

# Explaining Popularity

Lecture April 9, 2003

# Death of the Old Ways

Tatari-gami bites the dust (Princess Mononoke)

See <http://www.ntv.co.jp/ghibli/>

# Some styles of analysis

- artistic structures / themes
- social historical context
- resonance of drama
- industrial context
- fan communities

See “The Wonderful World of Sazae-san by Michiko Hasegawa.

# "Why is something popular?"

- **Tendency to read off text**
  - e.g., Mononoke vs. Spirited
  - Japaneseness / exoticism
  - Accessibility, etc.
- **But also**
- growing anime audience
- Academy Award
- network effects

# Sazae-san

- Sazae-san
  - woman protagonist
  - extended family
  - everyone included
- *Mukoyoshi* family

See “The Wonderful World of Sazae-san by Michiko Hasegawa.

# Why popular?

- "ordinary family life"
- changing Japan
- nostalgia
  
- Note: "nostalgia" and "resonance" can be interpreted many ways



An 80 yen (50 cent)  
stamp with Sazae-san

## Marriage Rate and Average Age of First Marriage by Country

See United Nations, *Demographic Yearbook*, 1999; Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, *Jinko tokei shiryoshu* (Latest Demographic Statistics), 2001.

## Divorce

See National Institute of Population and Social Security Research,  
Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, *Jinko tokei shiryoshu* (Latest  
Demographic Statistics), 2001.



## Number of Children per Household

See United Nations, *Demographic Yearbook*, 1999; Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, *Jinko tokei shiryoshu* (Latest Demographic Statistics), 2001.

## Change of Household Structure

See Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunications, *Nihon tokei geppo* (Monthly Statistics of Japan), January 2002.

# Crayon Shin-chan

Nostalgia or anti-nostalgia . . . ?

What other ways to explain  
"popularity" ?

*An inexorable march to greatness?*

# Network Effects

- information contagion
- increasing returns
- lock-in

Figure 2: A clockface before 12-hour design locked in in Brian Arthur (1994) in *Sci American*

# Analysis

- What explain how?
  - Kinsella: cultural production
  - "resonance"
  - social historical background
  - deeper meanings (Buddha)
  - artistic coherence (auteur)

# Discussion

- Does the Sazae-san article's conclusion seem valid?
- Doraemon abroad: how does dynamic change when thinking about Asian popularity?
- Perfect Blue - reactions?