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Author(s)	Yamamura, Takayoshi
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Cooperation Between Anime Producers and the Japan Self-Defense Force: Creating Fantasy and/or Propaganda?

Takayoshi Yamamura

Center for Advanced Tourism Studies, Hokkaido University, Japan

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Abstract

This paper presents examples of collaboration between anime producers and the Japan Self-Defense Force. By situating the transitions within the context of the broader trends in collaboration between anime producers and locations (namely, the development of contents tourism), the key turning point in anime producer — JSDF collaboration is identified and explained. Then, the reasons why in recent years JSDF has been actively collaborating with the production of pop culture contents in the realms of fantasy and fiction with an anime fanbase will be discussed. What is happening in Japan today is a fantasization (= contentsization) and consumption of the military, rather than a ‘drift to the right’ or resurgence of militarism. The pressures to produce military or ‘moe military’ anime are driven by the market rather than the military.

Keywords: anime, Japan Self-Defense Force, contents tourism, fantasization, moe military, anime pilgrimage, pop culture

Introduction

In Japan during the postwar era there have been many films made with the collaboration of the Defense Agency (to 2007) or Ministry of Defense (since 2007) and the three branches of the Japan Self-Defense Force (JSDF): the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF), Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF), and Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF). Sudo (2012, 2013) calls these films ‘Japan Self-Defense Force collaboration films’ and presents a detailed history in the only research of its kind taking a systematic look at this topic. However, the depiction of JSDF in films is often discussed in the field of media studies regarding war memories or representations of war in films, including anime works (for example, Tam et al. 2014). These studies clarify how war memories affect the depiction of JSDF or contemporary Japanese society, and why or how Japanese media use motifs of war.

Sabine Frühstück has analysed public relations using cartoons or JSDF recruitment posters with a focus on media images and narratives. She notes:

[the] trend of an increasingly intimate relationship between the Self-Defense Forces and popular culture certainly constitutes a form of militarization, but it is a militarization that already has internalized the multifaceted character of the military as a group capable of caring, rescuing, and building, in addition to the much more remote possibility of one that would fight the war. (Frühstück, 2007: 148)

Sudo’s research, therefore, is the only work examining directly the collaboration model between film-producers and JSDF, and its background. However, Sudo only discusses theatrical film (Sudo, 2013: 10) and mostly analyses live-action and special effect adaptations. To date there have been no academic studies concerning the Japan Self-Defense Force’s collaboration with video works outside of theatrical film, such as anime TV shows and original video animation (OVA).

Against this backdrop, JSDF’s collaboration with anime has had a mixed reception in recent years within Japan. There was more demand for production realism in anime beginning from around the 1980s, and JSDF started appearing in fighting scenes in many manga and animation works (anime TV shows, OVA, theatrical animation) (Fujitsu, 2010: 19). In live-action cinema, JSDF has

collaborated with both fantasy stories — for example, *Sengoku Jieitai 1549* [Samurai Commando: Mission 1549] (2005), a time slip story in which JSDF units travel back to the Warring States Period, or *Gojira tai Biorante* [Godzilla vs. Biollante] (1989) — and stories based on historical events — for example, *Rengōkantai shireichōkan Yamamoto Isoroku* [Isoroku] (2011) about the architect of the Pearl Harbor attack, Yamamoto Isoroku. The main reason why live-action and special effects films need JSDF's collaboration is to film realistic and gripping screen images often using real tanks, battleships, battleplans and SDF personnel (Sudo, 2012: 48). However, what is remarkable is that some anime producers started collaborating with JSDF from around the 1980s to develop realistic settings and anime images, even though they did not need live-action photography.

In recent years there has been an increase in JSDF's collaboration with anime producers, including joint production and using anime illustrations on recruitment posters. There has also been a sudden increase in 'contents tourism' or 'anime pilgrimage' by fans who travel to film locations and related sites or events. As a result, JSDF has come into increasing contact with anime fans.

'Tourism imaginary' is an essential concept related to contents and contents tourism. The term 'tourism imaginary' is defined by Athinodoros Chronis as a 'value-laden, emotion-conferring collective narrative construction that is associated with and enacted in a particular place through tourism' (Chronis, 2012: 1809). The contents as creative elements stimulate people's imaginations. Watching works and then engaging in contents tourism is a sign that the works have stimulated imagination and interest in the objects and places depicted in the works. Contents tourists start from the fantasy, but eventually develop their interest by connecting their imagination to reality and real places.

Military imaginaries are particularly sensitive in postwar Japan. Given Article 9 of Japan's pacifist constitution, which states 'land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained', the very existence of JSDF itself has been a controversial subject (for example, Kasuya, 1985; Inoue, 2015), although JSDF is also viewed with respect by many Japanese people, particularly for its disaster relief role in the wake of the 11 March 2011 earthquake and tsunami. Judging by the growing discussions in Japan regarding anime works and related events as seen by the author in scholarly, media and online sources, tourism imaginaries created by JSDF-related contents and JSDF — anime collaborations have also become focal points of debate. Strong arguments are made both for and

against collaboration, and from pro- and anti-military standpoints. One example (discussed in detail below) was in 2013, when a JSDF tank was exhibited in Ōarai town (about 130 kilometres northeast of Tokyo) at the local festival during an event related to the anime *Gāruzu & Pantsā* [Girls und Panzer] (2012), which was set in the town. There was vigorous online discussion among anime fans, citizens and politicians concerning the pros and cons of exhibiting weapons in this way.

These discussions take place not only among anime fans, but also in mainstream media and among citizens' groups involved in military issues. For example, an article in the popular weekly magazine *Sunday Mainichi* about Japan Self-Defense Force collaboration anime expressed alarm over JSDF's pop culture media strategy. It interpreted cases of collaboration with anime producers in a critical manner as 'the second coming' of a propaganda strategy using pop culture that the Imperial Japanese Army and mass media had used before and during the war (Takeda, 2015). As Kushner describes, the Imperial Japanese Army used popular entertainment and tourism as means of propaganda before and during the war years (Kushner, 2006: 38–48, 96–116). The critical opinions against Japan Self-Defense Force collaboration anime and related anime pilgrimage, therefore, are warnings based on the hypothesis that the same thing is happening now as happened before and during the war. A further issue of controversy is the depiction of women in military-themed anime, which is the subject of Sugawa-Shimada (2018). *Bishōjo anime* is a genre featuring beautiful young girls (*bishōjo*), often in sexualized ways. The use of such images is disliked by many people, even before they became linked to the highly masculinized world of the military in anime, JSDF recruiting materials, and military-related tourism promotion.

The issue of Japan Self-Defense Force collaboration anime, therefore, encompasses overlapping debates relating to the constitution, postwar attitudes towards war and the military, gender issues, civilian — military relations, and contents tourism or anime pilgrimage. In this context, media reportage has largely given ideological readings of the collaboration between anime producers and JSDF. However, this article identifies that the anime producers' and creators' intentions have more commonly been technical, namely to collect information and imagery that enables locations and military subjects to be drawn realistically. This is rarely touched upon and discussion frequently slips towards polemical interpretations of JSDF's public-relations strategies. Moreover, as several studies have argued, JSDF does not have a 'clear media strategy' (Sudo, 2012: 78) in its collaborations with

contents industries and the media strategy of JSDF is ‘much more immature than those of other countries or prewar Japan’ (Tsujita, 2015: 209).

The two main aims of this article, therefore, are as follows. First, examples will be presented of collaboration between anime producers and JSDF. This has been increasing in recent years and is often covered by the media. However, by situating the transitions within the context of the broader trends in collaboration between anime producers and *locations* (namely, the development of contents tourism), the key turning point in anime producer — JSDF collaboration can be identified and explained. Second, the reasons why in recent years JSDF has been actively collaborating with the production of pop culture contents in the realms of fantasy and fiction with an anime fanbase will be discussed.

History of anime tourism and collaboration between anime producers and JSDF

There have been many instances of official collaboration between the Ministry of Defense or JSDF and productions of live-action theatrical films from the 1960s (Sudo, 2012, 2013). Collaboration ensures realism, particularly in battle scenes. Practices in live-action cinema, namely identifying shooting locations through location scouting and then working in collaboration with communities or organizations like JSDF, have transferred over into the world of anime. By around 2011 the realistic depiction of actual locations in anime had led to active anime contents tourism among fans, which established the collaboration model between anime and communities (Yamamura, 2015). As part of this broader trend, anime producers increased their information collection from and collaboration with JSDF as part of their increased interest in realistic expression. Since the 1980s there has been an increase in anime TV shows and OVA featuring JSDF. However, it was not until the year 2000 that JSDF began publicly collaborating with the production of anime, and JSDF began actively collaborating with televised anime from around 2003 to 2004.

As summarized in the appendix Table A1, JSDF official collaboration with anime production coincides with the prosperity of collaboration between anime and regional communities, which is a characteristic of contents tourism (Yamamura, 2014: 28). Battle scenes in animation works prior to the 1980s, such as in *Uchū Senkan Yamato* [Space Battleship Yamato] (1974) and *Kidō Senshi*

Gandamu [Mobile Suit Gundam] (1979), take place in fictional or fantasy worlds separated from reality. However, from around 1995 to 2007 the appearance of the *sekai-kei* (world-style, le Réel — l'imaginaire style, e.g. *Shinseiki Evangelion* [Neon Genesis EVANGELION], 1995) and *nichijō-kei* (everyday life, e.g. *Raki Suta* [Lucky Star], 2007) anime reflected an increased interest among production companies and fans in the detail and realism of background images, settings and filming locations. From around 2005, the rapid development of digital and information technology made highly realistic animation possible. This led to the appearance of many realistic fantasy works, which drew an ambiguous line between fiction and reality. For example, *Uchū Senkan Yamato 2199* [STAR BLAZERS 2199] (2012), a remake of *Space Battleship Yamato* (1974), focused on making ambiguous aspects of the 1974 series more realistic. The producers worked with the public relations office for the Maritime Staff Office (part of MSDF), which was listed as a technical consultant in the closing credits, and the speech and pronunciation used by the characters was based on MSDF vernacular (Yomiuri Shinbun, 2012).

Many of these developments were driven by a number of key actors working within the animation industry. A number of the main JSDF collaborative anime works, such as *Sutoratosu Fō* [Stratos 4] (2003), *Takutikaru Roa* [Tactical Roar] (2006), and *Girls und Panzer* (2012), were produced by Sugiyama Kiyoshi. He conducted extensive research about JSDF as an anime producer and is considered the industry expert regarding collaboration between anime and JSDF.

The shifting image of JSDF and an emerging collaboration model

The discussion thus far has focused largely on the production side. On the consumption side, there are two further factors behind the increase in collaboration between anime producers and JSDF: improving public impressions of JSDF, and the emergence of a collaboration model between JSDF and contents producers.

First, according to surveys conducted by the Office of Governmental and Public Affairs, the number of people with a positive impression of JSDF has increased since the 1990s (Figure 1). The rescue work following the Great Kobe Earthquake in 1995 and the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, in particular, helped improve JSDF's reputation (Ministry of Defense, 2012). The proportion of people with a

positive impression of JSDF also increased after 2005. That year, the Dokdo/Takeshima territorial dispute between Japan and South Korea made the news with the establishment of Takeshima Day by the Shimane prefectural assembly; meanwhile in China there were major anti-Japanese protests largely in response to Prime Minister Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni Shrine.¹ These stories raised people's awareness of the necessity of JSDF and generated positive attention, which is probably also a cause of JSDF's increasing collaboration with anime series. Sudo (2012: 80–81) argues that such trends reflect increasing militarism in Japan based on her analysis of collaboration between theatrical movie producers and JSDF.

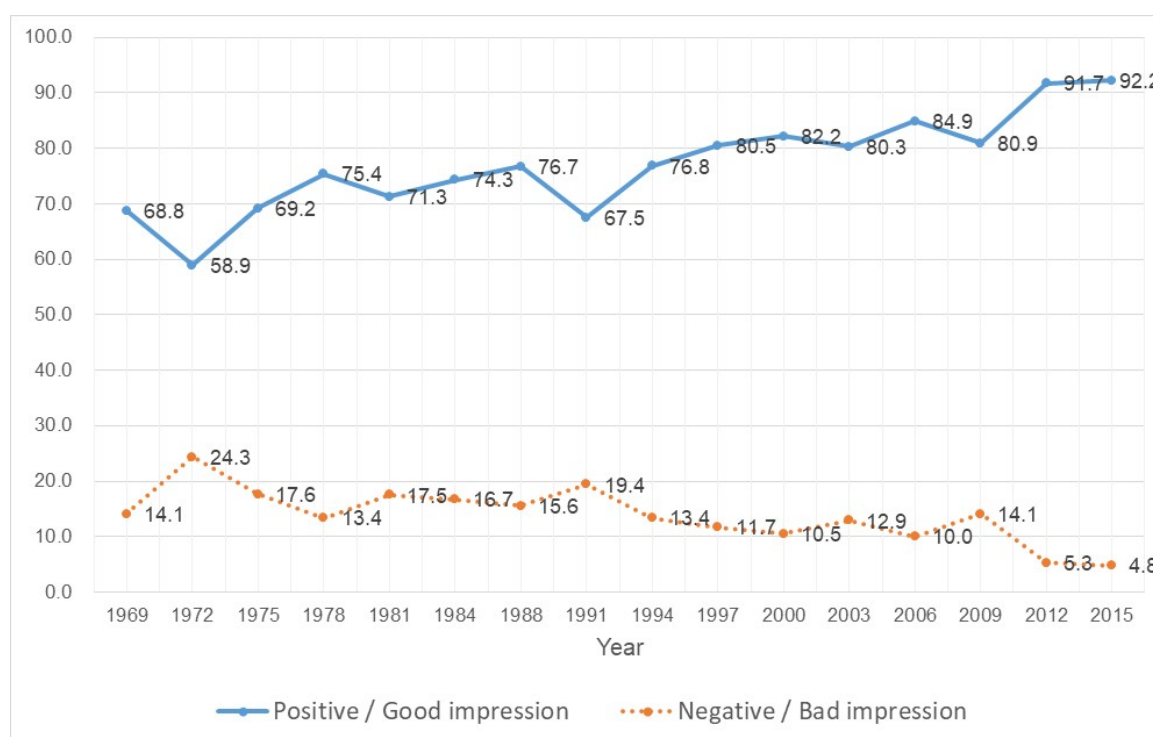


Figure 1: Japanese people's impression of the JSDF, 1969–2016.

Source: Compiled by the author based on Public Relations Department of the Cabinet Office (2015: Fig.7).

¹ Yasukuni Shrine is a Shinto shrine in Tokyo founded by Emperor Meiji in 1869 to commemorate those who sacrificed their lives for the construction of a modern Japan. It honors approximately 2.5 million people who died in wars from the mid-nineteenth century to 1945, including soldiers and those attached to the military, such as nurses. China and Korea oppose the visits of Japanese ministers to Yasukuni because executed Class A war criminals convicted at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East are also enshrined there.

Second, a collaboration model between JSDF and contents producers, including of anime and manga, has emerged which surpasses the bounds of JSDF acting merely as a technical consultant. The turning point was in 2004, when JSDF provided humanitarian assistance in Samawah, Iraq, and character stickers from the manga *Kyaputen Tsubasa* [Captain Tsubasa] that were posted on twenty-six water wagons became popular with local children (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2004; Yomiuri Shinbun, 2006). This news was widely reported as an example of the positive possibilities for Japan's pop culture in cultural diplomacy and regional promotion, which gained attention following the publication of Douglas McGray's influential article 'Japan's Gross National Cool' (2002). This collaboration at the level of image sharing and enhancement was different from simple cooperation with JSDF as a technical consultant, which was the norm up until that point, and was revolutionary for displaying JSDF's cooperation with manga and anime producers. Since then, their cooperation with anime has continued to increase.

A key example of JSDF's cooperation with anime that connects to contents tourism is the anime *Girls und Panzer* (2012). This work is about high school girls who compete in the championships of the martial art of armoured tank combat called 'sensha-dō'. The anime is set in the town of Ōarai in Ibaraki prefecture. The production staff conducted detailed information gathering with the help of the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF), including actually riding in a tank at the JGSDF Ordnance School (Sugiyama, 2014: 32–35).

The show became a hit and Ōarai saw a sudden increase in tourism as fans visited the town. The community asked JSDF's Ibaraki Provincial Cooperation Office for help in connection with the show and through the cooperation of JGSDF Camp Tsuchiura was able to exhibit a Type 74 Main Battle Tank at the Kairaku Festa 2013, a community event organized by the Youth League of the Regional Chamber of Commerce and Industry held on 24 March 2013. The event became big news. The Umi Biraki Carnival (organized by the Ōarai Umi no Gekkan committee), which took place from 13 to 15 July the same year, also exhibited tanks at the region's request (*Girls und Panzer* official blog 2013). According to the Commerce, Industry and Sightseeing Section at Ōarai town hall, the Kairaku Festa attracted 50 000 people, which was a 250 per cent increase compared to the previous year, and the Umi Biraki Carnival attracted 32 000 people over its 3 days, a 1915 per cent increase compared to the previous year.

These events have drawn criticism, however, for exhibiting JSDF tanks. Such criticisms exist within the broader debate about anime such as *Girls und Panzer*. Fujita Naoya, for example, has pointed out concern that ‘moe military’ (media contents that combine beautiful girl characters and military contents) such as *Girls und Panzer* has been interpreted by some as indicating or aiding a drift to the right in Japan, but it cannot simply be analysed as such (Kasai and Fujita, 2015: 126–7). In this context, the Ibaraki Committee of the Japanese Communist Party demanded that JSDF suspend any future exhibition of actual tanks for *Girls und Panzer* fans in Ōarai (Naver Matome, 2015). In response, an official of the Ministry of Self Defense stated, ‘We exhibited them at the request of the town and in order to promote JSDF. We have not received any requests for the future’ (Ibaraki Committee of the Japanese Communist Party, 2013). Whether this criticism caused future tank exhibitions to be cancelled cannot be ascertained, but there have been no subsequent tank exhibitions in Ōarai. However, such events also have supporters, particularly within conservative media. The *Sankei Shinbun* newspaper called on its readers to ‘Consider national security issues at Ōarai, the sacred site of the anime *Girls und Panzer*’ and to discuss Japanese national security through the anime and related contents tourism phenomena (Sankei News, 2014).

Tourism effects were not only seen in sites directly related to the anime. In August 2013 (the same year of the anime’s broadcast), the number of people who applied for a general tour of the Ground Self-Defense Force’s Fuji Firepower Review was the largest in its history. Approximately 116 000 people applied for the 5875 tickets available for general tours, which was a sharp increase from the approximately 87 000 people who applied the previous year. The public relations department of the Ground Staff Office of the Ground Self-Defense Force saw this as an ‘effect of the popularity of battle tanks’ and it was assumed *Girls und Panzer* was indeed the main instigator (Sankei Shinbun, 2013).

Increased publicity for JSDF through collaboration with animation works

As described above, it was not JSDF’s active efforts but rather requests from production staff and regions that initiated cooperation with anime shows. The Public Affairs Office at the Ministry of Defense commented:

We basically decide if we will cooperate with films and anime once we receive a request from the production side. We take a passive role in the process. We therefore don't have a firm understanding of what effect our cooperation might have and don't follow-it up after we have done our part (interview conducted by the author, 20 July 2016).

This stance follows the Ministry of Defense's procedures for public relations relating to cinematic productions. Following Japan's defeat in World War II and the occupation, the Self-Defense Forces Law was passed in 1954, which led to the birth of JSDF. Six years later in 1960, the framework for JSDF cooperation with producers of films shown in cinemas was created in Chapter 3 Article 13, 'Cooperation with Outside Production Films' of the Directive Concerning Public Relations of the Defense Agency (Defense Agency, 1960) and the Standards for the Japan Defense Agency's Cooperation with Outside Production Films (Administrative Vice-Minister of Defense, 1960). Since then, the Defense Agency (to 2007), Ministry of Defense (from 2007) and JSDF have adhered to these provisions when considering cooperation in the production of films after receiving a request from the production side.

However, while consent from and notification to the Minister of Defense is required under these provisions when cooperating with theatrical works, other visual works, such as TV programmes, are exempt. Approval from and notification to the Minister of Defense are not required, although if there is a request to cooperate with a production, Article 12 of the Directive is checked and the acting official makes an appropriate decision (Public Affairs Office, interview conducted by the author, 20 July 2016). Thus, JSDF's cooperation with anime TV shows is mostly at a provincial level. For example, *Girls und Panzer* was not subject to the above-mentioned provisions because it was not a theatrical anime but a TV series anime. Therefore, the producers did not need to notify the Minister of Defense, but just to contact the local JSDF office.

Comparison with the situation in South Korea (discussed in the paper by Jang 2018) confirms that, overall, JSDF is passive and leans towards 'soft power' benefits accrued from image improvement rather than having overt propaganda goals. However, while JSDF is passive in that collaboration between JSDF and anime producers at the provincial level is initiated by anime producers and not JSDF, it appears that JSDF is becoming keener to collaborate actively when

requested to do so. A good example is *Gēto: jieitai kanochi nite, kaku tatakaeri* [Gate], a young adult fantasy novel series with a plot in which JSDF is dispatched to a parallel world. The series, including novels and manga, has sold more than two million copies. The author is a former Ground Self-Defense Force official, and at his proposal the Tokyo Provincial Cooperation Office cooperated with the production of the anime version in July 2015 to make a poster recruiting Ground Self-Defense officials (JSDF Tokyo Provincial Cooperation Office 2015).

In addition, the anime event Anitamasai was held in Ōmiya city in Saitama Prefecture in October 2015, and JSDF entered their vehicles into the *itasha* contest for vehicles painted with anime characters. They also put these vehicles adjacent to the booth for the *Gate* anime. According to the Anitamasai official in charge of the event (interview conducted by the author, 22 August 2016), this cooperation was realized through the event organizers' request to the JSDF Provincial Cooperation Office in Saitama and their role as an intermediary between Warner Brothers (the main corporation in the anime production committee) and JSDF. This cooperation built upon the previous cooperation with the JSDF Tokyo Provincial Cooperation Office.

Following *Gate*, in April 2016 the anime show *Haisukūru Furīto* [High School Fleet] worked with the Kanagawa Provincial Cooperation Office to make a poster for recruiting JSDF members (High School Fleet website 2016). This show is set in Yokosuka city, Kanagawa Prefecture, and tells the story of female students who enrol in a school which trains female Marines known as the Blue Mermaids. In the case of *Gate*, the original author was a former Self-Defense Force officer and he revealed on the homepage for the Tokyo Provincial Cooperation Office that he was the one who proposed the collaboration. This raised questions about just how 'passive' a role JSDF played. By contrast, in the case of *High School Fleet*, the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) used their official Twitter account to make the following tweet on the first day the anime was aired.

Ministry of Defence, JMSDF, @JMSDF_PAO

We hope Captain Misaki and the crews will be good 'Blue Mermaids'! Anyway, in the anime, did you find the scenes that JMSDF helped to create? Try watching it (and listening carefully) again!! <http://hai-furi.com> #Haihuri
00:26, 10 April, 2016

This emphasized how active their role was in the collaboration. In response, many took to Twitter to criticize them for being ‘too outspoken’.

Since around 2006, there has been rapid development in the collaborations between anime producers and municipalities, which have helped generate contents tourism (see the appendix Table A1; also Yamamura, 2015; Seaton et al. 2017). Collaborations involving JSDF mirror these developments in terms of contents tourism, but with two additional traits.

First, posters are used for joint promotion. In the case of productions unrelated to JSDF, posters are made in collaboration between the anime producer and the region, and publicity for both the anime contents and regions occurs while the anime is airing on TV or being sold on DVD. Posters for anime series involving JSDF, meanwhile, tend to highlight recruitment to JSDF, but they also say when the anime is on air or announce that the show is being made. A news post on the High School Fleet website dated 10 April 2016 gave not only the poster with the wordings ‘Recruiting Land, Sea and Air Self-Defense Force officers’ and ‘*High School Fleet*, on air’, but also a link to the Ministry of Defense website (High School Fleet website 2016). In short, having formed a collaborative relationship through joint production, both sides were promoting one another for mutual benefit.

Yet fans are aware of such issues and can respond negatively to over-the-top promotion. Even in cases of collaboration between an anime and a region, if either side publicizes the collaboration ahead of the other, fans will typically criticize them for being ‘pushy’. For this reason, publicity managers are usually nervous over the timing and methods for publicizing such information. In this context, the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force made a mistake in the timing and wording of its tweet about High School Fleet (the tweet appeared to be promoting their collaboration with the anime and was released on the first day the anime was aired), thereby overstepping the boundaries of their ‘passive’ role and inviting a critical reaction on social media.

Second, JSDF is using such collaborations to reach a particular group: the anime fan market. Anime fans are known for high brand loyalty, active transmission of information via social media and fan groups, and high expenditure on related goods. In the case of collaborations between an anime producer and a region, the idea is that if fans of a show can be turned into fans of the region, then they will become a good market as tourists and consumers with high brand loyalty (Yamamura, 2014). This concept underpins JSDF collaborations with anime, too. Both *Gate* and *High School Fleet* are what are called ‘late night anime’, and the

market for fans of such works is small. The intent, therefore, is not so much to recruit these fans as members of JSDF. At most, the aim seems to be to gain topicality and to enhance the popularity of JSDF. In other words, the campaigns act as nothing more than another avenue for publicity in order to get the attention of younger generations and instil in them a sense of familiarity towards JSDF.

These observations also hold for items other than posters, too. For example, the anime characters may feature on souvenirs sold at stores at the Ministry of Defense and in JSDF bases. As Itō Toshiyuki, the former head of the public relations division for the Maritime Staff Office, describes, such publicity and products are first and foremost to ‘catch the eye of young people’. He added, ‘There are no members that have joined JSDF because something like this caught their attention’ (Asahi Shinbun, 2016a). As such, the use of anime characters has parallels with examples of ‘eye-catching’ photographs of *kawaii* (cute) young women in military uniform in places such as the front cover of the military magazine *Mamor*. This also raises the issue of how images of cute women (whether anime or photograph) are interpreted and consumed *within* JSDF. Such discussion is beyond the scope of this paper, although the complex issue of how women are depicted in military popular culture is developed further by Akiko Sugawa-Shimada (2018).

Conclusion

The expansion of collaboration between TV anime producers and JSDF shares many characteristics with the expansion of collaboration between anime producers and local communities in Japan. Usually the collaboration is initiated by the anime producers, and they approach the community or JSDF. Anime industries and JSDF have taken advantage of the knowhow obtained from the numerous examples of anime producer — local community collaboration.

The policy of JSDF regarding collaborations with film or anime production companies is always to be ‘passive’, in that they do not do anything without a request for cooperation from the contents industry side. After getting a request, they discuss the advisability of the cooperation carefully. Rather than JSDF using anime images aggressively, it is the anime production companies who ask JSDF to collaborate, and they are doing so in ever-greater numbers. While the collaboration policy of JSDF is ‘passive’, the evidence suggests that JSDF views

collaboration with pop culture producers positively as an effective media strategy to improve the image of JSDF among younger generations.

Almost all creators and fans of anime today are from generations that have not experienced war. As Matt Alt has pointed out, ‘the reason why JSDF and past wars can be united with the image of cute or kawaii characters is that Japanese people have not experienced war directly since the end of the war in 1945 [...] [I]n modern Japan, the war is just fantasy’ (Asahi Shinbun, 2016b). Postwar Japan is similar to Edo Japan (1603–1867) in that people have not experienced war directly for a long period of time. In both eras, many contents inspired or derived from past wars were created and generated spin-offs in the form of derivative works, parodies or fan-fiction. In such eras, there is a process of making fantasy war contents by the generations with no personal memories of war.

This situation generates criticism by those concerned about the trivialization of war. But it is also a sign that Japan has enjoyed prolonged peace and, with freedom of expression guaranteed, that the people are able to produce fantasy works related to the military, see tanks exhibited at local festivals, and watch military exercises as a form of leisure activity. So, it may be more appropriate to say that what is happening in Japan today is a fantasization (or contentsization) and consumption of the military, rather than a ‘drift to the right’ or resurgence of militarism. However, the role of the JSDF, as with any national military, is to refine its military capabilities for the purpose of national defense. Collaboration with anime producers can be an important part of that mission if it enhances the image of and popular support for the armed forces. Anime producers, meanwhile, seek to produce works that are either realistic military depictions based on extensive research, or fantasized depictions that create appealing new ‘worlds’ of contents. Then the fans consume them just as a fantasy.

It also should be noted that none of the works discussed in this paper are fundamentally pro-war. Instead, the contents package war as fantasy and entertainment, and cynically depict politics and the military. Watching the works closely also reveals antiwar messages from the context. Such characteristics can be found in many postwar military-related contents including anime, special-effects works, and live-action cinemas in Japan. There are many examples in Japanese cinema and television of more ideological works, from *Kyatapirā* [Caterpillar] (2010), a graphic critique of Japanese militarism, to those focusing on the tragic side of the war, such as the anime *Hotaru no Haka* [Grave of the Fireflies] (1988), to nationalistic cinema such as *Puraido*:

Unmei no Toki [Pride] (1998). However, with the development of the media mix and consumption of contents in different media formats, which is a fundamental characteristic of the anime industry and contents tourism, the challenge is to gain fans who will consume the contents across multiple media formats. The focus is on fantasy and entertainment, not ideology.

There are many people who superficially latch onto the links between anime and the military and criticize the works without watching them closely, or criticize JSDF without taking into account its largely passive role in the production process. This article has demonstrated that the pressures to produce military or ‘moe military’ anime are driven by the market rather than the military. However, changes in Japanese national defense policy, especially since 2004 when JSDF provided humanitarian assistance in Iraq, and the international situation have triggered worries that Japan’s postwar peace might be under threat. These factors help explain the intensity of debate regarding collaboration between JSDF and anime producers.

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Appendix

Table A1: History of collaboration between anime and local community/anime and JSDF

Phases of Anime and Local Community Collaboration	Year	Anime Produced with Local Community Collaboration	Anime Produced with JSDF Collaboration	Other “Moe Military Anime” (no official JSDF collaboration for anime production)	Locations / Tourism Destinations (Municipality/Site, Prefecture)
Phase 1: Fan-driven phase (the eve of the sacred site pilgrimage boom). No collaboration between anime producers and communities. Contents tourism is undertaken by individual fans of a work.	1980s	Wide distribution of home VCRs (videocassette recorders), emergence of OVA (original video animation)			
	1993	Opening of <i>Mizuki Shigeru Road</i>			Sakaiminato, Tottori
	1994		<i>Aozora Shōjotai (OVA)</i> (JASDF)		Iruma Base, Saitama
	1995	The Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake			
	2002	<i>Please Teacher!</i>			Kizakiko and Omachi, Nagano
	2003		<i>Stratos 4</i> (JASDF)		Shimojishima Airport, Okinawa
	2004	JSDF mission in Samawa, Iraq. Anime images of Captain Tsubasa on JSDF water trucks.			
	2004		<i>Zipang</i> (JMSDF)		
	2005	Sixtieth anniversary of the end of World War II. Tensions with South Korea and China over ‘history’ and territorial disputes. Anti-Japan protests in China.			
	2006	<i>The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya</i>			Nishinomiya City, Hyogo Prefecture
	2006		<i>Tactical Roar</i> (JMSDF)		
	2006		<i>Yomigaeru Sora: Rescue wings</i> (JASDF)		Komatsu Base, Ishikawa
Phase 2: Media recognition of the anime tourism phenomenon. Emergent tie-ups via ‘trial and error’ between communities and anime producers.	mid-2000s	The era of Web 2.0. Anyone can become a creator and actively exchange information online through images and videos.			
	2007	<i>Lucky Star</i>			Washimiya (now Kuki), Saitama
	2007			<i>Sky Girls</i>	Yokosuka, Kanagawa
	2008	<i>True Tears</i>			Johana (now Nanto), Toyama
	2008			<i>Strike Witches</i>	Yokosuka, Kanagawa
Phase 3: Main tie-up methods have emerged based on the lessons learned in Phase 2.	2009	<i>Sengoku Basara</i>			Sendai and Shiroishi, Miyagi
	2009	<i>Summer Wars</i> (theatrical anime)			Ueda, Nagano
	2010	<i>Tamayura</i> (OVA)			Takehara, Hiroshima
	2010			<i>Sound of the Sky (So Ra No Wo To)</i>	Cuenca, Spain

Phase 4: Regions take a more proactive role in emergent collaborations with anime. They hope to enhance brand image and contents tourism to their communities via collaboration with anime producers. Regional needs contribute to a diversification of tie-up methods.	2011	11 March, the Great East Japan Earthquake			
	2011	<i>Anohana: The Flower We Saw That Day</i>			Chichibu, Saitama
	2011	<i>Hanasaku Iroha</i>			Yuwaku Onsen (hot spring resort), Ishikawa
	2012	<i>Waiting in the Summer</i>			Komoro, Nagano
	2012		<i>Girls und Panzer</i> (JGSDF)		Oarai, Ibaraki
	2012		<i>STAR BLAZERS 2199</i> (JMSDF)		
	2012	<i>Koitabi ~True Tours Nanto</i>			Nanto, Toyama
	2012			<i>UPOTTE!!</i>	Atami, Shizuoka; Tama, Tokyo
	2013		<i>ARPEGGIO OF BLUE STEEL</i> (JSDF Yokosuka District Headquarters, etc.)		Yokosuka, Kanagawa
	2013			<i>Stella Women's Academy, High School Division Class C³</i>	
	2014	<i>Wake Up, Girls!</i>			Sendai, Miyagi
	2014			<i>Survival Game Club!</i>	Shibuya, Tokyo
	2015		<i>GATE</i> (JSDF Tokyo Provincial Cooperation Office)		Tokyo
	2015			<i>MILITARY!</i>	
	2015			<i>Kantai Korekushon</i>	Kure, Hiroshima; Etajima, Hiroshima
	2016		<i>High school Fleet</i> (JMSDF)		Yokosuka, Kanagawa
	2016	<i>Kuromukuro</i>			Toyama
	2017			<i>Frame Arms Girl</i>	Tachikawa, Tokyo

Notes and Sources:

The phases of anime and local community collaboration are described in detail in Yamamura (2015) and Seaton et al. (2017: 212–9).

The year for anime refers to when the title was first broadcast or screened in Japan.

Unless otherwise stated, all anime are television series anime.

Some municipality names have changed because of municipal mergers since the anime was released.

Anime titles in the column of ‘Other moe military anime’ have no official collaboration with JSDF in the

anime production process. However, in case of Shimada Fumikane, a character and mechanical designer of the anime *Sukai Gāruzu* [Sky Girls] (2007) and the original author of *Sutoraiku Witchiūzu* [Strike Witches] (2008), JSDF Okayama Provincial Cooperation Office asked him to create three official characters for the office and released them in 2013. The office used the characters in recruitment posters for new JSDF members (Sanyō Shinbun, [2013](#)). Shimada was born in Okayama and is also famous as a designer of the original characters for *Girls und Panzer* (2012) and *Frēmu Āmuzu Gāru* [Frame Arms Girl] (2017).