Meijin Samvad aka Expert conversation

WEBINAR TRANSCRIPT

Webinar Title:

"Impact and Synergy of Manga, Anime and Video Games"

Date: August 23rd, 2024

Speakers:

1. **Mr. Nao Hirasawa**
2. **Dr. Jun Kato**
3. **Miss Miki Sakuma**

Moderator: Mr. Saideep Rathnam

ABOUT THE SPEAKERS:

Mr. Nao Hirasawa is the founder of Arch Inc., following extensive experience at Bandai Visual (now known as Bandai Namco Filmworks), Production I.G., and Ultra Super Pictures. His roles included head of legal affairs and producer, equipping him with expertise in managing domestic intellectual property rights and handling contracts related to international property development. Hirasawa has produced notable works such as The Journey, Promare, Neko ga Kureta Marui Shiawase, ID-0, BBK/BRNK, the Monster Strike anime, She and Her Cat -Everything Flows-, Ultra Super Anime Time, Gargantia on the Verdurous Planet, and Lagrange: The Flower of Rin-ne. He has also served as Managing Director at Graphinica, Inc., Yamatoworks, Inc., and YUMETA Co. Ltd.

Dr. Jun Kato (https://junkato.jp) is a senior researcher at the National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology (AIST) and the technical advisor at Arch, Inc. He worked as a research intern for Microsoft and Adobe Research, received his Ph.D. degree from The University of Tokyo in 2014, and has regularly received academic recognition such as Honorable Mentions at ACM CHI (2013, 2015, 2023) and IPSJ/ACM Award (2021). He is interested in the broad area of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) and is particularly passionate about how computing can contribute to the diversity of creative cultures. As such, he has focused on the design of user interfaces and integrated environments for creativity support, aimed at programmers, music video creators, anime directors, DIYers in

the maker culture, etc. His work has often gone beyond research papers and been released for public use.

Miss Miki SAKUMA is a Ph.D. student at the University of Côte d'Azur, France. After her B.A. in English Studies in Japan, she obtained her Master's degree in TESOL in the USA (2002) and her second Master's degree in English Studies in France (2017). She is currently teaching Japanese in the University of Aix-Marseille (2023/2024) and in the University of Paric Cité (2024/2025) in France.

ABOUT THE MODERATOR:

Saideep Rathnam is the Chief Operating Officer of Mizuho India Japan Study Centre, bringing a wealth of 47 years of industry and academic experience to the Centre. An alum of IIM Bangalore, from Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. to British Aerospace, UK he has spent over 2 decades in the aeronautics industry and over 18 years in the automotive sector in various capacities including president of manufacturing excellence at Anand Automotive Ltd. He is also a Certified Chartered Management Accountant [CMA], UK. He wears many hats and has chaired Anand University, helping companies in the fields of management of change and innovation. Recently, he drives the Visionary Leaders for Manufacturing (VLFM) program as a Senior Advisory Committee Member of CII.

OVERVIEW OF THE TOPIC BY THE MODERATOR

The cultural phenomena of Japanese manga, anime, and video games have transcended national boundaries, becoming a significant force in global entertainment. "The Japanese model offers the West a dynamic example of how to combine commerce and creativity." (Roland Kelts, Japanamerica: How Japanese Pop Culture Has Invaded the U.S.). This synergy of commerce and creativity exemplifies Japanese soft power, which refers to the ability of a country to influence others through cultural appeal rather than through coercion. However, some scholars have commented about the negative influences on business and society (addiction, social isolation, decreased productivity, increased absenteeism etc.). The 2020 report by the Association of Japanese Animations noted that the global anime market was valued at over $24 billion, underscoring the substantial economic footprint of Japanese pop culture. Previous works have often focused on individual aspects of this cultural wave, such as the narrative structure of manga or the artistic innovation in anime, but a holistic discussion encompassing manga, anime, and video games together is less common. This webinar aims to explore the profound impact of these cultural exports, both positive and negative, drawing on the work of scholars and industry experts who have analysed their influence on global markets and cultural

landscapes. We will engage in a comprehensive discussion on the multifaceted impact of manga, anime, and video games as agents of Japanese soft power.

We will explore questions such as: How do these media forms shape perceptions of Japan globally? What are the economic benefits and cultural implications of their widespread popularity? Are there any negative repercussions both on business and society? By bringing together experts from diverse fields, including cultural studies, economics, and media studies, this webinar aims to provide a balanced view of the positive, negative, and nuanced impacts of Japanese pop culture on global markets. Join us as we dissect these dynamic cultural exports and their profound influence on the world stage.

1. **PRESENTATION BY Mr. Nao Hirasawa**

   Mr. Hirasawa gave an overview of his presentation by sharing the broad topics that he would be covering in his presentation, viz, Growth of Japanese Manga, Anime and Game; Strength of Japanese Manga and Internationalization of Manga/Anime look. He began with a brief introduction about himself, stating the impressive fact that he has been associated with the Anime industry since last 24 years. He was into legal department initially and eventually became an anime producer, having been exposed to Anime industry as well as other industries. He also has experience of working in 5 different companies in a span of 24 years. He spoke about his company "Arch" whose main job is to plan and help Manga creators to produce their work. It also has a subsidiary company which deals with Manga and works with gaming companies. This is the way they have been working at different dimensions in various projects, supporting B2C companies. Their specialisation is R & D Department, whose technical support is also shared with the international audience. They have a web-based tool named Griffith, that helps in creating Anime storyboards. There is also a company named Graphinica, where Mr. Hirasawa has served as managing director, which is operational since last 5 years and has 5 branches in Japan. There is also one named Prime contractor production which creates its own content and has successfully produced very famous contents in terms of movie and anime TV series. He is also in in-game video production and there are games in which techniques such as real time rendering is used. Software to create new animation techniques is also used. Graphinica is creating content whereas Arch is design company. Mr. Hirasawa then shared the trend of growth in Manga which is growing exponentially. Electronic Manga market in Japan is rapidly growing with it being USD 3.3 billion in 2023. It has reached USD 1 billion in North America and is expected to reach USD 3.8 billion by 2030. Japanese Anime market around the world has raised from USD 9 billion in 2012 to USD 20 billion in 2022. In United States, it has grown from USD 1.6 billion in 2018 to USD 3 billion in 2022 and is expected to increase to USD 10 million in 2020. Game market in Japan has increased from USD 8 billion in 2013 to USD 13 billion in 2022.

Game market around the world is expected to reach USD 200 billion in 2023. Number of game players is expected to be 3 billion in 2023. In gaming, most of them are using smartphones to play games. The key drivers of growth, as per Mr. Hirawasa are collaboration and shift to smartphones. Manga, anime and Games, they all have different audience and strengths. For Manga, low development cost allows authors to experiment with various genres and stories. Anime is accessible to wide audience due to the low literacy required for viewing. Games have a large market size, and a successful title can generate significant profits. The shift to smartphones in the 2010s, significantly increased accessibility to Japanese Manga, Anime and Games for users outside Japan. The strength of Mange at the core of collaboration is "character" and "strength of values" that those characters have. Mr. Hirasawa introduced the third part of his presentation, which was strength of Japanese Manga. There are 4 essences of the content, viz, character, story, worldview and theme. In US, story is most important part. On the other hand, in Japan, character is the most important part. The essence of character is the sense of values that those characters have, which attracts viewers. The result of Manga, Anime and Games spreading round the world with their attractive characters and sense of value is internationalization of the Manga/Anime look. Local production and consumption is happening in each country or territory. Manga/anime look is becoming like Sushi and Judo, which has also gone global. Overseas creators of game gave their own unique touch and created their own version. Gold Ring (manga) and Journey (Anime) are financed by people in the middle east and produced by Japanese creators. The Japanese Manga/Anime look is being used as a medium for national events and stories that people wish to pass down from generation to generation. The challenges that the Japanese Anime industry face are respecting the traditional values of each country/region and nurturing creators from overseas. Mr. Hirasawa summarised his presentation with following key points:

➢ Japanese manga, anime, and game grow together like a trio. The trio achieved significant growth by leveraging each other's strengths and responding to the changing times

➢ The core of strength is the charm of the character. Each character's unique sense of values & appearance combines to create an appeal that transcends the media.

➢ Internationalization of Manga/Anime Look is both an opportunity and challenge. In order to meet the needs of fans around the world, it is important to be considerate of each country's traditional values and to be able to create works together with creators from overseas.

2. **PRESENTATION BY DR. KATO**

Dr. Kato, who is a toolsmith researcher, started his talk on the context of how he has been actively engaged in collaborating with managers in Anime, Manga and Gaming industries

and held a workshop in March this year to insights on how creators can be supported in their work to push the frontiers of Anime, Manga, Virtual reality and game. Last year he also organised a workshop at ACM CHI '23, the premier conference in Human-Computer interaction where 100 interdisciplinary researchers gathered to discuss every aspect of creativity, cultures and computing. Different places have different cultures. Hence these days there is more emphasis on cultures in computing and anime creation. Tools for anime creators in Japan could be different from the Anime studios in Western world or other parts of the world. Dr. Kato is also involved in organising an annual programming contest utilising their research outcomes. He went on explaining the processes involved in production of Anime, which consists of two parts. First part is pre-production, wherein only ten people are involved, including producer, scenario writer and character designers. At the end of the first process is storyboard process which is handled by anime director, or, in some cases by storyboarding artist. Next step is production and post-production process in which more than 100 people are involved. He showed an E-conte or a storyboard, which is an A-4 size sheet of paper divided into 4-6 rows, containing "cut" number, a scene illustration, script and duration. The vertical timeline contributes to continuity allowing easy comparison on left-right balance between frames. Dr. Kato also pointed out the similarity between their storyboarding and Walt Disney storyboarding, which is that they both use hand sketches, each element is drawn intentionally and careful planning in pre-production is important. He also added the difference between the two, which is individual effort using their tool vis-à-vis collaborative and open discussions in Walt Disney's approach. Salient feature of Griffith, a web-based storyboarding tool is that it has instant access, and content can be viewed by others on their smartphones. He also added that in Japan, directors have the superpower to reflect their style in the final result. Dr. Kato also shed some light on Manga and revealed that 36% of Anime films have their origin in Manga. In Western world, "divergence culture" is observed, whereas in Japan, "divergence culture" is predominant. In Japan, Manga has been a part of "Pop" culture. Hence an ecosystem, where people playing various roles collaborate is built in Japan. He brought his presentation to an end by mentioning that by helping the creators through the power of these unique tools, their creativity flourishes.

3. **PRESENTATION BY MISS MIKI SAKUMA**

Miss Sakuma started her presentation on an interesting note based on her personal experience, that French people are more interested in Japanese culture more than American people. Ms Sakuma is a Ph.D student and topic of her research is "What cannot be translated in Japanese Film subtitling." She also introduced the term "Japonisme to the audience, which refers to the popularity and influence of Japanese art in Western European artists in the late 19th century. She also presented some historical background of Japan,

mentioning the fact that Japan was isolated from other countries between 1639 to 1854 BC. Japan re-started trade with other countries in the late 19th Century. Japonisme happened after this period in other countries of the world. Here Sakuma san highlights the impact of Japanese art's impact particularly on French art. This impact gave good image of Japan to French people, and this could be a reason why Japanese culture, including Japanese Manga, Anime and Video Games are still popular in this country. Ms Sakuma also shared the front cover of a magazine, Paris illustre, that presented Japanese art called Ukiyo-e in 1886 on it. In a painting made by Claude Monet in 1875, he has depicted French woman wearing Japanese traditional dress, Kimono. These instances affirm the fact that French people really used to appreciate Japanese culture at that time. Ms Sakuma further shared that French people still remember Japonism of 19th Century. She went to see an exhibition on 13th July, named Bonnard Etle Japon, in which it was illustrated that how Japanese art had an impact on Bonnard's art in the late 19th century. He chose Japanese traditional color in his artwork. In his artwork, he has depicted Ukiyo-e and in his other artworks also, it can be found that he got inspiration from Japanese art. Ms Sakuma shared some statistics which further proves the rising popularity of manga in France. Hence, she concluded that there is no doubt that soft power Manga has created impact on French markets. One of the examples of positive effects of Manga, anime and Video games is the Japan expo, the biggest event lasting four days dedicated to Manga in Europe, held in Paris, in which 255,000 visitors participated in 2023. It is the same number of visitors who visited Comike, a 4 day event at Tokyo, dedicated to Manga as well. Ms Sakuma also moved on with her presentation showing some more statistics that showed the number of visitors to Japan Expo that has been increasing continuously. Also, there has been an increase in the number of international tourists in Japan. Ms Sakuma is working as Japanese teacher in a French University, where number of students learning Japanese is much more than any other language department. She attributed it to the increasing popularity of Manga, Anime and Video games, as many of her own students talk about these too. She also discussed the negative side of the topic and highlighted that the soft power like manga, anime and video games can be strong power, but at the same time, it can be also vulnerable, and we cannot completely rely on this kind of power. She gave an example too, that in her university, Korean language is getting popular majorly, because of K-pop, the Korean pop music. She concluded her presentation stating the fact that cultural relationship between France and Japan, is deep. Also, the relationship between different countries with Japan is different which depends on the historical background.

4. **Question & Answers**

    1. Given your extensive experience of intellectual right and intellectual property, especially in the Anime industry, how do you see the balance between creative freedom

and legal framework evolving as Japanese anime continues to become a global phenomenon, especially once you have AI and ML. Do you see any loss of creative control and authenticity in how you are approaching this issue.

Ans: (Mr. Hirasawa) In Japan there is a lot of support extended to protect the creative work of the creators. In the very first page of the book or of creation, it is mentioned that these works are for spreading cultural awareness. There are two approaches, first one gives more importance to the producer or financer of the work, for example the US kind of approach. The second approach, followed in Japan, Germany and Europe, where the creators' interest is more in line. We have traditionally followed the European way, keeping creator in mind. Also, a good amount of economic profit given to the creator. Hence a balance of creativity and economic aspect exists.

2. There is an integration of AI & ML to the production process of Anime and Video Games. How do you see the current advancements in AI & ML impacting both the production processes as well as concepts like interactive anime or personalized storytelling?

    Ans: (Dr. Kato) Let me start by categorizing the application into two different kind of use cases. One is for the amateur use cases where AI and ML are used to create variations of the original content. Let's take example of advertisement that is crafted by creators. It is intended to for various target audiences. For example, web-based advertisements which are to be tailored to the needs of younger generations, male, female and so on. If there is such a need to create bunch of variations for the same content, to cater to various subtle tastes, this is what AI & ML does. It creates variations and allows customization. At the same time, it's really difficult to control the quality of final outcome. Each frame of the anime is created by human. Hence from the storyboarding perspective, it is really important that human creators are charge of the process. For professional use case, AI & MI could be useful, but mostly in a way that they are well integrated to the workflow of the professional creators. It is crucial to keep the freedom of control for the creators, so that they can control what they want to express. AI & ML are wonderful in a technical way, but it is really important to make it centred around the human creators. From that perspective, current machine learning techniques also have a certain kind of ethical issue which is, they learn from a bunch of content which are copyright protected. We need to solve this kind of ethical issue, at the same time, we need to make these technologies benefitting the creators. It's a long way that I can see, but at the same time I am expecting progress in this field. I would like to see reasonable and also beneficial examples for creators.

3. How do you see a potential shift in the narrative structure which will cater to international audience while still maintaining the unique cultural essence? Do you see that there is a challenge here, especially when the new technologies come in and new cultures are getting integrated? Do you see some challenges in this shift?

    Ans: (Mr. Hirasawa) I think the answer lies in Manga, Anime and presentation on Japonisme that Miki san has presented. Manga, Anime and pop culture that we see on global scale is not something that we are sending from our side. In actual, it is being picked up from the other side. For example, people in France or America or the club of Japanese learning students who are interested in it pick it up. The most important thing that we should do from our side is to keep our ears open and listen to the voices of these kind of people who have interest in these kinds of things.

    Ans: (Ms Sakuma) I want to add that I totally agree with Hirawasa san. I did research in "fansub" which means subtitles by fans. When Anime started, Japanese Anime industry didn't think that Anime would get popular outside Japan. Hence they didn't make any efforts to promote anime to other countries. But thanks to Anime lovers, they wanted to try to listen to Japanese it. Anime started in 1950s in Japan, but it took more than 10 or 20 years for Japanese anime to become popular in other countries. Thanks to Anime and Manga lovers for this. Again, I would like to talk about my students who know really a lot about Japanese Anime, and they are the promoters of it to other French people. So, I totally agree with Hirasawa san.

4. The characters that are built into both Anime and Manga, many of the physical features look very unrealistic in terms of body proportions. Do you see that it can influence the young viewers' perception of what is beauty and self-worth? Do you see any impact of this?

    Ans: (Ms. Sakuma) I can also mention, relating to physical appearance of anime. Cosplay is very famous in France and Europe. This a one of the good examples that young people got influenced by these characters, though its not very imaginary. But they want to be certain character. I am living in France since many years, and I see the influence of the appearance too.

    Ans: (Dr. Kato) To add to that, one interesting aspect from toolmakers perspective is that many of these costume players photoshop their photos before publishing it online. They kind of understand the difference between these unrealistic proportions and natural human proportions. They try to match it in the digital world. They keep their proportion in the physical world and transform it into virtual appearance in the digital world, which I think is healthy interpretation of these different roles, while still, expressing their love for the content.

5. Some Anime, Manga, and video games feature very graphic depiction of violence and glorification of negative behaviour which can sort of desensitize individuals, particularly youngsters to real world violence. Do you think it needs intervention by people, especially the state? How is this managed within Japan? Is there any advisory given to the parents by the content provider? And what is the advice you would give to other cultures and countries?

    Ans: (Mr. Hirasawa) In Japan we have limitations based on the type of content, whether it is universal content or for children or for adults. Also, depending upon the people who are actually watching it or the region where they are watching it, that might not be required. In our experience, based on the surveys conducted so far, there has not been any connection between or any bad impact on people seeing the content and any type of criminal activity that is related with violence or whatever is depicted in the contents. Probably because it is such an essential part of the culture, and they grew up watching their parents see these things, that people are able to distinguish the differences. Also, adaption is required by different countries as multi-generational people are watching the content. It is normal to have various adaptation where the content is trimmed or edited as per the audience.

    Ans: (Dr. Kato) One thing I would like to add is, it is really important to distinguish which kind of content can be created versus which type of content can be viewed by the audience. So, as Hirasawa san explained, there is a system of grading the content in Japan, which categorises it into kids, adults and so on. This can be done in every region of the world, and this is really important. But at the same time from the perspective of person who supports creators, creators really demand freedom. So for them, violence is welcomed. Some of them really welcome it as part of storytelling. I personally think that in a world that appreciated diversity, I really want to allow creators what they want to create but at the same time to balance, how these contents are distributed to the audience. We can do both at the same time.

6. (From Audience) I would like to know this process of content creation works, to become creator and producer of Anime/Manga in India and employ Japanese studios and creators in creating something memorable.

    Ans: (Mr. Hirasawa) On a lighter note, this problem will be solved when Hirasawa san employs the person who has asked this question. I would like to talk little bit more about the journey of a project that I co-created with the Saudi friends. When this project came to us, first, they had clear story, they knew what they wanted to show. Secondly, they had clarity on whom they want to show. They wanted to show it to Muslim audience. Thirdly, they wanted to send it to international film festivals and get some awards. When we received this, we told them that this is the process of creating content from a cross-

cultural context. And we must spend a significant time, some 2-3 years understanding the cross-cultural context that lies within the creation of this project.

7. (From audience) Owing to the factors like population reduction in Japan and tough working conditions, people who produce Manga are shifting to other countries. Do you believe that in future, markets like China, Korea and other countries may overtake Japan in terms of creation and production of Manga?

    Ans: (Mr. Hirasawa) Definitely there is a possibility that there are more creators of Manga from other places than in Japan. However, that's not a bad thing, as it means that there are more global audience as well. We gave examples of Sushi and Judo but let us take a more common example of football so that everyone can understand. Birthplace of football, England was not able to win neither the world cup nor Euro cup. Probably English people might feel sad because they are not able to win at sport that they created, however, they should take great pride in having created such a global sport that everybody is playing, so much so that they are better in it than them. Like India has super players with great style and quality, we are also looking at great manga and anime creators who have Japanese style and quality even from outside Japan, from places like India.

    Ans: (Dr. Kato) Let me add something as the soccer example is really interesting and clear explanation of what is happening. So, in case of soccer, it's about rules. The soccer has rules and it's kind of universal thing. But in the case of Anime, the rule or a kind of definition of Anime is a bit vague. So, I think in case of Anime it is happening in more simultaneous and diverse way, in a sense that various kinds of creators all over the world are kind of influenced by the anime and create their own variations, but at the same time, the authenticity of anime itself remains the same. So, I would like to see this diverse landscape of Anime influenced culture getting more popularity all-round the globe.

8. (From audience) The content shown in Mr. Hirasawa san's presentation also had Ramayana, which is an Indian epic. In the context of these characters, how would the Ramayana story get created? The characters will be created by Indian creators or by Japanese creators?

    Ans: (Mr. Hirasawa) The Ramayana shown in the presentation was a collaborative effort by both Japanese and Indian creators. If you will see the credit titles, there are 3 Indian and 2 Japanese people. The authenticity of characters, the look and appearance is done by Indian people and the technical part of how it will come on screen is done by Japanese people.