Global Grammar:
Successes and Failures in the International Business of Japanese Animation Production

Renato RIVERA RUSCA

Introduction

Recent years have seen a widespread recognition of the potential for Japanese contents, in particular animated works, to be capitalized upon in overseas markets, and their cultural impact in the mainstream international community since the 2000s has been much discussed. The crowning achievement is regarded to have been the 2003 Academy Award for Best Animated film for Studio Ghibli’s Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi/Spirited Away. However, there is very little discussion in international forums about the earlier attempts by animation companies at breaking through language and cultural barriers with the aim to make their contents reach foreign shores.

This paper will provide a close and detailed look at some historical examples of the work ethic to be employed, as well as hurdles, both expected and unforeseen, which must be crossed by Japanese animation companies with the aim of exporting their product abroad, especially in the United States and Western Europe. In particular, we will look at methods of promotion and development of product for the overseas market undertaken by TMS Entertainment of Japan, formerly “Tokyo Movie Shinsha”, one of the biggest animation houses with a long history dating back to 35 years of international entrepreneurship.

Much has been written regarding instances of localization of
Japanese animated television series for the Western regions and the scope of content changes employed. Using several Japanese sources of information from the early 1980s, this paper will go beyond simple observations and will look at what efforts the producers made in the exportation process and how their work was received, as well as any resulting issues. We will objectively analyze their successes and their failures and subsequently, we will take a look at how these experiences evolved their philosophy, gradually transforming their methodology from mere supplier of materials to be localized, to large-scale partner and one of the pioneers for co-productions and collaborations between Japanese animation firms and foreign entertainment companies.

**Brief background and early overseas promotion**

TMS Entertainment was originally founded as “Tokyo Movie” by the late Yutaka Fujioka in 1964 as a response to the ever-growing demand for animated serials by television broadcast networks. The company changed names and hands many times over the years, and in the past has traded as “Tokyo Movie Shinsha”, “Kyokuichi” and its wholly-owned subsidiary, “Telecom Animation”. Today it has been absorbed by the Sega-Sammy entertainment group and is known as TMS Entertainment, pronounced in Japan as “Tomusu Entertainment”.

From an early stage in the life of the company, Fujioka strived to be active around the world and promote Japanese animation overseas. The company’s Los Angeles office was established in 1985 as a subsidiary for the North and South American regions and the Paris office in 2000.

The August 1981 issue of “My Anime” ran a feature on Tokyo Movie Shinsha’s exploits abroad, showcasing the apparent global popularity of Japanese animation, and the studio’s successes in exporting it so far.

English-language pamphlets describing the premise and characters of every one of TMS’s productions — even the unlikely ones like “Makoto-chan” and “The Happy Section Chief”, which would need extensive
editing to make some of the typically Japanese scenes even remotely relatable to Western audiences, as well as toning down some of the crude humour which would no doubt be seen as unsuitable for children in the West — have been consistently produced and are still presented by TMS-e at international trade shows such as MIPCOM to this day. Originally, the idea was to attract potential buyers of television shows from overseas at these industry trade events. After any successful purchase, a bond of trust would be established between the buyers and TMS, and this rapport would later bring further deals and expand their network of influence. Interestingly, it would seem that the format and layout of the pamphlet pages vary for different shows, depending on the style and themes of each. That is to say, for example, the Tetsujin 28-gou/Ironman 28 page not only describes in detail the story of the show, rather, it goes further to explain how Tetsujin's controller box works (in order to clarify the difference in concept between Tetsujin and other robot shows), as well as providing specifications such as each robot's height, powers and other such data. Additionally, it features photographs of various licensed products from the show on sale in Japan — as if to underline the importance of the show's relation with toys and other items.

Anime Exports: The case of Ie naki ko/Nobody's Boy/Remi

Ie naki ko, or "Nobody' Boy", or sometimes known simply as "Remi", such being the title used for the show's many incarnations, not least in the pages of TMS's international solicitations catalogues, was not only the first TV series TMS successfully managed to market abroad back in 1977, but it was also the first animated 3D TV series ever produced. The gimmick utilized a system which took advantage of the Pulfrich effect. Basically, this effect is manifested when one eye's light reception is impeded, leading to a short lag time in rendering the image onto the retina when compared to the other eye. This lag gives rise to a sense of perceived depth in the brain, which in fact is an illusion. This effect is induced onto the viewer through the use of special glasses, which are
unlike both the red-blue "anaglyph" glasses commonly used for books and photographs as well as the glasses used for modern 3 D movies. In both of these cases, the images on the screen or page appear blurry to someone who is not using the glasses. However, *le naki ko* did not have this issue since it did not utilize a technique where double-images are employed, meaning that one could enjoy the show in standard 2 D format without the glasses.

The system works because the glasses were simply made of two plastic or cellophane lenses, one darker than the other, which would darken the image for one eye, thus inducing a false sense of depth whenever something moved laterally from one side of the screen to another. Japanese animation techniques had up until this point taken advantage of scrolling backgrounds in ever-increasingly complex ways, from the time of *Alps no Shoujo Heidi/Heidi, Girl of the Alps*, where the illusion of distance is brought about by the multi-layered, multi-speed scrolling and panning of the background cels as the foreground characters are walking along. Aside from the obvious elements in design aesthetic, Japanese animation is largely defined — even by Western audiences, oftentimes perhaps subconsciously — by its usage of these scrolling two-dimensional planes.

Lamarre explains this phenomenon by theorizing that the craft of "animetism" is made up of "open compositing", where several flat layers are animated to give the illusion of depth within the onscreen image, without the usage of other methods to do this, such as quantifying the volume of objects, which is something that 3 D CG animation — in particular in Western productions like Pixar works — has in recent years pushed to practically define the depiction of depth in animation. The Japanese style of flat layer motion to give the illusion of the camera tracking in or out arose from cost-saving measures, but the gradually increasing complexity in its methods of employment over the years gradually gave rise to a new recognizably "Japanese" aesthetic.

*Le naki ko* took this to extremes with many layers of parallax scrolling, immediately apparent during the opening sequence of every episode, where at least 3 layers of scrolling planes are in motion at any
given time, and the title of the show itself appears in three layers scrolling at different speeds, which when added to the panning clouds background, makes for no less than 6 individually animated layers, with an extra still one (the lone, leafless tree standing in the mid-ground), all in the first shot alone. Also, each and every superimposed credit scrolls onscreen from one side as opposed to simply appearing, again, for the sake of taking advantage of the stereoscopic effect. This means that while the show itself is still watchable without glasses, some of these touches may seem odd or unnatural, perhaps even convoluted to the point of dizzying to those viewers unaware of the 3D aspect, since the visuals had to be contrived at least in terms of motion in order for the effect to work.

Despite this being the main technological innovation from a production viewpoint, there is little evidence to show that TMS put particular efforts into making the 3D aspect a major selling point of the show abroad. Perhaps the distribution of special glasses would prove troublesome from a logistics point of view, or perhaps there was resistance to complicating the pitching of the show.

In the UK, the Pulfrich effect was employed in stereoscopy for a 1993 Doctor Who TV special for the “Children in Need” charity, and in the US, the DIC animated series The Bots Master (written and produced by Jean Chalopin), also utilized it in the same year. This was, however, fifteen years after Remi had — albeit rather quietly from a global standpoint — pioneered its usage.

TMS's Sachie Tsuneda in an interview from 1981 describes the European diffusion of Remi as a great success, with a very favourable reception in Italy, record-breaking audience ratings in the Netherlands and the smooth progress of the French dub, still in production at the time of the article. She explains that Remi is “not only the world's first 3D TV animation, but its high quality has also earned it vast popularity”. The wording does not indicate to what extent the 3D technical aspect was key in the purchasing negotiations with overseas licensors, if at all. The English-language TMS pamphlets do tout the 3D effect to a certain extent, however. The Italian-language version of Remi simply
uses the TMS-produced “international version” of the opening sequence, with the layered, scrolling Japanese title screen’s hiragana “Ie naki ko” written in the clouds being replaced with a similar, layered and scrolling “Remi” in Roman letters, thus also in 3D (incidentally, this same TMS-produced logo would be seen on the many books and items produced as local spin-off merchandise in the European regions). This is in keeping with Italian practices, as we will see later with Tetsujin 28-gou, they rarely perform any visual edits. Interestingly, though, they did emulate the laterally-scrolling production credits during the opening sequence, this time in Italian with the Romanized Japanese names, thus indicating that they likely were aware of the 3D effect.

If anything, the rest of the interview would seem to strengthen the idea that the European networks were more interested in content than technical aspects, and the Euro-centric themes of the “Meisaku” shows were something that TMS were willing to push as a major selling point. More modern literature for the promotion of TMS works such as can be seen on its website also appear to have conspicuously omitted any reference to the 3D visuals save for a brief anecdotal page as a supplement for their introduction to the movie version of Ie naki ko, as is any
mention of it on the ImaginAsian-licensed DVD box set released in 2007 for the US market. However, the collected series on DVD released in Japan as a limited set in 2008 includes a pair of 3 D glasses, meaning that the feature has not been entirely “forgotten”.

YouTube comments on the opening scene in Japanese point to the ease with which this “3 D” is misunderstood, even domestically, assuming that simply complex moving backgrounds led the producers to falsely stick a “3 D” label on the opening scene. Even respected and usually-well-researched publications such as the comprehensive The Anime Encyclopedia by Helen McCarthy and Jonathan Clements seems to dismiss the 3 D aspect as some “grandiose claim” (2006:455), seemingly unaware of the full potential of the effect or its method.

As a result, it can be said that this technological innovation, though perhaps a major factor in advertising the show during its original run, does not seem to have had an impact on the foreign markets to which it was exported, and thus may point to a somewhat lacking PR strategy. When compared to 1993’s The Bots Master, the difference is clearly apparent — the latter had large reliance on TV advertising and even the main character breaking the fourth wall to explain that “when it’s laser time, put on the 3 D shades!” during the opening sequence, as well as symbols in the corner of the screen during action scenes to denote when the viewer should put on and remove the special glasses. 35 years after its original broadcast, Le naki ko may have proven to be too far ahead of its time. Its success in terms of overseas buyers and local merchandising did give TMS an edge and provided the seeds upon which many international relations were sown, thus bringing about many more export deals, and eventually the realization of international co-productions.

Selling Japanese Robots

In 1980, TMS produced their first “original” — i.e. an in-house developed story not adapted from classic literature or based on a manga — work, the science-fiction fantasy tale Muu no Hakugei, which translates
to "The White Whale of Mu". Despite claims of "originality", the English title TMS provided in PR materials for overseas distributors and broadcasters was *Moby Dick 5*. For TMS, this was the first stepping stone in the development of original projects, and it eventually was dubbed into Italian for broadcast in that region. It was also their first foray into the booming sci-fi fantasy genre, which they followed up with their new interpretation of *Tetsujin 28-gou* later that same year.

What is most interesting about this, however, is TMS's attitude toward the popularity of robot animation in Europe at around this time. Again, from Tsuneda's 1981 interview, we can gain an insight on TMS's export strategies of focusing on certain properties over others. In the interview she mentions that because of the explosive popularity of "*Goldorak*" (the French dub of the Toei Douga-produced *UFO Robo Grendizer* series), a multitude of robot shows had begun flooding the market and the potential buyers were after something softer, more accessible to girls, which did not feature too much violence. Thus they were trying to meet this demand with works such as *Moby Dick 5*, *The Rose of Versailles* and *Hello! Spank* (*Ohayou Spank* — a show aimed at younger viewers). The science-fiction elements in *Moby Dick 5* were played not in a cold, action-oriented way, but more to an elegiac effect. She does not sound too hopeful in terms of the possibility of exporting *Tetsujin 28-gou* in European markets:

"What is intriguing about *Tetsujin 28-gou* is that unlike other robot shows up until now, anybody who holds the controller can make the giant robot do his/her will, and so — although I do not know how far we can take negotiations — there have been parties interested in the show requesting tapes. But mostly in Europe the market for robot series has become saturated, so now we are starting to see some negative reactions."

("My Anime", August 1981, pp. 51–52)

Eventually, the show was exported to many regions worldwide including the Middle East and Latin America. The Italian dub of the
*Tetsujin 28-gou* series did an extremely minimal job in terms of localization, in fact, other than changing the title to the somewhat generic-sounding *Super Robot 28* and also the theme song appropriately, no substantial changes were made whatsoever — the obviously-foreign sounding character names like "Shoutarou" were kept intact and the visuals remained untouched, with kanji in the superimposed credit titles as well as instances of written Japanese in the show. But then — as Tsuneda mentioned — Italy had by that point been an avid importer of 1970s Japanese robot shows from *Mazinger Z* to *UFO Robo Grendizer* and even rarities in today's Japan like *Groizer X*, thus it can be understood that a giant Japanese robot on television screens had become very much the norm by the early 1980s, and such treatment was common practice.

As such, for years, it would seem that TMS's exports (as opposed to their co-productions) were more successful outside of the English-speaking territories. In other words, regions like Latin America and Western Europe were enjoying the diversity of Japanese animation many years earlier than their counterparts in the US or UK. And this included the aforementioned shows seen in the solicitation catalogues, such as *Tetsujin 28-gou/Ironman 28*, which was seen in South America in an edited Spanish dub (which, according to the credits, was actually produced at Magnum Studios in Burbank, California) many years before it resurfaced for the English-language markets. The broadcast did not seem to spawn a licensed toy-line, but during this period, imported items from Japan, including toys in their original Japanese packaging, were hardly a rare sight and in fact were often sold in markets next to similar but illegitimate, bootlegged items. Thus it stands to reason that some items originally developed for a particular show such as *Ironman* would likely have ended up in shops, yet still bore the original Japanese logos and trademark information, remaining totally unlicensed in the region (and thus not relating to a profit for the legitimate licensor of the show there).

One major factor for this phenomenon of English-language market exclusion may have been the US Federal Communications Commission's
stance on children's advertising during this period. Effectively, television programs which were designed from the outset to push sales of children's toys were banned, with the most prolific case being that of the *Hot Wheels* cartoon in 1969. The show had been an extravagant advertising campaign for Mattel's line of toy cars. According to an industry report, by the 1960s, television had become the main advertising outlet for the toy industry:

"In 1969, Mattel underwrote a program based on its very successful Hot Wheels line. When a competitor complained, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) banned the program, calling it a "program-length commercial." In 1983, the FCC ruled that the marketplace should determine programming. This change of policy cleared the way for toy-based programming. By the 1986 to 1987 season, more than 40 toy-based programs were on the air." (http://business.highbeam.com/industry-reports/food/games-toys-children-s-vehicles-except-dolls-bicycles; Last accessed: October 30th, 2011)

It was Ronald Reagan's administration which opened up the airwaves in 1983 to product-based children's programming and thus gave rise to shows such as *He-man* and *The Transformers*. It would seem that up until this point in time, Japanese television series which relied heavily on sponsor backing — increasingly, toy companies — were difficult to sell into the US market as an attempt to expand toy sales. Yet the practice was commonplace in Japan, where toy companies such as Clover and Takatoku worked side-by-side with the show writers on robot-heavy series like *Gundam* and *Macross*.

Therefore despite the TMS pamphlet's *Tetsujin/Ironman 28* pages promoting the vast possibilities of merchandise tie-ins with the reliance on toy photographs, they were faced with quite a tough hurdle at the time when it came to US acceptance.

*Tetsujin/Ironman 28* as a full English-language broadcast did not surface until 1993 — thirteen years after its original Japan airing — on
America's Sci-Fi Channel from 9 September, 1993 to 30 June, 1997. It saw no such merchandising tie-ins. The 1980 series was re-titled *The New Adventures of Gigantor* and renamed its characters to fit the English dub of the original 1960s version of *Tetsujin* which featured characters such as "Jimmy Sparks" instead of Shoutarou Kaneda. It was also broadcast during the mid-90s on the cable/satellite channel "The Children's Channel/TCC" in the UK.

In a twist of fate, the TMS show which succeeded *Tetsujin 28-gou* in Japan when that series went off the air after its conclusion in 1981, *Rokushin Gattai Godmars* (also a robot show), proved so popular both in Japan and in Europe that TMS looked into the possibility of breaking into the US market with a specially tailored, entirely re-animated version. As mentioned, European regions had already been exposed to the roster of Japanese robot shows and so breaking into the US market with robot-themed animation required a more concentrated effort, as this was a market that had little prior mainstream exposure to these themes. The new show was titled *Mighty Orbots*, and although it did fall victim to fierce competition from other robot titles such as *Transformers* and *Go-Bots*, both of which were new American-produced tie-ins to vast toy lines quickly gaining popularity and market share, it remains a nostalgic piece of intriguing cartoon history for Americans who grew up during this time — in particular those who had already had a taste of Japanese shows on UHF channels or in region-specific networks such as Hawaiian programming, where Japanese imports were plentiful. Today, many fans erroneously regard the short-lived series as an attempt by Americans to emulate the style of giant robot action shows from Japan, but it was actually originally conceived as the basic *Godmars* template adapted thematically and visually for US audiences, all the while being directed and produced by a mainly Japanese workforce, namely the late legendary director and TMS hit-maker Osamu Dezaki, with Shingo Araki handling the animation.

*Mighty Orbots* began airing in the US in 1984, which meant that at some point TMS changed its stance regarding the export of robot shows abroad, or, more likely, they saw a distinct difference in the needs of the
European market in contrast with that of the American one. The show featured a combining robot very similar in style and design to *Godmars*, but with a much more relatable (to average American children) composition of elements such as each component robot being sentient and having caricatured characteristics and expressions in the style of Hannah-Barbera productions. While the original Japanese material featured highly mechanical-looking, angular combat machines and serious drama between the characters, this loose American adaptation has heroic, justice-championing characters and cartoonish, comical-looking robots (one of them is comically depicted as an overweight slob taking a nap in a junkyard — thus far removed from any robot that would appear in a Japanese animation at this time) featuring many more rounded lines to almost negate the impression of anything mechanical. That is until the actual combination sequence appears, where the titular *Mighty Orbots* unite to form the giant robot, which is where the high quality animation impresses most. Once the main robot is formed, its angular look, glossy finish and the choreography with which the camera admires it as it rotates and shifts angles, employing back-lit animation effects as well as sliding background layers, points to a sense of Japanese skill and accumulated craftsmanship which Hannah-Barbera, pioneers of entirely different animation techniques for character-based serialized television shows, could never hope to replicate with their *Go-Bots* animation. Essentially, *Mighty Orbots* was TMS's first attempt to merge the best of Japanese animation with the American requisites for children's entertainment, and it shows that they did a lot of research. High frame-rates, character designs appealing to Western tastes and state-of-the-art techniques ought to have guaranteed explosive popularity. However, success eluded them for one main reason.

Whereas in the US, legislation amendments in 1983 concerning children's television advertising standards had passed allowing the Federal Communications Commission to loosen its grip on product-oriented properties with serials on television — thus opening the door to big-budget franchises like the Transformers to dominate the airwaves, prior to this there had been no widely recognized robot shows breaking
through the mainstream as had been seen in Italy and France. Unfortunately, this robot craze environment came as a curse as much as a blessing for TMS. As much as young American viewers were now excited about being surrounded by all sorts of robots, the lack of any real *Mighty Orbots* merchandise was the key to the show's downfall into obscurity. Most of the more successful children's programs of this time had accompanying toy ranges, even the shows aimed at girls — Hasbro's *My Little Pony* animated by Sunbow, and Mattel's *She-Ra*, handled by Filmation, were mirrored counterparts to those companies' *Transformers* and *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe* brands, respectively, following a similar template as their "big brother" franchises. In fact, in most cases, the shows were conceived after the toys had been produced, which was not the way *Mighty Orbots* was handled by TMS. Mattel had been lined up to produce toys, but later backed out of the deal.

Even if the producers of *Mighty Orbots* had wanted to compete solely on the merits of their animated series rather than as a "brand" like the other American robot shows, there was one more hurdle they had yet to contend with — the aforementioned robot design's uncanny similarity to the robot *Godmars*, whose design was partly owned by Japanese toymaker Bandai, who in turn had already licensed many of its toy ranges out to be localized by US toy company Tonka as the *Go-Bots*, created yet another legal complication.

Here is an excerpt from the Minnesota District Court records dated May 20th, 1985 entitled "Tonka Corp. v. TMS Entertainment, Inc., 638 F. Supp. 386":

Plaintiff Tonka Corporation is a Minnesota corporation which has Spring Park, Minnesota as its principal place of business. Plaintiff manufactures children's toys, and is famous for its Tonka trucks. Plaintiff's most recent creations are robot characters that convert to vehicles. Plaintiff manufactures and markets these toys under the trademark "GOBOTS" and "GOBOTS MIGHTY ROBOTS MIGHTY VEHICLES" (hereafter GOBOTS). Plaintiff introduced its
GOBOTS in September of 1983 and began selling the GOBOTS in December of 1983. Since introducing GOBOTS, plaintiff states that it has spent millions of dollars advertising the GOBOTS trademark, including the production and syndication of a television show based on the robot characters. GOBOTS have been a phenomenal success.

Defendant TMS Entertainment, Inc. is a California corporation with its principal place of business in Los Angeles, California. Defendant's business consists of the production and selling of children's television shows. The television show in controversy is defendant's program "MIGHTY ORBOTS." Defendant has also filed for 14 separate trademark applications in the United States Patent and Trademark Office for MIGHTY ORBOTS trademarks on a variety of products.

Plaintiff asserts that defendant's activities involving MIGHTY ORBOTS constitute false designation of origin, trademark infringement, unfair competition, and deceptive trade practices with respect to plaintiff's GOBOTS. (full document can be browsed here: http://scholar.google.com/scholar_case?case=2551841612591080869&hl=en&as_sdt=2&as_vis=1&oi=scholarr; Last accessed: October 30th, 2011)

The case did not actually ever reach a conclusion. However, it is interesting to note the wording in the description of Tonka's claims. The Go-Bots are described as Tonka's "creations", and nowhere is it mentioned that Tonka is licensing the products from Japan. Moreover, there is no mention of Bandai at all. More to the point, there is no description of the specific similarity between the likenesses of Godmars and the Mighty Orbots combined form. This is odd, because if that could be demonstrated, logically it would have been the most persuasive exhibit of evidence Tonka could have presented. Alas, perhaps they were saving those details to be revealed during the court case. In any case, it would have been extremely interesting from a licensing standpoint to see how TMS's rebuttals against Tonka's claims of "false designation of
Figure 2  Mattel's prototypes for a range of *Mighty Orbots* toys appeared in catalogue photographs, but were never produced.

origin" (which, when we recall the aforementioned "creations" remark and omissions of the words "Bandai" and "Japan", could equally and credibly be ascribed to the plaintiff as well), "unfair competition" and "deceptive trade practices" might have played out.

Whatever the outcome may have been had the lawsuit actually gone to court, it is interesting that Tonka was going after TMS, rather than Mattel, since Mattel was the company which was to handle the *Mighty Orbots* merchandising. In fact, photographs of unproduced prototypes for the toys appeared in pamphlets for upcoming trade shows, though Mattel conspicuously never actually presented these or any *Mighty Orbots* product when the shows actually came to be held. Conjecture would dictate that the Tonka lawsuit, combined with the cancellation of the series affected this decision.

**Japan-France Co-productions: Double the trouble**

As their exports were becoming more popular and their overseas
contacts grew, TMS began experimenting in planning co-productions with overseas production companies from an early stage.

Their first co-production was with French company DIC Audio-Visuel on a show titled *Ulysses 31*, in 1980. The main concept came from the mind of the aforementioned executive producer Jean Chalopin, who, through many successful animated television series, would later go on to make the DIC company name synonymous with the notion of the Saturday morning cartoon all around the world, with TMS playing no small part.

The original designs for *Ulysses 31* were first sketched out by animator and designer Shingo Araki, of Araki Productions. Araki had already made a name for himself due to his popular “beautiful characters” such as those on *Mugen Kidou SSX* and *Aishite Naito* and then with his involvement in other TMS-produced franchises such as the animated version of Tetsuya Chiba’s boxing manga *Ashita no Joe, Cutey Honey* and *Saint Seiya*. As such, these designs (seen here as rough sketches in Figure 3) were probably much more relatable to Japanese audiences than designs dictated by foreign investors/collaborators, due to Araki’s proven track record. However, the characters as seen in these sketches were only ever used in the original, un-broadcast pilot film of *Ulysses 31*, for which only a Japanese-language dub track exists.

Asked about Japan working with foreign countries, Araki says: “In terms of basic designs and such, the Europeans are very well-trained, their art having highly realistic characteristics, while in Japan each artist has a very unique style.” (The Anime, August 1983, p. 71)

The October 1981 issue of Animec has a brief introductory piece on *Ulysses 31* showcasing some of the upcoming designs, which describes not only the basic concept of the show, but also surprisingly goes further to provide anecdotal references to the hardships of negotiating with the foreign side of the equation over permissible content. For instance, one page describes how French broadcast standards limit the expression of violent and grotesque scenes, creating many disputes for both Japanese and French sides. An example given is that of the prohibition of showing skeletons on French TV, which led to problems for
Figure 3  Spaceship designs by Shoji Kawamori, left, from “Animee” volume 20, 1981, and Shingo Araki’s original character rough sketches for *Ulysses 31*, right, as seen in the August 1983 issue of “The Anime” magazine.

Figure 4  A French artist’s preliminary design for the Sirene character (left), and the same design as adapted by Araki Pro for the animation (right). From “My Anime”, August 1981, page 59.
the Japanese design staff working on the background settings for a
certain scene where human bones were to have been scattered.  

Shoji Kawamori, now an established director and executive of ani-
mation studio Satelight, recalls his days of working as mechanical de-
signer on *Ulysses 31* as part of sci-fi design atelier Studio Nue in an
interview published in 1985 for an *Animage Bunko* publication. In it, he
seems frustrated at the barriers put up around him, impeding his ability
to experiment with fresh ideas. From the outset during the planning
stage, the French producers rejected many versions of his mechanical
plans for spaceships and such, always wanting more rounded, “less-
pointy” designs. The young Kawamori’s frustrated retorts were usually
to the effect of, “If it’s supposed to be dangerous (weaponry), then of
course it has to be pointy! It’s only logical! So how do you explain the
Concord, then?”

He goes on to describe how he had received the order that the main
ship, the “Odyssey”, was to have a giant “eye” at the center, and using
that as his basis, designed a large torso-like area behind it, which did
not get approval. Most of the design concepts ended up coming from
France, with Kawamori left to just clean them up, but the many rejected
ideas, such as the “city within a spaceship” concept, were later used in
Kawamori’s own works such as *Chou jikuu yousai Macross* in 1982.
Some of these ideas would come to fruition many years later, most nota-
ibly in 1994 with the sequel, *Macross 7*, where he finally realized his pro-
posed concept of having skyscrapers rise above past the glass dome of
the emigration spaceship, mentioned in this 1985 interview. The con-
cept of having a tube-type transportation system running all around
the spaceship was also finally put to screen in *Macross 7*, 13 years after
he originally conceptualized it for *Ulysses*. He therefore ascribes a lot of
his success with *Macross* to his failures in *Ulysses 31*.

Aside from designs, there is another area in which Western stan-
dards for animated serials differ from Japanese ones and thus create a
disparity, causing barriers to smoothly distribute the same product in
the two regions. Production-wise, *Ulysses 31* was animated mostly
using the 2-koma method. That is to say, for every frame of animation,
two frames of film are used. In a standard live-action movie, 26 frames of film per second is generally accepted as natural smooth movement, and Disney animators traditionally use the same number of drawings per second in their theatrical works, one for each frame. But 13 frames per second is almost indistinguishable from 26 without having to do twice the drawing work. Even so, for a weekly series this is still a strain on the animators and Japanese productions have generally had much lower frame rates, and common instances of re-used footage and still shots to cut time and effort. 2-koma therefore refers to one drawing for every two frames of film to give the illusion of smooth movement, and the difference in motion that Ulysses featured was very clear to someone accustomed to low frame rates in animation, even though the overseas target markets would find it quite standard, and would be much more critical if less drawings were discernibly used. Additionally, this method incurred more production costs, ranging from 22 to 23 million yen per episode (where the Japanese average was 8 million yen per episode — nowadays it stands around 15 million yen) with ten thousand cels per episode, and would not have been possible had there not been overseas investors.

TMS's specialist of legal rights management, Mr. Shirou Aono, speculates that part of the reason Japanese audiences were not so responsive to Ulysses on TV may have been that by that point in time, they were already well accustomed to limited animation methods established by Osamu Tezuka in 1963's Tetsuwan Atom/Astroboy. Thus, more fluid movement in animated TV series was quite off-putting for somebody trying to concentrate on the story, and rather ended up having the effect of creating too much of a distraction. This, combined with unfamiliarity in character designs (the characters did not fit the popular, established Araki style) was one of many factors that led to the show not seeing the light of day in Japan until much later. It was eventually broadcast in Japan by Nagoya TV in a 12-episode format (from a total of 26 actually produced — all of which were shown in Europe) over a one year period from 1988 to 1989, eight years after the original pilot was produced. Later still, in 1991, the series was redubbed with
different voice actors and broadcast in full on NHK. It was also released on home video, but still, it did not make the impact that was expected of it domestically.

1981 also saw production of the pilot for *Lupin VIII*, a futuristic, high-tech re-imagining of the popular TMS character “Lupin III”. Lupin began life in 1966 as a manga series by artist Monkey Punch, after which he had many animated incarnations in both televised series and theatrical releases. The character is still popular to this day, with new TV specials being broadcast every year, and it remains one of the very few animated properties to still have its production be predominantly funded by a television network, namely Fuji TV.

Lupin III’s traditional set-up is simple: a rag-tag band of thieves led by Lupin, the grandson of Marcel LeBlanc’s legendary Arsene Lupin gentleman-thief character, embark on wild adventures to steal some rare item or treasure, all the while being chased by Interpol officer Zenigata. For the DIC and TMS partnership’s production of Lupin VIII, however, the set-up was changed in various ways.

Firstly, the most obvious difference is that this new Lupin is no longer a thief. Rather, he has been re-cast, somewhat jarringly, as a private detective. The un-broadcast pilot test film footage shows a young girl entering his office and asking for help, and Lupin subsequently accepting to take on her case. However, the first planned TV episode — entitled “Lupin versus Impostor Lupin” — begins with Lupin disguised as Zenigata committing a robbery. Later it is revealed that this is an impostor Lupin (as the title suggests) and that the real Lupin VIII in fact now trades as a private detective, thereby re-working the concept into a plot-twist for the audience, whereas the original just presented the set-up rather matter-of-factly.

It is unclear how many episodes were eventually produced before the project was cancelled, but it would seem that at the very least the pilot and first episode made it to final film, although they have never been released. The pilot footage can be found online, albeit with its dialogue track missing.

Lupin’s established popular hardboiled image featuring fast cars
and gun-shooting action often involving gangs and assassins made for a difficult subject matter to convert into an international, universally-accepted cartoon show. Besides his profession, some of the other documented changes between the Lupin III that Japanese viewers loved and his new "VIII" incarnation included shifting around some characteristics of the other established members of the Lupin III cast: Daisuke Jigen, up to this point Lupin's partner-in-crime, no longer carried a revolver, rather a laser-gun, in keeping with the contemporaneous science-fiction-inspired trends. Similarly, Goemon Ishikawa, the samurai master swordsman, no longer has his beloved Zantetsuken, instead he now wields a Star Wars-styled lightsaber weapon.

Ultimately, the show ended up languishing somewhere in the stockroom due to copyright issues. The aforementioned Marcel LeBlanc's estate had sued TMS over the use of the name "Arsene Lupin" as a character, and this dispute factors into the reasons why there were no animated works of Lupin III from 1979 to 1984.

Once again, a co-production had to be shelved.

Conclusion

TMS has proven its dexterity to weave together highly-developed technical skills in animation with the know-how to formulate content and format adapted specifically for particular markets. It has shown that it is able and willing to differentiate between the consumer needs of different overseas regions and careful negotiations have brought about some positive results in terms of trustworthy and long-term relations with overseas firms. In an incredibly short space of time in the early 1980s, TMS managed to have an enormous influence on European broadcasts through established commitments with networks such as Italy's RAI, for whom they would later produce original content made to order.

Moreover, it has shown a deeply-founded ambition to continue promoting their skills and craft with increasingly large projects, in spite of (or perhaps due to lessons learned through) some mishaps along the
Figure 5  The state of the world distribution of TMS animated works, circa 1980. A wide influence can be seen throughout Asia, Europe, the Middle East and South America, but the United States seems conspicuously untouched. From the January 1981 issue of “Gekkan OUT”, page 87.

way. The sprit of their founder Fujioka’s adamant ambition can still be felt as we observe their aggressive drive to excel in international markets.

The cultural impact of TMS productions on television screens throughout the world is more a muted, subconscious one than one would expect, considering the firm’s prominence over three decades. Many more cases of subsequent subcontracting and collaborations ensued after the period focused on in this paper, which we will turn our gaze to in the next installment of this ongoing study, where we will move on to observe the eventual conquering of the elusive US market.

Notes

1 MIPCOM is an international entertainment contents market held every
year in Cannes, France. TMS has been attending this trade show for over thirty years to communicate with prospective buyers of their contents, such as distributors or broadcasters. The relationships they built up as a result of these negotiations directly relates to their involvement in co-productions and contracting as overseas production houses of foreign projects. Long relationships that came about because of TMS’s activities at MIPCOM include those with DIC Audiovisuel and Warner Brothers.

2 Lamarre, 2009: 36-37

3 There were however, other techniques in Japanese animation to express depth and three dimensions “realistically”, such as the “hatkei douga”, which means “animated background”, in which the backdrop would be line-drawn and flat-painted just the same as a foreground character cel, and animated in the same way using multiple frames in order to give the illusion that the “cameraman” is moving on a dolly, or filming handheld, thus the background is always changing angle in complex ways. This is most often employed particularly during more dramatic or action scenes, though due to the workload, is quite rare.

4 So-called “Meisaku” works are series based on classic literature or European history: for example le naki ko/Remi was based on the story Sans Famille by Hector Malot, known as Nobody’s Boy in English. Rather than TMS, the main producers of these “Sekai Meisaku Gekijou” (“World Masterpiece Theatre”) shows were typically Nippon Animation, who began with the hugely popular A Dog of Flanders in 1975, after the success of hits like Heidi, Girl of the Alps in 1974, and they constantly produced these until 1996. Many of these saw a large following in Europe because of their relatable themes and contexts. After being on a decade-long hiatus, they are currently produced sporadically.


6 As The New Adventures of Gigantor, in 1993. Gigantor had been the US-localized name of the original Tetsujin 28 robot from animation studio Eiken’s (then known as TCJ) production in 1963, and the 1980 TMS show was retroactively re-written in the US as a continuation, to take place years after the Eiken show, in spite of TMS having planned their show as an alternate take on the original, rather than a sequel.

7 A summary of the case in a little more detail: “Because of it’s [sic] close connection with Mattel’s Hot Wheels line of toy cars, the Federal Commu-
ninations Commission demanded that the opening to the Hot Wheels cartoon, along with any references in the cartoon to the Hot Wheels title and any mention of the makes of cars, all be counted as commercial time. The FCC was, in effect, ruling that the whole cartoon show was a commercial for the Hot Wheels toy cars and not an entertainment program. This led ABC to cancel the popular series after only two years on the air. The FCC ruling remained in effect until 1983, when a new lineup in the FCC ended the restrictions." (http://www.toontracker.com/hotwheels/hotwheels.htm; Last accessed: October 30th, 2011)


9 Shoutarou Kaneda was also, not coincidentally, the name of the protagonist of the seminal 1988 master work of animation by director Katsuhiro Otomo, Akira (which TMS also played a large part in the production of). In many ways, Akira is a postmodern retelling of the basic themes explored in Mitsuteru Yokoyama's original Tetsujin 28-gou tale, with the elements re-styled in adult fashion. In it, Kaneda is not a young boy in control of a giant robot, but rather he is a teen biker gang leader who similarly has to bring his rampaging best friend —"Tetsuo", instead of "Tetsujin"— under control after his raw superhuman power is unleashed. Thematically bringing the classic Tetsujin to a new mature audience, Akira is often overlooked in this respect despite its many visual homages and metaphors alluding to Yokoyama's work (for example, the storage chamber housing the remains of Akira himself being numbered "No. 28"). As an added piece of trivia with regards to the significance of this name, the name for the subgenre of pornographic manga, "shotakon" — in essence, the "boy" version of little girl paedophilia designated "lolicon" (from "Lolita complex") — has its origins in the words "Shouta complex", the Shouta in question pertaining to this particular 1980 incarnation of Shoutarou, who apparently had his adulating fans.

10 A similar cancellation was made when toymaker Matchbox reneged out of the contract for product tie-ins with Harmony Gold in 1986's Robotech II: The Sentinels. Without Matchbox, the entire project hit a major wall and the proposed 65-episode series was scrapped, with production on only three episodes completed (Later these would be released on home video as an edited "movie").

11 Although it is important to note that a Tonka-licensed toy of the actual
Godmars robot was never officially released in the United States, thereby making Tonka's arguments substantially weaker.

The record goes on to show that other than being a Minnesota-based firm itself, Tonka had made a misjudgment in bringing up the case to the Minnesota court since no business pertained to the state of Minnesota. The court decided the correct venue for this case would be the US District Court for the Central District of California. However, no evidence can be seen that the lawsuit ever actually progressed past this point.

Again, this is assuming that Tonka could also prove that they had acquired the license to Godmars as a product in the US.

The pilot film can be accessed on Youtube. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ed-zxFsWeHQ; Last accessed: October 30th, 2011

Animec volume 20, October 1981, p. 44

“Oboeteimasu ka” pp. 95–96. It is interesting to note that this interview emphasizes that Kawamori was the only member of Nue to work on Ulysses. The credits in European versions of the series show only the Studio Nue name, however, and do not credit Kawamori specifically.

From an interview I conducted at TMS Entertainment’s head office in October 2011.

Bibliography

『アニメック』20号, 1981年10月 (Animec volume 20), October 1981, ラポポート Rapport

大塚康夫 Ootsuka, Yasuo 2004：『リトル・ニモの野望』 (Little Nemo no Yabou), 徳間書店 Tokuma Shoten

河森正治, 美樹本晴彦, 片桐卓也 Kawamori, Shoji; Mikimoto, Haruhiko; Katagiri, Takuya, 1985：『おぼえていますか』 (Oboeteimasu ka), アニメージュ文庫 Animage Bunko


草薙聡志 Kusanagi Satoshi 2003：『アメリカで日本のアニメは、どう見られてきたか？』 (How is Japanese Animation Viewed in America?) 徳間書店 Tokuma Shoten

「月刊アウト」1981年1月号 (Gekkan OUT, January 1981), みのり書房 Minori Shobou
「月刊アウト」1981年8月号（Gekkan OUT, August 1981）、みのり書房 Minori Shobou
「ジ・アニメ」1983年8月号（The Anime, August 1983）、近代映画社 Kindai-Eiga-sha
「マイアニメ」1981年8月号（My Anime, August 1981）、秋田書店 Akita Shoten
Patten, Fred 2004: Watching Anime, Reading Manga: 25 Years of Essays and Reviews, Stone Bridge Press

（レナト・リペラ、ルスカ 商学部専任講師）