

For Review

579WORDS RTO **3-4** min /RA **5-6** min

The images of America and the West that appear in contemporary Japanese advertising startle many Westerners when they come across them for the first time. Their accidental encounter by an American tourist or businessperson on a visit to
5 Japan often evokes surprise, confusion, and misunderstanding. Such encounters were not the ones the makers of the advertisements had in mind when they constructed the images and ideas in them.

The extraordinary number of foreigners appearing in
10 contemporary advertising is one of the most distinctive features. First-time Western visitors to Japan notice this; even Westerners who have lived there a long time continue to talk about it. But the foreign models do not cause so much reaction from the Japanese, who are accustomed to it.

15 In the years immediately following World War II, Western models and images were held in awe as icons of abundance and success. In the seventies, advertisers began to replace unknown Western models with celebrities. The first of these was Charles Bronson, who advertised toiletries for men. He was followed in
20 successive years by a long list that includes Paul Newman, Audrey Hepburn, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone, Madonna and more recently, Mark McGwire. Advertisements featuring these celebrities are seldom seen outside Japan. It would indeed be an oversimplification of the current situation to say that the use
25 of these celebrities is an effort to further Westernize Japan. A more

correct interpretation would appear to be that in modern, cosmopolitan Japan these celebrities are internationally known figures who happen to be Western. Their use lends a more international quality to the advertisements in which they appear
30 and to the products which they support.

In contrast, the use of unknown Western models is somewhat more complex. There seems to be a view within Japan that Western clothes often look better on Western models and that products associated with origins abroad create an exotic
35 atmosphere by association with foreigners. It is no simple matter, and any effort to provide a single answer would not only be simplistic but probably wrong.

The association of Western models with action, freedom, and flexibility is also made in the signs and symbols contained in the
40 advertisement. The models might have been Japanese, but they are not. They simply help construct the contrast between Japan and the West, between order and flexibility, between studied behavior and spontaneous action.

This use of Westerners to present a condition to the
45 expectations and conventions of Japanese society is repeated and significant. It is emphasized in the wording of advertising as well as in the direct imports of Western popular culture — films, television, and music. It is also this freedom from the limitations of one's own customs and traditions that constitutes the appeal of
50 Europe and America as tourist destinations for the increasingly wealthy traveling public.

And so it is that when we encounter Japanese advertisements for the first time, we are likely to react to them in various and complex ways. Most of all, we cannot but find a difference between
55 how we are represented in these and what we think about ourselves. Although we recognize the aspects of our culture that are selected for use in the Japanese advertisements, the emphasis given to them is unusual. But like other stereotypes, these have bases in reality. It is their exaggeration we are likely to reject.
60 Therefore, as we react to such representations of America and the West, we must ask ourselves, “Is this not what we have done in our advertisements to peoples and cultures that are defined as ‘other’?”