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"Japan's Illustrated Storytelling": [1] A Thematic Analysis of Globalized Anime and Manga

By Anne COOPER-CHEN*

I acknowledge the help of my husband, Charles Chen, who sadly did not live to see publication of this article. I also thank Miiko Kodama and Hideo Takeichi.

Introduction

In the 1970s, Japan shifted its status from importer to exporter of information (Ito 1990; "Sekai ni..." 1994). More recently, animation (anime) accounted for 90% of all Japanese TV exports, according to the Internal Affairs and Communications Ministry (Suzuki 2009). Leading studios such as Toei earn up to 35% of their annual revenue from foreign markets. In the United States alone, for example, anime and related businesses (such as box-office revenue and licensing of character goods) generated $4 billion annually (Brown 2006).

In terms of manga, 200 million comic books in the Dragonball series, originally published in Japanese by Shueisha, have been sold worldwide. U.S. manga sales have grown at a rate unprecedented in the publishing industry-- 350% from $60 million in 2002 to $210 million in 2007; they began to decline only with the economic downturn that began in late 2008 (Brienza 2009).

A recent search entry ranking by Baidu, China's No.1 search engine, revealed that "Naruto" was searched more than15 million times. According to Koji Senda, director of the Anime Center in Tokyo's Akihabara area (personal communication, April 2009), the center annually attracts 34,000 foreign visitors. Anime clubs exist in every inhabited continent (Lu 2009).

Method

The study used multiple approaches to explore the cross-cultural adaptation and acceptance of Japanese animation. The author conducted interviews in 2008 and 2009 by travelling to Canada, China, Taiwan, France, Tunisia and Japan, where persons from other nations were interviewed at the Tokyo International Anime

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Fair, the Tokyo International Book Fair and other meetings and conferences. The interviewees included Japanese experts on cartoons, Japanese domestic creators of cartoons (artists, publishers and editors), Japanese marketers of the cartoons overseas, overseas merchants who sell Japanese cartoon products, overseas non-Japanese "processors" (both publishers and translators) of the cartoons for overseas audiences, non-Japanese experts on cartoons and overseas consumers of the cartoons.

Survey research was done in fall 2008-January 2009, through a printed questionnaire the author received from 119 freshmen though seniors at a prominent university in Beijing. The university attracted students from all over China, including many from minority groups. The questionnaire asked about current and past (childhood) consumption of anime and manga from Japan. Results were used to establish the mainstream popularity of specific anime in China

TV ratings data were used to establish the mainstream popularity of specific domestic anime in Japan. Offerings by the Cartoon Network were used to establish the mainstream popularity of specific anime in the United States. That network is the foremost mainstream TV venue that runs substantial anime; the fact that an anime runs at all testifies to the series' strong (albeit niche) popularity.

10 themes

The 10 themes below can elucidate the process whereby Japanese cartoon arts cross cultural boundaries. They were derived from extensive readings as well as the original research noted above.

I. Un-Disney **—** the global spread of cartoon arts testifies that an alternative, non U.S. popular culture can capture fans' imagination. As Goodale (2005:12-13) observed, "The [anime] art form has achieved what no other indigenous cultural expression has managed to do: become widespread enough to challenge America's stranglehold on entertainment."

Writing about Europeans' manga/ anime acceptance, Napier (2007: 170) states that fear exists in Europe of U.S. television **—** "fear of being Americanized… of American materialism and vulgarity washing over an authentic, aesthetically sophisticated cultural heritage." Today Europe stands out as unique for the saturation level of anime and "the impact of manga" per capita (Bouissou et al. 2009: 1). The U.S. bestselling manga in 2006, *Naruto* #9 (about 100,000 copies), averaged out to one copy per 3,000 people, whereas in France each new *Naruto* volume averaged 1.3 copies per only 640 people; even more astounding, single issue sales in Italy can average 1.5 copies per 580 people.

Those who, especially in the 1970s, adhered to cultural imperialism (e.g.,

Schiller 1971) assumed strong media effects and a Disney-fication of weaker countries' media — similar to McLuhan's (1964) earlier idea about a homogenized global village. Straubhaar (2007: 6) writes that rather than homogenization, the effect of cultural globalization is "neither a complete resistance to rejoice about nor a complete loss of identity to despair about, but a complex contradiction of both continuity and change."

Similar to Straubhaar's assessments, De Mooj (2001) refutes the truism that markets would grow ever more globalized and homogeneous — in other words, more Americanized. On the contrary, affluence permits cultural differences to come to the fore. This approach reflects Napier's (2007: 5) optimistic comment that the spread of Japan's cartoon arts shows us that "the world is not nearly as homogeneous as might have been feared."

II. Manga via anime — overseas fans usually encounter anime first — the reverse of the pattern in Japan. Japan's domestic cartoon pyramid rests on a crowded base of manga comic books, mostly having short lives, but a few of which rise to anime status. Fumio Osano, formerly an editor for Kodansha's *Sailor Moon* manga, said that *Sailor Moon's* author Naoko Takeuchi "was not thinking about TV" when the story began in the monthly comic *Nakayoshi*. Later "Toei noticed it and the TV series came out" (personal communication, July 2009, Tokyo).

The overseas pattern usually "begins with the broadcast of animated series from Japanese television. As the series gains popularity, the original comic work is translated and published in book form" (Ono 1996: 6). Hyoe Narita, executive vice-president of Viz Media, concurs: "there are many children who have seen an anime version of a manga, and this encourages them to read the manga serial in the magazine as well" (Chujo 2007:19). Without successes in anime, early attempts to move manga overseas limped along. Schodt (1996: 312) refers to the "real boost in anime fandom (*and by extension* manga fandom)" (italics added).

A U.S. fan from Ohio described her journey from anime to manga thus (Cooper-Chen 2010: 79-80):

> My siblings and I were sitting around flipping through channels, and we stopped at Cartoon Network… my brothers found "Dragonball Z" and "Tenchi Muyo," and I took a liking to "Gundam" and "Rurouni Kenshin." … After I'd seen everything Cartoon Network had to offer, I turned to manga. I'd always been a good reader, but it was actually my little sister (the one who hated reading) that got me hooked. She was babbling on and on about some deranged family in a book called *Marmalade Boy*, and she practically forced me to read it. So I read it… and the next one. I think I might have finished the series before she did, but actually it didn't matter because I was hooked.

An anime-to-manga process brought those book-format graphic novels to U.S. readers. "Sailor Moon" began in syndication in 1995; due to its initial failure, Stuart Levy, founder of Tokyopop, "had no trouble acquiring the rights to the Kodansha manga while the market for manga was still nascent" (Brienza 2009: 110). By 1998, the anime aired again "to enthusiastic response... Few could have predicted the phenomeon it eventually became" (Decker 1998: 6). The anime sparked interest in the manga. Today anime and manga reinforce each other both in Japan and overseas.

III. Technology as catalyst — without the Internet, fan groups could not have found each other, anime could not have circulated and fan interest would not have been piqued. Amateur subtitlers, called fansubbers or scanlators, connect with each other through BitTorrent, Usenet groups, or other channels. Physics student Sam Pinansky, the scanlator known as Quark Boy, started a fan-sub group at the University of California-Santa Barbara, in grad school. Having studied Japanese for a few years in college, he chose anime that had not been translated.

"I had every continent in my group; these groups from all around the world would only meet online," related Pinansky. "My cofounder was from Sweden. I've since met [only] two in my group" (personal communication, May 2009, Tokyo).

About 1996 in the United States "Internet fan subbing took off over UseNet. No more VHS tapes," said Pinansky. Starting about 1999, a Japan peer-to-peer network would capture Japanese TV shows, which, with BitTorrent, were easy to find; shows at that time took one hour to download per episode. Later, about 2004, speed subbing became the rage, wherein "the purpose is to be first. Quality was not an issue," related Pinansky. "Competition increased; subbing became an ego thing."

For manga, a fan would scan the pages into a computer and email them to a translator. Then, after a quick translation (usually into English), the work would go to a proofreader. Next, a "cleaner" would remove the Japanese and insert the translated words into the speech bubbles. Sometimes a quality controller would examine it before its release onto Web sites, where fans could download it for free.

In sum, the "Net allows publishing, archiving, copying and distribution on an unprecedented scale" (Macias 2006). The website www.manganews.net lists more than 500 scanlator groups, from one-person operations to multi-nation cooperatives.

IV. Gender differentiation — the clearly divided girls', boys', young men's and women's markets have found niches worldwide. Japan ranks the highest (95) of all countries on Hofstede's (2001) masculinity scale, indicating extreme gender role differentiation. The separation of gender roles affects manga and anime in myriad ways, from men's and women's habits as media consumers to the media's portrayal of women (Cooper-Chen, 2001).

This extreme differentiation makes for dramatic story lines in gender-bending tales when characters cross the wide gulf between the sexes. For example, the anime "Ranma ½," based on a manga by Rumiko Takahashi, features a boy who, because of a previous dip in a magic pool in China, turns into a girl when splashed with cold water. Since age and gender can affect choices of and responses to various forms of entertainment, Japan's manga and anime have a built-in advantage.

To explain the rise of manga in the United States and its implications for the globalization of culture, Brienza (2009: 101) argues that "manga migrated from the [mostly male] comics field to the [mostly female] book field and that the ways in which... target demographics differ between the two fields are directly responsible for the medium's newfound visibility." Books are bought by females — especially in the fiction genre, where women represent of 80% of the market. Another difference between the two relates to size, with the book field far outdistancing the comics field in every respect. Capitalizing on these differences, Viz Media (co-owned by the giant Japanese publishers Shueisha and Shogakukan) and Tokyopop make "an excellent case study in which to consider processes of globalization" (Brienza 2009: 104).

In 1998, the mall-based chain Waldenbooks started to distribute Tokyopop books. Once inside the mall, a second step in the march to manga's success occurred: pulling into the manga tent the young female audience. With Barnes & Noble and the Borders Group (including Waldenbooks) representing 43.3% of U.S. bookstore sales, manga's transition from the white male comics store was complete. The process occurred worldwide; this author has bought graphic-novel manga in France, Taiwan, Canada and North Africa in mainstream book shops and convenience stores.

V. Language gateways — English, French and Chinese are pathways by which the cartoon arts spread globally. Up through the early 1990s, translation into English acted as a gateway to the world, through both conventional and new-media channels. In the 1980s and 1990s, "lean years for imports of Japanese pop-culture products abroad," amateur subtitlers "helped to spread the gospel of anime in English-speaking countries" (Macias 2006). Satoru Fujii, editor-in-chief of Viz Media, told Schodt (1996: 318) that

> one of our most profitable areas right now is the sale of rights of our English translations to European publishers, who then work them into their own languages. We've licensed nearly all of our titles in Italy, and we've done very well in Spain and Sweden, and recently Germany. We've even sold rights to Indonesia and Brazil, and we've been approached by Turkey.

A non-U.S. student scanlator from Vienna, Austria, who calls himself "Caterpillar" (caterpillar.voiea.net), hosts "English translations of manga you probably won't (or wouldn't want to) find on the shelves of a chain bookstore anytime soon, such as the erotic and grotesque work of the notorious Suehiro Maruo" (Macias 2006). Caterpillar confines his work to manga that he wanted to read and that mainstream publishers would never translate into English.

"Some bilingual subbers translate back from English if they don't know Japanese," related fan subber Sam Pinansky. "Today the hot skill is Japanese-to-Italian. The Chinese have always been first, but the problem is bad translations when words are translated back into English, [with resulting] mistranslations. It's OK if the final checker goes over both" the original and English. Sometimes within hours after an anime series airs in Japan, fans in China can download an amateur-subbed version from the Internet (Chen & Teng 2006).

Once translated into French, cartoon creations gain a stamp of approval that furthers their acceptance in Europe and North Africa. Bouissou (2006: 149) calls France nothing less than "the most developed export market for manga," pointing out that in December 2005 alone, 16 publishers put out 91 new volumes. During 2001- 2005, offerings in France increased five-fold.

VI. Genre preference **—** fantasy/ magic themes, even if the story has clear Japanese roots, do better overseas than contemporary, domestic dramas. "Sazae-san," which started as a manga shortly after World War II, ranked as the most-watched TV cartoon (rating 19.6) in Japan for the year 2008 ("Anime bangumi…"2009: 9). Neither Camp and Davis (2007) nor Richmond (2009) in their overview books in English mention this series, which tells the story of a housewife and her family. Likewise, neither Camp and Davis (2007) nor Richmond (2009) mention Japan's second most popular 2009 cartoon (rating 15.9), "Chibi Maruko-chan," which started as a Shueisha manga in 1987; it reveals the daily life of an eight-year-old schoolgirl.

By contrast, the 276-episode fantasy "Dragon Ball Z," which debuted in 2000 in an after-school slot, became the U.S. Cartoon Network's top-rated program. After its initial run, it continued to do well in a Saturday night slot, often topping out as that night's highest-rated show. "Dragon Ball Z" opened the door for more anime. In the network's U.S. home base, viewers can still spend their late Saturday nights (actually early Sunday mornings) immersed in anime. As of December 2010, the offerings in the Adult Swim block began at midnight in half-hour segments as follows:

12:00 & 4:00 a.m. — "Bleach"
12:30 & 4:30 a.m. — "Kekkaishi"
1:00 & 1:30 a.m. — "Fullmetal Alchemist"

2:00 & 2:30 a.m. — "Cowboy Bebop"
3:00 & 3:30 a.m. — "Ghost in the Shell"
5:00 & 5:30 a.m. — "Inuyasha"

All these older-teen classics feature characters with supernatural powers and other-worldly beings, even if part of the action takes place in typical Japanese high schools (e.g., "Bleach," "Kekkaishi," "Inuyasha"). "Cowboy Bebop," the tale of a futuristic bounty hunter on the fantasy Bebop spaceship, began its first run on Adult Swim on September 2, 2001. "Ghost in the Shell," also futuristic science fiction, deals with computers and cyborg humans. A second Cartoon Network block occurs on weekday mornings aimed at children: "Bakugan" at 7:00 a.m. and "Pokemon" at 8:00 a.m., as of December 2010.

VII. China as #1 — Over the past 30 years Japanese anime and manga have taken hold in China. Millions of anime and manga consumers currently live in China, fueling a market worth RMB 100 billion each year (Yang, 2008), or $14.6 billion.

Japanese cartoons entered China in 1979, when "Astro Boy," one of Japan's most influential anime characters, was used as an image representative to promote Casio's calculator products. China Central Television (CCTV) began to air the black-and-white "Astro Boy" cartoon series, translated and dubbed in Chinese, in 1980. "Astro Boy" was followed by "Doraemon" and "Kimba the White Lion." Two years later, accompanying the broadcast of another Japanese cartoon series "Jungle Emperor" (Sen lin da di), a publishing house in Shanghai began to sell comic books related to the series, as well as "Astro Boy."

Today any medium-sized urban kiosk features four or five Chinese-language anime fan magazines. Chinese youngsters' love of Japanese anime has sparked a boom in various related venues, ranging from Internet anime fan sites to shops touting often-unauthorized anime products.

Likewise among young adults, a strong anime culture exists in China. For example, nearly every university and many high schools have anime clubs, said Dr. Wang Lei, assistant dean, animation school, Chinese University of Communication (personal communication, Beijing, January 2009). Given the wide popularity of foreign cartoons, especially Japanese anime, Chinese authorities have made a series of moves in an effort to protect China's own animation industry.

Since the government prohibits current Japanese anime such as "Death Note" from TV airing, fans must actively seek them out on DVDs, pirated TV shows and peer-to-peer sites. Apparently among young Chinese, resentment over historical issues between China and Japan does not deter students from consuming these cartoon products. According to Iwabuchi (2002: 1), "Something unexpected has happened. Japan is beloved in Asia!"

VIII. Regional diversity — preference patterns in Asia, the biggest market for "Japan's illustrated storytelling" (Jenkins 2006: T27), differ from those in the West. In 2005 Asia other than Japan accounted for 42% of the manga market; the United States, 36%; and the rest of the world, 22%. Theme VI above described the current U.S. popular anime, based on Cartoon Network offerings.

Having no presence on the U.S. Cartoon Network, the blue cat Doraemon underscores Iwabuchi's (2002: 340) perception of a difference in Asian versus Western acceptance of Japan's popular culture. The manga-turned-anime blue robot is not so "well known to Western anime fans, although he's as popular across Asia as he is in Japan," confirms Richmond (2009: 17).

In fact, to capitalize on the ubiquitous cat's super-star status, the Japanese government in 2008 named him as the nation's official anime ambassador. This author corroborated the cat's omnipresence during a 2009 visit to Taiwan, spying Doraemon posters and soft toys everywhere. The Doraemon bar-thread on the Chinese search engine Baidu contains numerous original articles (Ge 2009).

Just about any child in Asia can draw the likeness of the robot cat, who solves problems with a wondrous array of "high-tech devices from the future" (Shiraishi 1995: 4). Children in Asia "respond well to cartoons' themes of children's empowerment" and the promise of technology; in developing Asian economies, kids "are generally better educated than their parents, and they are expected to lead in the national march into the future" (Shiraishi 1995: 52).

Tamino "Tammy" Kusama, supervisor, International Licensing Group, Global Licensing Department, Media Content Division, ADK agency, confirmed Doraemon's top licensing markets as Asian; "Doraemon" TV rights, she said, are also most prominent in Asian nations: Thailand, Taiwan, Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia (personal communication, March 2009, Tokyo).

A recent study by this author (Cooper-Chen 2009) focused on Chinese college students' active consumption of manga and anime. The study found that "Doraemon" and "Sailor Moon" ranked as the students' top two favorite anime in childhood — that is, in the early 1990s. "Young Monk Ikkyu" "Detective Conan" and "Slam Dunk" rounded out the top five anime. The same early 1990s childhood favorites appeared for manga, except that "Dragonball" replaced "Young Monk Ikkyu." Students' current (young adult) anime favorite turned out to be far and away "Detective Conan." Other than "Dragonball" and "Sailor Moon," these four cartoon stories would not rank as top favorites among Western consumers; in fact, none of the four appears on the Camp and Davis (2007) list of 100 "must see" anime.

IX. Domestic intent — in the well-entrenched home market, most creations are never intended for and in fact do not travel overseas. According to Ono (1997: 7), the cartoon arts won fans overseas, even though "Japanese cartoonists... never

gave a thought to overseas readers." Kawakatsu (2006: 14) concurs, stating that "publishers target only local readers and have no intention of altering the traditional right-to-left formatting."

When Koyama-Richard (2007) interviewed in Japanese a number of mangaka (manga artists) for her encyclopedic tome *One Thousand Years of Manga*, some mentioned the audience they held in their mind's eye. For example, Taniguchi Jiro, author of *Botchan*, did not intentionally court fans overseas; speaking of his admiration in the West – especially in France and Italy – he commented, "I myself am at once astonished and delighted by it" (Koyama-Richard, 2007: 211). Isao Takata, who established Studio Ghibli with Hayao Miyazaki, told Koyama-Richard (2007: 233) that the Western enthusiasm for manga and anime "amazes me… obviously I'm delighted, but I would like to make clear that we never sought to produce works for a foreign public… We create the films we want to and are happy to see that people like them."

This author's interviews with artists and experts in Japan in 2009 corroborate their domestic orientation. Koji Senda, director of the Anime Center in Tokyo's Akihabara district, stated, "The producer thinks of an international audience, perhaps. Producers sometimes request certain emphases, which could include an export style. Artists, though, have special emphases (kouji) and styles; some may fit international tastes, but they don't set out to create a 'foreign' product" (personal communication, April 2009, Tokyo).

Fumio Osano, formerly an editor for the *Sailor Moon* manga, said of author Naoko Takeuchi that "her thinking was 'Japan only' " (personal communication, July 2009,Tokyo). At the Kyoto Manga Museum (opened in 2006 in a renovated primary school), Reika Takahashi, who sends her work from Kyoto to Tokyo for publication in *Margaret*, said she had that girls' (shoujo) periodical in mind and nothing more when making her art. Likewise, Eiyu Kojima, who draws for boys' (shounen) manga, worked with editors who have a purely domestic orientation (personal communications, June 2009, Kyoto).

We should not, however, confuse the "odorless" (Iwabuchi 2002) world of Pokemon with the Caucasian-looking characters that Lu (2008) discusses. We should remember that most non-Japanese (Caucasian-looking) characters do not spring from a conscious effort to market an anime overseas. Since most anime up to the present have had a domestic target, those domestic audiences exhibit a drive toward duality—consuming both domestic (e.g., "Sazae-san") and exotic storylines. European settings and characters, especially from times past (e.g.,"Fullmetal Alchemist," set in Europe in 1910; "Heidi," set in 19th century Switzwerland; and "Marie Antoinette," set in 18th century France), have proved commercially popular. The Japanese, isolated on their archipelago, often desire to travel abroad, if only vicariously through the media.

Many Caucasian-looking characters, such as those in the *Weekly Young Jump*

manga stories “Pure” and “H-Girls Can’t Help Falling in Love” (Cooper-Chen 2001), never have an incarnation as anime, much less as exported anime. Artists draw those big-eyed blondes solely for a domestic, manga-reading audience.

X. Universal and exotic — global fans embrace products of a culture outside their own, yet feel engaged by themes such as perseverance and friendship. Even though audiences prefer proximate content (Straubhaar 2007), the “powerful appeal of exotic, nonlocal programming” (Elasmar 2003: 80) can help explain the success of anime/manga outside Japan. Straubhaar (2007) posits that people prefer local, provincial or national content *first*, given that its production values meet at least a minimum standard; regional content *second*; and “alien” content *third*, which has the appeal of encompassing new ideas – in other words, for want of a better term, the exotic.

The exotic cultural specifics are seated within universal themes — bravery, friendship, striving towards goals, fighting the good fight. Lu (2008: 175) refers to anime’s “universal topics of love, friendship, death, and personal growth that have been sanctioned by most cultures.” The specifics can range from samurai and ninja depictions, with historically accurate costumes and architecture, to a contemporary Japanese high school milieu, with sailor uniforms for girls, mandarin-collar jackets for boys and courtyard-central architecture.

The right mix (which can vary greatly) of this duality can lead to overseas success. “Sazae-san,” a domestic comedy, has such a high a dose of specifics that marketers have not even tried to export it, despite its #1 rating in Japan; “Sailor Moon,” “Inuyasha” and “Death Note” had a mix that worked. “Pokemon” and “Speed Racer” sit at the other end of the cultural spectrum, with erased or non-existent specifics, which can lead to success on the same playing field as any domestic product.

Future research

Is scanlation digital-age piracy? This question could be more substantively explored. Macias (2006) quotes one scanlator as saying, “There’s no denying that scanlations are illegal no matter how groups might spin it. But I wouldn’t consider it like the advent of the MP3 format, where sharing music damaged the music industry. I legitimately believe that scanlating manga encourages domestic publishers to license manga.”

If the wave of overseas fandom rolls on, as witness the recent surge in Hungary and Poland, it may yet encompass South America, Africa and the Arabic-speaking world. Future research could explore how success overseas, especially in new markets, will affect the creative process at its Japanese origin. More extensive

surveys with larger samples and specific viewing data for varied nations could add to the preliminary research base of this study.

NOTES

1 Jenkins (2006: T27). This term fits the two topics of this study better than "comic book" and "animation," but the common terms will be used in this article for convenience.

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These manga-inspired drawings were created by a fan in North Africa, attesting to the wide popularity of Japan's cartoon arts.