



The following text is a translation of an interview article I did for the June issue of German magazine **MULTI-MANIA**. Unfortunately I wasn't able to have it being published in any English speaking magazine (despite the fact that I offered it for free, I didn't even deserved a no for an answer), so I'm publishing it via internet and hope that it reaches those who are interested in it.



Super Sentai is one of the most popular Tokusatsu shows for over 30 years now, and became known in Germany as **Power Rangers**, a version revamped for the American viewers and dubbed for German television. Latest episodes are available at RTL, Super RTL and Jetix. In April I was able to do an interview with Hideaki Tsukada, producer of the brand-new original season **Jukan Sentai Gekiranger**.

SUPER SENTAI INTERVIEW

35 year old Tsukada is a Super Sentai fan since childhood. "My favourite series as a child was **Himitsu Sentai Goranger** (the story of the first Ranger team with 84 episodes). After graduation I applied for a job within this genre at several companies and got hired by Toei. There are hundreds of applications and its very difficult to get hired, so I consider myself lucky. Besides Tokusatsu I watch many movies and series, of which the historical drama **Shin-**



sengumi is my actual favourite. My favourite from the more recent Super Sentai seasons is **Tokusou Sentai Dekaranger** (German title: **Power Rangers: S.P.D.**), mostly because it is the first season that I have been responsible for."

As a producer, Tsukada-san is involved in everything from the very beginning up until broadcasting and beyond. It starts with devising all the basic concepts, talking with sponsors and broadcasting companies, organizing auditions and casts, and managing the whole process until release and even taking part in some post release activities. "The work load is covered by many divisions, so all-in-all there are about 300 to 400 people involved in the production. My job is to organize their work from beginning to end. With those seasons I am responsible for, like Dekaranger, Magiranger and now Gekiranger, I have complete control about the show's contents. However, in regards of influence, the writers, directors and sponsor companies all have their say as to where the series goes in detail. Also there is a new toy line being released by toy company Bandai for each new Super Sentai season. Basically the toys are made to fit the concepts of the series, but there are many cases where Bandai comes up with certain ideas that we then try to introduce into the series' concepts."

There is no large cooperation between the production teams of the Japanese **Super Sentai** and the American **Power Rangers** series (which is using action scenes from the original and revamps the rest

of the series with western actors and contents): “*The recent Power Ranger series is being shot in New Zealand and being produced by Japanese producer Sakamoto-san. Even some of the scenes used in the original Super Sentai series, namely the opening scenes for Magiranger and Gekiranger, were shot on set in New Zealand. Bandai America has some input in the production of the Japanese series, but apart from that the Power Ranger producers are being presented with the finished series to do with it what they want. Other than that there’s not much influence one way or the other.*”

The original series is actually being broadcasted outside of Japan in Hong Kong, Korea, Thailand and Malaysia and other



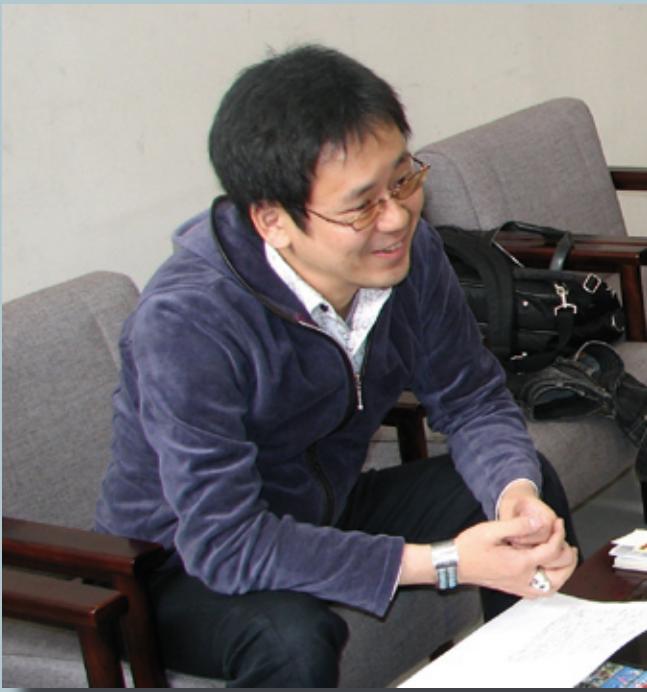
Asian countries, and it wouldn’t be a legal problem to have the original series being released everywhere in the world. “*However, you have to keep in mind that our target audience in Japan as well as every other country are preschoolers, and we feel that for those viewers in western countries the Power Ranger series is probably easier to grasp.*”

Many concepts of the series are aimed at the young audience. “*Every season has a specific theme that is well received by our young viewers, and the most popular themes are re-emerging every once in a while. Whilst Dekaranger was centred around police themes and Magiranger around magical themes, the latest season Gekiranger is based on Kung Fu and animal themes. Also we always bear in mind that Super Sentai*



*is usually the first non-animated TV drama for our viewers, so we try to put in messages like ‘Try to do good things, avoid doing bad things.’” Is this also the reason why none of the good guys ever dies? “Well, in past instalments like **Hurricanger** there have been deaths of good characters to add to the drama. But those deaths have been taken to heart by our young viewers so much that right*





now we are trying to avoid it. Personally I think there's enough bad things happening in the world, so at least in the Super Sentai series we want to stick to a more idealized world without dying heroes." So in the actual GekiRanger series none of the main characters is going to die? "Well, we don't know until we know, right? Rio might actually die."

The Gekiranger plot seems to concentrate a lot on Jan (Geki Red) as leading character and his duel with Rio, rather than on the team aspect, as previous series did. Does this mark a trend of making Super Sentai into a show with one leading character? "No, it doesn't. All Super Sentai series emphasise on the team theme, with the Red Ranger always being the focus of the story. However, in Gekiranger there is a slightly different approach in treating the two main enemy characters like central characters of their own."

Is Jan an reincarnation of Ban from Dekaranger? "I don't think that there are many similarities in Jan and Ban. For one, Jan is the most childish Super Sentai character ever, being raised by tigers and using his own version of Japanese, whilst Ban, even though he has certain childish aspects, is basically an adult."

The Super Sentai series plays a lot with male and female role models, and often some characters are allowed to cross the line of the traditional roles for a short time. However, there are certain issues that remain untouched. Will there ever be a male pink ranger? Will there ever be a female red ranger (leader)? "Well, neither of those is completely out of the question, but still unlikely. For example the fact that Super Sentai is a show for 3 to 5 year old boys, having a female leading character is not supported by the toy shops."

Apart from Super Sentai Toei produces yearly instalments of the **Kamen Rider** series, which is very popular in Japan but little known in western countries. Is there a cooperation between the producers of both series and do you suit the seasons to match each other? "Before we start we have basic meetings to make sure we are not using the same concepts in the same year, but there is not much contact during the production process, so sometimes halfway into our series we accidentally start using the same concepts."

So far there has only be a single season for every background, and there are no actual plans for a continuation of popular series like



Dekaranger or Sailor Moon. "It largely depends on someone within the company being passionate about any of those series, wanting to do a sequel and convincing the company that it would be a good business idea to do so. For example, I would really like to do a sequel to Dekaranger but yet have to convince the company to do so. Technically speaking it wouldn't be a problem to do a third series at the same time as producing Kamen Rider and Super Sentai, as has last been seen with the **Sailor Moon** live series."

In Japan the Toei series are supported with a number of fan events. "Every time we start broadcasting a new series, we support it with small fan events virtually all over Japan, but those events don't involve any of the actual cast. With the cast we usually do a live event in Tokyo Dome (one of the largest stadiums in Tokyo) when a series is about to end in February. Also, our studio in Kyoto has a theme park attached to it, where costumes and props from all the recent shows are on display."

Finally we would like to know which challenges Tsukada-san would like to face himself with in the future. "Frankly, I consider my current work as a challenge all by itself. However, I am working on Super Sentai for seven years now and despite the fact that I love my job I would of course like to try other formats in the future, like Kamen Rider or historical dramas. For example I worked on the **Choninjatai Inazuma!! Spark** OVA series, which is a historical time travel drama featuring actors from previous Super Sentai series. It will be released in summer."

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-Christian Lonsing
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