

CHAPTER 2

Transformational Magic *Some Japanese super-heroes and monsters*

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Introduction

In any culture, there are elements of change and elements of continuity (Ohnuki-Tierney 1987). The literature on Japan tends to over-emphasize either change (such as in technology) or continuity (for example, cherry blossom viewing, haiku, sumo, etc.). In this chapter, I hope to show how cultural continuities may be found even in an area of popular culture which is subject to countless fast-changing influences: commercial television dramas for children.

The makers of these programs are under constant pressure to respond to changing tastes, to maintain audience ratings, and to sell advertising and spin-off products. Yet a look at the programs reveals recurrent themes which, in some cases, have their roots in supernatural beliefs dating back to antiquity.¹ In this chapter I shall discuss how some of these old beliefs find expression in the super-heroes and monsters of Japanese children's television. The very longevity of these themes and their shared symbolic similarities (as outlined below) suggest that they are of fundamental importance in Japanese culture.

Japan has seven national television networks, two public and five commercial, besides numerous local and satellite stations. At any given time there are likely to be some twenty to thirty assorted children's dramas in the viewing week, most of which disappear from the screens after a year or so, often to be replaced by something very similar. Nearly all of these programs air between the hours of 5 and 7.30 pm, and they typically last thirty minutes including three commercial breaks, some of which are devoted entirely to advertisements for spin-off products. In addition, most of the programs I discuss have spawned feature films which are shown during the school holidays. Perhaps two-thirds of the

programs are animated, but many of the most popular ones, and most of those discussed here, are dramas performed by heavily costumed actors.

The small selection of programs mentioned here rely on pre-schoolers, aged 3 to 6, for the bulk of their viewers, and are primarily aimed at boys. There are fascinating super-hero programs for young girls too, such as *Sailor Moon* and *Cutey Honey Flash*, but space is limited so they will be left for others to discuss.²

Ultraman and Superman

Perhaps the most popular character ever to emerge from children's television in Japan is Ultraman, a widely recognized icon, on a par with Superman in American culture. *Ultraman*, a costume drama, was launched on Mainichi/TBS TV in 1966 by Tsuburaya Productions; there were no new series launched in Japan between 1980 and 1996, when Tsuburaya ended a sixteen-year drought with *Ultraman Tiga* (1996-97).³

Like "Superman", the name "Ultraman" implies a man who exceeds ordinary men. Both words have Latin roots: "super" meaning "above" and "ultra" meaning "beyond". But there are significant differences. Superman is the super-individualist: he flies solo; he never changes; he has no Superdad and Supermum, no Supersiblings.⁴ In contrast Ultraman was once alone, but as each year passed the family grew bigger, spawning series such as: *Ultra Seven* (1967), *Ultraman Jack* (1971), *Ultraman Ace* (1972), *Ultraman Taro* (1973), *Ultraman Leo* (1974), an animated version called *The Ultraman* (1979) and *Ultraman 80* (1980). Along the way various other ultra-brothers appeared, such as Zoffy and Julian; and also Father of Ultra and Mother of Ultra.

The commercial advantages of this big happy family of Ultramen, in terms of dolls, suits, stickers and so on, are obvious. But it is probably also fair to say that Ultraman was originally modeled on the solitary Superman and developed his family because filial loyalty, fraternal solidarity, camaraderie and teamwork were found to have more appeal for Japanese children than the struggle of a lone individual.⁵ In fact, some of the former qualities went into the very creation of Ultraman, since no one person can lay claim to the honor: *Ultraman* was designed by a committee at the Tsuburaya Creative Department.

With one exception (discussed below), all Ultramen, and Mother of Ultra, share the same basic color scheme: red suits with silver trim. These two colors are combined in various patterns of Essoldo Cinema curves and stripes. Why red and silver? I believe it is really a shiny version of red and white, the traditional colors of celebration and good luck in Japan.⁶ Ultraman is thus a sort of good luck talisman: he brings beneficial magic.⁷

Superman's predominant colors are red, yellow and blue – hinting, perhaps, at the American flag. He is a patriotic American created in the 1930s to fight for what the American 1950s television serial used to call "truth, justice and the American Way." Such nationalistic themes are much less evident in Japanese heroes than in their American counterparts. There is no Captain Nippon in Japan, while patriotism is fully embodied in the hero Captain America. Another contrast is that while Superman is incredibly strong and can fly, in other ways he is still a human being. Superman is human-sized and he lives on Earth; he may be superhuman, but he is also recognizably human.

Ultraman lives on Planet Ultra and has to commute to Earth. In fact he is not really human at all: he is as tall as the Tokyo Tower and weighs about 40,000 tons. He has a sort of brooch in the middle of the chest (or on his forehead in some versions), which changes color or flashes on and off when his energy reserves are running dangerously low. He has a pointy head with a ridge running down the middle of the face, and some versions have a residual dorsal fin. These attributes tell us that there is something of the fish in Ultraman. There is something of the insect, too. Some versions have bulging, multiplex eyes, for instance. None have eyeballs (though sometimes the pinholes for the actor to see through are rather obvious), nor eyelashes or any other hair. His brother Superman is a hairy man, but Ultraman is a smooth man.

Another contrast is in the use of language. Superman is laconic, but he has a way with words. He will tell villains that their game is up, he will make ironic quips in times of crisis. Ultraman, in most of his incarnations,⁸ is completely inarticulate. He does not speak English or Japanese. The only word he utters is "SWATCH!", an onomatopoeic exclamation as he swishes into the sky once more after a mission. Nor does Ultraman share Superman's hidden emotions. He does not suffer teenage angst over any Japanese Lois Lane.⁹

While Superman holds up falling buildings, stops trains falling off cliffs and diverts death rays, Ultraman only does one thing: he fights monsters. He may use his specium ray to finish the job, but most of the action is hand-to-hand wrestling. A Japanese informant offered me the theory that Ultraman satisfied the psychological desire for violence and helped dispel the sense of impotent frustration which lingered on in Japan after the nation was beaten in the Pacific War and had to sign the American-authored constitution renouncing the aggressive use of arms.

Ultraman may be good at fighting, but he is not as overtly masculine as Superman. Superman is a big, American football-playing, sweaty locker-room-type hunk with big biceps and there is even a suggestive bulge in his all-American underpants. Ultraman is sexless, if not downright feminine. When we lived in Japan, my son, then a five-year-old fan,

often described Ultraman's smooth, sculptured pectorals as *oppai* (breasts). There is no hint of any genitalia: he has a smooth, plastic crotch.¹⁰ Again, whereas Superman is strong enough to win every battle, Ultramen, especially Ultraman Taro, often have to call for help from home. Taro is an apprentice Ultraman, an Ultralad. His rays do not always work properly; he needs monster-battling advice from Seven and Ace.

The monsters in the programs are so numerous that they appear to have been constructed from identi-kits generating variations on number of heads, number of eyes, shade of green, hairy/scaly, claws/tentacles, spines/goitres. The most famous is the Baltan Starman (*Barutan Seijin*), whose pair of gigantic claws associates him loosely with the lobster. Then there are the likes of Bemstar, Ereking, Mururoa, Kiira, and the Babaru, Metron and Hypolito Starmen. These beasts may trouble Ultraman Taro, but for an experienced Ultraman they usually pose no problem, for Ultraman is often bigger than the monster (imagine Superman big enough to rap King Kong on the cranium). After half an hour of complicated plotting and suspense-building, the monster is usually disposed of in a couple of minutes with a couple of Judô throws and karate chops.

Thus it can be argued that Superman is an American fantasy: strong, lonely, resourceful and independent. An immigrant to the US (as are most "Americans"), Superman left Planet Krypton behind long ago and today he lives inside Clark Kent. He could be said to represent the power contained within every human being: the hero within every ordinary man. Superman is one of many heroes common in the Judeo-Christian tradition: he possesses an inner strength which enables him to emerge victorious against overwhelming odds. Ultraman is a more reassuring, perhaps a more plausible fantasy: he can beat the monsters because he is bigger than they are and can call on his brothers to help if necessary. In relying on others, Ultraman could be said to be Japanese to the bone. Also worth noting is that Ultraman has never been internalized like Superman: he is external and gets called in, like the pest-extermination man, to get rid of those annoying slobbering monsters. This last attribute makes it possible to liken Ultraman to one Shintô god among many, who will miraculously appear from nowhere and intervene to save Japan: a *deus ex machina*, a divine wind, a *kamikaze*.¹¹

Ultraman's popularity peaked in 1967, towards the end of the first series, when a single episode captured no less than 42.8 per cent of the viewing audience, equivalent to nearly 40 million people. It troughed with *Ultraman Leo*, who struggled to register 10 per cent in the ratings. *Ultraman 80* fared only slightly better, which accounts for Tsuburaya's lengthy hesitation before producing the new series. The lesson of *Leo*

and 80 is that mediocre Ultramen will not sell: the popularity of the original Ultraman demands that something really good be attached to the name. Perhaps now, with the widespread perception that Japan is plagued once more by intractable social and economic problems, is the right time for Ultraman to return.

Ultraman cleansed: Gridman

One of *Ultraman's* modern descendants is *Gridman*. *Gridman* comes from the same stable as *Ultraman*, Tsuburaya Productions, and appeared on Mainichi/TBS television from 1993–4, pulling in a mainly pre-school audience of around 8 to 9 per cent. *Gridman* is decidedly similar to *Ultraman*, complete with red/silver coloring and energy brooch, but he looks more human: his heavy-jowled silver face suggests a crusty old brigadier. His lifestyle is completely different from *Ultraman's*: he inhabits a computer-generated parallel universe of clean, generic skyscrapers. When monsters threaten, he merges with a small boy, who beams himself to *Gridman's* universe and enters *Gridman's* body by pressing a button on a magic amulet worn on the arm, called the Acceptor. *Gridman* is then observed on screen by two other children, a boy and a girl, who assist him by tapping away at their computer keyboards and sending in extra supplies of remote-controlled hardware to support him.

The plot pattern is also rather different from *Ultraman*: *Gridman* is *never* strong enough to win on his own. He gets lobbed over buildings and booted into the gutter by monsters considerably larger than himself. But once the additional hardware arrives, things soon change. A barrage of rockets to soften up the monster, then the robo-dragon goes in claws-first. *Gridman* merely has to finish off the shell-shocked beast with a quick burst of the Gridbeam. And these monsters do not splatter black blood and tentacles all over the screen as they would in *Ultraman*: they hygienically disappear in an electronic puff accompanied by a short bleeping noise. *Gridman* is *Ultraman* post-economic miracle, *Ultraman* for the electronic age.

Events in the computer world govern those in the real world: the end of the monster brings relief to some tricky situation in the lives of real people. In one episode, scientists excavating a *Tyrannosaurus Rex* skeleton are suddenly attacked by their own mechanical digger. The spirit of the old dinosaur has somehow got into the hydraulics. While it chases them around in a quarry, *Gridman* does battle with a *Tyrannosaurus Rex*-derived monster in his own boxed world. This monster has been sent by an evil schoolboy, who is under the sway of a Darth Vader-derived supervillain in some other universe.¹² In the end,

when Gridman finishes off the monster, the digger becomes inanimate once more.

In another episode, a mother and child are trapped in a toy warehouse by a platoon of marauding model tanks. Again, Gridman's victory in his videogame battle exorcises the demons and the tanks grind to a halt just in time. Sometimes the relation between the parallel universes works the other way: in yet another episode, Gridman's failing power supplies are topped up by energy generated by several flabby middle-aged men working out on exercise machines in a gym and somehow patched through to Gridman's world.

Magical rescue, rather than individual heroism, is the theme of *Ultraman* and *Gridman* alike. But where Ultraman comes crashing into the threatened world of frail mortals, Gridman does his business in a separate, though connected, sphere controlled by child technocrats. Aided by new skills and equipment, humankind has regained a degree of control over nature in the latter version of the giant super-hero myth.

Color-coded gangs of five

Japanese television super-heroes fall into a quite limited number of categories: one is the giant super-hero as described above; another is the gang of five, a group of five pals, often mounted on motorbikes, dedicated to defending justice and fighting evil. Every year the Tōei film company produces a new version of the gang of five, usually airing at 5.30 pm on Fridays on TV Asahi. Some 80 per cent of its seven million viewers are in the target age range of 3 to 7 years, and the producers estimate that it is watched by 90 per cent of all 3-to-7-year-old Japanese children. "It's one of the first things they see when they open their eyes," says one of the producers.

The 1993 version was the *Dai (Great) Renjā*: four young men and one token woman, who turn into super-heroes: *Ryū* Ranger (Dragon Ranger, the leader in a red uniform), *Tenma* Ranger (Sacred Horse Ranger in a blue uniform), *Kirin* Ranger (Fiery Horse Ranger in yellow), *Shishi* Ranger (Lion Ranger in green) and *Hō* Ranger (Phoenix Ranger, who is a girl in pink). These in turn gave way to the *Kaku (Hidden) Renjā* in 1994, and then to the *Ō (Great, again) Renjā* in 1995.

The *Dai* Rangers are virtually identical to their many predecessors, as the following list will show. It comes from a children's fanzine in which portraits of the gangs are invariably posed to show a central/leading figure, and usually the second and third tiers are clearly indicated too. In the following translation (my own) I have used the positions of the actors in the portraits accompanying the descriptions to link color with

status. Colors of the same status class are separated by commas; those in different classes by semi-colons.

Feb 1979: *Batorufibâ J* (Battle Fever J)

"The Defense Ministry's strongest force, they fight with a dance action."

Red; blue; orange; green; white

Feb 1980: *Denshi Sentai Denjiman* (Electronic Combat Unit Denjiman)

"Imbued with the science of the Denji Starmen, they destroyed the *Bêdâ* ([In]vader?) Clan."

Red; yellow; blue; pink/white; green.

Feb. 1981: *Taiyô Sentai Sanbarukan* (Sun Combat Unit Sun Vulcan)

"Three heroes with the power of the eagle, the shark and the leopard."

Red; blue; yellow.

Feb 1982: *Dai Sentai Gôguru Faibu* (Great Combat Unit Gogul 5)

"Five powerful warriors chosen by computer."

Red; black; blue; yellow; pink.

Feb 1983: *Kagaku Sentai Dainaman* (Scientific Combat Unit Dynaman)

"Five super-scientific heroes with monstrous fighting abilities."

Red; blue; black; pink; yellow.

Feb 1984: *Chôdenshi Baioman* (Super-electronic Bioman)

"Contain bio-particle energy from a bio-star in their bodies."

Red; pink; yellow; blue; black.

Feb 1985: *Dengeki Sentai Chenjiman* (Electric Attack Combat Unit Changeman)

"Five men who have been drenched in the earth force and have acquired its power."

Red; pink; white; blue; black.

March 1986: *Chôshinsei Furasshuman* (Ultra-New Star Flashman)

"Brought up in the Flash Nebula, they fight with star power."

Red; pink; yellow; blue; green.

Feb 1987: *Hikari Sentai Masukuman* (Shining Combat Unit Maskman)

"Warriors who forged their own bodies to use aura power."

Red; yellow; pink; black; blue.

Feb 1988: *Chôjû Sentai Faibuman* (Superbeast Fiveman)

"Five heroes with the power of wild beasts inside their suits."

Red; green; black; blue; yellow.

Feb 1989: *Kôsoku Sentai Tâbo-Renyâ* (High Speed Combat Unit Turbo Ranger)

"High school warriors who specialize in high-speed attacks."

Red; pink; yellow; blue; black.

Feb 1990: *Chikyû Sentai Faibuman* (World Combat Unit Five Man)

"A combat unit of 5 brothers possessed of many united powers."

Red; blue; black; pink; yellow.

Feb 1991: *Chôjin Sentai Jettoman* (Birdman Combat Unit Jet Man)

"With their 'birdnic waves', they acquired the abilities of birdmen."

Red (hawk); blue (swallow); white/pink (swan - female); black (condor); yellow (owl)

Feb 1992: *Kyōryū Sentai Jū-Renjā* (Dinosaur Combat Unit Monster Ranger)
 "Dinosaur warriors who woke up after 170 million years' sleep."

Red (tyrannosaurus rex); pink (pterodactyl - female), yellow (sabre-toothed tiger); blue (triceratops), black (mammoth).

Feb 1993: *Gosei Sentai Dai-Renjā* (Five Star Combat Unit Great Ranger)

(See above)

Red (dragon); green (lion), pink (phoenix - female); blue (sacred horse), yellow (mythical fiery horse).

Feb 1994: *Ninja Sentai Kaku-Renjā* (Ninja Combat Unit Hidden Ranger)

"Ordinary youths perform a double transformation: into hooded *ninja* with advanced fighting skills, and then into beasts from oriental mythology."

Red (monkey); white (crane - female), blue (wolf); black (toad), yellow (bear).

According to Toei, the series' popularity peaked in 1980, with *Denjiman*, which had an average rating of 16 per cent, against 7 per cent for the most recent versions. The program has tended to keep its pre-school and early primary school audience, while losing older viewers: a common pattern with long-running entertainments in Japan. As the average viewing age has dropped, so has the significance of gender: audiences for early versions were 70 per cent male, whereas now the gender split is about fifty-fifty.

The gangs have shown remarkable consistency over the years in their use of the totemic theme and in number and color. The very first gang of five, *Battle Fever J*, had a political flavor: the red leader was called Battle Japan, and his followers included Battle Cossack,¹⁵ Battle France and Miss America. Since then, however, nearly all the incarnations of the Ranger gang seem to have related the members of the gang to existing, prehistoric or mythical animals. This can be seen as a kind of modern totemism: the beasts are chosen for their positive attributes - usually strength, courage or cunning - and to differentiate the characters of the gang members. The use of birds to symbolize females has also become firmly established. As in Lévi-Strauss' (1962) famous critique of totemism, these animal species are clearly chosen because they are "good to think".

A second important point is that with one exception, *Sanbarukan* (1981), each unit has five members. Why five? Five is a number that signifies hierarchy. It is an odd number, which suggests a man in the middle, or in front, in short a leader. It is also the smallest number that allows for a plural middle class and a plural lower class as well as a singular leader. The gang of five is a miniature class system: each member has reasons to be content with his or her station, for each has a special set of skills; at the same time, it is always made perfectly clear who leads and who is led.

The strong Japanese tendency to divide the natural and human world into groups of five may be a further influence on the television gangs of five, members of which tend to have simple, clearly defined characters, elemental if you like, dominated by a single characteristic linked to their totemic beast. Japanese people do not think in terms of three primary colors, rather they recognize five cardinal colors (*goshiki*): red, blue, yellow, white, black.¹⁴ These are the very colors of the five *Kaku* Rangers. It is obvious that some quite strong cultural chords are being struck here.

An alternative explanation comes from the producers at Tōei: the smallest number for a group drama is three (duos have never been very popular with Japanese children); but three is “lonely” (*sabishii*). No-one makes programs about gangs of four, because four is an unlucky number.¹⁵

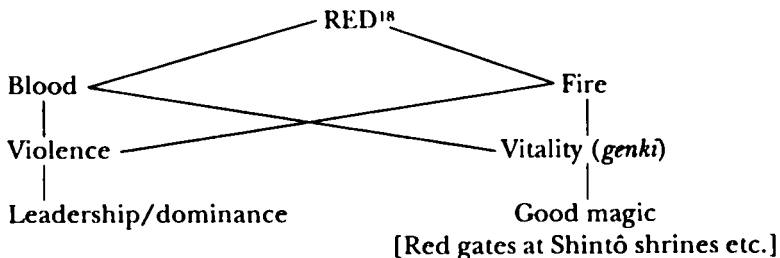
A third point to note about these gangs is the use of color. Each unit's members appear virtually identical except for their color-coded suits.¹⁶ Out of sixteen units, colors are as follows:

Red: 16;	Status: leader (16)
Blue: 16;	Status: middle (8) low (8)
Yellow: 14;	Status: middle (8) low (6)
Pink: 12; ¹⁷	Status: middle (8) low (4)
Black: 10;	Status: middle (4) low (6)
Green: 6;	Status: middle (1) low (5)
Orange: 1;	Status: middle (1)
White: 1;	Status: middle (1)

It is obvious that there is always a red member who is always the leader. There were no purely white rangers until the summer of 1993 (see below), although all suits in all units use white trim to offset distinguishing colors. White also tends to be accentuated with pink uniforms, perhaps to remind us of *kamaboko* again (see note 6). These pink uniforms are, I believe, invariably worn by the token female in the gang (there is always at least one female, and on occasion two, but women have never been in the majority).

Red, blue, yellow and pink then are staples, with green and black disputing the fifth place. However, the overwhelming impression is of the unquestioned dominance of the color red. Why always red? Tōei conducts regular surveys on child color-consciousness, which consistently show that red is by far the most popular color with Japanese children. Its associations with blood and fire make it a powerful color in most cultures, and so it is in Japan. Fire is seen in great quantities in Ranger programs: sheets, gouts, eruptions, great balls of fire. There is a limit to how much blood can be shown on programs with a large

pre-school audience, but a fair amount of it drips from flesh wounds. I would argue that the associations go something like this:



The association between red and leadership has a well-documented history. In the seventh and eighth centuries, one aspect of the Chinese system of bureaucratic government adopted by the Japanese imperial court was the five-rank (*gogyô*) hierarchy of civil servants. Each rank was indicated by clothing of an appropriate color (*seishoku*). Red ranked second only to purple, which enjoyed the same supremacy as Tyrian purple in the ancient Roman empire, and for the same reason: the dye was extremely difficult to make. In the Heian era (794–1185), these status-indicating colors were strictly forbidden to the common people; as dyeing techniques improved, the gorgeous reds of the madder root, sappanwood and saffron became powerful symbols of the court aristocracy (Saito 1988). Notwithstanding the absence of purple it is tempting to speculate that the Ranger gangs might be remote descendants of the old five-rank court hierarchy.

Like Ultraman, the Ranger concept has recently been transplanted to the United States. The 1992 model, *Jû-Renjâ*, was culturally adjusted, re-shot with American actors and released on US television, and then British television, as *Power Rangers*. The body-suits and motorcycle helmets have been kept; likewise the red-pink-yellow-blue-black color line-up, and the prehistoric theme, but there are one or two interesting changes. Inevitably, the color system has taken on ethnic significance: Black Ranger is played by an African American actor, Yellow Ranger by an Asian American actress. This makes two girls in the team, since Pink Ranger, inevitably, is female too. On the team line-up pictures, Black Ranger has been moved up to the middle tier of the hierarchy in a minor gesture towards affirmative action (yet at the expense of one of the girls). The Red Ranger retains supremacy, and is played by a generic white male hunk. The primitive magic of the Japanese version has gone; instead, like most American heroes, the Rangers have been clumsily politicized.¹⁹

It has been argued that Rangers inevitably come in packets of five, but in recent years the five has tended to become six. In the *Jû-Renjâ* story

there is a sixth ranger, Dragon Ranger in the Japanese version, Green Ranger in the American version, who starts out hostile but is won over and joins the gang in the course of the series. The theme is repeated in the *Dai Renjā* series, with a small boy called Kô, imbued with the spirit of a snow leopard, who transforms into a white Ranger called *Kiba* (Fang) Ranger. A complex family history makes him an enemy, but as with Dragon Ranger he converts to the cause just in time for his figurine to be added to the set for the end-of-year gift-giving season. He takes up a position at the center of the gang, alongside *Ryū* Ranger (the red one) and only very slightly behind him. Once again, that powerful and significant red-white combination emerges. When the *Kaku-Renjā* were launched the following year, one member – the female one – was clad all in white for the first time ever.

The five original *Dai* Rangers are all teenagers – the four males work in a Chinese restaurant, a pet shop, a boxing gym and a beauty parlor when off-duty (like Clark Kent, Rangers are often wimps when in civies), and Hô is a Chinese student. In contrast, Kô, the newcomer, is much younger and smaller, but just as powerful when transformed, of course. The young child gaining acceptance among older, more mature children is another common Japanese theme. Interestingly, the American version replaces little Kô with another big, strapping teenager.

As in *Superman*, Rangers are of normal human size and hence easier to identify with than Ultraman. Their adversaries, too, are of the wicked humanoid variety rather than outsize monsters. They are called *yôkai* (bogeys; hobgoblins), whereas Ultraman and Gridman always fight *kaijū* (monsters). Quite often the *yôkai* are women. In the *Jū-Renjā* series the main enemy is a witch-figure called “Bandora”, a reference to Pandora’s box. She fights the Rangers with grotesque gnomes and hunchbacks in her thrall.

The *Dai* Rangers also have a leering witch-foe, Colonel Gara (*Gara Chûsa*), who has two male accomplices: Colonel Shadam (a possible Gulf War reference) and Colonel Saidos. They all wear leather pilots’ caps, monocles, with plenty of thongs, straps and studs, reminiscent of the *Mad Max* movies. They are a troika, the “three executives” of an evil empire called Goma, which is ruled over by the corpulent, pasty-faced King Goma XV. The troika commands an army of pathetic foot soldiers called *kottopotoro* (“putties” in the *Power Ranger* version) which are rubbished in large numbers by the *Dai* Rangers in most episodes. They are like the footbots in *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*: humanoid, but sufficiently formalized and mechanical to be destroyed without humanistic qualms.²⁰

As with Ultraman, the fighting scenes for which every viewer waits only occupy a few minutes towards the end of each half-hour episode. I

lack space to analyze the material with which the rest of the episode is filled, but one theme which seems to recur very often, in this series and others, is that of loss of parents or alienation from them. Kô, the boy who becomes *Kiba* Ranger, had the mark of the leopard branded on him by his mother when still a child, and has frequent flash-backs, complete with howls of pain. Now he is living with a foster-mother, a young single woman who at one point in the series throws him out of the house for touching her breasts. At the end of the episode he is re-admitted on condition that there will be no more unauthorized fondling. Overtly sexual themes like this are quite common in Japanese entertainment for pre-schoolers.

Whether or not one regards such programs as significant cultural indicators, one cannot ascribe them simply to one man's idiosyncrasy: like Ultraman, the Rangers are designed and produced by a team whose personnel varies with the years. There is no single auteur to be discerned behind the mythology. It comes from the broader culture, and in turn illuminates it.

Purple heroes

We might ask why the leaders of Ranger gangs are always clad in red rather than purple, the traditional color of leadership. First, of course, because of the powerful associations of red outside its connection with old court hierarchies, discussed briefly above. Second, because although these red riders are leaders, they are not supremos. There usually seems to be an older man, a *sensei* (teacher/master) to whom they defer. The red rangers are field commanders, not generals.

So far I have only come across two purple heroes in the television culture. One is Ultraman King: the only Ultraman who is not red and silver. He is purple with silver trim and a silver beard. This makes perfect sense: purple is the imperial color. The other is Jan Pâ-son (TV Asahi/Asahi Communications/Tôei, 1993-4). The name is supposed to mean person, not parson. It seems to be a feeble attempt to substitute the "man" with which so many heroes' names end. Jan Pâson, who closely resembles the American Robocop, is a purple robot, whose weaponry includes the "Break Knuckle" (where his rocket-propelled fist flies off the arm) and a cannon concealed in his knee-cap. He has a comrade called Gun Gibson who touts a colossal bazooka called a "spindle cannon". JP (as he's affectionately known) drives the "Dark J Car" which is also purple and contains a detachable purple helicopter called the "Sky J Car". Gibson is a Wild West-like character. He rides a large motorbike called the "G. G. Slayer", festooned with tassels and silverware, and wears a cowboy hat.

These robots are emotional types. In an early episode some enemies kill Gibson's robot girlfriend, sending him into a frenzy of grief in which he wanders around randomly blowing people up. JP finally manages to console him and they bury the girlfriend's central microchip under a tree. This cements their friendship (and the following week Gibson dolls appeared next to JP dolls in the toy shops). JP himself is attracted to frail human women; in one episode he thanks a young lady for showing him what feelings are and tells her he is about to be "reborn". However, like Ultraman, he appears to lack the basic equipment for passionate relationships.

Again like Ultraman, JP started out as a lonely solo act ("*Hitori de doko e yuku?*" – "Where are you going all alone?" – asks the melancholy theme song), but rapidly acquired a large support group. As well as Gibson there are several human friends and a little flying robot with expressive eyebrows who melds with JP's "Jan Dejik" handgun to make a yet more powerful cannon. Japanese heroes never seem to be alone for long: merchandising, as much as culture, sees to that.

Jan Pâson aired on TV Asahi at 8 am on Sunday mornings, 1993–4. Early in 1994, he was replaced with an even more violent program called *Blue Swat*, about a SWAT team of two men and one woman who use highly sophisticated weaponry to destroy disgusting monsters. Despite the title, their uniforms are clearly purple.

Transformations and incorporations

Along with color, transformation (*henshin* or *henkei*) and incorporation/combination (*gattai*) must be examined, as they are staple themes of all children's SF adventures in Japan. The former literally means "change body" or "change form", the latter "combine bodies".²¹ Transformation is a theme of folk tales and religions all over the world, and Japan is no exception. Significantly, a popular Japanese word for almost any kind of ghost or monster is *bakemono* (literally: a thing that changes). An alternative word for *yôkai* (hobgoblin) is *henge*, both the characters of which mean "change".

When the Allied occupying armies arrived in Japan at the end of World War II, they found (using what would now be seen as pejorative and ethnocentric labels) that "spirit or demonic possession, necromancy, black magic, witchcraft and purification rites are very common among the common people" (Bunce 1955: 113). Today these beliefs remain strong and find expression in the huge followings of certain charismatic religions (Astley n.d.; Davis 1980; Matsunaga n.d.). Human-animal and human-demon transformations are a stock theme of *ukiyo*e

paintings: old women who cast the shadow of a fox; beautiful courtesans who are reflected as ferocious demons in the samurai's cup of sake. The original transforming goblins of Japanese folklore are still shown on television in *Nihon Mukashi-banashi* (*Japanese Tales of Long Ago*, Mainichi/TBS TV), a long-running animation which has won prizes for its educational content. The *tanuki* (raccoon dog) and *kappa* (water sprite) are two popular folkloric figures with the ability to transform themselves.²²

Incorporation, by contrast, looks like a much more modern, machine-age myth. The two come together in most modern tales of super-heroes. Gridman can transform himself in a number of ways: he can expand, and become Gridman Big. When this is not enough, he can be merged with his peripheral hardware and be incorporated into Thunder Gridman. The tank merges with his abdomen, the robo-dragon folds itself round his shoulders. Only Gridman's head still protrudes from a far bigger, bulkier torso in which body and armor are one seamless mass. Somewhere inside all the armor and weaponry is Gridman, and somewhere inside Gridman is the small boy, the self in the middle of a nested Russian doll.

The theme of transformation is familiar from Marvel comics, of course, but the circumstances are significantly different. By and large, the American heroes bio-transform; the Japanese mecha-transform. The childhood incident which marks the hero out for the future is a common element in American comics: the atomic radiation, the spilled test-tube, the spider serum. These are the magic potions which give the transformatory power. Spiderman has got the knack of transforming on purpose; Batman and Superman are always powerful and only require a change of clothing. For the Incredible Hulk, the transformation is involuntary and convulsive; there is no uniform, just the torn remains of his working clothes. It could be said that the American heroes are variations on the Jekyll and Hyde theme: for Dr Jekyll the transformation is at first voluntary, then shades into involuntary; the Marvel men are stationed along the curve.

Japanese heroes do not usually transform biologically. The serum motif is missing from the mythology. A device is required. This is true even for Ultraman. I noted earlier that Ultraman is a helper who arrives from afar. That is basically so, but there is a half-hearted stab at the transformational theme: Ultramen must be summoned up, by one of a group of special policemen who wear rubber jump suits and motorcycle helmets. This is done by switching on a device resembling a Pifco torch with a red filter. The torch is waved in the air, and (an) Ultraman comes flying in. We are supposed to believe that he takes over the body of the policeman, but we never see this happen. The only proof we have is that

the actor playing the policeman does not appear while Ultraman is on Earth, and that after Ultraman's departure we may see some tell-tale sign: typically a flesh wound on the same part of the body as where the monster got a claw into Ultraman. Gridman's Acceptor is a high-tech version of the Ultraman torch.

The transformation device used by the *Dai* Rangers is a small gadget called an "aura-changer". It consists of two parts, one with a slot and the other with a key, one worn on each wrist. Inserting the key into the slot produces the change. The *Kaku* Rangers have a very similar item called a "doron-changer".

The underlying difference between bio-transformation and mecha-transformation is clear enough: only people with special personal histories, exposed to radiation or serum, can bio-transform, whereas anybody, any child, can mecha-transform provided she or he has the appropriate kit. Compared with the American version, the Japanese is both more democratic and more commercially exploitable: Acceptors, aura-changers, etc., are readily available in the shops.

Transformational gadgets are enough of a cliché to be lampooned in the less po-faced cartoon series. In one episode of *Doraemon*,²³ the very long-running, very popular cartoon about a blue, atomic-powered robot cat, Doraemon fixes up his weakling friend Nobuta with a *Chikara Denchi* (Strength Battery), which allows him to become incredibly strong for very brief periods if he sits still and does nothing for a long time to charge up the battery. It is the sort of transformational machine that might have been "made in Britain".²⁴

Mecha-transformation took off in the 1980s with the comic series *Mobile Suit Gundam*. The latest version, *G Gundam*, was recently still showing on Asahi TV, immediately before *Kaku-Renjā*. The mobile suits are worn by children. They are colossal, exotic robots that fly through space and battle teams of similarly massive opponents. They can convert into tanks, rockets and so on. An entire new genre of toys has been spawned from this series: trucks and police cars that turn into robots; dinosaurs that turn into robots; ships that turn into robots; and the robots can in turn be merged with other robots to make bigger, better robots.

Which leads to the complementary motif of incorporation. I have already described the incorporation of Gridman into Thunder Gridman: similar events occur in practically every super-hero series of at least the last decade. Sometimes the nesting is truly elaborate. In the case of the *Dai* Rangers, we first have the transformation from child to Ranger, accomplished with the aura-changer; then each *Dai* Ranger has his own vehicle, into which he disappears and is effectively swallowed. Just occasionally we glimpse him at the controls of his hidden interior cockpit. The Blue and Yellow Rangers (Sacred Horse and Fiery Horse)

both climb into vehicles resembling chess knights. The Green Ranger (Lion), pilots a vehicle resembling a lion, that covers the ground in great clanking leaps. The Pink Ranger (phoenix) flies around in a pink aeroplane resembling a bird, and the Red Ranger (dragon) controls a gigantic red robot called the *Ryû-Sei-Ô* (Dragon Star King). This robot in turn can transform into a vast flying dragon. It is clearly the best of the vehicles, another superior status marker.

The process of transformation and incorporation does not end there. If the Rangers find themselves up against an adversary too tough even for the *Ryû-Sei-Ô* and the other four vehicles, they amalgamate all five of them into a truly massive robot called the *Dai-Ren-Ô* (Great Connected King). The two chess knights attach themselves to the *Ryû-Sei-Ô*'s legs like huge boots; the lion vehicle divides into three parts to form the head and both arms; the bird wraps itself round the *Ryû-Sei-Ô*'s waist to form a kind of kilt. Thus the children of the gang have gone through three stages of transformation/incorporation: turning into Rangers, disappearing into vehicles, and combining vehicles.

Another interesting version of the transformation and incorporation theme appears in *Jay-Decker*, a cartoon which was launched by TV Asahi in 1994. This features three pieces of anthropomorphic construction equipment: they are clearly foreigners, for their names are Dumpson, McCrane and Power Joe. They are robots in the form of a dump truck, a crane and a power shovel, which then come together to create the "Build-Tiger", a huge robot/tiger. The idea builds on the fact that orange and black stripes are a popular color scheme for construction equipment. The mighty Build-Tiger is controlled by a very small boy called Yûta.

This recurrent popular fantasy might be read in two ways: first, as a mechanism for dealing with fear of adults. Adults are the real bogeymen of any child's imagination: they are huge, irrational and unpredictable, rather like monsters. How comforting then, to be bigger than them, to be a big person, concealed from the world by the anonymous crash helmet; better still, to be that big person hidden in the interior cockpit of a behemoth that could crush any adult to custard by simply putting its foot down.

Secondly, the child in the robot can be read as a metaphor for the spirit inside the body,²⁵ suggesting that an important theme is that of mind achieving control over the unruly body. This theme runs through Japanese culture: it is there in the popular obsession with *gaman* (endurance), for instance, and in the ascetic varieties of Zen Buddhism. The child in the robot, with his array of buttons and levers, and mastery of all manner of *hissatsu kôsen* (sure-to-kill rays) and *tokusen panchi* (special punches), is the self in full control – and fully hidden.

The Momotaro theme

In this chapter attention has been drawn to the important Japanese word *genki*, which signifies health, vigor and good spirits. It is familiar to anyone who has ever attempted to study the language from the customary greeting *genki desu-ka?* (literally: are you fit?).²⁶

A *genki* person is one whose *ki* is flowing correctly, ensuring rude physical health.²⁷ There is also a link between bodily flows and emotional vitality. The body/mind link can run in either direction. Thus in Japanese folklore, small children whose thoughts and emotions are not corrupted by adult knowledge are thought to be particularly *genki* and capable of performing incredible feats of strength.

This brings us to another powerful figure in the Japanese popular pantheon: the small but incredibly powerful boy, depicted as chubby, rosy-cheeked and very *genki*. The most famous traditional versions are Momotaro, the Peach Boy, and Kintaro, the Golden Boy. Momotaro defeated ogres to retrieve a village's stolen treasure; Kintaro wrestled with bears. Smaller still was Issun-bōshi, the Japanese equivalent of Tom Thumb, who was only an inch high, but still rescued a princess from an ogre by stabbing the ogre in the eye with his pin-like sword.²⁸

Today the super-strong little boy is alive and well in Japanese hero mythology. He re-emerged just seven years after the war ended, in 1952, in the person of *Atomu Taishi* (Ambassador Atom), later renamed *Tetsuwan Atomu* (Mighty Atom), and popularized in the English-speaking world as *Astro Boy* (Schodt 1983: 63–5). The Mighty Atom fought dinosaurs and robots and bad men with the old Momotaro spirit of *hisshō* (certain victory).²⁹

This creation of the great comic artist Tezuka Osamu spawned a host of descendants. These include Son-Gohan and Trunks, a pair of tiny, incredibly powerful heroes in *Dragonball*, a very popular cartoon series from Toei which aired from 1986 to 1997 on Wednesdays at 7.30 pm on Fuji TV, commanding massive ratings (in the region of 20 per cent of the viewing audience). A large portion of this series is taken up with fights in which these tiny boys destroy gigantic ogre-like adversaries. Characters in *Dragonball* have so much *ki* energy that they literally glow, emit flames, float into the air and so on. Their creator, Toriyama Akira, knows his myths well: the original concept of magic balls which give control over dragons comes from Chinese mythology, and many characters are overtly linked to folkloric forebears: the name "Son-Gohan", for instance, is a jokey reference to Son-Gokū, the magic monkey of Chinese and Japanese tradition.

Another Momotaro-type hero who has been linked by his creators directly to the old folk magic is Yaiba, an animated cartoon character

who was on TV Asahi from 1993 to 1994. Yaiba looks very similar to Son-Gohan: a very small boy, with stylized spikey hair pointing in seven directions, who is full of raw, bellicose energy. He shouts a lot, is dressed as a samurai, and carries a magic sword which emits water, ice, thunder, fire, etc. He is one of a gang of seven. The other members are a cute schoolgirl, a tall, one-eyed samurai, an irascible little old man with a long beard, a dinosaur dressed in armor, a cat and a vulture. Each carries a magic ball, color-coded of course. They lose energy if parted from their balls; but if they all put their balls together they can create greater energy than the sum of their powers. This theme of magic balls also features in the *Dai Rangers*. They put their balls together on the control panel of the *Dai-Ren-Ô* robot.

Yaiba's opponents are also derived from folk mythology. In one episode, he takes on an old hermit with the power to transform himself into an agile monkey and turn people to stone with magic darts fired from a blow-pipe. After a desperate battle, during which all his comrades are petrified, Yaiba succeeds in sucking the old man into the hilt of his sword, narrowly avoiding sucking himself in at the same time. Finally, there is even a baby hero called "Akachanman" (Babyman) who makes occasional appearances in the children's series *Anpanman*. He is a flying super-baby who returns to his cot and bottle after each daring mission.

Conclusion: the classificatory impulse

In hero-monster tales with plural heroes and monsters, the theme of classification always seems to be most important. When I ask Japanese children what they like about these programs, they come up with answers such as that the heroes are *kakko-ii* (smart, dashing) or that the monsters and fighting are *omoshiroi* (interesting). But when they talk among themselves, I notice, the main issue is mastery of classificatory knowledge: who can tell the difference between Gridman Big and Thunder Gridman; who can name the yellow one in the *Dai Rangers*; who can say whether a certain monster fought against Ultraman Great or Ultraman Powered, etc? Most of the fanzines which these children read have almost no stories in them: they are primarily catalogs, of heroes and monsters, classified by age (i.e. year of release), gender, genus, planet of origin, color of uniform, fighting technique, strength, status or posture.³⁰ For those who have read the plethora of material on socialization in Japan, these themes will be familiar: how the body is formed (Ben-Ari 1997); notions of appropriate gender behavior (Higuchi 1978); the importance of seniority (Hendry 1986); and the concept of Japanese-ness or origin (Goodman 1989).

Despite the cultural specificity of the themes examined above, I believe this concern with classification may well be universal. Certainly British children find it deeply satisfying to know which Tracey brother pilots which Thunderbird.³¹ Moreover I suspect that classificatory disputes may be heard in playgrounds all around the world. For as Edmund Leach (1982), among others, has argued, the human experience entails imposing a system of discontinuities on the seamless continuum perceived by the baby or animal. To the small child order, classification and taxonomy are not arid academic issues, but the key to security and confidence; to a sense of one's place in the world. Hence, I would suggest, the pervasiveness of the classificatory theme in children's television adventures in Japan and elsewhere. Evil villains and rampaging monsters both excite and alarm by holding out the intriguing yet disturbing possibility that the order of things may be re-shaped, or even hurled into chaos. But in every episode the heroes bring us back from the brink, restoring a familiar order which the young viewer will value more highly, having seen it under such evident threat.

Notes

- 1 For an interesting discussion of this see van Bremen 1995.
- 2 For a discussion of *Sailor Moon*, see Napier Chapter 5.
- 3 During Tsuburaya's sixteen-year hesitation over *Ultraman*, the old series grew in popularity around the world. Two new series were made in the US: *Ultraman Great* (1990) and *Ultraman Powered* (1993). In 1996 Tsuburaya released a movie version, *Ultraman ZEARTH*, which was followed by the new TV series, *Ultraman Tiga*.
- 4 Fans of Superman may question the accuracy of my account of Superman the loner. True, as Clark Kent he may have adopted earth parents and lived with his Aunt May, but when he becomes Superman he generally fights on his own. True, too, there have been fleeting appearances of Superboy, Supergirl and Superdog, but they were fellow citizens of Planet Krypton, not relatives; and the appearance of Marlon Brando as Superman's father in the film version, is, I would argue, a late and cynical commercial corruption. When a story runs for so long, thematic impurities will inevitably creep in. At any rate, Superman as icon is always depicted as fighting a lone struggle against evil and disaster.
- 5 It could be said that Ultraman is a case of a cultural figure who has been "re-made" in Japan (Tobin 1992).
- 6 For example, *sekihan*, the white rice cooked with red beans at weddings and other celebrations; the pink and white *kamaboko* (compressed fish meal), also considered felicitous; the red and white striped awnings and favors often seen at festivals, the red and white colors adopted by the two moieties of a Japanese school when competing against each other at the annual athletics tournament.
- 7 Japanese encyclopedias offer various theories as to why the red and white combination is so powerful: some derive it from the idealized beauty of the

- Japanese plum and its blossom; others put the competitive association down to the colors worn by the Genji clan (white) and the Heike clan (red) during a clan war of 1180–85, highly reminiscent of the Wars of the Roses in England. I feel sure there are deeper underlying reasons as I discuss later.
- 8 In some of the later feature-length *Ultraman* films, the scriptwriters found it impossible to sustain interest without giving the inhabitants of planet Ultra some lines. But in the typical TV episode, Ultraman simply arrives near the end to fight the monster, without comment.
 - 9 The only time I can recall Ultramen displaying emotion was in an episode of *Ultraman Taro*. A particularly dangerous monster had trapped Taro and four of his brothers in paralyzing ether cylinders. Father of Ultra – easily recognizable with his silver sideburns and splendid pair of Viking horns – had to come and get them out. He killed the monster and liberated the lads, but died in the attempt. The brothers of Ultra stood around the body with heads hung low, then bore the body back to Planet Ultra in a slow (mach 200) and solemn flying convoy. Later, in typical super-hero fashion, Father of Ultra was resurrected by a special machine.
 - 10 It should be noted that since he is most often portrayed by an actor in a rubber Ultrasuit, distressing rubber wrinkles and folds inevitably do appear.
 - 11 In this summoning of the hero we can see a similarity to the summoning of the divine, as Yamaguchi argues for sumo and kabuki in Chapter 1.
 - 12 The evil schoolboy also has an unhealthy adolescent obsession with Yuka, the girl among the Grid-heroes. Although the viewers are overwhelmingly pre-pubescent, juvenile sexual frustration is a subtext in *Gridman*.
 - 13 Battle Cossack is the only gang member ever to have worn orange; his color was supposed to signify Russia, but red had already been claimed by Battle Japan.
 - 14 Note also that Japan has borrowed from Chinese culture the concept of five natural elements (*gogyō*) (rather than the four in European culture): fire, wood, earth, metal and water. The same word, *gogyō*, also signifies the five virtues of Buddhism: *fuse* (charity), *jikai* (obedience), *ninniku* (endurance), *shōjin* (diligence), and *shikan* (spiritual concentration). Japanese Buddhism recognizes five, rather than seven, sins: *sessho* (murder), *chūtō* (theft), *ja'in* (adultery), *mōgo* (slander) and *onju* (drinking). Confucianism also recognizes five virtues deriving from five fundamental human relationships: justice between ruler and ruled; benevolence between parent and child; propriety between husband and wife; order between elder and younger; and sincerity between friends. Then, too, there are the five senses.
 - 15 The Japanese word for four, *shi*, also means death.
 - 16 For cross-cultural comparison, here is the color-coded line-up of the five Tracey brothers in *Thunderbirds*, as indicated by their sashes: Scott (TB1): pale blue. Virgil (TB2): pale yellow. Alan (TB3): off-white. Gordon (TB4): orange. John (TB5): lilac.

These are pretty insipid pastel shades. I would describe Alan's sash as very pale pink, but the above are the descriptions in the official *Thunderbirds* annual. They share the color-coding principle with the Japanese gangs of five, but the colors play a much less significant role. Not many British children could name all five sash colors – lilac? – but every Japanese child who follows *Dai-Renjā* knows that *Ryū* Ranger is the red one, etc. All Japanese gang of five members wear bold, unambiguous colors, which I think symbolize robustness and vitality.

- 17 Including pink and white.
- 18 The makers of the Ranger series take the color red very seriously. Whereas most Japanese TV programs are shot on Fuji film, the Ranger series are always shot on Eastman/Kodak, which they say gives a better red.
- 19 Japan got its own back with the launch of the *Kaku-Renjā* in 1994: Ninja Black is a Japanese-American boy who cannot speak Japanese, walks through earth, and is imbued with the spirit of the toad. Clearly he is a peculiar foreigner; note also the association of black with foreign, even when skin color does not match.
- 20 Otherwise, the Goma empire consists of a collection of very low-budget *yōkai* which are well into the realm of self-parody: *Hakaishi Shachō* (Gravestone President), who looks like a rubbery walking gravestone; *Tōfu Sennin* (Tofu Hermit) in a white suit with a one-eyed cube of tofu for his head; *Nokogiri Daisōjō* (Saw Archbishop) whose head is a couple of saw-blades nailed together with three eyes painted on them ... and so on.
- Often these beasts are able to defeat individual rangers, or even the whole gang when they are at odds with each other and unable to concentrate their energies. But once the five are working in concert, they are soon victorious: the spiritual power of harmony and teamwork invariably brings success.
- 21 I have seen *gattai* used to signify sexual intercourse in other contexts.
- 22 One of the *Kaku* Rangers' foes is a modern *kappa*, bald on top as all *kappa* are, but with green rasta dreadlocks hanging from the sides of his head.
- 23 Created by Fujimoto Hitoshi and Abiko Motō; *Doraemon* has appeared in the comics of Shogakukan Inc. since 1969, and on Asahi TV since 1979.
- 24 For more on transformational gadgets in *Doraemon*, see Schilling 1993.
- 25 Japan, and indeed "the Orient" in general, is sometimes said to be characterized by a holistic way of thinking that does not make the Cartesian dichotomy between mind and body – hence, for example, holistic oriental medicine, and the concept of mastering skills by repetition. Yet Japanese concepts of human behavior often seem to make a very clear mind/body distinction. Take *yakuza* (gangster) movies, for instance, with their recurring theme of the hero who maintains iron control of his body until losing it in the last reel in an explosion of righteous violence (see Buruma 1984: 167–95).
- 26 Roughly equivalent to "How are you?", the characters for *genki* are *gen* (origin) and *ki* (energy) which imply that one's life-spirit is flowing correctly. Illness or unhappiness are ascribed to poor circulation of *ki*, a concept borrowed from ancient Chinese philosophy which informs martial arts such as judō and karate and therapeutic techniques such as acupuncture and shiatsu massage.
- 27 This is reminiscent of the English Renaissance concept of the four humors: one whose blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile are in correct proportion will be healthy and emotionally balanced.
- 28 Dower (1986) has some fascinating material on how Momotaro was used in Japanese propaganda during World War II: the Allied forces were the ogres, of course, Momotaro the outnumbered but indomitable Japan. This belief in the ability of childish, innocent verve to overcome massive odds (which must surely rank alongside the equally optimistic belief about the Divine Wind – *kamikaze* – that would blow away invading fleets, embodied in the suicide pilots) was an underlying cultural reason for Japan's stubborn refusal to surrender until after Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

- 29 The characters for *hisshō* appear on the headbands of baseball supporters, exam candidates, etc. – again, that doggedly irrational optimism.
- 30 Posture is important to all heroes; each strikes his own distinctive fighting pose. Each Ultraman has a different arm/hand configuration for launching beams; knowing them is like gaining familiarity with masonic handshakes.
- 31 Many years ago, I battled with my brother over the Mole, the underground drilling machine featured in that series. My heretical brother insisted that the Mole was Thunderbird 6, since it appears on the title sequence immediately after Thunderbird 5. I pointed out that the Mole does not have a “6” painted on the side, and that if it were Thunderbird 6, this would ruin the symmetry between the five Tracey brothers and five Thunderbirds. Neither of us has changed his mind more than 20 years later. Meanwhile, the very same episodes of *Thunderbirds* are being argued over by yet another generation, just as Japanese children are still arguing over the classification of Ultramen and Rangers of the 1960s and 1970s, like tiny museum curators.

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