



The Many Faces of Internationalization in Japanese Anime

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Abstract This article explores the internationalization of Japanese anime (animation) in an effort to help explain the cultural politics behind this popular cultural product. The internationalization of anime includes the incorporation of de-Japanized elements into anime's background, context, character design, and narrative organization. A theoretical framework for understanding anime's internationalization is developed, proposing that there are at least three kinds of cultural politics working behind anime's international success: one, de-politicized internationalization, which primarily serves as a commercial tactic to attract international audiences; two, Occidentalized internationalization, which satiates a nationalistic sentiment; three, self-Orientalized internationalization, which reveals a cultural desire to establish Japan as an ersatz Western country in Asia.

Keywords anime, cultural politics, de-Japanization , internationalization, Japanese animation, Occidentalism, Orientalism, self-Orientalization

Anime, another name for Japanese animation,¹ emerged in the 1910s (Fan, 2001: 115)² and developed its current distinctive form in the 1960s (Mangels and Hamill, 2003: xvii).³ A fascinating characteristic of anime is that it usually does not seem Japanese. For example, today's middle-aged Americans can 'fondly remember watching *Speed Racer* (1967) after school on television, often without realizing its Japanese

origin' (Napier, 2000: 5). Although anime's export began almost simultaneously with its birth (Mangels and Hamill, 2003: xvii),⁴ it did not become an important cultural export until the 1990s.⁵ In 2003, anime and its related products⁶ accounted for almost one-third of revenue in the world media market (Nakamura, 2003). Organized anime fandom began in North America in 1977 (Leonard, 2004). By 2004, anime clubs existed on nearly every continent (Patten, 2004). Today, anime has been translated into more than 30 languages (Anime News Network, 2005) and the anime market continues to grow (Japan Consumer Marketing Research Institute, 2005).

Critics have taken notice as anime's popularity has increased. Most scholars focus on a particular genre instead of the form as a whole and their analyses usually come from a set of restricted cultural perspectives. Few studies have attempted to establish or work from an open framework on one of anime's most distinctive features – internationalization (the incorporation of non-Japanese or 'universal' elements) and the multi-faceted cultural politics at work behind its international popularity.

A theoretical framework for understanding the internationalization of commercial anime works produced after the 1960s is developed here. Following Bourdieu (1984), I go beyond the isolated and fixed textual analysis to discover the fecund network behind anime. I include a broad spectrum of more than 50 anime works produced between 1964 and 2007⁷ and consider them collectively as codes of a language generated within the interplay of social, economic, and cultural forces. I assert that at least three kinds of cultural politics⁸ are at work behind anime's internationalization: de-politicized internationalization, which acts as a commercial tactic; occidentalized internationalization, which suggests a nationalistic practice; and self-orientalized internationalization, which reveals a cultural desire. The three cultural politics will be discussed after I elaborate on anime's internationalization in general.

The internationalization of anime

Western animation exerted a strong influence on anime during its early development and may partly account for anime's initial inclusion of international elements. In its budding years of the 1910s, anime was created by Japanese animators who were heavily influenced by such American and German artists as John R. Bray, the Fleischer brothers, and Lotte Reiniger (Patten, 2004). During the 1930s, due to the commercial success and international popularity of American animation, most anime were drawn in the style of the Disney and Warner Brothers' cartoons (Patten, 2004). This trend lasted till the end of the Second World War when Osamu Tezuka,⁹ much impressed by Disney animation's success, borrowed many visual elements from the Disney

studios, created numerous anime works, and set up the 'big-eye' style of anime figures (Lewis, 2000; Natsume, 2000). He also developed many unique characteristics that went beyond Disney.¹⁰ Gradually, anime formulated its distinctive style, including moving the mouths only but not other facial features, the omnipresent black lines,¹¹ the death of main characters, and the serious and mature themes. Internationalization, in this sense, was initiated during anime's early cultural dialogue with the West. As it developed, anime returned the animation world the favor with a profound update that has far surpassed the original crude mimicry.

Since the 1960s, the 'internationalization' of anime can be seen in the background and context of its narratives and plots, character design, and narrative organization. As Sato (2003) points out, over the past decades, there has been a clear trend of incorporating 'Nihonjinbanare', or non-Japanese cultural elements, into anime. A good example of the trend appeared in the animated TV series *The Rose of Versailles* (1979-1980) that skillfully incorporated the history of the French Revolution into its narrative. Other examples include *Cipher* (1989), which tells the story of the life of a pair of identical twins in New York City; *Count Cain* (2001), which revolves around the young master of the House of Hargreaves in Victorian London; and *Princess Tutu* (2002), which is set in a small European town of indistinct nationality.

The influence of Western literature is also commonly seen. For example, the *Record of Lodoss War* (1990) includes European-style Dungeons-and-Dragons elements. *Anne of the Green Gables* (1979) is the animated adaptation of the Canadian children's literature classic by Lucy Maud Montgomery; *Nadia - Secret of Blue Water* (1990-1991) is loosely based on Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues under the Sea*; and *The Knights of the Zodiac* (1986-1989; 2002-2005) has many references to Greek and Roman mythology.

Many anime feature Caucasian-looking characters either from the West, or Orientals with Western names. For example, in *Lain* (1998), Alice is a Japanese schoolgirl with no Western background. Two Japanese characters of *Sailor Moon* (1992-1993), Tsukino Usagi and Aino Minako, look like blondes. Quite a few anime characters come from America, France, Germany, and other Western countries. Asuka Langley in *Neo Genesis Evangelion* (1995-1996) hails from Germany.

Moreover, there are many 'fantasy' characters whose nationalities are hard to distinguish, either from their appearance or background, but they are by no means Japanese. For example, Urd in *Ob My Goddess* (1993) has white hair, green eyes, and yellow skin. Hoshino Ruri in *Yamato Nadeshiko* (1996-1997) is a pale android girl with violet hair and golden eyes. The male protagonist in *Rurouni Kenshin* (1996-1998), a wandering samurai in the Meiji period, is a swordsman with coral hair and blue eyes. Further, not belonging to any race, many characters in animation have either an unrealistically high stature with

a perfect shape or a small, cute body with a round shape. It is also common for many characters to have big eyes, deep orbits, and a high nose bridge, all of which imply a certain exoticness. It is hard to detect any typical Japanese physiognomy from the characters - instead, a kind of hybrid global 'look' hovers on their faces and bodies.

If occasionally there are some depictions of Japanese cultural traditions or Oriental rituals, they are highly simplified, arguably to the point of superficiality. Many anime series are more about a 'universal', or 'everywhere nowhere' narrative, void of cultural traits commonly coded Oriental. A character's Chinese origin may be represented only by traditional Chinese clothes or hairstyle. Even when more traditional Oriental characters are employed, the drama focuses on universal themes of love, friendship, and death. For example, in the anime adaptation of the Chinese literary classic, *Romance of Three Kingdoms* (1991-1992), the original Chinese-ness embedded in the plot has been substituted with a more approachable universal romance. Another controversial adaptation of the book *Ikki Touden* (2003) retains only the Chinese historical figures' names and replaces the characters with exotic-looking Japanese high school students.

Three kinds of cultural politics

Scholars have puzzled over these trends in anime's internationalization. Sato (2003) speculated that it is the result of 'the Japanese people's deeply entrenched sense of self-loathing, extending even to their own ethnic traits'. Contrarily, Jiaxin Xu (2001) argued that the imaginary boundary-less-ness of anime - internationalization - is actually a form of Japanese cultural imperialism. By blurring issues of Japanese identity in anime, Japanese cultural hegemony is furthered.

I argue, however, that self-loathing and cultural imperialism are not sufficient explanations for why anime looks the way it does and why it has achieved such global popularity. At least three kinds of cultural politics inform anime. First, through its suggestion of racial mixing and cultural blurring, anime neutralizes itself, which reflects a broader national desire to enter an extra-territorial stage of development. This dynamic can be thought of as 'de-politicized internationalization'. Second, even as much of anime can be seen to promote a transcultural globalization, other anime features work to maintain Japanese authority. These products, arguably less intended for Western consumption, trade in highly stereotypical depictions about the West. Anime 'Occidentalizes' the West and eulogizes the East, and thus this trend can be called 'Occidentalized internationalization'. The third kind of cultural politics is 'self-orientalized internationalization', the extension of techniques of Orientalism as developed by Edward Said (1979). It suggests how anime may be complicit in 'orientalizing' the other Asian cultures.

De-politicized internationalization

Quite a few theoretical perspectives help to explain the nature and mechanism of anime's de-politicized internationalization. Although much of the discourse on globalization revolves around the dichotomy of homogeneity or heterogeneity, Tomlinson (1999) has considered globalization as 'an extraordinarily fecund concept in its capacity to generate speculations, hypotheses and powerful social images and metaphors which reach far beyond the bare social facts' (p. 82). He uses the concepts of 'deterritorialization' and 'hybridization' to denote the mutual influence of various cultures and the subsequent possible detachment of a cultural product from its origin.

These ideas fit well with the state of Japanese anime both at home and abroad. Through depriving itself of Oriental signifiers, anime has carved a unique path to international markets. According to Chen (2003), a distinctive feature of anime's globalization is its interconnect-edness – a kind of horizontal (changed from parallel) net between international fans. (See also Leonard, 2004, for a discussion on international fans' active role in anime's dissemination.) The possibility of having a worldwide fan base ultimately should depend on some special characteristics of anime itself.

As more and more anime are exported to Western countries, 'international-ness' gradually emerges. Following John Fiske (1989), I argue that the de-politicized internationalization has made anime more 'open', allowing for more participation. What audiences see is not any specific cultural characteristics but a blend of different cultures. American anime fans I interviewed also said they could accept the story and character settings without much barrier. They say that many anime characters do not look Japanese, and that the narrative, which is not necessarily embedded in a Japanese context, is more important. One fan even said that it was the racially ambivalent anime characters that propelled him to see more anime. Another said that he was really curious about how Japanese tell stories about fantasy worlds.¹²

In *Pokémon* (1997–2002), for example, although some dragon-like pokémons might remind the audiences of certain Western folklore creatures, they are portrayed as pokémons that do not belong to any specific culture. From the very beginning, *Pokémon* was intended in part for export, and the production team aimed for a universal feel acceptable to international audiences. According to an executive producer, the production teams learned a lesson from the should-have-been-more-popular series *Sailor Moon* (1992–1993):

Our research on this case suggests that things like Japanese writing showing up on signboards in the background and uniquely Japanese family settings distract American kids, preventing them from really becoming absorbed in the movie's fictional world. With these examples in mind, from the start we had our hearts set on thoroughly localizing *Pokémon* (in the English-speaking market). (Masakazu, 2000: 59–62)

Hoskins and Mirus' (1988) 'cultural discount' theory can be applied here to explain anime's international appeal. Their theory argues that as a cultural product is being exported to a foreign cultural environment, its appeal will be discounted to the foreign viewers. For international audiences, the de-politicized internationalization removes cultural barriers for reception, making anime characters more approachable. North American importing companies' localization efforts,¹³ such as giving Japanese characters English names, further help audiences in English-speaking markets to accept anime as a not-that-distant product. The de-politicized internationalization also supports the intercultural promotion of anime products in international markets. As a result, the *Pokémon* series has initiated a large fan base for trading cards and games (Brougère, 2004).

The *Yu-Gi-Oh* (1998–2004) series is another example of anime's commercial success outside Japan.¹⁴ Monsters in this anime are often comparable to those in Western Role-Playing Games (RPG). Yugi, the protagonist, has purple-and-blond fiery and spiky hair. Like *Pokémon*, the monsters' and characters' national origins are obscured, which may help reduce the international audience's cultural barriers to get them more involved with the narrative and peripheral products. A Froogle search with 'Yu-Gi-Oh' as key word at <http://froogle.google.com/> on 4 June 2005 yielded around 280,000 *Yu-Gi-Oh*-related types of merchandise in English, ranging from character figurines to card game strategy guides. The popularity of *Yu-Gi-Oh* can also be partly explained by the de-politicized internationalization.

Many other anime have similar attributes: *Princess Tutu* (2002) uses a fabric woven of classical music, including that of Tchaikovsky, Wagner, Rimsky-Korsakov, Bizet and European fairy tales, as well as a large helping of ballet to tell a story about storytelling taken to the 'next level'. *The Five Star Stories* (1989) is an epic space opera and military drama depicting the evolution of the God of Light in a universe marked by uneven technological and social advances. *Angel Sanctuary* (2000) is a biblical reinterpretation of angels' relationship to humanity. In *Fullmetal Alchemist* (2004), the protagonists, the Elric brothers, are Caucasian boys born into a 1910 small European town that is part of a parallel world. Almost all of the major characters in this series have Western names and all official documents and letters are written in English.

Although many anime series claim they are depicting Japanese stories (e.g. *Prince of Tennis*, 2001; *Slam Dunk*, 1993–1996; *Perfect Blue*, 1997; *Jin-Roh*, 2000), they lack clearly defined Japanese characters. Even for Miyazaki, who is regarded as a promoter of 'Japanese' anime, his *Princess Mononoke* (1997) was still a blend of Japanese and non-Japanese elements. According to one commentator, this anime film's features 'are nearly identical to the presumably Caucasian characters in Miyazaki's earlier work, *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind* (1984), a fantasy set in a future world suggestive of medieval Europe'



Figure 1 De-politicized internationalization: Yami Yugi, Yugi Moto's darker personality held in the Millennium Puzzle in *Yu-Gi-Oh* (1998–2004). © 2008 Kazuki Takahashi™ Nihon Ad Systems, Inc.

(Sato, 2003). Even *Spirited Away* (2001), acknowledged as very Japanese in tone, shares much similarity in its plot with *Die Unendliche Geschichte (The Neverending Story)* by the famous German children's literature author, Michel Ende (Nie, 2003).

Along another theoretical stream, anime can be considered a good example of what Bolter and Grusin (2000) call remediation – the idea that modern media draw from earlier forms and styles familiar to audiences. Anime thus remediates classical Hollywood films' continuity editing styles, paintings, video games, comics, and multi-cultural elements and turns itself into a product without cultural boundaries.

The idea of cultural odor raised by Iwabuchi (2002, 2004a) is also helpful in examining anime's de-politicized internationalization. In a globalized world, for a non-Western cultural product to become successful, it must lose much of its original 'cultural odor' so as to be promoted in the international market as a neutralized product to gain wider audience reception. Although it is difficult for a cultural product to become completely odorless, audiences apparently feel little political incorrectness in admiring and identifying with characters unbounded by perceived racial or ethnic 'otherness'. After all, behind the 'internationalized' characters and plots of anime are the universal topics of love, friendship, death, and personal growth that have been sanctioned by most cultures.

In summary, de-politicized internationalization, as a commercially successful tactic, makes anime popular across cultures because it

allows a broader imaginary space of identification for people of various cultures.

Occidentalized internationalization

The second kind of cultural politics at work in anime can be thought of in terms of the Occidentalization of international elements – in some ways a seeming reversal of the idea that anime is successful because of its strong incorporation of Western cultural features. Occidentalism can be seen as a reversal of Orientalism, yet both concepts perform the same function: distorting the other and obscuring the other's voice. Before discussing some anime works, a brief review of the terms Orientalism and Occidentalism is in order. Basically, Orientalism emphasizes Western agency, and Occidentalism is the backlash from the East.

Said (1979) laid down the foundations of Orientalism in 1979, arguing that 'Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for the West' (p. 21). Originally related to the Franco-British encounter with the Arab world, this concept, though, can be applied to the assessment of anime's ability to both reinforce and challenge Western audiences' ideas about the Oriental. Although he did not devote much attention in his analyses to Japan, Said (1976) argued that the 'Orient' as envisioned by the West included Arab, Indian, Chinese, and Japanese civilizations.

The idea of Occidentalism emerged in response to Said's assumption that Orientalism includes more than China and Japan. Compared with Orientalism, it is more fluid and connotes various layers of meaning. Scholars in Arabic studies have drawn much inspiration from this notion. For example, in 1992, Hassan Hanafi tried to objectify the Occident in the same way that Westerners objectify the Orient, with the express purpose of recreating an independent Arab intellectual tradition (Tønnesson, 2004). For Hanafi, the Occident has been the teacher and the Orient the pupils, although today the Occident is in decline: 'For Arabs, Africans, Latin-Americans, Asians, history has not ended. It has perhaps not even started' (Tønnesson, 2004). Avishai Margalit and Ian Buruma (2002) even offered the term a broader conceptual framework: Occidentalism contains 'a set of attributes, such as arrogance, feebleness, greed, depravity, and decadence, which are invoked as typically Western, or even American, characteristics'. Occidentalism, therefore, involves a set of stereotypical depictions of supposedly Western characters, usually in a negative sense. While Orientalism works to create a center of power in the West, Occidentalism tries to do the same in the East.

Interestingly, Hanafi did not see Japan as an inspirational source. 'Japan . . . is the most translating country in the world. Translating but

not creating' (Tønnesson, 2004). While his assertion about Japanese culture is problematic and essentializing, it is nevertheless possible that Japanese anime contains some elements of Occidentalism and achieves cultural affect among the viewers of different countries. This issue can also be associated with the competition between the United States and Japan in the 1980s. If anime operates, in part, according to the logic of Occidentalization, we might then ask if it also works together with other aspects of Japan's economic and cultural expansionism to reform both Japanese and non-Japanese audiences' notions about 'the Oriental' and 'the Occidental'. I will expand the term, 'Occidentalism', into another dimension through analyzing several anime works.

A common motif in many anime series produced between the late 1970s and the mid 1990s is Japanese heroes defeating Western enemies. In combat anime such as *Tekken Chinmi* (1988), *Fist of the North Star* (1984–1987), *Fatal Fury* (1992), *The Knights of the Zodiac* (1986–1989; 2002–2005), Japanese characters are depicted either as hyper-muscular Asians or as Asians with stronger wills and spirits than their counterparts, mostly arrogant blonds. Western characters are normally more powerful and muscular in the beginning and look down upon their opponents. In the initial process of combat, usually it is the Japanese character getting the short end of the stick. Just as he or she seems on the verge of losing the game, the character summons the willpower to stand up and defeat the Western menace.



Figure 2 Occidentalized internationalization: Kenshiro (left) fights against Souther (right) in *Fist of the North Star* (1984–1987). © 1984 Buronson, Tetsuo Hara/NSP, Toei Animation.

In anime not intended for Western consumption, it is usually the blonds who are less patient and more contemptuous. They eventually learn their lesson at the hands of Japanese characters who solve the problems. For example, in *Spirit Hero Wataru 2* (1990–1991), the protagonist Wataru is a Japanese boy, whose destiny is to liberate the world dominated by a demon. Toraoh, another protagonist, is a blond boy with blue eyes, pointy ears, and a small horn on his head. His real identity is the demon's son. He shares the arrogance, quick temper, and pride of the Western fighters in the combat anime series and repeatedly attempts to claim that he is more powerful than Wataru, only to be 'taught' time and again that he is not. Similar plots are common in many series.

Most such works were produced between the late 1970s and mid 1990s, when the primary and intended market for anime was Japan. This allowed Japanese the possibility to stereotype Western characters without worrying about losing foreign audiences. With increasing anime export since the late 1990s, however, anime contain fewer, or much more subtle, negative depictions of the West. In these depictions, the Occident is stereotyped and simplified. Western characters are rendered flat and secondary to Oriental characters. In those anime, characters coded as Western are 'misfits' and 'inferior'. The conclusion is thus made more figuratively that the Oriental people, and more explicitly, the Japanese, are the leaders and the saviors.

Pushed to the extreme, Occidentalism can result in an explicit or implicit demonization of the West. The explicit demonization usually includes references to actual nations. Not surprisingly, this is usually the United States, depicted as the behind-the-scenes plotter or aspiring conspirator seeking to dominate the world. Japan, in this condition, acts as the savior of humanity and democracy and the crucial figure to frustrate US hegemony. Here, Occidentalism appears in the form of nationalism, which implies Japan's aspiration to become a world leader and guardian in its own right. Such a theme is commonly seen in anime, especially science fiction works, in which the West is depicted as potentially evil and filled with wild ambition. For example, Puppet Master, the powerful enemy in *Ghost in the Shell* (1995), was 'born' in the United States because the United States is the default setting and/or origin for manipulative characters.

A more subtle example of Occidentalization is seen in *She, the Ultimate Weapon* (2002).¹⁵ An important aspect of this series is that Japan's enemy is never clearly identified. All the audience learns is that Japan is fighting against a powerful force. In one episode when some Japanese middle school students are searching for an enemy pilot whose plane has crashed, a girl finds the pilot, whose ethnicity is unclear because he is still enclosed in his pilot suit. He shouts a line, 'Hey, stop it!', which is the only English line in the whole series. They shoot each other and both die. In the end, just as the world is about to be destroyed, many pyramid-shaped plumes of black smoke

piercing the sky are symbolic of the atomic smoke of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the Second World War. In this series, the English-speaking West is an abstract enemy and a potential threat to world peace. A more recent example comes from *Code Geass: Lelouch of the Rebellion* (2006–2007). In this series, Japan is conquered by the Holy Empire of Britannia and renamed Area 11 in 2010. The geographical location of the Holy Empire, as reflected on the military map in the beginning of the series, interestingly, corresponds closely to current day North America.

To summarize, few of the Occidentalism characteristics in anime equal the corrosive potency of the Occidentalism identified by Arab scholars. However, some of the patterns can be regarded as variants of Occidentalism – depicting the ‘Other’, or the West, in a distorted and typically negative way. With anime’s increasing international market, especially in Western countries, Occidentalism should be expected to become more implicit if not rare.

Self-orientalized internationalization

Looking at the internationalization of anime from another perspective, it is clear that the explanatory power derived from the dualistic model of Orientalism vs Occidentalism alone is limited. Another kind of Orientalism has developed in Japan, primarily as a result of cultural exchanges between the East and the West.

Dirlik (1994) introduced the idea of ‘Orientalism of the Orient’, suggesting that Orientalism now works to construct aspects of Easterners’ self images as well. Miller (1982: 209) called the idea ‘self-orientalism’, arguing that ‘it is rather as if the Japanese were . . . determined to do it to themselves and to their own culture before others can do it for and to them’. To a certain extent, Japan considers itself a Western country in Asia. This can be illustrated by the slogan ‘*wakon yōsai*’, which means ‘Japanese spirit, Western technologies’,¹⁶ and suggests Japan’s determination to preserve its own way of doing things in part by looking outward at what the world or the Other has to offer (Nakamura, 2002: 66). With Japan’s active participation in global cultural flow, Orientalism has been internalized, neutralized, and ‘reinvented’ in anime.

To adapt to the present global situation, anime’s internationalization illustrates that Japan not only ‘imitates’ and ‘adopts’ but also promotes Orientalist discourse in new and unexpected ways. This new cultural politics is consistent with the notions of glocalism or glocalization through what I call ‘self-orientalized internationalization’. Self-orientalism differs from the traditional Orientalism in the sense that it provides a stage on which Japan can stand out from the Oriental side of other Asian countries and act as both a stranger and a leader in Asia. In this process, the original Asian-ness attached to Japanese culture is obscured; what emerges is a distant yet familiar halo around Japan.

While anime suggests how Japan both Occidentalizes the West and Orientalizes itself as part of a broader effort to go global, it can also be understood as depicting Japan as akin to the West so as to help promote a certain kind of hegemony over the rest of the East. As Iwabuchi (2004b) argues:

Japan's condescending sense of being the leader of Asia and the asymmetrical power relationship between Japan and the rest of Asia are still intact. Japan's cultural nationalist project has been reconfigured within a transnational and postcolonial framework. (p. 15)

His points have been illustrated by the Japanese domestic best-selling comics such as *Hating the Korean Wave* and *Introduction to China*, which portray Chinese and Koreans as inferior peoples and advocate confrontations with them (Onishi, 2005).

A number of Taiwanese scholars¹⁷ hold this perspective about the popularity of Japanese cultural products. Their standpoint originates in part from Taiwan's history of being colonized by the Japanese empire in the past century. They further support this argument with postcolonial theories, arguing that behind the innocuous faces, Japan becomes complicit with or 'equal to' the West as a cultural imperialist. Yet these arguments still emphasize the traditional dichotomy between the East and the West and avoid consideration of anime's Janus-faced status.

Self-orientalized internationalization appears frequently in anime. In the first episode of *R.O.D. - the TV* (2003–2004), 'The Paper Sisters', three Hong Kong sisters – Michelle Cheung, Maggie Mui, and Anita King – are assigned to protect Nenene Sumiregawa, the female protagonist, a Japanese writer who is adored throughout the world and who is on a book signing tour in Hong Kong. Two jealous Chinese writers, frustrated by 'the Japanese woman's success' in China, decide to get rid of her. Ultimately, both of their attempts are defeated by Nenene's three Hong Kong bodyguards.

The three Hong Kong sisters are nevertheless not portrayed as Asian,¹⁸ except for Maggie, who has black hair and brown eyes. Michelle has blonde hair and olive eyes, Anita has pink hair and green eyes, and Nenene has amber hair and green eyes. Maggie, who has the most obvious Asian traits, is a tall, shy, and sometimes dumb figure in a waiter's uniform. She is referred to by her sisters as the driver in this episode. Her favorite writer is Hemingway. Yet she frequently adds comments like 'I admire Nenene – she is the true author'. Michelle is the most outgoing and frivolous of the four. She admires Nenene and acts as the leader of her sisters. Her favorite book is *Harry Potter*, but like Maggie, she adds, 'But I love Nenene's book better'. Anita is the youngest among the three. Rebellious in the beginning, Anita does not follow her sisters, who are Nenene's fans. But, eventually, she, too, becomes Nenene's follower. Nenene, the talented Japanese writer, is a thoughtful and mature figure. Like many anime girls, Nenene is

highly sexualized. Further, as a kind of 'fan service'¹⁹ to the presumptively male gaze, she is also 'offered' in shots which, not relevant to the plot, depict her cleavage and thighs under her skirt. These depictions illustrate the dilemma of Japanese characters. They serve as the Oriental's mentors while being regrettably 'feminized' and 'sexualized' by Orientalism.

In contrast, the Chinese authors are jealous, cruel, and weak antagonists. Their Chinese identity is depicted with small, vicious eyes and grayish yellow skin. They are fanatic nationalists who cannot tolerate a 'Jap's' popularity in their country. One wears traditional Chinese clothes, and the other is lewd. When he hijacks the plane, he uses his gun to pinch Nenene's breast. Lee, Nenene's publisher, is Chinese; he has yellow skin and slit eyes, a common feature for characters of Asian origin. Most of the readers in Hong Kong, plus the three sisters, have bigger eyes and whiter skin. All volunteer to defend Nenene. In the end, when the three sisters arrive in Japan with Nenene, they are stunned by the superfluity and sophistication of Japanese culture and act like pilgrims in this country, which, in kind, has also been a pilgrim to the West since the Meiji Restoration in the late 19th century.

The depiction of Chinese nationalists has a lot to do with the memories of the Second World War and ongoing tensions in the relationship between each country's nationalists and the two countries' competition in Asia. The setting of Hong Kong also adds a flavor of post-colonialism oft-associated with the city. However, even considered in tandem, these do not provide sufficient explanation for



Figure 3 Self-orientalized internationalization: a Chinese writer (left) holds Nenene (right) hostage in *R.O.D. – the TV*. © STUDIO ORPHEE/Aniplex Inc. All Rights Reserved.

the construction of the relationship between Japan and the rest of Asia that self-orientalism may provide.

To a certain degree, Orientalism is constructed on the basis of Western capitalist imperialism and its racist underpinnings. It is possible to identify a logic whereby these processes have been incorporated into Orientalism's narrative:

In a quite constant way, Orientalism depends for its strategy on the flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without even losing him the relative upper hand. (Said, 1979: 6)

Consequently, "Orientalism" manufactures the "Orient" and thus helps to regulate colonialist relations' (Slemon, 1995: 47). *R.O.D. - the TV* is an example of how Orientalism's 'lessons' can be applied by Japan to the contexts of its Asian competitors and markets.

This anime series also indicates how Japan might rid itself of an Asian quality through 'ethnic bleaching' (Sato, 2003) and polarizing/simplifying its Asian origins. Examples of ethnic bleaching (similar to the 'deodorizing' raised by Iwabuchi) are commonly seen, especially in science fiction anime. In *Cowboy Bebop* (1998-1999) and *Gasaraki* (1998-1999), the 'tumors' of civilization and development are inhabited by illegal Asian immigrants, usually Chinese. Japanese protagonists, looking much whiter and internationalized, glide through the slums in high-tech planes either to use those Asian locations for a fight or to act as the protectors of the Asian inhabitants. In *G Gundam* (1994-1995), a story of combat between the different robots of different countries in the future, the robots and the pilots from Neo America, Neo China, and Neo France are highly stereotyped and the audience can easily recognize their nationalities and origins from their appearance. However, when it comes to the three robots and their pilots from Neo Japan, the audience might be puzzled by their international appearance and rootless identity, a code perhaps for how Japan might locate itself in a future world where it has completely detached itself from Asia.

Distinguishing between Orientalism and self-orientalism, Iwabuchi (1994) suggests that 'while Orientalism enjoys the mysterious exotism of the Other, self-orientalism exploits the Orientalist gaze to turn itself into an Other'. Self-orientalism shows how Japan does not have enough power to dominate the West yet and 'Japan talks about the Self, while the West talks about the Other'.

Self-orientalism and Orientalism, however, have never been fully in conflict with each other because self-orientalism pivots around the West as a universal entity. Accordingly, Japan localizes the West and the East to establish itself as an ersatz Western country in Asia. It extends the traditional dichotomy between the West and the East to a new model with Japan as the pivot: the West-Japan-the East.

Conclusion

The three cultural politics of anime suggests that appropriation changes the cultural mix in many ways. A local product thus has the potential to go abroad and create, through unexpected cultural clashes, novel ways to think through issues of identity, exchange, and politics. Anime's internationalization has been so profound that it is arbitrary to summarize the phenomenon from any single theoretical perspective or to treat the three 'cultural politics' as rigidified categories exclusive of each other. An anime work can comprise more than one kind of cultural politics, too.

At least three patterns of cultural politics have been observed here: de-politicized internationalization, the commercial tactic; Occidentalized internationalization, the nationalistic practice; and self-Orientalized internationalization, the cultural desire. Different from Western animation, anime has undergone a unique developmental trajectory that allows creative borrowing of various cultural and political elements to build up its stylistic properties and narrative framework along the way. This process is further complicated by the dynamics of the mobilization and circulation of anime products among international audiences who endow anime consumption with various cultural possibilities. As a result, anime is able to engage multiple cultural politics, whose interplay with its mixed signifiers results in an interesting postmodern landscape.

The discussion here triggers another set of questions: Do Westerners watch anime in part to indulge themselves in some faded Orientalist dream or do they use anime to continue their consumption of the familiarity of another industrialized nation? Does anime push them to be more reflective in thinking about their own culture if they see through anime that many cultural traits are transcultural? To what extent have these cultural politics been internalized by anime production staff? Do they make any conscious effort to incorporate the three cultural politics into anime as a commercial product? These questions could be answered through future systematic audience research and production studies.

From its inception and throughout its development, anime has been an integrated component of Japan's multi-cultural interactions with others. Coupled with the international audience's involvement and the cross-cultural anime trade, it would be unreasonable to examine anime from any single lens while denying the relevance of other interpretations. The three cultural politics of anime's internationalization discussed here are probably not the only ones that should be examined. They are intended to open future discussions about internationalization-related issues and possibilities. As anime suggests, internationalization can help produce a novel possibility for intercultural exchange, induce provocative connotations in popular

cultural products, and enable different cultures to interact with and better understand each other.

Notes

- 1 Anime is derived from a French word, 'animé'. There are two possible reasons for that: one, it is easier to pronounce than Japanimation, or Japanese animation; two, this is a tribute paid to the French, who were the first to dub anime into another language.
- 2 The first Japanese animation was produced in 1917. Unfortunately, the early animation industry was virtually destroyed by the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923.
- 3 On 1 January 1963, one of the earliest animated TV series in Japan, *Tetsuwan Atomu*, debuted on Fuji TV.
- 4 Later in 1963, the US network NBC bought a syndicated package of *Tetsuwan Atomu* and renamed it *Astro Boy*. The edited and dubbed series was a hit in North America.
- 5 In 1992 and 1993, 58 per cent of the world's animated films were exported from Japan (Iwabuchi, 1995). See also Leonard (2004) for anime's international trade.
- 6 This includes Anime/Comic/Game (ACG), three major forms of Japanese pop culture, and their spin-off sales.
- 7 Filmography is available upon request.
- 8 The term 'cultural politics' here is used metaphorically to refer to 'cultural possibilities' conveyed through anime's internationalization.
- 9 Osamu Tezuka (1928–1989), also known as 'God of Manga (comics)', created a huge amount of manga and anime. It is often said that had it not been for Tezuka, Japanese anime would not be what they are today.
- 10 From the beginning, Tezuka wanted to create more interesting and mature stories. 'I incorporated tears, grief, anger, and hate, and I created stories where the ending was not always "happy"' (Schodt, 1986: 63).
- 11 Unlike Disney characters who are usually delineated by darker colorful lines of different width around the shapes of light similar color, most of anime characters are depicted by black lines of the same width. The origins of this format and the aforementioned 'moving only the mouths' are closely tied to anime's early difficulties in securing production funding.
- 12 From 10 January to 10 March 2004, I conducted anonymous interviews with 10 members of the Carolina Otaku Uprising, also known as the UNC Japanese Animation club.
- 13 Although many hardcore anime fans are unsatisfied with the quality of the English dubbing and the importers' censorship that make alterations to ensure the content is appropriate for a young audience, the North American importers have played a crucial role in promoting anime to general audiences.
- 14 This series was seen on WB Kids in the US, YTV in Canada, and Nickelodeon in the UK.
- 15 In this series, Japan is involved in a war with another powerful unnamed

country. Chise, a Japanese high school girl, is summoned by the government to defend Japan and the rest of humankind. Her body is enhanced technologically to become the 'ultimate weapon'.

- 16 This slogan is a modification of the 1850s term '*wakon kansai*', which means 'Japanese spirit, Chinese technique' (Nakamura, 2002: 66).
- 17 They include, but are not limited to: Tianduo Li and Huiwen He (2002), Shuwen Qiu (2002), and Jiaxin Xu (2001).
- 18 The three Hong Kong sisters, Michelle, Maggie, and Anita, appear to be named after the actresses of the Hong Kong blockbuster, *The Heroic Trio* (1993), and its sequel, *Executioners* (1993). Although their real identities, as revealed in Episode 24, are test-tube babies, they have been referred to and depicted as Hong Kongese in this series.
- 19 This refers to the sexual depiction of anime characters, such as the peeping-pant shot, ripping off clothing, etc. that has nothing to do with the narrative or character development.

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