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To quote this article:

Hernández-Pérez, M., Corstorphine, K., & Stephens, D. (2017), Cartoons vs. Manga Movies: A Brief History of Anime in the UK. *Mutual Images* [Online], Vol. 2, Winter, 1-39.

Link to the Open Access Journal:

<http://www.mutualimages-journal.org/index.php>

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# Cartoons vs. Manga Movies: A Brief History of Anime in the UK<sup>1</sup>

Manuel HERNÁNDEZ-PÉREZ, Kevin CORSTORPHINE & Darren STEPHENS

## Abstract

*This paper has as main objective to explore, adopting a historical and critical perspective, the release of film and anime TV in UK. This would be a first step towards the study of the peculiar implementation of manganime Culture in Britain.*

*Compared with other European countries, UK has shown to be slower and even reluctant in importing Japanese television products. Thus, while major markets of anime such as France, Italy or Spain expanded considerably during 1975-1995 period, in a recurrent synergy of television markets, and technological publishing, the implantation of the principal channel (televised anime) in UK has been irregular and unstable. Even today, the catalogue of broadcasting anime is limited to some high success movies, late night television on thematic channels and quite recently, video-on-demand services (Netflix). The offer cannot be compared in importance and diversity to other European countries. This fact, far from being anecdotal, has had an impact on the subsequent implantation of media Japanese cultures such as manga, anime, video games and cosplay.*

*What can be the reason of this irregular development of Japanese visual culture in United Kingdom? Characteristic having the television market and / or the UK audience? Main hypothesis in relation to these issues can be considered to be of sociological character, but are reflected in the idiosyncrasies of British television culture and production system.*

*Thus, compared to other Western markets (including the US) which saw the opportunity to purchase economic products for children's television audiences in the late 70s and early 80s, the British 'telly' already offered a broad catalogue (Roobarb, Super Ted, Danger Mouse, etc. ...). The only exception to this children's 'made in Britain' programming was the co-production model. This caused a leak of few products that were not even considered as "Japanese" (Seven Cities of Gold, Godzilla) but mere 'cartoons'. This competition with the British children production as well as the wide catalogue of other forms of British Popular Culture would explain why the film, domestic video and later adults programming would be the marginal routes of entry for manganime.*

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<sup>1</sup> Dates of the shows correspond to transmission dates and not to production schedule. This is particularly relevant in the case of Japanese products released in the UK, which is also the main object of this paper. In addition, titles of animated productions will use the English version over the original Japanese title, as this will better reflect the fact that we are talking about translations and/or adaptations of certain products.

### **Introduction: was the anime market in the UK a “failure”?**

According to an article published in *The Guardian* only a few years ago, anime was considered as “invisible” in the British Television schedule (Van Spall 2009). The article does not provide tangible evidence but it does invite reflection. The reporter’s intuition and experience reflect sentiments of British anime fan communities. Besides, the paper points out some interesting questions about how the concept of anime that can be extended to other European countries. For example, it is not a coincidence that the author of the article noted a dissociation between anime and other Japanese animation products. There is some debate among fans around the concept of “anime” that has transcended academic discourse. Anime in general is sometimes distinguished from other kinds of Japanese animation such as movies due to the prestige international relevance of the latter. This kind of anime, generally defined as “*gen’an*”, or standalone animation films, could be opposed to “*gensaku*”, a term that designates urtexts, which quite common as a base of manga-driven franchises (Cavallaro 2010, 7). In Western countries, cinema has been, along with television, a main gateway for anime and manga culture. The appeal of international figures such as Mamoru Oshii, Katsuhiro Otomo and Hayao Miyazaki is due to their success in international festivals and the prestige created through film criticism. Despite belonging to a minor market, these authors still have their place in occasional TV and indie cult cinema sessions. However, it is significant that in the UK the presence of mainstream anime on broadcast television has been relatively scarce historically. The main exceptions to this have been the most popular and international franchises, such as *Pokémon*, *Bakugan*

or *Yu-Gi-Oh!*, and their availability through satellite and cable technologies.

A few other official sources seem to support this idea of “failure”. In March 2011, the Japan External Trade Organization JETRO (Japan External Trade Organization 2011b) published the report, “Realities of the content market in the United Kingdom”. In this report, a brief history of British anime releases is presented, and the most successful titles in anime and manga sales are highlighted. The report describes how a number of Japanese industries vary in their performance in the UK market. On the one hand, Japanese video games have great relevance in the UK market. Japan is the second largest exporter of games after the US. On the other hand, manga and anime struggle to find a place due to the dominance of other (mainly American) producers. Notably, the report does not seem to be concerned about the real reasons behind this asymmetry, and offers vague explanations, such as the high price of goods, qualifying the British consumer as a “middle-class” or “wealthy” individual (JETRO 2013 18). Our interpretation is that Japanese anime and manga aims for a wider audience including younger audiences. However, the high prices of editions of these products narrow their potential market to teenagers and young adults. This sector has to compete with a larger offer of international products (and, also, their target market are active internet users with access to pirated versions of these materials). These issues might not affect the video game market; this medium has more effective anti-piracy measures. It has also built a reputation established over decades by brands such as Nintendo, Sega and Namco.

While the majority of the gamer target market is older, some video game blockbusters have marketed successfully to wider audiences. That is the case of the *Pokémon* Franchise, which is arguably one of the most successful video games ever released in the UK market context.

Other aspects of the dissemination of Japanese popular cultural commented upon in *The Guardian* article are more difficult to evaluate. There is a preconception within the media that modern Japanese pop culture is only a minority interest, despite the efforts of independent producers and fan communities in the UK. Typical UK events are not just about comics but also subcultures. Mostly, such events adopt the shape of commercial fairs either as popular culture or science fiction conventions. Cultural activities play a secondary role, and their nature is defined by the “brand” of the event, which corresponds to a particular subculture. There is, of course, a presence of *otaku* fan communities at video game and comic conventions targeted to wider fan audiences such as London Super Comic con. It is in fact difficult *not* to find activities and events related to Japanese popular culture in these events, including tea ceremonies, ramen stands, cosplay and karaoke contests. However, it is true that events exclusively dedicated to manga and/or anime are not as popular as in other countries. As an exception to this, *AniMangaPOP* fair in Plymouth has been showcasing Japanese culture and its main related industries on an annual basis since 2013.

This poor evaluation can be considered the result of a failure of expectations, compared to European and American sales. In this sense,

it is important to differentiate whether we are talking about a “failure” in terms of levels of circulation, or of delays between releases. Currently, domestic video sales in the US and Europe are far below those achieved at the beginning of the century during to the so-called “anime boom”. In Europe, manga sales have increased in recent years (2006-2011), while anime DVD and Bluray sales have stabilized since around 2006 (JETRO Japan External Trade Organization 2011a, 2011b, 2013). According to those same sources, British DVD and Bluray markets fell away dramatically between 2006 and 2011. In this way, British sales would seem to follow the trend of other territories, but they would still be small in comparison to France and the US. However, the situation may have changed as there is not yet data for after 2011.

There are, indeed, different routes for cultural and commercial exchanges such as the expansion of anime and manga. Japanese popular culture in Britain may have followed a particular route that stressed the cinema and domestic video markets as the main channels for an engaged user. This would be in distinct contrast to the way anime has been marketed in other countries worldwide, where it has been part of the regular TV schedule. As a result, anime in the UK would not have had the opportunity to create a nostalgia-based audience, which would have made possible a more engaged market similar (in its pro-activeness) to fan audiences.

In this paper, we address the specific case of the British anime market using both synchronic and diachronic perspectives. As we analyse the current situation of the anime market, we will also try to

find historical trends evident in imported anime. In this reflection, we will adopt a critical point of view in the analysis of data, monographs and commentaries. Instead of accepting the perceived failure of anime in Britain as a given, we prefer to focus on the description of the political and historical factors that have determined how Japanese anime has been received in Britain. This will be a way of ascertaining whether that perceived failure is actually the case, and the extent of the significance and relevance that anime has actually had.

### **Anime in the UK: A Brief History**

Before describing the main factors and conditions in the British broadcasting market, we will describe briefly its historical development. Anime history has been considered a global phenomenon and the US, seems to have drawn most of the attention (Levi 1996; Poitras 2008, 49). Sources exclusively reporting on the UK anime history are scarce. Clements (2013, 179), for example, makes little mention of the case of the UK, possibly due to the international scope of his monograph.

We have constructed the following section upon these global histories of the manganime expansion through the stages differentiated in previous studies (Hernández-Pérez 2013, 88). Our aim will be to focus on finding the main turning points of the history of anime in this country. However, we found it necessary to explore complementary sources in order to illustrate the UK's market idiosyncrasy. These sources include official reports, such as those published by British (IPO, BBFC) and Japanese agencies (JETRO). We

have also employed journalistic sources, such as TV guides and broadcaster databases (BBC, ITV, and Channel 4).

Of special interest will be the data obtained through the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC), the organisation responsible for content rating in both the domestic market and theatrical releases. It is necessary to explain the nature and purpose of the BBFC and its database. Any product released on video has to be age rated according to the Video Recordings Act (1984). Cinema releases are not obliged to be part of the process, although it has become a general trend. These may not share the same rating, however, as domestic format evaluations sometimes adopt a more severe approach. This is due to a bigger risk of de-contextualised viewing (BBFC, 2014). Ratings include the following grades: suitable for all (U), parental guidance (PG), cinema/video release suitable for 12 years and over (12A/12), suitable for 15 years and over (15), suitable only for adults (18) and adult works for licensed premises only (R18). The BBFC database is a valuable resource for qualitative analysis. The database offers updated information about the cultural products and the ratings of different versions, but this should not be misinterpreted as a market index. The number of titles in each period reflects the diversification of the medium, its genres and sub-genres and hence its consolidation in the market, but this does not necessarily correlate with sales.

### **First Period: (1963-1989)**

This period corresponds to the beginning of the adaptation of manga products to television. Thus, in contrast to the US, it is surprising not to



have found earlier animes such as *Astroboy* (1963) and *Speed Racer* (1965). Classic *shōnen* genre products are difficult to find in TV programming schedules in the UK<sup>2</sup>, with the exception of *Battle of the Planets*, which was broadcast by BBC1 (1979-1980).

As we will explore later, the social and political context of the UK's public broadcasting system (BBC) affected the acquisition of foreign materials and created a filter for potentially harmful products. Private companies were more willing to import, which eventually made possible the importation of serial adventure/action cartoons. Transnational, mainly European-Japanese productions such as *Mysterious Cities of Gold* (BBC-1, 1986), *Ulysses 31* (BBC-1, 1985-87), together with *Dogtanian and the Three Muskehounds* (BBC-1, 1985-1987) were indeed very popular among young audiences.

American cartoons had a strong presence in this period. As with other countries, it is difficult not to find a Hannah-Barbera-animated production on the children's TV schedule: *Scooby Doo* (BBC, 1970-1981), *Top Cat* (BBC, 1962), etc. This American producer also created their own version of *Godzilla* (BBC-1). The series was produced with the participation of Toho Ltd, with the creators of the character profiting from its popularity from decades earlier. Despite almost being an anime (Japanese animation), it does not follow the style of other Japanese productions of the same period, including the *Tokatsu*

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<sup>2</sup> With the introduction of digital formats, since the 2000s, there's also a trend for recovering vintage classics, even when they weren't screened at UK. *Space Adventure Cobra* was released in 2008 to DVD, for example, but his release might be more justified for the release of the movie in 1995 in cinemas with the occasions of the Manga Festival. The event, celebrated at the National Film Theatre screened in London screened also *Patlabor*, *Wings of Honneamise* and *The Legend of The Overfiend* (The Guardian 1995).

(special effects) series of films that it is based on. Instead, the series adopted a simple episodic and (self-conclusive) formula and followed the style of other action genre cartoons by this production house, such as *Johnie Quest* (Ryfle 1998, 10). Self-production was another trend that was complementary to importation. ITV's agenda created programming addressed to children, although these included also live-action productions (*Children's ITV*, 1983-1987) and stop-motion (*Thomas and The Tank*, 1984- ).

Though the social and institutional reception of anime was not particularly good, reasons for this lack of anime in this period cannot be exclusively attributed to prejudices. In comparison to other European countries, the TV schedule in the UK covered a huge number of hours, and the importation of globally-produced animation had to compete with British children's television productions (see section 'Natural Competitors'). Even with that, there were some exceptions. A Japanese animation could be distributed when it was based on a substantially different selling proposition. Like in other countries, products inspired by children's literature were an alternative to American action and comedy cartoons. While in Spain, Italy and Portugal, adaptations from Edmondo De Amicis (*Cuore*) or Johanna Spyri (*Heidi*)<sup>3</sup> were very popular, in the UK we can find several versions of *The Moomins*, based on the works by Tove Jansson, including two Japanese anime: *Mūmin* (ITV, 1986-) and *Tanoshii Mūmin Ikka* (BBC)

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<sup>3</sup> We refer here to Marco (*Haha wo tazunete sanzenri*, 1976) and Heidi (*Arupusu no Shōjo Haiji*, 1974), both part of the *Meisaku* ("Theater Master Pieces") Collection, released by Nippon Animation.

Cinema has been traditionally the other main gateway for anime distribution overseas. In the UK, animation distribution in cinemas presented a diverse panorama, including not just Disney 'blockbusters' but also animation films from European filmmakers. Animation products are primarily associated with children's audiences. However, in the British case, this is not incompatible with the inclusion of elements of drama or adventure. In that sense, European cinema was drawn on for the importation of animations which contributed to the medium's thematic diversification. These include *Wizards* by Ralph Bakshi, 1977, and *Pollux et le chat bleu* (*Dougal and the Blue Cat* in the UK, 1972), which were shown alongside 'home-grown' productions such as *Watership Down* (1976). By contrast, anime releases in cinema are scarce in this period. Regarding to this lack of titles, we note the difficulty of identifying animation productions in databases. In the case of the BBFCO, for example, the label 'animation' as a genre definer/thematic designation was not used extensively until 2009. However, at least two significant anime releases from this period were released in the UK: *Panda & the Magic Serpent* (Golden Era, 1961) and *Alakazam the Great* (Anglo Amalgamated, 1961). Both were also screened in the US and form, together with *Magic Boy* (*Sarutobi Ninja Sasuke*), the pioneers that TOEI productions distributed in the Western market. In short, these anime cinema releases show that UK anime dissemination was not that different from other Western countries.

### **Second Period: (1990-1999)**

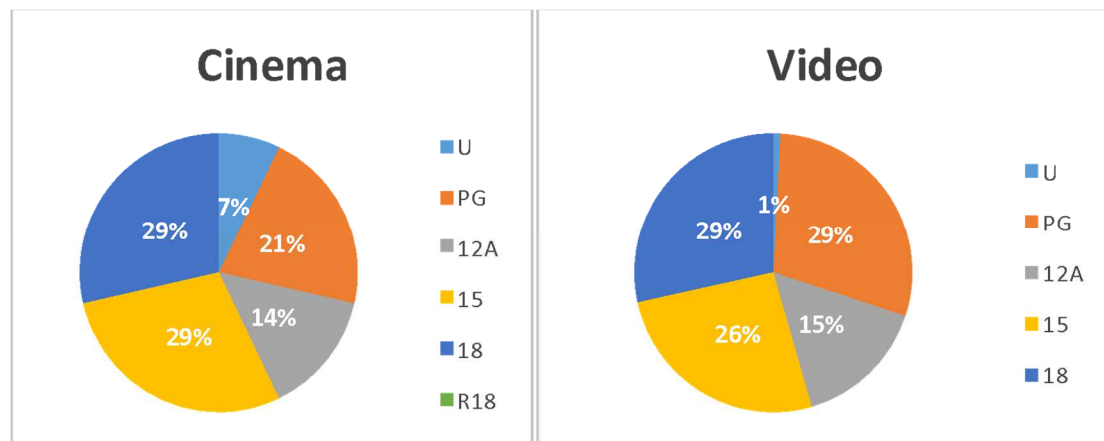
This period is of great significance, as it marks the entry of anime into the UK through cinema and television. For the first time, Japanese

productions were recognized and identified by audiences as such. Film criticism influenced the coming decades with the assignation of the 'cult film' label to Japanese animation.

As happens in other European countries, the word "manga" began to be used (and over-used) after the release of *Akira* in theatres. *Akira* is a cultural phenomenon that was considered a major influence in its time. The film premiered at the Piccadilly Film & Video Festival in June, 1990 as part of a wider programme. After that, *Akira* was released in theatres (ICA Project, 1990) and later promoted as an "intense, fiercely anti-establishment animated film for adults" (The *Guardian*, 1994). It is clear, however, perhaps due to minor consideration of the animated medium, that Broadcast Film Critics talked more about the influence of Otomo's masterpiece in the live-action film. It seems they did not consider, at that time, its relevance as pioneer of an entire industry based on the production committees and its expansion through strategies structured on media-mix.

The anime markets in the UK profited from the development of home video technology, and used the ubiquity of the VHS medium to reach different audiences. However, as a cultural phenomenon, manga video inherits the same oversight by critics of animated productions. *Sight and Sound*, the official magazine of the BFI, reviewed many of the productions. Here, the commentary seems to equate the 'manga' video concept with action, otherness and fantasy. As an example, the movie *Venus Wars* was presented as: "Manga comic heroes go hyperspace in this animated adventure set in the future", while *Odin*, another release of the same period, is summarised as "More comic strip adventures on

Japan's manga cartoons" (BFI 1992, 61). The main VHS distributor of the period was Manga Ltd entertainment. Following the strategy of the US and other countries, the company released titles for adults, combined with other products marketed to the 12-15-year-old audience.



Ratings corresponding to the 1990-1999 period on the video Manga Ltd. Catalogue.  
Data obtained from BBFCO (May 2016).

Cinema and video catalogues share a similar distribution of ratings wherein general audiences (U & PG) represent at least 28-30%. However, this diversity was hugely misrepresented in public opinion as Clements, the main anime historian in the UK, points out (Jacques and Clements 2005, 4): "The media perception, however, based largely on the *Urotsukidoji* press-pack, was that anime was a cavalcade of depravity".

At the end of this period, the catalogue of Manga Ltd video had increased to 123 titles. We have no access to the data corresponding to the sales during this period. However, it is certain that the video market was key in the creation of committed audiences, especially

compared to cinema and television, which had relatively limited impact. However, social impact is not always accompanied by good reviews. *Ghost in the Shell* was released in regular theatres on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 1995. The movie had already been screened in November during the London Film Festival but film criticism on this occasion took a harsh tone in general with the film. The storyline was considered "confused", and critics pointed out that it struggled to "take wing" (Malcom 1995, A9), probably in reference to the slow development of the plot. A critic from *The Observer* said:

"Animated Japanese films have acquired a cult following on video in recent years but on the strength of Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell*, it is hard to see why (...) The characters are blandly drawn, and though the cityscapes are impressive, they pale beside the live-action sets of *Blade-Runner*. A soulless film that helps explain why Schwarzenegger and Stallone vehicles are known as 'high-concept' movies". (French 1995, 65)

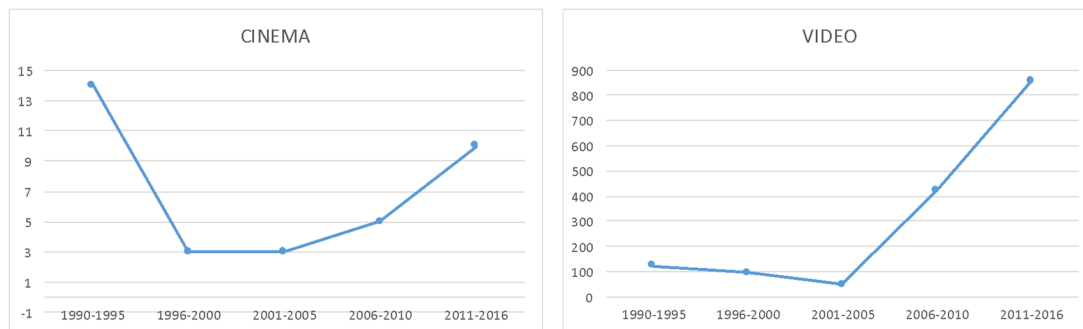
In the television, Japanese animation distribution could not compete with the American global producers that ruled the British broadcast agendas. The race between these competitors started in 1996 through multi-platform systems via cable and satellite technologies. By 1998, five corporations were established players in the market: the Disney Channel, Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network, Fox Kids and Trouble. From 1986-1996, both terrestrial and new technology operators offered a significant percentage (above 10%) of total television time in the form of children's TV programming (*Ibid*, 92). It is important to highlight that this had a relevant impact on the cartoon programming, not just as producers of new content, but also as curators of important libraries of copyrighted contents. These included the work of Hannah-Barbera (Cartoon Network) or Saban Entertainment (Fox Kids), which

contributed to an even larger catalogue of child-oriented products (Buckingham, Davies, Jones, & Kelley, 1999, p. 60). Due to the contribution of new platforms (and the several, already existing broadcasters), there was a huge increase in the contents available for children. Transnational co-productions such as *Ulysses* (Channel 4, 1993), still have a large presence on the British television schedule.

### **Third Period: (2001-2008)**

Attempts to increase the programmes offered on television continued irregularly during this period, most of it based on cable and satellite technologies. One of these initiatives was a specialized, thematic channel called Anime Central, which operated from September 2007. This channel offered a limited catalogue based mainly on titles such as *Cowboy Bebop* (1998), *Full Metal Alchemist* (2003), *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex* (2002) and *Bleach* (2004). After reducing anime timetables, it finally closed completely in August 2009.

In relation to the domestic video market, the number of anime titles increased to 172 in DVD and Blu-ray formats for the period between 2001-2010. With the significant contribution of Ghibli titles, which were extremely popular at the time because of the recent international phenomenon *Spirited Away* (2001), this period can be considered the peak for the distribution of anime sales. Existing data from the period indicates that sales for new titles decreased gradually year by year since 2006 (JETRO 2011, 33).



**Number of anime titles released in UK cinemas (Manga Entertainment Ltd., ICA Projects Ltd, among others) compared to those released straight to video (Manga Entertainment Ltd, Island World Communications Ltd, Optimum Releasing and others) during the period of 1990-2016. Data obtained from BBFCO (May 2016).**

The overall presence of the Studio Ghibli films is the most interesting trend of the cinema market in this period. From 2001 to 2008, of the 9 Japanese animated films distributed in the UK, 6 were produced by Studio Ghibli. The proportion is still larger in the next period when Ghibli's classic films from the 1980s and 1990s are released for first time in Britain. Hayao Miyazaki, one of the filmmakers associated with the production house, is the most recognizable figure in the British market for anime by a significant margin. Together with the fascination expressed by film critics, his international success, has contributed to creating his status as a 'cult' figure among British *otaku* audiences (Hernandez-Perez, 2016).

Through its association with these cult labels, cinema has proven to be an important way of consolidating minor but influential audiences in this period. The Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) hosted some events associated with Japanese visual culture. The majority of these were film exhibitions with a focus on either classical or contemporary Japanese filmmakers. Even when anime or manga were the main element of the programme, these media production were usually



presented in the wider context of Japanese visual culture. That was the case with the *Manga Matinees* (July 2008) and the *Comica* (November 2008) events. These were complemented by other film cult screenings such as *The Castle of Cagliostro* and *The Girl Who Leapt Through Time* (August 2008). In addition, The Barbican Centre, located in London, began an intermittent series of activities linked to the anime phenomenon ("*Japanimation*") in 2007. Hosted by iconic figures of anime scholarship and criticism such as Helen McCarthy, *Japanimation* activities have surely made significant contributions to the dissemination and understanding of Japanese animation. One of the most popular events took place in 2011, with the screening of a Studio Ghibli retrospective. Its zenith was reached in September 2008 with a retrospective about classical anime called "*Osamu Tezuka: Movies into Manga*", with more screenings and talks happening in the spring of 2009. However, since 2011 its activity has been reduced to selected film authors, most notably Mamoru Oshii and Katshuiro Otomo (The Barbican, 2015). Despite this reduction, the work of these centres was an important complement to the still-limited anime menu offered in large cities.

#### **Fourth Period: (2009s-)**

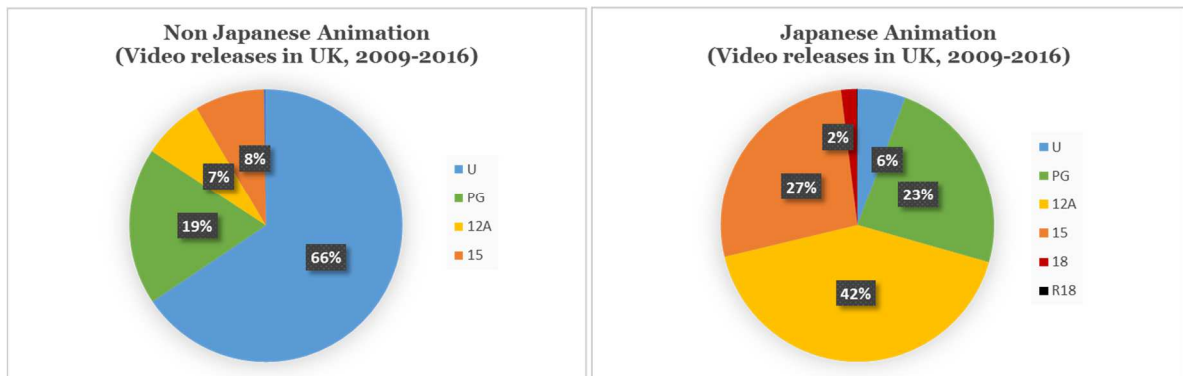
In recent years, the television anime catalogue has completely disappeared from the broadcasted offer. It seems to have found its audience in the children's segment on themed channels such as Cartoon Network (*Yokai Watch*) or Kix TV (*Yu-Gi-Oh Zexal*). *Pokémon* (Children ITV, 2006), is still the main element of the anime TV schedule. The rest of the channels on Digital TV (non pay-per-view platforms) do

not appear to gain much interest. BBC Children's TV channel continues with its historical focus on British production, such as magazines (*Blue Peter*), puppets or costume-based shows (*Teletubbies*) and stop-motion (*Clangers*, *Shaun the Sheep*).

Anime may have acquired a cult status but its presence has been limited to occasional marathon homages to Ghibli Studio and in particular, Hayao Miyazaki's films. This cult status has contributed to ongoing cultural activities. The ICA (London) continues with its dissemination of Japanese visual culture, with the participation of institutions such as the Japan Foundation. It is hard not to see the relationship between cultural criticism and commercial success in the case of the reception of Miyazaki's films, the screening of which can be considered a kind of social 'indie' event. In 2010, the late screening of *Ponyo* in cinemas has reinforced the presence of Ghibli productions and anime itself on British screens. After its success, vintage productions from the studio's 1980s and 1990s filmography have been re-discovered by British audiences (*Totoro*, *Laputa*, *Nausicaa*, *Porco Rosso*, etc.).

On the other hand, in the domestic market the number of Japanese animation titles certified by the BBFCO increased dramatically with 5337 animation titles, of which 1327 were anime titles. This data contrasts with a low impact in terms of sales, and corresponds to the DVD-box set phenomenon; not a single anime title was found in the Top 100 charts of the last five years (The Official UK Charts Company, 2015). Judging from the data obtained after the revision of age

classifications, anime remains a qualitative different product, at least in the way it is distribute in the UK. Compared with the products of "non-Japanese" animation, the contents of Japanese anime show a more adult profile.



**Ratings corresponding to the 2009-2016 period within the 'animation' label and video formats.**

**Data obtained from BBFCO (May 2016).**

The most used tag is 12A: this is not recommended for children under 12, except where accompanied by a parent. This label is usual in productions with lots of action and those stories inspired by a martial arts scenario. Some products classified as 12A include: *Slayers*, *Magi*, *Kamisama Kiss*, *Fate / Stay Night*, *Naruto* and *Dragon Ball*.

Following this, the next most used classification for anime productions is 15. The reasons are similar, however the action scenes contain more explicit physical violence. A common cause for this category is usually what is considered to be imitable behaviour, through the use of weapons such as swords and pistols. Violence, understood as the consequences of fighting, so common in the *shōnen* animation, is also a motivation for this classification, as well as sex scenes, which are a common component in *shōnen* productions but

also in other subgenres like “*ecchi*” anime. Finally, horror themes and scenes regarded as explicit or causing disgust are not unusual in this category. Some products classified as 15 include: *Claymore*, *the Ghost in the Shell*, *Parasyte*, *Tokyo Ghoul* or *Assassination Classroom saga*.

Adult content or R18 is not very common. Most of the adult content in anime scenes is considered “gore” or “strong bloody violence”. Also, the risk of sexual content (“strong sexualised nudity”) can be found. Compared to previous periods<sup>4</sup>, such as the first releases on VHS (1990-1995), it seems that the profile of adult content has dropped considerably. In that period, series and movies considered ‘adults’ (R18) were about the 29% while in this period it barely reach 2%. These are products as *Hentaipalooza* o *Ringetsu the animation*, which always belong to the *Hentai* (pornography) category and include explicit sex scenes.

The standardization of video on demand is the greatest achievement of the recent anime market. Although it still constitutes a small market, it is an increasingly popular alternative to illegal distribution. Recent reports by the Intellectual Property Office suggested that legal services such as Netflix have contributed to a decrease in filesharing. Despite having increased the popularity of legal downloads progressively since 2013, piracy is still a danger for the British creative economy, with 25% of internet users downloading illegally (GOV.UK, 2016).

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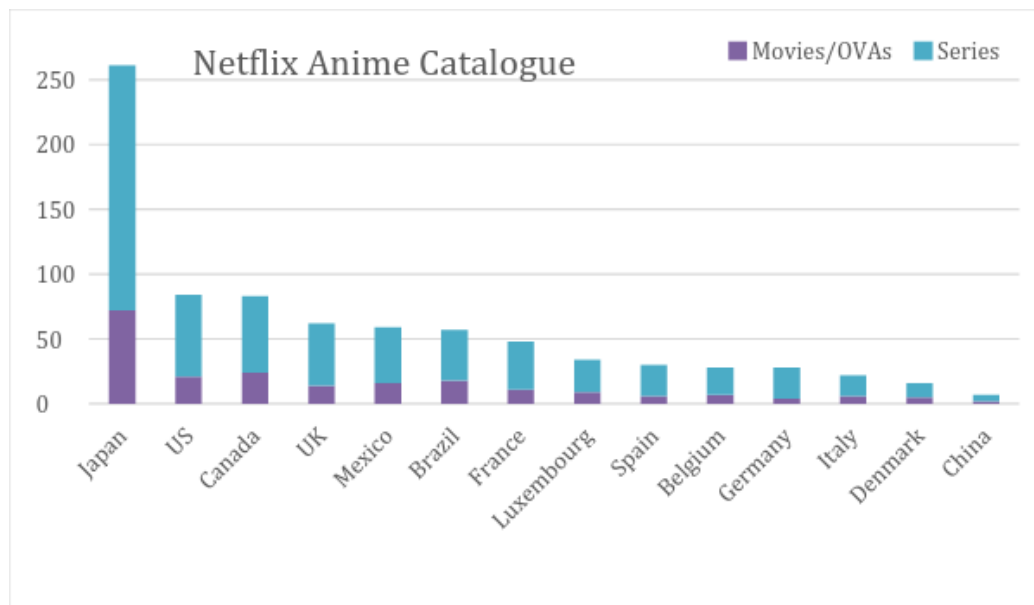
<sup>4</sup> It is necessary to note that the 1990-1995 sample correspond to the data from the main distributors (Island World Communications Ltd and Manga Entertainment Ltd.). From 2009, BBFCO established the consistent use of the “animation” label as a genre, making easier to construct a more complete sample.

Government and industry are both interested in creating measures to reduce piracy levels. Increasing jail sentences has been one of the most polemic decisions. However, this seems difficult to apply and, as an action, is intended to persuade through fear rather than actually eradicate piracy downloads. This is part of other measures (“Creative Content UK”) adopted during the last few years by the Internet service providers under British Higher Court pressures. These include the banning of sites dedicated to illegal downloads and letters sent to households that download illegal content (Curtis, 2014).

In the European market, Video on Demand Systems experienced an increase of 250% in sales during the period of 2006-2008 (JETRO Japan External Trade Organization 2011a, 30). It is expected that official distributors, pay-per-view (PPV) and View on Demand (VoD) systems, and even unofficial channels (mainly p2p and other file sharing systems) may open the gates to new audiences for anime genres.

In the UK, as in other countries, this has been the case with Netflix and the American operator Crunchyroll. Netflix is the most important streaming service in the UK, apart from YouTube, and it represents 44% of the streaming and downloading of films (IPO, 2016). It started to offer its service in the UK in 2014, and since then the company has expanded its offer by including a number of recent international successes (e.g.: *Fairy Tale*, *Attack on Titan*, *Psycho-Pass*). It has also recently started to co-produce animes in order to have exclusive rights in their distribution (*Knights of Sidonia*, 2014). Although the UK anime

catalogue on Netflix is currently smaller than that of many other countries such as Japan, the US and Canada, it does not seem to be much different from other countries such as France, which are traditionally larger consumers of Japanese animation.



**VoD anime titles offered by Netflix (July, 2016). Note that it is just recently-at the end of October- that Netflix has been able to expand to Italy and Spain. Data obtained from Netflix.com**

Crunchyroll launched a UK website in March 2012 (ANN, 2012). As it is more specifically for anime fans, it cannot compete with Netflix's terms of subscription. Its catalogue, however, is huge. The site offers 464 titles, most of them series, which is nearly the same as the 470 titles offered in the American version (at July 2016). While the categorization includes Japanese names such as *shōnen*, *seinen* or *ecchi*, most of the common categories correspond to themes rather than describing a genre. Comedy (18%) and action (14%) were the most used categories while fantasy, slices of life and romance achieved the 9%, being the rest of categories equal in lower rates.

Today, Amazon Prime is also quite popular but has not yet shown interest in this particular audience. It offers up to 150 titles under the category "anime" (July, 2015). However, this category is unclear and includes many products that do not correspond to series or movies; including for example, showcases of toys and comic-book related merchandise, some of which is not even Japanese. Of the 25 series and movies, many are just anime-style like the Nickelodeon series *Avatar*. While it is clear that both the original series and its sequel, *The Legend of Korra*, incorporate many elements similar to *shōnen* narrative and style (such as character design), in fact these are entirely American productions. While in the past (1970-1990) Japanese productions and co-productions were not identified as such, now adopting an anime style is a way to build more attractive products and appeal to a particular audience. These "fake animes", together with equals to real animes such as *Pokémon* (*Pokémon the Series: Diamond and Pearl*) reveal that anime is mostly just another form of cartoons, and merely a potential marketing label for these distributors.

Besides, Internet VoD may not be the most accurate way of measuring current anime consumption trends. Internet download distribution may be illegal, but it remains a common practice. In the previous period, there were no legal downloading alternatives. Despite the menace that they were, most popular mangas and animes downloads operated as a guide for producers and publishers who acquired rights following their popularity. This functioned as a measure of the popularity of franchises overseas. Animes like *Naruto* or *Bleach* were very popular in the previous decade, and this

popularity was followed by DVD distribution and transmission on satellite TV channels, as well as the distribution of their corresponding mangas. Besides, it should also be noted that copyright regulation in each country may have been an obstacle to new markets for VoD.

### **Understanding anime context in the UK**

The second step of our research consists of the formulation of some working hypotheses. These may supplement the previous historical analysis while providing a better understanding of the British broadcasting system and its sociological constraints. As explanations, they may not all be equally supportive of the explanation of the anime markets in the UK and their idiosyncrasies. Instead, they are intended to reveal several aspects of the reading of Japanese visual products within British society, at least in a superficial way. These will eventually drive future research toward a better understanding of the history of Japanese cultural industries in the UK context.

#### **1. Protecting from pernicious influences: paternalism or ethnocentrism?**

Throughout its long history, British public television has shown a commitment to the regulation of content, especially in the case of younger audiences. This commitment can be traced back directly to the so-called “*Reithian*” Principles of the BBC: Inform, Educate, Entertain, laid down by the corporation’s first Director-General, John Reith. This explicit statement leads us to our first hypothesis: the history of British TV regulation, ostensibly to protect the audiences from any content



deemed “unsuitable”, has affected the acceptance of Japanese animation products, including anime ones.

One of the main examples is the way that schedules were programmed and targeted. Thus, the so-called “watershed” was introduced in 1954, where there was a break in all programming and no transmissions. In this way, it was possible to separate children’s programming from the rest of the schedule. In addition to this, from that early period children programmes were distributed according to age, always starting with the content for the very youngest viewers, followed by other content such as drama or literary adaptations which were more suitable for older child audiences (Buckingham et al. 1999, 19). These measures contributed to control of the number of broadcasted hours allocated to children's televisions that would not change until the release of themed channels through cable and satellite technologies in the 1990s. Even after the start of commercial broadcasting through ITV in 1955 this tendency continued in the form of a number of different policies. The most important of these was the redistribution of content with violence and sex that was banned from appearing on TV channels before 9.00 pm. Commonly, in the UK as well as later in other countries, the evening news bulletin marks the beginning of adult content. It is not a coincidence that it is precisely the content of the news that is one of the most studied in the area of TV’s effects on children (Pecora, Murray, & Wartella, 2006).

While it may be not appropriate to contend that institutions behave like individuals, there may be some evidence to suggest that a *corporate* prejudice might exist. For example, the vision of Japanese animation as a merely violent form of expression was particularly deep-rooted in the British industry. John Marsden, who in charge of animation department at Carlton UK (an ITV franchise in London), commented:

“The Japanese style of animation is particularly graphic; you can see people with their heads chopped off, cracked open with great hammers, etc. . . . I wouldn't want my children to be exposed to that . . . it's just not necessary to show . . . graphic . . . sexual activity . . . In a lot of countries this is an acceptable form of animation (..)”.

John Marsden as quoted in Messenger-Davies (2001, 30)

But can this explanation be applied to the scarce catalogue of Japanese media products within British broadcasting? It has been argued elsewhere that there was a “misrepresentation” of Japanese products that may have driven audiences to embrace features such as “otherness”, “transgression” or “difference” over “similarities” while avoiding the required cultural contextual keys for its decoding (Hinton 2014, 89). While insightful and valid, this argument presents some problems. First, it might be difficult to sustain that a social representation such as “Japanese” could remain unchanged such a long period. The way western society looks at Japan would of course have changed since the first *Japonisme*. Besides, it is hard to believe that social representation can be as monolithic and homogeneous as it is presented in the article. Hinton articulates the misconceptions around the idea of “otherness” in which sexual violence and gender (especially female) misrepresentation seem to be essential. *Shōjo* girls, *kawaii* and

*otaku* male anxiety are elements considered to be equal part of the exported products when, in fact, they are aspects of different stages and genres of a very diversified and complex industry. Over-erotization of the teenager, together with an appeal to humour through sexually suggestive portrayals (so-called “fan-service”) can be, for example, a very frequent trend in *shōnen* and *seinen* manga and anime, while it is less frequent in *shōjo*. He also seems to recognize implicitly that some of the faces of this distinctiveness include positive (or less transgressive) aspects such as the *kawaii* culture and so-called “Cool Japan”. Besides, one can hardly believe that anime’s image among the British audience can be summarized as merely a cross-cultural misreading of gender representation. There are also other content aspects that are intimately related to the aforementioned British tradition of content regulation. That is the case, as we will see later, with the first anime titles screened by the BBC and Channel 4. These aroused the attention of commissioners, as they were rich in sexual and, perhaps more notoriously, violent content (such as *Akira* or *Urotsukidoji*). As a result, they were usually broadcast well after the watershed.

The paternalism of BBC producers (arguably) may have been reflected not just in the broadcast of so-called “adult content”. There is evidence of an anti-Americanization trend in British cultural life from the 1970s to 1990s (Buckingham et al. 1999, 48), but it is unclear if this tendency was influential enough on institutions to create a filter based on the production origin. In the case of the BBC, for example, this focus on its own productions has been explained by the lack of

agreement with British film producers and its aspirations to consolidate its dominion over broadcasting contents and media (Stokes 2000, 32).

Nevertheless, the realities of the market are not always in parallel with the world of politics. The UK and US have a long history of collaboration in media production, pre-dating the TV industry. American film producers invested in UK productions due to the lower cost of UK facilities and workers, while the UK became an important second market for American products (Stokes 2000, 14). In the transnational television market, it was soon proven that English-language contents were cheap, as they did not incur dubbing costs. The acquisition of US and Australian series was a common trend in British commercial television in the 1960s and 1970s, when a significant number of series were imported, creating a trend that was followed by public broadcasters. Looking at children's television programming schedules (BBC Genome, 2015; Radio Sounds Familiar, 2015), we can see several examples in the form of children's drama (*Skippy the Bush Kangaroo* appeared on ITV Yorkshire in 1970), soap operas (*Peyton Place* on ITV Tyne Tees in 1965) and comedies (*The Munsters* 1965, *Sgt. Bilko*, 1966, both BBC1). Imports also included popular cartoons, among which were Hannah-Barbera productions such as *The Flintstones* (ITV Anglia, 1961), *Yogi Bear* (ITV, 1963), *The Jetsons* (ITV Border, 1964) and *Hong Kong Phooey* (BBC1, 1975). Market rules might be the only way to understand how this spread can co-exist with an old prejudice about American TV productions within the British market. Such prejudices may not just be political ones, but also related

to scholarly traditions within media studies, such as the Birmingham School theorists, who also contributed to the suspicious view of ideological superstructures which underpin programmes' origins. "Americanized" features of a rich, class-dominated mass media had already been commented upon in Richard Hoggart's first work, and later became a common trend in texts focused on topics such as "power" and "imperialism" (Rixon 2006, 13). History of British media has highlighted how US television shows were seen as "commercial, 'American' and a source of social violence" (Oswell, 2008, 476). This may be understood as a sign of how academic and political points of view may be linked, or perhaps affected by the same kind of prejudices.

Another perspective, which can be considered more optimistic, points out that this success of the American networks can be also considered the consolidation of children's audiences, not just as "citizens" but also as "consumers" (Buckingham et al. 1999, 4). But, it can be also argued that the citizen model has long been less successful, or was never really considered a goal for these global producers. British public opinion (*The Guardian*, 1987) started to register alarm in the late 1980s after the success of toy franchises such as *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe* (1983), *Transformers* (1985) and *Thundercats* (1985), which were always introduced through their own animated series.

Returning to the specific case of Japanese anime, regulation of contents does not explain by itself the absence of anime in the broadcast schedule, although it may explain the existence of an

increasing anime market for domestic videos in the 1990-95 period and later, based on the appeal of different contents and the block of the television route for these adult products. As aforementioned, there were other anime released before these products came to the video market and late night shows, which did not fit into that “transgressive” category (*The Moomins*, for example). This is where we will introduce our second explanation about the reception of anime in Britain, which in fact, also sustains the Hinton argument: those permitted materials were not perceived as Japanese animation but just as mere cartoons.

## **2. The Misleading of Genres, National Producers and Television Formats**

Throughout British broadcasting history we can also see some examples of a certain difference in the treatment of television genres. This can be linked to the circumstances of the US-UK market relationship. Also, that reluctance to depend exclusively upon others' productions (which also came from the film industry) stimulated the networks' own productions. It seems however that there was also a natural preference for some genres linked to a public educational function. A clear example of this was the preference for drama productions over comedy, especially adaptations from literary and historical sources. This may also have had cost imperatives; many of these works were probably out of copyright, and needed less work and cost to adapt. As we have commented, some contents such as drama series were considered more suitable for children and young adult audiences.

Animation in films, for example, is an appreciated form of art, with some relevant films produced by British filmmakers over the years (*Animal Farm*, 1954; *Watership Down*, 1978). There is certainly appreciation and admiration of Studio Ghibli films in the UK, which is reflected in their sales (JETRO Japan External Trade Organization, 2011b). Nevertheless, animated feature films are considered “films” and the use of the term “animated” or “animation” is deliberately different from the words used to refer to animated productions in television, which are traditionally denominated as “cartoons”. In fact, cartoons are seen essentially as an innocuous and permitted vice, a “mental bubblegum” (Buckingham et al. 1999, 2) that could easily be better replaced with more useful (educational) content. This might be the reason why many British animation companies (such as Aardman, Cosgrove Hall, Bura and Hardwick) began working in the BBC’s educational provision, especially in schools programming, before creating products that have a greater emphasis on “entertainment”.

Again, the regulation of contents and formats by public and private British broadcasters may have been a factor in the relative lack of imported anime products. Early anime released on American television such as *Astroboy* (NBC, 1963), *Speed Racer* (NBC, 1965) and *Jungle Emperor* (NBC, 1965), were not released in the UK. One significant exception to this was *Battle of Planets*, a transnational (though some would say adulterated) version of the series *Science Ninja Team Gatchaman*, which was broadcast by the BBC in 1979. This is in fact a very early precedent for other transnational adaptations that could be found in the British television schedule during the 1990s, such as

*Transformers* (BBC2, 1990) and *Galaxy Rangers* (UK Gold, 1993). A common practice in the 1980s and 1990s animation industry was for cels and filming processes to be produced in Japan and other Asian countries, while working from US-sourced storyboards. Even their narratives were also reflected a transnational essence, as they usually presented a science fiction-based narrative, but also some identifiable local (perhaps even American) elements. The logical explanation for their release in the UK is that these kinds of production were not identified as Japanese, even though they were clearly shared some elements of Japanese anime style. In fact, what we mean is that they were not specifically associated with its “transgressive” features.

In this way, anime production in the UK can be assimilated into different categories. The first one, the more “transgressive” content that is usually known as “Manga Movies”, is “adult-oriented production” which is common to both the domestic video market and late-night television. The second category is that of the “cartoon”, which includes some *shōnen* and even *shōjo* products from the 1970s and 1980s, that is toward younger audiences and erroneously redirected towards children. This category also includes other American cartoons using anime-style elements. Finally, there is also a third category, which has been traditionally limited to a more exclusive and limited range of products: the “feature-length animated film”, a form that requires a format more reminiscent of the *auteur* style.

So, where others see a misconception, we argue for the existence of different routes for Japanese broadcast television with the potential to



attract different kinds of audiences. In the first category, “transgressive” contents might find a niche in thematic TV and the home video market, and could create the base of an engaged and rich cultural capital that we could consider as future fan audiences. In the second category, within primetime and available schedules, are the TV cartoons. Though not always recognized as being related to Japanese culture, they will eventually create a group of consumers motivated by nostalgia as audiences get older. The third route would be the more prestigious international festival domain, which may eventually elicit subsequent release on public television.

### **3. Natural Competitors**

American and European products had a strong influence on British TV products during the late 1970s and 1980s. The tradition of content regulation and the perception of animation as “cartoons” or a genre primarily defined as child-targeted were the starting point for a “Golden Age” of British animation, especially on TV. Our third hypothesis is that Japanese imports were also affected by this strong competition. In fact, it was not just animation, but children's programming in general that experienced notable growth and enrichment during this period, mainly due to the addition of cable and satellite platforms (Buckingham et al. 1999, 92). During the period of 1967-1980, UK public broadcasters offered a “mini-schedule” for children and young people within the larger context of general programming (*Ibid*, 33). UK channel schedules included magazines (*BBC's Blue Peter*, *Thames TV's Magpie*), news and current affairs (*BBC Newsround*), educational shows and a number of other formats.

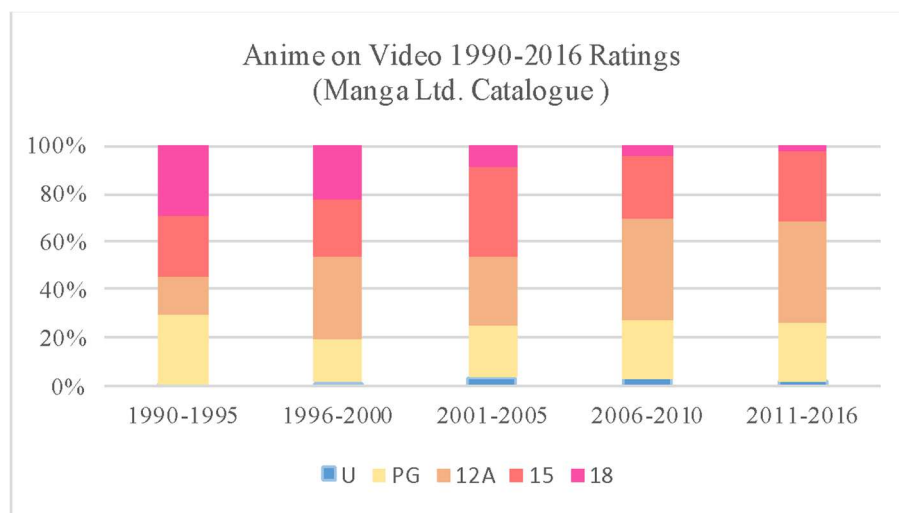
This situation continued even into the late 1980s, when the British children's TV catalogue was quite different from other European countries. Focusing on anime distribution, we see that Spain, France and Italy saw the release of a wide variety of TV anime during this time. The most common genre in these schedules was the *shōnen spokon*: a serial drama with action-based stories about different sports. A main example of this trend was the success of contemporaneous *shōnen* soon after their release in Japan. Examples include: *Captain Tsubasa* (1983), a story about football competitions, and *Touch!* (1985), a teenage drama with baseball matches as the main theme. The market for this kind of product was quite large in Europe, and included products from earlier decades such as *Aim for the Ace!* (1973).

However, research following the idea of natural competitors could not be proven. Within the UK catalogue we found nothing that could be compared to anime in the sense of “dramatic animation”. Competitors were, therefore, usually in the form of the cartoon genre, animated sketches and animated dramas, sometimes based on literary resources. In fact, drama was quite popular among young audiences, but normally in the form of (live-action) single dramas (such as ITV's *Dramarama strand*) or drama serials (BBC's *Grange Hill* or *The Machine Gunners*, or ITV's *Chocky*). The dramatic component in cartoons seems to be much less common, while the classical drama format had a presence in animation tele-films and series such as Cosgrove-Hall's adaptation of *The Wind in the Willows* (ITV, 1984-1987).

## **Conclusions and Future Research**

Through this paper, several aspects of anime distribution in the UK have been examined in order to determine if its distribution patterns could be considered anomalous in relation to other countries. Moreover, the idiosyncratic consumption of anime in the UK has also been commented upon. Anime industries have several meanings among the Japanese audience which may not always find correspondence in Western markets. These differences map onto terms that a Western audience might consider either as “cartoons”, “manga movies” or “animation”.

The label of “anime failure” may better be assigned to the first TV stages in terms of diversity and accessibility (non pay-per-view systems). Cinema distribution has been proven not to be that different from other European cases. In this medium, anime differs in terms of critical reception and commercial success within anime movies (mainly Ghibli films) and *shōnen* franchises (singular cases with unequal results). The reception and consumption of anime products also faced singular transformations. The main one is exemplified in the way adult-oriented animation (1990-1995) became more diverse and finally came to address mainly children and young teens audiences (2006-2016). This diversification of genres and content has been a big trend since 2001 in video releases and it will no doubt be even more relevant in the upcoming years due to the consolidation of the VoD market.



**Ratings corresponding to different periods in the video Manga Ltd. Catalogue.  
Data obtained from BBFCO (May 2016).**

The UK case also reveals significant information with the potential for a larger discussion in the study of European or Western development of anime distribution.

First, anime distribution may have had an effect upon other parallel markets, such as manga and video games. This idea can be supported by previous studies which pointed out how TV anime is usually the gateway for the rest of Japanese Pop Culture Industries (Levi, 1996). Secondly, as discussed previously, the UK failure could be understood as a reflection of the broader image of Japan in UK/Western countries, an image that can be defined as based on an innate “otherness”. This aspect deserves to be more deeply explored in the future in order to be compared with other images of *Japanisme* within European audiences (Pellitteri, 2011).

Also interestingly, especially for communication and media studies, this case illustrates a significant difference in the cross-cultural reading

of products and popular genres, such as the cartoon/anime differentiation. In other countries, anime products have been considered as mere 'cartoons' until a specific (fan) audience developed. The difference between one country and another might lie in the time needed for this audience group to be consolidated and generate a voice in other media such as magazines, conventions and Internet forums. Again, more research is needed in order to examine the evolution of these communities in the UK. Eventually, the future of anime in the UK will depend upon the capacity of these groups to draw the attention of distributors and persuade them that they can be faithful and engaged consumers.

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