Dreams of Small Nations in a Polycentric Fashion World*, explores several central issues concerning the evolution of the fashion system and the cultural and economic dynamics related to it. In particular, the author analyses the transformation of the traditional model of fashion, which, citing the theory of sociologist Fred Davis, moves according to ‘a center-periphery structure, towards a new paradigm of pluralism and polycentrism’ (Davis 1992, cited in Skov 2011). According to the author, this change has had a significant impact on both production and perception of fashion, emphasizing how global dynamics have altered traditional fashion hierarchies.

In doing so, it also draws attention to how fashion designers draw on local and global cultural references to create unique identities, and how the use of national symbols and popular culture, visible in the works of designers such as Vivienne Westwood and Moods of Norway, enables the construction of narratives that reflect the interplay between tradition and innovation. In this context, fashion has become a medium through which designers can explore and affirm cultural identity, both nationally and internationally. In fact, Skov states that: “Indeed, popular culture is in many ways the natural ‘home’ for fashion, as shown by multiple studies of street style and subculture” (Skov 2011).

However, it is also important to dwell on critical issues that have arisen between globalization and local content, an issue that is particularly relevant in the case of Japanese designers, whose growing international visibility is often accompanied by essentialist stereotypes.

The author discusses how cosmopolitan trends can clash with local cultural specificities, creating a dialectic between setting up global fashion and supporting unique cultural traditions. This openness on the global stage has also led to the emergence of new fashion centers that, to show themselves globally, have seen a detachment from the traditional textile and clothing sectors and have relied more on cultural institutions and government support. The resulting change suggests an alteration in the economic and cultural foundations on which fashion has traditionally been built, with new dynamics of power and influence emerging in the global fashion landscape. Within this scenario, young fashion designers must operate in an unstable environment that mixes commercial gains and public support, echoing Angela McRobbie's line of thought, identified as the hybrid nature of the fashion economy, where creative independence is often intertwined with the need for institutional support, creating a complex and multidimensional economic reality (Angela McRobbie 1998, cited in Skov 2011).

Skov describes a dichotomy in the fashion industry, characterized by a globalized production system, which tends towards extreme centralization, and localized fashion sectors that, on the contrary, function as intermediaries. The latter connects international suppliers with national events, media, and audiences, and plays a crucial role in linking the global world with local realities. In fact, she claims that "attracting tourists is also an aspect of global connectivity, which although it goes outside the professional networks of fashion, is often an attractive success criterion for municipalities and cultural institutions, such as museums, which have found that fashion exhibitions can attract not only crowds of enthusiastic visitors but also corporate sponsorship" (Skov 2011).

In this way, designers develop the ability to integrate local cultural content within a cosmopolitan context, allowing them to stand for their nations not only through fashion as clothing but also to create a sense of modernity and national identity through exhibitions and events to express these values.

Thus, even small nations can gain international recognition, while supporting strong ties with their local heritage. Similarly, cities and countries that were considered mere recipients of global trends are now trying to prove themselves as arbiters of style. This shift marks the growing confidence of

smaller nations in asserting their cultural narratives in global fashion discourse, showing an emerging authority and influence in this sphere. This mixed economy, derived from a combination of economic factors, such as commercial sustainability, and institutional factors, such as public support, contributes to a more sustainable fashion ecosystem that values both global trends and local creativity (Ibid.).

Cultural and business entities, therefore, play a decisive role in defining and strengthening a nation's brand, influencing it through various means. In the doctoral thesis by researcher Kyung Mi Lee titled *Nation Branding and Sustainable Competitiveness of Nations* (2009) and in Oksana Biletska's article *Culture as a Nation Branding Tool within the International Interaction System* (2021), the importance of culture as a crucial element in the nation branding process is highlighted. Culture, with its historical heritage, diversity, and potential, plays a central role in enhancing a country's image, helping to create a positive perception of its identity on the international stage, and becoming a means through which a country can communicate its uniqueness and values (Lee 2009; Biletska 2021).

While Lee emphasizes the potential of culture in creating a strong brand that can attract foreign investors and highly skilled professionals (Lee 2009), Biletska focuses on its ability to exert political influence and shape international relations. The goal of the process she describes is to communicate the uniqueness and appeal of the country, asserting that:

> "[...] a nation branding must ensure its identification both inside and outside the country. It should reflect the best mentalities and traditions of the country's population and perform an ideological function, thus uniting the population to implement common tasks. Nation branding is the quintessence of the state's mission and development strategy, including the cultural one" (Biletska 2021).

In this sense, cultural organizations, such as artistic institutions, museums, and performance groups, significantly contribute to national identity by highlighting a country's heritage, values, and creativity. These entities, in fact, can influence international percpetions through various initiatives. Similarly, businesses play a crucial role as ambassadors of the national brand. When companies align their brand with national branding efforts, they help present a cohesive and unified image of the country, emphasizing aspects such as innovation, competitiveness, and the ability to attract investment.

Through tourism and the export of cultural products, they contribute to economic growth, fostering a positive view of the country and strengthening its image globally. Additionally, collaborations between the public and private sectors, particularly through co-branding, enhance the visibility and reputation of nations in international markets, using the resources and power of corporate branding (Lee 2009).

Aspects such as the population, culture, history, and symbols are all interconnected elements that, according to Biletska, collaborate in shaping a coherent and recognizable narrative of national identity. Indeed, the author states that: "the nation brand is a country’s national spirit and cultural values manifestation. It promotes the people’s national identity, embodies the harmony of the state’s tangible and intangible assets, and shows the level of the country’s cultural industry development. That is why cultural brands play a leading role in nation branding today." (Biletska 2021).

Referring to the discourse of globalization, in an increasingly interconnected world, countries must be able to respond quickly and strategically to global challenges to keep a solid and influential presence on the international stage. In this way, the concept of cultural diplomacy is also a fundamental strategy for promoting a nation's cultural brand.

To best analyze this information, it is necessary to consult the Nation Brand Index (NBI) devised by Simon Anholt in 2005, which consists of a system for evaluating member countries based on six

criteria: culture/heritage, tourism, economy (import and export), government, immigration/investment, and population (Fig. 2).

Figure 4: Simon Anholt's Nation Brand Hexagon

According to recent market analyses carried out on 60 nations and provided by the Ipsos-Anholt Group, in 2023, Japan overtook Germany and took first place in the Nations Brand Index (NBI), becoming the first country in the Asia-Pacific region to reach this position (Fig. 3). According to the Ipsos-Anholt analysis, Japan achieved significant improvement in all areas, entering the top ten in all six indices. Its reputation is particularly strong in the Export Index, which ranks first in three categories: contributions to science and technology, creativity, and product attractiveness. It also

stands out in the People and Tourism indices, where it receives high ratings for the employability of its citizens and vibrancy of its cities (Ipsos-Anholt 2023).

Nation Brands Index 2023: How does your country rank?

2022 Rank	2023 Rank	NBI	2022 Score	2023 Score
2	**1**	Japan	69.53	**69.85**
1	**2**	Germany	69.80	**69.43**
3	**3**	Canada	69.52	**68.91**
6	**4**	United Kingdom	69.13	**68.80**
4	**5**	Italy	69.26	**68.69**
8	**6**	United States	68.28	**68.43**
7	**7**	Switzerland	68.57	**68.24**
5	**8**	France	69.18	**67.95**
10	**9**	Australia	67.94	**67.80**
9	**10**	Sweden	68.10	**67.75**
11	**11**	Spain	67.30	**66.81**
12	**12**	Norway	67.03	**66.55**
13	**13**	Netherlands	65.89	**66.34**
14	**14**	New Zealand	65.63	**65.96**
16	**15**	Finland	65.19	**65.36**
15	**16**	Scotland	65.30	**65.28**
16	**17**	Austria	65.19	**65.08**
18	**18**	Ireland	64.36	**64.66**
19	**19**	Belgium	64.06	**64.12**
-	**20**	Portugal	-	**64.08**
20	**21**	Greece	62.90	**63.59**
21	**22**	Iceland	62.70	**63.46**
22	**23**	Wales	61.94	**62.43**
23	**24**	South Korea	61.09	**62.17**
24	**25**	Northern Ireland	60.89	**61.62**

Additional 35 rows not shown.

Source: Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brands Index 2023
• Created with Datawrapper

Figure 5: Ipsos-Anholt Nation Brand Index supplemental report

Simon Anholt, founder of the NBI, notes that the international image of nations is not only crucial for attracting trade, tourism, investment and talent, but also reflects the geopolitical currents that influence the world and our collective future. According to Anholt, the fact that Japan is now

considered the most admired country in the world after Germany and the United States marks a significant change in the global soft power landscape. Indeed, this achievement is a clear signal that the "Asian Century" has begun.

The use of soft power and the creation of national brands have caused countries to look for distinctive elements to differentiate themselves within the global landscape; for this reason, over time, specific images have been created that represent people's perceptions of a particular nation. Thanks to the analysis conducted by the Ipsos-Anholt group, it is possible to see the various personality traits that have been associated with countries based on their distinctive traits (Fig. 4). For example, Germany, the United States, and China are seen as 'strong' countries owing to their important presence in the global scenario in several respects. Alternatively, how Russia and Ukraine are now associated as 'dangerous' following the recent Russian Ukrainian conflict that erupted in 2022 and so on.

Figure 6: Ipsos-Anholt's Nations as Personalities Scheme

CHAPTER 3: CASE STUDIES ON FASHION BRAND STARTEGIES

So far, the analysis has focused on how, through globalization and soft power, there has emerged the need to create national brands capable of influencing not only the domestic scene but also the international one, for economic and political reasons, and to promote a country's image through cultural diplomacy. Consequently, the aim is to explore the differences between large cities, characterized by Western luxury and non-luxury brands, and smaller realities, where smaller brands and businesses have emerged. Attention will be given to regional branding strategies that focus on the re-evaluation and promotion of local craftsmanship aspects in Japan and South Korea.

Case study on Japan

Fashion represents the tool that links soft power and national branding, as seen in the case of Japan through brands like Uniqlo and Muji. Both brands leverage Japan's image to attract international consumers, drawing on values associated with Japanese culture such as simplicity, innovation, and attention to detail. The branding of Uniqlo and Muji emphasizes Japanese authenticity and quality, attracting customers seeking functional, well-designed products with a clear connection to both tradition and modernity. In this way, they align perfectly with a soft power strategy that uses national culture as an instrument of attraction.

In contrast, Western luxury brands do not focus on the brand's origin, but rather on the quality and exclusivity of their products. For example, despite being French, Louis Vuitton's branding centres on creating a universal image of luxury, emphasizing prestige, rarity, and the unique experience the brand

offers, rather than focusing on association with a single country. Thus, Louis Vuitton distances itself from the idea of being exclusively tied to France, aiming at a global clientele that seeks status and distinction, without being directly influenced by the brand's cultural origin.

Another aspect discussed in this work is the difference between national and regional branding. While brands like Uniqlo and Muji operate globally, using Japan's image as a symbol of quality and innovation, regional branding, as in the case of Aomori Prefecture, seeks to highlight local specificities and unique artisanal traditions. Aomori, for example, leverages its cultural heritage, natural resources, and agricultural traditions to promote typical products like the region's Tsugaru craft materials, aiming to attract consumers interested in a more authentic, locally rooted experience.

The distinguishing feature of regional branding, as opposed to national branding, is its focus on local authenticity and the individuality of a region, creating a direct connection with consumers who seek experiences more intimate and grounded in local culture, as opposed to national branding, which can tend to generalize the image of an entire country. The case of Aomori thus highlights how regional branding can be a powerful tool of soft power.

3.1. Luxury and non-luxury fashion brands strategies in central areas

As suggested by Professor Shin'ya Nagasawa of Waseda University in his article *Japan has developed Luxury Brands*, the history of luxury brands in Japan is marked by crucial developments that have had a significant impact both on the domestic and global luxury markets. In the post-war period, when Japan experienced rapid economic growth, the economic boom was the determining event that led to an increase in disposable income, allowing a growing segment of the Japanese population to aspire to luxury goods, which were seen as symbols of status and social success. The favourable economic context thus fostered a growing demand for high-end products.

In the early 1970s, Japan also underwent a significant change in terms of travel restrictions, as until then, regulations prevented Japanese citizens from traveling abroad or using foreign currencies. With the end of these restrictions, there was a surge in overseas travel, particularly to Europe, where Japanese tourists began to frequent luxury brand stores. Notably, Louis Vuitton's Paris boutiques became a favoured destination for Japanese consumers, contributing to increased visibility and demand for these luxury products. Some Japanese importers began purchasing Louis Vuitton bags in Paris and reselling them at significantly higher prices in Japan, creating a product scarcity and fuelling growing demand. This phenomenon sparked a true "luxury boom" in the country.

The success of these brands in Japan led to the creation of a solid distribution system, with Japanese department stores like Takashimaya in Nihonbashi initially hesitant to include luxury stores, but later, with the evolution of the market, becoming aware of the importance of brand image for final consumers. This model of integrating luxury stores within department stores later spread to Europe, where chains such as Printemps and Galeries Lafayette adopted a similar approach, consolidating luxury as an integral part of retail commerce.

The opening of numerous Louis Vuitton stores in Japan in 1978, thanks to the Japanese consultant Kyojiro Hata, marked a pivotal moment in the globalization of luxury brands. This initiative represented the first time a luxury brand opened more than one store in a foreign country, setting a precedent that would later be followed by other major luxury houses.

In the context of globalization, Japanese luxury brands also began to transition from family-run businesses to international conglomerates. An emblematic example is the merger between Louis Vuitton and Moët Hennessy in 1987, which led to the creation of LVMH, the first luxury conglomerate, now one of the dominant forces in the industry.

Over the years, the luxury market in Japan has undergone an evolution in consumer preferences. There has been a shift from ostentatious consumption to a preference for discreet luxury, reflecting a broader social change, such as the aging population and declining birth rates (Nagasawa 2016).

Nagasawa argues, in fact, that: “Businesspersons as well as leaders in the luxury goods industry consider Japan to be an important market in terms of global strategies. This is not only because Japan has the highest sales, but because they view Japan as an experimental laboratory for the global scene, and use it as a touchstone or benchmark for the rest of the world” (Ibid.).

The author emphasizes that communication of value is crucial for luxury brands, as it goes beyond product quality, including the ability to convey the story, exclusivity, and craftsmanship. This is achieved through engaging storytelling and exceptional customer service, which foster an emotional connection with the audience and ensure their perception of value. Furthermore, luxury brands must adapt to new generations that place greater importance on sustainability, social responsibility, and the shopping experience. Therefore, it is crucial for brands to innovate their strategies to remain relevant in a constantly evolving market.

The distribution network for luxury products in Japan is characterized by unique strategies developed to meet market demands. Wholesalers play a key role in selling products to retailers. While this approach favours sales with minimal investment, it can complicate the management of brand image and pricing. Therefore, luxury brands must maintain careful control over relationships with wholesalers to preserve the exclusivity and prestige of their products.

Another method for distributing luxury products in Japan is the concept of "shop-in-shop," which involves allocating dedicated spaces for luxury brands within department stores. This model has historically been the main form of luxury retailing in Japan, as it allows brands to leverage the foot traffic and established customer base of department stores while maintaining a strong brand identity.

However, for this strategy to be effective, luxury brands must negotiate favourable terms with department stores, ensuring their products' visibility and space optimization.

The drawbacks of this distribution network for luxury products in Japan include high real estate costs. As a result, luxury brands tend to prioritize presence in high-traffic areas, such as Ginza and Omotesando in Tokyo, to increase brand visibility and attract affluent clientele. This focus highlights the importance of brand image over immediate sales profit.

Controlling distribution channels allows luxury brands to maintain direct contact with Japanese consumers, who are known for their attention to detail and high expectations regarding product quality and customer service (Ibid.).

3.2. Examples of National Branding in Japanese Non-Luxury Brands UNIQLO and MUJI

In Japan, in large cities such as Tokyo, there are not only European luxury goods stores but also non-luxury Japanese stores that serve as examples of national branding, particularly Specialty Retailers of Private Label Apparel (SPA). These are brands that handle the entire process of designing and selling their clothing items, without relying on external producers. SPAs control the entire production and distribution cycle, from design, manufacturing, and distribution, to selling through physical stores or online channels, such as their websites. This control allows them to have greater influence over costs, quality, and production speed, while also offering competitive prices. Among these brands, UNIQLO and MUJI stand out, as their strategies have enabled them to establish a global presence, competing with well-known European brands like ZARA and H&M.

According to a study conducted by Professor Nagasawa in the 2020 article *Building a Brand through the Flagship Store Strategy: International Examples of UNIQLO and MUJI*, several key aspects of

Japanese SPA strategies emerge, following the four P's framework: product, price, place, and promotion.

In particular, the strategic positioning of their flagship stores stands out. These stores are in high-visibility areas, such as Ginza, which not only promotes brand recognition but also attracts a broader customer base. The choice of these locations is crucial in establishing a strong and recognizable brand presence in the urban environment. These spaces do not merely offer products but also host promotional activities and create events aimed at engaging consumers in an immersive experience, which fosters long-term brand loyalty.

Thus, in the relationship between soft power and national branding, these brands manage to communicate a global image that conveys a positive idea of Japanese culture and lifestyle. This can add significant value to the brand, especially in foreign markets, where the cultural association can positively influence consumer preferences (Nagasawa 2020).

Although they belong to the same category of stores, UNIQLO and MUJI differ in several ways.

In the case of UNIQLO, its management strategy is based on key elements such as the brand name, which comes from the expression "Unique Clothing Warehouse," reflecting the company’s mission to offer a wide range of clothing. The decision to simplify the name to "UNIQLO" was a strategic move aimed at improving brand recognition and creating a sense of uniqueness, a decision that gained additional value when a spelling error during the brand’s expansion to Hong Kong was favourably accepted by founder Tadashi Yanai, transforming it into an opportunity to strengthen the brand’s identity (Yanai 2009, cited in Honjo 2020).

Additionally, the management of visual identity plays a key role. UNIQLO adopts a consistent approach, including the use of logos, colour schemes, signage, and in-store displays, creating a cohesive visual representation that helps convey the brand’s values. They also focus on providing customers with a clean and pleasant shopping environment, ensuring constant availability of

advertised items, and offering flexible return policies. Customer satisfaction is a fundamental pillar of the brand's promise, contributing to customer loyalty and consolidating its reputation.

At the same time, the company has developed innovative marketing communication that effectively engages consumers. Its promotional approach includes extensive use of advertising campaigns and events to generate attention around its stores. The company aims to create an immediate impact through limited-edition products highlighting elements of Japanese culture, such as animation, to attract a young and cosmopolitan clientele (Nagasawa 2020). A notable example is the "Complaints to UNIQLO" campaign, which invited customers to provide feedback, creating a direct communication channel. This approach not only improved service but also strengthened the connection between the brand and its customers, emphasizing the company's commitment to listening and responding to public needs (Honjo 2020).

Regarding its positioning strategy, the company tends to localize its flagship stores in high-visibility areas, often in high-traffic locations such as Fifth Avenue in New York or Myeongdong in Seoul. Regarding product offerings, UNIQLO provides a wide range of items in its flagship stores, aiming to reflect the brand concept "Made for All." This broad variety of products is designed to appeal to a wide and diverse audience, addressing various consumer needs (Nagasawa 2020).

In this way, UNIQLO has adapted its offerings and marketing to meet the needs of global markets, with the goal of inspiring affordable casual wear worldwide. This decision is aligned with its mission statement, which emphasizes accessibility and inclusivity, appealing to a wide range of consumers from various cultures. Additionally, UNIQLO has demonstrated considerable skill in adapting its product offerings and marketing strategies to meet specific consumer needs in different cultural contexts. This mix of localization and globalization has allowed UNIQLO to establish itself as a strong, recognizable brand on the international stage (Honjo 2020).

Finally, the introduction of innovative product concepts, such as LifeWear (Fig. 5), which focuses on functional and comfortable clothing for daily life, is also important. The company's ability to offer practical and stylish solutions that align with global trends has contributed to its competitiveness on the international stage. This philosophical approach allows the brand to differentiate itself from other fashion retailers, as it focuses on the practical benefits of its products rather than purely aesthetic or temporary aspects. It reflects UNIQLO's commitment to understanding and responding to its customers' lifestyles, who seek versatile, high-quality clothing suitable for various daily situations, creating a direct and personal connection between the brand and its audience (Ibid.).

With the evolution of social responsibility and sustainability concepts, the company has also committed to promoting eco-friendly practices and engaging with local communities, further amplifying the brand's appeal. UNIQLO is not only focused on producing functional and stylistically valid clothing but is also dedicated to creating environmentally responsible and sustainable products (Ibid.).

LifeWear: Japan to the World

Simple, High-quality Clothing for All

LifeWear offers excellent design, functionality, comfort, and enduring appeal at exceptional prices. This unique value can be traced to our origins in Japan. Our first brand message in 1999 was "UNIQLO is a new kind of Japanese company that enables people all over the world to experience the joy, happiness and satisfaction of wearing truly great clothing." Our aim was to take on the world with Japan's unique aesthetic sensibility, exquisitely attentive manufacturing, and industriousness. UNIQLO overturned conventional fashion wisdom by offering clothing as elements of personal comfort. Our production processes were inspired by the strict quality control required for precision instruments. This artisanal spirit remains the biggest factor behind our worldwide customer support and growth.

A shift in consumer tastes toward products that offer real value has also boosted support for LifeWear and enabled UNIQLO to dramatically increase its presence in the USA and Europe. We now have the same number of stores in central London and Paris as top local brands, and UNIQLO brand visibility has increased to over 80% in the US cities where we operate stores. Having built the necessary platforms for uninterrupted expansion in the USA and Europe, the stage is now set for us to become a truly global brand.

What is LifeWear?

1. Inspired by life's needs
2. Ingenious in detail
3. Simple and adaptable to everyone's style
4. Looking ahead to continuously evolve
5. The highest quality made accessible to everyone

Figure 7: UNIQLO's LifeWear startegy

Thanks to these effective strategies, in fact, in 2024 the UNIQLO brand re-entered the top 3 global flagship brands, as can be seen in the graph below created by Fast Retailing Co., Ltd (Fig. 6).

Industry Ranking

Last Updated: 2024.11.29
to Japanese page

Major Global Apparel Manufacturer and Retailer

Company Name (Flagship Brand)	Country and Region	End of Fiscal Year	Sales (Trillion of yen)	Sales (Billions of dollar)	Change (%) (local base)
Inditex, S.A. (ZARA)	Spain	Jan. 2024	5.99	39.0	+10.4
H & M Hennes & Mauritz AB	Sweden	Nov. 2023	3.39	22.1	+5.6
FAST RETAILING CO., LTD. (UNIQLO)	**Japan**	**Aug. 2024**	**3.10**	**20.2**	**+12.2**
Gap Inc.	USA	Feb. 2024	2.29	14.9	-4.7
lululemon athletica inc.	USA	Jan. 2024	1.39	9.1	+18.6
PVH Corp. (Calvin Klein,Tommy Hilfiger)	USA	Feb. 2024	1.34	8.7	+2.1
Next plc	UK	Jan. 2024	1.05	6.8	+9.1
Ralph Lauren Corporation	USA	Mar. 2024	0.96	6.3	+2.9
Victoria's Secret & Co.	USA	Feb. 2024	0.90	5.8	-2.6
American Eagle Outfitters Inc	USA	Feb. 2024	0.76	5.0	+5.4

Notes: Compiled from the annual reports of the companies listed above.
*Figures calculated in yen using October 31,2024 FX rates. ($1=¥153.65)

Figure 8: Fast Retailing's Industry Ranking 2024

In the case of MUJI, the strategies differ. Regarding store positioning, MUJI prefers to place its flagship stores in secondary locations within prime areas, such as on upper floors of buildings rather than at street level. This approach highlights a more discreet and less invasive presence, while still maintaining a strategic location in desirable zones, reflecting the brand's more understated and minimalist character.

Unlike UNIQLO, MUJI does not rely on "aggressive" promotions. The brand focuses on conveying its message through the selection and design of its products, which emphasize functionality and simplicity rather than ephemeral fashion trends. This strategy allows the products to communicate the brand's values and aesthetics on their own, without the need for excessive promotional exposure.

MUJI has thus chosen a more understated path, based on the quality of its products and the shopping experience offered in its stores. Therefore, the company prefers to concentrate its efforts on enhancing the product and fostering direct interaction with the consumer (Nagasawa and Suganami, 2019).

Additionally, MUJI adopts a more targeted selection strategy, positioning itself as a lifestyle brand rather than a mere fashion retailer, carefully curating its product range based on local preferences and varying lifestyles. Indeed, its stores are also designed to offer a simple, functional, and welcoming environment, where the focus is primarily on the practicality and design of the products.

The brand thus promotes a minimalist image, centred on a sustainable and serene lifestyle. This message resonates with consumers who seek a shopping experience that prioritizes durability and simplicity over transient trends (Nagasawa 2020) (Fig. 7).

Figure 9: Ryouhin Keikaku's "Grand Strategy" Muji Report 2023

However, both brands use their flagship stores to convey aspects of Japanese culture. UNIQLO is known for featuring limited edition products that reference Japanese pop culture, such as collaborations with anime franchises, in a section called UT Graphic Tees Collections (Fig. 8). This not only attracts a fan base of such franchises but also reinforces UNIQLO's image as a representative of contemporary Japanese culture. MUJI, for its part, is often perceived as a brand that embodies the principles of Japanese design, which enhances its appeal in international markets, where Japanese design is associated with quality, functionality, and simplicity (Nagasawa, 2020) (Fig. 9).

Figure 10: UNIQLO's UT Graphic Tees Collaborations

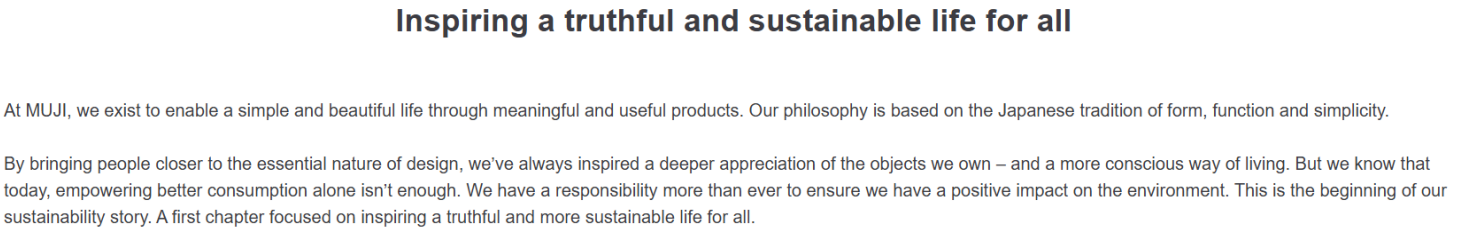

Figure 11: MUJI's philosophy

In this analytical framework of SPA brands, several challenges emerge, both domestic and international, as suggested by Nagasawa and Suganami in their 2019 article *Flagship Shop Strategy for Brand Building–Case of MUJI* and by Jun Gotō in the 2020 seminar *Examination of Global Strategies in Japanese Fashion Companies*.

Among these, one of the primary challenges concerns cultural differences, as Japanese brands often encounter difficulties in adapting their business models and marketing strategies to the preferences and behaviours of consumers in foreign markets. Indeed, there is a lack of adequate understanding of the differences in brand recognition between the domestic and international markets. Japanese companies often assume that success in the domestic market will automatically translate into positive results abroad, without considering the need to adapt their marketing strategies to the specific preferences and consumption habits of local markets (Gotō, 2020). In this regard, it is crucial to understand local tastes, shopping habits, and cultural nuances that differ from those in Japan, as a failure to grasp such variables can compromise the success of expansion (Nagasawa and Suganami, 2019).

In fact, the inadequacy of marketing strategies adopted by Japanese companies leads brands to continue relying on traditional promotional methods, such as magazine advertisements or transport advertisements, which may not be effective in capturing the attention of international consumers. Similarly, communication difficulties, primarily due to language barriers, limit Japanese companies' ability to convey their message clearly and effectively (Gotō, 2020).

Additionally, costs associated with location and rents represent another hindrance to international expansion. Opening stores in strategic areas, necessary to ensure good visibility and attract foot traffic, can lead to significant expenses. For brands like MUJI, which do not rely on aggressive promotions to stimulate immediate sales, it is particularly difficult to sustain operations in high-cost areas, making economic expansion more complex (Nagasawa and Suganami, 2019). Economic factors, such as market fluctuations and the evolution of global trends, have negatively impacted the performance of

Japanese companies abroad. In many cases, financial difficulties have led companies to withdraw from international markets, especially when they have failed to achieve immediate results (Gotō, 2020).

In this scenario, where the global fashion market is saturated and there is strong competition, Japanese brands often face well-established local competitors and other international players, complicating efforts to gain market share and establish a solid presence in new regions. Therefore, competition not only slows growth but also requires a well-structured differentiation strategy to emerge in an increasingly competitive global market (Nagasawa and Suganami, 2019; Gotō, 2020).

According to Gotō, based on Pankaj Ghemawat's model of the three A's (Adaptation, Aggregation, and Arbitrage), Japanese fashion companies could adopt the "hybrid model," which involves collaborating with local designers to develop products that meet the tastes and needs of the target market. This not only fosters innovation and diversification of Japanese brand offerings but also allows for leveraging the creative potential present in individual countries. Anticipating fashion trends and maintaining a position of leadership in innovation thus becomes essential.

One of the main components of the hybrid model involves cross-border mergers and acquisitions (M&A), through which companies could acquire or form alliances with established brands and designers abroad. In this way, the author argues that access could be gained to new markets, in-depth consumer insights, and well-established distribution networks, facilitating faster and more sustainable international expansion.

Finally, cost leadership and differentiation also become key elements. While maintaining a policy of competitive pricing, Japanese brands could also focus on creating distinctive, high-quality products capable of standing out in an increasingly crowded and competitive market. In this way, long-term relationships could be built with consumers and other stakeholders in foreign markets (Gotō, 2020) (Fig. 10).

表 29　グローバル戦略のツール

Figure 12: Jun Gotō's Tools of global strategy

At the end of the first chapter, the discussion focused on how, according to Scott Lash and Celia Lury, urban spaces and architecture are key elements in a brand's success, as they represent the physical experience for the consumer (Lash and Lury, 2007), which encompasses the brand's intentions and messages through product arrangement, promotional images, and the customer service provided by store staff.

According to research by Ken Kumagai and Shin'ya Nagasawa, luxury brands benefit more from prestigious locations, as consumers associate them with high-status places, thus increasing their perceived value. In contrast, for non-luxury brands, the store's location does not significantly affect perceived status, showing that placing them in prestigious areas does not substantially alter their perception (Kumagai and Nagasawa, 2017).

In his 2017 article *Spatial Structures and the Urban Hierarchy System of Metropolitan Areas as Seen by Brand Fashion Store Locations*, Yutaka Gotō analyses the spatial structures and urban hierarchy of metropolitan areas, emphasizing that large retail stores, as concentrations of brands, reflect the

centrality of cities in the fashion market. This concentration in major urban centres represents the commercial relevance of these cities and serves as a strategy to attract a diverse clientele (Gotō, 2017).

Kumagai and Nagasawa argue that luxury brands benefit from a favourable perception when located in exclusive environments, such as luxury shopping centres or high-end residential neighbourhoods, as they are associated with an image of exclusivity and premium prices. In contrast, for non-luxury brands, being in prestigious places does not confer a luxury image, suggesting that other marketing strategies are necessary to enhance their perception. These brands are primarily evaluated based on their functional characteristics, such as convenience and accessibility, and are typically found in suburban shopping centres or department stores, where competition is based on price and variety, not exclusivity (Kumagai and Nagasawa, 2017; Gotō, 2017) (Fig. 11).

Finally, Gotō highlights how different types of stores cater to specific demographics. Fashion markets are segmented by age groups, such as youth, professionals, families, and mature consumers, with a reflection on the differentiated approach of urban commercial buildings and suburban shopping malls. Although both may target similar demographics, they distinguish themselves through their specific branding and marketing strategies. In this sense, the concept of flagship stores is explored in the context of major urban areas like Tokyo and Osaka, where the concentration of these stores is particularly high, not only to meet the growing demand for international and emerging brands but also to serve as a strategy to increase brand visibility and attract a broad consumer audience (Gotō, 2017).

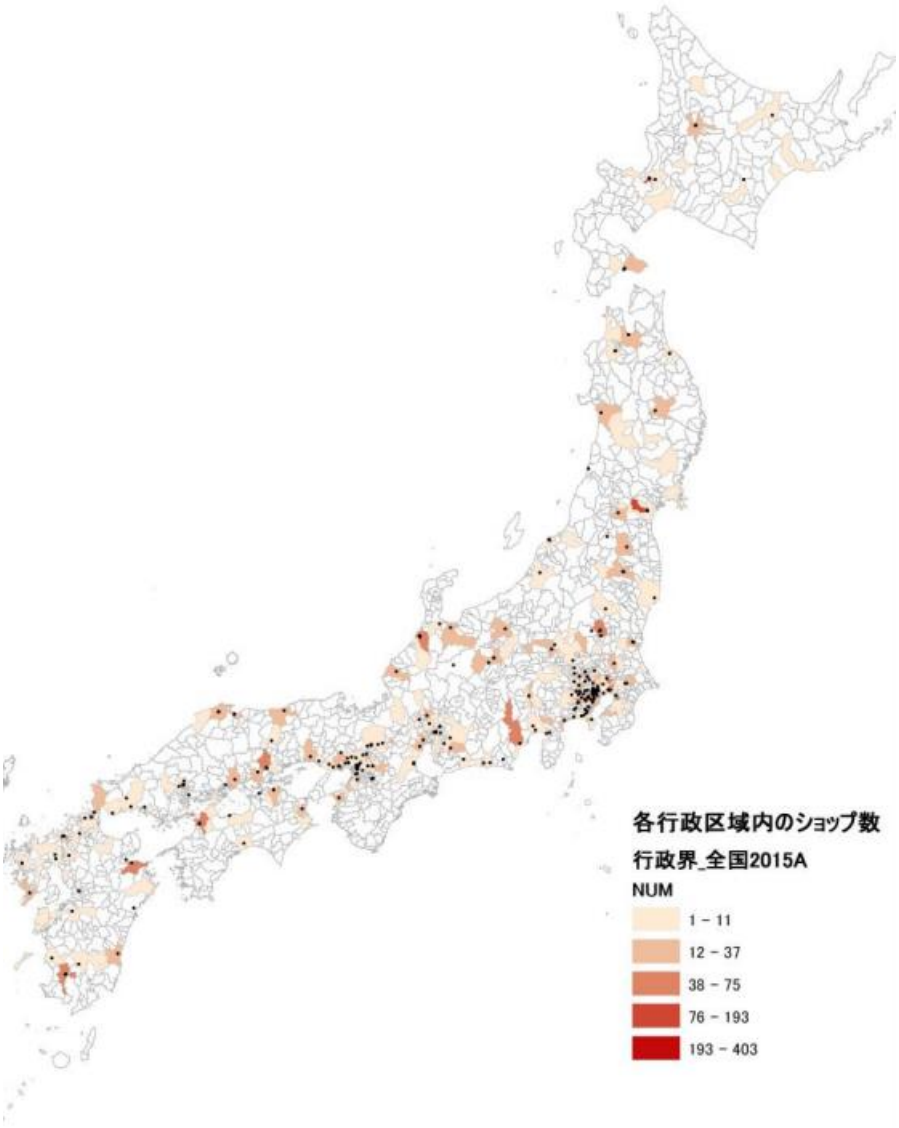

図１　ファッションブランドショップの全国分布および集中程度

Figure 13: Yutaka Gotō's National distribution and concentration of fashion brand shops

As seen in Figure 11, in large cities there is a more substantial presence of both international luxury brands and national non-luxury brands. It can also be inferred that in areas "distant" from major metropolitan centers, there is a decreasing presence of the former, while the latter are more widespread throughout the country (Figures 12 and 13).

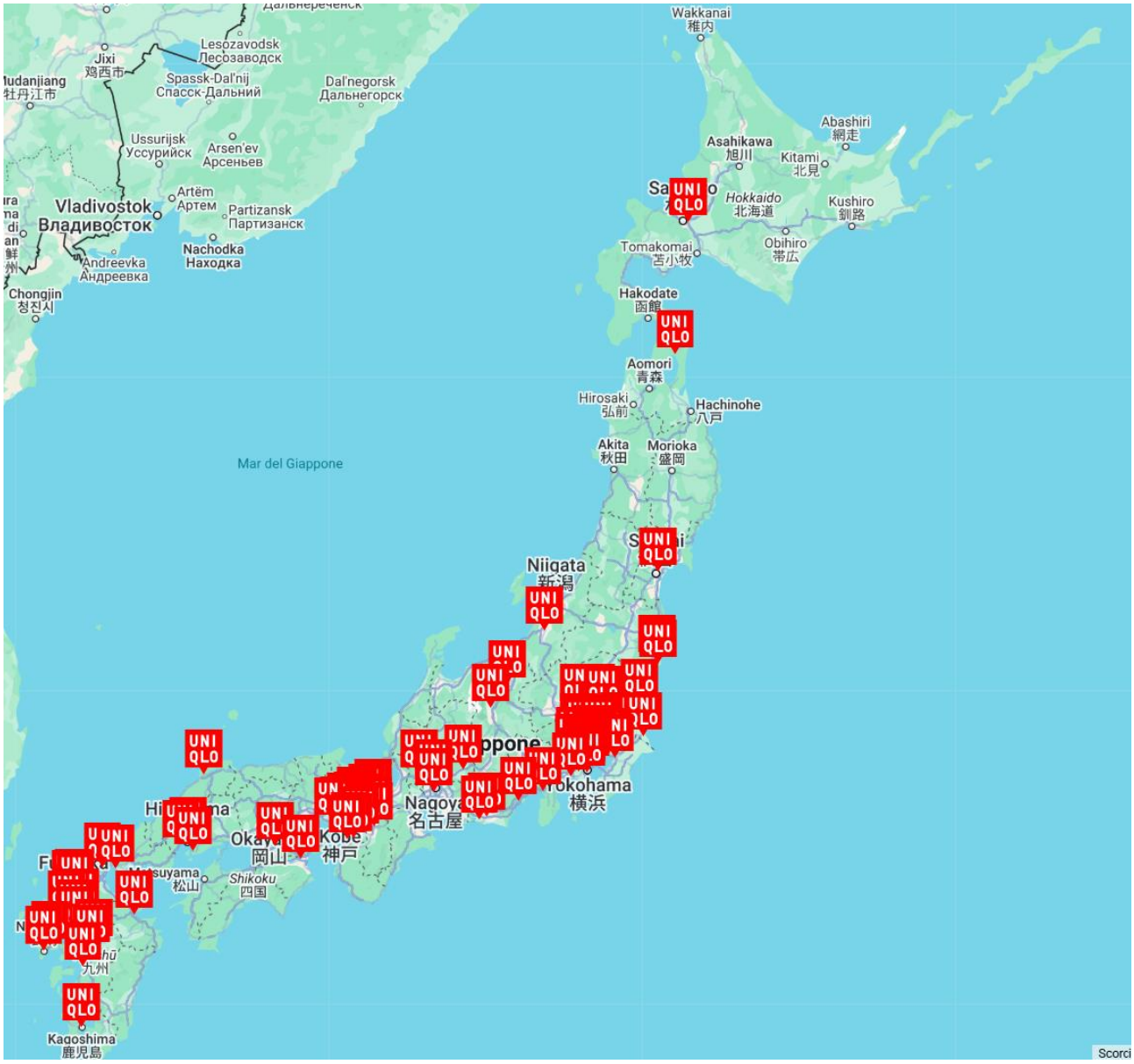

Figure 14: UNIQLO stores in Japan

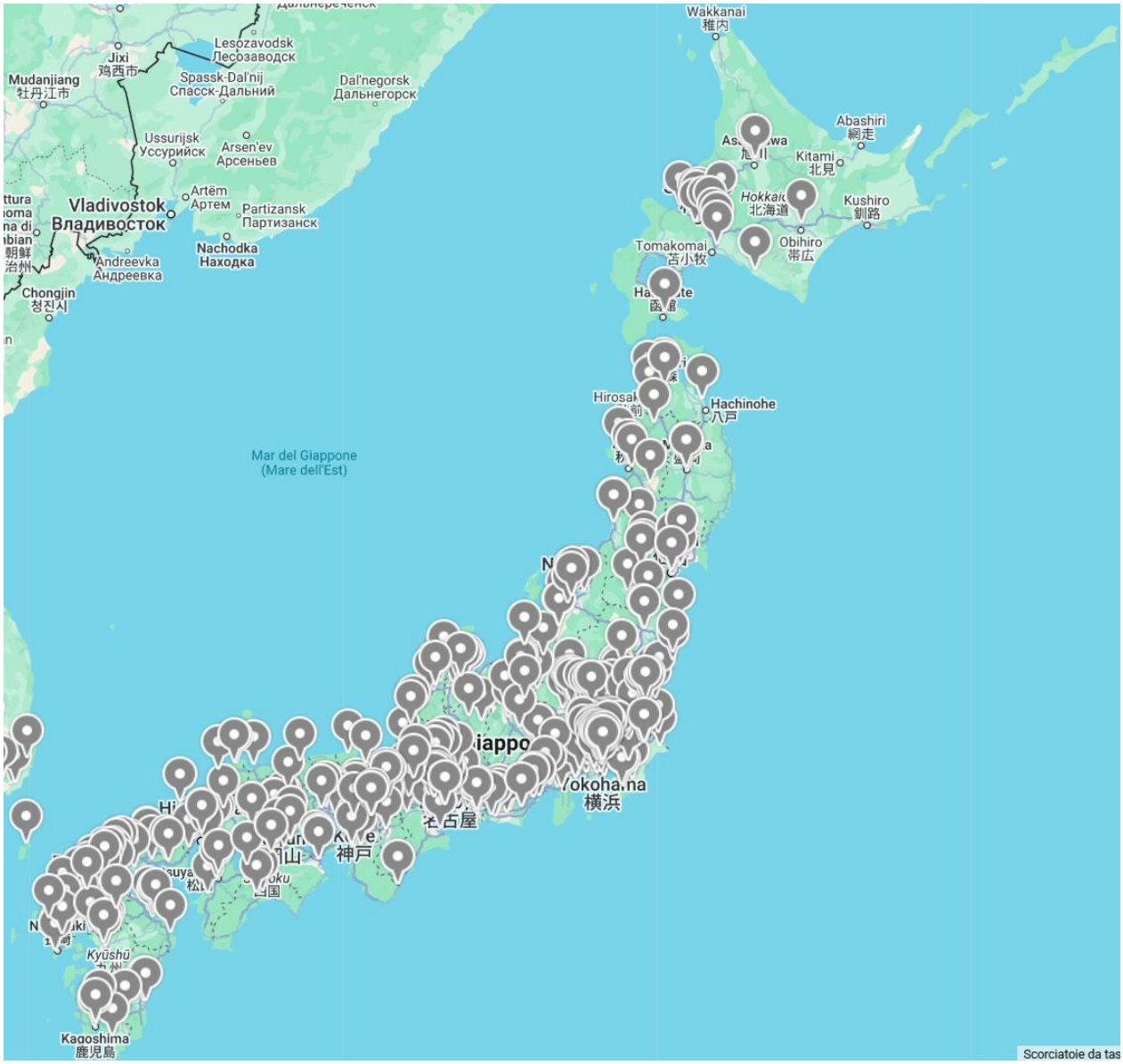

Figure 15: MUJI stores in Japan

3.3. Examples of regional branding through apparel companies' strategies in Aomori Prefecture

At this point, one of the questions this paper seeks to address concerns the peripheral areas of Japan, specifically the Tōhoku region, and the types of clothing stores as examples of regional branding that can be found there.

In addition to the presence of numerous second-hand stores in the area, such as *2nd Street* (セカンドストリート), *Off House* (オフハウス), and *Yorozuya* (萬屋) (Fig. 14), there are also several local craft and clothing stores that aim to revitalize the areas in which they are found, using strategies that combine traditional practices with innovative approaches.

Figure 16: 2nd Street, Off House and Yorozuya' stores in Hirosaki

Indeed, during the 2023 seminar *The Role of Regional Brands and Apparel Companies* organized by Professor Junichiro Sasaki of Hirosaki University in Aomori Prefecture, a range of crucial topics related to regional brands and apparel companies was discussed, with particular focus on the importance of the apparel industry in the Tōhoku region. The interview featured three local entrepreneurs: Katsutoyo Satō of Sunline Corporation (株式会社サンライン), located in Inakadate town, Shinmori Prefecture (Fig. 15); Nobutaka Morioku of Iwate Moriya Corporation (岩手モリヤ株式会社), based in Kuji city, Iwate Prefecture (Fig. 16); and Masaki Satō of Satō Textile Corporation (佐藤繊維株式会社), located in Sagae city, Yamagata Prefecture (Fig. 17).

Katsutoyo Satō, president of Sunline Corporation, shared his experiences, highlighting the journey of his company and its commitment to craftsmanship. After working at a clothing manufacturing company in Aichi Prefecture, he decided to start his own business following the failure of his earlier venture, facing economic challenges and the high competitiveness of the industry.

Participation in events such as *PITTI UOMO* in Florence marked a turning point, as it provided the company with exposure on an international platform, increasing visibility and creating networking opportunities with global buyers and designers. This experience allowed him to gain a better understanding of global trends in men's fashion and learn from Italian craftsmanship and aesthetic standards, strengthening his company’s commitment to craftsmanship, stimulating his creativity, and driving him to innovate in design and improve Sunline's competitiveness in the global market.

Figure 17: Sunline Corporation's Website

The company Iwate Moriya Corporation, led by President Nobutaka Morioku, is in the city of Kuji, which is referred to as the "Holy Land of Clothing." The company is committed to ensuring high production standards, which relieves the need to keep a highly skilled workforce in the region. Morioku emphasized the importance of quality and craftsmanship—distinctive aspects of Japanese manufacturing—that are threatened by low-cost international competition.

Like Satō, Morioku also highlighted Iwate Moriya Corporation’s growing participation in international trade fairs such as *PITTI UOMO*, which are essential for promoting Japanese craftsmanship and increasing the visibility and recognition of local brands in the global market.

Figure 18: Iwate Moriya Corporation Website

Masaki Satō, a representative of Satō Textile Corporation, specifically focused on collaborations with Italian brands. Satō Textile Corporation is also renowned for its attention to high-quality production and design innovation, with a strong commitment to craftsmanship and mindfulness. He explained how international collaborations, particularly with Italian textile manufacturers, have had a significant impact on his work, thanks to exposure to unique materials and techniques. The exposure to the variety of Italian yarns and fabrics, such as at the *PITTI UOMO* fair, enriched his collections, contributing to enhancing the originality of his products.

A significant episode involved the creation of added items by combining high-quality Italian yarns with Japanese craftsmanship, resulting in distinctive creations that attracted attention in the market.

Satō's experience highlights the importance of cultural exchange between Japan and Italy, with Satō Textile Corporation bringing Japanese craftsmanship to Italy while learning from Italian textile methods, thus promoting innovation and strengthening the textile traditions of both countries.

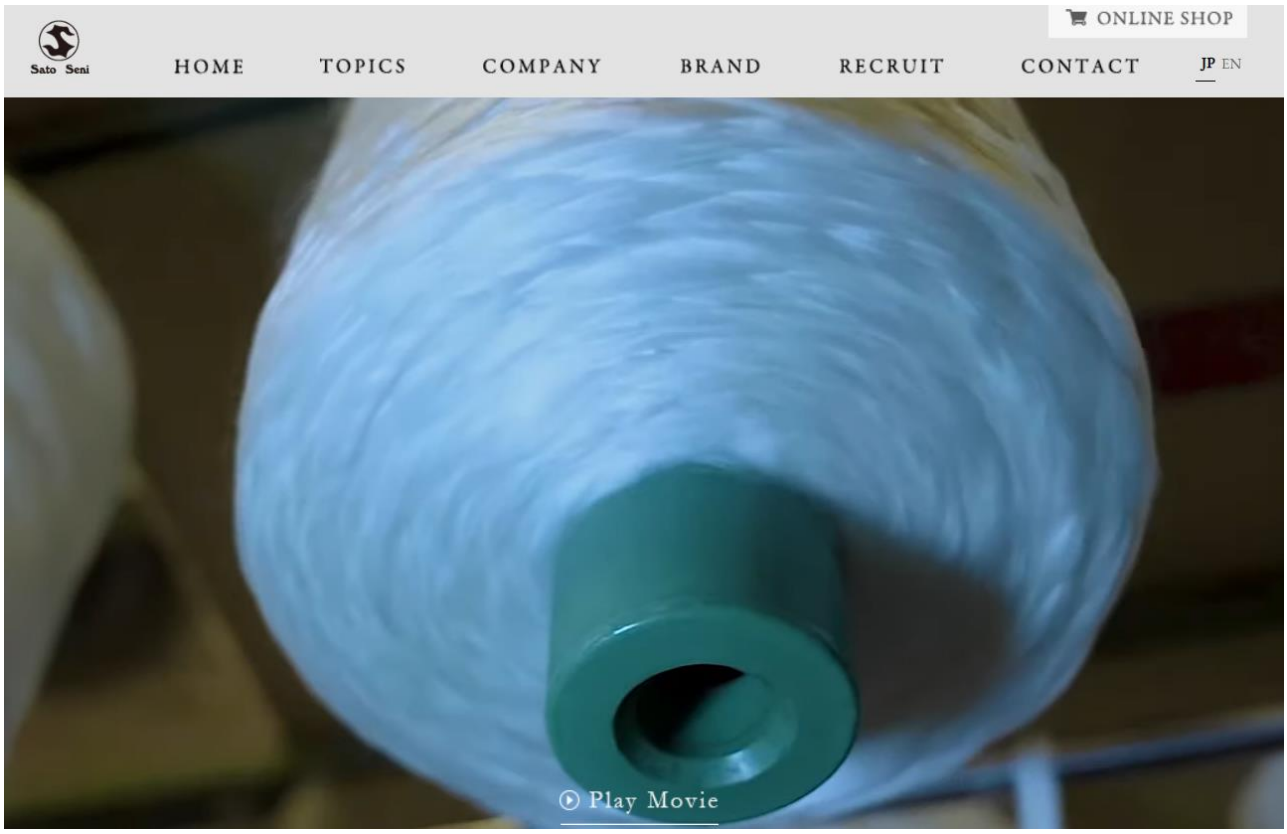

Figure 19: Satō Textile Corporation's Website

Therefore, the seminar highlighted the crucial role this sector plays in the local economy, significantly influencing the region's economic dynamics and contributing both to job creation and the support of local suppliers. At the same time, it examined how apparel companies can support the development of regional brands, suggesting various strategies to strengthen the presence and value of such brands in the market, given that the manufacturing sector serves as a vital engine for the economic vitality of this area.

One of the priorities found was the commitment of local companies to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with particular emphasis on the importance of adopting eco-friendly and socially responsible practices in product creation. Entrepreneurs highlighted the potential of regional brands to drive sustainable innovation by adopting eco-friendly materials and ethical production methods. This alignment with global sustainability trends was seen as a strategic opportunity for local companies to prove themselves to be leaders in the responsible fashion sector.

In this context, the relevance of craftsmanship in the apparel industry was also discussed, highlighting the need to combine tradition and innovation, both in design and production techniques, to meet the growing variety of consumer preferences. Indeed, the issue of cultural identity was emphasized, as regional brands are considered effective tools for reflecting and promoting local culture. The uniqueness of products from these regions is seen as a distinctive resource that allows them to stand out in the market, attracting consumers seeking authenticity. One such product typical of the region is *Kogin-sashi* (こぎん刺し), a traditional form of Japanese textile art originating from the Aomori Prefecture, particularly from the Tsugaru region. During the seminar, the significance of this technique was explored, emphasizing its connection to Japan's cultural heritage and its growing relevance in the context of contemporary fashion.

Its origins date back to the Edo period (1603-1868), when this technique was primarily used to reinforce the fabric of garments, particularly by farmers and workers in cold environments. It involves sewing geometric patterns onto fabric, traditionally using white thread on a background dyed with natural indigo. This visual contrast not only adds beauty to the product but also serves a functional purpose, as the embroidery contributes to the fabric's durability (Fig. 18)[1].

[1] プロモーションサイト弘前市,【東北・青森】Let's experience Tsugaru! 津軽を丸ごと体験 ～津軽藩ねぷた村～（弘前大学留学生制作動画）, available at: https://youtu.be/l1_pZ2q7-wc?si=lrQHGLbX4f_HU2oH (january 2025)

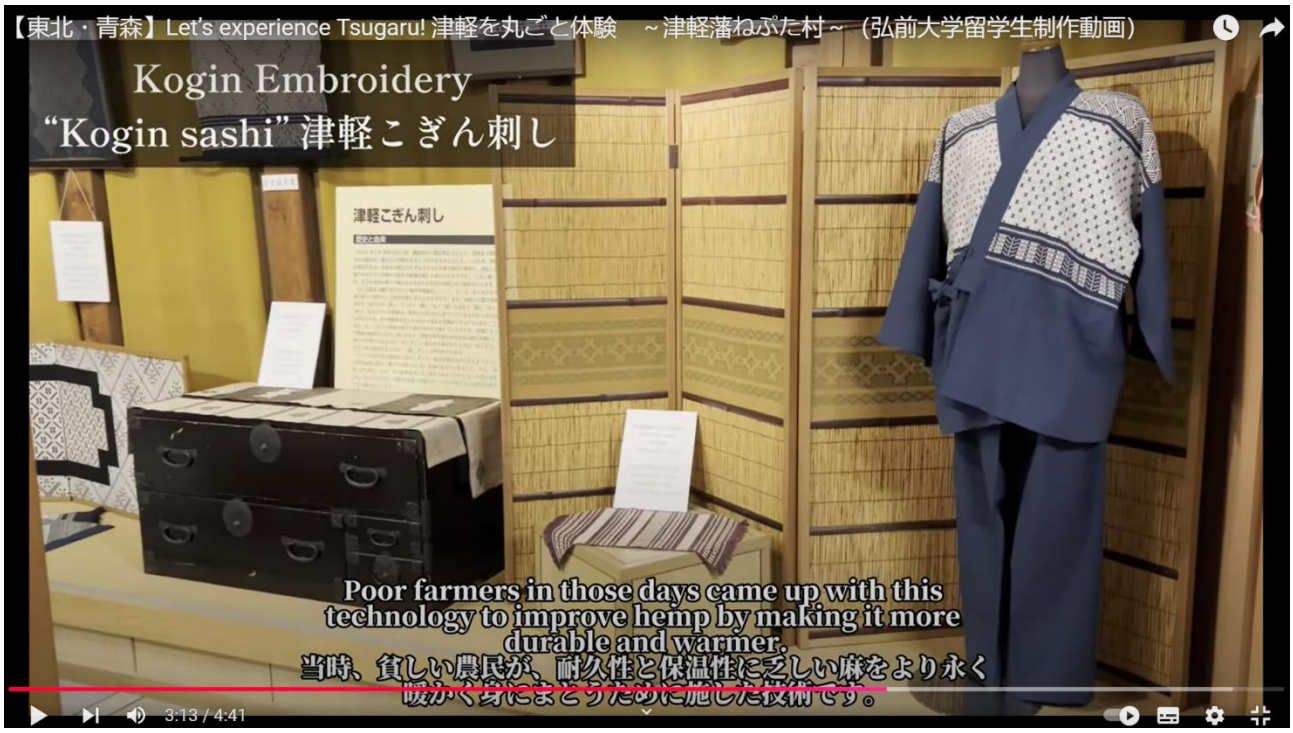

Figure 20: Kogin sashi brief explanation

The technique is characterized by using a simple backstitch to create intricate geometric patterns, which often reflect the surrounding natural environment, such as flowers, plants, and landscapes. These patterns are not merely decorative; they are also imbued with symbolic meaning, making *kogin-sashi* a profound expression of connection with nature and Japanese culture. In addition to its aesthetic value, embroidery also serves as a practical function, enhancing the durability of the fabrics used and helping to keep warmth (Fig. 19). Further information on this craft technique, including the patterns it stands for and instructions for trying to create them, can be found on the website of Setsu Maeda, titled *"Tsugaru Koginzashi" – koginbank*, specifically designed to highlight the history of this craft.

Recently, this traditional practice has experienced a sort of renaissance, finding new applications in the context of modern textile techniques, a phenomenon that reflects the growing interest in traditional craftsmanship. In contemporary fashion, several designers are incorporating *kogin-sashi* into their collections, enabling a fusion of traditional and modern elements both to honor the centuries-old practice and to cater to the aesthetic demands of contemporary consumers. Collaborations between

artisans skilled in this technique and fashion brands are an example of how traditional techniques can be revitalized and find new life in the global fashion landscape. Since *kogin-sashi* is regarded as a source of pride for the local community, promoting it by incorporating it into regional branding initiatives allows companies to highlight the uniqueness of their products while strengthening the identity of the Tōhoku region, thus creating a bridge between the past and present in the fashion industry.

Figure 21: Examples of Kogin Sashi patterns

The discussion then emphasized the need to promote greater collaboration between academic institutions, local businesses, and government agencies to strengthen the links between research and practical application, thereby supporting regional development. The main obstacles faced by regional apparel companies were also discussed, including competition from larger brands and shifts in consumer preferences. Although these challenges have arisen, they argue that these difficulties present opportunities for development, particularly through niche marketing strategies and using local craftsmanship as a strength.

The primary goal of the seminar was to discuss plans for what is referred to as the "Regional Business Roundtable" (地域企業版ラウンドテーブル), an initiative to continue the dialogue between regional companies and the university's regional studies department through these seminars and other activities. Through this plan, a networking platform will be created, enabling local businesses to connect with one another, share best practices, and explore collaboration opportunities, which are crucial for enhancing the competitiveness of regional brands. To this end, workshops and collaborative projects are also planned, addressing practical issues such as developing marketing strategies, managing supply chains, and innovating products. Furthermore, various stakeholders, including representatives of local institutions, industry experts, and academic researchers, will be involved to ensure a holistic and inclusive approach that promotes regional development in a coordinated and sustainable manner.

These meetings are opportunities to work practically on specific challenges, fostering an integrated approach to improving regional activities (Sasaki, 2023).

Case study on South Korea

As emphasized so far, fashion, as a tool of soft power, plays a crucial role in strengthening national branding and promoting cultural identities through fashion brands. In South Korea, the fashion industry, ranging from luxury brands to fast fashion brands such as SPAO, TOPTEN10, and 8seconds, significantly contributes to building a national narrative that captivates global consumers. The distinction between Western luxury brands and Korean fast fashion brands is like the situation in Japan, primarily rooted in the perception of exclusivity and the connection to cultural tradition. Luxury brands emphasize craftsmanship and prestige, while fast fashion brands seek to attract a broader audience with a more immediate and accessible offering.

The promotion of local brands through regional branding represents a key strategy to stimulate growth and revitalization in peripheral areas, such as Mokpo in the South Jeolla province, where the revival of local traditions and fashion streets can contribute to urban renewal and the area's attractiveness. In this context, fashion not only becomes a tool of national affirmation but also of territorial revitalization, creating a deeper connection with consumers through authentic local values. Just as Japanese brands like Uniqlo and Muji use the image of Japan to create a link to quality and innovation, Korean branding values its traditions and culture, leveraging a blend of global and local influences to attract both national and international consumers.

3.4. The Evolution of Fashion in Seoul and the Influence of Fast Fashion Brands

Regarding the history of the Korean apparel industry, it is important to focus on the various phases that have marked its evolution, highlighting both the influence of Western fashion brands and the strategies adopted by Korean entrepreneurs to develop their national brands while adapting to a global audience.

As indicated by researcher Solee I. Shin in her 2017 article *Transforming into Fashion Firms or Multi-Country Suppliers? Accounting for Varied Firm Trajectories in the Deindustrialising Korean Apparel Industry*, the Korean textile industry began its early development during the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945), marked by the dominance of Japanese companies in the spinning sector. In this context, some small Korean textile companies emerged, supported by the state and the creation of initial industry connections. After the end of World War II and the Japanese occupation, many Korean producers began to consolidate, with emblematic companies like Cheil Wool (later part of the Samsung conglomerate) and Hangook Nylon establishing themselves during this period, acquiring production capabilities in weaving and fabric manufacturing.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the rise of chaebols—the large diversified Korean business conglomerates—marked a key milestone in the history of the apparel industry. These conglomerates began to dominate the national economy, focusing increasingly on imports of materials such as cotton, wool, and other textiles (Kim 1977, cited in Shin 2017) and including textile and apparel subsidiaries within their holdings.

In the 1970s, the Korean apparel industry underwent a significant transformation, adopting an export-oriented model. Clothing production became heavily reliant on OEM (Original Equipment Manufacturer) contracts with international buyers. By the early 1980s, companies like Hansae Tongsang began to operate successfully, securing contracts from international buyers and adapting to their specific requirements.

However, during the 1980s, global economic conditions, marked by the signing of the Multi-Fiber Agreement (MFA), which regulated textile imports, posed challenges to domestic Korean production. These challenges, coupled with several periods of crisis, led many companies to relocate their production to countries with cheaper labour. Despite these difficulties, some Korean firms began adapting their strategies: the chaebols focused on vertical integration and expansion into foreign markets, while smaller firms developed strong relationships with Western buyers to maintain their competitiveness.

Subsequently, in the 1990s, with the liberalization of the market and the entry of global fashion brands, local companies faced increasing competition from fast fashion brands, which reshaped consumer expectations and market dynamics. By the 2000s, the large chaebols were no longer limited to producing goods but had become key players in branding and marketing, transforming into leading companies in the fashion industry.

Today, the major Korean companies, influenced by fast fashion practices, operate globally, gaining a solid reputation for their agility and high-quality production processes. Groups such as Samsung and LG have extended their interests into the fashion sector, reflecting the industry's evolution into a dynamic hub for production and innovation. This complex and multifaceted trajectory highlights how the Korean apparel industry has evolved from basic textile production to a prominent role in the global fashion landscape, adapting to economic challenges and the changing needs of the international market (Shin, 2017).

In this context, Western brands have had a significant impact on the fashion industry in South Korea for several reasons: primarily, they have influenced changes in Korean consumer preferences, with consumers beginning to gravitate toward more modern and diverse styles. As foreign brands offered contemporary and fashionable designs, Korean consumers began to seek these products, often perceived as more stylish and desirable than local options. Secondly, the rise of fast fashion brands such as Zara and H&M introduced a new distribution model. These brands focused on quick

production timelines, from design development to availability on store shelves, offering trendy clothing at affordable prices. The success of fast fashion set a precedent for responsiveness in the fashion market, prompting local companies to adopt similar practices to stay competitive. As a result, the number of designers who chose to gain experience abroad to learn new methods to integrate into their own practices increased, as reported by Shin:

> "'Designers (in my team) go to Vicenza twice a year for development training, Pitti Uomo twice a year, and London and Paris for market research' (personal communication, June 2016). These trips allow merchandisers and designers to watch European markets operating a season faster, and use the information for next seasons' drawup. This complements the trend research conducted internally." (Ibid.)

Many Korean designers have, therefore, visited international fashion capitals to acquire insights into global trends and study the techniques and machinery used to produce garments using various textile materials. Additionally, events such as fashion shows and trade fairs began to incorporate Western influences, allowing them to showcase their creations alongside those of international peers, thereby contributing to the development of a more globally oriented fashion scene within South Korea.

In this sense, the importance of branding and marketing strategies became evident through the success of Western brands, prompting Korean companies to recognize the need to develop strong brand identities and new strategies to differentiate themselves in a saturated market. However, as with Japanese fashion companies, this competitive pressure also encouraged collaborations, mergers, and acquisitions among domestic firms to strengthen their market positions (Ibid.).

The fashion landscape in South Korea is, therefore, characterized by the coexistence of luxury and fast fashion brands, which differ in their approaches to production, target markets, and marketing strategies. As suggested by Anastasiya Tsoy in her 2012 paper *Korea's Competitive Position in Apparel Industry: Strategies and Perspectives* and Dayoung Park in her 2024 paper *Success Factors Behind South Korean Emerging Designers Brands: A Case Study*, luxury brands in South Korea

traditionally emphasize craftsmanship, cultural heritage, and the use of the highest quality materials. High-fashion brands often draw inspiration from Korean culture and aesthetics, focusing on exclusivity and artistic refinement. In contrast, fast fashion brands, while offering trendy and affordable products, lack a strong identity, focusing on current trends to reach a broad audience at low cost. Major fashion houses adopt long-term strategies, emphasizing sustainability, prestige, and exclusive design through significant investments in marketing, while fast fashion brands focus on high product turnover and competitive prices, rapidly replicating trends from runways and celebrities (Tsoy, 2012; Park, 2024).

Luxury fashion houses focus on slow fashion, prioritizing quality and craftsmanship with limited collections that require more time for design and production. In contrast, fast fashion brands like SPAO, TOPTEN10, and 8seconds respond quickly to trends, offering fashionable clothing at affordable prices and ensuring rapid product turnover. Competition in fast fashion has intensified with the entry of global brands, putting pressure on local players. Luxury fashion houses target affluent audiences, with stores located in exclusive areas such as Apgujeong-ro and its surrounding neighbourhoods, including Cheongdam-dong, Garosu-gil, and Sinsa-dong in the Gangnam district (Fig. 19) (Fig. 20). Fast fashion brands, on the other hand, primarily target a young audience, with marketing strategies based on aggressive tactics such as social media campaigns and collaborations with influencers, enabling them to reach a wide audience (Ibid.). Their stores, in addition to being in affluent areas, such as within the Starfield Coex Mall in Gangnam, are also found along the streets of popular districts like Myeongdong and Dongdaemun-dong (Fig. 21).

Figure 22: Louis Vuitton store in Gangnam district

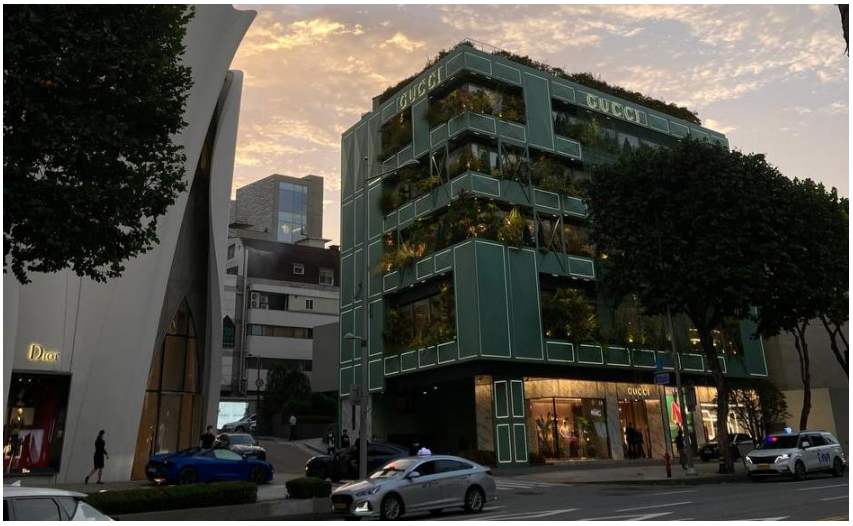

Figure 23: Gucci store in Gangnam district

Figure 24: SPAO store in Myeongdong

However, although luxury brands occupy a smaller market share compared to mass-market brands, they exert considerable influence and enjoy established prestige. International brands such as Louis Vuitton, Gucci, and Korean luxury designers attract affluent consumers and an international clientele through limited editions and the high quality of their products, which amplify their symbolic value. In contrast, while fast fashion brands can quickly respond to new trends, their impact tends to promote a disposable fashion culture, which fuels issues such as overconsumption and increased waste in the fashion industry.

Furthermore, Tsoy highlights that in the context of growing digitalization, luxury brands have shifted their investments towards e-commerce and online marketing strategies, aiming to reach a younger audience. While maintaining their prestige, these brands create visually captivating online experiences, thus expanding their accessibility without compromising their exclusive image. The rise of K-Pop and Korean dramas has also had a significant impact on the luxury fashion sector, with celebrities wearing branded clothing and strongly influencing the purchasing perceptions and behaviours of both local and international consumers (Tsoy, 2012).

Dayoung Park focuses on the introduction of emerging Korean designer brands in the modern Korean fashion market, which must cater to a different audience compared to older generations, specifically the “Millennial Generation” (early 1980s to mid-1990s) and the “Generation Z” (mid-1990s to mid-2010s). These brands are implementing a series of distinctive strategies to establish themselves in a highly competitive fashion industry. These brands adopt unique strategies to emerge in a competitive market, creating strong identities and offering unique aesthetics, cultural stories, and values that reflect the origins and influences of their creators. The goal is to establish emotional connections with consumers, promoting loyalty and building a community around the brand. Therefore, the cultural narratives and local heritage used to create these brands not only serve to engage consumers on a deeper level but also encourage word-of-mouth, a crucial promotional tool that amplifies the effectiveness of marketing strategies.

In response to the growing dissatisfaction among Generation MZ with the lack of originality in fast fashion, emerging brands place a strong emphasis on product design innovation, focusing on creating unique items, often offering customization options that allow customers to express their personal style through the brand's products.

In the current digital context, emerging brands use platforms like Instagram and TikTok to promote community interaction, thereby enhancing their visibility and creating a direct connection with their target audience. Additionally, collaborations with digital influencers and fashion bloggers have become increasingly influential and present, to boost their credibility and expand their reach and visibility within the community.

As a result, many of these new brands adopt a hybrid retail strategy that combines both physical and online channels. Notable strategies include organizing pop-up events and creating unique in-store experiences that attract consumers and engage them beyond the traditional retail context, offering more immersive and interactive experiences.

This discussion also extends to the growing consumer awareness of environmental issues, which has driven many emerging brands to adopt sustainable practices, such as sourcing eco-friendly materials and implementing ethical production processes (Park, 2024).

According to Tsoy, to maintain their competitive advantage, brands should focus on aspects such as the importance of developing highly skilled talent, including entrepreneurs and managers with specific expertise in managerial and technical areas, as well as innovation and technology, particularly regarding the development of advanced production technologies and modern infrastructures (Tsoy, 2012). Over the years, the production of "smart clothing" has increased, incorporating devices or the use of special fabrics.

The growing popularity of fast fashion brands has reduced the sales of local brands, weakening the competitive advantage they had due to their established presence in the domestic market. Aggressive

marketing strategies, a wider distribution network, and the strength of global brands have led to a slowdown in growth for local brands, which were unable to adapt quickly. This shift has transformed the clothing market in Korea, making the country the second-largest clothing import market in Asia, after Japan, and has led consumers to demand greater variety, competitive prices, and more readily available fashion.

3.5. Urban Regeneration Strategies through the Revitalization of Fashion Streets in Mokpo

Therefore, how do the central areas, such as Seoul, differ from the peripheral ones in South Korea? As the capital and cultural hub of the country, Seoul is strongly influenced by global fashion trends and is at the forefront of design and style innovation. As mentioned earlier, consumers in Seoul are predominantly exposed to international brands, fast fashion, and high-fashion trends. This global exposure leads to a perception of clothing that emphasizes modernity, innovation, and trendiness, with a strong focus on rapid change and the adoption of new styles.

In contrast, in peripheral areas, fashion tends to reflect a greater emphasis on local traditions and more practical styles, although global trends are still accessible. In these areas, clothing is often chosen for its functionality and comfort rather than an exclusive pursuit of contemporary fashion, and the acceptance of new styles may occur more slowly compared to urban centres.

In Seoul, consumers tend to prefer prestigious brands, high quality, and innovative designs, with purchases responding to aesthetic needs and a desire for social affirmation. Style choices are influenced by celebrities and influencers. In peripheral areas, however, consumers are more price-sensitive and oriented toward practicality, preferring durable and versatile clothing. Local brands, which are more accessible and culturally relevant, enjoy greater consumer loyalty in these areas. Urban centres feature a vast network of commercial spaces, including luxury boutiques, department

stores, and fast-fashion chains, which allows consumers to quickly explore and adapt to new trends. In contrast, peripheral regions have more limited shopping options, with high-end stores being rare and new collections arriving less frequently. Consumers rely on local shops offering basic clothing or regional specialties, creating distinct styles that reflect local traditions rather than global trends. Regarding this topic, studies tend to focus more on urban regeneration in large cities, with fewer studies concentrating on medium-small cities. However, a recent study conducted by Professors Yun Jung Choi and Heechul Kim in the article *Fashion Street Competitiveness in a Downtown Area of Small and Medium-sized Cities: A Case Study on Mokpo* (2021) explores crucial aspects of fashion street competitiveness in medium-sized cities based on regional branding strategies, with a specific focus on Mokpo, a city in the South Jeolla province.

As the commercial landscape of fashion has changed due to high rental costs and the growth of e-commerce, leading to the closure of flagship stores of major brands in large cities, there has been a greater interest in fashion districts in smaller urban areas, where sales and consumption dynamics are perceived differently than in metropolitan contexts (Foley, 2019, cited in Choi and Kim, 2021). Indeed, Choi and Kim highlight that:

> "Daegu city is implementing various support policies that emphasize high-quality clothing and textiles, Jeonju city supports traditional fashion and youth entrepreneurship, and Gwangju city does art and fashion. […] The culture and locality of a small and medium-sized city has the potential to attract consumers to the offline business district. This is because, if the fashion retail industry centered on major commercial areas is reactivated, it can lead to urban regeneration effects such as creating local jobs, creating attractive spaces for local communities, and attracting tourists (Lim & Byun, 2017)." (Choi and Kim, 2021)

In this context, the role of fashion streets as "cultural hubs" becomes more significant, as they not only contribute to the creation of unique regional identities but also play an important role in stimulating consumer interest and supporting local economic revitalization. This highlights the

connection between fashion, tourism, and local culture, emphasizing how distinctive cultural characteristics can attract both local consumers and international visitors.

The study by the two professors focuses on Mokpo and its main commercial streets, such as Downtown Rodeo, Hadang Rose Street, and Namak Central Park, which are characterized by a predominance of mid-range and low-priced fashion brands. Although these areas show significant potential, the article also points out some limitations, primarily related to the need for further thematic development and improvement of local infrastructure.

They analyse the key factors determining the competitiveness of fashion streets using the "Diamond Model" introduced in 1990 by the American economist Michael Porter. This model illustrates the competitive advantages that a nation or group possesses based on the factors available to them, including demand conditions, related and supporting industries, business strategy, structure, and rivalry, as well as exogenous conditions such as the role of government and events (Fig. 22).

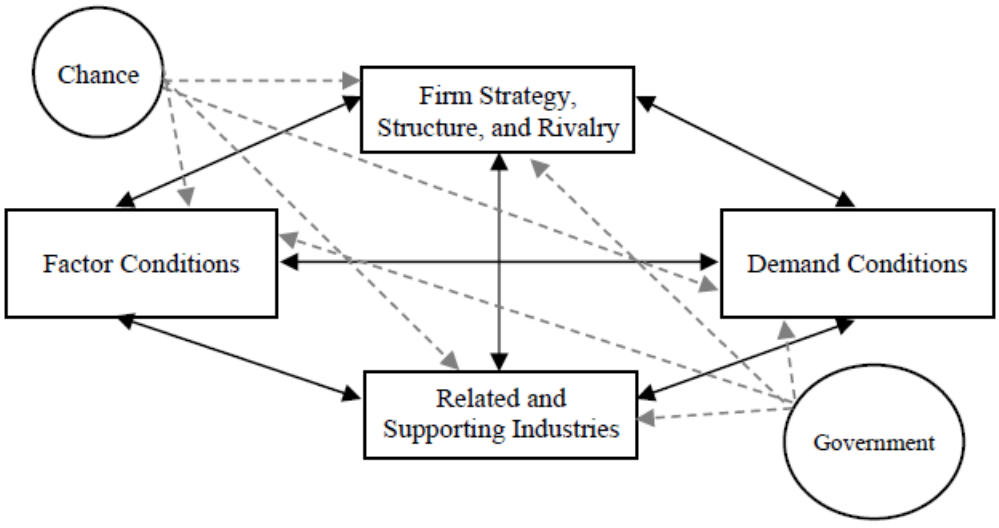

Figure 25: Porter's Diamond Model by Vangelis Tsiligiris

According to this model, regarding the competitiveness of Mokpo's fashion streets, Choi and Kim identify factors such as market size, demand quality for the product or service in the sector, population size, and the need to develop unique themes for districts, along with strong support for local entrepreneurship.

First, it is noted that the lack of adequate manufacturing facilities leads young people in search of employment to start small businesses, such as cafes or restaurants, which creates a shortage of young human resources willing to work steadily in local fashion stores. It has been observed that the excessive concentration of startups in the food and beverage sectors negatively impacts the revitalization of commercial areas, and it is suggested that the focus should be on converting food service businesses into productive craft enterprises, rather than solely incentivizing new businesses in the fashion sector.

Next, the issue of low demand and the large number of commercial areas is presented. Indeed, if there are too many commercial areas but not enough consumers to support them all, fashion stores struggle to distinguish themselves and be competitive, thus reducing their ability to attract customers. Consequently, the existing demand "shifts" from traditional fashion streets to new commercial areas, further weakening commerce in Mokpo's historic streets. It is suggested, therefore, to focus more on trade with neighbouring areas such as the islands near Mokpo port, like Haenam or Jindo. Finally, the problem that many fashion brand outlets are located in Seoul, which is far from the Mokpo area, is discussed, and the importance of creating and promoting local textile and clothing craft shops is suggested (Ibid.).

At this point, in relation to this, urban regeneration policies are proposed to support the growth of commercial districts. One of these involves the use of local cultural heritage. Indeed, Mokpo is a port city and is surrounded by mountains, offering a setting where all three characteristics harmonize and provide various local products (Fig. 23). Similarly, the creation of attractive spaces through improvements in public infrastructure and urban aesthetics is important, as it can attract both

consumers and retailers. Both art, such as the creation of murals, and the establishment of stores combining vintage and other types of shops, play a key role.

Figure 26: Mokpo's landascape from Yudal Mountain

Another significant aspect concerns support for local businesses. Regeneration policies may include financial incentives, grants, and resources aimed at local entrepreneurs, assisting them in consolidating and expanding their businesses. Specifically, encouraging youth entrepreneurship serves as a strategic lever, as it stimulates diversification within fashion districts and promotes innovation. It is suggested that, through the creation of workshops and creative spaces, young people can cultivate fertile ground for their projects in the revitalization of city areas. At the same time, the accessibility of fashion streets, with improvements in transport links and easier access to commercial areas, promotes a higher flow of visitors and, consequently, an increase in sales for local merchants, thus contributing to the district's economic prosperity.

Finally, the introduction of educational programs at universities, offering training to local business owners in areas such as marketing, visual merchandising, and fashion trends, can strengthen the competitiveness of fashion streets. Education, in fact, allows businesses to quickly adapt to the changing dynamics of the market and to stand out in an increasingly competitive environment. The creation of events and activities, such as fashion shows, markets, and other cultural initiatives, is thus a tool for promoting the district, encouraging the influx of visitors and solidifying the sense of community around fashion streets (Ibid.).

Global Perception of Asian and Western Fashion Brands

So far, topics such as the relationships between soft power, national and regional branding, with reference to the strategies of various fashion brands in central areas and peripheral regions in Japan and South Korea, as well as how tradition blends with innovation within the fashion industry, have been addressed. In this final section, the aim is to explore the global perception of East Asian fashion brands and how they influence the choices of foreign consumers.

As evident from the previous chapters, fashion plays a significant role as a global cultural intermediary, manifesting in various domains, thanks in part to the continuous development of digital platforms and social networks that make countries increasingly interconnected.

Scholars Sarah Cheang and Elizabeth Kramer, in their 2017 article *Fashion and East Asia: Cultural Translations and East Asian Perspectives*, list several reasons why fashion occupies this mediating role, first and foremost because fashion is not limited to the dimension of clothing alone but is the result of a process of cultural translation that involves interlinguistic and intercultural interactions. Clothing and styles not only move across cultures but undergo transformations in their meanings, reflecting and generating new understandings and identities. In this sense, analysing fashion practices can reveal significant moments of this translation process, offering the opportunity to explore regional identities within a global context.

Moreover, it promotes the exchange and fusion of aesthetics between East and West. As demonstrated earlier, East Asian fashion is an example of this, as it integrates Western styles and practices while retaining distinctive cultural elements. Designers and brands often draw from both local traditions and global trends, creating a dialogue that enriches both cultures.

In this regard, the fashion industry facilitates economic and commercial interactions that allow East Asian fashion to reach European markets and vice versa. As highlighted in the article:

> “The Japanese brand UNIQLO has over 1300 stores in fifteen countries throughout Asia, Europe and the United States. This high street ubiquity is underscored by the brand’s identity as a source of clothing basics for all human bodies everywhere (‘lifewear’), laying claim to a universal cultural neutrality. At the same time, UNIQLO also promotes the idea of innovative Japanese fibre technology (Heat Tech) and its visual branding incorporates Japanese writing, so that the universal is also very Japanese” (Cheang and Kramer, 2017).

This demonstrates that brands like UNIQLO are now firmly established in numerous countries, contributing not only to the spread of clothing but also to the promotion of cultural narratives tied to their products, fostering greater cultural awareness and appreciation across various regions of the world.

Fashion plays a crucial role in shaping cultural identities in both Eastern and Western contexts, with the interaction between local and global influences defining how identities are expressed through clothing. Eastern and Western fashion trends can sometimes lead to the commercialization of Asian designs, raising issues of cultural appropriation. Globalization and localization foster intercultural exchange that gives rise to hybrid styles, blending traditional Asian aesthetics with global trends. Asian designers reinterpret global influences, adapting them to local contexts, as seen in the case of UNIQLO's Heat Tech technologies, which combine global practicality with specific cultural roots, transcending simple divides between East and West.

As observed, the growing awareness of global issues such as fast fashion and sustainability has prompted both consumers and Asian designers to become increasingly mindful of ethical practices in the production and consumption of fashion. Consequently, local movements promoting sustainable sourcing and culturally sensitive production methods have emerged, influencing fashion trends toward more responsible and conscious directions.

Globalization has created a more cosmopolitan consumer base in Asian cities, seeking fashion that blends diverse cultural influences and style aspirations. This has increased demand for brands that

combine global appeal with local relevance, driving companies to innovate. Social media and digital platforms have amplified this phenomenon, with influencers and fashion bloggers shaping trends and promoting rapid fusion of fashion cultures, creating a continuous flow of inspiration between the local and the international.

In Koutsikas Alexios's thesis titled *The Phenomenon of Brand Ambassadors and Marketing Influencers as a Tool for Companies and Its Impact on Consumers* (2019), a theme that has become highly influential in recent years is explored—the role of brand ambassadors. Brand ambassadors, including celebrities and public figures, play a crucial role in consumer perception, shaping the brand's image and enhancing its credibility. Their promotion fosters consumer trust, as consumers are more likely to trust a brand associated with a reputable ambassador. The author argues, in fact, that: "The development of brand ambassadors will ultimately create a network of brand names that lead to increased sales and stronger relationships with customers. Real brand ambassadors act as evangelists, enthusiastically spreading the brand's message and recommending it to others" (Koutsikas, 2019).

Brand ambassadors, through digital platforms and social media, actively engage with the public, endorsing the brand and communicating its values. This creates a community around the brand, fostering consumer loyalty and encouraging identification with it. Their presence across various channels amplifies the brand's image, making it more accessible and attractive. The author also proposes, in addition to the traditional four Ps of marketing, the so-called "four M's of marketing" — merchandise, market, media, and message — which represent a modern framework for understanding contemporary marketing strategies. Merchandise refers to the identity and characteristics of the product or service, while the market focuses on the accurate identification of the target audience. Media refers to the channels through which marketing messages are conveyed, and finally, the message includes the content and communication strategy used to engage the audience (Ibid.).

However, according to the research conducted by Widyo Nugroho, John R. S. P. K. M. Isa, and Abiyyu Zharif Nugroho in their article *Exploring the Influence of Korean Wave Brand Ambassadors on*

Marketplace Purchase Intentions through Brand Image and Online Reviews Using the Theory of Planned Behavior Approach, while brand ambassadors positively influence brand image, the resulting image does not seem to directly affect consumer purchase intentions. This suggests that, while brand image is a crucial element, other factors, such as online customer reviews, may play a more significant role in influencing purchasing decisions. The study shows that customer online reviews serve as an intermediary factor that can amplify the influence of brand ambassadors on consumer purchase intentions. Fans of the Korean Wave tend to rely on peer reviews to validate the quality of products endorsed by their favourite ambassadors. The authors therefore argue: "this analysis confirms the importance of integrating an effective brand ambassador strategy with the utilization of a strong brand image and optimizing the power of online reviews to influence consumer purchasing intentions. […] is particularly relevant in the marketing context influenced by the popularity of the Korean Wave, which has proven to be a significant driving factor in brand dynamics and consumption" (Nugroho, Isa, and Nugroho, 2024).

At this point, how do consumers respond to brand promotion by influencers?

Several factors need to be considered: first, the type of influencer. While mega-influencers, such as celebrities and idols, can attract a large audience, micro-influencers, who have a smaller following, tend to generate greater and more authentic engagement. Consumers may perceive micro-influencers as more genuine, leading to greater trust and participation compared to promotions from celebrities. Second, the demographic characteristics of consumers, such as age, gender, and cultural background, significantly influence their response to influencer marketing. Younger generations, such as Millennials and Gen Z, are more likely to be influenced by social media personalities, as they are more familiar with digital platforms. If consumers perceive the influencer as sincerely sharing the brand's values or using the product in an authentic manner, they are more likely to be influenced by the message. However, if the endorsement seems forced or inauthentic, scepticism may arise, resulting in negative perceptions of both the influencer and the brand. Finally, the medium used

influences consumer responses. Visual platforms like Instagram may elicit different reactions compared to video-focused platforms like YouTube. Consequently, content formats such as stories, posts, or sponsored videos can engage consumers in different ways, depending on their consumption preferences (Koutsikas, 2019).

In this regard, the rise of Korean idols, who have become increasingly sought-after as brand ambassadors for Western luxury brands such as Versace, Gucci, or Louis Vuitton, and for participation in the most anticipated fashion shows of the year, such as Milan Fashion Week or Paris Fashion Week, has achieved remarkable success (Fig. 25).

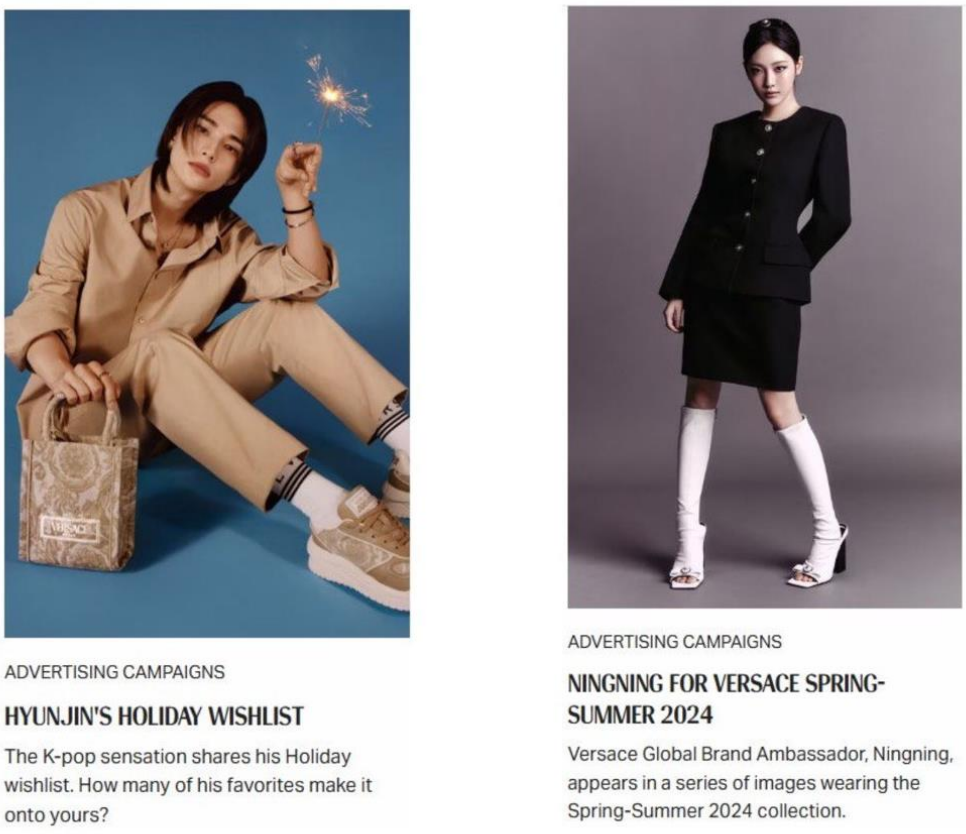

Figure 27: Versace Official Website Advertising Campaigns with Hyunjin from kpop boy-group Stray Kids and NingNing from kpop girl-group Aespa

An additional topic that will be addressed concerns K-Fashion, analysed by scholar Han Bin Yoo in her 2022 doctoral thesis *What is K-Fashion from Foreign Perspective*. K-Fashion is described as a dynamic and diverse phenomenon, capable of reflecting a wide range of styles and influences derived from its media representations, such as K-Pop, K-Drama, and social media platforms. This perception highlights the adaptable and continuously evolving aspects of K-Fashion, which develops in response to contemporary trends. According to Yoo's analysis, both extrinsic and intrinsic characteristics defining Korean fashion have been identified. Among the extrinsic characteristics, the global exposure through media is noted, while the intrinsic characteristics include the use of advanced fabrics and unique designs, which contribute to shaping the image of K-Fashion. This dual recognition emphasizes how K-Fashion is perceived not only as an aesthetic product but also as a cultural phenomenon that resists and adapts to international contexts.

In this regard, the phenomenon of *Hallyu* (한류) has been identified as a determining factor in shaping perceptions of K-Fashion. Indeed, styles promoted by Korean celebrities and media reinforce the idea that K-Fashion is not simply viewed as clothing but as an integral part of a global cultural movement. It is also conceptualized as an overall aesthetic rather than a mere combination of individual items. Yoo emphasizes the importance of considering the "whole look," which involves the combination of clothing, accessories, and styling, as all these elements are essential to determine the essence of Korean fashion. This approach, which considers the outfit as a “whole”, distinguishes K-Fashion from other styles that focus more on individual elements.

Thus, cultural fusion also plays a significant role, as it integrates traditional Korean aesthetic elements with modern and global influences, creating a blend that attracts a heterogeneous audience. Moreover, while deeply rooted in the collectivist culture of Korean society, Korean fashion is progressively embracing more individualistic aspects, particularly among younger generations. This balance between a sense of community and personal expression allows K-Fashion to respond to the needs of

a changing society, promoting both conformity to certain cultural codes and the freedom to express one's identity (Yoo, 2022).

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis aims to analyse how East Asian countries have developed national branding strategies and constructed national images to compete globally, alongside Western countries. The use of various forms of soft power, such as heritage, culture, and fashion, has increasingly enhanced the influence of East Asian countries, to the point of creating true global trends, partly due to technological development and social media platforms such as the Chinese social network TikTok.

This study highlights how national branding in Japan, through brands like Uniqlo, is based on promoting Japanese culture, while in South Korea, local brands like Samsung Fashion employ a similar strategy to leverage the influence of technology and innovation. Furthermore, the differences between national and regional branding are particularly evident in peripheral areas, where the promotion of local traditions plays a crucial role.

From the academic sources explored, it is evident that regions in Japan and South Korea can improve their competitiveness in the global fashion market through strategic spatial planning, integrating various sectors such as economy, transport, and the environment in a sustainable and participatory approach, as suggested by Oliveira and Ashworth. These include, primarily, the integration of technologies, such as digital showrooms and augmented reality, enabling immersive shopping experiences, and data analysis that helps personalize offerings to better meet consumer preferences. Additionally, the adoption of eco-friendly materials and supply chain transparency strengthens consumer trust, responding to growing attention towards sustainability.

Moreover, intersectoral collaboration, such as with the technology and arts industries, fosters innovation, and product customization, such as made-to-order models, enhances the customer experience while stimulating ideas for future original projects. Most notably, the integration of local

culture into designs helps create unique collections, which, through intelligent marketing based on storytelling, strengthen their regional identity.

Regarding the store structures themselves, innovative retail models such as pop-up shops and experiential centres are suggested. The construction of solid e-commerce platforms and social media marketing is crucial to increasing brand awareness, as done by brand ambassadors, to attract greater consumer interest and expand the global reach of local fashion brands. Regional clothing companies actively monitor trends and gather feedback regularly to enable regions to adapt to market needs and continuously improve, following Porter's "Diamond Model" as suggested by Choi and Kim.

In this highly interconnected era, characterized mostly by homogenized and "global" products, it is crucial to ensure that local traditions and craftsmanship are not forgotten by younger generations, who typically tend to build their future away from peripheral areas, which are increasingly depopulated. Conversely, metropolises continue to grow relentlessly, leading to the increase of various socio-economic issues that persist in a vicious cycle.

Over the years, numerous studies have been conducted on national branding, but the topic of regional branding, particularly concerning local fashion brands in Japan and South Korea, has been less explored, which constitutes the primary focus of this thesis.

For small and medium-sized Asian local clothing businesses, participating in international trade events is important to gain exposure on a global platform, increase visibility, and create networking opportunities with global buyers and designers, as evidenced by entrepreneurs from Aomori Prefecture in Japan and the results of interviews conducted with the Mokpo community in South Korea to revitalize the city.

Moreover, it has emerged that educating new generations through university courses focused on regional studies, both for domestic and international students, is essential—on one hand to preserve local tradition and on the other to transmit values within an international context. Additionally, there

is a need to organize accessible workshops to impart practical aspects of local craftsmanship, aiming to reconnect the younger audience, increasingly "disconnected" from these realities. In this sense, the narratives and stories of people, especially through social networks, play a key role in disseminating information about fashion brands from peripheral areas that reflect tradition and craftsmanship.

During this study, it has become evident that when discussing regional branding, articles analysing strategies for the food and technology sectors are more prevalent, while recent articles related to local fashion are scarce, which represents a significant limitation for addressing the topic comprehensively. It is hoped that future academic studies will continue to investigate the local fashion sector to create new strategies that adapt to ongoing technological developments, and through events such as round tables, seminars, and workshops, the qualities and originality of local craftsmanship techniques can be transmitted both in national and global contexts.

Regarding the use of innovative technology, several issues faced by small and medium-sized enterprises regarding brand expansion and image promotion could be resolved through artificial intelligence, which represents a tool capable of creating innovative strategies and original ideas in a short time, combining tradition and modernity. However, there is concern that at the regional branding level, artificial intelligence may act as a barrier that leads to a loss of authenticity in local fashion brands, risking being perceived by consumers as serialized and homogenized.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anholt, S. (1998). Nation-brands of the twenty-first century. *Journal of brand management*, *5*, 395-406.

Anholt, S. (2008). 'Nation branding' in Asia. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, *4*(4), 265-269.

Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization* (Vol. 1). U of Minnesota Press.

Bakalov, I. (2019). Whither soft power? Divisions, milestones, and prospects of a research programme in the making. *Journal of Political Power*, *12*(1), 129-151.

Biletska, O. (2021). Culture as a nation branding tool within the international interaction system. *Culture and Arts in the Modern World*, *22*, 22-33.

Cheang, S., & Kramer, E. (2017). Fashion and East Asia: Cultural translations and East Asian perspectives. *International Journal of Fashion Studies*, *4*(2), 145-155.

Choi, Y. J., & Kim, H. (2021). Fashion Street competitiveness in a downtown area of small and medium-sized cities: a case study on Mokpo. *International Journal of Costume and Fashion*, *21*(2), 19-30.

De Martino, M. (2020). Soft Power: theoretical framework and political foundations. *Przegląd europejski*, (4), 11-24.

Gotō, Jun 後藤潤. (2020). *Nikkei fasshon kigyō ni okeru gurōbaru senryaku no kōsatsu 日系ファッション企業におけるグローバル戦略の考察* (Doctoral dissertation, Waseda University) [An Examination of Global Strategies in Japanese Fashion Companies].

Gotō, Yutaka 後藤寛. (2017). *"Fasshon burando-ten no ruikei-betsu ritchi ni miru toshi no chūshin-sei to toshi kaisō." In Jinbun chiri gakkai taikai kenkyū happyō yōshi 2017-nen Jinbun chiri gakkai taikai (pp. 38-39). Jinbun chiri gakkai* ファッションブランド店の類型別立地にみる都市の中心性と都市階層. In *人文地理学会大会 研究発表要旨 2017 年 人文地理学会大会* (pp. 38-39). 人文地理学会 [Urban Centrality and Urban Hierarchy in Relation to the Location Types of Fashion Brand Stores." In *Human Geography Society Conference Research Abstracts* 2017 *Human Geography Society Conference* (pp. 38-39). Human Geography Society]

Griffiths, T.G., Imre, R. (2013). Wallerstein's World-Systems Analysis. In: Mass Education, Global Capital, and the World. Marxism and Education. Palgrave Macmillan, New York. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137014825_2

Hakala, U., Lemmetyinen, A., & Kantola, S. P. (2013). Country image as a nation-branding tool. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, *31*(5), 538-556.

Harada, Hiroyasu 原田 大靖. (2010): *Ware ga kuni ni okeru sofutopawā senryaku* 我が国におけるソフトパワー戦略 [Soft power strategy in our country]. Tōkyō: Tōkyō University of Science. Available online at: https://dspace02.jaist.ac.jp/dspace/bitstream/10119/9432/1/2G23.pdf.

Heng, Y.-K. (2010). Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the softest of them all? Evaluating Japanese and Chinese strategies in the "soft" power competition era. *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, *10*(2), 275–304. Available online at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/26159537

Huang, S. (2011). Nation-branding and transnational consumption: Japan-mania and the Korean wave in Taiwan. *Media, Culture & Society*, *33*(1), 3-18.

Ikuta, T., Yukawa, K. & Hamasaki, H. (2007) Regional branding measures in Japan — Efforts in 12 major prefectural and city governments. *Place Brand Public Dipl* **3**, 131–143. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.pb.6000056

Iwabuchi, K. (2015). Pop-culture diplomacy in Japan: soft power, nation branding and the question of 'international cultural exchange.' *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, *21*(4), 419–432. https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2015.1042469

Kaneva, N. (2018). Simulation nations: Nation brands and Baudrillard's theory of media. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, *21*(5), 631-648.

Kroenig, M., McAdam, M., & Weber, S. (2010). Taking soft power seriously. *Comparative Strategy*, *29*(5), 412-431.

Koutsikas, A. (2019). The phenomenon of Brand Ambassandors and Marketing Influencers as a tool for companies and its impact on consumers.

Kumagai, K., & Nagasawa, S. (2017). Consumers' perceptions of store location effect on the status of luxury, non-luxury, and unknown apparel brands. *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, *8*(1), 21–39. Available online at: https://doi.org/10.1080/20932685.2016.1257359.

Lash, S., & Lury, C. (2007). *Global culture industry: The mediation of things* (p. 4). Cambridge: Polity, 1-15.

Lee, K. M. (2009). Nation branding and sustainable competitiveness of nations.

Lury, C. (2004). Brands: The logos of the global economy.

Lury, C. (2009). BRAND AS ASSEMBLAGE: Assembling culture. *Journal of Cultural Economy*, *2*(1–2), 67–82. https://doi.org/10.1080/17530350903064022

Margarisová, K., & Vokáčová, L. (2016). Regional branding: building brand value. *Acta universitatis agriculturae et silviculturae mendelianae brunensis*, *64*(6).

Meyer, J. W. (2007). Globalization: Theory and trends. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, *48*(4), 261-273.

Nagasawa, S. Y. (2016). Japan has developed luxury brands. *Marketing Review St. Gallen*, *33*(5), 58-67.

Nagasawa, S. Y., & Suganami, N. (2019). Flagship Shop Strategy for Brand Building–Case of MUJI–. In Proceedings of 'Global Fashion Marketing Conference at Paris,' being printed, Global Alliance of Marketing & Management Associations.

Nagasawa, Shin'ya 長沢伸也. (2020). *Kikanten senryaku" ni yoru burando kouchiku, Yunikuro to Mujirushi Ryohin no kaigai jirei ni miru. Shouhin kaihatsu・kanri kenkyuu*「旗艦店戦略」によるブランド構築 ユニクロと無印良品の海外事例に見る. *商品開発・管理研究* [Brand Building through Flagship Store Strategy: Overseas Examples of Uniqlo and Muji.] Product Development and Management Research, *17*(1), 26-46.

Nakano, R., & Zhu, Y. (2020). Heritage as soft power: Japan and China in international politics. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, *26*(7), 869–881. https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2020.1845322

Nugroho, W. John RSPKM Isa, Abiyyu Zharif Nugroho (2024). Exploring the Influence of Korean Wave Brand Ambassadors on Marketplace Purchase Intentions through Brand Image and Online Reviews using the Theory of Planned Behavior Approach. *Cross Current Int J Econ Manag Media Stud*, *6*(3), 53-58.

Nye, J. S. (1990). Soft Power. *Foreign Policy*, *80*, 153–171. Available online at: https://doi.org/10.2307/1148580.

Nye, J. S. (2004). *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*. Public affairs.

Nye, J. S. (2021). Soft power: the evolution of a concept. In *Essays on Evolutions in the Study of Political Power* (pp. 196-208). Routledge.

Oliveira, E., & Ashworth, G. J. (2017). A strategic spatial planning approach to regional branding: Challenges and opportunities. *Handbook on place branding and marketing*, 22-40.

Park, D. (2024). *Success Factors Behind South Korean Emerging Designer Brands: A Case Study* (Master's thesis, Kent State University).

Sasaki, Junichiro 佐々木純一郎. (2024). *Chiiki Shakai Kenkyūka Seminā "Chiiki Burando to Aparelu Kigyō no Yakuwari". Hirosaki Daigaku Daigakuin Chiiki Shakai Kenkyūka Nenpō* 地域社会研究科セミナー「地域ブランドとアパレル企業の役割」. 弘前大学大学院地域社会研究

科年報 ["Regional Brand and the Role of Apparel Companies" Regional Society Research Seminar. Hirosaki University Graduate School of Regional Society Research Annual Report], 20, 73-98.

Sassen, S. (2004). The global city: Introducing a concept. *Brown J. World Aff.*, *11*, 27.

Schwak 줄리엣 쉥크, J. (2016). Branding South Korea in a Competitive World Order: Discourses and Dispositives in Neoliberal Governmentality. *Asian Studies Review*, *40*(3), 427–444. https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2016.1193474.

Shin, S. I. (2019). Transforming into fashion firms or multi-country suppliers? Accounting for varied firm trajectories in the deindustrialising Korean apparel industry. *The Journal of Development Studies*, *55*(1), 1-18.

Skov, L. (2011). Dreams of Small Nations in a Polycentric Fashion World. *Fashion Theory*, *15*(2), 137–156. https://doi.org/10.2752/175174111X12954359478609.

Tamaki, T. (2019). Repackaging national identity: Cool Japan and the resilience of Japanese identity narratives. *Asian Journal of Political Science*, *27*(1), 108–126. https://doi.org/10.1080/02185377.2019.1594323.

Trunkos, J., & Cerny, P. G. (2019). Culture, soft power and globalization. *Afterword. Spheres of Culture and Soft Power, L'Harmattan, Toronto*.

Tsoy, A. (2012). *Koreas Competitive Position in Apparel Industry: Strategies and Perspectives* (Doctoral dissertation, 서울대학교 대학원).

Vigolo, Vania. (2009). Nation branding tra prodotti e turismo, 1-20. Available online at: https://www.insidemarketing.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Nation_Branding.pdf.

Yasuno, Satoko 安野智子 e Enomoto, Yasuko 榎本泰子. (2020): *Nihon ni okeru Chūgoku no sofutopawā to sono genkai - Kankoku no sofutopawā: to no hikaku kara* 日本における中国のソフトパワーとその限界ー韓国のソフトパワー—との比較から— [China's soft power in Japan and its limitations - a comparison with South Korea's soft power]. Tōkyō: Chuo University. Available online at: https://chuo-u.repo.nii.ac.jp/record/13335/files/0529-6803_30_125-147.pdf.

Yoo, Han Bin 유한빈. (2022). *What is K-Fashion from Foreign Perspectives?* (Doctoral dissertation, 서울대학교 대학원).

FIGURE INDEX

Figure 1: Wallerstein World Society System 13
Figure 2: Ikuta, Yukawa and Hamasaki's table of concepts and measures of regional branding 37
Figure 3: Japan Brand Research Institute's strategic plan 39
Figure 4: Simon Anholt's Nation Brand Hexagon 56
Figure 5: Ipsos-Anholt Nation Brand Index supplemental report 57
Figure 6: Ipsos-Anholt's Nations as Personalities Scheme 58
Figure 7: UNIQLO's LifeWear startegy 66
Figure 8: Fast Retailing's Industry Ranking 2024 67
Figure 9: Ryouhin Keikaku's "Grand Strategy" Muji Report 2023 68
Figure 10: UNIQLO's UT Graphic Tees Collaborations 69
Figure 11: MUJI's philosophy 69
Figure 12: Jun Gotō's Tools of global strategy 72
Figure 13: Yutaka Gotō's National distribution and concentration of fashion brand shops 74
Figure 14: UNIQLO stores in Japan 75
Figure 15: MUJI stores in Japan 76
Figure 16: 2nd Street, Off House and Yorozuya' stores in Hirosaki 77
Figure 17: Sunline Corporation's Website 79
Figure 18: Iwate Moriya Corporation Website 80
Figure 19: Satō Textile Corporation's Website 81
Figure 20: Kogin sashi brief explanation 83
Figure 21: Examples of Kogin Sashi patterns 84
Figure 22: Louis Vuitton store in Gangnam district 91
Figure 23: Gucci store in Gangnam district 91
Figure 24: SPAO store in Myeongdong 91
Figure 25: Porter's Diamond Model by Vangelis Tsiligiris 96
Figure 26: Mokpo's landascape from Yudal Mountain 98
Figure 27: Versace Official Website Advertising Campaigns with Hyunjin from kpop boy-group Stray Kids and NingNing from kpop girl-group Aespa 104

WEBSITES AND PORTALS

Wallerstein World Society System: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Wallerstein%27s_Core-periphery_model.png.

Ipsos-Anholt Nation Brands Index: https://www.ipsos.com/en/search?search=Anholt+Ipsos+Nation+Brands+Index.

Brand Research Institute (ブランド総合研究所 *Brand Sōgō Kenkyūjo*): https://www.tiiki.jp/brand/index.html

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan: https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/culture/koryu/index.html.

Fast Retailing Co., Ltd: https://www.fastretailing.com/eng/ir/direction/position.html.

2nd Street Hirosaki (セカンドストリート弘前店): https://maps.app.goo.gl/fHzAWhAwhSvQyXedA.

Off House Hirosaki (オフハウス弘前店) : https://maps.app.goo.gl/6czPxmondNX6oAJc8.

Yorozuya Hirosaki Ōshimizu Store (萬屋 弘前大清水店): https://maps.app.goo.gl/9bzN1KJRG2HDDUr39.

North Iwate Apparel (北いわてアパレル産業振興会): https://www.kita-apa.com/.

Sunline (株式会社サンライン): https://sunline-aomori.com/.

Sato Seni Co.LTD (佐藤繊維株式会社): https://satoseni.com/.

【東北・青森】Let's experience Tsugaru! 津軽を丸ごと体験　～津軽藩ねぷた村～（弘前大学留学生制作動画）: https://youtu.be/l1_pZ2q7-wc?si=lrQHGLbX4f_HU2oH.

"Tsugaru Koginzashi "by Setsu Maeda 1973 – koginbank: https://koginbank.com/en/modoko/source/setsu-maeda-tsugaru-koginzashi/.

"Diamond Model" scheme by Vangelis Tsiligiris available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322543250_An_adapted_Porter_Diamond_Model_for_the_evaluation_of_transnational_education_host_countries.

Mokpo’s photos google maps: https://maps.app.goo.gl/6XueYWj2QWTp62Q79.

Louis Vuitton Seoul Galleria Women: https://eu.louisvuitton.com/eng-e1/point-of-sale/korea/louis-vuitton-seoul-galleria-west-women.

Photo of SPAO store in Myeongdong: https://english.visitkorea.or.kr/svc/contents/contentsView.do?vcontsId=90787.

Versace Official Website Advertising Campaigns: https://www.versace.com/row/en/stories/advertising-campaigns/.