

Entame's Global Vision

How Japanese Intellectual Property
Became One of the World's Most
Powerful Cultural Exports.

BY BERNARD THOMPSON

From Astro Boy in 1952 to the global phenomenon of Demon Slayer, Japanese entertainment (known as Entame) has continuously shaped global popular culture. Today, its intellectual property extends far beyond manga and film, driving streaming, gaming, music, merchandise, tourism and immersive experiences worldwide. The reason: Japan's enduring advantage lies in its ability to create beloved franchises that resonate across generations, platforms and international markets.

Living Entertainment with Stories That Last

Entame continually reinvents its mediums, creating an ecosystem where tradition, publishing, film, gaming and live experiences strengthen one another. Shochiku Co., Ltd., one of Japan's oldest major entertainment companies and the steward of Kabuki theater, embodies this philosophy. Representative Director and President Toshihiro Takahashi sees innovation as part of its heritage: "At the heart of Japanese entertainment lies a legacy of constant innovation. Perhaps this is where the Japanese spirit and sense of beauty truly come to life."

That spirit is reflected in the industry, which acts as a vibrant melting pot, a place where each medium inspires the other. Hiro Matsuoka, president and CEO of film giant TOHO CO., LTD., captures this perfectly: "The defining strength of Japan's entertainment industry is its diversity within continuity." And who could deny a man whose company has been home to Godzilla and countless cinematic franchises? From family-friendly characters to kaiju films, Japanese entertainment has consistently produced stories that resonate across generations.

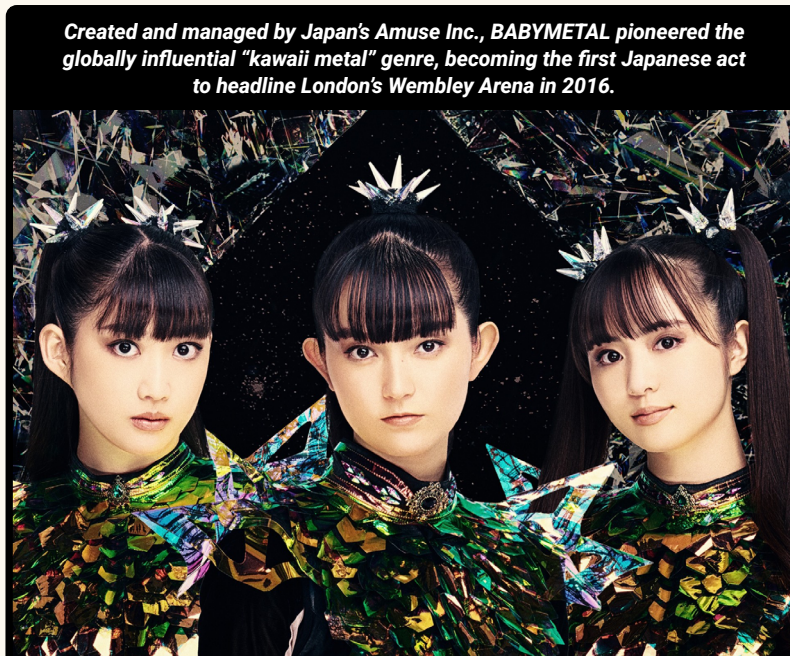
At the heart is storytelling. Talent and entertainment company HORIPRO GROUP HOLDINGS, INC Chairman Yoshitaka Hori argues that nuanced character development is one of entame's defining qualities. "Japanese storytelling embraces complexity, where even the antagonist can evolve into the protagonist," he says. Operating across publishing, anime, film, gaming, web services and education/edtech, KADOKAWA sees another reason for this enduring appeal. CEO Takeshi Natsumo believes "Japanese manga and anime are very unique—they reflect the lives, emotions, and challenges of the times." Rather than relying on universal formulas, Japanese cre-



For more than 130 years, Shochiku has championed Japan's 400-year-old Kabuki tradition, stewarding the historic Kabukiza and Minamiza theatres ©Shochiku Co., Ltd.



Since 2011, Bushiroad's Cardfight!! Vanguard has grown into a global franchise with over 10 million players and an anime spanning more than 600 episodes in multiple languages ©Bushiroad illust:タカヤマトシアキ



Created and managed by Japan's Amuse Inc., BABYMETAL pioneered the globally influential "kawaii metal" genre, becoming the first Japanese act to headline London's Wembley Arena in 2016.

CONTENT BY THE WORLDFOLIO

ators build emotionally rich worlds that continue to captivate audiences as culture evolves.

From Stories to Sustainable IP

The challenge is turning creativity into intellectual property that endures rather than simply producing the next hit. GEEK PICTURES Inc., operating across advertising, animation, film and visual production, approaches entertainment as a continuous creative cycle. President and CEO Tamotsu Kosano explains: "Our mission is to build a virtuous cycle of entertainment evolution: we create content, monetize it, then reinvest into the next wave of content creation." Bushiroad Inc. demonstrates how that philosophy extends across formats. Known for its trading card games and multimedia franchises, the company has built intellectual property that seamlessly moves between media and audiences. President and CEO Takaaki Kidani notes, "Many TCGs are linked to popular anime intellectual properties (IP), and as anime became more mainstream worldwide, interest in TCGs grew alongside it." Together, these approaches reflect an industry focused on cultivating franchises that continue to evolve across media, generations and global markets.

Beyond the Screen

Japanese IP increasingly extends into everyday life, creating emotional connections that reach far beyond television or cinema. Character creator San-X Co., Ltd., home to Rilakkuma and Sumikkogurashi, designs personalities to become lifelong companions. President Hiroshi Chida explains, "We aim to create beings that feel close to people, almost like members of the family." Another company at the heart of this is Sun-Star Stationery Co., Ltd., which combines everyday goods with licensed characters and original designs.

President and CEO Yuki Yoshiyoshi illustrates his company's approach: combining idea-driven products with character IP with an element of fun so that "the overall value of the product increases significantly and makes daily life more enjoyable."

Taking Entame Global

Streaming, localization and digital platforms have dramatically accelerated the international reach of Japanese entertainment. VTuber and digital entertainment company Brave group sees this flexibility as key to overseas success. CEO Keito Noguchi explains: "There are two



Debuted by San-X in 2003, Rilakkuma has become a global icon of Japanese kawaii culture, spanning merchandise, books and animation.



Developed by KADOKAWA-owned FromSoftware, Japan's ELDEN RING became a global phenomenon, surpassing 30 million copies sold by April 2025.

main approaches to international expansion: one is bringing the product directly from Japan without modification, and the other is full localization." As audiences discover anime and gaming, many naturally explore other aspects of Japanese culture as well. AMUSE Inc., which manages artists and produces live events, observes this firsthand.

"Many anime fans are also fans of Japanese music," Representative Director, Chairman and President Yokichi Osato said, illustrating how one form of entertainment naturally leads audiences to another.

Great stories evolve into films and games, concerts and collectibles, destinations and communities, connecting audiences across generations and borders. Japan proves that entertainment is one of its most enduring forms of innovation, and it is just getting started.

A Friend Always Quietly by Your Side: The Characters of San-X

From smartphone games and television screens to plush companions carried through everyday life, San-X has transformed Rilakkuma and Sumikkogurashi into globally beloved character worlds rooted in emotional empathy. By Cian O'Neill and Bernard Thompson

At 5 p.m. on a Friday: an office worker waits in line at Shinjuku Station for the next train on the JR Chūō-Sōbu Line. After a long and exhausting day, she finds a small moment of comfort by opening the mobile game Rilakkuma Farm on her smartphone, harvesting crops alongside Rilakkuma as the train approaches.

In Kyoto, a six-year-old boy hurries through his breakfast before school, eager to catch the latest animated adventures of Uso Tantei Tomanto on television. And a world away in Sydney, a 16-year-old student in Campbelltown unwinds by watching clips of Sumikkogurashi shared across TikTok and YouTube, a ritual repeated by fans far beyond Japan's shores. These are scenes played out every day across the world. The worlds created by San-X are not confined to store shelves or television screens. They move seamlessly between digital and physical spaces, becoming part of daily routines through games, animation, merchandise and emotional familiarity.

For more than four decades, San-X has cultivated a form of character creation rooted less in aspiration than in empathy. Its characters are intentionally imperfect. They become anxious, withdrawn, lazy or emotionally tired in ways that mirror the everyday experiences of the people who embrace them. "We are not trying to embody something merely cool, cute or aspirational," says President Hiroshi Chida. "We aim to create beings that feel close to people, almost like members of the family."

That philosophy shaped both the company's characters and its approach to intellectual property. The

company gradually shifted away from the rapid-fire character production that defined the 1980s and 1990s. Instead, San-X began focusing on cultivating fewer, deeper intellectual properties. "Fans can project themselves onto the character, and that act of projection is very important," Chida explains.

The result was enduring IP such as Rilakkuma and Sumikkogurashi, both long-running companions that gradually became woven into everyday life across generations. Today, the company develops roughly one or two new IPs each year through a carefully structured internal process. Creators are selected for their ability to imagine an entire emotional world around a character. New recruits first work on established characters before presenting original concepts through internal competitions that determine which ideas



Rilakkuma - CEO

"We aim to create beings that feel close to people, almost like members of the family, while also making them reassuring presences that bring comfort simply by being there with you."

ultimately become official San-X characters. That emphasis on emotional worldbuilding now stretches beyond merchandise alone.

Projects such as San-X Universe bring multiple characters into shared spaces while also helping audiences connect those worlds back to San-X itself. This summer, San-X's first-ever character area, "San-X Paradise," will open at Fuji-Q Highland, letting fans step directly into that world. Animation plays a central role. According to Chida, visual storytelling allows audiences to experience a character's movement, personality and worldview in ways products alone cannot achieve. "When people encounter a character in person, it can completely change the level of attachment they feel," he says. Internationally,

the company is pursuing growth with the same restraint, patience and focus on emotional attachment that define its character philosophy.

Asia remains a major focus due to the region's longstanding familiarity with Japanese pop culture, while local partnerships allow San-X to expand gradually within each market. Much like the characters it creates, San-X seeks something quieter and more enduring: remaining beside people through the small emotional moments of everyday life, whether through a television screen, a smartphone game or a plush companion resting silently nearby.

FUJI-Q HIGHLAND



San-X



<https://www.san-x.co.jp>

Sun-Star Blends Function and Fun

Sun-Star Stationery is taking Japan's playful design culture global, turning everyday stationery into useful, collectible lifestyle goods.

BY DANIEL DE BOMFORD, CIAN O'NEILL AND QUENTIN LANGE

Japan is the home of novel, high-quality stationery. But beyond novelty, these seemingly simple items resonate emotionally and are expressions of identity. Simple clips and notebooks emblazoned with favorite characters are both a fashion and a conversation piece. It is in this space where Sun-Star Stationery Co., Ltd. has made that sensibility its business, developing character stationery, idea-driven products and everyday goods from its base in Tokyo.

For President and CEO Yuki Yoshi Yoshimatsu, the strategy is not to compete on commodity stationery, but to make ordinary tools feel original. "We focus on what we call idea-driven stationery," he said. "These are products that incorporate unique concepts or added

functionality, which allows us to stand out from standard items." The company combines these ideas with character IP and recognizable faces, like Gundam, Tamagotchi and Moomin, further broadening its appeal. "By strengthening both aspects, the originality of the product and the addition of character IP, we are able to expand the range of markets where our products can be sold," he said. These elements differentiate Sun-Star Stationery in the market, creating a sense of uniqueness where price competition is strong. "Our goal is to build a portfolio of products that clearly reflects this uniqueness and that can appeal to customers in different markets while still maintaining our identity," he said.

That approach is also shaping Sun-Star's overseas expansion. Yoshimatsu

said Asia accounts for about 80 percent of overseas sales, while the company sees strong potential in the United States and North America. A three-day pop-up at Yoseka Stationery in New York sold about 1,000 items, giving the company direct feedback from American consumers. "We realized that when customers can physically see and touch our products, their evaluation is very positive," Yoshimatsu said.

Sun-Star Stationery aims to add fun to everyday items to make life more enjoyable. "Our vision is to become the number one stationery and lifestyle goods manufacturer in terms of what we call mind share," he said. "This means becoming the brand that customers love the most and think of first when they consider stationery."



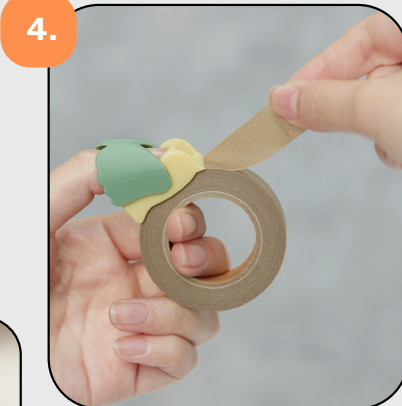
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1. Book Clip "UKANMURI CLIP"
2. Metal Pencil "meracil"
3. "Cicada Shell Pencil Case"
4. Bird Washi Tape Cutter "KIRITORING"
5. "Cassette Tape Cutter"

"Among the many stationery manufacturers in Japan, we strive to be the most unique and entertainment-oriented company."

Yuki Yoshi Yoshimatsu,
President and CEO,
Sun-Star Stationery Co., Ltd.



<https://www.sun-star-st.jp/>

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