

Abstract Trends project: Altehenger, Jennifer

Transplanting Wonderlands: Gatekeepers, Tastemakers, and Consumers in the Making of International Youth-Product Trends

On the example of three interlinked, international conglomerates – USA’s Disney Worldwide, Denmark’s Egmont, and China’s Children’s Fun Publishing – this project examines transcultural trends convergence as a result of international merchandising and brand-stretching practices. All of the above three firms are linked through complex licensing agreements. They have been and continue to be responsible for the proliferation of well-known, ubiquitous brands such as Donald Duck, Mickey Mouse, Barbie, Baby Einstein, W.i.t.c.h., Winnie the Pooh, Thomas the Tank Engine and NaZha. Each of these brands has experienced waves of popularity amongst young audiences in the US, Europe and China. Cumulatively, they represent a cross-section of highly merchandised brand products that successfully paved their way to becoming icons of international, global youth culture – i.e. trends. At the same time, however, each of these products has, in the process of their marketing, been localised to suit regional tastes; a process which should not be considered a side product, but rather a necessary intermediary step in the making of any trend. This project therefore investigates the fuzzy, yet profuse interaction of producers, gatekeepers, tastemakers, and audiences/consumers of the above brands. Ultimately, it seeks to refute Koichi Iwabuchi’s assumption that many international popular culture products are “culturally odourless”, instead suggesting that national product identities are manipulated and negotiated in the process of product placement and consumption.