

Research Notes

Images of Latin America from the Perspective of Japanese Students

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This paper explores the role of media in the creation and/or strengthening of stereotypical images of Latin America when media exposure is extensive, and when the access to information about this culture and their people from sources other than media is very limited. Data from a survey conducted in the Kanto area among college students reveal that greater access to mass media, particularly television and the Internet, corresponds to typification of the meanings associated to Latin America. These, in addition, constitute a small group of images that appear to be favorable but try to fix and limit Latin America, which might bring unfavorable results. Findings also suggest that direct contact between Japanese people and Latin Americans might exert influence on the images that the former have about the latter.

Keywords: Japan, Latin America, audience, media representation, cultivation

This paper explores the perceptions of Japanese audiences about Latin America. It discusses how perceptions are restricted to a small number of images that tend to be typified while they might be framed by traditional beliefs of Japanese society. In a low immigration country like Japan, mass media play an important role in the construction of ethnic groups¹, which might be extrapolated to refer to non-dominant or subordinate identities. In this study the focus is not on Latinos as an ethnic minority but on the images of Latin American people, region and/or culture in general, constructed by Japanese. These include, but do not exclusively refer to, Latin Americans of Japanese ancestry.

Latin America, which is geographically and culturally very distant from Japan, has increased its contact with the island-country contemporarily; thus, real life encounters are on increase as well. In addition to an initial exploration of the relation between greater media exposure and stereotypical representations of Latin America, this analysis considers the cases when media are not the only source of information. It suggests that when there is direct interaction between the two groups, representations might vary.

First, this paper presents an overview on relevant literature including media theory and media representation of foreigners in Japan. Next, results of the data collected and some concluding remarks are presented.

1. Theoretical Background

Communication scholars are not in complete agreement about the influence that media exert on

1 Hagiwara, 'Terebi no naka seikai jōsei', 23.

representations of non-dominant identities by the audience. Some have pointed out that media actively criticize and question the status quo with portrayals²; that is, they challenge the traditional structures of the society. From other perspective, mediated content presents preferred interpretations, which tend to re-create a hegemonic system³ but that content is open to negotiation⁴.

According to the understanding of media representation in this study, the negotiation of media images is possible, which would indicate that realities are not fixed, and that, media are an influential institution. The media may diffuse the differences in behavior and perceptions that might be expected in groups with different social, cultural or political backgrounds and this is the mainstreaming that occurs as part of a process of cultivation⁵. That is to say, greater exposure to mass media is the responsible for cultivating conceptions of reality that permeate and stay in the society; this equals a more homogeneous world-view.

Cultivation theory contends that people with greater media exposure have stronger tendency to understand the world in ways that evidence the most common and recurring messages provided by television⁶, and television—media—messages serve certain needs of the dominant segments of the society. In this way, the audience is divided in heavy and light viewers. The former, according to Gerbner⁷, tend to think that the world presented on television and their own world is the same. They do not choose the programs they watch and have very homogenous and traditional attitudes toward issues such as racism and gender. These individuals are also more fearful, and consequently more supportive of all measures against illegal actions.

One of the most salient concepts of cultivation analysis, therefore, is mainstreaming. It guarantees social stability and means that founding ideologies of the society are never challenged or threatened but reinforced. As Signorelli and Morgan claim⁸, stories told by only some part of the population become common social parameters that constitute the mainstream. The world is made of media stories that teach most of the knowledge humans have⁹. They are continuously transmitted and reinforced through television, which as the medium, turns into a cultural link between the elites and the general public. In that way, media strengthen the status quo, spreading dominant ideologies, and even acting as a servant of the state¹⁰. Indeed, it is generally believed that all media perpetuate the existing discourses, support and spread dominant ideologies¹¹.

Initial cultivation research principally focused on television, but this theory has been applied to the analysis of other several media, including newspapers, magazines and videogames¹². Moreover, cultivation analysis was first focused on attitudes toward violence and crime; nevertheless, this theory has been very useful in the study of the portrayal of groups. Particularly, there has been significant research on the cultivation effect on audiences who do not have real direct contact with some groups of individuals represented in the media. Several studies, thus, have used this theory for analyzing

2 Pharr, 'Media as Trickster in Japan', 25–34.

3 Gledhill, 'Genre and gender', 340.

4 Hall, *The Work of Representation*, 20.

5 Signorelli & Morgan, 'Cultivation Analysis', 22.

6 Gerbner et al, 'Growing up with Television', 46.

7 Gerbner, 'Television Violence', 344.

8 Signorelli & Morgan, 'Cultivation Analysis', 22–23.

9 Gerbner et al., 'Living with Television', 3.

10 Freeman, *Closing the Shop*, 6–8.

11 Tsuda, 'Domesticating the Immigrant Other', 290–292.

12 Anderson et al., 'Violent Video Games', 199–249; Reber and Chang, 'Assessing Cultivation Theory', 99–112; Williams, 'Virtual Cultivation', 69–87.

conceptions, usually stereotyped, around gender¹³, elderly population¹⁴, adolescents¹⁵ and minorities¹⁶.

The portrayal of minorities such as those of African descent, indigenous people and immigrants has been widely studied all over the world. Media research has revealed that women, usually older women, and minorities are evidently more likely than white men to effectively become invisible or stereotyped by the media¹⁷. Research in the U.S., for instance, reveals that in respect of crime, African Americans are more likely to be represented as offenders or suspects than investigators, policemen or other justice professionals¹⁸. Also in the U.S., Latinos are often seen in a limited range of stereotypical roles such as the Latin lover or the buffoon in dramas¹⁹.

Mastro and Kopacz²⁰ explain that empirical studies have consistently demonstrated the influence of television—media—worlds on the real-world perceptions of the audience in relation to ethnic groups in the U. S. cultivation implies learning and constructing the social world²¹, which may produce stereotypes that are used as rules of social interaction and delimitate relationships of power²².

Cultivation research is mainly centered on media content; nevertheless, it has been considered that real world contact is very relevant for this analysis²³. Particularities of the audience influence their relation with media portrayals, and the tendency of non-dominant group members to process mediated content in ways that safeguard and strength their group identity has been proved²⁴. That is, audiences do interpret media according to their position. The kind of socialization the audience has would also mark their responses to media messages. This suggests that the mediated production of identities might combine both, dominant portrayals and also a space of confrontation in the audiences²⁵.

2. Ethnic Media Representation in Japan

There have been few media studies on the attitudes and images that Japanese audiences have towards foreign ethnicities or minorities. This might be explained by particular features of Japan.

Being a society traditionally self-distinguished by the absence of diversity and a shared feeling of 'uniqueness'²⁶, Japanese mass media have showed homogeneous images leaving minorities and foreigners outside focus for a long time²⁷. In addition, as a country with comparatively few foreigners, media content in Japan has been characterized by the predominant portrayal of images of middle class ethnically homogenous Japanese individuals²⁸.

13 Signorielli, 'Aging on Television', 279–301.

14 Robinson and Anderson, 'Older Characters in Children's Animated Television Programs', 287–304; Robinson et al., 'The Portrayal of Older Characters', 203–213.

15 Rhineberger-Dunn et al., 'Constructing Juvenile Delinquency through Crime Drama', 1-23; Stern, 'Self-absorbed, Dangerous and Disengaged', 23–38.

16 Mastro and Behm-Morawitz, 'Latino Representation on Primetime Television', 110-130; Tamborini et al., 'The Color of Crime and the Court', 639–653.

17 Mastro et al., 'Exposure to Television Portrayals of Latinos', 13–16.

18 Eschholz et al., 'Television and Fear of Crime', 395–415.

19 Mastro and Behm-Morawitz, 'Latino Representation on Primetime Television', 110–130.

20 Mastro and Kopacz, 'Media Representation of Race, Prototypically and Policy Reasoning', 307–310.

21 Gerbner et al, 'Growing Up with Television', 45.

22 Ramirez-Berg, 'Latino Images in Film', 13–37.

23 Mastro et al., 'Exposure to Television Portrayals of Latinos', 8.

24 Fujioka et al., 'Differences between White and Black College Women', 454.

25 Gledhill, 'Genre and Gender', 340–358.

26 Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization*, 1–22.

27 Gossman and Kirsch, '(De)Constructing Identities', 2.

28 Gossman and Kirsch, '(De)Constructing Identities', 1–4; Muramatsu, 'Gender Construction through Interactions between the Media and the Audience', 72.

Muramatsu²⁹ has reviewed several studies on media in Japan conducted from the 1970s to the 1990s, which were mainly concentrated on gender but made important references to the cultural and social contexts of Japanese society. These investigations focused on the media effect in the audience and showed how some aspects of Japanese culture have influenced the development of media in Japan. Namely, Japanese people believe their society is characterized by three aspects: the limited ethnic diversity, the small gap among social classes and the significant sense of community.

Japanese, therefore, expect to and are inclined to find commonality between themselves and media texts³⁰. Moreover, Ehara suggests that because Japanese audiences regard themselves as similar, they tend to assume that all other Japanese position towards media texts in the same way that they do. These aspects have determined the production of media content and the representation of a society with no differences.

Nevertheless, in the 1990s, transformations in the media and in the depictions of Japanese society started to take place in Japan³¹. Such changes might be occurring for very distinct reasons including the pursuit of new variants, which meant the insertion of foreigners and representations of bicultural couples³². Although particularly fiction program started to portray a more heterogeneous society, from Gossman and Kirsch's argument it is possible to deduce that some features of the representations of non-Japanese still reveal a strong belief in homogeneity among Japanese in two ways.

First, regarding the representations of Asian characters, there has been emphasis on a mutual cultural understanding and on the intrinsic similarities between them with Japan. In order to be softly accepted, differences are blurred. This is similar to what Tsuda³³ describes as facilitating a hegemonic control based on assimilation rather than exclusion. Second, and very distinctly, foreigners in general have been associated to exoticism and horror in television dramas and also other genres. Non-Japanese identities, therefore, represent extremes.

Moreover in relation to non-fiction media representations, Hagiwara³⁴ examined news concerning foreigners and foreign countries that was broadcasted on the three most influential television stations in Japan. This author found that the number of hard news (politics and economy), which develop topics such as criminal incidents and Japan-Korea relations, is more than double the number of soft news, with a lighter content linked to culture, sports and science. This could suggest the association of foreigners with negative images.

In addition, Hagiwara explains that some of the topics developed in the longest news reports are terrorism, war and crime, international relations and the spreading of animal diseases. Previous studies have also revealed that Iraq, Afghanistan and North Korea are countries extremely highly stereotyped among Japanese students, who commonly associate them with danger and poverty³⁵. Even though the political situation in these countries makes them extreme examples, Hagiwara argues that in such cases which are characterized by a lack of interaction between these cultures or their citizens and the Japanese, and where news become the main access to information, the news, as expected, plays a substantially influential role.

Frequently the information that Japanese people have about Latin America is associated with the population of Japanese descent, and there has not been extensive research on the images of general

29 Muramatsu, 'Gender Construction through Interactions between the Media and the Audience', 73–84.

30 Ehara, *Jenda chistujo*, 29–58.

31 Gossman and Kirsch, '(De)Constructing Identities', 1–3.

32 Ibid.

33 Tsuda, 'Domesticating the Immigrant Other', 302.

34 Hagiwara, 'Terebino nakano seikai josei', 53–58.

35 Ibid.

Latin Americans in Japan. One interesting reference, however, was found in the analysis of the popular variety television program, *Kokoga hen nihonjin*, which in absence of an official translation could be translated as *Japanese are strange!* This program aired from 1998 to 2001 and discussed themes concerning foreigners.

In this analysis, Hagiwara and Kunihiro³⁶ accept that in Japan the word *gaikokujin*, or foreigner, has negative connotations in many cases. Indeed, according to these scholars, the program might be suggesting a negative stereotyping of Latin America since 79% of the topics about this region were related to criminal actions. Furthermore, a common Latin American viewer would say that, in addition to images of law violations, in Japan, variety programs show strange features of Latino and other foreign cultures while documentaries emphasize the nature and social problems of their countries.

Tsuda³⁷, with his studies about media representation of Latin Americans of Japanese descent or *nikkeijin* in person who have returned to Japan, highlights the significant role of media on the perceptions about this group. This author points out to the media pervasiveness and the limited possibilities to encounter a *nikkeijin* in person. In Japan, Tsuda claims, media coverage of return migrants legitimates and perpetuates traditional Japanese ethnic and cultural assumptions. Their representation apparently undermines these problematic essentialist perceptions. However, it indirectly supports the ethnic status quo by presenting *nikkeijin* as ethnic curiosities that do not fit the assumption that Japanese descendants should be culturally Japanese.

Media portray strange ethnic identities and make exotic their cultural foreignness in order to amuse and surprise the audience. For this reason, according to Tsuda³⁸, media act as trickster when they appear to undermine dominant ideologies while actually promoting and legitimating them. In this way, media content fosters the perceptions of *nikkeijin*'s strangeness and foreignness in Japan.

Latin American culture and languages (Spanish or Portuguese) are emphasized by Japanese media when Japanese descendants are portrayed as foreigners³⁹. Documentaries and news show, for instance, their illiterate condition in Japan and the difficulties that this causes in their daily life. Media present *nikkeijin*, with no Japanese proficiency, as laborers that plan to save or send money to their countries. Their motives are depicted as mainly economic; thus, they lose status and become part of the Japanese lower class⁴⁰. In addition, they are represented as protectors of very strongly marked cultural traditions of Latin American origin that contrast with those of Japanese society. Therefore, in most cases the information that Japanese people have about Latin America is associated with *nikkeijin*.

Research on individuals of Japanese descent has confirmed that the "Latin spirit" evidenced and admired in Latin American music and dance, is not always welcomed and may be disturbing; Latinos may be perceived as noisy and misbehaving⁴¹. Although a personal experience would indicate that Latin American cultures and people are related to friendship, cheerfulness and enjoyment, it is also true that Latin American countries and especially Latino communities in Japan are typically associated with disorder, violence and sometimes crime. In that way, the Sea, the jungle and ruins of past civilizations are usually combined to the joyful character of people who enjoy music and dance but have the tendency to break the rules. These have become the stereotypes of Latin America, and when real encounters

36 Hagiwara and Kunihiro, 'Terebi to gaikokujin imeeji', 38–41.

37 Tsuda, 'The Motivation to Migrate', 1–31; 'Domesticating the Immigrant Other', 289–306; 'Japanese Brazilian Ethnic Return Migration', 206–227.

38 Tsuda, 'Media Images, Immigrant Reality', 9–10.

39 Ibid.

40 Lie, 'The Discourse of Japaneseness', 74–83.

41 Tajima, 'La otra cara del interrelacionamiento socio-cultural', 510–515.

between them and Japanese people are so scarce, media content might have some incidence⁴².

All the studies mentioned above are relatively recent. Compared to other countries with a tradition of multiculturalism, media research concerning the representations of other ethnic groups in Japan is limited and novel. Diversity was completely unaccepted in the past and explicit insinuations of the possibility of Japan becoming a multiethnic society are too recent⁴³, which have slowed the inclusion of non-Japanese identities in media and consequently, their study too.

Moreover, studies on this regard are mainly concentrated on representations of Asia and Asians; Whiteness vs. Blackness and Latin Americans of Japanese descent. However, today Japanese media represent a comparatively larger variety of cultural and ethnic identities, one of them, the Latin American. This region and its culture are usually thought to be very distant; and thus media might be the main source of information in Japan.

According to the findings of investigations about the portrayal of foreigners and Latin Americans in Japan mentioned above, and cultivation theory, this paper proposes an initial exploration of the images of Latin America in Japan. Based on the representations by Japanese college students, it also constitutes a first step in the examination of the possible relation between representations by media content and media exposure. In this way, this study looks into the construction of the image of Latin America(ns) among Japanese college students and tries to understand whether it is restricted to a limited number of images that tend to be typified, or it shows heterogeneity. This paper also aims to explore the possible role that greater media exposure and/or less direct contact with Latin America might play in representation.

3. Methodology

A questionnaire was designed in order to explore the image of Latin American people and culture among Japanese young adults and the media access by these group of people. Audience survey has been a common technique used in the analysis of media representation and media cultivation research, usually combined with content analysis of media⁴⁴. Being a first step in the analysis of the representation of Latin America in Japan, this paper only focuses on the audience.

Data collection took place during September 2010. The respondent group was composed of 276 college students from seven universities located in the Kanto area in Japan (51% female; 49% male; age average, 20). They answered the questionnaire in classroom settings as the author directly contacted professors who were be interested in contributing to the project. The classes these students were registered in ranged various topics: agricultural economics, biology, computer engineering, Latin American politics, media, Spanish language and statistics.

The questionnaire comprised the following sections. First, a question asked whether students have had any kind of contact with Latin America. If their answer was affirmative, they had to mark the circumstance(s) in a multiple answer type question. Given that the group was homogenous as they were all college students around the same age, information on their contact with Latin America was fundamental to construct different profiles.

After this, the questionnaire was concerned with the knowledge and the images that these students have about Latin America(ns), and was subdivided into three questions. With the purpose of obtaining information that might not be anticipated in the questionnaire and some qualitative data, respondents were asked to freely write any word or thought that came to their mind when thinking about Latin

42 Tsuda, 'Domesticating the Immigrant Other', 301-303.

43 Douglass and Roberts, 'Japan in a Global Age of Migration', 3-5.

44 Gerbner, 'Television Violence', 342.

America. Answers provided had between one and five words or phrases.

Other two questions were composed of 10 five-point Likert-type items with response categories ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), and were divided in two groups. The first Likert-type question looked at the images of the Latin American region and countries, and was elaborated based on the methodology used in a study conducted by *Instituto Cervantes*⁴⁵ about the image of Spain in Japan. The adaptation meant the inclusion of pertinent items, and specially the transformation from a differential semantic type question into a Five-point Likert-type item question.

The second group, on the other hand, focused on Latin American people and was adapted from the Fujioka scale of racial perceptions⁴⁶ that has been used in the U.S. to measure racial perceptions towards African Americans, Caucasians and Hispanics/Latinos, and the differential semantic scale used in the study by *Instituto Cervantes* mentioned above.

After this, media were considered and respondents were asked to freely provide up to three sources from which they learn or have learnt about Latin America. Then, students were asked to indicate how much time per day they usually use mainstream mass media (television, Internet, newspaper, magazines, radio).

4. Results

Findings basically focus on the construction of Latin America by Japanese students, their time exposure to mass media, their contact with this foreign region or their people, and the relation among these aspects. To start with, the words that first came to respondents minds when they were asked about Latin America were classified into 23 clearly delimited categories (See Table 1). For example, *music, salsa, samba, tango, dance* were included in the group *Dance and Music*; *joyful, cheerful, friendly and energetic* integrated *Joyful Character*, which was the most mentioned word in the group; *the sea, petroleum, the Amazon* became part of *Natural Resources*, and *poverty, street children, developing*, of *Developing Region*. The category with the largest number of words was *Joyful Character*, followed by *Dance and Music*; *Territories and Countries* (with words such as *Sao Paulo, Mexico or Brazil*); *Natural Resources* and *Tropical Weather* (including *hot, the Sun, heat*). In general, words mentioned have an optimistic meaning; the only groups with strictly unfavorable associations were *Developing Region* and *Lack of Safety*.

A group of first thoughts showed an unexpected representation of Latin America that showed the wide meaning of this region and culture in Japan. There were respondents who mentioned events, objects, food or other elements, including *reggae, Jamaica* and *country music*, which are proper of cultures or areas in the world such as Jamaica or the South of the U.S.. That is to say, according to the Japanese students in this study, the meaning of Latin America is not limited to the Spanish and Portuguese speaking territories, but it includes the English and French speaking Caribbean and part of the U.S.. The common point, however, is that these representations mainly refer to music and dance, a large category. Initially, these words formed an independent group, but they were subsequently included in others such as *Dance and Music* or *Territories and Countries*. According to respondents, they equally integrate Latin America.

45 Noya and Rodao, 'La imagen de Espana en Japon', 96-126.

46 Fujioka, 'Television Portrayals and African American Stereotypes', 55.

Table 1 First mental images of Latin America

Word Group	Times repeated
Joyful Character	96
Dance and Music	85
Territories and Countries	68
Natural Resources	61
Tropical Weather	57
Food	49
Culture	38
Sports	31
Language	21
Developing Region	19
Famous People	13
Spain	10
Historical Monuments	7
Black People	7
Lack of Safety	6
Multiethnic	6
Women	5
Passion	4
Indigenous	4
White people	3
Africa	3
Brown skinned people	3
Strong drinkers	2
Total words	598

The sources of information about Latin America were also very homogeneous as mass media were predominantly mentioned. Respondents provided two or three answers, and television was the first medium, followed by Internet and newspapers. Sources different from media were grouped in *School*, which includes terms such as *classes*, *teachers* and *university*, and *People*, that is, in respondents' words, *acquaintances*, *friends* and *neighbors*.

Table 2 Sources of information about Latin America

Media source	Number of Times	%
TV	213	39
Internet	117	21
Newspaper	60	11
People	42	8
Books	38	7
Magazines	37	7
School	25	5
Others	9	2
Movies	8	1
Radio	3	1
Total	552	100

Television was the most mentioned source of information about Latin America, and this was also the medium that respondents access to the most with an average of 83 minutes per day, closely followed by Internet with 78.2 minutes. Therefore, with regard to the time spent using media, television still maintains the highest viewing, although a slightly higher number of respondents report to access the Internet. The difference between these two media and the other three, radio, newspapers and magazines, is significant. Radio has a high average of 42 minutes, but it should be noted that number of respondents is extremely low in comparison to the other sources. Based on the number of respondents

and the time average, television and the Internet might be the most influential media.

Table 3 Daily media access (minutes)

Source	Respondents	Maximum	Minimum	Average
TV	245	300	5	83
Internet	264	400	5	78
Radio	29	120	5	42
Newspapers	158	100	3	18
Magazines	111	60	2	18

The relation between the scores given to the Likert-type items associated to Latin American region and people and the time spent using media (Table 4) shows a positive relation between some stereotypes of Latin America and greater media exposure. As mentioned above, these stereotypes range from favorable portrayals such as a region with valuable cultural heritage and friendly citizens to unfavorable images of crime. The mean of questions that measure the variables *developed region* and *pleasant weather*, for instance, decrease and increase, correspondingly, when media access is greater. These constitute two typical constructions of Latin America, which could be respectively unfavorable and favorable, and might seem to be reinforced as media access rises. In both cases, changes mean that there is correspondence between the typical images of Latin America and media exposure.

Other items that might confirm this relation are *safe*, *clean*, *environment-friendly*, whose averages decrease, and *rich culture* that increases, confirming the typical constructions. With regard to the adjectives describing Latin American people, there is more variation between Internet and television, and scores in the latter seem to show a closer relation between exposure and some stereotypes of Latin Americans. That is to say, greater media access correlates to higher scores of *friendly* and *sexy*, and lower scores of *hard working*, *educated* and *peaceful*.

Table 4 Relation of media exposure and perceptions

	TV Exposure			Internet exposure		
	Low	High	Total	Low	High	Total
Rich natural resources	4.0	3.8	4.0	4.0	3.9	4.0
Pleasant weather	3.2	3.4	3.2	3.2	3.3	3.2
Developed region	2.8	2.3	2.5	2.7	2.3	2.5
Safe	2.2	1.8	2.0	2.2	1.8	2.0
Clean	2.5	2.3	2.4	2.4	2.3	2.4
Environment-friendly	3.1	2.9	3.0	3.1	3.0	3.1
Rich culture	4.2	4.4	4.2	4.3	4.5	4.2
Inherited European culture	3.4	3.2	3.3	3.4	3.2	3.3
Inherited indigenous culture	4.0	3.9	4.0	4.0	3.8	4.0
Inherited African culture	3.0	3.1	3.0	3.0	3.1	3.0
Hardworking	2.9	2.8	2.9	2.9	2.9	2.9
Educated	2.9	2.7	2.8	2.9	2.8	2.8
Honest	3.6	3.7	3.6	3.6	3.6	3.6
Altruistic	3.1	3.2	3.1	3.1	3.2	3.1
Friendly	4.3	4.5	4.4	4.4	4.5	4.4
Polite	3.3	3.1	3.2	3.2	3.2	3.2
Outgoing	4.4	4.5	4.4	4.5	4.4	4.4
Peaceful	3.2	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.1
Physically attractive	3.8	3.7	3.8	3.8	3.7	3.8
Sexy	3.9	4.2	4.0	4.0	4.1	4.0

Moreover, of 276 respondents only 78 (29%) mentioned that they have had any contact with Latin America(ns). This interaction was mostly favorable because 69% declared that it had improved their image of Latin America afterwards, giving a score of 4 or 5, where 5 was the highest and more positive grading in the scale. Students who scored 3, in addition, explained that perceptions were good from the beginning before interactions took place.

Although students who have experienced any contact with Latin American people or culture are less than 30%, it is possible to find some differences between this group and the students who have not had direct contact (see Figures 1 and 2). In general, the images of students who have had contact are relatively more positive than the images of the majority that has not had any relation. For example, the variable *safe*, which is not positive in either case, has evidently higher averages in respondents that have had any contact; *clean* reaches the midpoint of the scale and *care about nature* is positive.

Another interesting finding shows a gap regarding the variable about about the European heritage of Latin Americans because people who have not had any contact gave to this variable a very low score while people who have interacted with Latino culture or region scored it higher. Opposite results are shown in the variable about African heritage even though the difference is less marked. That is, Japanese students in the survey tend to associate Latin America more with its African heritage than with its European heritage while its indigenous heritage is equally recognized by both groups. These answers coincide with the first mental images (refer to Table 1).

Regarding the character of Latin Americans, major differences are in the variables *educated*, *hardworking*, *sexy* and *physically attractive*. More contact resulted in higher scores in the first two variables, and lower scores in the other two. Other associations are be extremely similar. That is, a closer relation with Latin American people or culture corresponds to the weakening of stereotypes such as not hardworking and sexy. However, other characteristics such as *friendly*, *honest* or *outgoing* do not show much change.

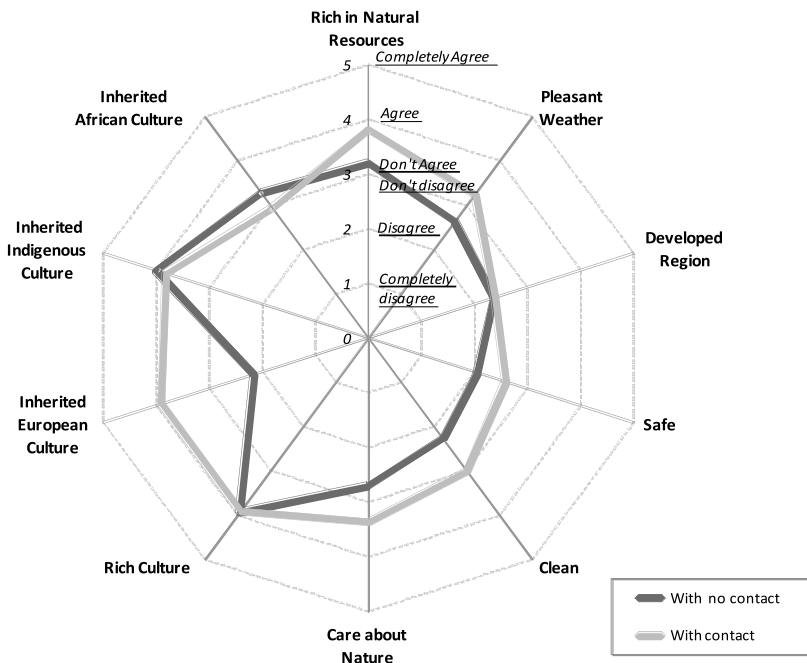


Figure 1 Perceptions about Latin America

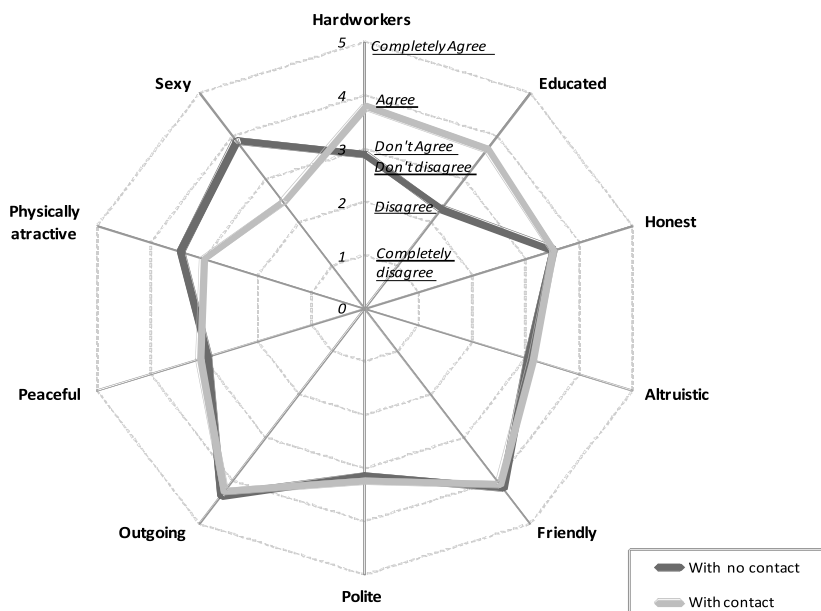


Figure 2 Perceptions about Latin Americans

2. Discussion

This survey revealed favorable results about the image of Latin American people and culture, and it proved that most representations are shared among respondents. The Japanese students in the survey have similar positive and negative perceptions of Latin America that coincide with the typical images that previous research has pointed out to. It was very simple to group the impressions they freely provided. Most of them basically defined this region as one of *tropical, hot weather, rich nature* and *historical ruins* or *monuments*. People are *friendly, joyful* and *cheerful* and like *dancing*, but they live in *developing* and *poor* countries with *no security*.

These results, indeed, coincide with the answers in the Likert-type questions that measured the image of Latin American people and region. On the one hand, scores of adjectives referring to the region such as *safe, developed* and *clean* were under the midpoint of the scale. On the other hand, features such as *rich nature* and *rich culture* scored at 3 or higher. Similarly, when referring to the character of Latin Americans, adjectives such as *friendly* and *outgoing* received very high scores (over 4). In that way, these variables confirm the typified image of Latin America.

Results also demonstrated that Latin America, according to the Japanese students in the survey, does not only mean countries that today speak Spanish and Portuguese after they were colonized. A small group of respondents included in their answers references or characteristics proper of the South of the U.S., African American culture and Caribbean culture. It is remarkable to think that these words were related to music, dance and food, which are features that come out when talking about Latin America. More than claiming a possible lack of knowledge, these answers indicate that from the perceptions of students in the survey, they all belong to the same Latin America.

Several mental images were *black and brown skinned people*. This might lead to the assumption that Japanese people's image of Latin America is closely linked to its African heritage. Fewer respondents referred to *indigenous people* and mixtures or *mestizaje*, but none talked about the Spanish and Portuguese heritage. These results, furthermore, coincide with the variables in the Likert type question

that sought to identify ethnic associations. In general, African heritage scored more than European heritage, even though it is important to note that there were respondents who gave the same score to all three—indigenous, African and European—heritages.

Although this paper is only a prior approach to describe the kind of relation between media access and representations of Latin America by Japanese students, results showed a connection between individuals with greater mass media access with a stereotypical understanding of Latin America. Respondents who spend longer time watching television and/or using Internet also have more typified images of Latin America, which coincides with the premises of cultivation theory. Therefore, subsequent studies could look into the direct contribution of mass media to the construction of Latin America.

In addition, data show that an aspect affecting the representation of Latin America might be the absence or presence of contact that Japanese students have with Latino people and culture in their real life. The few respondents who have access to other sources of information that constitute real-life interaction somehow diverge in their perceptions of Latin America from those who do not. On the one hand, most respondents who do not interact with Latin America tend to understand this culture and people according to the stereotypes (safe, clean, development, natural resources). On the other hand, in general respondents who have real life contact show more diverse results; some of them coincide with the stereotype and others do not.

The fact that individuals who have other kind of relationship with Latin America do not coincide with some stereotypes proves that media representations can be negotiated. A further study might determine how media cultivation and individual's kind of relation with Latin America(ns) determine audience opinions and perceptions. This would prove the argument of Mastro et al⁴⁷, who claim that the quantity of media exposure and the level of real-world contact predict real world perceptions. Indeed, these authors also mention the importance of the perception of the nature of portrayals, an aspect that should be also considered in future research.

Serious changes in the patterns of media access might be expected in the future since young generations tend to be more proximate to the Internet. Even though average access to this medium was high, television access was higher. Therefore, television definitely continues to play a significant role in the representation of groups who are not very frequently encountered, but the Internet also substantially contributes to this process. This study shows the presence of large exposure to both television and the Internet and a correspondence with more stereotypical perceptions of Latin America and Latin Americans.

These data proved the existence of cultural stereotypes, which Shipper⁴⁸ considers the base for prejudices against foreigners by Japanese who reside close to them. Research proves that prejudice exists toward the *nikkeijin* population, which is considered to be the third largest minority in Japan after Koreans and Chinese. The percentage of all Latin Americans in Japan is still lower than Asian nationals, but they comprise the largest non-Asian group⁴⁹. Further analyses would allow finding out the effects of stereotyping on the interaction between Japanese and the Latin American immigrants, Latin American born in Japan and individuals of Latin American and Japanese mixed ancestry.

Although the overall image of Latin America was positive, it coincides with a limited set of characteristics that confirm the importance of media content in Japan. As other foreigners and minorities have been silenced, Latin Americans are portrayed in such a way that satisfies the audience and does not disturb the preconceptions of Japanese society. This argument is indeed presented by

47 Mastro et al., 'Exposure to Television Portrayals of Latinos', 4–6.

48 Shipper, 'Criminal or Victims', 300–301.

49 Ministry of Justice of Japan, <http://www.e-stat.go.jp/SG1/estat/Xlsdl.do?sinfid=000009998149>

Tsuda⁵⁰ when he investigates about *nikkeijin*. His work reveals that this conservative position seems to be against the possibility of multiplicity in Japan. Latin Americans and foreigners in general, are portrayed as completely contrasting to Japanese. The most marked this differentiation is, more distant Japanese are from Others, and their uniqueness is more reinforced⁵¹.

It has been said that when confronted with the fact of ethnic diversity, many Japanese either ignore or deny it⁵², but despite the effort (and the illusion) to maintain the ethnic homogeneity in today's Japan, the presence of 'the foreign' is becoming more evident. Japanese views about other cultural groups have been shaped by the elite and the mass media as a way to exert control over the citizens⁵³. However, because culture in Japan is a contested terrain as new and old immigrant groups begin to permeate the society⁵⁴, the mono-ethnic dominant discourses should be contested by media⁵⁵.

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50 Tsuda, 'Media Images', 'Immigrant Reality', 1–30.

51 Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization*, 6–8.

52 Lie, 'The Discourse of Japaneseness', 81–83.

53 Willis and Murphy-Shigematsu, 'Ethniscapes and the Other', 316–320.

54 Murphy-Shigematsu, 'The Invisible Man and other Narratives', 394.

55 Tsuda, 'Domesticating the Immigrant Other', 302–303.

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