Introduction

LEGO Monkie Kid is a Danish-Australian coproduction between the LEGO company and Flying Bark Productions. The show is mostly based on the LEGO Monkie Kid theme, and both take inspiration from *Journey to the West*. In *LEGO Monkie Kid* the events of the *Journey to the West* have long since passed and are now considered legends by most until Mk finds the Monkey Kings (*Sun Wukong*) staff and gains the powers from it. Mk and his friends must fight against the old enemies of the Monkey King to protect the city and save the day. Due to the source material that the show is based on the show takes both visual and narrative influence from Chinese culture. We see through the way that character's dress with many characters wearing traditional Chinese outfits: Mei wears a *hanfu*[1] in the Calabash (*LEGO Monkie Kid* 2021, season 1 episode 5); Mei's parents wear a *tangzhuang*[2] and *qipao*[3] (*LEGO Monkie Kid* 2021, season 1 episode 3). We can also observe the Chinese influence through prop designs such as the magical lantern that the character Macaque uses in Shadow Play (*LEGO Monkie Kid* 2021, season 2 episode 7) being designed similarly to Chinese palace lanterns, and trough background characters actions (Harper 2020, 03:30).

The series stands out as a western cartoon when compared to other children's cartoons such as, *Adventure Time, Amphibia,* and *The Loud House* not only due to Chinese stylistic influences, but also due to the *anime-esque* traits it utilizes. I will be examining how the *LEGO Monkie Kid* uses *anime-esque* qualities and how that might affect viewers perceptions of cartoons. First, I will be discussing the characteristics of the *anime-esque,* next I will discuss how it uses practices from *sakuga* followed by how the show uses limited animation, then I will examine how *chibi-fication* is utilized within the show, and finally I will reflect how the usage of *anime-esque* traits may affect the perceptions the series.

The Anime-esque

The *anime-esque* was introduced by Stevie Suan in *Anime's Performativity: Diversity through Conventionality in a Global Media-Form* (2017). Suan borrowed the term from Jaqueline Berndt's '*mangaesque*'. The term mangaesque is understood to be what passes as 'typically' manga among

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[1] Traditional clothing worn by Han Chinese people (Wang 2020, 79).
[2] Formal Chinese jacket that has its origins in the Quing Dynasty (1644-1911) (Weng 2014, 190-191).
[3] Chinese dress developed from the changfu that was popularized during the 1920's to 1940's (Britannica).

regular media users, allowing us to draw attention to practically relevant popular discourse and to critically informed, theoretical reflections on what may or may not be expected from manga (Jaqueline Berndt in Suan 2017, 64). Suan applies this term to be used for what passes as 'typical' of anime among viewers (Suan 2017, 64).

Suan primarily examines how anime that is primarily CGI is able to maintain their *anime-esque* aesthetics (Suan 2017, 68-69), how certain facial expressions have become conventionalized in anime (Suan 2017, 70), and how various anime reference each other in their visual style to create what we consider *anime-esque* (Suan 2017, 71). These observations become the groundwork for how the *anime-esque* can be recognized by viewers of the medium. He later expands on this concept in *Colorful Execution: Conventionality and Transnationality in Kimetsu no Yaiba* (2021). Here Suan examines how the tension between the local demands of Japan and the Global demands affected the demon slayer series through the lens of the *anime-esque* (Suan 2020, 179-180).

What one might consider as 'typical' of anime varies from person to person and it will also vary depending on the amount of anime one consumes. Some of the common elements that Suan draws our attention to are conventionalized expressions, character design styles, narrative content, voice acting styles, background, world-setting, sound design, techniques of animation, styles of movement, narrative structure, and pacing (Suan 2017, 64). These conventionalized elements could be attributed to production historical and cultural differences between different animation industries. Suan attributes the aesthetic differences between anime and other forms of animation to a difference in animation techniques, character design styles, narrative structures, and setting. Over time the continued repetition creates a distinction that eventually connects them to anime as an identity (Suan 2017, 64).

The *anime*-esque is based upon conventional elements that are reinforced through repetition however the elements that we attribute to the *anime-esque* may vary with time. Each iteration of the *anime*-esque cites a previous performance and through its contribution it allows the opportunity for further citation creating further moments of change (Suan 2017, 73). Through the repetition of this process the traits that we associate with the *anime-esque* change over periods of time. We can see this happening with anime that have been re-adapted such as *Sailor Moon*, *Digimon Adventure*, and *Trigun*. The original anime was all produced during the mid to late 90's and they have subsequently all gotten new, recent adaptations.

Another way we can observe variation in the *anime-esque* it through genre. While there is overlap between many aspects of the *anime-esque* there is variation between genres. For example, in *mahō shōjo*[4] the protagonist will usually have an intricate transformation from her everyday self to her magical girl design. While these transformations are commonly found in this genre you are less likely to find them present in an anime like *Kimetsu no Yaiba* (Demon Slayer) or *isekai*[5] anime such as *My Next Life as a Villainess: All Routes Lead to Doom!* The same is true for other forms of genre TV.

In LEGO Monkie Kid one of the ways the show utilizes the *anime-esque* is through the shows setting. Due to anime often being perceived as a Japanese product, some of the location elements that were used for background design and setting have become a part of the *anime-esque*. This is a trait that has continued, in historical fiction anime its generally accepted most settings that have East Asian as an inspiration or as the setting will be viewed as *anime-esque* by fans outside of the region. The town that the Demon Bull King is attacking has clear Chinese influence from the way the roofs the houses are structured but the geographical location is never stated, (Harper 2020, 00:49-01:07). The Demon Bull King gets sealed under a mountain in the same village by Monkey King and the city gets built around him. This lets the audience have a regional location to place the setting of the show in. This is location reinforced by background elements in the show such as some of the signs use Mandarin instead of English such as Pigsy's and his competitors Restaurant (Harper 2020, 03:36) the illuminated signs that Mk drives past when delivering noodles (Harper 2020, 05:43-05:51) and the signs at the construction site (06:05). Having so many elements that are clearly meant for a Chinese and broader East Asian demographic may have influenced the production's decision to utilize *anime-esque* elements in the series.

Chibi-Fication

Some of the elements that Suan points to when discussing characteristics of the *anime-esque* are character design elements such as hair pieces and large eyes, yet one aspect that he doesn't mention is the *chibi-fication* of characters. Berndt describes *chibi-fication* as characters "turning" into emoticon versions of themselves during moments of emotional duress" (Lukas R.A. Wilde in

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[4] Subgenre of fantasy anime, manga and light novels that is centered around young girls that possess magical power that will (often) allow them to transform into superheroines (Sugawa 2019).
[5] Subgenre of fantasy anime manga and light novels where the protagonist will be transported to (or reborn) another world (Pagan 2019).

Berndt 2021, 173). *Chibi-fication* to put it simply is the visual simplification of characters emotions. It will often be used to visually exaggerate characters emotions for comedic purposes. In this regard its use is similar to cartooning.

Andre Molotiu defines cartooning as "the graphic simplification of figurative shapes for purposes of communication, humor," (Molotiu 2020, 153). *Chibi-fication* as a form emotional simplification could be considered a form of (emotional) cartooning. It is quite commonly found in children's anime such as *Pokémon Journeys: The Series* when Satoshi (Ash) and Pikachu run into a Snorlax on the street (Pokémon Journeys: The Series), *Gakuen Alice* when Mikan tries to hug Hotaru (Gakuen Alice 2004) and in Naruto when Iruka yells at Naruto (Naruto 2002). We can also see *chibi-fication* being used *in LEGO Monkie Kid*.

In *The Great Wall Race* Mei and MK are watching an advertisement for a race that's being held in the city where the first-place winner will receive a peach of immortality (LEGO Monkie Kid 2021, season 1 episode 6). When Pigsy asks about the peach of immortality it sends both Mei and Mk into shock. (LEGO Monkie Kid 2021, season 1 episode 6).

Their faces go from large sparkling in awe to shock and horror (pictured left). Meis eyes and mouth are enlarged to the point of taking up most of her face, and she has lines below her mouth and between her eyebrows, her eyes are squashed into an oval shape and accent lines are added below them to accentuate her expression. Mk on the other has his eyes stay enlarged slightly more than his character model calls for. His eyes have become slightly oblong, and they are slanted, the reflection has become much smaller than usual, and it has shifted to the bottom left side to indicate that he is looking at Pigsy. His mouth has become triangle shaped and it helps to indicate that he isn't quite in shock, but rather disbelief. The rest of the shot helps emphasize the emotions the characters are feeling through the background design. The background is solid color with speed lines (lines that are drawn to indicate speed) flying from the bottom to top of the frame (Wilde 2020, 67). In this shot the use of *chibi-fication* accentuates the characteristics shock over

the situation. It also informs the audience that the lack of information that Pigsy has is extremely unnatural, thus, a more natural opportunity to provide exposition to the viewer.

The Anime-esque in Lego Monkie Kid

One of the most recognizable traits of the anime-esque in *LEGO Monkie Kid* can be found in the fight sequences of the show. The fight sequences have a quick tempo that utilizes continuity editing[6] to ensure that viewers can focus on the actions that are taking place between shots without getting lost. The fight sequences also utilize anime-esque fight coordination. *LEGO Monkie Kid: A Hero is Born* starts with a fight sequence between Demon Bull King and Monkey King where the animation is extremely fluid due to the character animation utilizing more follow-through[7] in characters movements (Harper 2020, 1:08-03:09). The scene uses squash and stretch[8] in combination with speed lines to emphasize the speed that the characters are moving at (Harper 2020, 01:36-01:40). The posing for the fight choreography is reminiscent of other prominent fights in anime such as Gojo verses Sukuna from *Jujutsu Kaisen* (*Jujutsu Kaisen* 2020) in which both characters are animated with a full frame rate (24 frames per second), intricate movements, and speed lines to emphasize the impact of actions or the speed they mov at. This causes the audience to perceive them as moving at superhuman speeds and underlining just how powerful both characters are, setting the tone for the rest of the series. *LEGO Monkie kid* uses *sakuga* for the same reasons Jujutsu Kaisen does. In the first few minutes we get to see both characters in the film establishes Demon Bull King as an extremely powerful antagonist, and Monkey King as an even more powerful hero, causing the putting the viewer in the position of Mk to be in awe of Monkey Kings strength (Harper 2020, 03:37-04:12). While the series primarily uses *sakuga* for their fight scenes this isn't the only anime-esque trait that the production implements in their fight scenes

Another way the fight scenes in LEGO Monkie Kid may appear anime-esque is due to the stylization of the debris. The way that debris is animated in the *LEGO Monkie Kid* is similar to the stylization of debris in shows such as *One Punch Man*, *My Hero Academia* (*Boku No Hero Academia*), *Mob Psycho 100*, and *Space Dandy*. In the fight between Monkey King and The

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[6] Editing footage with the goal of maintaining a clear and continuous action by matching shots (Bordwell 2019, G-1).

[7] The animation that takes place after the main action, such as hair continuing to move after a character has stopped moving.

[8] Applying a contrasting change of shape to give a feeling of fleshiness, flexibility, and life in animation (Hurtt 2017).

Demon Bull King there are instances where the debris that is unleased is stylized to have a more cubical shape (Harper 2020, 01:00-02:50). This style is commonly referred to as *yutapon cubes* by fans when discussing fight sequences in various anime (Dupree 2017).

The style originates from fans noticing how Yutaka Nakamura stylizes debris (Sakuga Booru). Nakamura is credited as the key animator for prominent anime such as *My Hero Academia*, *One Punch Man*, *Mob Psycho 100*, *Space Dandy*, and *Fullmetal Alchemist.* Nakamura has a distinct style in terms of fight choreography, and he has become a recognizable part of the anime-esque style of studio Bones through his work on the previously mentioned shows. He is most well-known for the way he designs debris. We can see this style being used in the *Boku no Hero Academia* when Izuku is fighting Todoroki (*Boku no Hero Academia* 2018) and in *One Punch Man* when Saitama is battling against Carnage Kabuto (*One Punch Man* 2015). *Yutapon cubes* are recognized by their cubical shape. It doesn't matter if the previous action was due to blunt force or sharp force, the debris will still appear to be cubical.

There are several moments throughout *LEGO Monkie Kid* where the fight sequences utilize *yutapon cubes,* for example during the sparring match between MK and Monkey King in *Impossible Delivery* (LEGO Monkie Kid 2021, season 1 episode 7), the battle between Monkey King and Macaque in *Macaque* (LEGO Monkie Kid 2021, season 1 episode 9) or during the climactic battle in *The End is Here* (LEGO Monkie Kid 2021, 10). However, the first example where this effect is used is during the first battle between the Demon Bull King and Monkey King in *LEGO Monkie Kid: A Hero is Born* (Harper 2020, 1:08-03:09). This is the first scene that the audience is greeted with. The scene demonstrates the anime-esque qualities of the series to the audience.

In the battle between Demon Bull King and Monkey King there are a few scenes that I would like to draw attention to that demonstrate how the show uses *yutapon cubes.* In the scene when Demon Bull King first is rampaging through a village, Monkey King appears to stop him. In seeing this the Demon Bull King tries to attack him by plunging his ax into the ground itself, causing a cloud of dust to form and large chunks of the earth to come loose (pictured right) (Harper 2020, 01:48-

01:49). Similarly, there's a later shot where Monkey King changes the size of his staff and forces it into the ground (Harper 2020, 02:18-02:20). This causes the ground to splinter off into thinner cube shapes where the staff immediately impacts the ground and the force ricochets through the ground leading the foreground to also be affected (pictured right) (Harper 2020, 02:21). In both shots the *yutapon cubes* are used to show the weight of the objects and the force they have behind their impact. This stylization makes the viewer see the characters as larger than life and adds weight to their actions and the sheer amount of strength each character has.
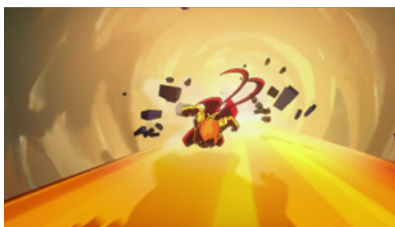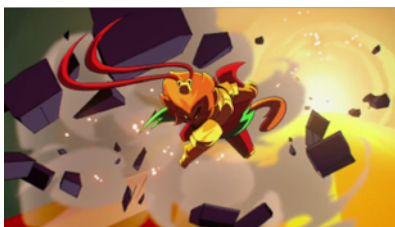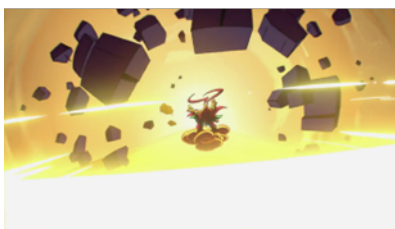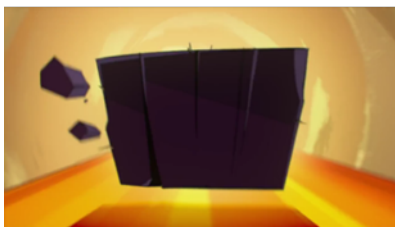
However, the final scene from the introduction where Monkey King is flying towards Demon Bull King is by far the best example of the *yutapon cube* being used in the series. We can see the cubes are utilized when the Demon Bull King emerges from the rubble. Demon Bull King causes chunks of rubble to be thrown into the air that Monkey King must maneuver through to get to Demon Bull King (Harper 2020, 00:00). In both scenes and the anime that was previously mentioned, *yutapon cubes* are used to show the force and the impact that the action caused. When used in *A Hero is Born* it shows the physical weight and size of Demon Bull King via showing all the debris that his actions cause, his mere movements are able to cause massive amounts of destruction.

Animation Techniques

As previously mentioned, there are animation techniques that have become a part of the anime-esque due to their widespread usage within the industry. In addition to this, in recent decades anime has become a transnational product that is more globalized. With large companies such as Netflix and Disney having anime as part of their streaming services, and streaming services such as Crunchyroll being an anime exclusive streaming service, anime is now more accessible to an audience than it has ever been. Gone are the days when the only anime western fans could watch was through piracy and fansubs[9] and children's anime that had been extremely. Anime has effectively become a major part of the cultural zeitgeist. Along with this we can see various aspects of the anime-esque have bled into other mediums and other animation industries. One of the ways that we can observe this is in *LEGO Monkie Kid* is through the use on *yutapon cubes*, but another way we can observe this is through the animation the show uses.

One of the traits that Suan recognizes as anime-esque is *limited animation*. Suan's discussion of limited animation primarily focuses on Loosers *anime-ic* and Thomas Lamarre's writing on the subject. The *anime-ic* is a way of conceiving how anime organizes layers of perspective (Looser in Suan 2017, 68). These layers of perspective that Looser discusses in anime have their roots in the production process of cel animation. In cel animation animators break shots down into various layers that can be animated separately on different layers of celluloid. These sheets were then organized into a single frame then photographed, creating a frame of animation.

In *The Anime Machine* Lamarre introduces the concept of *animatism*. In animatism the style has the viewer move across the screen, rather than moving into the landscape (Lamarre 2009, 7). Animatism places the viewer outside the frame of action as opposed to cinimatism that places an emphasis on dynamic camera angles and debth (Lamarre 2009, 7). This difference in style is often due to the compositing. Lamarre states "[d]ue to the stacking of celluloid layers, animation tended to put an emphasis on compositing (editing of image layers) over camera movement (the camera became relatively fixed)" (Lamarre 2009, 9). In productions that use 2d animation and cel animation there is less focus on camera movement and a larger focus on the compositing of the image. In *Impossible Delivery* Monkey King explains how to focus to Mk. Monkey King is holding

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[9] Fan-produced translated, subtitled version of an anime program (Anime News Network).

Mk while the background moves creating the illusion of camera movement (LEGO Monkie Kid 2021, season 1 episode 7). This effect is due to the way the shot was composted. If we were to break the shot down to a few of its frames, we can further analyze its structure.
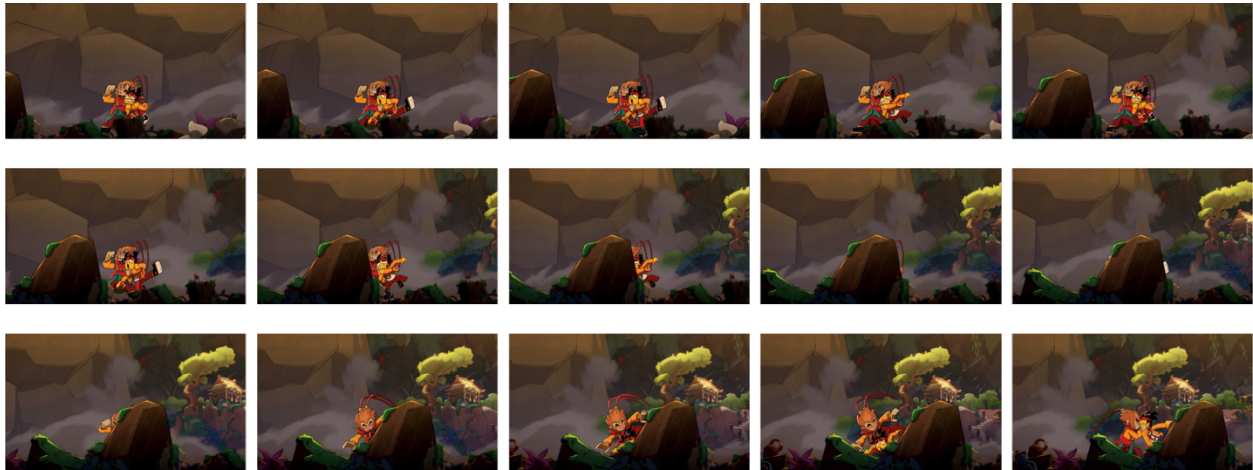
We can see from the frames (pictured above) that there are three main layers in this shot, the foreground (the layer that is closest to the camera), the midground (the layer where the characters are positioned), and the background (the layer that is furthest away from the camera). The foreground and background are moving in opposite directions of each other. Due to the foreground and background layers moving in different directions of each other at a consistent rate the viewers perceive this movement in the scene as the camera moving around the scene. This technique does not solely apply to the anime-esque. Similar techniques have also been used in cartoons and animated films such as due to the animation industry historically using multiplane cameras[10] for their productions, causing the techniques to become standard practice.

This discrepancy between limited animation as a standard practice and limited animation as an aspect of anime isn't clearly differentiated in Lamarre's book. Suan argues that Lamarre doesn't create a distinction between anime as a medium and anime as a type of animation (Suan 2017, 63). While limited animation is used in anime it is not exclusive to anime, there are animation productions that use limited animation outside of anime. Where limited animation crosses over into a trait of the anime-esque is through its usage when combined with other elements. Suan argues that limited animation when used in anime creates rhythm by using stillness (Suan 2017,

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[10] Camera designed to make cartoons more realistic by having the layers of the shot broken down and suspended at different heights to create depth (Disneyland 1957).

68). By observing how limited animation is used for character interactions we can observe how the limited animation becomes anime-esque.

When Mk implies that Monkey King isn't focused Monkey king says, "maybe you can't handle real focus" (LEGO Monkie Kid 2021, season 1 episode 7). When Monkey King says that there is accompanying text onscreen that says, "shots fired" underlining Monkey Kings point. in this shot limited animation is used primarily for comedic purposes. The text that appears is a single illustration that is just moved across the screen frame-by-frame while Mk goes from being animated fluidly and in more detail to a solid illustration that gets pushed by the text (source).

Chibi-fication in LEGO Monkie Kid

The final anime-esque trait we can point to in *LEGO Monkie Kid* is its usage of *chibi-fication*. Both scenes that I discussed in the previous section have *chibi-fication* as one of their prominent elements. In Impossible Delivery it is a humorous way to show Monkey Kings strength and Mk's impatience (*LEGO Monkie Kid* 2021, season 1 episode 7), in *Impossible Delivery* it is used to show how Monkey Kings comment effects MK. Yet there are plenty of other examples from the series that we could pull from to discuss the way the series uses chibi-fication. The one common aspect that connects each time it's utilized is comedy.

Taking another look at *The Great Wall Race* the scenes that use *chibi-fication* are scenes of shock, anger, or possessiveness. An example of a scene that uses *chibi-fication* for all three purposes is when Mei and MK are discussing the race itself. Mei and MK are discussing Mei's knowledge of the track and her likely chance at victory when Mk comments that he's going to win the race, due to the assumption that Mei entered the race on his behalf (*LEGO Monkie Kid* 2021, season 1 episode 6). In this specific scene there are three instances of Mei being chibi-fied. The first one being while she is talking about the race track itself, the other when she reacts to MK's comment and finally when she processes what he said. While Mei is discussing her knowledge of the racetrack, she poses for emphasis before they build up to her *chibi-fication*.

In one of the shots her eyes become much larger and elongated horizontally, and they are much flatter with less defined line art making them look scribbled on. The black parts of her eyes are completely gone in favor of it being filled with white. While her eyes have been altered, there isn't much of a stylistic difference for the rest of her design. This is likely due to the shot serving as a transition between her on model[11] design to her extremely chibi-fied design. In the next shot both Mei's eyes and mouth have become severely enlarged to the point where it is taking up most of her face. The dominant aspect of this shot is of course Meis comically evil expression. Her expression emphasizes the confidence she feels about dominating the competition in this race. Her smirk, squinting eye and dominant pose.

The *chibi-fication* is used to set up the following shot when MK comments that Meis preparation for the race is going to help him win the prize even though he isn't participating, completely disregarding Meis own interests (LEGO Monkie Kid 2021, season 1 episode 6). This causes Mei

to be extremely visually demonstrated by her becoming much larger. Her eyes become circular and similarly to the previous shots her eyes are fully white and there are lines that are drawn to accentuate both their size and shape. Unlike the previous shot where her mouth was more angular, here her mouth is downturned and more rounded

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[11] When a character is animated according to the model sheet.

with the only sharp line being at the bottom of her mouth to indicate that she is biting her lip. Additionally, there's a dragon that wraps around the screen in Meis signature color (green) to indicate her extreme fury. Mk in comparison is only taking up a small portion of the screen. In this scene the use of *chibi-fication* is emphasizing Meis emotions. The *chibi-fication* helps demonstrate how outlandish and insensitive Mk is for assuming that Mei was entering the race on his behalf.

How is LEGO Monkie Kid Affected

We've established that the *LEGO Monkie Kid* series has much *anime-esque* traits including but not limited to, setting, limited animation, prop design, fight choreography, and *chibi-fication* but why does the series take so much visual influence from anime to the point that it is *anime-esque*? One reason the series may have so many *anime-esque* qualities could be due to the source material. Since *Journey to the West* is a Chinese novel, it is likely that the production team didn't just take inspiration from Chinese culture but perhaps they used east Asian animation as an inspiration for the visual style of the show. While anime has been associated with Japan the production process has become transnational. With a more diverse production crew behind the scenes (Suan 2021, 182), and animation being outsourced to Korean production companies (Suan 2021, 182) what we consider *anime-esque* has been expanded far passed 'animation made in Japan'. This has allowed for different countries to have series that are recognized as anime-esque by viewers (such as *Avatar the Last Airbender* or *Voltron Legendary Defenders*). This has also allowed different countries to have parts of their animation industry recognized as *anime-esque*, with *donghua* being one example of this.

Donghua, similarly to Anime is the Chinese term for animation and outside of China its used to refer to Chinese animation. However, visually it shares many traits with anime. Donghua has started to receive more attention outside of a Chinese audience in recent years with shows such as *Tian Guan Ci Fu* (Heaven Official's Blessing), *Mo Dao Zu Shi* (The Founder of Diabolism), and *Shiguang Dailiren* (Link Click) all having their own pages on the *My Anime List* website. While these shows have traits that make them I to the viewer (such as character design, animation styles and setting) donghua are much more varied stylistically in comparison to anime, yet due to it having a unique cultural aspect and it often utilizing I traits they become part of the performance of the *anime-esque* and become a new point of reference for the *anime-esque*. In the same way that

new performances of the *anime-esque* may change the traits that it is defined by, its more recent globalization may also have an influence on the style of other parts of the animation industry.

In the past few decades there have been more western cartoons that take inspiration from anime. With recent shows such as craig of the creek making direct references to otaku culture through the creek elders (*Craig of the Creek* 2018), and Sparkle Cadet (*Craig of the Creek* 2019), shows referencing classic scenes from anime it's clear that those working in the animation industry are fans of anime. Productions use complex animation for key scenes in the same way anime uses *sakuga*. When Steven is reunited with himself (*Seven Universe*, 2019), when Luz and Amity share their first kiss (The Owl House 2020), when Sasha and Anne are sword-fighting (Amphibia 2022), and of course in the scenes from LEGO Monkie Kid that I previously mentioned. With more shows utilizing the anime-esque does their usage influence what we might consider *anime-esque*? To answer this, we should first analyze why LEGO Monkie kid uses *anime-esque* traits.

One reason *LEGO Monkie Kid* may utilize anime-esque traits could be due to the Flying Barks Productions studios specific style. In addition to *LEGO Monkie Kid* Flying Bark production has produced popular shows such as *Glitch Tech*, *Rise of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, and more recently *Moon Girl* and *Devil Dinosaur*. Certain animation studios may be known for their studio's animation practices and visuals (such as studio bones being recognized for their use of *yutapon cubes*). Flying Bark Productions has become known for the way they animate fight scenes. Their fight sequences are known for having dynamic movements, fast pacing, speed lines and anticipation[12]. in addition to this the animation quality increases during the fight sequences, having much more elements of movement while the animation style switch to a more cinematic style (more dynamic camera angle, and movement, animation appears to be less in layers). This is present in Rise of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (*Rise of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles,* 2018), *Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur* (*Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur,* 2023) and as previously discussed, in LEGO Monkie Kid. The fight sequences that are animated by Flying Bark Productions could be considered as *sakuga* in the west.

Suan defines *sakuga* as a complex animated sequence that often only lasts a few seconds (Suan 2018, 3). Suan explains that *sakuga* as a a Japanese term refers to "images that are made" and is

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[12] Frames that are added to prologue certain actions and affect a shots timing.

usually used to discuss key-frames[13] but it can also be used to refer to the final cut of the animated sequence (Suan 2018, 3). While *sakuga* refers to complex animation sequences it is not typically applied when discussing cinematic animation (such as children's animated feature films). I would argue that *sakuga* is most often applied to animated projects that use large amounts of limited animation in their production. Due to limited animation being used as the primary animation technique, if a sequence that has much more complex animation is added it will contrast against the established style of the production, causing viewers to take note of the sequence. This allows *sakuga* to be used in key moments of films and series to highlight key scenes to the audience. The scene that uses *sakuga* "reveals the fruits of the labor (and its conflicts) that were just witnessed as the drama of the episode" (Suan 2018, 3). If we examine the fight scene between Demon Bull King and Monkey King that I mentioned earlier, the scene uses extremely fluid animation for most of the scene combined with limited animation being used mostly to emphasize the speed which characters move at. We see this similarly in Impossible delivery when Monkey King is sparring against Mk (*LEGO Monkie Kid 2021*, season 1 episode 7), in Rise of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and in Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur.

Another reason LEGO Monkie Kid may use anime-esque traits is due to anime's globalization and its stylistic influence. As anime grows in popularity there are more productions that draw from it for their films and tv shows. The continuous referencing of performances of the anime-esque is how its traits are defined but is the case different if the form of referencing isn't throughout the series. Despite LEGO Monkie kid having a varied visual style and utilizing several anime-esque traits most would not consider the show as an anime due to the lack of key traits of the anime-esque, that being character design and pacing. Though the scenes I have discussed utilize anime-esque aspects these traits are used for emphasis rather than it being the stylistic norm of the series. The anime-esque in (similarly to *sakuga*) is used for emphasis, whether that be to emphasize comedic scenes or dramatic scenes.

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[13] Frame of animation that defines the start or end point of an animation.

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