

Japanese Animation Narrative in China Market Influence on Chinese Youth

Wu Yan ¹, Mustaffa Halabi Azahari ²,
Khairun Nisa Mustaffa Halabi ³,

¹ City Graduate School, City University Malaysia
wuyan_54@163.com

² Faculty of Creative Industries, City University Malaysia
drmustaffa.azahari@city.edu.my

³ Faculty of Creative Industries, City University Malaysia
khairun.mustaffa@city.edu.my

Abstract

The narrative of Japanese animation in China market has impact to the Chinese youth's values. There are positive effect on the values of Chinese youth where it continues develop the way of life thinking. The paper investigates the impact of Japanese animation narrative to the Chinese youth specifically focusing on the content, composition and characteristics of anime. This study is based on qualitative methods including a brief historical overview, textual analysis and semi-structured interviews. This study also provides the advantages to Chinese youths that have impact on their lifestyle that can enhance from artistic values in Japanese animation narrative, such as plot, characters, and illustrations. This paper concludes with implications and suggestions for further research.

Keywords: cultural differences, creative industry, Japanese animation, intercultural animation, China.

Introduction

Animation, is a visual medium, has an intrinsic relationship to technological development, shifting media norms, and the dynamic nature of cultural paradigms. Around 60% of all animation television programmes in the world have been estimated originally from Japan. Comic cafés (manga kissas), comic rentals, dojinshi (amateurish manga), and cosplay (costume play) are examples of how Japanese comic and animation culture have successfully penetrate into the culture in major Asian cities.

Recently, the Japanese animated film "The First Slam Dunk" has a solid early lead at the mainland China box office with \$13.8 million. According to a local company, Ent Group, the film made \$3.16 million from roughly 14,000 preview screenings on Wednesday, and \$13.8 million from 184,000 showings on Thursday (Frater, 2023). Among young people in Asia, merchandise featuring Japanese cartoon characters like Hello Kitty, Doraemon, Chibimaruko-chan, Crayon Shinchan, Sailormoon, Dragonball, Tare Panda, Pokemon, and Digimon are extremely popular. Japanese animation characters are also used by some Asian companies to sell their products. The popularity of Japanese manga among Asian youth contributed to influence people's perception about Japan. Figure 1.1 Pokemon and Slam Dunk are examples of popular Japanese animation in China.

Figure 1.1 Popular Japanese animation among young people in China.



Scholars in China have argued about the positive and negative impact from Japanese animation. Wang (2016) for instance, stated that culture would eliminate the value attributed on national culture, bring risk to domestic animation, and valuable cultural resources. Japanese animation culture is spreading rapidly, leaving fewer opportunities for local animation, comics, and games to survive (Yue, 2017). Watching anime can form of relaxation, that have positive impact on life for mental growth, and sports anime can help the youth to develop a broader healthy perspective on life (Liang, 2015). Japanese animation can inspire youths to learn about Japanese culture and they are viewed as Japanese but they are additionally perceived as a culture of choice. On the other hands, Japanese animation demonstrate their unique, multidimensional cultural status as a worldwide phenomenon and a highly individual form of entertainment. Many domestic academics and experts have examined and investigated the impact on the value, cultural, psychological, and occupational of Japanese animation on Chinese youth in order to determine the positive and negative effects of Japanese anime on the development of Chinese youth. After a

significantly depressed 2022 that posed a threat to the survival of Chinese cinema exhibitors, Chinese authorities have reopened the door to foreign film imports in 2023.

Anime, short for Japanese animation first appeared in the early twentieth century and evolved into the form it is today during the 1960s (Lu, 2013). The term refers to animated features created by Japanese creators and production studios based on the Japanese pronunciation (animēshon), whether they be shown in theatres or broadcast on television or released directly to home video using the 'cel' animation technique (Pellitteri, 2021). Millions of Chinese watching animation and enjoying additional products from Japan's creative industry, and this term is used to describe their shared set of views, values, knowledge, collective practises, wants, and social behaviours such as through manga, TV shows, videogames, movies, music, fashion (Momchilova, 2019). Animation has been recognised as an integral part of Chinese youth culture since it has not only entertained several generations of Chinese but also accelerated the socialisation process, specifically the development of their intercultural communication skills (Momchilova, 2019). This study contributes to the existing theoretical literature by proposing that the narrative of Japanese animation have an impact on the Chinese youths.

Japanese animation in China

The growing cultural demands of the middle class in China, especially among the youth and children, have pushed prosperous Chinese cities to prioritise issues like education, health care, and entertainment. China was probably the largest comics market in the world, with 5 million readers. The survey found that the immediate target audience for comics was youths entering middle school (below 13 years accounted for 11%, 14-17 years for 50%, and above 18 years for 30%), with 70% of respondents were female (Fung & Pun, 2019). Chinese creative imagination and content continue to be restricted by what may be termed as manageable creativity, and as a result, they have been cultivated to generate predictable political outcomes because the Chinese government is not yet ready to embrace the principles of free expression and changing orders (Zeng & Chan, 2020). De-Japanese features are included to the setting, plot, and characters in order to make anime more accessible to audiences outside of Japan.

Japanese cultural products have considerably changed from emphasising the Japanese national context in order to cater to the preferences of other inter-Asian nations, which represent the biggest possible cultural partners for business (Iwabuchi, 2022). The concept of "cultural odorlessness" indicates that most Japanese comics and animations are out of date. Due to their consumption of Japanese manga and animation, Chinese consumers have an extensive appreciation for Japanese culture. Inevitably, the quality of Japanese animation and

manga has lowered the standards of the Western versions (Fung & Pun, 2019).

Japanese Anime on Chinese youth

Japanese animation has an extensive selection of themes that allow viewers to select. Categories of blood and positive energy include sports and competitive experiences, while fantastical categories include magic, superpowers, and the future world (Sen & Rong, 2019). The Chinese have had a significant impact on Japanese culture for many years. Japanese anime characters are given special "Cute attributes" aspects in their design and the setting of characters, which are in line with the aesthetic preferences for contemporary Chinese youth (Sen & Rong, 2019). The animation produced in Japan has a wide range of categories and styles. Young people's minds are perceptive and dynamic; full with curiosity and imaginative of the unknown and they prefer to role-play their own characteristics and values; and they have a tendency in psychology to experiment with different ways of self positioning. Animation from Japan is able to comprehend the psychology of young people's minds and intends to meet the psychological demands of target audience through its storylines (Sen & Rong, 2019).

Animation from Japan has an impact of decreasing psychological stress in young people. As the speed of society continues to accelerate, a lot of young people in contemporary society are dealing with greater stress and the stress keeps increasing. Sen & Rong (2019) stated that animation from Japan may encourage in young people to build their confidence, independent and fearless. Many heroes in Japanese sports animation have persistent struggles and refusing to give up their will. The stories provided are success stories of the masters.

Japanese animation is frequently viewed as an example of racial mixing and cultural blurring, neutralises itself, as it symbolises a wider national objectives to reach an extra-territorial stage of development and which is known as "de-politicized internationalisation" (Lu, 2013). In addition, while certain aspects of animation can be interpreted as promoting the transcultural globalisation, meanwhile other aspects of animation contribute to the preservation of Japanese authority. Although these items may be targeted to a broader audience, they frequently feature negative stereotypes of the West. In the past few years, the comparison between Chinese and Japanese culture indicates that many cultural trends in China today, such as the "cat economy" and "healing culture," originated in Japan, and that the lifestyles of young people in contemporary China are becoming increasingly similar to those in neighbouring countries. (Jiang et al., 2022).

Table 1.1 Cultural differences in Chinese animation and Japanese anime (Momchilova, 2019).

	Artistic perception and audience expectations	Production
Chinese animation	1. Low status in society 2. Didactic purpose 3. Audience – children, mostly Chinese 4. Compacted viewing practice	1. Feature length movies 2. Slow and expensive production 3. Poor quality of creative vision 4. Mimicking anime technique 5. Culture-specific themes and characters 6. Strict censorship and government TV monopole 7. No migration of characters 8. No cross-media and cross-sector collaboration 9. Unwillingness to co-produce 10. Uncertain commercial success 11. Limited overseas distribution 12. No paraphernalia products 13. No audience feedback 14. No fan practices
Japanese anime	1. Beloved by all age groups 2. Didactic and entertainment purpose 3. Audience – all ages, the world over 4. Flexible viewing practice	1. Serial character of episodes 2. Speed and low cost of production 3. Talented artists passionate about their product 4. Limited animation technique, specific use of camera, instantly recognizable visual characteristics 5. Universal themes and myriads of characters 6. Limited censorship (age) 7. Character migration from media to media 8. Cross-media and cross-sector collaboration 9. Increase of co-produced anime 10. Great commercial success due to overseas contracts and transmedia storytelling 11. Global distribution 12. Heaps of anime merchandise 13. Active audience feedback 14. Worldwide fandom

Research Method

The qualitative research approach uses a brief historical overview, textual analysis, and semi-structured interviews was employed for this research. Two episodes of Pokémon and Slam Dunk, representing two episodes from one season were chosen at random for textual analysis. The average episode lasting about ten minutes, making the total runtime for twenty minutes. The program's opening titles and songs were analysed to get a feel for its overall aesthetic and mood. The narrative of these animation emphasise less on scientific competition but focusing more on issues such as friendship, love and family. This investigation of text analysis emphasised on how characters developed and how they related to each other characters. The narrative approach of the programme was subsequently divided into two key terms such as heroism and conflict.

Based on the results of the textual analysis, the first author conducted the semi-structured interviews. There were five participants and they were young adults aged from 15 to 18 years old. All those who were interviewed were informed that their conversations could include in the final piece. This study explored how they perceived from Japanese animation and their reasons in their response based on the themes, style, storytelling and cultural nuances.

Results and Discussions

The findings from interviews indicated that characters are significant to the healing value of animation. Characters with unique characteristics and captivating charisma stand out as highlights of animation works. The circle of protagonist consists mainly of people who know and care about the protagonist such as classmates, friends or relatives; and did not represent no other social qualities or crossover relationships. Moreover, Japanese animation gives positive influence to Chinese youths that can enhance their perceptions in their work and life; animation and semiotics, self-reliance, cross-cultural appeal, and cultural exchange.

Animation and semiotics

People create a connection among the object and the sign that it carries. People are able to obtain a denotative meaning of an icon by knowing directly, what the icon is representing. On the other hand, presenting people a symbol may require some additional thought from their part because symbols often have connotative meanings that go beyond the object's physical appearance. It has been demonstrated that, in order to comprehend changing multimodal communication behaviours, it is essential to understand the relationship to the shift of social and cultural aspects. Participants indicated that watching animation series, they are more focuses on the language and culture of Japanese people through its content and the storyline of animation series. Additionally, both home and urban settings in Japanese animation can be seen as examples

of social and cultural development. Therefore, this indicated that from different social and cultural contexts, the Japanese animation influences people's communication pattern. Moreover, the use of digital media in Japanese animation enhances the spreading of the trends even faster. The power balance between authors and viewers changes due to digital media. Social semiotic theory has often emphasised that 'Interaction with a message created by another person is essential to communication since it requires the transformative/interpretive involvement of the participant' (Yamada-Rice, 2014).

Self-reliance

The results indicate that watching animation has influenced the perspective and motivation of Chinese youth. The participants indicated that they feel motivated and self-reliance after they watch animation. The content of Japanese animation is extremely selective and unique. Moreover, one participant stated that most of her female friends who are watching Japanese animation focused on the self-reliance. It involves not merely financial independence but also social equality with male. In the Japanese animation, the woman's success should not be measured entirely by the number of children or her family, but female character should be judging based on their career, achievements, their abilities, and talents. Many strong female animation heroes have inspired audiences to strive for their own dreams in the real world.

Cross-cultural appeal

Developing complex characters and structuring narratives in animation with unexplored emotional areas makes animation continues on a long literary tradition. Many young people all across the world are fans of animation because the stories generally focus on the unstable feelings and defining experiences of youth. Animation provides more detailed image of human experience than pictures from European and the United States, which tend to be more basic in their plots and occasionally focusing mainly on humour. Animation manages to encompass every emotional bases. Animation can be entertaining but it can also be intense, sad, and even apocalyptic. Animation connects directly to the emotions with young people by portraying their struggles with life challenges. The genre of Japanese animation also makes emphasis on common human issues such as gender inequality, mass urbanisation, and political control.

Cultural exchange

Animation has contributed to bringing people from all over the world with Japan and its culture. It is also play a significant role in spreading Japan's culture and values globally and offered people from other countries an insight into Japan's unique culture and tradition. The European and American markets have extensively demonstrated that animation is the gateway to Japanese content across the world

(Hernández-Pérez, 2019). It is now common practise for scholars to indicate that manga and animation depicted their Japanese-ness to start their exploration. Japanese-ness is not an inherent trait but it is an indication of how deeply these products relate to Japan and its cultural traditions.

Conclusions and Further Research

This paper concludes that based on its findings, animation is a medium for entertainment and there are many advantages to be acquired, particularly in the development of creative thinking among Chinese youths. The findings provides insight into the narrative strategies to portray 'heroes' in young people's animations, that have deeper social significance to contemporary China and changing the objectives of producers, audiences, and the government in the country. Additionally, the findings indicated the positive and negative impacts of Japanese animation has influenced Chinese youth from government, educational institutions, and families.

The government of China was the first to bring animation to the country. In contrast to traditional Chinese animation that targeting at younger audience such as children, animation is attracting audience among mature audiences. To date, the internet contributed disseminating animation in China faster due to Chinese government restrained Japanese animation on television. In fact, many Japanese animation do promote positive values. In most shonen narratives, the protagonist is assisted by a group of allies who collaborate with each other to fight the crime and evil. By imitating and practising the conversations in anime, Chinese youths can improve their communication skills, and the Japanese dubbing and engaging with exciting characters. It is also the Chinese youths may gain benefit from animation's themes and genres since they expose to Japanese vocabulary and culture as well.

Although Japanese animation is separate from other media linked with Japanese popular culture, anime, manga, and videogames are transnational businesses that have able to attract a wide range global audiences. Moreover, the findings indicated that many people relate animation with cultural imperialism and cultural resistance because animation carries the ideologically loaded language that can influence people globally. Love, loss, identity, morality, and the human nature are the complex themes that often explored in animation. Animation is also capable discussing about important political and social issues in an accessible manner that is clear to a wider audience and influence the way of Chinese youths thinking.

Furthermore, horror and spirituality are common themes in Japanese animation, which does not help young people develop realistic views of the world and has negative impact on their growth development. Asian comics and animation have a strong Japanese influence due to how they

portrayed the real life and conveyed in a unique way. Japanese animation has the ability to attract audiences from all ages, and theatrical animation in the animation industry has become an important aspect of the domestic animation development.

Japanese animation has massive impact to the Chinese youths' communication skills where they are engaging with different language and learning different culture. Animation is an effective way to learn about Japanese history, pop culture, and customs and enhance their knowledge about other culture in the world. Chinese youths may develop their imaginations and develop the ability to express themselves creatively and achieving academic success through storytelling method. As a result, they are able to sketch, which provides them opportunities exploring in animation and architecture areas. Further research needed from the study where an empirical study can be conducted on the impact of new media to animation and Manga to Chinese youths habits and attitudes.

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