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NTU and Japanese anime company collaborate on anime development
- A milestone in Singapore and Japan collaboration

Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and Japan’s Anime International Company Inc (AIC) will jointly develop anime episodes for the Japanese market. This collaboration marks the first time that both countries are working together in the anime industry.

Anime refers to the Japanese art form that uses distinctive animation to tell stories of science fiction and fantasy, and counts among Japan’s most recognisable cultural exports. Anime comes in various forms including TV serials, feature films and computer games, etc. The anime industry is worth an estimated US$ 7 billion worldwide.

For a typical anime TV series such as “Tenchi Muyo”, it takes more than 50 animators about 6 months to complete a half-an-hour episode. With NTU School of Computer Engineering (SCE)’s technology, it is possible to reduce the production cost and time by up to 40% and also improve quality of the animation.

With SCE’s technology providing a significant reduction to the animation production time, companies can spend more time on the creative aspects such as script writing, story telling, etc. As content and creativity play a key role in the quality of any animation product, this advantage gives companies an edge over their competitors.

AIC, an anime content provider since 1982, is a market leader in Japan and has provided anime content for Japanese TV and video market. Like many anime companies in Japan, majority of its production work such like “in-betweening” and “ink and colouring” are outsourced to China and Korea. “In-betweening” is the process of generating intermediate pictures between “keyframes” which
make the animation smooth. “Keyframes” are pictures which indicate important positions of characters in an animation sequence.

To date, China and Korea are still the two main countries which provide outsourced services for Japan’s anime production work due to its low-cost labour. In the year 2004, the anime market in the U.S. is worth $4.36 billion, which is 3.2 times the value of Japanese exports of steel products.

By leveraging on the new technology to reduce dependence on low-cost labour, this collaboration signifies a landmark step for Japan and Singapore. It paves the way for many future joint anime productions.

The collaboration was formalised today through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by Associate Professor Seah Hock Soon, Dean of NTU SCE and Mr Toru Miura, President of AIC. The MOU was witnessed by Dr Christopher Chia, Chief Executive Officer of Media Development Authority.

Under the MOU, SCE and AIC will jointly develop 13 anime episodes, using animation technology developed by SCE. These episodes will be broadcast in Japan and possibly in Singapore as well.

Says Associate Professor Seah Hock Soon, Dean of NTU SCE: “NTU has always been at the forefront of animation technology and active in collaborating with the industry to advance this field. In SCE, we have developed numerous innovations and technologies, such as CACAni animation algorithms and Animaker stop-motion animation software which will be licensed for commercial applications. Over the years, our many breakthroughs have certainly built our reputation as a leader in animation technology research. NTU students also benefit from SCE’s cutting-edge research which equip them with industry-relevant skills and thus prepare them for exciting career opportunities when they graduate. Through this MOU, SCE’s technology will equip Singapore with an edge to attract animation production companies to be based here and subsequently conduct their anime production work in Singapore.”

Adds Mr Toru Miura, President of AIC: “This is an exciting collaboration for AIC to partner NTU in a landmark agreement between Singapore and Japan. AIC has a wealth of experience in anime production and we look forward very much to work with SCE for these 13 anime episodes. The application of SCE’s technology will enhance our production capability and I’m sure that the eventual product will be a success when it is aired in Japan. The collaboration represents a small, but significant foothold in what is already a US$ 7 billion market and raises hopes that Japan will be able to further reduce the time and cost factor to produce more anime titles within the given period. “
About Nanyang Technological University

Nanyang Technological University (NTU) is a research-intensive university with globally acknowledged strengths in science and engineering. The university has a beautiful garden campus and a distinguished lineage with roots that go back to 1955.

NTU's 12 schools span diverse disciplines – from engineering and the sciences to art, design and media. The university has a strong engineering college focused on innovation, a business school with one of the top 100 MBA programmes in the world, an internationally-acclaimed National Institute of Education, one of the best communication and information schools in Asia, and a biological sciences school at the forefront of Singapore’s life sciences initiative. The Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies is a world authority on terrorism issues.

Ranked among the top 50 universities in the world, NTU has in place multi-country programmes and initiatives, many established through its strategic alliances with 300 institutions in more than 45 countries, including Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Stanford University, California Institute of Technology, Cornell University, Cambridge University, and Beijing University.

For more information, visit www.ntu.edu.sg.