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Characters and Premises in the Quest for Cool Japan

By Ian Condry

In the script meetings for the children's TV series *Zenmai Zamurai* (2006), the five writers sit somewhat uncomfortably awaiting their turns. The director, producers, original designers, and various others sit around a rectangular table to evaluate the new scripts and plot ideas. The director Yasumi Tetsuo leads the meeting, choosing from the stack of print-outs in front of each of us. The meetings were usually held on Wednesdays at noon at Sony's Aniplex offices near Ichigaya station in central Tokyo. After the director chooses, we all read the script or synopsis, and Yasumi would begin the discussion, sometimes with direct questions to the writer, "Does it have to be oil in the character's hair? Can't it be honey?" Sometimes he opens a space for more free form discussion, "Does a soccer game really go with the world we've created?" For the scripts in final drafts, the director would commonly make some changes to dialogue or comment on the length. Some of the most interesting discussions came during the brainstorming of new ideas, thinking about the main character's love interest or his rival, considering the central gag or conflict, fretting over the resolution, or wondering if the plot could be easily understood by the young children who were the target audience. During the summer of 2006, I observed about a dozen of these script meetings for *Zenmai Zamurai* as part of my ethnographic research into the making of anime (Japanese animated films and TV shows).

Script meetings themselves were only one part of a many-layered process with diverse participants that extends over many months. It would commonly take six months to go through the steps of plot, script, storyboard, drawing the frames, voice recording, and editing. The first meeting I attended for *Zenmai Zamurai* in June 2006 included some initial ideas for the end-of-

the-year special to air in December. Unlike the majority of anime which is built upon manga (comic book) series, *Zenmai Zamurai* was an original anime with the stories of future episodes still being worked out as the initial episodes were airing. What had already been designed, and what formed the basis of the work to follow, were a set of conceptual tools that help define the making of anime. Working outwards from script meetings gives us a way to see some of the limitations of talking about anime's "success" in national terms, for example, when anime is described as a flagship for "cool Japan," a catchphrase referring to the hoped-for economic and political influence of the nation's content industries. Although cool Japan may turn out to be a powerful ideological construct, it tends to bring the focus on Japanese specificities and thereby to impose a national logic on analysis. In this essay, I'd like to propose an alternative. Rather than asking, what is it about the Japaneseness of anime that makes it successful, I ask instead, what are the logics that guide anime production? In approaching anime from the perspective of creators bringing new projects to their audiences, I focus on the key concepts of characters, premises, and world-settings. These foundational concepts help organize the collaborative creativity of anime, and in turn, give us a new way of thinking about how the cultural world around us comes into being.

After I conducted fieldwork in the summer of 2006 in anime studios, including observing script meetings for two TV series, I was struck by certain aspects of production that contradicted my assumptions about what gives anime value. When I began my research, I tended to view the distinctiveness of anime in terms of the complexity of the stories, which I commonly used as an example of what set anime apart from other cartoon fare. Fans I spoke with at anime conventions in the US often explained their appreciation of anime in terms of stories as well, for example, drawing attention to plotlines that extended over an entire year (or more) and that avoid

simplistic renderings of good versus evil. Scholars who write about anime frequently begin by explaining the story of a particular series or film, and then analyze how it reveals something about Japan or gives us insight into cultural politics regarding gender, technology, history, youth, and so on (Brown 2006; Lunning 2006; Napier 2005). As I observed anime creators at work, however, I came to see that the story was only one element of a broader range of conceptual tools they used in designing new projects. Moreover, the stories themselves are often developed after the foundation has already been laid for a given series.

More central than the story itself in organizing the collaborative production of anime was a different set of concerns, specifically, the design of characters, the establishment of dramatic premises that link the characters, and the properties that define the world in which the characters interact. This combination of characters (*kyarakutaa*), premises (*settei*), and world-settings[i] (*sekaikan*) generally came prior to the writing of the story per se, and as such, provide a way of considering how the processes of anime creativity unfold. By "anime creativity" I mean that compared to viewing anime as a collection of texts, anime's influence can be interpreted somewhat differently if we conceive of anime as an approach to creative production, that is, a way of defining and putting into practice particular processes of world-making. A character-based analysis of cultural production raises a somewhat different range of questions compared to thinking of anime in terms of narrative representations in already-completed works. I should note that I'm not claiming a creative emphasis on characters, premises, and world-settings is unique to anime. TV serials, videogames, and much more could be analyzed in a similar light. But I do hope to clarify some of the particulars of anime production in the hope of expanding the opportunities for comparison with other media, an issue I touch on here, but which I also see as something that can be expanded through further research.

How do our interpretive methods change if we consider not primarily the stories of anime, but the combination of characters and premises? How might this alter our understanding of what anime is about? To explore these issues, I focus on several TV series including three that use samurai as main characters. At one level, a samurai evokes the idea of a character (warrior with sword), a premise (samurai are guided by honor, empowered by swordsmanship), and a world-setting (historical Japan, generally 1400s-1800s). It is often at this level of generality that samurai are seen as representing Japan, or at least Japanese manhood as symbols of loyalty, perseverance and skill. But just as the equation of samurai with Japan is overly simplistic, so too is the idea that a samurai equals a character too simplistic for understanding what defines a character. To dig deeper, I focus on two anime series for young children, *Dekoboko Friends* and *Zenmai Zamurai*, and also discuss two anime for grown-ups, *Samurai Champloo* (2004, Dir. Watanabe), which mixes hip-hop and samurai, and *Afro Samurai* (2007, Dir. Kizaki), a "fusion anime" designed in Japan but starring American voice actors. Through this comparison, we can observe the some of calculus that goes into designing new shows around characters, premises, and world-settings.   Before turning to the details of the anime series, let's begin with a brief consideration of what anime can add to media and cultural studies.

Anime and Media Studies

An ethnographic approach to cultural production offers the opportunity to evaluate how the overarching discourses of anime as a national resource relate to day-to-day concerns in production houses.   This can also advance critical theory in under-explored directions. Raymond Williams has commented that what is striking to him is that "nearly all forms of critical theory are theories of consumption. That is to say, they are concerned with

understanding an object in such a way that it can profitably or correctly be consumed" (Williams 2006: 141). Although he wrote this in 1980, noting that questions of "taste" and "sensibility" dominated discussions of texts, the criticism remains apt, particularly in the many studies of Japanese popular culture that start with the story of a particular media text and then unpack its significance. This approach can play a useful, critical role, but it also portrays only part of the the workings of media. Williams's point raises the question, what would it mean to develop a critical theory of production?

Media anthropologists have attempted to redress the overemphasis on consumption by looking in more detail at the ways institutions, transnational pressures, and a diverse range of actors negotiate the complex challenges of making their productions, whether it is Bollywood films (Ganti 2002), Kazakh soap operas (Mandel 2002), or amateur video production by Miao ethnic minorities in China (Schein 2002), to name a few important studies. Faye Ginsberg, for example, traces the complex tradeoffs that occur when Aboriginal groups in Australia attempt to use television to recuperate their own collective stories and histories. While access to media outlets for the Aboriginal community does provide some measure of redress for the erasure of many these stories from national Australian narratives, she finds that "retelling stories for the media of film, video, and television often requires reshaping them, not only within new aesthetic structures but also in negotiation with the political economy of state-controlled as well as commercial media" (Ginsburg 2002: 40-41). One wonders, then, how do such aesthetic structures operate and with what effects?

In addition, our media mix world raises the question, what exactly is it that moves across media? Media scholar Henry Jenkins argues that what connects new and old media is a cultural phenomenon called "convergence," by which he means "the flow of content across multiple

media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment" (Jenkins 2006: 2). As a successful example of "transmedia storytelling," Jenkins points to the *Matrix* franchise, which includes not only the trilogy of films, but the animated shorts, the comic books, video games, and so on, each of which fills out part of the story. "In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best—so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics; its world might be explored through game play or experienced as an amusement park attraction" (Jenkins 2006: 96). But in the case of anime, it is seldom narrative coherence—the story—that provides the link across media. Rather, it is the characters. In this respect, anime can deepen our understanding of media anthropology in part because of the blurred boundaries between media on the screen, whether packaged, broadcast, theatrically released or streamed on the Internet, and the emergent potential of character-related businesses and activities later, from lucrative licensing deals with pachinko manufacturers to non-commercial fan uses as cosplay (dressing in costume as one's favorite character). Although my focus in this essay is on the ways professional animators make anime, in my larger project I intend the idea of "collaborative creativity" to draw attention to several dimensions of collaboration: among animators; among media industries (e.g., comics, anime, toys, etc.); between producers and consumers; and across national orders. Characters and premises thus help us thinking about the cross-media processes of collaborative creativity.

By mapping the processes through which creators take original ideas and turn them into on-going projects, we can grapple with some of media anthropology's main concerns: "how media enable or challenge the workings of power and the potential of activism; the enforcement of inequality and the sources of imagination; the impact of technology on the production of

individual and collective identities" (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin 2002: 3). Yet

something may be gained if we shift from a concern with the "power" of media, to questions of

how "value" is incorporated in processes of media production. If we begin with characters and

premises, we may be able to sketch some new directions in thinking about value and control. In

media studies, the difficulties of evaluating the "power" producers compared to audiences are

well-documented (Louw 2001; Morley 2006). Should we focus on the encoding power of

producers, guided by capitalist interests in corporations, or the activities of audiences that

reinterpret multivalent texts? In the case of anime, however, such a binary opposition between

the power of producers and the power fans makes little sense. The "otaku movement," as anime

scholar Thomas Lamarre calls the collective practices of obsessive anime fans, supports the

industry, though is not fully contained by the industry either (Lamarre 2006). An emphasis on

characters also shows how some of the logics of production within industry are mimicked by fan

appropriations. Fanzine *dôjinshi* (amateur comics) revel in the possibilities of breaking

characters out of their assumed roles and premises, refashioning them while reproducing them.

Music video mash-ups similarly play on the dynamics of characters and premises, arguably more

centrally than on the stories.

    In other words, a critical theory focused on production might work best if instead of

questions of power, we consider questions of value. Anthropologist David Graeber argues that

we must move beyond the definition of value in terms of the economistic individual evaluating

objects' exchange value or use value, and beyond the overly holistic and static structure of a

society's "values," because neither is much help in developing social theory that accommodate

people's efforts to change society purposefully. Instead, Graeber encourages us "to look at

social systems as structures of creative action, and value, as how people measure the importance

of their own actions within such structures" (Graeber 2001: 230). I am interested in seeing what thinking in terms of characters and premises might do as a kind of "operating system" on which dispersed participants work in their particular areas of expertise. Few people within the process feel that they have a tremendous amount of "power," but they would likely concede that as a group they work towards common, or at least somewhat shared, notions of value. As one anime producer said to me in an August 2006 interview in which he discussed his enjoyment of script meetings, "You get hooked (*hamacchau*). You like the characters. They become like friends, and you want to spend time with them."

The Quest for Cool Japan

By zeroing in on some of the details of new projects, I also offer a contrast to some of the theorizing by commentators and policy-makers' in Japan who view anime's export as a leading edge of "cool Japan," which broadly defines the nation's efforts to manage and capitalize on the growth of the content industries (*kontentsu sangyô,* what elsewhere are known as entertainment industries, media industries, or cultural industries). A character-based analysis of collaborative creativity gives us a critical perspective on "cool Japan" discourses which aim to link the content industries with national identity. In 2002, just as Japan was returning to economic growth after a decade of recession, journalist Douglas McGray published an article in *Foreign Policy* magazine that drew attention to what he fatefully called "Japan's Gross National Cool" (McGray 2002). "Japan is reinventing superpower," he argues, through the export of cultural goods and styles that have become not only conspicuous proof of Japan's international relevance, but also a powerful commercial force (p. 47). McGray's knack for naming ("gross national cool" – how cool is that?) was matched by his timing. Entering the 21st century with China on the rise as the

world's leading manufacturing center, Japan's leaders were eager for a fresh approach to reinvigorate the economy. This helps explain why McGray's argument drew so much attention from such a wide range of policy-makers, businessmen, scholars and social commentators, who latched onto the idea that Japan's content industries could lift the nation from its economic doldrums. Such a strategy would take advantage of Japan's high tech, information society infrastructure, an underemployed populace of well-educated, pop culture savvy youth, and the promise of getting more international capital, both cultural and economic, from hip cultural properties. The global acclaim for director Miyazaki Hayao's films, such as *Princess Mononoke* (1999) and *Spirited Away* (2001) also provided policymakers with anime that portrays the beauty of Japanese culture. It helps that some of Japan's top bureaucrats, such as one-time Foreign Minister Asô Tarô (under Prime Minister Koizumi), are deeply devoted fans of manga and anime.   In this, some see cause for celebration, as when the president of a technical university called Digital Hollywood foresees Japan as a "cultural empire" (Sugiyama 2006), but others hear echoes of a worrisome cultural nativism (Iwabuchi 2002; Ôtsuka and Ôsawa 2005).

     The government views the content industries as promising in part because they think that Japan has not sufficiently exploited its cultural properties. In contrast to the oft-cited figure that 60% of all cartoon TV shows broadcast worldwide are made in Japan, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry also found that the income related to Japan's content industries as a percentage of GDP is relatively low (2%) compared to the US (5%) and compared to the world average (3%) (METI 2005: 6, data from 2001). In an effort to do more, the Office of the Prime Minister has formed a task force to encourage the development of Japan as a "nation founded on intellectual property" (Chiteki zaisan senryaku kaigi (Intellectual Property Policy Headquarters)

2002). How to analyze the sources of creativity and media dynamism, therefore, is more than an academic question.

Indeed, one reason for focusing on ideas of creativity, rather than economic success, is that the logic of popular culture economics is such that, in some ways, conspicuous visibility is more important than actual commodification. If an artist or company can develop a character that audiences desire, the possibilities for making money off that character can ramify in many directions and over a long period of time, sometimes taking hold years after the original production. Such potentiality is an odd feature of this popular culture world, one that has far-reaching implications, and which I would argue, constitute an important "influence" of anime and the ideas of cool Japan. It is not the packaged product as a bounded object that matters, as if an anime were an automobile or television set, but rather a more fluid, relational, object – a relative focus of attention and desire – which is valued.

Coping with elusiveness of popularity in media constitutes something different, I would argue, from what Fredric Jameson identified as the "cultural logic of late capitalism," with his emphasis on surface, the merging of high and low culture, and the rejection of master narratives of history (Jameson 1984). Rather, anime can be viewed as a battleground in the ideological fight for a "capitalist logic of cultural value." Capitalism itself is becoming an increasingly hybrid system, with variations based on national and regional differences (socialist/capitalist China comes to mind; so too do barter economies of the poor). We can also observe variations based on different realms of the economy, such as in the ways intellectual property-based businesses are working to embed their own logics in the uses of cultural materials (e.g., DVD region codes, copy-protection, digital rights management, etc.). What is at stake is a capitalist logic of cultural value that highlights some aspects of the making of anime while ignoring others.

Yet for policy-makers, the question of what constitutes success is too often measured in national terms, which blurs the more specific dynamics of anime production. Consider, for example, a pamphlet produced for the Japanese Embassy of the United Kingdom which praises the new image of "creative Japan":

> All over the world, people are focusing their attention on contemporary Japanese culture. From the 1990s onwards, in manga, anime, gaming, art, architecture, design, literature, food and fashion there was a burst of cultural energy among the population at large. This has now blossomed into contemporary Japanese popular culture whose influence is reverberating around the globe and continuing to fascinate many people, mostly the young generation. (www.creativejapan.net, accessed July 31, 2007)

This idea of a "burst of cultural energy" in the 1990s from "the population at large" gives too little consideration to the variety of hits, and of the evolving nature of the media worlds.

Dekoboko Friends: **characters, but no story**

Let's begin with an anime TV series called *Dekoboko Friends*, which stands out as an extreme example of how characters themselves, rather than the stories about them, can be the driving force of some shows. In April 2002, *Dekoboko Friends* began airing as interludes in the hugely popular morning show *Together with Mother* (*Okaasan to issho*), broadcast weekday mornings on the educational channel of NHK, Japan's public broadcasting network. NHK, which stands for *Nihon Hôsô Kaisha* (literally, Japan broadcast company) is funded by publicly assessed fees, and is connected to the Japanese government. NHK has been taking a more aggressive role in developing anime that is not only educational, but that can sell DVDs (e.g., the baseball-themed anime aimed at teens called *Major*) (Kubo 2005). NHK works closely with

major publishers like Shogakukan, and major studios, such as Sony's Aniplex, to create their anime, thus giving insight into the linkages between public broadcasting and commercial production.

In the case of *Dekoboko Friends,* the target audience is preschool and young elementary school-age children. The shorts are only 30-seconds long. They always begin with a red door set against a white background, and a musical phrase of the characters singing the words "Dekoboko Friends." Then, a "knock knock" and the door opens to have one of the show's characters come out and talk to the TV viewers. One of the unusual features of the series is that each episode hinges on the relationship between the character and the young viewer, rather than the interactions between the characters. As the creators explained to me, "Children never know what's going to come out of that door, and that's part of the fun of the show" (Interview, 8/06). The DVD releases include a function as well that randomizes the order in which episodes are shown, thereby reproducing the surprise factor.

In each episode, a character comes out and introduces him or herself, for example, a cactus-shaped boy who is so shy his needles fall out. Another character can throw holes on the ground, dive in and out of them, and then gather up the holes like dishes. Another can blow up his nose like a balloon. Another can play his teeth like a piano (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: Dekoboko Friends official website, dekobokofriends.jp, accessed 5/2/08.

They each face minor crises or adventures that are resolved by the end of the 30-second episode. For instance in one episode, a boy in a red shirt whose head is an egg comes out and says, "Hello. I'm Tamago Ôji" ["Prince Egg"]. When he looks down, he sees that he's wearing one yellow sock and one green sock. "Oh no," he says, "I came out wearing the wrong sock! I'm so embarrassed!" He grits his teeth, he seethes, steam rises from his head, and his egg cooks, suddenly cracking at the very top, then little egg shell pieces fall on the floor. This surprises the boy, but he's not hurt. Now, doubly embarrassed by his display of anger, he bows and says, "I'm sorry," and sweeps up the egg shell. Thus the episode ends.[ii]

The series was the brainchild of a two-person design team who call themselves m&k. After graduating from art colleges, Maruyama Momoko (m) and Kuwamoto Ryotarô (k) began working at Hakuhodo, the second largest advertising company in Japan. They worked on a

variety of ad campaigns, and scored a big success with their character Qoo, initially designed for Coca-Cola's ad campaigns in Japan, and since then incorporated into the company's global marketing strategy. If you haven't lived in Japan, it may be hard to appreciate how ubiquitous are the images of characters. They advertise everything. Cutesy characters often adorn business cards of serious companies and even government agencies. Sometimes they advertise services for which endearing characters might seem inappropriate. Once I received a flyer handed out on the street for a private detective firm that specialized in trailing wayward spouses suspected of having affairs. The flyer showed teddy-bear-like characters, one with a trench coat and binoculars spying on a teddy bear couple going into a love hotel. (I should clarify that m&k had nothing to do with this particular design.)   Such ubiquity of characters helps explain why character designers with a proven track record can be sought-after creators in their own right.

Characters, stories, and brands

Given that some characters can be little more than logos that identify corporate brands, does this mean that characters should be thought of as simply a variation on brands?   Although there are parallels, we should not ignore the differences. Sociologist Adam Arvidsson argues that brands are "an institutional embodiment of the logic of a new form of informational capital—much like the factory embodied the logic of industrial capital" (Arvidsson 2006: vii). Brands put to work the capacity of consumers "to produce a common social world through autonomous processes of communication and interaction" (Ibid.). Similarly, Celia Lury argues that brands constitute a "new media object" that organizes and promotes certain types of consumer and producer interactivity (Lury 2004). In this sense, characters and brands share some interesting features in highlighting the collaborative creativity between consumers and

producers. A full analysis of the commonalities and differences between characters and brands

is beyond the scope of this essay, but to begin to sketch some of the specificities, we can note

that brands speak back to corporate underpinnings, whereas characters tend to emerge from

particular premises and world-settings. For some, this is a question of the "story," such that the

premises and setting are something revealed (or left intentionally unspecified) through the

narrative itself.   Might it be that "the story" is what separates a character from a brand?

To put it another way, can characters be separated from their larger stories? According to

some experts, absolutely not. In 2008, manga artist and critic Ôtsuka Eiji published a manual

concerning "how to create characters" (Otsuka 2008). As a manga artist and teacher, he says he

is accustomed to meeting people who want to be manga artists (*mangaka*), but that recently he

noticed a marked increase in the number of young people who say their ambition is to become a

"character designer" (p. 14). True, he says, that is a job description today, and such

opportunities are likely to increase with the projected growth of the content industries of anime,

manga, and video games. Yet he expresses frustration at the limited way in which aspiring

artists often imagine their role as designers: "They spend a lot of time on the hair, the clothes,

and the outer appearance of characters in an effort to bring out their individual personalities

(*kosei*)" (p. 17). What they don't seem to grasp, he says, is that the visual "design" of outward

appearance is only one part of what is actually required to "make" (*tsukuru*) a character.

In contrast, he emphasizes that characters can never be separated from their story

(*monogatari*) (pp. 18-19). Otsuka Eiji acknowledges that there are exceptions. For example,

voice-generating software called Vocaloid, which makes anime-like songs in the voice of an

imaginary character called Hatsune Miku (lit. "first sound of the future"), inspired fans to

develop images, stories and videos around the synthetic voice. There is even a blog that tracks

the best fan-made music videos featuring this character (www.mikufan.com, accessed 5/21/08). Despite such counterexamples, Otsuka Eiji contends that popular characters almost develop because of their larger stories. In a similar vein, media studies professor Hamano Yasuki draws on a Hollywood adage to propose that there are three requirements for a hit: story, story, story (Hamano 2003: 52). I would underscore Otsuka Eiji's point that characters are more than their visual design, but I also think it is useful to make a distinction between characters and their stories because in the process of creating anime, the making of the characters often precedes whatever story or stories will be developed later.   This was clear from hearing about how m&k thought about their design task. It wasn't about a story, per se, but nor was it simply the visual design of the characters.

How did m&k create new characters?

How did m&k come up with the initial dozen characters of *Dekoboko Friends*? In July 2006, I had a chance to sit down with them at a Ceylon tea shop in Jimbocho, an area of Tokyo notable for the dozens of small bookstores crowded along narrow streets. According to Kuwamoto, they developed the characters by "auditioning" about 60 of them, that is, drawing up a wide range and selecting from them. "We avoided average characters, and aimed instead for those who were in some way unbalanced," he explained. Indeed, this is one meaning of the Japanese term *dekoboko*: uneven or rough.   The creators also didn't start with the visual image of the character, but instead thought in terms of a character's distinctive flavor (*mochiaji*) or special skill (*tokugi*). This reflects a distinction made by manga theorist Itô Gô between *kyarakutaa* (character) and *kyara* (the character's personality). Itô argues that "the personality (*kyara*) precedes the character itself, evoking the feeling of some kind of existence (*sonzaikan*)

or life force (*seimeikan*)" (Itô 2005: 94-95). When m&k selected characters from among the many they auditioned, they emphasized the extreme: one character is extremely shy, another extremely speedy, another is an elegant older woman who sings traditional sounding songs, another is so big he can't fit through the door. The life force of the characters is also conveyed through particular drawing practices as well. When I visited the small studio where the animator Akiho works, she showed me how she draws the characters using a brush-pen, explaining "When I copy over the lines to make the in-between frames, I can't perfectly match the pressure on the brush, even when I trace directly on top of a frame underneath." She does this on purpose so that the edges of the characters oscillate slightly to give them "a living feel" (*ikite ru*).

Significantly, in *Dekoboko*, the relationships between the characters are never a plot point. In fact, the characters never interact with each other. "We only think about the relationship between the character and the child watching the show," Kuwamoto explained. "Because we use such different characters, we hope to show how there are all kinds of ways to be in the world. There's nothing wrong with being very shy, or always in a hurry, and so on." In these ways, *Dekoboko Friends* illustrates how characters themselves, without stories around them and without relationships between them, can in themselves generate a dramatic series. The series became hugely popular, even to the point where it was aired in the US on Nick Jr. DVDs are available for sale from the publisher Shogakukan. Characters are something more than the logos of brands, but they also can exist in a space where the story, the narrative coherence, is left open. The success of *Dekoboko Friends* gave m&k the opportunity to design a slightly longer series. When I first met m&k in the summer of 2006, their second animated series, *Zenmai Zamurai*, had been on the air for three months and it was doing very well. This series was

somewhat more complicated, and it allows us to factor in the concepts of premises and world-settings in addition to characters in the making of anime.

The Making of *Zenmai Zamurai*

"It's kind of a secret," confided Kuwamoto, "but Zenmai was one of the Dekoboko characters that didn't make the cut." Zenmai's second chance came when NHK approached m&k to make a longer format series (albeit still only 5 minutes, including the opening closing credits). The series debuted in April 2006, and NHK and Aniplex were very pleased by the response. *Zenmai Zamurai* was a hit. The series began as a 5-minute-long short aimed at an audience of early elementary schoolchildren, and aired daily without commercials on NHK Educational (channel 3), once at 7:50 a.m. and repeating at 5:40 p.m. It follows the adventures a samurai boy with a wind-up turn-key (*zenmai*) on his head, hence his name and the name of the series "turn-key samurai" *Zenmai Zamurai*. I observed a series of meetings around *Zenmai Zamurai* (Dir. Yasumi) from June to September 2006. I also conducted interviews with the director, animation director, a writer, and a producer as well as observing voice recording and evaluation of licensed merchandise.

In explaining the design of Zenmai, Kuwamoto pointed out, obviously enough, that it is the wind-up key on Zenmai's head, in the place of a topknot, that makes him special. "What does that topknot symbolize?" he asked rhetorically, "That life is limited (*kagiri no aru jinsei*)."

Figure 2: Zenmai Zamurai character introduction from website www.zenmaizamurai.com (accessed 1/19/07). The character introduction reads: "He attacks wrong-doing like a snapping turtle. His feelings can be seen immediately in his turn-key. He likes Zukin-chan."

In the context of the TV series, the first episode "The Birth of Zenmai Zamurai" (*Zenmai Zamurai no tanjô*)[iii], explains the origin his odd topknot and establishes the dramatic premise. The episode unfolds like this. One day, while walking through town, Zenmai's sidekick Mamemaru, a child ninja-in-training, asks the samurai how he ended up with the *zenmai* on his head. Zenmai tells the tale. "Oh, that was over 200 years ago," he begins. As a boy, "probably junior high school age," according to the creators, Zenmai was spied stealing *dango* (rice dumplings), and during the chase that followed, he fell into a well. Suddenly, an enormous smiling god tells him, "You just died." Zenmai is understandably upset. All is not lost, however. The god, who speaks only in rap, offers Zenmai a second chance (not unlike the second chance the creators gave him), on one condition: Zenmai must promise to do good. Zenmai promises. The god takes one of the wind-up turn-keys on his belt and puts it on Zenmai's head. The god explains: You can live as long as the turn-key stays wound up. If you do something good, the turn-key winds up. If you do something bad [e.g., get angry or quarrel],

the key winds down." Kuwamoto later explained, "Children may not be overly concerned with the mortality of Zenmai, but it does add a kind of seriousness to the show" (Interview, 7/06).

Zenmai, an unusual kind of samurai character, gets an unusual prop as well: a "must-laugh rice-dumpling sword" (*hisshô dango ken*), that is, a sword with multi-colored rice dumplings on it (endlessly replenished). In the first episode, the god explains, "When a person eats one of these dango, they will experience a warm feeling of good fortune (*shiawase na kibun*)." Taken together, the turn-key, the sword, and the deal with the god constitute the premise (*settei*) of the series *Zenmai Zamurai*. In general each show involves Zenmai and his friends working to solve the day's challenge. His friends include the female love interest, Zukin-chan, who always wears a bandana because she's embarrassed by her afro hair; Zenmai's rival Namezaemon, who is overly obsessed with his wealth and his extra-long topknot; and others, such as a granny-aged proprietor of a rice dumpling shop who specializes in striking "sexy poses." Adventures ensue, each reaching resolution after four-and-a-half minutes.

World-setting: Clockwork Old Tokyo (*Karakuri Ôedo*)

In addition to the characters and the premise, however, m&k also thought long and hard about the "world-setting" (*sekaikan*) of the show, that is, the background or context of the series. In general, the world-setting can refer to the technical look-and-feel of the animation (e.g., hand-drawn or 3D computer graphics) as well as symbolic references to particular eras (e.g., an imaginary Edo era, 1600-1868, outside of history, not, for example, a futuristic space fantasy). In other words, the *sekaikan* defines the stage on which the drama of the characters and premise unfold. For m&k, they described this world-setting as *karakuri ôedo*, which might be translated as "clockwork old Tokyo." Kuwamoto explained, "What makes this world unique is that there is

no 'black box,' if you will." He added, "We live in a world where we've become used to the idea that we don't know how things work. Things like this," he said, pointing at the iPod I was using to record the interview. "We have no idea how the thing works, and we don't find it strange that if it broke, we would have no idea how to fix it." Kuwamoto lamented that we've become so accustomed to not knowing how things work, that we don't even find that discomforting.
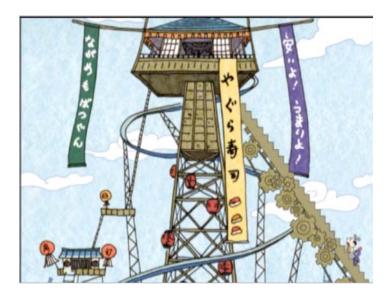

Figure 3: Zenmai and his sidekick Mamemaru visiting the rotary sushi bar

So in contrast, in the world of *Zenmai Zamurai*, there is no electricity; when something moves, you can see how things are mechanically connected.   In one episode, Zenmai and his ninja sidekick Mamemaru visit a rotating sushi bar at the top of a tower. The escalator on the way up shows the gears driving the steps. Inside, the customers rotate thanks to a giant windmill at the top of the building. A closer look at script meetings will allow us to explore in more detail how these building blocks—characters, premise, and world-setting—were put into motion to create the stories.

Script Meetings to Create the Stories

During the weekly script meetings, it was the combination of characters (Zenmai and friends), the premise (Zenmai must do something good, and he has a magic sword), and the world-setting (clockwork old Tokyo with no black box) that formed both the raw materials and the rules within which plots and scripts were evaluated. To spend time in meetings like this was a constant reminder of the collaborative process of media creation. It was here especially that questions of "power" seem less revealing than trying to analyze what people valued and why. Among the people in the room, the identity of the key players was obvious, but their roles were somewhat less so. A pointed "Um, I wonder..." could move the conversation in an entirely different direction, depending on who said it. What gave scripts their dramatic hold varied considerably depending on the case.

The script meetings included the five writers (four men, one woman), who would arrive together, usually bringing their tiny laptops. The writers never commented on each other's work, but rather waited silently until the director Yasumi chose their scripts to examine. Once a particular writer's work was done, he or she would leave immediately. Many of the writers were working on several projects, and often for several different studios at once. The writer Nishizono, for example, was working on *Zenmai*, a children's show, as well as the edgy, late-night spoof *Welcome to NHK* (*NHK ni yôkoso*) which was a send-up of *hikikomori* (youth shut-ins) and their love of erotic video games, among other themes. In an interview, Nishizono described his efforts to find the emotional core of characters, and the ways his thinking about scripts was happening all the time. "Sometimes, I get my best ideas in the bath" (Interview, 7/06).

A proposal of Nishizono's that received a lot of attention during the meetings I attended was "Zenmai's Big Slump," which centered around the idea that his "must-laugh sword" was no longer working. As opinions arose around the table, it was clear that people liked the idea. A woman producer at Aniplex liked that the story gets serious, even a little upsetting, but then resolved. Others, however, were worried about showing the main character having trouble. "What would be the reason for the slump? How would it resolve?" "Maybe it's because he has his shoes on the wrong foot?" Or, "Perhaps because he's wearing the wrong size underwear (*fundoshi*)?" The debates went on for several weeks as Nishizono developed the plot idea into several versions of scripts.

Although the particular combination of characters, premises, and world-settings that define *Zenmai Zamurai* were a constant theme in the discussions, that does not mean that there was a common formula for developing the episodes. Some plot ideas were moved forward simply because they included a clever pun. For example, one proposed plotline involved an extraterrestrial alien whose spaceship resembles a pot (*okama*). What the spaceman would do with Zenmai and his friends was uncertain, but quite a few people enjoyed the idea of the pun that would end the show: As the friends thanked the alien, he would say as he flew off, "*Okamai naku*" ("It was no problem") which has the double meaning of "The pot goes away" (*okama inaku*). Kuwamoto would often sketch as the discussion was going on, and here too he provided a sketch of the pot-shaped UFO that could be in the episode. Other times, some visual gag seemed to provide the forward momentum for a concept as long as it fit with the world-setting. For example, one episode revolved around the idea of "butt-sumo" where the massive sumo wrestlers would force each other out of the ring by banging their huge bottoms together. During the summer of 2006, Japan was swept with World Cup fever, and one writer proposed an episode

with a soccer match. In the end, however, the idea was rejected because a soccer game was deemed ill-suited to the world-setting of clockwork Old Tokyo. The conclusion was that there should be some different kind of game that related better to the world-setting. In sum, we can see in *Zenmai Zamurai* some of the touchstones for anime creativity. They depend less on a well-formed story than an array of characters and a premise that gives the characters some dramatic tension. The world-setting (*sekaikan*) fills out the vision of the artists by providing the frame which the story unfolds.

Emergence and Character Goods Businesses

After the script meetings, the companies that were making *Zenmai Zamurai* licensed merchandise would bring their boxes of goods – board books, dolls of all sizes, little pachinko games, puzzles, lunch boxes, food plates, and on and on. The goods would circle the table, with m&k checking the drawing of the characters, and, to some extent, the design of the goods. The problems that arose mostly concerned the likenesses of the reproduced characters. When I asked them how they, as the creators, felt about the weekly avalanche of licensed goods, the woman Maruyama Momoko (the "m" of m&k) remarked on her mixed feelings. On one hand, she was happy that the many companies' interest in making merchandise was evidence of their appreciation of their characters, but she also worried that not all the goods accurately reflected the atmosphere of the world they had created. "The goods that seem to be of Clockwork Old Tokyo, that's fine, but a lot of the things are completely unrelated" (Interview, 8/06). Even in the character goods business the tension remains, at least to some extent, in reproducing not only the visual design, but also the larger worlds in which characters come to life.

The concept of "emergence" can help elucidate the connections between creators, businesses, technologies and fans which are all part of the story of anime's success. I borrow the term from the work of anthropologist Michael M. J. Fischer, though others are experimenting with similar ideas. Fischer reminds us that culture is not a "thing," nor an unchanging pattern of norms and values, but rather "a methodological concept or tool of inquiry" that has been refined over the years to "allow new realities to be seen and engaged as its own parameters are changed" (Fischer 2007: 3). New metaphors are needed for confronting cultural realities that are no longer bounded by national borders, and yet which remain in dialogue with enduring national ideologies. Fischer points to the usefulness of analogies drawn from new technosciences, especially life and information sciences, which can help us think of cultural and social patterns as "emergent out of mutations, assemblages, viral transivity, rhizomic growth, wetwares and softwares, disciplinary discourses transmuting into even more pervasive and infrastructurally embedded codes and flows" (Ibid: 31). New information technology and media environments can be viewed as "culturing new connectivities" after the way biologists learn "to culture tissue, to grow immortal cell lines, use recombinant DNA techniques . . . to 'write with biology' rather than discover, creating tools, molecules and tissues that did not previously exist in 'nature'" (Ibid: 32).

For me, this notion of emergence offers a more productive analytical direction than what Scott Lash and Celia Lury (Lash and Lury 2007) describe as the "thingification of media," by which they draw attention to the ways a brand logos, like the Nike swoosh, are increasingly becoming embedded in larger, encompassing media environments, such as the spectacular shopping complexes of a Niketown. In this they see a transformation of media from the realm of "representation" to that of the "real," which shares some affinity with my emphasis not on

"reading the stories" of anime but rather examining production through collaborative creativity. What I'm trying to suggest in this essay, however, is that the logic of that realization in anime can be specified in a more nuanced way by attending to the logic of characters. So far, I've introduced some of the ethnographic details of script meetings to show how characters, premises, and world-settings help define the processes of anime production. This combines the intentionality of Graeber's call to attend to "value" and also Fischer's emphasis on connectivities that produce particular kinds of emergence.

Characters and premises can also help us understand what connects anime to a wider universe of merchandising. From a business perspective, the market for licensed merchandise based on fictional characters is ten times that of anime itself (DCAJ and METI 2005). This is one reason to consider that what the anime industry ultimately produces is not so much TV series and films, but rather, more importantly, fictional characters and dramatic premises that can be parlayed across diverse media. Why hasn't Japan been able to produce big hits in the anime character business in the years after *Pokemon* and *Yu-Gi-Oh*? This is the question posed by Kubo Masakazu, a producer at the publisher Shogakukan who helped promote the global Pokemon phenomenon, managing the franchise's transition from video game to television, film, and more. He now heads the Character Business Center for the Japanese publisher Shogakukan. In a 2005 study he wrote for the *Digital Contents White Book* (2005), he addresses a number of the issues facing anime as the flagship content for "cool Japan." He notes that while there are many business chances, few recent anime series have much longevity. In April 2005, there were 72 weekly anime TV series, of which, 60 were shown on the main TV stations, 6 on local TV stations, and 6 on cable or satellite channels (Kubo 2005). He notes with concern that there was a high turnover in series, with 37.5% (27 series) being new, and only 3 series crossed over the

two-year threshold (p. 13).   This tendency towards rapid turnover tends to weaken the companies that help support the anime business, including licensed merchandisers who make toys, video games, clothing, stationary, as well as the package media business of DVD and video. Kubo describes the dangerous death spiral that can occur if licensees invest in new productions only to see them cancel quickly, and find themselves with overstocked merchandise of largely unknown and uncared-for characters. In contrast, Kubo also points to the virtuous cycle of anime characters that continue for two or three years, allowing companies to manage the supply of goods, spend time developing quality goods, and generally control the market (p. 22). "To prevent the worst-case scenario, there is no other policy solution than creating long-lasting characters" (*iki no nagai kyarakutaa*) (p. 22). As examples of Japanese-made anime (*nihonsei anime*) that have achieved this big hit status, Kubo lists *Sailor Moon*, *Dragon Ball, Doraemon, Pokemon, Yu-Gi-Oh* and *Ham Tarô* (p. 22).

Yet the connection between the world-settings of anime and contemporary worlds in which we live are necessarily connected, through language, imagery, symbolism to larger cultural worlds, and not simply to the requirements of merchandising. Media scholar Keith Negus (Negus 2006) draws attention to the dangers of assuming that the locus of creativity in media worlds can be reduced to what happens within the confines of the content industries. He urges us to acknowledge that the dynamics of creative production do not take place "simply within an industrial context structured according requirements of capitalist production or organisational formulas, but in relation to broader culture formations, economic practices, and social divisions" (Negus 2006). Negus wants to draw attention to the broader contexts in which creators struggle, not only with the demands of their companies, but in their desire to shape their own lives and the society around them. Two more brief examples of samurai anime provide an

opportunity to begin considering some of these connections from the perspective of characters and premises, in particular to emphasize that premises articulate with broader cultural formations, some of which can be global styles, such as hip-hop, others of which can arise from cult-level circulation of specialty goods, such as figurines.

Transnational Premises for Characters: *Samurai Champloo* and *Afro Samurai*

Consider, for example, the premise of the TV series *Samurai Champloo* (2004, Dir. Watanabe) which rethinks samurai using hip-hop music. Rather than using hip-hop music primarily as a background element, the director chose to use hip-hop as a way of thinking about cultural production. In March 2005, just before a party to celebrate the airing of the final episode of *Samurai Champloo* on Japanese TV, I had a chance to sit down with the director Watanabe Shinichiro in a Shinjuku coffee shop near the historic Koma Theater. Watanabe said this about what inspired him about hip-hop.

> First of all, sampling. In pop music these days there's a lot of sampling of phrases from old jazz and soul records, placing the needle just in the right spot, using cut and paste, and mixing them with a beat of today. In that way, they create a new kind of music. I wanted to make a period piece using samurai, which is a style that's been around in Japan a long time with a lot of classics. I wanted to use these classics, not to copy them, but to sample them. (Interview, 3/05)

The creativity of hip-hop DJs is one of using samples, adding a beat, moving the crowd. In a way analogous to thinking of anime creativity in terms of characters, premises and world-settings, hip-hop creativity (at least in the DJ/music producer realm of hip-hop) involves sampling and remixing. This cut-n-mix style is used in the opening episode of *Samurai*

Champloo to introduce the characters and the premise of the show. With the scritch-scratch sound of DJ's turntable, the series moves back and forth between the three main characters, namely, two masterless samurai and a tea shop girl. Intriguingly, sampling as creative practice is expanding across other media forms as well, arguably driven in part by digital technologies, but clearly also part of a widening recognition of the creativity of remixing. Anime music videos, which are fan-made music videos that are composed by editing clips of favorite anime to create an MTV-like montages to accompany a single pop song, are now a staple, and a big draw, at anime fan conventions.[iv]

Watanabe's work reminds us that defining the premise of a series can include connections beyond the Edo era world-setting itself. Although the overall story is vaguely defined as a "search for the samurai who smells of sunflowers," and the themes draw from samurai period piece stock characters—evil toll guards, lords with a penchant for guns, molls in the pleasure quarters—the premise is also connected to things outside the world of the series. According to the director, hip-hop provided another key concept underlying the premise for *Samurai Champloo* in addition to sampling.

> There's also the idea of "represent" (*repurizento*), you know, writing it in katakana [the Japanese syllabary for foreign words]. Many Japanese people nowadays aim to be inconspicuous. By far most people tend to hide themselves in the group, and people say this is the Japanese style. But in the old days, it wasn't like that. In the samurai era, people would use their one sword, and represent (*repurizento suru*). It seems to me that was similar to today's hip-hop style. (Interview, 3/05)

The "mook" ("movie book") about the series describes the concept of "represent" in terms of characters: "people who have a strong sense of themselves and who can't be confused with

anyone else" (Kato and Furukawa 2005). Of the two samurai, Jin is the honorable, straight-ahead swordsman, but one who is running from a murky past with his old master and school, while Mugen is the wild and rambunctious swordsman from the Ryukyu Islands (present-day Okinawa). Fû is the 15-year-old girl with the strength of character to keep the group on their quest. Each character is meant to stand out as a particular kind of personality.

The use of the Edo era in *Zenmai Zamurai* provided a way of thinking about technology—"no black box"—and this is theme that we can observe in other reworkings of samurai-related anime, such as *Samurai 7*, which adapts Kurosawa Akira's film *Seven Samurai*, by introducing giant fighting robots, or *Oh Edo Rocket*, which imagines an crash-landed alien who enlists a fireworks-maker to build her a rocket (at a time long before space travel). Premises then can have this characteristic of moving across eras, technologies, and social settings to reformulate not only the worlds of anime, but also to speak back to contemporary concerns. *Samurai Champloo* includes references to hip-hop, but also baseball, Impressionist painting, Andy Warhol, and graffiti art. *Samurai Champloo* is remixed samurai, and as such, it opens up possibilities for thinking through complex cultural relationships that are not easily contained in a singular, unchanging notion of cool Japan.
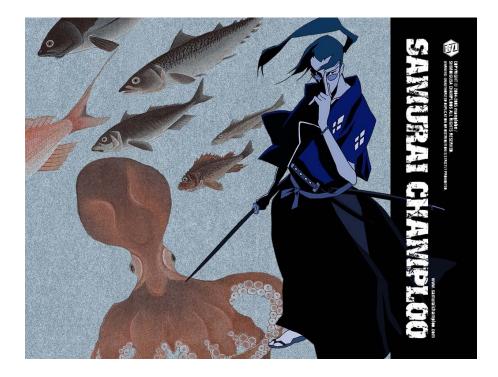
Figure 4: Desktop of character Jin and opening sequence images recalling Edo era art.

What we can see in Watanabe's work, then, is an emphasis not on "Japanese culture" as a thing

separate from "foreign culture." Rather, he uses hip-hop as a tool for rethinking creativity,

specifically, sampling and "represent" as touchstones through which to imagine characters,

premises and world-settings.

The unusual story of the birth of the TV mini-series *Afro Samurai* (2007, Dir. Kizaki)

illustrates another way in which the idea of a character can launch a project. Eric Calderon, vice

president of creative affairs for GDH International, the parent company of the anime studio

Gonzo, says he was hired to develop "fusion Japanese animation, which is Japanese animation

that is made in collaboration with western talent or western companies in order to make

something that is more marketable for the world rather than just the Japanese market" (Epstein

2007a). Calderon says he first became aware of Afro Samurai when he saw, on a colleague's

desk at Gonzo, a limited edition toy ("maybe three or four thousand made"), that was a figurine

of the character Afro Samurai. He was told that the toy was inspired by a limited edition comic, a fanzine (*dôjinshi*) called *Nou Nou Hau*. The comic was originally only six pages long. After months of negotiations with the manga creator Okazaki Takashi, Calderon got the green light to develop a pilot animated film that was a few minutes long. Once completed, he made copies and shopped them around Hollywood, until, reportedly, Samuel L. Jackson saw Gonzo's pilot film and declared, "You tell them, I'm Afro Samurai." SpikeTV, a US cable channel aimed at men (e.g., heavy coverage of Ultimate Fighting), began airing the show in January 2007. At least, this was the way Calderon, the producer, told the story later.

According to Okazaki Takashi, the creator of the original manga, his inspiration goes back to his longtime love of music. "I've been hooked on African-American music like hip-hop and soul since I was a teenager and that's when I started doodling African-American cartoon characters on things like Kleenex boxes. Then I threw in elements of samurai which had also been my fascination and eventually the character of Afro Samurai was created" (Epstein 2007b). Okazaki especially cites Kurosawa Akira films, as well as *Zatoichi* and *Lone Wolf and Cub* as inspirations (Ibid.).

Figure 5: Afro Samurai character

What makes the example of *Afro Samurai* interesting is that it shows how the glimmer of a character can be enough to get a project going. Okazaki made a small, cult-level comic, which was picked up a cult-level figurine maker, which wound up on a desk of a worker at an anime studio, which caught the eye of a producer looking for new ideas. According to the producer's telling of the process, it was the image of a character "Afro Samurai" that provided the spark.

Conclusion

The emphasis on characters, premises, and world-settings as opposed to stories is not unique to anime, and in fact, it may be possible to imagine a palette of conceptual tools that that differ in value and importance depending on the media form. I should clarify that I'm not setting up a binary opposition, say between characters and story, as if an emphasis on characters thereby reduces the importance of a story. Rather, it seems to me that media forms can be described and analyzed based on the centrality of different elements like character, premise, world-setting, and story, depending on the media form. More elements would likely need to be added on a case-by-case basis, for example in considering the variety of ways in which "interactivity" in video games operates (between player and world, between player and player, team dynamics, etc. etc.). How might such an analysis proceed, and what new questions does it open up?

Arguably, feature films in the Hollywood style tend to emphasize the story, with all the attendant curiosity and critical reflection on "how the story ends." In contrast, TV situation comedies tend to emphasize the fluctuating relationships between the characters and with the worlds they inhabit, as in the way the series *Seinfeld* was famously "about nothing." Soap operas with their long-running and complex plots perhaps lie somewhere in the middle. Video games vary in terms of how empty characters might be, such as classes of warriors in World of Warcraft

compared to a character in a video game related to some externally driven, ongoing story, as in the video game versions of the *Matrix* franchise. If one is a Night Elf in World of Warcraft, the personality (or *kyara*) of the character is constructed by the way the player plays and the objects and skills gained as a player "levels up." In a video game based on a film or other external narrative, such as the *Matrix* video game, some characters come with a personality already depicted and developed elsewhere.

An ethnographic approach to the making of Japanese animation provides an useful means of exploring contemporary intersections of culture and the global economy because it draws attention to some of the ways that ideas of cultural difference can disguise the workings of contemporary media capitalism. Although the notion of "cool Japan" as an engine of economic growth has become popular among many scholars, businessmen, and policymakers, it must be debunked to capture more accurately the dynamics of anime production. Edward Said showed how Orientalism, in the ways it represented its objects, also constituted a form of domination. To define "the Orient" in certain ways was also a means to power over people's and regions. One could argue in a similar vein that elisions in the ways we represent the cultures of anime disguise some of the creative capitalist currents underlying today's media flows. Critics of the "cool Japan" discourse note that government officials and business leaders who highlight desirable Japanese values in selected animated works engage in a kind of "brand nationalism" that not only disguises features of anime borrowed from the West, and also tend to ignore the day-to-day challenges faced by creators (Iwabuchi 2002; Ôtsuka and Ôsawa 2005). Significantly, both the assertions of the power of "cool Japan" and the critiques thereof tend to make loose connections between the cultural and the economic. The most common symptom of this involves various assertions of "cultural resonance," for example, in the way that the Japanese

specificities of anime (or, paradoxically, consonances with the West) are seen as a leading determinant of success. At the same time, they tend to begin with an idea that the narrative structure, or story, of particular anime is the source of this resonance. This imprecise view of cultural production is problematic for understanding several important features of emergent cultural economies, of which anime is an intriguing example.

As an alternative, I have tried to show how anime creators design new projects not in terms of the stories they tell, but rather in terms of the distinctiveness of the characters, premises, and world-settings that are then used to spin off stories. In this essay, I have focused primarily on the anime shows themselves, rather than the ancillary businesses, such as licensed goods, or the extensive and various fan activities, which extend anime worlds in diverse directions. Nevertheless, I hope it is possible to see how the character-premise principle encourages these extensions by not limiting anime worlds to one particular story. Part of the value of widely popular anime series arises precisely from the flexibility in adapting characters and premises across a wide range of media platforms.

By touching on three examples of samurai anime, I also wanted to emphasize that the idea that samurai ultimately stand for Japan is too simple a formulation, just as the idea that anime arises from some generalized national culture of Japan. What adds more nuance to our understanding of anime's successes is a clearer picture of how creators view their projects, and how they assemble them through the activities of large groups of people. In the examples discussed above, the collaborative creativity of anime arises from a foundation of characters, premises, and world-settings. This may not explain all anime production, but it does provide a different starting point that more accurately reflects the day-to-day concerns of creators.

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i The Japanese word *sekaikan* is usually translated as "worldview," but in the case of anime production, the term more often evokes the idea of a particular context or background setting, such as "space colony in the near future" or "samurai-era Japan." Because "worldview" tends to imply "how one looks out at the world," that is, a subjective orientation, I propose using the term "world-setting" to specify the usage of *sekaikan* in anime studios.

ii This episode appears as chapter 29 on the DVD *Dekoboko Friends: "Shippo no Pû" Hoka Zen 48-wa* (Shogakukan, 2004, PCBE-51041).

iii This episode is available (in Japanese only) on the DVD *Zenmai Zamurai: Zenmai Zamurai Tanjô* (2006, Aniplex, ANSB 2321).

iv AMV competitions draw huge crowds, and are now divided into a range of genres. While they are still widely regarded as illegal uses of copyrighted material (even among the fans who make them and the fans who watch them), the expansion of competitions, and the high status of the winners, makes it clear that the creativity of sampling is becoming increasingly widespread. For some examples, see http://www.animemusicvideos.org