



The Power of 'Cute'

Hello Kitty Expert Comes to Australia

When is a cat not a cat? When it's **Hello Kitty**. That's what **Christine R. Yano**, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Hawai'i, found out when curating a Hello Kitty exhibition that was on show in the US until May this year.

Produced by Japanese company **Sanrio**, Hello Kitty is a character that has spawned countless lines of merchandise since she was created in 1974, and is known as much for her pointy ears and signature bow as for her mouthless, expressionless face. Like so many fans worldwide, Yano had always assumed that she was a cat. "I was corrected—very firmly," said Yano to the Los Angeles Times on the eve of the exhibition last year, revealing Sanrio's assertion that Hello Kitty is actually "a human girl" and sparking [shock among social media users](#) worldwide.

Yano's recent book, *Pink Globalization: Hello Kitty's Trek Across the Pacific* (Duke University Press, 2013), looks at Hello Kitty less as a character than as a powerful cultural and commercial phenomenon. In it she shows how Hello Kitty has capitalised on 'cute' as a disarming force to win affection across national, cultural and social boundaries.

This goes toward explaining how well-known Hello Kitty is outside of Japan. The character entered the U.S. market in 1976, European markets in 1980, and official Asian markets in 1990. Today, "she is one of the most widely recognized symbols of 'cute', or '*kawaii*' across the globe," says Yano.

Hello Kitty's talent for crossing boundaries is articulated by her selection as Japan's Ambassador for Tourism in the Taiwan and Korea markets in 2008, and her current ambassadorial role for 'Cool Japan', the Japanese government's cultural diplomacy program. Says Yano, "Hello Kitty represents a highly successful soft-power niche for Japan that builds upon an arsenal of innocence. The positioning of Hello Kitty as the face of Japan represents the

power of the would-be child, at once appealing, seemingly benign, and ever in need of care and nurturance.”

So what are the broader implications of Hello Kitty’s rise? “As more and more Asian nations see soft power as the core feature of cultural diplomacy, examining one case study – Japan and its cute culture – becomes critical to our understanding of both the content and processes of this endeavour.”

Yano appears as part of the [Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy](#) panel event on October 13, 6:30-8:00pm at The Japan Foundation, Sydney in partnership with The Australian National University. The title of her talk is ‘Small as Big: Hello Kitty, Innocence and the Politics of Scale’. She will be joined by soft power and public diplomacy expert Yasushi Watanabe (Keio University) and trans-Asia globalisation specialist Koichi Iwabuchi (Monash University). More information at www.jpf.org.au.

Event Details

Date:	October 13 (Tuesday), 2015
Time:	6:30pm - 8:00pm (Doors open 6pm)
Venue:	The Japan Foundation, Sydney Level 4, Central Park (Access via lifts) 28 Broadway, Chippendale NSW 2008
Entry:	Admission free. Bookings essential.
RSVP:	Online via www.jpf.org.au
Enquiries:	reception@jpf.org.au / (02) 8239 0055
Website:	www.jpf.org.au

Further reading on Hello Kitty:

■ Official webpage, *Pink Globalisation*:

<https://www.dukeupress.edu/Pink-Globalization/>

■ Official bio from Sanrio

<http://hello-kitty.sanriotown.com/>

■ Official exhibition website: ‘HELLO! Exploring the Supercute World of Hello Kitty’

<http://www.janm.org/exhibits/hellokitty/>

■ Los Angeles Times: ‘Hello Kitty is not a cat, plus more reveals before her L.A. tour’

<http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/miranda/la-et-cam-hello-kitty-in-los-angeles-not-a-cat-20140826-column.html#page=1>

■ “Hello Kitty is not a cat”—Buzzfeed

<http://www.buzzfeed.com/jessicamisener/hello-kitty-is-not-actually-a-cat#.reWpVWdl6d>

ABOUT CHRISTINE R. YANO



Christine R. Yano is a professor of anthropology at University of Hawai'i and 2014-15 Visiting Professor at Harvard University. Her research focusses on Japan and Japanese Americans, and looks at popular culture within the frameworks of gender, class, nationalism, and globalism. Professor Yano's recent work on 'cute culture' received worldwide attention with the release of her latest book, *Pink Globalization: Hello Kitty and its Trek Across the Pacific* (Duke University Press, 2013), and a major exhibition she curated for the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles, titled 'Hello! Exploring the Supercute World of Hello Kitty' (2014-15).

ABOUT SOFT POWER AND CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

[Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy](#) is an expert panel on soft power in Japan. It runs at The Japan Foundation, Sydney on October 13 (Tuesday), 6:30 – 8:00pm, in partnership with The Australian National University (ANU) as a satellite event of the ANU's *Japan Update 2015* conference. The panel is convened by Dr Simon Avenell, Director of The Japan Institute at ANU, and features three speakers: 'cute' culture theorist **Christine R. Yano** (University of Hawai'i), public diplomacy analyst **Yasushi Watanabe** (Keio University), and trans-Asia globalisation specialist **Koichi Iwabuchi** (Monash University). Panellists will draw from their innovative work to critically explore the global clout of Hello Kitty, the politics of soft power and the policies around 'Cool Japan'. This panel also runs at *Japan Update* at ANU on October 12, supported by The Japan Foundation, Sydney.

ABOUT JAPAN UPDATE

Japan Update is The Australian National University (ANU)'s flagship annual conference on Japan. Held at the ANU in Canberra, *Japan Update* aims to give policy-makers and academics a comprehensive overview of Japan's economic and political landscape, and the changing opportunities and challenges it offers. Historically, *Japan Update* has focused on politics, economics and trade. However, this year for the first time, *Japan Update* incorporates a culture panel ('Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy') which will run at ANU in Canberra on October 12 before coming to The Japan Foundation, Sydney as a standalone event on October 13. The *Japan Update 2015* culture panel is proudly supported by The Japan Foundation, Sydney.

ABOUT THE JAPAN FOUNDATION, SYDNEY

The Japan Foundation, Sydney is the Australian arm of the Japan Foundation, which was established by the Japanese government to promote cultural and intellectual exchange between Japan and other nations. It runs a diverse range of programs and events, including exhibitions, talk events, grant programs and Japanese language courses for all levels from beginner to advanced. The Japan Foundation was established in 1972 with a global network of 22 offices in 21 countries. The Australian office was founded in 1978.

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For more information please see www.jpff.org.au or contact:

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