

# Japanese animation and its globalization



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Japanese anime traces its roots to the early 1900s but not many of the early works have survived for varied reasons. One of the reasons that led to the loss of these works was the sale of reels to smaller cinemas once the clips had run. These were then disassembled and sold as single frames, but even with the loss of the early anime works, Japanese anime made major popularity growth in the 1970s when filmmakers in Japan experimented with animation techniques used in the western world (West (2008)).

The reason for this success was that in as much as the filmmakers explored the western techniques, they totally distanced themselves with the western roots and instead developed different genres among the ‘ mecha’. With this, anime went main stream in Japan in the 80s and what followed was an explosion in production. ‘ Real Robot, Space Opera, Macross and Gundam’ were among some of 80s most successful anime. Today, as other sectors in the Japanese economy are struggling, revenue from anime related products has risen to over \$100 billion, up from a tenth of this figure ten years ago (Brienza 2009). Anime is undoubtedly a savior to the Japanese culture. It is of a lot of interest to be able to understand how what was initially targeted at Japanese children has today become such a global sensation. This is what we seek to find out.

## **Growth and Globalization of Japanese Animation**

Growth of anime amidst issues of language barrier and distinct world cultures is one thing that has never ceased to amaze anime lovers and critics alike. The world is today a global village and anime has been embraced in all the corners of the globe, with fans linking and discussing new and old

productions in blogs and fan sites (Leonard, 2004). One of the things that fueled growth of anime to the corners of the world was fan distribution.

## **Fan Distribution**

Anime was distributed among fans in the 70s through to the 90s via various non conventional methods. Fans made copies which were circulated to other fans and this created anime fan networks especially in America which imported and distributed videos to a large number of underground enthusiasts (Leonard, 2004). All this happened during the pre internet age and with the growth of fan networks, so did many players within those circles make fortunes. Knowledge and love for Japanese animation spread via these underground networks and in the process widespread commercial exploitation of anime was witnessed.

## **Popularity of Anime in the American market**

It should be very well understood that the American cultural Imperialism was not a factor in pulling anime and other Japanese products to America and instead people voluntarily accepted anime for reasons that some experts say were because they provided an alternative to Hollywood (Davis, 2008).

As technology improved, so did the fan networks make use of the available technologies to spread the anime message and more enthusiasts came on board. Language barrier was overcome when the fans added sub titles to the videos and as a matter of fact, fan subtitles is an exclusive feature of anime. The subtitles were facilitated at the end of the 80s in America following a wide availability of computers that were mainly Commodore Amiga and Macintosh brands (Auzenne, 1994).

The availability of generator locking device, a hardware that enabled television sets to accept two simultaneous signals of video signal and computer output made it possible to have subtitles that were recorded on cassettes and distributed to the large network of fans. With sub titles, fans could not only appreciate the graphics but also understand the content of anime and how they depicted the various aspects of the Japanese culture. One of the most successful anime was ‘Astra Boy’, a production that realized huge commercial success and is still loved today. (Auzenne, 1994).

When Walt Disney released ‘Spirited Away’ directed by Hayao Miyazaki which did very well both in America and Japan at some point out selling Titanic in Japan, the film industry took notice and currently, American film companies making investments in this segment (Davis, 2008). They are mainly attracted to anime for their costs, producing anime is way cheaper than the block buster’s and they do make huge successes in theatres and DVD sales, coupled with the movie industry being very high risk and big budget productions failing miserably, anime has presented a wonderful opportunity to film makers in America to break even with their productions

Anime has since evolved from an underground fortune maker in the 70s to a mainstream commercially viable industry. In America, anime has won the hearts of many and the winning of an Oscar by Miyazaki Hayao’s anime, Spirited Away, in 2002 for best animated feature film was a clear show of just how much anime has been embraced in the American way of life (Davis, 2008). Today, America is anime’s biggest market with anime TV programs in the US jumping from 13 at the start of the 90s to 37 in the first quarter of 2006 (Davis, 2008).

In 2004, the revenues from character licensing, home videos and cinema screenings topped \$2.94 billion which was much more than what the value of steel imported by US from Japan, additionally Pokemon and Yu-Gi-Oh! made it to Americas top five prime time animated programs, anime is clearly Japan's biggest export to the states today. Technology has since been a catalyst to the spread of anime as fans could with the internet, link and deliberate on topics and new releases (Auzenne, 1994). Subtitlers also known as fansubbers have also not been left behind, today, they can easily find each other online and work together to translate the latest anime.

The translation process for Manga entails a fan scanning the pages and emailing them to a translator who would then translate to a language of choice, usually English, a proofreader would then check the translation after which some other person known as the "cleaner" would replace the Japanese with English into the speech bubbles. The final product is then available for free downloads online. The internet has presently given room for publishing and distribution of anime at an unforeseen scale and is one of its biggest growth ingredients.

Japanese anime has managed to stand up to American cartoon productions for reasons that it is much un-Disney and therefore offers an alternative to animation lovers in other parts of the world like Europe where several people are quite uncomfortable with American productions for their materialism and vulgarity which is likely to influence their rich cultural heritage that has been kept for many generations, a risk they cannot afford. Some critics argue that the world is moving towards homogeneity with the American culture being the world culture but the acceptance of anime and Manga in

Europe for fear of being Americanized is a clear show that people around the world are yet to put their cultural heritage aside for the American way of life.

Anime clearly differentiates gender with market niches properly divided for girls, boys, young men and women. Manga separates gender roles and this makes the dramatic anime story line in gender inclining tales when characters bridge the wide gap between the sexes. A typical example is the anime “Ranma 1/2” based on a Manga by Rumiko Takahashi in which a boy who because of a previous dip in a Chinese magic pool turns into a girl when splashed with cold water. The extremes of the two genders are clearly depicted in this piece (Levi, McHarry & Pagliassotti 2008).

Americans have clearly gone beyond acceptance and taken the business opportunities presented by the popularity of manga and anime. Hollywood has not been left out of the boom and Walt Disney has today made enormous investments in the art, which apart from being popular, is also lucrative, coming at a time when most box office movies are not breaking even, anime is not just a rescue to the Japanese culture but a shot in the arm to Hollywood .

### **Anime and manga in Europe and other parts of the world**

Other than America, Miyazaki's ‘Spirited Away’ also won a Golden Bear Award at the Berlin International Film Festival in 2002. As at the start of 2006 there were 18 Japanese anime airing on a German TV channel. China is one place that Japanese anime is not expected to be very popular given the seriousness with which foreign content is restricted by the government. The debut of the animated feature film ‘Gin-iro-no Kami no Agito’ at 1000

theatres in the spring of 2006 in China was a show of how just much Japanese anime has taken over the world. The reason for anime success outside Japan, Kubo Masakavu, the chief producer of 'Pokeman' said, was the quality that is very different from western animation with the difference being its characters that he said capture the heart of viewers and brings out their emotions (West, M. I. 2008).

The United Kingdom is one of the most consecutive countries. The British have for generations been skeptical about other cultures and today, they broadcast very distinct TV programs from their American brothers. A look at programming on "Cebebees", a children channel of the BBC, depicts a culture that has kept its morals intact for generations. It is with these conservative ideologies that the acceptance of Manga and anime in the British culture has never ceased to amaze many critics.

When anime by the name, the 'Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles' debuted in the UK, the audience felt that the word Ninja was an inappropriate connotation that was unfit for the animes young audience and the title was changed to "Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles". (Laird & Eastman, 2009).

Several articles were written about anime in major newspapers especially in "The Independent" during the early 90s when "Island World" and the horror story "Urotsukidoji" were released with the later being poorly rated by its audience who claimed to have had nightmares. (Laird & Eastman, 2009).

Even with many articles in the UK papers, there was never an anti-anime wave in the country and there was a belief of anime explosion like in other European countries, something that never happened, the British did accept

anime and manga but on their own terms, choosing to edit what they see as inappropriate and embracing what suits their way of life.

The same is not however the case in Spain, France, Sweden and Italy where anime has had an explosion with an active fan base who have web sites at all levelsb to keep the enthusiasts in touch with each other and new releases.

## **The love for anime in China**

China has for the past 30 years been a market that the Japanese anime have quite some grip and currently, millions of anime and manga consumers live in China giving rise to a market of \$14. 6 billion a year (Brienza, 2009).

Anime debuted China in 1979 with “ Astro Boy” which is one of Japan’s most known anime characters, which was aired on China Central Television (CCTV) in black and white in 1980 after translation to Chinese. ‘ Astro boy’ was at that time used as an image to promote Casio calculator products which have since been very popular in China and so has Japanese anime with comic books being major components of stock at most magazine kiosks in Shanghai (Chen, 2006).

The Chinese government has today banned Japanese anime like “ Death Note” from TV broadcast but that action hasn’t stopped the millions of fans who have sought the anime on pirated television shows and DVDs alongside fan sites. Young Chinese today, do not really care about the historical differences between the two nations in their consumption of cartoon products, which they do indiscriminately by going for what appeals to them (Brienza, 2009)



People tend to embrace exotic cultures when certain aspects of these cultures share into their local values. Japanese anime have themes of perseverance, friendship, striving towards certain goals and fighting a good fight which appeals to the global audience and this has made it very acceptable to many (Bouissou J. 2006).

Anime however, got language gateways through English, Chinese and French via which the cartoon art extended globally. With the help of amateur subtitlers, in the 80s and 90s, the anime gospel was taken to English speaking nations and this breakthrough is one of the reasons the art is where it is presently.

With china's population at worlds highest today, manga and anime can only get bigger in this part of the world, presenting a wonderful opportunity to industry players to show their creative prowess by continually releasing to the market, productions that will live through generations.

## **Techniques in Japanese anime**

Some of the techniques used in creating these globally acceptable productions include character design, coloring and eye size (Brienza, 2009). Characters are designed to human body proportions to separate them from western cartoons, this sometimes vary when if emphasis is needed on certain body parts. The eyes in anime are usually large to show distinct emotions. The technique is believed to have been first used by Osamu Tezuka who borrowed it from American cartoon characters like Mickey Mouse and Betty Boop. Coloring that is usually added to the cornea is intended to give depth to the eyes, it should however be noted that not all anime have

large eyes and some works especially by Toshiro Kawamoto and Hayao Miyazaki have been known for proportional eyes with realistic colors which is very close to Japanese art.

## **Music in Japanese anime**

Music is used in productions is very close to Japanese pop, as an industry, anime has developed its own genre known as “ anison”. Anime today has its own songs and the release of an animation video is usually accompanied by a soundtrack album. Behind the United States is Japan in terms of the of the music market with most of the music consumed in Japan being Japanese. The music combines ‘ kanji’ (on sound) and the ‘ gaku’ (fun and comfort) to produce what the Japanese call “ ongaku”, a genre of music which is well incorporated in anime (Brienza, 2009).

## **Anime in South America**

Latin America has not been left out with manga and anime enthusiasts found in Venezuela, Chile, Mexico and throughout the entire region. Several websites have been set up in this part of the world to help connect fans and provide a platform for sharing and discussing anime related issues. Anime News Network (ANN) Latin America is one such site that has enabled fans to make contributions and share their anime experiences (Bouissou, 2006). The site has created chapters in most if not all of the South American countries to help fans connect and share issues at country level.

The emergence of such sites have been a major tool in facilitating non English and French speaking nations appreciate anime. Fans get the Espanola and Portuguese translations very fast and can as well collaborate in

sub titling which in most cases end up in enthusiasts setting businesses from the collaborations and making fortunes from these ventures.

Anime News Network Latin America also runs a weekly podcast where hosts give opinions on the day's news, review of some of the latest titles on offer; interview some major players in the anime and manga industry. Listeners can at the same time call in and make contributions to the topics being discussed as well as pose questions to guests. The site has a section where fans can find certain features of Japan including guided tour of interesting historic sites and for such, it has been a good way of fans connecting to the characters beyond the videos by understanding how they are regarded in the Japanese culture (Schodt 1996).

Similar sites have been set up in South Africa, India, Australia and many other regions of the world to serve enthusiasts in the same way. It worth noting that Japanese anime is not only meant for entertainment but is also used in education sector especially in Japan and is working very well with kids who find it as a very friendly illustration tool.

## **Conclusion**

Manga and anime have clearly gone global and is today appreciated by people of diverse cultural beliefs and walks of life. There is unanimity that people went for manga and the fan networks in the 70s flourished because of the content of anime which has since stayed the same. There is a general feeling that the whole world is converging at the American culture a view which we have seen as not true with many nations accepting manga just because it is an opposite alternative to American cartoons.

The globalization of anime started at a time when sharing information was very difficult with tapes being delivered physically from one fan to the next, which is very different from today where fans can with internet, at the click of a button link to share ideas and even go further and cooperate on anime projects without any physical contacts. The genre of anime can today get access into more cultures with these technological advancements.

There is however a general consensus on the strength and morality in the Japanese culture, which has appealed to many, who interact with anime and manga. Anime today, from the figures released by Japanese and American authorities is not only a major revenue earner to the world's third largest economy but also a leading cultural ambassador, which has done quite a good job in letting the world know and appreciate the uniqueness of the Japanese way of life (Chen & Teng 2006),

Producers of anime should continue giving the world wonderful entertainment, something they have for close to 100 years done with great perfection and sense of responsibility. Having kept their content above the expected minimum for close to a century, today's anime enthusiasts have no doubt that more generations from all over the world will be entertained by anime.