

A Study of Anime's Success Factors in USA and Its Suggestions

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ABSTRACT

Anime is very popular in Japan, it has also gained a following in America and is beginning to hit the mainstream. Anime is gaining popularity in the United States as it is shown more on television, most noticeably on the Sci-Fi Channel with shows such as Saturday Anime and during Anime Week and on Cartoon Network with shows such as Sailor Moon and Dragon Ball Z being shown every weekday during the Toonami block. In this paper, I present the key factors behind the success of anime in USA. To find out the factors, I research literature and simple survey. The differences of anime from US animation make anime popular. Anime-related goods such as video games, trading cards, and characters' jewelry aid the anime growing popularity. A booming trend in admiration for Japan is one of the key factors behind anime's success. In spite of disputing about Japanese animation, anime is starting to have some influence on US animation and also young American. Anime's success factors in USA could suggest that Korean Manhwa and Korean animation have to prepare strategies for rising popularity in oversea.

Keywords: Japanese Animation, Anime, Manhwa

1. INTRODUCTION

Japanese animation is called by several names. Anime in Japanese is an abbreviation of the word "animation". Outside Japan, the term most popularly refers to animation originating in Japan. to the West, not all animation is considered anime, and anime is considered a subset of animation. The word "Japanimation" is neologism that is made by two words, Japan+animation.

In recent years, anime has risen in popularity in the United States as more and more series surface into mainstream culture. The beginning of this new wave of anime fandom in America began in the mid-1990s with shows such as Ronin Warriors and Teknoman being aired and publicly advertised on American television; the Sci-Fi Channel began having "Saturday Anime" mornings, showing a different anime movie each Saturday morning. Even before those, some stations were airing anime more subtly; Cartoon Network held "Saturday Japanime" several times, during which an anime movie was shown at midnight Saturday. Currently, Cartoon Network plays an assortment of anime; it airs several series during the week and has a time slot allotted for anime Sunday mornings.

When a bizarre cast of fellow manga characters debuted in the U.S. January 2003, in the Japanese magazine *Shonen Jump*, pre-and post pubescent consumers snatched up all 250,000 copies; issues of the most popular U.S. comic books rarely see print runs of more than 150,000. Web sites are filled with

anime (the word for animation in Japanese) pages. In Yahoo home page, "Anime" search results are 125,000,000.

Parents, reading children's Santa lists, look for Yu-Gi-Oh! Cards or Pokemon dolls instead Cinderella or Pinocchio. Youngsters want to wear the necklace or ear rings that the main characters of 'final fantasy' Game always wear, try to learn Japanese, and are quite willing to visit an Anime Expo in spite of a long journey and considerable expense.

One might be wondering: What's the secret behind anime's success? Why have American become enthusiastic fans of anime? In this paper, I research literature and simple survey for looking for the key factors behind the success of anime in USA. I had worked at an animation store by part time worker for 1 year. The survey in this paper was done at that time. The survey was made by 126 American who frequent an anime store in Savannah, Georgia on spring 2006. This survey is consisted of 5 questions. Sex distinction is not questioned.

2. POPULARITY OF ANIME

First question is about age. Under 20 is 47%(59 of 126), 20's is 33%(42 of 126), over 30 is about 20%(25 of 126). The U.S generally seems to believe that "animations are kids' things" and dismisses it as one of the lowest forms of popular art; on the other hand, Japan produces a large variety of animated series and movies aimed a wide spectrum of ages and audiences. The Japanese consider it a true art form and pay great respect to the artists and creators who produce anime.

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Second question is "How often do you read and watch Anime?". About 54 people answer that they read and watch Anime almost every day. 'Three to four times a week' answer is

29%(37 of 126). 'One or two times a week' answer is 22%(28 of 126).

While cartoons, that were made in Western countries mainly targets children as its main audience, anime, on the other hand, targets a wider range of viewers. As a matter of fact, big parts of anime fan population are teenagers and people in their early to mid 20's.

People who watch Anime over one time a week is no less than 90%. The anime invasion into the U.S is not a new occurrence. It has been going on for over forty years. By 1965, "Astro Boy" had run on network television in the United States (retitled and dubbed in English). In the late 80's, a major screen release about a futuristic Tokyo and genetic mutation hit the American screens. It was Akira (televised in 1991 on Sci-Fi Channel). Japanese animation series were hot commodities in the US, and many publishers rushed to dub them into English and release anime to the public. Produced in Japan for an adult audience, the new series of animated movies began to be translated for the adult American audience, instead of being dubbed down for children on Saturday morning. The result was a burst in interest for all things in Japanese animation.

3. ANIME'S SUCCESS FACTORS

3.1 Intrinsic Factors

Third question is a significant part. The question is "Why do you like Anime?(select all that apply)." High marked answers are an interesting story, cool characters, and beautiful drawings.

3.1.1 Diverse Plots

Japanese animation is far different from other animation. It has a plot. And some attempts can be given to add depth to the characters in Japanese animations. Unlike the American superhero type, where many writers tend to do different plots and stories, Japanese animations are more like a novel with complete and detailed worlds that are the vision of a single author. The characters remain consistent, and they are allowed to grow and develop. The plot has to develop and has to be interesting at a fairly rapid clip.

3.1.2 Character's Growing

Main characters of Anime grow and develop their abilities as the story progress. Unlike in most western cartoons, wherein once the hero has established its character there's a little room for improvement, Anime characters grow as the story goes along. A good example would be the "Dragonball Z" characters where they even use 'power levels' to show the improvement in a character's fighting skill. Often, the most exciting moment in an episode of an Anime series, is when the villain and the other characters are surprised by the hero's new ability[1].

Some American super heroes often seem to just go around defeating evil, while Japanese animation characters usually have other goals in life, which play large themes within their lives. Characters are not forced into plots, like a foot into a too-tight shoe; instead, stories grow out of the characters.

Japanese Animation shows that one's enemies are not just evil. In series like Gundam, the enemies have hopes and dreams of their own and have reasons for what they do. They are not just crazy or just plain evil.

3.1.3 Simple lines and stylized features

Simple lines and stylized features are some of Japanese animation's main features. Kubo, a chief director of Shogakukan Inc's character business center, which produced the Pokemon series, movies and games, cited the example of Pikachu, a yellow electric mouse character, which is the most popular of all 372 characters in the Pokemon series. "Pokemon is successful because of its simple characters. Children all over the world can remember and draw its characters easily, especially Pikachu." Kubo said[2].

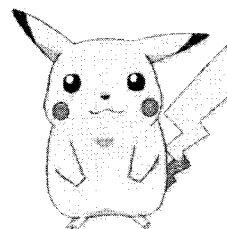


Fig. 1. Pikachu in Pokemon

3.2 Extrinsic Factors

Fourth question is a simple one. That is "Do you want to buy goods related anime characters?" 100% answer 'Yes'. Animation-related goods, such as video games, trading games, and characters' jewelry, aid the animation growing popularity. According to Jiwon Ahn, author of an article "On the Circulation of Japanese animation as Global Cultural Products" there has formed a full circle of related industries around anime[3]. In many cases, It starts from the original manga (comic book) series ; then, the manga is adapted to animation series in television or film; then almost simultaneously, various goods related to the anime, including original soundtrack CDs, paperback books, fanzines(a nonprofessional publication produced by fans of a particular subject for the pleasure of others who share their interest), and numerous character merchandises like action figures, toys, stationary goods, trading cards, and confectionary products are distributed in the market. Also, the release of computer games and video games based on anime follows.

3.2.1 The media mix

For example, Pokemon (an abbreviation for "pocket monsters") originally started in Japan in 1996 as a computer game for Nintendo's Game Boy and quickly became a huge hit, and has now spread in 68 countries, with versions in 25 languages. Pokemon (televised in 1998 on Syndicated) continues to dominate the younger set in the U.S, and the episodes are being dubbed into English at a rapid pace to meet

demand. Products imported from Japan sit alongside American versions as the toy makers race to keep up with the demand for the newest and hottest versions of the small creatures and their trainers. Pokemon has also enjoyed success as a licensing franchise, with applications including video games, comics, trading cards, and numerous merchandise products. Anne Allison, a Duke University associate professor, cited the Pokemon's success in US. "Pokemon cards in Japanese are more popular to American children than those in English"

One of the best-popular goods is the Yu-Gi-Oh! card. Yugioh, is a media mix content series which started as a manga series in Shonen Jump magazine in 1996, and has since spawned a television animation, two different card game versions, over ten different Playstation and Game Boy games, and a wide range of licensed character goods. The most popular form of engagement with Yugioh (televised in 2001 on WB Network) is the official card game. (Mizuko Ito) The hero of Yugioh, Mutou Yugi, is a high school boy with a split personality. Yugi's original personality is one of a small, weak, skinny and unpopular kid, whose strength is his skill in playing games. Yu-Gi-Oh! trading card game official homepage explains its story. One day, he solves a complex ancient Egyptian puzzle and unlocks a hidden spirit of an Egyptian pharaoh within it, which becomes a second personality for him, powerful, secure, decisive, and ruthless. The two Yugis use their game expertise to combat forces of greed and evil, battling with adults as often as with other children.

Kinder, M., Ed explained the ripple effect of Yu-Gi-Oh! in his research "Kid's Media Culture" [4]. Media mix content like Yugioh is based on the fact that their market is well organized and segmented enough to support a diverse range of consumers and products. The media mix supports different forms of engagement depending on age, with younger children orienting to the anime, manga, and character goods, and older children orienting to the video and card games. Game aficionados scour Jump for the latest news on Yugioh cards, game rules, and reading the comic series that previews new cards to be released.

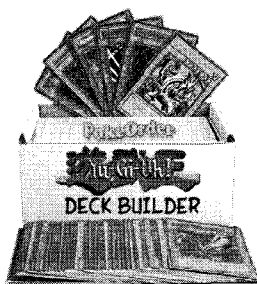


Fig. 2. Yu-Gi-Oh Card

3.2.2 Anime-related goods

The ongoing series of giant robot fighters continues to be one of the hottest properties in the United States, with the models and videos flying off the shelves faster than they can be stocked. Also, animated film features are becoming just as popular: Princess Mononoke, an adaptation of a Japanese folk tale, did well in the United States, drawing such famous actors as Minnie Driver and Gillian Anderson to lend their voices to the English dubbing; making it more mainstream as

ever[5]. Square, a Japanese gaming giant company, built a video game empire with Final Fantasy. Square's flagship Final Fantasy series, launched in 1987, has sold more than 33 million units worldwide and generated nearly one billion dollars in sales.

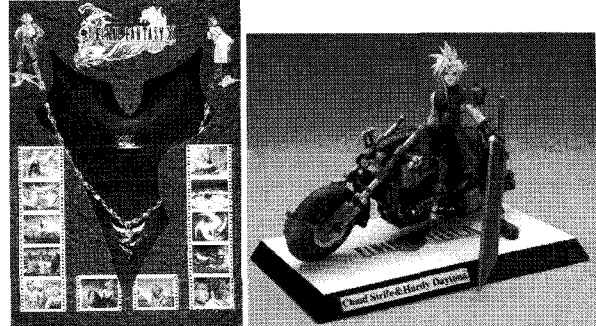


Fig. 3. Final Fantasy X Necklace and Final Fantasy VII Cloud Figure

4. JAPAN ANIMATION'S INFLUENCE

Final question is about Japan. The question is "How does Japan stand among the countries you would like to visit?" Almost 94%(118 of 126) answer 'highly'.

Other question is "If you would like to visit Japan, do you know an word of Japanese?" 82%(97 of 118) answer that they know Japanese and can say over an word.

Another question is "If you know Japanese, Where you get the words?" "From manga books, magazines or anime movies" is 67%(65 of 97). "From friends or families" is 28%(27 of 97). This result is commented that anime might help American like Japan. There is an evidence that American is attracted by Japan and Japanese things. Pocky(a Japanese snack food) is that.

Outside of Japan, Pocky is fairly popular among Japanophiles and otaku (anime fans). Neon Genesis Evangelion - The character of Asuka Langley Soryu is shown in many posters and promotional photos holding Pocky and/or eating it. Please Teacher - A parody of Pocky called "Pochy" in a box design closely resembling that of Pocky appeared numerous times as Mizuho Kazami's favorite snack. Spirited Away - In the beginning of this Studio Ghibli film, a box of Pocky (actually called "Pock")can be seen on the car seat beside Chihiro[6].

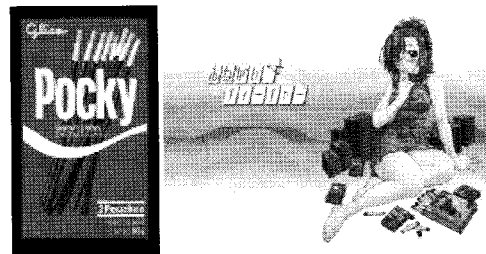


Fig. 4. Pocky and Mizuho Kazami, eating Pochy, in Please Teacher

In the United States, Pocky can be found in Asian

supermarkets and the international section of most large supermarkets, such as Wegman's, as well as Wal-Mart Supercenters and anime convention dealers' rooms. There are 98,300 sites, sell Pocky, in Yahoo homepage searching section.

4.1. Great Yearning for The Orient

Many broadcasting stations, from WB or Cartoon Network to the Action channel and Tech TV, offer various Japanese animations. Among these anime are Yu Yu Hakusho (televised in 2002 on Cartoon Network) and Rurouni Kenshin (televised in 2003 on Cartoon Network).

In Yu Yu Hakusho, the central character is a spirit detective improving the world. Kenshin is a samurai warrior who needs to right the wrongs of his previous life. Both premises are deeply based on Japanese tradition and sensibility. And, the animation itself is not culturally generic either[7].

The characters in Japanese animations live in small rooms in tatami mats, go to school with school uniform, eat tin-box lunches, and often wear Japanese traditional clothes with wooden clogs. Saturday morning cartoons now include anime that does not hide its Japanese heritage. These shows have visibly Japanese characters, people eating rice bowls and Japanese script.

Antonia Levi, an author of "Samurai from Outer Space: Understanding Japanese Animation" provided much of the information dealing with cultural background to those people who are already somewhat familiar with Japanese animation. He indicated many of the symbols "hidden" within the animation that may not be apparent to a Western fan offer some explanations of gods, goddesses, heroes/heroines, villains, futuristic machines and the very dominant women who have been appearing in many anime epics[8].

The booming good impression about Japan was found at an episode. The American comic reads in Japanese fashion-right to left-, so the publishers have added operating instructions and signposts to guide people through the pages.

4.2. Two Faces of Anime

As more animation makes its way across the Pacific from Japan, anime has raised from sporadic appearances on U.S. television and movie screens to fill daily time slots, with programs such as Pokemon and Dragonball Z being among the most popular[9]. This growth in popularity has not gone unnoticed by critics of media violence.

Today, animation on television is not necessarily aimed at children and any assumptions made should follow this way of thinking; however, the animation specifically made for children to watch, whether it is of American or Japanese origin, contains more violence than it has in recent years.

Typical of these criticisms is articles appearing on family.org, a Web site dedicated to promoting good influences for the traditional families and warning against questionable ones[10]. The articles claims that many anime movies also feature graphic brutality, ferocious language and intense depictions of the occult. This callous exploitation of sex, violence, profanity and spiritual counterfeits raises huge red flags over the entire genre[11]. The articles suggest that many of these morally

corrupt products constitute one of America's most dangerous entertainment imports.

Arroyo, Professor at Mercer university, emphasized that anime has added benefits for Americans; it gives American insight into the Japanese mind, providing a way to relate to a culture seemingly unlike our own through a common language long underestimated in power and style[12].

5. CONCLUSION

Japan's production of animation is becoming particularly well known in the West. Though commonly known as "Anime," the media is actually a conglomeration of: The manga (comic book) industry, the anime (animated video and film) industry, and the video game (e.g., Nintendo and Sony Playstation) industry; they are tied together by their reliance on a characteristic art style. What are the common threads that bind these works together? Even though American is famous for Disney' animation, many young Americans are excited by Japanese animation because of its distinctive features, various character related merchandises, and a booming trend in admiration for the Orient.

Japanese animation's essential identities-various stories, growing characters, unique drawing technique-are some parts of anime's success factors. Together with these, various goods related to the anime, including original soundtrack CDs, paperback books, fanzines, and numerous character merchandises like action figures, stationary goods, trading cards, and confectionary products promote anime's popularity.

Anime's introduction into mass media has had good and bad effects. In spite of disputing about Japanese animation, anime is starting to have some influence on US animation. Long before the flap about how much Disney did or did not borrow from Tezuka's Kimba-The White Lion to make The Lion King, Disney animators deliberately modified their style to follow some of the anime motifs. The characters' eyes in The Little Mermaid, Beauty and the Beast, and Aladdin are larger, more expressive, and closer in style to most anime productions than to any of the earlier Disney animations. American animation has taken elements from Japanese animation, especially in cartoons like the Powerpuff Girls and Samurai Jack and continued to remain American.

Recently, Korean manhwa has taken over Japanese Manga to be the hottest books in the market in USA. Contrary to the success of manhwa overseas, the domestic manhwa market in South Korea is not doing so well. Over 80% of the Korean market is composed of imported comics, mostly from Japan. Even worse, the size of the Korean market is decreasing. In the middle of this gloomy situation, the increase of manhwa exports serves as a ray of hope to the Korean industry. According to the "Manhwa Industry Survey," the number of manhwa exported in 1999 totaled only \$240,000, in 2004 it increased to \$1.9 million, and \$3.26 million in 2005.

In the past, only Japan and a few other Asian countries imported Korean manhwa, but now manhwa is spreading like wildfire in the U.S., Europe, and South Asia. Manhwa has earned a positive reputation in these countries[13]. Anime's

success in USA implies that Korean animation and manhwa could be a booming trend. Anime's success factors could be helpful to Korean animation producers.

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