

Routledge Culture, Society, Business in East Asia Series

JAPANESE ANIMATION IN ASIA

**TRANSNATIONAL INDUSTRY, AUDIENCES,
AND SUCCESS**

Edited by Marco Pellitteri and Heung-wah Wong



Japanese Animation in Asia

Anime is a quintessentially Japanese form of animation consisting of both hand drawn and computer-generated imagery, and is often characterised by colourful graphics, vibrant characters, and fantastical themes. As an increasingly globalising expression of popular art and entertainment, and distributed through cinema, television, and over the internet, anime series and films have an enormous following, not only in Japan but also in Asia. This book provides a comprehensive survey of the historical development, industrial structure, and technical features of Japanese animation and of the overall dynamics of its globalisation in key contexts of the Asian region. Specific chapters cover anime's production logics, its features as an 'emotion industry', and the involvement of a range of Asian countries in the production, consumption, and cultural impact of Japanese animation.

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How and what are we to examine if we wish to understand the commonalities across East Asia without falling into the powerful fictions or homogeneities that dress its many constituencies? By the same measure, can East Asian homogeneities make sense in any way outside the biases of East-West personation?

For anthropologists familiar with the societies of East Asia, there is a rich diversity of work that can potentially be applied to address these questions within a comparative tradition grounded in the region as opposed the singularising outward encounter. This requires us to broaden our scope of investigation to include all aspects of intra-regional life, trade, ideology, culture, and governance, while at the same time dedicating ourselves to a complete and holistic understanding of the exchange of identities that describe each community under investigation. An original and wide ranging analysis will be the result, one that draws on the methods and theory of anthropology as it deepens our understanding of the interconnections, dependencies, and discordances within and among East Asia.

The book series includes three broad strands within and between which to critically examine the various insides and outsides of the region. The first is about the globalisation of Japanese popular culture in East Asia, especially in greater China. The second strand presents comparative studies of major social institutions in Japan and China, such as family, community and other major concepts in Japanese and Chinese societies. The final strand puts forward cross-cultural studies of business in East Asia.

1 Japanese Visual Media

Politicizing the Screen

Jennifer Coates and Eyal Ben Ari

2 Japanese Animation in Asia

Transnational Industry, Audiences, and Success

Edited by Marco Pellitteri and Heung-wah Wong

Japanese Animation in Asia

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Audiences, and Success

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and Heung-wah Wong**

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Note on typography and orthography

- In this book, the Editors have opted for the UK English orthography: e.g. readers will find ‘globalisation’ or ‘sceptical’ rather than ‘globalization’ and ‘skeptical’, except for direct quotes from cited authors.
- Inverted commas of first level are single (‘ ’); inverted commas of second level are double (“ ”). Punctuation is placed outside of inverted commas. In quoted passages, clearly, we left the formatting of the original text untouched.
- Acronyms of common words are rendered in small capital letters, such as ‘TV’; acronyms of institutions or companies are rendered in capital letters, such as ‘METI’.
- The names of Japanese persons follow the surname-given name order: e.g. Tezuka Osamu.
- When rendering Japanese words, the diacritic accent upon the letters ‘a’, ‘e’, ‘o’, ‘u’ (‘ā’, ‘ē’, ‘ō’, ‘ū’) indicates the elongation of the vowel. The elongation of the letter ‘i’ is rendered with the doubling of it (‘ii’).
- Given their primary presence in the book as keywords, the terms ‘anime’ (generally indicating animated cartoons created in Japan) and ‘manga’ (labelling comics made in Japan) are rendered in regular font, not in italics.
- Japanese words are *not* pluralised using the English plural ‘-s’ also when they are intended in the plural.
- In this book we observe the following policy for referencing Japanese animated works: the title in Japanese (but rendered in Latin alphabet) is always privileged, followed by a literal translation between parentheses, to allow readers to know the original meaning via a simple transliteration; e.g., ‘Versailles’, not ‘Berusayu’. The title of a possible official edition in English is not automatically indicated, but it is added only if such edition is respectful of the original version or useful in the chapter’s discourse; otherwise, it will be neglected. Synthetic filmographic references are provided in-text only, not in the Bibliography of the various chapters.
- Words indicating geocultural areas through cardinal directions are in small letters (i.e. ‘west/ern’, not ‘West/ern’).

Introduction

Heung-wah Wong

This collection of essays explores various ways by which Japanese animation globalises in Asia. Considering the globalisation of Japanese animation in various Asian contexts as a dialogic process, the first three chapters in [Part I](#) of the book focus on the main features of Japanese animation and its industry, while the last chapter of [Part I](#) provides a discussion on European contexts, with which the experience of Japanese animation in Asia can be compared as an attempt to avoid Asian-centric biases. The six chapters in [Part II](#) present concrete empirically based cases in South Korea, China, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, and India to explore the way Japanese animation spread there and, at the same time, investigate how Japanese animation is received in these countries. These countries were chosen for three major reasons. First, South Korea, China, and Japan are not only the world's top three animation (co)production powerhouses, but also huge animation markets across the globe. The second reason is the economic, social, and cultural interconnection among these countries, which provides us with an opportunity to examine whether such an interconnection has to do with the spread of Japanese animation to these markets and *vice versa*. Finally, the volume as a whole is intended as a study of the globalisation rather than the internationalisation of Japanese animation, and that is why we chose to study Japanese animation in various Asian countries.

Harumi Befu highlights the importance of distinguishing globalisation from internationalisation in the study of the spread of Japanese culture to the world. As he clarifies,

Internationalization implies a relationship between two or more nations: a minimum of two nations can engage in “international” relations. Indeed, when the term internationalization became popular in the 1970s and the 1980s, the reference was usually to Japan relating to one or another country. For example, when Osaka established a sister-city relation with San Francisco or when Nepal and Japan engaged in a cultural exchange program, it was a case of internationalization.

“Globalization,” on the other hand, implies simultaneous extension and expansion in all directions. At least in intent, the term implies that

2 Heung-wah Wong

Japan is extending its interests all over the world in a network [...]. If Japan was simply having an association with one or two countries, it would not warrant the term. “Globalization” as a concept, indeed, designates the empirical reality of Japan’s common presence throughout most parts of the world. The appellation is an *ex post facto* affirmation of a reality that has existed since at least the 1970s.

(Befu, 2001: 3)

What we can learn from Befu’s clarification is that we cannot simply investigate how Japanese animation spreads to one or another country or region as doing so, according to Befu, would not qualify this book as a study of the globalisation of Japanese animation. Given the fact that most of the previous studies with a title claiming that they themselves are studies of the globalisation of Japanese popular culture are in fact all about Japanese popular culture in *one* country or region, this edited volume—which covers Japanese animation in various countries in Asia—can in our view contribute to the understanding of the globalisation of Japanese animation in Asia.

The book also contributes to the study of the *transnationalism* of Japanese animation. We suggest that the spread of Japanese popular culture overseas can be conceived as a dialogical process (in a Bakhtinian sense, more on this later), in which Japanese animation interacts with a network of different factors at different levels. We cannot specify in advance what factors at which level are involved, not to mention how these factors are related to each other. Nor can we *a priori* assign privileges to a certain factor or certain level as the dominant factor in the process. The spread of Japanese animation or ‘anime’ (commercial animated cartoons mostly made in 2D techniques; see [Chapter 1](#) for more insight on this) must therefore be intended as an *open series*. Conceptualising the spread of Japanese animation overseas as a dialogical process in turn calls for new theoretical frameworks that can better capture such complex and open processes. The chapters in this book are different attempts to answer the call.

It is however important to clarify at the beginning what we are not inclined to achieve. This edited volume is not intended to be a work of anime studies. The chapters in this book do not devote to the analysis of Japanese animation as text. Nor do they teach us how to read Japanese animation as text, as Japanese sociologist Yui Kiyomitsu (2010) did in the Preface for the book *The Dragon and the Dazzle: Models, Strategies, and Identities of Japanese Imagination—A European Perspective*. It is instead a collective work by a group of experts who are interested in the spread of Japanese animation as a cultural product to Asia. Hence the critical literature review that follows is not confined to the studies of globalisation of anime. Rather, it is intended to target at some general theoretical discourses on the globalisation of Japanese popular culture at large.

Underlying the voluminous literature on the spread of Japanese popular culture are two opposing theoretical discourses. The first is the

‘globalisation’ thesis and a later version of it, ‘regionalisation’; the other is ‘localisation’ and its varieties, including ‘cultural resistance’, ‘creolisation’, and ‘hybridisation’. The first part of this introductory chapter is intended to offer a critical review of these two theoretical discourses, as they are like two poles between which the theoretical perspectives on the globalisation of Japanese popular culture have oscillated since the second half of the last century, in order to see where the problems lie.

Regionalising culture through Japanese popular culture

In his book *Regionalizing Culture: The Political Economy of Japanese Popular Culture in Asia*, Nissim Otmazgin (2014) sets himself to answer two self-imposed questions. The first is about what accounts for the prevalence of Japanese popular culture in East Asia. The second question is about how such popularity of Japanese popular culture shapes the regional formation in East Asia (Otmazgin, 2014: xvii). Otmazgin’s answers to these two different but interrelated questions are very innovative and complex. To simplify enormously, Otmazgin argues that the organisational aspects of the production of Japanese popular culture across the region, rather than an essentialist view of shared culture, are responsible for the popularity of Japanese popular culture in East Asia. As Otmazgin puts it,

Popular culture plays a constructive role in pulling people closer together by providing them with shared experiences. The commodification, production, marketing, pirating, and consumption of popular culture leads to the construction of new frameworks for delivering images, ideas, and emotional expressions that can stimulate feelings of proximity and belonging. The spread of popular culture may help people across Asia develop a common language made up of the same sounds, images, and texts available on CDs and DVDs, on TVs and movie screens, in comic publications, on commercial billboards, or via the Internet. These commodities and images need not be uniquely Asian as long as they are shared by wide segments of the Asian population.

(Otmazgin, 2014: xvii–xviii)

Obviously, Otmazgin prioritises the production rather than the consumption side of Japanese popular culture in explaining the popularity of Japanese popular culture in East Asia. That is why he starts his narrative with a chapter titled *Japan’s Popular Culture Powerhouse*, emphasising the strength of Japanese creative industries, which enables Japan to produce and export its popular culture products to East Asia. More importantly, the strong Japanese creative industries are able to not only create a market of Japanese popular culture for the middle-class of East Asian societies, but also introduce if not impose standardised organisation methods and

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product formats to its counterparts in the region, as the latter always look to Japanese creative industries as their model. The convergence of the organisation methods and product formats of creative industries in Japan and East Asia further fosters commonalities among the middle-class of major cities in East Asia, who consume the same set of Japanese popular culture products. As Otmazgin argues, consuming the same set of popular culture products makes the middle-class in the region develop similar lifestyles and life goals, which contributes to the regionalisation in East Asia.

As mentioned above, Otmazgin's use of the proliferation of Japanese popular culture in East Asia as a window to investigate the regionalisation of the area is very innovative and smart, given the fact that most of the international relations scholars tend to emphasise, in the study of regionalisation processes, the role of the State (top-down approach). The popular culture approach (bottom-up approach) can help to highlight another aspect of regionalisation. But Otmazgin's arguments do have some serious problems. One general problem is the negligence of consumption. As Marshall Sahlins effectively argues,

all production, even where it is governed by the commodity-form, by exchange-value, remains the production of use-values. Without consumption, the object does not complete itself as a product: a house left unoccupied is no house

(Sahlins, 1976: 169)

Hence, the question why consumers in urban East Asia would like to consume Japanese popular culture in the first place remains unanswered. Another problem is whether Japanese popular culture has the *same* meaning to the urban middle-class in different countries and regions of East Asia. One more related question is whether consumers in urban East Asia use Japanese popular culture in the same way as their counterparts in Japan do. Our last question is whether the middle-class consumers of Japanese popular culture in the various Asian contexts would develop similar, if not the same, lifestyles and ideas about how to live their lives as those of the Japanese consumers in Japan.

Otmazgin's answer to the last question must be an affirmative 'yes', otherwise the conclusion of his 'regionalisation by Japanese popular culture' approach cannot stand, as his arguments require such a cultural commonality. As Otmazgin explains,

Popular culture is a powerful engine that helps make East Asia into a region. Regional circulation of commodified culture encourages the creation of shared popular culture markets. *These establish East Asians, especially city dwellers, in a new cultural realm constructed by common popular culture products and images, and thus enable the*

dissemination of communalities of conceptions and ideas. The dissemination and consumption of popular culture constructs new frameworks for delivering images, ideas, and emotions, which can stimulate feelings of belonging to the same cultural space and convince people in places such as Hong Kong, Japan, Bangkok, and Jakarta that they live in a unified cultural domain. There is little doubt that when people grow up consuming the same popular culture, it engenders a special bond or a special sense of kinship between them. Given the large number of people in East Asia who spend many hours every day in front of a television, go to movies, listen to music, and generally invest in cultural consumption, it seems reasonable to expect that these practices will have an impact on their lives and perceptions, introduce new images and options, and create new social and symbolic references. We can well imagine popular culture, along with the practices and discourses it gives rise to, creating a sense of “we-ness.”

(Otmazgin, 2014: 49; italics added)

Obviously, Otmazgin’s regionalisation by Japanese popular culture thesis must rely on his claim that some commonalities among the consumer of urban East Asian societies emerge as the result of consuming the same Japanese popular culture. In fact, he is well aware of the possible criticisms against this claim. As Otmazgin clarifies,

I would like to make my argument clear: I am not suggesting that the operations of Japanese cultural industries ultimately lead to the formation of a Japanese-dominated regional identity in East Asia, to the homogenization of cultural practices, or to the imposition of Japanese norms and values on local societies. The flow of popular culture in East Asia is multidirectional. A variety of other popular culture confluences, both global (American) and regional (Chinese, Korean), have rapidly intensified in recent years and Japan itself has become an avid importer of popular culture from other parts of East Asia, although there is a conspicuous asymmetry in the import-export ratio, with Japan generally exporting much more popular culture within East Asia than it imports from the region.

(Otmazgin, 2014: xix)

Despite the above clarification, the fact that there must be a certain homogenising effect of Japanese popular culture in East Asia is, we argue, unavoidable, as Otmazgin’s regionalisation by Japanese popular culture thesis *logically* requires such an effect.

We do not deny the homogenising effect of the spread of Japanese popular culture in East Asia, but we are also not going to give away the historical agency of the consumer in urban East Asian societies. The simple reason is that the people in East Asia do have *historical agency*: many empirical

studies on the spread of Japanese popular culture in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mainland China (Ching, 1994; Lai and Wong, 2001; Yau and Wong, 2008) have testified how Japanese popular culture 'goods always have to be contextualised (given meaning, inserted into particular social relationships) to be utilized, and there is no guarantee that the intention of the producer will be recognized, much less respected, by consumers from another culture' (Howes, 1996: 5–6).

Even if there is a homogenising effect of the spread of Japanese popular culture on East Asia, we however still have to answer the question why the consumer of urban East Asian societies tends to consume Japanese popular culture in the first place. In this regard, Iwabuchi Kōichi's 'cultural proximity' thesis (2001) seems to be able to offer help. We have already discussed his thesis elsewhere (Wong and Yau, 2010), so I am going to be brief here. In his account of the popularity of Japanese TV dramas in Taiwan, Iwabuchi argues that the 'coevalness' shared by Japan and Taiwan gives rise to the popularity of Japanese TV dramas in Taiwan because 'Japanese TV dramas offer their fans a concrete model of what it is to be modern in east Asia, something which American popular cultures can never do' (Iwabuchi, 2001: 73). The 'coevalness', Iwabuchi continues to argue, is formed as the result of Taiwan's recent economic development and the circulation of commodities and information between Japan and Taiwan, which help to foster a sense of simultaneity among Taiwanese consumers. This sense of simultaneity then is further reflected in the consumption of Japanese TV dramas because the modernity embodied in the texts of these TV products is something that Taiwanese consumers long for.

I argue that Iwabuchi's argument is a form of Marxist dialectic: the determination of the superstructure by the base structure. He assumes that people's tastes are a function of their material circumstances, as we can see from his arguments that the 'taste' of Taiwanese consumers is directly informed by the 'coevalness' that results from Taiwan's recent economic development, which in turn explains the prevalence of Japanese TV dramas in Taiwan. In the event, Iwabuchi does not consider the active historic role of the people in Taiwan, 'which must mean the way they shape the material circumstances laid on them according to their own conceptions' (Sahlins, 2000: 416). We are brought back to the homogenising effect of Japanese popular culture thesis.

From regionalisation to localisation

As Marshall Sahlins (2005: 4) correctly points out, when the people all over the world developed their own cultural consciousness and asserted their own cultural identities in the second half of the last century, academics tended to frame their theoretical discourses by localisation in favour of globalisation. The same goes for the study of Japanese popular culture in Asia.

Wai-Ming Ng can be seen as one of the most prolific scholars who adopts the localisation discourse to interpret the prevalence of Japanese popular culture in Asia. He published a series of articles and chapters on various Japanese popular culture products in Singapore, including TV dramas (Ng, 2001a), animation (Ng, 2001b), cultural goods (Ng, 2001c), sushi (Ng, 2001d), video games (Ng, 2001e), comics and animation (Ng, 2002), and popular music (Ng, 2003b) when he worked in the National University of Singapore, with an emphasis on how Japanese popular culture is localised. When Ng moved to teach at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, he repeated similar studies and published another set of articles and chapters on Japanese popular culture in Hong Kong, including comics (Ng, 2003a), TV dramas (Ng, 2005), food (Ng, 2006a), games (Ng, 2006b), films (Ng, 2008), and animation-comic-games (Ng, 2010). Given the number of publications on Japanese popular culture in Singapore and Hong Kong and the variety of Japanese popular cultural products covered, Ng can be regarded as *the* major scholar in the region, and that is why I pick his work here to make my point.

In a sense, Ng can be considered as a cultural diffusionist who dismembers Japanese popular culture into various traits and examines which elements are selectively adopted in Singapore or Hong Kong when Japanese popular culture products travel there. The narrative of Ng's work is always schematic, if not mechanical. Ng usually starts his work with an introduction. It is then followed by a brief history of the Japanese popular cultural product concerned, in which Ng identifies what traits of the product are accepted and what others are ignored in the local society. Given such a simple narrative structure, Ng's work can never capture the complex dynamics involved in the cultural encounter between Japanese popular culture and the local society.

Another crucial problem is that Ng's work is undertheorised. I of course am not saying that Ng does not consider theorising important. In fact, Ng always attempts to theorise his work, but what he actually did was just assigning labels to the selective adoption of the traits of Japanese popular cultural products by the local society considered. The first label is 'localisation' (Ng, 2001d). As Ng concludes in his study of sushi in Singapore,

Sushi is re-made and consumed in Singapore. To the majority of Singaporeans who do not know sushi, they take localised sushi as Japanese sushi. Hence, culturally, the acceptance of sushi in Singapore and overseas should be viewed as the result of culinary hybridization, cultural interchange, and an interplay of Japanization and localization. As a commercial and cultural product, sushi has been localized to a certain extent to different nations. In Singapore, localization is the key to the birth of a sushi culture. Without the localization of sushi, sushi would not have become so popular.

(Ng, 2001d: 17–8)

Ng reaches the same conclusion in his study of Japanese elements in erotic films in Hong Kong. He writes:

The presence of Japanese elements in Hong Kong erotic films is salient. However, the force of localization seems to be stronger than Japanization. While borrowing from Japanese erotic films and AV in terms of casting and themes, Hong Kong filmmakers fuse them with Hong Kong cinematic styles and practices.

(Ng, 2004: 223)

Interestingly, in Ng's later publications the label has been changed from 'localization' to 'indigenization'. As the author puts it,

Through a study of the impact of Japanese dramas on Hong Kong dramas, we understand that elements of Japanese dramas enrich and not replace Hong Kong dramas. Hong Kong producers, scriptwriters, actors and photographers are benefited from localizing Japanese elements. Being cosmopolitan and hybrid, Hong Kong TV dramas have their own traditions and characteristics. They have been incorporating and indigenizing elements from foreign television dramas (and films) for a long time. Not only Japanese dramas, but also American, Taiwanese, Korean and Mainland Chinese dramas are used as references. All these foreign elements enrich local elements.

(Ng, 2005: 169)

I have to immediately point out that although the label used has changed from 'localization' to 'indigenization', the referent of these labels that Ng has described in his works remains the same: a selective adoption of the traits of Japanese popular cultural products. The reader is thus tempted to ask how to distinguish theoretically the concept of localisation from that of indigenisation if they refer to the same cultural phenomenon.

More importantly, Ng seems not to be able to address several crucial questions: why are certain traits picked up by the local societies while others are ignored? Who makes the selection and why? When and how is the selection made? How do the local societies make sense of the traits selected?

These questions are not trivial as they have to do with local culture and the historical agency of local people. I argue that the local culture, as a meaningful system, plays an important role in the selective adoption of foreign cultural elements. Franz Boas, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and others taught us that human perceptions are cultural conceptions. Or, as Sahlins puts it,

the experience of human subjects, especially as communicated in discourse, involves an appropriation of events in the terms of *a priori* concepts. Reference to the world is an act of classification, in the course of which realities are indexed to concepts in a relation of empirical tokens

to cultural types. We know the world as logical instances of cultural classes: “Captain Cook is a god.” It is not that, as some have believed, we have a “need” to classify. Formal classification is an intrinsic condition of symbolic action.

(Sahlins, 1985: 145–6)

When local people adopt foreign cultural elements, they understand them in terms of their own culture by assigning them to certain classes of their classification system, which is not the only possible one but is different from its foreign counterpart. In the event, the foreign cultural elements acquire a new meaning according to the cultural class of the local classification to which they are assigned. Since the cultural meaning of foreign cultural goods is not due to their properties, but to the significance attached to those properties by the local culture, the same foreign cultural good can have different cultural significances (meanings) and uses in different cultural contexts. That is to say, the same cultural trait can have different meanings in different societies, depending on the way such cultural trait is mediated by the local culture. In this sense, we cannot treat the ‘same’ trait as culturally the same in different cultural contexts. The implication of this argument is critical as it points to the errors committed by any theoretical discourse, such as globalisation or regionalisation, which takes the superficial commonalities as evidence of cultural ‘sameness’.

More importantly, the local culture as a meaningful system directs the cultural attention to certain properties and ignores other properties of foreign cultural goods, as the Boasian principle tells us that “‘the seeing eye is the organ of tradition’”(in Sahlins, 1985: 145). That is why knowing the local culture is important to understand why certain elements of foreign cultural goods are selected. That is also why it is insufficient to identify which elements of foreign cultural goods are selected. We also need to know why and how certain elements of foreign cultural goods are picked up by local cultures, which is also to say that we need to take local cultures seriously. Unfortunately, Ng’s publications fail to address the local cultures of Hong Kong and Singapore.

I am not arguing for a homogenous nature of culture. Nor do I suggest that there is only one shared structure in culture. I echo Sewell’s argument that culture has plural structures. As Sewell explains,

Cultural structures, in my opinion, should not be seen as corresponding to distinct “societies”—because it is so often impossible to specify where one society or culture ends and the next begins—but rather as corresponding to spheres or arenas of social practice of varying scope that intertwine, overlap, and interpenetrate in space and time. This would mean that for any given geographical or social unit, the relevant structures would always be plural rather than singular.

(Sewell, 2005: 206).

The pluralistic nature of structure makes the situation more complex because people in different social positions will adopt different cultural structures to understand the elements of foreign goods, which in turn leads to even more complex dynamics in receiving foreign cultural goods. The result from these complex dynamics is always rich and uncertain as it is contingent on the various ways in which foreign cultural goods are mediated in the local culture. That is why general concepts including localisation cannot help us to understand the dynamics of the spread of Japanese animation to Asia. We indeed need a more open framework.

A ‘third zone’ and the idea of dialogical process

The chapters of this book share a common epistemological stance that opposition between Japanese animation and the local societies in Asia is too simple because the result of their encounters cannot be reduced *only* to either Japanese animation homogenising the local societies or the latter localising or creolising the former. For between them there is what Sahlins calls ‘a third zone’ ‘where the cultural differences are worked through in political and economic practice’ (Sahlins, 1993: 13) which is too complex to be captured by some general notions such as globalisation, localisation, creolisation, and hybridisation. Inasmuch as these concepts are ‘too abstract and indeterminate in relation to the rich array of modern cultural forms and historical processes it is meant to cover’ (Sahlins, 2005: 6). We suggest that the idea of history by Mikhail Bakhtin and others is more appropriate for the study of the spread of Japanese animation to Asia. As Kelly and Kaplan explain,

For Bakhtin and others, history as a dialogical process is an open series, with neither absolute priorities of level nor finite numbers of subjects and objects involved. In a dialogical account, even global history is a series of planned and lived responses to specific circumstances that were also irreducibly constituted by human subjects, creating not a single vast chain of “the subject” changed by “the object” and vice versa, but a dense, complex network of individual and collective subjects continually responsive to each other. These constitutive, irreducibly subjective dialogics add enormous contingency and complexity to what dialectic there is between material realities and human societies.

(Kelly and Kaplan, 2010: 423–4)

Embracing the dialogical approach also means that we have to adopt what Jon Henrik Ziegler Remme calls ‘polygenic causality’, by which he means that an ‘effect is produced by many causal factors that alone cannot produce the effect but which all are conducive to it’ (Remme, 2014: 413–4). It follows that the factors that shape the spread of Japanese animation to Asia are various and vary with contexts. The interaction among these factors must also be