The "characterization" of Japan : from merchandising to identity

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Chapter 5

Characters on the World Stage

In Chapter 4, I argued that characters as media could promote themselves as the central knot that connected various social relationships. The impact of characters on Japanese society is expanding, in terms of both their social breadth and depth, and their contribution to the "characterization" of the society. Hence characters, as a form of discourse, reflect, constitute, and represent contemporary Japan. Against such a backdrop, the use of characters as ambassadors for the nation is taken for granted. In 2008, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs appointed Doraemon as the first anime cultural ambassador, and in 2013 he was also chosen to support Tokyo's bid to host the 2020 Summer Olympic Games. Also in 2008, Japan's tourism ministry appointed Hello Kitty to be the ambassador for Japanese tourism in both China and Hong Kong. In 2014, Pikachu became Japan's cheer-ambassador for the FIFA World Cup. More interestingly, in August 2016, for promoting Tokyo, the next host city, Doraemon, Captain Tsubasa, Hello Kitty and Pac-man appeared in the closing ceremony of Rio Summer Olympic Games. According to *The New York Times*, others who showed together with them were "Abe-Mario": the Prime Minister of Japan, Abe Shinzō, emerged by dressing as Super Mario (Rich, 2016).

As ambassadors, characters are promoted into the international arena, that is, onto the world stage. Indeed the phenomena surrounding characters are not confined to Japan. There is a lot of evidence of this. For example, the man who can read five manga books a day in Switzerland, the girls who devote themselves to cosplay in Italy, the boys who hold *otaku* events in Brazil, the Spanish young man who hugely enjoys Japanese historical manga, the Canadian woman who hopes to become an anime singer (Sakurai, 2010), the Korean man who married his Japanese character pillow (Funk, 2010) and the Chinese girls who work in the Maid Café in Shanghai (12 July 2011 *Chinanews*). In this sense, characters can be said to belong to the world.

As early as the 1960s Japanese characters were brought to the world stage through Japan's cultural exports and exchange. This process created the right conditions for promoting Japanese popular culture as the "leading exporter of fantasy" (Cross, 2006: xv). As Allison (2006) points out in her study of the development of Japanese character toys in the U.S., Japan built up a particular kind of global imagination that attracted children from all over the world. Allison links this global imagination with the globalization of contemporary consumer culture, especially with children's consumer culture, which has created a longing among children for Japanese characters and Japanese character franchises. This, in some ways, has expanded the relationship between Japanese characters and American children, suggesting the "characterization" of America and the world, which Allison examines in detail through Pokémon and dubs the "Pokémonization" of the world. The same point is made by Joseph Tobin on viewing Pikachu's global adventure, "as Einstein taught us to view light, as both particle and wave, matter and energy; that is, both as physical commodities that get

shipped to specific sites around the globe and also as a wave of interest and awareness that began in Japan" and is diffused throughout the world (2006: 291).

Anime scholar Susan Napier suggests that the global imagination built by anime "offers a space for identity exploration" for both Japanese and non-Japanese people, and thus potentially creates a global cultural identity (2001: 27). Agreeing with the point of view that "Japanese popular culture has invaded the U.S.," Roland Kelts focuses on Japanese animation in America and notes that the seemingly different cultural outlooks between both nations are not barriers and in fact "Japan is a lot closer to America than ever before" (2006: 8). Anne Cooper-Chen (2010) looks at East and South Asia and Europe by examining many aspects of the globalization of Japanese popular media, manga and anime, including the differences in cultural production in domestic and foreign markets, fan cultures, and cultural exports, and points out the importance of overseas enthusiasm. Yano, who specifically traces the globalization of Hello Kitty, posits that Kitty is a global product that stimulates global desires. This facilitates Kitty's success in transnational flows and commodification. She also points out that Kitty embodies "Japan's Cute-Cool" which, as a form of soft power capital, has conquered the world. Thus, Yano concludes, "Hello Kitty's success as a global icon was part of a triumphal discourse of personal, corporate, and national achievement" (2013: 16). Aoki Sadashige (2014) also makes the same suggestion that characters, which exist at the heart of Japanese society and the nation, have power and could become the national image of Japan.

These ideas shift our attention to the development of characters within the global context. In this chapter, I will examine characters in other locations, that is, the exportation of characters to other regions and how they have become an indispensable part of people's cultural lives in those regions. I will look at the process of characters going overseas, in which the Japanese government plays a significant role by encouraging cultural exports and exchange and creating related cultural policies, including appointing characters as ambassadors.

To analyse how characters influence other regions in the world, I will then offer a case study of China, which is the biggest market in Asia and one of the most successful destinations for Japan's cultural flow. Indeed Asia is one of the most significant regions for exports, and one which Japan wants to explore further. For example, in a 2005 government program, "Japan's 21st Century Vision," Japan gives priority to the "economic integration of East Asia," especially with China and South Korea. The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI, 2010) also points out that the primary target for Japan's cultural industry should be a "China-centric Asia." In his study, *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism*, Iwabuchi Koichi has elaborated on the significance of Asia for Japan, leading to "Japan's return to Asia" in the form of the diffusion of commercialized Japanese popular culture including "animation, comics, characters, computer games, fashion, pop music and TV dramas" in the 1990s (2002: 1; 16). He particularly examines the growth in popularity of Japanese TV dramas and popular music in this region, which provides an useful interpretation of how Japanese pop-culture fares against local culture in the context of globalization. As Japan has built its dreamworld in Asia, it is

clear that the main destination for Japan's cultural flow has shifted to the Asian region, where China, as the biggest market, can never be ignored.

I will explore in detail how Japanese characters have developed in China and are received by the local people, and how this has affected the rise of a character culture in China. From this, I argue that characters are useful in illustrating today's fragmented and recontextualized postmodern cultural diffusion. However we should also note that there is resistance, and restrictions are in place in China. Against the backdrop of such tensions, it is worth exploring how an intimate and dynamic cultural connection between China and Japan is growing, with characters acting as the bridge between the two countries.

Characters Going Overseas

Japanese characters' adventures overseas begin with Japan's cultural exports, which usually experience the same process of moving from anime to manga and then on to character merchandising. It generally "begins with the [overseas] broadcast of animated series from Japanese television; as the series gains popularity, the original comic work is translated and published in book form" (Ono, 1996: 6, quoted from Cooper-Chen, 2010: 26). Following this, character products are exported (or licensed to the local producers) (Shiraishi, 2013). Nevertheless, the last two steps are a relatively slow process, which is frequently threatened by local piracy. For instance, while anime was being exported to China as early as the 1980s, manga did not appear in the local market until about 10 years later and character goods about 20 years later; before that the existence of most of these items in China was unlicensed.

According to Tsugata, the earliest record of anime going overseas can be traced to the literature of the Daishō period: "in 1917 the work of *Momotarō* [Peach Boy] produced by Kitayama Seitarō was 'exported' to France" (2004: 166). Here the term "export" was only an attempt then—it was not until the 1960s that official exports took place. Tōei first exported its animation films, including *Hakujaden* (1958),[1] *Shōnen Sarutobi Sasuke* (1959) and *Saiyūki* (1960),[2] to America in 1961. These were followed by *Arabian naito Shindobatto no bōken* (Sinbad, The Sailor, 1962) and *Anju to Zushiōmaru* (The Orphan Brothers, 1961)[3] in 1962. According to Japanese scholar Kusanagi Satoshi, from the start, *Hakujaden*, which was known as the "first oriental in-colour feature-length manga film," was aimed at the overseas market. The leader of Tōei at the time, Ōkawa had stated, "We could use the artwork and movement to make up for the disadvantage of the Japanese language [a non-international language] and to help the audiences understand our art" (quoted from Kusanagi, 2003: 30). To realize this goal, as we have seen, the initial export of anime was led by Tōei, which launched five films in American cinemas in the space of two years. In 1963, after having been broadcast in Japan, the television anime series *Tetsuwan Atomu* was exported to America by Tezuka (see chapter 1) and received a warm welcome from American children. As both the animation films and the television anime had opened

[1]The filmwas released in America under the title of *Panda and the Magic Serpent* (Kusagagi, 2003: 32).
[2]The film was released in America under the title of *Alakazam the Great* (Kusagagi, 2003: 32).
[3]The film was released in America under the title of *The Littlest Warrior* (Kusagagi, 2003: 32).

the door to the American market, the conditions were created for the successful exportation of subsequent Japanese works, such as the TV anime series *Uchū senkan Yamato* in the 1970s, the animated film *Kaze no tani Naushika* (Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind, 1984)[4] in the 1980s, the TV anime series *Bishōjo senshi sērā mūn* and *Pokémon* in the 1990s, and the film *Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi* (Spirited Away, 2001) in the 2000s.

In contrast, translated manga did not really enter the American market until the late 1980s. In 1987 two events marked a turning point: a historical manga, *Kozure ōkami* (Lone Wolf and Cub, 1970), was translated and published in the US, which triggered the enthusiasm of American comic book readers, and VIZ Media began to explore the possibilities of translated manga (Schodt, 1996). Since then many manga works have been translated into English which, as Cooper-Chen has pointed out, "acted as a gateway to the world," because these English versions are then used by European publishers to translate them into their own languages (2010:43-44).

Similarly, before the appearance of manga, many anime works had been broadcast in Europe, beginning in the 1970s. In 1976 the animated film *Arupusu no shōjo Haiji* was released in Italy. By the early 1980s more than 150 animation works, including both TV anime and animated films had been exported to Europe. Tōei had also introduced its TV anime series *Doragon bōru* (Dragon Ball, 1986) to France, gaining a phenomenal 67 per cent rating (Tsugata, 2004: 166-167). At the same time, Japan began to focus on its neighbours, the Asian region. According to Japanese scholar Shiraishi Saya (2013: 56-57), Doraemon had been introduced to Taiwan via television and manga in the 1970s, and the local school buses were even named "Doraemon Kindergarten." By the early 1980s Doraemon anime was being exported to Hong Kong, where images of him could be found on baby biscuit tins as well as on posters about the local police aimed at children. By the early 1990s the TV anime series had been widely broadcast throughout Asia, including in mainland China, Thailand, Singapore, Korea, Malaysia and Indonesia. Doraemon thus became the best known character in this region, even being called the "Asian Hero" (Lyer, 2002, quoted from Kelts, 2014).

However, there are certainly exceptions to this reliance on manga and anime for exports, such as Hello Kitty, *yurukyara* and Mario (see chapters 2 and 4). Without anime and manga to support it, Hello Kitty was exported as a global cultural commodity. According to Yano, Sanrio always intended to turn Hello Kitty into a "global figure"; the character was created in 1974 and appeared on the American market in 1976, the European market in 1978 and the Asian market in 1990 (2013: 9). Similar to Hello Kitty, the export of *yurukyara* also rests on commercial exploitation. For example, in 2012 Kumamoto University, Kumamoto Prefecture and Kumamoto city opened a promotional centre in Shanghai, China, which also aimed to promote their *yurukyara*, Kumamon, and included exclusive stores and online shopping

[4]According to Brain Ruh (2010: 43-46), the American version of the film is known as *Warrior of the Wind* and many original scenes have been unnecessarily cut. Such modifications are not satisfactory to the creator of the work, Miyazaki Hasao, or to the American audience.

opportunities.[5] Since the early 1980s, Japanese video game industry began to play important role in the global market and developed soon; by the 1990s it had been the market-share leader that contributed to making Nintendo's Mario the best selling video game franchise (with more than 500 million units sold as of September 2016) and the most recognizable game character in the world.[6]

According to the statistics for 2010 of the Association of Japanese Animations, Japanese anime production companies provided products for over 112 countries, reaching some 87.2 per cent of the world's population and making huge profits: for instance, "Japan's anime industry saw [its] overseas sales peak at ¥16 billion in 2006" (Nagata, 2010; 2012). Consequently Japanese culture has been widely introduced to the rest of the world, which is consistent with the policy of the Japanese government.

Since the postwar period, culture has been an important issue in Japan. In 1947, former Prime Minster Katayama Tetsu (1887-1978) proposed the building of a *bunka kokka* (cultural nation) in his cabinet policy speech (Neki, 1999). In the postwar recovery period, culture was a key aspect of technology and innovation. By the 1970s culture was being utilized in Japan's foreign policy and, in 1972, the Japan Foundation was established by an act of the Japanese Diet to undertake the international dissemination of Japanese culture. In 1979, in a policy speech, former Prime Minister Ōhira Masayoshi (1910-1980) argued that what the Japanese were pursuing had shifted from *mono no yutakasa* (material abundance) to *kokoro no yutakusa* (spiritual abundance), the "transition from economy to culture," and thus he pointed out that the "*bunka no jidai*" (the era of culture) had already arrived (1982: 284, quoted from Kumon, 1993). In 1980 Ōhira convened more than two hundred people to constitute a study group and published a report titled "*bunka no jidai*," which exerted a significant enlightening influence on the subsequent development of Japanese governmental policy in the 1990s. Yet another important issue discussed in this report was internationalization. Realizing that many countries had an interest not only in Japan's traditional culture but also in its modern culture, the report stressed the value of the cultural aspects of international communication and widely introduced modern Japanese culture to the world beyond Japan. This cultural communication with other countries was helpful in creating a Japanese cultural identity. Hence, at the beginning of the 1990s, the Japanese government focused on internationalization.

In 1991, the Cultural Policy Promotion Conference of the Ministry of Education had an in-depth discussion on *bunka no jidai*.[7] In 1995, in its report titled "*Atarashi bunka rikkoku*" (Building a New Nation through Culture), this conference proposed the strategy of *bunka rikkoku* (nation building through culture) and, based on this, the

[5]See, Kumamon's micro-blog and Taobao Juhuasuan, accessed 5 March 2016, http://www.weibo.com/u/2537989652?is_hot=1, and https://ju.taobao.com/jusp/other/jupan3/tp.htm?spm=608.2291429.102204.2.ZF7mgH.

[6]See, "Top selling software units," Sales data, Nintendo, accessed January 2017, https://www.nintendo.co.jp/ir/en/sales/software/index.html.

[7]The Ministry of Education is now the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (*Monbukagakushō*). This conference published the report titled "*Bunka no jidai ni taisuru wagakuni bunka shinkō no tōmen no juten hōsaku ni tsuite*" (On the Focus of the Development of Culture in the Era of Culture).

government published "*bunka rikkoku 21 puran*" (The Plan for Nation Building through Culture in the 21st Century) a year later. This plan aimed to further expand international cultural exchange and facilitate the development of cultural dissemination. From 1997 to 1998, the Japanese government devoted itself to the strategy of *bunka rikkoku* and published "*Bunka shinkō masutā puran*" (The Master Plan for Cultural Development, 1998), in which it emphasized the close connection between culture and internationalization. Thus influenced by these policies during the 1990s, many Japanese cultural products were exported around the world. The Japanese government even provided cultural sources, such as Japanese TV dramas and anime, free of charge, which laid the foundation for the overseas success of Japanese popular culture.

By the 2000s, the attention of the Japanese government had been increasingly caught by culture, the concept of "soft power," and "Cool Japan." In the 1990s Joseph Nye proposed the concept of "soft power," referring to "the ability to get others to want the outcomes you want because of your cultural or ideological appeal" (2000: 123). He noted that Japanese culture had had a transnational effect in some respects, such as the success of Pokémon in America, which could "confer it significant soft power" and help the nation to "succeed once again" (2000: 124). The same point was made by Douglas McGray (2002), who positioned the growing cultural appeal of Japan as its "national cool." McGray's view soon spread across Japan and was reprinted by *Chūō kōron* (Central Review) magazine as the special slogan for *bunka rikkoku*, which contributed to making "Cool Japan" a popular phrase in Japanese society (Lam, 2007; Odagiri, 2010).

As the mass media became excited about the term, the Japanese government also began a series of measures to promote culture, especially popular culture. In 2001, the Agency for Cultural Affairs published the *Bunka geijutsu shinkō kihonhō* (Basic Law on Promotion of Culture and Art), in which "films, manga, animation, and computer and other digital arts" were defined as "media art." In 2002, the culture review conference held by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture particularly emphasized the importance of promoting "media art," and pointed out that "media art is a proud part of our culture all over the world that could promote the further development of all aspects of culture and art" (quoted from Tsugata, 2004: 198). In the same year the Tokyo government established the "Tokyo International Animation Fair" in order to absorb more of the attention being paid to Japan by the world. However, in his annual policy speech, Prime Minister Koizumi Jun'ichirō stated that the Japanese government would focus on the development of intellectual property, especially on intangible property such as content products. According to METI, content products include films, anime, games, books, music, and so on; the creation and circulation of these products constitutes the Japanese content industry.[8] In 2003 METI advocated advancing the internationalization of the content industry through

[8]See "Content Industry," Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, accessed 2 March 2016, http://www.meti.go.jp/policy/mono_info_service/contents/.

employing content as the branding for Japan, and this policy became the basis for Japan's cultural diplomacy.

In 2004 Koizumi called for a discussion on promoting the government's cultural diplomacy (*Bunka gaikō no suishin ni kansuru kondankai*) and in the following year published a report, one of whose three basic ideas was to pursue "21st century cool."[9] In 2005 the Japanese government released "Japan's 21st Century Vision" which pointed out that because of the coming of "an age of cultural attraction," Japan would invest more in increasing free cultural exchange in order to "build stable international relations." Moving on to 2006, "A New Look at Cultural Diplomacy" was suggested by the then Minister for Foreign Affairs, Asō Tarō, who argued that "any kind of cultural diplomacy that fails to take advantage of pop culture is not really worthy of being called 'cultural diplomacy'." He also affirmed the power of characters such as Atomu and Doraemon, who had enriched the meaning of robots as the friends of human beings and, more importantly, as potential brand images for Japan abroad. "We have all grown up nourished by Shakespeare and Beethoven and other forms of culture emerging from the West. Yet we are now at the point where culture made in Japan—whether anime and manga or sumo and Japanese dietary culture—is equally able to nourish the people of the world, particularly the younger generations. We would be remiss not to utilize these to the fullest" he said.

Moreover, Asō announced in the same speech that "a Nobel Prize in manga" and "ambassadors of anime" would be set up. The International MANGA Award was established in 2007 and the character ambassadors have already been described at the beginning of this chapter. The manga prize is open to manga artists from all over the world in order to give them a real "feeling of association with Japan" and the chance to get closer to their beloved characters. As Asō's (2007) congratulations on the creation of the award states, "To the girls in Copenhagen, Denmark, who have grown up together with Tamagotchi, Pokemon, and Sailor Moon, to the Chinese boys who could not have lived a day without Saint Seiya, and to Zinedine Zidane, Francesco Totti, and all the boys who have penned likenesses of Captain Tsubasa…Manga is about love. Manga is about friendship. Manga is about growing-up. Manga is about everything—it knows absolutely no boundaries. Manga, in a word, is the most universal unifier of the hearts and minds that are young or young at heart." In 2009 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs became one of the main sponsors of the World Cosplay Summit and it also appointed three girls as kawaii ambassadors in order to promote Japanese fashion. So far the manga award, anime ambassadors, support for international cosplay events and introduction of kawaii ambassadors have constituted the "pop-culture diplomacy" of Japan.[10]

In sum, Japan's internationally oriented cultural policy and the increasing attention it pays to popular culture are the keys to turning characters into the ambassadors of Japan. Since the postwar era, the government of Japan has valued the development of

[9]See "The discussion on cultural policy," Ministry of Foreign Fairs, accessed 2 March 2016, http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/culture/koryu/kuni/jigyo/kondankai.html.
[10]See "Pop-culture Diplomacy," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 14 August 2014, accessed 2 March 2016, http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/culture/koryu/pop/index.html.

culture and regards it as a significant part of its policymaking process. By the beginning of the 1980s, with the social focus shifting to culture, as proposed by the Prime Minister Ōhira, how to facilitate the internationalization of Japanese culture, particularly modern culture, had become a crucial issue for Japan's government. As a result, in the 1990s, the policies of the Japanese government positioned culture as the foundation of the nation, as the strategy of *bunka rikkoku* showed, and thus a wide range of popular cultural products were exported overseas. By the 2000s, driven by the idea of "soft power" and the slogan "Cool Japan," the government of Japan had taken intensive steps to promote Japanese popular culture through laws, plans, various cultural events, and consequently Japanese pop-culture diplomacy. In this way, characters have gradually come to represent Japan on the world stage.

Japanese Characters in China

Though supported by the government of Japan, many scholars do not consider this pop-culture diplomacy to be working very well, as it is limited by many issues including historical tensions, nationalism and regional protection (Lam, 2007; Daliot-Bul, 2009; Kadosh-Otmazgin, 2012; Ishii, 2013; Iwabuchi, 2015). As Allison (2008: 107) argues, "it is not so much Japan itself as a compelling culture, power, or place that gets signified" as it is a signifier for "a blend of fantasy-ware" that evokes individual emotions and identity (as we have seen in chapter 3). Thus there is another voice that says that even though Japanese pop-culture cannot be free of these limitations, it is unexpectedly welcomed by consumers outside Japan because of its characteristics such as cultural "odourlessness" and "*mukokuseki*" (stateless) (Iwabuchi, 2002) and the fact that it creates "shared memories" with the local people (Nakano, 2008). As Asō (2006) also states in the above speech, "You can see this clearly if you take a peek in any of the shops in China catering to the young otaku-type manga and anime fans. You will find the shops' walls lined with any and every sort of Japanese anime figurine you can imagine. With all due respect to Mickey and Donald, whether you look at J-pop, J-anime, or J-fashion, the competitiveness of any of these is much more than you might imagine… It is that fact that is bringing about a steady increase in the number of fans of Japan. We have a grasp on the hearts of young people in many countries, not the least of which being China."

Here the country that Asō is specifically describing is China. As early as 1980, the export of the Japanese television anime series *Tetsuwan Atomu* (*Tiebi Atongmu* in Chinese version) to China paved the way for the presence of Japanese characters among Chinese audiences. The Chinese generation of the 1980s was the first to grow up with Japanese characters. Nevertheless China is not an easy market to explore. Taking the popularity of television for example, there was such a great gap between access in urban and rural areas, varying from 86.33 per cent to 3.99 per cent respectively in the mid-1980s (Kong, 1985), that the contact of Chinese audiences with anime varied considerably from place to place. However there were other problems too. One was piracy. Due to the lack of related laws and regulations in China, this was a serious problem for manga and character merchandising. The other issue was the policies of the Chinese government in this regard. It has always maintained vigilance

against potential threats from foreign culture and, since 2000, has treated cultural imports even more carefully and conservatively. However, these issues provide us with a clearer backdrop for investigating the development of Japanese characters in China: there are concentrated areas of character consumers (mainly in urban China) and in a given period their spread followed clear and simple steps: through television anime in the 1980s, through manga in the 1990s and on the Internet since 2000.

In short, I argue, the case of China demonstrates both receptivity and restriction. Receptivity refers to the fact that Japanese characters have been mainstream and beloved by Chinese audiences since the 1980s. I will examine this aspect through interviews with a group of Chinese who were born in the 1980s and for whom Japanese characters have been an indispensable part of their childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.[11] Restriction refers to the Chinese government's tightening of policy, especially since 2000 when Chinese television stations began to reduce the broadcasting of anime. These restrictions forced Chinese audience to search for Japanese works from other sources, which in turn fuelled the diffusion of Japanese characters.

After China carried out its Economic Reform in 1978, foreign anime works soon became available in China. In 1980 *Tetsuwan Atomu* was broadcast on Chinese Central Television (CCTV), which marked the historic entrance of anime into China. It is said that this import was the result of the endeavours of the leader of the Tokyo Chinese Association, Han Qingyu, who suggested that CCTV should accept this anime as a form of programme-cum-advertisement. According to Han (2013), at that time the Japanese electronic enterprise *Kashio* (Casio) wanted to buy the broadcasting rights for China, on the condition that it could display its product advertisements on CCTV. Thus when anime first appeared on Chinese television screens it was free, but with the pay-off that *Kashio*'s electronic watches were quickly familiar to Chinese audiences. Although this anime series did not arrive in China until 20 years after its original release, its science-fiction theme and robot character made Chinese audiences, both children and adults, feel that it was fresh. Atomu thus became the first well-known Japanese character in China. As a female Chinese interviewee said, "I remember that at the moment the anime song began, my father and I would sit together in front of the television and wait for Atomu."

Following Atomu, many anime works, such as *Tatsu no ko Tarō* (Taro the Dragon Boy, 1979), *Hana no ko Runrun* (The Flower Child Lunlun, 1979) and *Ikkyū-san* (The Little Monk, 1975), were introduced to China, not only on CCTV but also on local Chinese television stations. The participation of local TV stations not only provided

[11]On March 2016, I conducted semi-structured interviews online with ten Chinese (including four male and six female interviewees), who were born in the 1980s and whose favorite characters included Japanese characters. They come from different positions such as teacher, journalist, worker and guide. The questions I asked them depended on their own stories with Japanese characters. For example, a male interviewee told me that he likes Doraemon very much, I asked him questions including when was the first time and how to know Doraemon, why like this character, is there any special reason or not, and so on; for another female interviewee who likes to buy Doraemon goods, I asked her questions including what kind of products she prefers, how many products she has already had, and so on.

more ways for Japanese animations to be broadcast but also enabled more Chinese audiences to watch them.

The 1980s was only the beginning of this cultural influx and, as well as anime, many cartoons from other areas were also imported to China. However, the 1990s witnessed the domination of anime in China. In 1990, a local Chinese television station was the first to import *Seinto Seiya* (Knights of the Zodiac, 1986), which was immediately popular with Chinese children and young people. Chinese publishers sensed the business opportunities that could arise from it and printed the manga of the same name, which contributed to a boom across the country. In just one year, from 1990 to 1991, 6 million manga books were sold, stimulating more Chinese publishers to participate in manga publishing (Chen and Teng, 2006). Thus many works, including *Doragon bōru* and *Ranma 1/2* (Ranma One-half, 1987), appeared in the Chinese market and drew the attention of Chinese readers, but many of them were unlicensed and produced without the government's permission. And at that time Chinese children's pocket money did not stretch to buying many manga books. Despite this, the demand for manga grew quickly. "At the time my two cousins and I all loved manga, but we did not have enough money. Hence I bought the first volume and they bought the second and third. We exchanged books to read," noted a female interviewee.

In 1991 Doraemon came to China with its anime being broadcast on CCTV. Because of the different translations, Doraemon was known as both *Jiqimao* (Robotic cat in Mandarin) and *Xiaodingdang* (Little bell in Cantonese) in China, and is now affectionately called *Lanpangzi* (Blue fatty). Similar to Atomu, this robot character soon captivated Chinese children's hearts with his magical gadgets such as his four-dimensional pocket (*yojigen poketto*) and anywhere door (*dokodemo doa*). Although this story is about a robot, it is the friendship between Doraemon and his friends which captivated Japanese children from the very beginning. Chinese children felt the same way: "I like Jiqimao. He always helps his friend solve problems. I think every child should be in some way like Daxiong (Nobita in Mandarin), who has shortcomings and often makes trouble, as well as having special feelings for a girl," said a male Chinese interviewee. For him, Doraemon and his friends are not only characters in a story but also "real" people who are like his friends or himself, thus creating a sense of "reality." As I have discussed in Chapter 3, though the sense of "reality" is the perception of the viewers, it helps them identify with the characters, which is the key factor in stimulating their desire for the work and its characters. However, because CCTV only imported part of this series, the dissatisfied Chinese audience was forced to turn to the manga books of the same name.[12] Through both the anime and the manga, Doraemon became one of the most memorable characters in this Chinese generation's childhood.[13]

[12]In 1991 the People's Fine Arts Publishing House imported and published 43 volumes of Doraemon manga. The rest of the volumes (44 to 60) were pirated for the Chinese market. The copyright was then transferred to Jilin Arts Press.

[13]A 2008 survey of the favorite manga and anime works of Chinese college students (who were born between 1986 and 1990) ranked *Doraemon* at four out of more than four hundred Japanese works (Chen and Song, 2009: 189-214).

By the late 1990s, Japan's cultural flow into China had become smooth and instantaneous. This was a benefit of the close cultural exchange between China and Japan at that time. China and Japan did not re-establish diplomatic relations after the Second World War until 1972. However, prior to this there had been some non-governmental exchanges, such as the Japan–China Friendship Association, which in 1956 created the Japan–China Cultural Exchange Association as a window for communication.[14] After the resumption of relations, various economic and cultural exchanges were frequently promoted, especially the latter, which involved a number of areas, mainly sport, film, music, art, and opera. In 1978, China and Japan concluded the China–Japan Treaty of Peace and Friendship. The third article of the treaty made their intentions clear: "We should make efforts to further develop the economic and cultural relationship and promote exchanges between the two countries." Based on this treaty, in 1979 China and Japan signed a Cultural Exchange Agreement and agreed to "develop exchanges of culture, education, academia and sport between the two countries" that would "facilitate the understanding and friendship between the people." In the same year, Prime Minister Ōhira visited China, marking the beginning of frequent visits between the leaders of the two countries in the 1980s. These formed the foundation for the cultural exchange of anime, manga, and characters between China and Japan in the 1980s and 1990s. Characters became the ambassadors for the friendship: in a friendship event held in Tokyo in 1981, Atomu and Sun Wukong, representing Japan and China respectively, shook hands for the first time (see **Figure 20**).

Figure 20. "Atomu and Sun Wukong" created by Tezuka Osamu and Yan Dingxian (the character designer of Sun Wukong in *Danao tiangong* [Havoc in Heaven, 1961]) together at a friendship event in Tokyo in 1981; Source: "Talking: The Imagination Connected by Sun Wukong," *Peoplechina* news.

[14]See "Japan-China Cultural Exchange Association" (*Nihon Chūgoku bunka kōryū kyōkai*). Accessed March 2, 2016.
http://www.nicchubunka1956.jp/.

In many respects, the 1980s and 1990s were a Golden Age for various exchanges between China and Japan. The two countries explored multiple routes for cooperation and to very good effect. According to an opinion survey on diplomacy conducted by the Japanese Cabinet Office, in the 1980s the percentage of Japanese people who felt friendly towards China increased from approximately 70 per cent to 80 per cent; in the same survey China was seen as the second most trustworthy country after America (*Seiron chōsa*, 1980). On the tenth anniversary (1988) of China–Japan Treaty of Peace and Friendship, Prime Minister Takeshita Noboru (1924-2000) of the time visited China and gave a speech titled "Seeking New Development," which aimed to strengthen the cultural exchange between Japan and China (6 July 2000 *Chinanews*). In the 1990s, the Emperor of Japan visited China (1992) and later China and Japan published a Joint Declaration (1998) on expanding cooperation in various fields. From this platform more anime, manga, and characters came to China.

Many later works such as *Bishōjo senshi sērā mūn* (first shown in Japan from 1992 to 1997 and broadcast in China in 1997) and *Suramu danku* (SLAMDUNK, first shown from 1993 to 1996 and shown in China in 1998) were introduced into China shortly after premiering in Japan, which forged a lasting impression with Chinese audiences. "My friends and I often repeated the line in *Meishaonv zhanshi* [Sailor Moon in Chinese version] that '*Shuibingyue, bianshen*' [Sailor Moon, transforming] while role-playing the guardians after class. I guess this might be the earliest 'cosplay' in China," one female interviewee recalled. "There were many stickers and notebooks of the characters sold in the school shops. I saved up my pocket money to buy those items. I could not bear to use the stickers and made a collection book for them especially." There were many inexpensive character products on the market, such as toys, foodstuffs, cards, stationery and decorations, which were welcomed by Chinese children. However, most of them were not authorized until official character merchandising widely developed in the Chinese market after 2000.

Since 2000, the Chinese government has also focused on the development of culture industry. This term was first utilized in a government document in 2000 (Han, 2002). The cartoon and comic industry is an important component of it. Due to Japan's success, China is actively learning from Japan's experience and imitating its model. At the same time, in order to leave room for the domestic development of the industry, the Chinese government began to tighten the policies on importing and broadcasting foreign works, indicating a shift in the form of cultural influence from "content" to "format," as suggested by Nissim Kadosh Otmazgin (2013). Certainly, this is in part because of concerns about cultural aggression and imperialism. As noted in the social commentary at the time, "since the early 1990s, Japanese anime works such as *Seinto Seiya* and *Doraemon* smoothly entered China and easily dominated the market. What is welcomed and accepted by the generation of the 1980s in China is Japanese works

not our *Danao tiangong* [Havoc in Heaven].[15] We thus have lost a generation, the battlefield [the market] and all chances" (Yang, 2005: 11). The same issue was noted by the Chinese Ministry of Culture, "Cultural aggression has created the phenomena of 'Hari' [Japan-lover], 'Hahan' [Korea-lover] and 'Chongmei' [America-lover]. Over time these will affect our cultural traditions and cultural security" (The Report of Development of Cartoon and Comic Industry, 2006: 22).

Hence in 2000, the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT, 2000; 2006; 2008) stipulated a clear limitation: the broadcasting time of imported anime could not surpass 25 per cent of the total running time for children's programming each day and must equal less than 40 per cent of the total animations shown. Before this, there had not been any limitations on the running time and number of anime programmes. In the following years the regulations became stricter and more specific. In accordance with the requirements of SARFT in 2006, the broadcasting of any foreign animations or related programmes between the hours of 17.00 and 20.00 each day was forbidden—only Chinese works could be shown then; however programmes co-produced by domestic and foreign producers were initially approved by SARFT for broadcast during this period. In 2008, this time limit was extended from 17.00 to 21.00. These practices produced a marked effect: since 2006 no foreign animations have been broadcast on prime-time television; foreign animations are aired outside of these hours and most are repeats of old episodes. Here we can see a clear decline in the cultural importation of anime into China. In contrast, domestic production has grown rapidly: in 2007 Chinese cartoon production for television exceeded 100,000 minutes, in 2008 it overtook Japan, and by 2011 it had leapt to the top of the world ranking with more than 260,000 minutes being produced (Masuda, 2012; *Annual Report on Development of China's Radio, Film and Television*, 2012).

However such restrictive policies have not isolated Chinese audiences from Japanese works and characters, but rather have encouraged them to gain information through other avenues, such as the Internet. Since the late 1990s the Internet has gradually grown in popularity in China as an important platform on which to collect information. When Chinese audiences could not watch anime on television, they turned to the Internet for other sources. There were a lot of Chinese anime and manga websites that were introducing and translating the latest information from Japan at the time. They also broadcast many anime series collected from foreign channels, most of which were undoubtedly unauthorized.

In order to transmit these video resources quickly, many Chinese fans established fan-subtitle groups, often called fansubs for short. The rise of Chinese fansubs began around 2001. They grew so fast that works like *Kidō senshi Gundam shīdo* (Mobile Suit Gundam Seed, 2002) and *Seito Seiya meiō hādesu hen* (Saint Seiya: Hades arc, 2003)

[15] *Danao tiangong* is an award-winning Chinese animated feature film directed by Wan Laiming and produced by Shanghai Animation Film Studio. It tells the story of the mythical Chinese Monkey King, Sun Wukong. The film was created at the height of the Chinese animation industry in the 1960s, and received numerous awards. The whole work was drawn by hand, with more than 70,000 original pictures forming the first part (the film was divided into two parts) and taking almost two years to complete. The style of the film and the musical accompaniment used in it were heavily influenced by Peking operatic traditions.

were translated and distributed almost simultaneously. In this way, more and more Japanese works were brought into China, and fansubs became the major transmitters which, according to *The New York Times*, slaked the Chinese thirst for foreign popular culture (French, 2006). Although fansubs play a key role in diffusing anime and characters in China, they are unauthorized. According to Jordan Hatcher (2005: 514-542), fansubs are "situated among current copyright policy debates over user rights and the boundaries of copyright law." He notes, "Within Japan, fansubs could potentially be within the law because the Japanese take a more relaxed attitude towards some aspects of copyright law and include private use and non-profit exception into their law." It is the same in China. In 2006 China's National Copyright Administration was urged to fight the illegal for-profit downloading of films, music, software, and educational textbooks on the Internet. Because most Chinese fansubs had only been created for interest rather than profit, even though they might be situated in a grey area legally, they were therefore approved. In 2009 SARFT prohibited video-providing websites from distributing unlicensed sources for films, dramas, animations, and documentaries. However fansubs use BitTorrent, a protocol for peer-to-peer file sharing, for distribution, meaning that they were not constricted by this requirement. Likewise, in the new version of the Chinese Copyright Law of 2010 there was no direct restriction on them. Thus fansubs have been able to survive despite the Chinese government's policies.[16]

The birth of fansubs showed that there was a solid fanbase for anime and manga in China, and their development implies that this group is growing. Seemingly it is just a form of internal communication among fans, but as a result of the Internet this kind of niche communication has been widely received and accepted by the masses. According to a survey of 5,000 Chinese university students in 2008, when asked "what is your favourite cartoon and comic?", 82.76 per cent chose Japanese works, 8.8 per cent chose Western works and only 8.5 per cent chose Chinese works (Chen and Song, 2009). Another survey of 600 university students in 2011 showed that more than half of them accessed anime and manga through the Internet, while 34 per cent accessed it through television and just 15 per cent through books (Zhu and Chen, 2011). Both surveys also asked about the consumption of character goods, but neither the level of ownership of goods nor spending on them was high. On the one hand this was because university students do not have much purchasing power, and on the other because many character goods in the Chinese market are pirated and so, although not expensive, are always of low quality.

Ever since anime's arrival in China, Japanese enterprises have planned to extend their character merchandising industry to China. However, due to the lack of related Chinese laws and regulations, the Chinese market was not widely explored until around 2000. When this did occur it was undertaken in two main ways. In the first instance, the Japanese company chooses a Chinese firm to act as their agent, for example, Aiying Company Shanghai (Animation International Company) is

[16]In recent years, the Chinese government has strengthened the administration of fansubs. In 2014 several big fansub groups closed or stopped updating.

authorized to license the merchandising rights for Doraemon and is responsible for promoting the commercial exploitation of the character in China. Aiying can license 80 to 100 Chinese companies a year to produce over 1,500 character goods to a value of 200 million yuan each year; Doraemon sells exceptionally well as various commercial events are held in China each year (Mei and Xu, 2012). From 2012 to 2014, an exhibition of Doraemon's secret gadgets with hundreds of Doraemon statues toured Hong Kong, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Beijing, Qingdao, Chengdu, and Hangzhou. The character was enthusiastically welcomed wherever he went. "The exhibition shows us a vivid Doraemon. It once met with a typhoon and many people were so worried about whether the Doraemon (statues) had blown away or whether they had raincoats that the host had to continuously post on the microblog to update the audience," one exhibition planner, Lin observed. "There was a scene designed to put on the side of the street, but too many people rushed out to take pictures and in the end we had to move it to inside the door" (Mei and Xu, 2012). It is not just children and teenagers who are crazy about Doraemon, but their parents too. As a female interviewee who has a child said, "I am very excited because Doraemon was also a witness to my childhood." Hence when the 3D Doraemon film, *Stand by Me*, was released in China in 2015, she went to see it at the cinema with her child.[17]

The second method of introducing character merchandising is to set up branches like those of Sanrio and the above-mentioned Kumamon promotional centre. These not only explore the character industry opportunities but also promote cultural exchange between China and Japan. As the promoter of Kumamon Sakamoto Takahiro (2012) notes, "The centre can contribute to the prefecture for its industry communication, to the city for tourism, and to the university for absorbing more Chinese students."

As introduced in Chapter 4, Kumamon is Kumamoto Prefecture's *yurukyara* who not only greatly promotes the local place but also brings out numerous business opportunities and huge profits. Similar to Hikonyan, Kumamon is designed as an anthropomorphic black bear character. Bear in Japanese is *kuma* symbolizing Kumamoto Prefecture and his black colour corresponds to the same colour of the local famous Kumamoto castle. "Mon" comes from the local dialect and means people. Hence Kumamon implies "the people from Kumamoto." As his particular tongue, every sentence Kumamon speaks will end with "mon." Different from other cute *yurukyara*, Kumamon is designed with a wall-eyed facial expression that makes him not welcomed at the beginning. However, he indeed changes the existing image of a bear character and creates a pear-shaped body and his movements are always comical and funny, which gradually draws people's attention. In 2011, he was voted as the winner of "Yuru-character Grand Prix."

[17]This film includes many short stories from the first time Doraemon came to Nobita's house to Doraemon bidding farewell to Nobita, which brings memories to audiences who have grown up with the companion of Doraemon. Although *Stand by Me* was released in China one year later, the box office of this work in China broke that in Japan after only a dozen days and ranked number one of the export animated films of 2015.

With regard to his commercial exploitation, Kumamoto Prefecture adopts a "royalty free" marketing strategy that does not charge producers for usage of the character's image, as long as the products as something to do with the local place. This strategy in turn increases popularity of Kumamon: according to an Internet poll, 87.4 per cent of the Japanese recognized this character (Fujii, 2013). In 2012, sales of Kumamon items reached 29.3 billion yen and his image appeared on "everything from cookies and bags of rice to bed covers in a luxury hotel to an airplane for Solaseed Air" (Fujii, 2013). Thus Kumamon is also known as the *Kumamotoken eigyō buchō* (the business manager of Kumamoto Prefecture).

Moreover, one of the popular marketing strategies for *yurukyara* is to utilize social network platforms such as twitter, blogs and facebook, on which characters can have an immediate and intimate connection with people. To take an example of Kumamon, his twitter account which has more than half a million followers (as of August 2016) is responsible to record the daily life of the character and updates tweets at least three times a day, which enables followers to pay close attention to the character and have immediate interaction with him. Yet the character smartly uses twitter for promoting himself. For example, he created an event titled "*Kumamon shinshutsukibotsu daisakusen*" (the Project of Elusive Kumamon): Kumamon appeared in the streets of Osaka city and distributed his name cards on which printed the key words or QR codes of his blog and twitter. This event indeed helped win many attentions to Kumamon's blog and followers on twitter. However, after one month Kumamon suddenly disappeared from Osaka city. For this, the governor of Kumamoto Prefecture specifically held an emergency press conference, urging people to find Kumamon and post the message on twitter if saw him somewhere. Hence as the posts about Kumamon increased on twitter this *yurukyara* became a topic at the time. This event then was animated and broadcasted on the official website of Kumamon, also known as "*Kumamon o sagase daisakusen*" (the Project of Seeking Kumamon) (*Kumamoto kenchō chūmu Kumamon*, 2013).

When Kumamon came to China, the character adopted the same strategy. Information about the character is frequently posted on his micro-blog (see **Figures 21** and **22**), which is similar to twitter (twitter is blocked in China). Some posts are about his daily life and are posted simultaneously with his twitter account, while others are about promotional events and news in China. Because of his funny and cute image, he soon became popular on the micro-blogging site and is affectionately known as *Mengxiong* (Moe bear), *Xiongbenxiong* (Kumamoto bear) or *Buzhang* (Manager). His image is also widely recognized by Chinese micro-blog users, who become his fans, frequently repost his posts, share his image and interact with him on the micro-blog. As of 6 February 2016 he had 171,900 followers. In order to attract more Chinese fans, he adopts a localized strategy and adds some Chinese elements: for instance, on traditional Chinese festivals he expresses his congratulations and celebrates with the Chinese (see **Figure 23**).

Figure 21. The verified Sina micro-blog account of the Shanghai branch of Kumamoto traders with its small blue v-mark; Source: Sina micro-blog.

Figure 22. The Sina micro-blog account of Kumamon authorized and recommended by the above-verified account of Kumamoto traders; Source: Sina micro-blog.

Figure 23. Kumamon eating the Chinese traditional food, Laba rice porridge to celebrate the Laba festival; Kumamon expresses his congratulations for the 2016 spring festival; Source: Sina micro-blog of Kumamon.

These practices facilitate the character's access to Chinese fans and their lives. And with the increasing interaction with Kumamon, a kind of intimacy has been established. For example, in the comments from those following his micro-blog, Chinese fans are curious about what kind of Laba porridge Kumamon is eating and teasingly warn him not to eat too much in case he puts on weight; they also wish him good luck on New Year's Eve. When the earthquake hit Kumamoto Prefecture in April 2016 and Kumamon's twitter also stopped updating, many Chinese fans expressed their concern for the character.[18] They created drawings and posters around the theme of supporting the local people and place by using Kumamon image (see **Figure 24**). In addition the character actively attends a series of cultural communication events in China such as "The Future of China and Japan: A Photography Exhibition for 100 Children" and "The Competition for the Most Original Micro-blog [for 'image of Japan' and 'Japanese style in China']" held by the Japanese Embassy (Zhao, 2013; 21 February 2016 *Renmingwang* news).

The development of Japanese characters in China since 2000 has been down to factors, the economy and culture. Character merchandising has brought Japanese characters into the lives of the Chinese in the form of a commodity and has triggered certain emotions and desires. As I have pointed out in this dissertation, emotion and desire are two key factors in stimulating character consumption and alongside the growth of these factors in China the commercial side of characters is rising. For example, the opening of Shanghai Disneyland (16 June 2016) reveals a large potential for character business in China. During soft opening month, there have been around half a million visitors attracted (Lin, 2016). At the official opening ceremony on 16 June 2016, Chinese Vice Premier directly pointed out that the opening of Shanghai Disneyland meant a lot of U.S. dollars and RMB (Chinese currency) (16 June 2016 *BBC Zhongwenwang*). It is estimated that Shanghai Disneyland will draw at least 12 million visitors in its first year (Fritz, 2016), which will greatly promote the consumption of characters in China. It is an opportunity for Japanese government when marketing its national brand and "cool" culture, for example, Kumamon's cultural practices in China, above and before Disneyland Sanrio had opened a Hello Kitty theme park in China in 2015. As "cool has become the central ideology of the late consumer capitalism" (Dailot-Bul, 2009: 262), consumption, "the social practice through which persons are drawn into the work of fantasy" (Appadurai, 1996: 82), indeed provides a way for the Chinese to become involved in the fantasy of Japanese characters, thereby constructing a closer connection between China and Japan.

[18]On14 April 2016, a 6.2-magnitude earthquake hit Kumamoto Prefecture and caused serious damage. Kumamon played important role in supporting and comforting the people in local disaster area. His image was soon applied to posters, flags, leaflets and donation boxes for rising funds (JIJI, 2016). Thus he disappeared from twitter for one and half a month until 1 June his account started again.

Figure 24. “Pray for Kumamoto” created by Chinese artist, Tiancai de zhuqing daren; Source: Micro-blog of Tiancai de zhuqing daren, 16 April 2016.

The Shared Present between China and Japan

With the development of technology and the media, many new character-related aspects such as fan creations, databases of character elements, cosplay, and anthropomorphism, have been introduced into China. Like Japanese fans, Chinese fans also create fan works of anime, manga, and characters; form fan circles; hold and participate in cosplay events; and consume character products. In this, as we saw in Chapter 3, there is a postmodern tendency for consumers to no longer gather information following a line of narrative but rather, to gather it by playing with the small narrative or data in a fragmented way: as Appadurai proposes, “we begin to think of the configuration of cultural forms in today’s world as fundamentally fractal, that is, as possessing no Euclidean boundaries, structures or regularities” (1996: 46). This tendency also affects the diffusion of characters, particularly within today’s

decentred information environment, which means that Japanese characters have the same cultural impact as Atomu, Doraemon and Kumamon did, but indirectly.

Green Dam Girl (Chinese: Lvbaniang) is one such example. She is an anthropomorphism of a piece of software produced by the Chinese government—Green Dam Youth Escort—created by Chinese Internet users. She is influenced by Japanese character culture in many aspects, such as the idea of anthropomorphism, a design consisting of character elements, her impact on society and her non-narrative but simple profile (as below): [19]

> Name: Green Dam Girl
> Favourite phrase: "I hate bad information!"
> Birthday: 11 June 2009
> Residence: personal computer
> Personality: always feeling confused and forgetting key words; likes using her power to peek at others' privacy
> Description: a rich girl who has 40 million yuan as her pocket money; the committee member for discipline in her class, she is conservative and often messes everything up; a female shaman who can drive out information

With regard to her image, because there are no specific details or any official appearances, a lot of different images of her have been created and published online by Chinese Internet users. Nevertheless, these images all have something in common in their depictions, with bunches, a river-crab hat, a discipline armband, a rabbit toy, a key and a soy-sauce container being common features (see **Figure 25**).

These features suggest a similarity with Japanese characters, as if they have come from the same database of character elements. This is particularly true if the first and most popular version of Green Dam Girl is compared with Kawashiro Nitori (see **Figure 25**), a *moe* Japanese character from the *Touhou porojiekuto* (Eastern Project[20]). It is said that the creator of Green Dam Girl referenced Kawashiro Nitori when designing her.[21] Both characters have a hat, a key and bunches, which are typical character elements (see chapter 3), seen as symbols of *moe* in Japanese character culture and often given to young girl characters, such as Hatsune Miku.

[19]See "Green Dam Girl", "moegirl-pedia," accessed 5 March 2016, https://zh.moegirl.org/zh/%E7%BB%BF%E5%9D%9D%E5%A8%98.

[20]*Touhou Project* is a Japanese *dōjin* game series focused on bullet hell shooters made by the one-man developer Team Shanghai Alice, whose sole member, known as ZUN, is responsible for all the graphics, music, and programming.

[21]Most of Chinese Internet users published their creations of Green Dam Girl image anonymously. The website of Green Dam Girl (*Mengniang baike*) mentioned later also does not record the detailed information of the creator. See "The story of Green Dam Girl event," "moegirl-pedia," accessed 5 March 2016, https://zh.moegirl.org/%E7%BB%BF%E5%9D%9D%E5%A8%98%E4%BA%8B%E4%BB%B6%E5%A7%8B%E6%9C%AB.

Figure 25. The most popular version of Green Dam Girl created by Chinese Internet user and the Japanese character, Kawashiro Nitori created by Yurami Kohaku-san; Source: Mengniang baike website and Nico Nico Seiga website.

However, for Green Dam Girl these elements not only refer to *moe* but also to specific actual meanings in China that relate to her background. The origin of Green Dam Girl is the Green Dam Youth Escort, a piece of software promoted by the Chinese government as a means of purifying the Internet environment. The software was commissioned by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) through an open tender and developed by Jinhui Company and Dazheng Company. MIIT purchased the software for 41.7 million yuan ($6.1 million) and provided it as a free download for users for one-year's use. However, because of some suspicious aspects of it, such as it automatically updating the list of prohibited sites from an online censorship database and collecting private user-data, the software is considered to be a form of electronic censorship and a tool for state surveillance. In accordance with notices issued by MIIT in April and May 2009, the campus networks in all primary schools and secondary schools had to install the software and on 1 July of the same year all personal computers produced in China had to come with the software pre-installed, which led to a feeling among the public that it was mandatory.

A change came about a day before that the notices would be valid: MIIT suspended the pre-installation of the software for objective reasons, including the heavy workload the installations caused and the short turnaround time (30 June 2009 *Xinhuanet* news). In August the minister for MIIT offered an explanation for the "mandatory

installation" and pointed out that it was not true that it was mandatory to install it; however, he noted that the ministry would improve the project after listening to various opinions and would instead promote it publicly including in schools and at Internet bars (13 August 2009 *Chinanews*). This change was in part because the software had exposed many functional defects, such as its misrecognition of texts, pictures, and videos as inappropriate content and its shielding of sensitive of political words regardless of their legality. By 2010, the project was teetering on the brink of collapse, reportedly because of financial problems. After MIIT's offer of a free licence for one year, it was hard for the project to turn a profit.[22]

Regardless of this, these events inspired Chinese Internet users to create a character for the software. They gave the character a "river-crab hat." "Hat" is a *moe* element, but "river crab" in Chinese has a special associative meaning. In Mandarin Chinese, the term "river crab" (Chinese: hexie) has the original meaning Chinese mitten crab, which sounds similar to the word for "harmonization" (Chinese: hexie), symbolizing the "harmonious society" (Chinese: hexie shehui) that the Chinese government is committed to building. One of the goals of such a society is to construct a harmonious Internet environment by blocking and filtering pornographic and violent information, which of course was the main aim of Green Dam Youth Escort. Because it is a sensitive political word, the use of "harmonization" is limited on the Internet. Thus Chinese Internet users tend to use the term "river crab" instead. In addition, the image of a river crab waving its claws can be a metaphor for either "hegemony" or "rampage," both terms which satirize some of the functions of the software, such as its ability to hide and control information, and limit freedom on the Internet.

The soy-sauce container in her hand is like a sealing-tool, revealing her job—a *miko* (Japanese female shaman) who can prevent the appearance of unacceptable information on Chinese websites. The term is also borrowed from a Chinese Internet phrase—*dajiangyou* (literally, "getting soy sauce"), meaning "passing by," a kind of nonchalant or no-comment attitude, which pokes fun at the software's inaction. The discipline armband (Chinese: fengjizhang), as a symbol of *fūki iin* (a disciplinary supervisor),[23] often appears on Japanese characters (such as Hibari Kyōya in *REBORN!*). While the term discipline (Chinese: fengji) in combination with the red of communism has been used in China for a long time, its use in popular culture has been influenced by manga and anime. The rabbit toy which the character holds is the mascot of Green Dam Youth Escort. Moreover, because of her stupidity (often misjudging information) there is a key around Green Dam Girl's neck in case she cannot find it.

As soon she appeared on the Internet, she received a warm welcome from Chinese Internet users. Many of them were fascinated by her and took part in the process of developing the character by creating derivative animation videos, songs, and novels

[22]This project then became a public welfare matter (21 July 2010 *Xinhuanet* news).

[23]*Fūki iin* (the disciplinary supervisor) refers to the pupils who used to be responsible for managing discipline on school campuses. They checked uniform and bags and monitored those who arrived late or left early. They were the models for other students. Such roles no longer exist in contemporary Japan but often appear in Japanese anime and manga.

about her. Green Dam Girl was soon familiar to Chinese Internet users and had even spread to Japan and become recognized by Internet users there.[24]

Timeline of Green Dam Girl	
May 2009	Notification issued by MIIT regarding requirement that the software be pre-installed on all newly produced computers.
From June 2009 to 2010	Birth of Green Dam Girl.
	Baidu BBS and Baidu Fan Club for the character were created.
	Green Dam Girl appears in Japan's NicoNico-pedia and 2ch.
	Green Dam Girl entry was created for Wikipedia and Baidu Baike.[25]
	Derivative works including *dōjin* novels, games, manga, and songs were created and released by Chinese Internet users.
	Green Dam Girl entry on Baidu Baike was deleted.
	The first cosplay image of Green Dam Girl emerged.
	All references to Green Dam Girl on the Internet were banned in China.
	In order to collect information about her, Chinese Internet users established the Green Dam Girl wiki. It was then renamed *Zhonghua mengniang xiaobaike* (Chinese moe-girl-pedia) and used as a place to collect information about all anthropomorphic *moe* characters in both China and Japan. It is now called *Mengniang baike* (Moe-girl-pedia).
2011	The first garage kit of Green Dam Girl was released at the Hyper Comic Galaxy Festival in Guangzhou, China.

Table 5. The main events of Green Dam Girl from 2009 to 2011; Source: *Mengniang baike.*

This timeline (**Table 5**) shows us that Green Dam Girl grew up on the Internet and was cultivated by Internet users. In a way she triggered the boom in *moe* girl characters in Chinese popular culture. The creation of the Chinese "moe-girl-pedia"[26] was also inspired by the existence of Green Dam Girl. This website has an important role not only as a way of introducing *moe*, Japanese *moe* elements and *moe* characters into China, but also for enabling communication among fans from China, Japan and other countries or areas (it has three versions, in Chinese, Japanese and English).

Significantly, the attention paid to Green Dam Girl is the result of the Chinese Internet users' "intertextual makeup" (Barthes, 1977: 145), through which they realize recontextualization, defined by Per Linell as the "dynamic transfer-and-

[24]See "Ryuibā nyan," "Niconico-pedia," 17 June 2009, accessed 7 March 2006, http://dic.nicovideo.jp/a/%E7%B7%91bar%E5%A8%98.
[25]Baidu Baike is Baidu Encyclopedia, a Chinese-language collaborative Web-based encyclopedia provided by the Chinese search engine Baidu.
[26]An online collaboratively built encyclopedia of *moe* girls.

transformation of something from one discourse/text-in-context … to another" (1998: 154). Green Dam Girl specifically demonstrates the recontexualization of character elements. Derived from consumption that separates a specific character from its original narrative (including a work, a worldview, or the setting of the character) and "takes apart the object into moe elements and objectifies them within a database" (Azuma, [2001] 2009: 53), character elements to some extent have finished the process of decontexualization. These deconstructed yet decontextualized elements provide much room for reconstruction, thus when they are diffused and applied to another context—China—a new local character is born, endowed with local cultural meanings. As Stuart Hall in his "Encoding /Decoding" suggests, "It is possible for [one]…to decode the message in a *globally* contrary way…[and] retotalize the message within some alternative framework of reference" (1980: 137-138; emphasis in original).

Moreover, the local cultural meaning of the character lies in the social impact that Green Dam Girl, as an anthropomorphism of Green Dam Youth Escort software, has as a weapon for social criticism. From what is stated above regarding the history of the software, it is clear that it had many problems, including the government's promotion of it and its mandatory installation, and this started a series of social controversies. Many Chinese Internet users held a negative view of the software, but without access to the power of expression, they created a character who acted as a spokeswoman and did not "labor in the service of an existing reality but only [gave] voice to the mystery of that reality" (Horkheimer, 1972: 217). They actively created derivative works about the character and enjoyed them. Although the character was initially banned and deleted many times by the Chinese government's Internet censors, fans continued to develop and support the character. This reveals an attempt at criticism in China which, based on the focus of this dissertation, I will call "characterized criticism." As we have seen in Chapter 4, in Japan it is not a new concept to express one's political opinions through the use of characters. In particular, it can be a way of introducing irony into self-entertainment. Thus the seemingly self-appreciative behaviour of creating Green Dam Girl, and continually supporting and enjoying her, is in fact a way for Chinese Internet users to express their ire and dissatisfaction with the software, the whole debacle, and the government.[27]

The above analysis of Green Dam Girl manifests a clear cultural connection between China and Japan. It shows that reading manga, watching anime, purchasing and collecting character goods, and consuming characters have been the shared experience between Chinese fans and Japanese fans. This just accounts for the recent popularity of 2D culture in China.

As a concept originating in Japan, 2D particularly refers to the fantasy world of 2D characters, which has been widely recognized in China as an interesting field.

[27]Many scholars argue that the Green Dam Youth Escort software causes the debate about the boundary between the public power and private right in China (Du, Liang and Li, 2009). However, as the software stops providing service, the enthusiasm of Chinese Internet users towards Green Dam Girl gradually become their pure love of the character.

According to a 2015 report for the 2D industry[28] in China conducted by *iResearch* Institute, since the first generation in the 1980s 550 million Chinese consumers have been involved in this industry and the number of core consumers who watch anime or read manga each week has reached 50 million and is estimated to peak at 80 million in 2017. In response to the question of "what aspects of 2D culture are these consumers interested in?" the 76 per cent that cited anime, 14.8 per cent that cited manga and 2.8 per cent that cited Japanese games formed a much higher percentage than those who cited Chinese comics—1.9 per cent—and cartoons—1.2 per cent. To the question of "what is your favourite character?" only one Chinese character made it into the top 20, the rest being Japanese. Furthermore 99.4 per cent of Chinese consumers have a favourable opinion of Japanese works. To the question of "why do you like 2D world?" the 63.4 per cent "believe that they themselves identify with the 2D world and they can obtain comfort and love from it." To the question of "how do you think of 2D world?" the 47.5 per cent "express that they understand and accept 2D world" and 45.6 per cent "express a strong wish to live in a fantasy world and even become a 2D character." These aspects to some extent correspond with what I have argued earlier, individuals' true feeling towards character world and their psychological needs for characters (see comfort and desire in chapter 3). In this sense, Chinese consumers are identifying with characters through an ever more lively interaction, which is not only about shared memories but also a shared present.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that characters belong to the world. When they travel overseas, characters are widely welcomed and loved by people throughout the world. Driven by Japan's cultural exports and policies, characters as cultural products and cultural ambassadors have been brought onto the world stage as part of the Japanese government's expectations of exercising soft power and branding Japan. However, there is something we should keep in mind inasmuch as the reality is far more complicated than has been assumed. Even if Japanese characters have been wildly accepted by the Chinese audiences and fans (especially for those who grew up in and since the 1980s), this does not mean that Japan's pop-culture diplomacy is capable of neutralizing the tensions between China and Japan. As a poll conducted by the China Foreign Languages Publishing Administration and the Genron NPO of Japan in 2015 suggests, even though 70.1 per cent of Chinese agree that the relationship between China and Japan is important and expect to strengthen their cultural exchange, some 78.3 per cent of Chinese still have a poor impression of Japan (Zhang and Wang, 2015). Many scholars also note that the Chinese fans tend to have a detached attitude whereby on the one hand they can love manga, anime, and characters, but on the other will not change their political opinion as a result of their preference (Iwabuchi, 2015; Ishii, 2013; Nakano, 2008). In short, cultural exchange and soft power may have limited influence in a country such as China, without even considering the historical

[28]The 2D industry referring to a flat world overlaps with the anime, comics, games, and novels (ACGN) industry but is narrower than it.

issues and recurring diplomatic spats (Vyas, 2012). For instance, one reason for the Chinese government's tightening import policy of Japanese cultural products since 2000 is that Koizumi, as the Prime Minister, constantly visited the Yasukuni Shrine during his six-year tenure and pushed China and Japan into a very difficult relationship.

However, it cannot be denied that in the process of going overseas, characters may have become deeply rooted in both the past and present of other regions, as the case of China shows. Since Atomu's arrival in China in 1980, more and more Japanese characters have been introduced to China and are recognized by Chinese audience. These characters evoke memories of childhood, especially for members of the generation born in the 1980s, who identity with characters and view them as their friends or like themselves. And although there are restrictions, they still actively search for (via the Internet), create, and enjoy (through fansubs) the related sources of manga, anime, and characters. The official entrance of Japanese character goods into the Chinese consumer market has created a broader group of consumers who are keen to collect and purchase character products. Furthermore, despite their origins, these characters promote the diversity of the local culture. By borrowing character elements and recontextualizing them, the Chinese Internet users have created their own character, Green Dam Girl, who is not only a spokeswoman for expressing their opinions of society, but has also contributed to the current 2D boom in Chinese popular culture. In this sense, bridged by characters, both shared memories and a shared present have been forged between China and Japan.