

Made in Japan: games, anime and manga

- 1 Shigeru Miyamoto, Toru Iwatani and Satoshi Tajiri may not be household names, but they have clearly left their mark on the world. They are the creators of Super Mario, Pac-Man and Pokemon respectively, and they can be said to be the “robber barons” of Japan’s creative industry, tapping the nation’s unique cultural DNA to create characters that have stolen hearts all over the world.
- 2 A ministry report issued last April showed that the market size of Japan’s content industry, which includes ACG (animation, comics and games), as well as TV drama and music, in 2013 was around 12 trillion yen. The Japanese market for content industries may be second only to the United States (worth over 2.5 times more) 27 growth is slowing and the industry ought to increase its presence in foreign markets.
- 3 It was the love for video gaming that led programmer Mr Michael Susetyo, 28, to work as a game developer. But he is worried that Japan will not be able to compete with Western studios. Mr Susetyo said that English standards have to be raised to allow Japan to “continue to reach new heights at the same pace as the West.” He added: “Technology evolves from the spread of information, and with so much information on the Internet being available in English only, it takes much longer for information to reach Japanese developers.” This point was also raised by Mr Hisatsugu Kasajima, founder of the Japan arm of Czech production house Eallin. He attributes the lack of interest in English to an insular, inward-looking mindset that has led to stagnation.
- 4 Hideo Uda, founder of a Japanese animation studio, noted that the anime industry is hindered “from becoming a major player like Disney or Pixar” because it uses conventional pen-and-paper methods, which he said are increasingly unproductive in a fast-moving industry. “As craftsmen, they have very good techniques. That is an advantage,” Mr Uda said. “But it is also a disadvantage. Innovation hardly takes place and not many people can be involved in the process. So it will remain a 30 without any cross-border collaboration.”
- 5 Given that ACG is a costly business, companies are trying to diminish risks by sharing the burden across several stakeholders – which means that the future of the anime industry will lie in the hands of the financiers, not the creators. But these bankers have a record of not having a pulse on



the market. A recent example was historical anime *Kono Sekai No Katasumi Ni (In This Corner Of The World)*, which was a sleeper hit in Japan. It failed to get financial backing and was produced only after it raised funds through crowdfunding. It then became an enormous success.

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