



## JAPANESE ANIMATION: THAILAND'S PERSPECTIVE

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This paper referenced the ongoing popularity of Japanese animation and provided some insights and benefits for animators, entrepreneurs and government organizations based on historical and cultural perspectives as well as their impact on Thai culture and society. This study examined and identified the factors affecting the popularity of Japanese animation by tracing the historical development from the late 1960s until the present. Through analyzing characteristics of Japanese animation, data was collected from related research, articles, websites and interviews of some Thai fans ranging from young children to adults. The global success of Japanese animation includes diverse art styles, methods of animation and its production and processes such as character design, comic books, story-telling and 2D techniques. More key factors adding to the success of Japanese animation include marketability, moral messages or knowledge latency, cultural proximity, partnership and government support.

**Keywords:** Anime, Characters, Japanese Animation, Manga.

### Introduction

The size of the global animation industry was about USD 222 billion in 2013, where major animation markets were the United States, Canada, Japan, China, France, Britain, Korea and Germany growing around 7% year on year. The animation production market is increasingly being outsourced by North American and European film and television program producers.

Animation history in Asia embarked upon its journey in the 1940s which was remarkably influenced by Western studios, Disney in particular. Exposure to foreign production, training abroad, and foreign assistance were pivotal factors for such countries as China, Japan, Korea, and India. Since the 1960s, production in Asia was attractive for foreign investors due to low cost labor, Western studios started establishing and maintaining production facilities outside their own territories, first in Japan, then in South Korea and Taiwan, later in the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, Thailand, India, Indonesia and China. At present about 90% of all American television animation is produced in Asia but pre-production and post production is produced by the American project head office. As a result, this has led to the emerging and nurturing of a local industry, such as local animation content, infrastructure, tools and equipment, skill transfers and even intellectual property attentions.

Most American animation titles predominantly influenced Asian countries including Mickey Mouse, Flintstones, Scooby-Doo, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Looney Tunes, Tom and Jerry, Popeye, Garfield, Peanuts, the Adventures of Tintin and Marvel Comics. The mature Asian animation production includes Japan, South Korea, the Philippines and Taiwan, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam and India due to labor-intensive and labor costs. In many of these countries, pioneer animators such as Payut Ngaokrachang of Thailand (influenced by American cartoonist Max Fleischers), Osamu Tezuka of Japan, James Wang of Taiwan, and Shin Dong Hun of Korea were known as the Walt Disney of Asia.

Japanese animation (anime in Japanese language) has become globally recognized especially in Asian nations like Taiwan, Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines and India. Anime enjoys a tremendous popularity in Asia where it has become a mainstream youth culture due to cultural and geographical proximity. In Singapore, television animated series are much more influential than animated films. Television continues to be the most important agent for popularizing Japanese animation. So far more than 150 Japanese television animated series have been screened. Pokemon has created a global craze and is extremely popular among small children in Singapore. In the 1990s, Japanese animation grew prominently in China including Doraemon, Chibimaruko-chan, Dr. Slump & Arale-chan, Sailormoon, Slam Dunk, Detective Conan, Saint Seiya, Dragonball, Crayon Shinchan, and Pocket Monster. As such, the Chinese government started to promote home-grown animation instead of imported cartoons.

Japanese animation titles have been translated in many different languages including Portuguese, Korean, Mandarin, Hokkien, Cantonese, French, German, Spanish, Italian and Thai. Surprisingly American and European young people, especially from France, Germany and Italy have become Japanese animation and manga lovers. France represents about 50% of the European manga market and one-third of the comics has been published in the country while 70% of the comics were sold in Germany. One example of a manga publisher in the United States, VIZ Media, is an affiliation of the Japanese publishers Shogakukan and Shueisha has published many popular titles such as Dragon Ball, One Piece, Detective Conan, Neon Genesis Evangelion, Rurouni Kenshin, Naruto, Yu-Gi-Oh!, Fullmetal Alchemist Bleach and the various works of Rumiko Takahashi.

In this regard, Japanese animation has paved the way for many countries to produce more work and skilled animators as well as inspire people. Associations of Japanese cartoon lovers are emerging in many countries like Thailand, Singapore, China and even India. Japanese animation has had a profound effect on the rest of the world.

## **Literature Review**

### **Historical Background of Japanese Animation**

Animation dates back to the birth of Japan's own film industry in the early 1900s and has emerged as one of Japan's major cultural forces over the past century. Much of the work done in these early years was not the same animation techniques that would come to be the dominant production technique today, but a host of other methods: chalkboard drawings, painting directly on the film, paper cut-outs and so on. In the past Japanese animators were influenced by the West, producing serial newspaper comics, comic strips and motion pictures. These evolved into full length manga (manga are basically Japanese comic books). The art in manga is unique and very recognizable. Manga usually incorporates black and white, like other types of comics, and characters with big bright eyes. Japan began producing animation in 1917—still the age of silent films—based on animated shorts from France and the United States. Japan's first world-wide success was Kitayama Seitaro's short film Momotaro (1918).

### **Prewar to post-war**

Prewar animation depended considerably on sponsorship as animators often concentrated on making public relation (PR) films for companies, educational films for the government and eventually propaganda for the military. In the 1930s, the Japanese government began enforcing cultural nationalism leading to censorship and control of the public media. Several Japanese animators were forced to produce animations full of Japanese spirit and national affiliation. Therefore most animated films were commissioned by the military instead of public institutions. Momotarō Umi no shinpei (Momotarō's

Divine Sea Warriors, B&W, 74 minutes), produced by the navy, came out just before the end of the war as a propagandistic film designed to lift morale and commitment to the war effort.

Prewar animators faced several difficulties due to foreign producers such as Disney. Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs appeared in 1937 inspiring the dreams of a young man who altered the direction of Japanese graphic story-telling forever, Osamu Tezuka. Animators such as Kenzo Masako and Mitsuyo Seo, however, did attempt to bring Japanese animation up to the level of foreign work by introducing cel animation (a traditional form of animation used in the production of cartoons or animated movies where each frame of the scene is drawn by hand).

Osamu Tezuka—the God of Manga—became a Japanese cartoonist after World War II, *New Treasure Island* appeared in 1947. For manga and anime fans Tezuka's most obvious contribution came in the design of his characters because his characters were energetic, emotional and highly influenced by Disney. Tezuka's animal and human characters featured round heads with big and expressive eyes. Although these features appeared simple and cartoonish, they actually allowed the characters to express a wide range of emotions from romantic interest to hatred. Manga-style characters simplified facial features and have Frisbee-sized eyeballs such as Sailor Moon, Speed Racer, and even Ash Ketchum.

It was not until after WWII in 1948, the first modern Japanese animation production company, Toei, was established. Toei produced the first color animation feature film. Toei's style was also characterized by the ideas of animators in production. One sample was the ninja-and-sorcery mini-epic *Shōnen Sarutobi Sasuke* (1959), the first anime to be released theatrically in the United States (by MGM in 1961). What really pushed animation to the fore in Japan were adaptations of popular manga: Ditto Shotaro Ishinomori's hugely-influential *Cyborg 009*, which was adapted into another major Toei animated franchise. The animated features by Toei, like Walt Disney Studios, later released *The Tale of the White Serpent, the Mischievous Prince Slays the Giant Serpent* (1963), *the Adventure of Horus, Prince of the Sun* (1966), and *Puss in Boots* (1967). Japan's first major animated export to the U.S. was *Tetsuwan Atoms*, commonly known as *Astro Boy*, by Isao Takahata and Hayao Miyazaki adapted from Osamu Tezuka's manga about a robot boy with super-powers. It aired on NBC and appeared in color. This was the first Japanese cartoon with an American co-producer. As new and exciting as Japanese animated television series seemed in the 1960's, most series were created strictly for children.

### **Diversification between 1970-80**

This all changed as a new and more sophisticated approach began to emerge in televised anime. Some of the most ambitious productions from this period were not always financially successful. Gainax's own *Royal Space Force: Wings of Honnêamise* and Katuhiro Otomo's *AKIRA* did poorly in theaters, but another major innovation that came along during the eighties made it possible for those films to find new audience long after home: video release. Studio Ghibli was firmly placed at the top of the Japanese film industry. Among the most important genres that arose during this time included *mecha*, anime dealing with giant robots or vehicles, and *Tetsujin 28-go*. This science fiction sub-genre got a significant reinterpretation when *Mobile Suit Gundam* premiered in 1979 and quickly became a nation-wide obsession when the series was re-run and later compiled into three theatrical films. The success of the theatrical versions of *Yamato* and *Gundam* could be considered as the golden age of anime. *Mazinger Z* showed up in many Spanish-speaking countries like the Philippines and Arabic-speaking nations. The earlier series *Heidi, Girl of the Alps* found great popularity across Europe, Latin America, and even Turkey. While the animation genre shifted from superhero giant robots to elaborate space operas. As such Otaku (obsession) of Japanese anime began to appear toward the end of the 1970s.

As the 1980s began, the home video market exploded onto the scene. Japanese fans could actually buy copies of their favorite animated TV shows and movies. Sports anime with an anime adaptation such as Yoichi Takahashi's soccer manga *Captain Tsubasa*, *Slam Dunk*, *Prince of Tennis* and *Eyeshield 21*. Production companies even started to bypass the traditional entertainment media and release original animated features straight to video. Akira Toriyama's comedy series *Dr. Slump* became an instant hit.

An adaptation of fantasy series, *Dragon Ball*, became Japan's most popular animated TV show. The success of *Dragon Ball* (1984) introduced the martial arts genre and became incredibly influential in the Japanese animation industry. *Dragon Ball Z* and *Sailor Moon* were dubbed into more than a dozen languages worldwide. The two films helped introduce the "new anime" to a larger audience while showcasing the talents of emerging artists like Otomo, Rin Taro, Yoshiaki Kawajiri, Atsuko Fukushima, Hiroyuki Kitazume, Mao Lamdo, Hidetoshi Omari, Kaji Morimoto, Yasomi Umetsu, Hiroyuki Kitakubo and Takashi Nakamura. Equally as influential was the work of artist Masamune Shirow. The anime film *Akira* was a huge international hit and ushered in an entirely new style of anime that was not strictly action or comedy oriented. Anime was not only for kids but also adults. The 1990s saw popular video game series and international audiences enjoying a growing influx of popular anime.

### 2000-Present

An art movement started by Takashi Murakami that combined Japanese pop culture with post-modern art was called superflat. Superflat refers to various flattened forms in Japanese graphic art, animation, pop culture and even fine art. The Evangelion era refers to Evangelion or Eva, a Japanese science-fantasy mecha dystopian genre for animated series. It continued into the 2000s with works such as *RahXephon* (2002) and *Zegapain* (2006). The real robot genre which had declined during the 1990s was revived in 2002 with the success of shows such as *Mobile Suit Gundam SEED* (2002), *Eureka Seven* (2005) and *Macross Frontier* (2008). The 2000s has also been characterized by the increase of moe-style art, bishojo and bishonen character design. Also the new popularity of genres such as romance, harem and slice-of-life story had begun.

Many shows are being adapted from manga and light novels as well popular titles such as *Fullmetal Alchemist* (2005), *Rozen Maiden* (2005), *Aria the Animation* (2005), *Death Note* (2006), *Luck Star* (2007) and *Toradora and Bakemonogatari* (2009), but original anime titles are still being created and successful. Since 2010, more anime has been produced with new techniques such as 2D Hydrise and 3D animation.

Anime's success can be credited to the unswerving dedication of many Japanese artists dedicated to fully exploiting the possibilities of animation as a creative medium. These gifted artists understood that they could do more with moving pictures than just entertaining children. They could explore the boundaries of space and examine the complexities of the human condition. It's this willingness to experiment that has made anime so dynamic and appealing. It's this willingness to experiment that has made anime so dynamic and appealing. This same quality promises to keep anime a vital artistic option for filmmakers in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

### Past to Present of Japanese Animation in Thailand

In 1965 Japanese animation came to Thailand with *Ninja Fujimaru* followed by *Tiger Mask and Astro Boy*. It was broadcast through Channel 4, Bang Khoo Phromma, presently Channel 9. However in early days before 1992 almost all available manga comic books were unlicensed, poor quality or bootlegs. Several publications were hand copied such as Vibulkij, SiamSport Publishing, Mitmaitri, Yodhidha, Samdao and others. Each offered its own strengths and weekly publications. Animation genres including action and sweet-eyed girls were found during this period. Best seller manga was *Dragon Ball*, *Saint Seiya* and *Doraemon* but *Dragon Ball* made publishers compete one another fiercely.

Due to copyright laws this has changed and copyrights protect nearly all published manga. Thailand's well-known manga publishers include Nation Edutainment, Siam Inter Comics, Vibulkij, and Bongkoch. In 1971 many Japanese comic books were exported to Thailand and sales grew tremendously. It can be said that the 70s marked the golden age of comics which were mostly in the action and sweet-eyed-girl genre. Many Thai publishers competitively published Japanese comic books and later created new ways of marketing by collecting versions of animation titles in a single book to draw buyers with a better quality. More than 1,000 comic books titles have been published since then.

The most famous comic book was Doraemon, which inspired an entire generation of Thai youngsters, followed by the Curse Pharaoh, Rose of Versailles's, Ninja Hatori, Puerto Rico Little Ghost, Q Taro, Kin Niku Man, Saint Seiya, Gundam, Macross, and Dragon Ball. Early Japanese cartoons screened contained humanistic themes, moral messages and educational values. Most of these were classics made in the late 60s and early 70s, such as Heifi's Song (1973) and Candy Candy (1975). Later Channel 5, Channel 3, and TITV started broadcasting regularly on Saturday and Sunday morning and major holidays. They played works such as Shin Chan, Hsien Hikaru Ichigo, Yu-Gi-Oh Yu-Gi, the Log of Man, One Piece, and the King of Tennis.

Thai people, especially youngsters, know Japanese cartoons through comics books, television and video games. In the late 70s and early 80s, television showed on to four Japanese animated series a year. At this time most Japanese cartoons were screened on prime time between 7-8 pm. on week days and 7:30-10:30 am on weekends. The majority of the series belonged to the girl and animal genre such as *Dr. Slump*, and *Doraemon*. However cartoons based on Western stories continued to be popular as well, including two works by Tetsuka Osamu: *Treasure Island* and *the Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.

During the 80s Thai audiences also were exposed to sci-fi, the most creative and internationalized genre of Japanese animation. Sci-fi series were the first to create a commotion among young males in Thailand. It was popular among primary and secondary school students. Sci-fi made the number of male viewers increase tremendously.

From the 90s to the present, Japanese television cartoons have become increasingly popular among children and teenagers in Thailand. Each channel selects its own titles for being screened and diversified. Japanese cartoons are screened daily on free TV, channels 3, 5, 7, 9 and TPBS. *Doraemon* was introduced and became a tremendous success for Japanese cartoons in Thailand. That has made Thai people understand more of Japanese culture and Japanese society.

At present all Japanese cartoons are still popular among Thai kids and broadcast through free TV, satellite and cable TV. They have many more titles to watch. The top ten Japanese cartoons of 2013 in Thailand include: *One Piece*, *Naruto*, *Attack on Titan*, *Bleach*, *Magi the Labyrinth of Magic*, *Toriko*, *Sword Art Online*, *Kuroko No Basket* and *Madaka Box*, respectively. Televised animated series have had much success while animated films have not. Western animation is aggressively marketed for sale to theaters and very few Japanese animated films are shown in the cinemas like in the past.

## Discussion

Factors influencing the global hit of Japanese animation can be discussed and highlighted based on an analysis of related articles, research work, websites and interviews.

## Marketability

### Target group

Anime is often classified by its target demographic: *kodomo* (children), *shojo* (girls), *shonen* for boys and *senin* for adults. Japanese animation is geared to meet the needs of different age groups ranging from the youngest to the eldest to serve market needs. Market survey is very essential ranging in age from 0-over to 50, broken into 0-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-9, 10-12, 13-14, 16-19, 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, and over 50 for both male and females categories. For example, 0-2 year-old children of both sexes like *Ampan Man*, while 3-4 year-old male and females like different characters. No wonder the Japanese anime is honored as one of the most complete, comprehensive and competitive industries in the world.

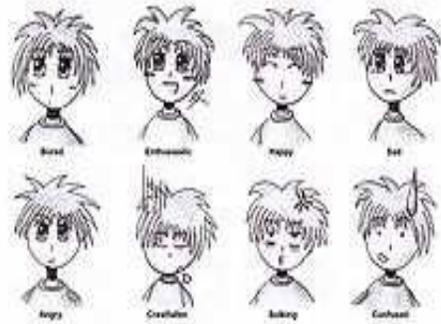
### Popular Comic books (manga)

Japanese animated productions have mostly chosen popular comic books to ensure popularity for broadcasted programs. Manga and anime have a close relationship since Japanese anime is highly influenced by Manga. Over half of anime productions are based on manga, the rest on light novels and other sources. Interestingly, in Japan two out of three books published are comics, and manga has been the main source of ideas for anime and a huge influence on the animation business in merchandising helping to sustain its popularity. Merchandise is another impact of Japanese animation on Thai society. Doraemon being the most popular.

### Character Design and Genre

Characters in Japanese animated stories are unique because of the difference in their features. The characters in these stories will have eyes larger than normal. The big eyes of Japanese characters communicate strongly to the viewer. This design is rarely seen in the work of other nations. However body proportions of human anime characters tend to accurately reflect the proportions of the human body in reality.

Most Japanese characters are cute animals and humans with big eyes, but not all Japanese anime have this, especially the works of Hayao Miyazaki. Little girls always have sweet eyes representative of a Japanese cartoon character. Characters in Japanese anime are shaped with sensuality. Each and every detail in every frame has been developed discreetly. Dub actors are another essential part as they breath vitality into the characters and create realism. Background music is recognized easily because most anime scores are composed of J-pop or J-rock songs, often by famous bands, which particularly important scenes.



Anime and manga artists often draw from a defined set of facial expressions to depict particular emotions. They also draw from a common canon of iconic facial expressions to express typical moods and thoughts. The style itself uses many angles and flowing attenuated lines. Features such as eyelashes, hair and clothing are created in more fine details. The color often uses more variants and shading with greater attention paid to non-outlined highlights and shadows to add more depth.

Unlike American animated characters, Japanese characters are not only superheroes who power through situations, they also go through many hardships and trials to grow and develop emotional attachments through protagonist activities. Japanese popular characters in Thailand include Doraemon, Hello Kitty and Pokemon. All genres represent comedy, family drama, school life, superheroes, fantasy, war, period dramas, ninjas, action, sci-fi, robots, sports, female protagonists, love, crime, sex and more.

### **Story-telling and Knowledge Latency**

Japanese animation producers are very good at writing stories from beginning to the end which capture the attention of Thai kids. After school Thai kids watch Japanese cartoons first before doing their homework. Most Japanese stories convey moral messages and knowledge latency which is considered good for young children to create positive attitudes. The stories in Japanese cartoons have influenced young kids tremendously from many different genres: action, sport, fantasy, sci-fi or even magic.

### **TV systems and programming slots**

Air time for Japanese animation on free TV, cable TV, and satellite TV is increasing gradually. Free TV includes channels 3, 5, 7, 9 and TPBS. Since 2010, several new types of television channels have emerged. For example, Satellite TV includes channel 6 and 39 by S. Boomerang, 40 Cartoon Club, 59 Gang Cartoon, 101 Kid Zone, 221 and 234 Daily News. Each cartoon program runs 30 minutes and some channels run 24 hours a day. Weak programming slots to some extent have had a negative impact on the popularity of Japanese cartoons.

Cable television became available in Thailand more than ten years ago and subscribers have increased dramatically. TRUE Cable TV has the most Bangkok household subscribers helping popularize Japanese animation. Some titles of anime such as Doraemon produce more episodes to satisfy the demand. Up until now Japanese animation has been mainly broadcast in Thailand on prime time especially on Saturday and Sunday morning.

### **Censorship issues**

Censorship issues made for quality content in comic books and entertainment for readers. Some Thai readers have collected good quality comic books like maniacs. The first licensed comic book in Thailand was in 1969 and written by Tezuka, the father of Japanese anime.

### **The Success of a Series in Other Nations**

Sometimes based on their popularity in other nations, Japanese cartoons will be the top choice of subscribers for airing in Thailand. Some such programs are Astroboy, Dragon Ball and Pokemon.

### **Cultural Proximity**

Culture has impact upon the popularity of anime in Thailand because of the proximity of Asian culture, especially religion. The inner strength of Japanese anime presents its real charm by drawing materials from diverse cultures to impress viewers create understanding in movies that feature culture such as Thai boxing and Thai food which appeared in *Street Fighter*, *20<sup>th</sup> Century*, *Maruko Jang*, and *3x3 Eye*. Anime's marked popularity for Thai fans since 1990s is referenced in so-called "OTAKU" (big fans of anime and manga) in the form of cosplays, comic books, anime and music videos.

### **Industry and Partnership**

The animation industry consists of over 430 production companies with some major studios namely Toei Animation, Gainax, Madhouse, Gonzo, Sunrise, Bones and Studio Ghibli. Many studios are merged into trade associations, including the Association of Japanese Animations and the Japanese Animation Creators Association. The Japanese way of production is to work in project committees from the related agencies which range from scriptwriter, TV channel, video, music publishers and to the production team. As a result, animation production has no problem about marketing and budgets. Almost all Japanese movies and animation are created using the production committee formula by sharing investment, funds, operations and risks.

### **Technology**

Technology makes Japanese animation popular, especially since viewers can watch at home through video and internet. In the 90s, video tape and laser discs helped popularize Japanese cartoons and were able to be rented at affordable prices. Adult anime is gaining popularity through the internet.

### **Low Cost**

Japanese anime is produced at lower cost compared to the West because they target specifically to sell internationally. Over 160 new TV animated programs are created each year and there are 40-50 feature films. Their competitiveness, as such, comes from entertainment value, low cost and high productivity.

### **Organization and Government Support**

From past to present, the Japanese government has strongly supported animation production for a military use and education in order to make people love their own nation and for students to understand lessons easily. Currently COOL JAPAN campaigns, the concept of Cool Japan along with that of "Gross National Cool," was coined in 2002 as an expression of Japan's emergent status as a cultural superpower. It has been described as a form of soft power, as the ability to indirectly influence behavior or interests through cultural means. Trade bodies also seek to exploit the commercial capital of the country's culture industry. The Creative Industries Promotion Office is there to promote cultural and creative industries as a strategic sector "under the single, long term concept of 'Cool Japan'," to coordinate different government functions and to cooperate with the private sector.

The Society for the Promotion of Japanese Animation (SPJA) is a non-profit organization dedicated to popularizing the unique and deep culture that surrounds Japanese animation. Their objective is to bring together fans, industry and all other stakeholders to share, celebrate, promote, and educate with Japanese anime.

### **Conclusion**

The success of Japanese animation has arisen from several key factors namely national history, character design, cultural proximity, scriptwriters, partnerships, best-seller manga, and market surveys ranging from very small to adult aged groups. These cannot be easily found in other countries. Not all Japanese animated movies are successful but the creativity of animators has made Japanese animation thrive. The Japanese government has also proclaimed Japanese animation as one of its national agendas, continuously. In the past Japan produced only for their own domestic market but now, as the Japanese market shrinks, they look for more international viewers. The fast adaptation of companies, animators and

government plus their long vision, has made other countries have a difficult time competing in the global market.

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