

## Japanese Cultural Ambassador Essay: Doraemon:

Doraemon, a Japanese cultural anime figure (also the name of the series), is a fictional robotic cat from the future that helps a young schoolboy called Nobita in his everyday struggles and conflicts. Successfully selling 170 million copies of several versions of the manga worldwide<sup>1</sup>, Doraemon stands as one of Japan's most lucrative and iconic series of all-time created by two manga artists under the name of Fujiko Fujio. It is praised for not only being entertaining to a broad and diverse spectrum of ages, but also for the themes and real-world issues explored in each installment that is exhibited not only educationally, but also in a comedic and innocent manner. The series has achieved numerous milestones and garnered enough attention and popularity with the general public to have its leading character - a blue and white robotic cat - elected as the first "anime ambassador" to the world. A number of driving catalysts lay behind this cultural decision that aims to promote and provide global insight into aspects of Japanese culture and tradition.

Doraemon, surprisingly enough, is an extremely influential and popular figure internationally with his image utilised as endorsement in advertisements and causes, including his rightful title as Japan's cultural and "anime ambassador". The storyline of Doraemon is about an anthropomorphic robotic cat from the 22<sup>nd</sup> century sent back to the modern-day (though before technological gadgets existed) to aid a young boy, Nobita, in his daily struggles and inner-conflicts. Every situation typically results in the ultimate dependence of Doraemon to retrieve a futuristic gadget from his belly with Nobita or someone else misusing it thus leading to a moral lesson learnt at the end. Themes of reliance, weakness, courage, over-indulgence, sin and critical issues such as global warming, endangered species and deforestation are addressed in each chapter which thus explains why children are not the sole audience for the series.

The character is not only a familiar sight for a majority of countries globally, especially that of Asian ones, but has surpassed other similarly prominent figures such as Hello Kitty and Godzilla. Not only has he already been elected as an international ambassador for Japan worldwide, but Doraemon can also add to a streak of achievements that he has transcended international figure Hello Kitty in a vie as to

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<sup>1</sup> Iwamoto, T 2012, *Happy birthday! Doraemon will be born 100 years from today*, Asahi Shimbun, Osaka, accessed 24 July 2013, [http://ajw.asahi.com/article/cool\\_japan/culture/AJ201209030098](http://ajw.asahi.com/article/cool_japan/culture/AJ201209030098)

which figure will be Japan's 2020 Tokyo Olympics mascot. As posited by Chavez, "[w]hat else represents Japan better than an anime character understood by children and adults alike, and represents Japanese core values of respect and friendship, which are also two of the three Olympic qualities. The third Olympic quality is excellence, and in this area Doraemon can deliver too."<sup>2</sup> Besides from traditional, cultural and ethical values, Doraemon has also surpassed the similarly popular figure Godzilla in terms of ticket sales. It was announced by Toho that the Doraemon film series had sold over 100 million tickets as of 26 March 2013, compared to the 99 million by Godzilla.<sup>3</sup>

In 2008, Doraemon was selected by Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to an international mascot and cultural promoter. The character, or at least a person in a Doraemon costume, travelled the world and visited multiple countries from regions such as Asia and Europe on a diplomatic mission. The prime goal was to endorse and provide a view into Japanese culture and its valued traditions as well as sharing the notion that different nations should strive to befriend one another. Japan's pop culture especially has altered the skeptical minds of people around the world and caused them to have more interest in the cultures of others, thus the choice to use a manga and anime figure was deemed suitable. The actress who voiced Doraemon, Wasabi Mizuta, claimed that "It [was] an hono[u]r to do such an important job. [That] [she'd] work as hard as [she] [could]."<sup>4</sup> She also promised the Minister of Foreign Affairs at that time, Masahiko Kōmura, that "[t]hrough [her] work, [she] [would] do [her] best to tell people in foreign countries about what [the] Japanese think, how [the] Japanese live and what kind of future the Japanese hope to make."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Chavez, A 2013, *Doraemon trumps Hello Kitty for Olympic Games ambassador*, The Japan Times, Tokyo and Osaka, Japan, accessed 12 July, 2013, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2013/04/20/our-lives/doraemon-trumps-hello-kitty-for-olympic-games-ambassador/#.UefLFqwav-u>

<sup>3</sup> Sekiguchi, T 2013, *Godzilla Loses Top Spot to Kittybot Doraemon*, The Wall Street Journal Asia, Hong Kong, accessed 18 July 2013, <http://blogs.wsj.com/japanrealtime/2013/03/26/godzilla-loses-top-spot-to-kittybot-doraemon/>

<sup>4</sup> Gomez, E 2008, *Japan's high-level, new diplomat is a cartoon cat*, San Francisco Chronicle, San Francisco, California, accessed 18 July 2013, <http://blog.sfgate.com/worldviews/2008/03/21/japans-high-level-new-diplomat-is-a-cartoon-cat/>

<sup>5</sup> AFP 2008, *Japan appoints Doraemon as new diplomat*, AFP, Paris, accessed 26 July 2013, <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5gHnijmT-Mg9aofF7g2LXNAu8v5Rw>

Besides from being famous for his role as an international diplomat, Doraemon is also a familiar sight in pop culture. His image has been used in products, services, events and for sponsorship both in Japan and overseas. “Doraemon has become a pop-culture phenomenon at home and abroad through animated-cartoon TV series, countless toys and trinkets, video games and movies. His licensed image has been used to promote all sorts of goods and services.<sup>6</sup>” After the disastrous 2011 earthquake in Japan, TV Asahi began a charity fund that would go towards relief that was endorsed by Doraemon himself. The fund raised over 600 million yen (~\$7.4 million USD) within a week with the money being donated to disaster sites such as the Miyagi and Fukushima Prefectures, as well as organisations such as the Japanese Red Cross Society.<sup>7</sup>

Doraemon has rightfully earned his place within the hierarchy of beneficial and successful characters with his charisma, morality and munificence. With worldwide recognition, a collation of achievements and accolades as well as an instilled morale upon a generation of people, the figure is expected to go further and beyond once again in his future feats.

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<sup>6</sup> Gomez, E 2008, *Japan's high-level, new diplomat is a cartoon cat*, San Francisco Chronicle, San Francisco, California, accessed 18 July 2013, <http://blog.sfgate.com/worldviews/2008/03/21/japans-high-level-new-diplomat-is-a-cartoon-cat/>

<sup>7</sup> Tokyo Hive 2011, *TV Asahi's "Doraemon Charity Fund" raises over 600 million yen for disaster relief*, 6Theory Media, Edgewater, New Jersey, accessed 18 July 2013 <http://www.tokyohive.com/article/2011/03/tv-asahis-doraemon-charity-fund-raises-over-600-million-yen-for-disaster-relief>

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