Mutual Images

ISSUE 2

WINTER 2017

JAPANESE POP CULTURES IN EUROPE TODAY:

ECONOMIC CHALLENGES, MEDIATED

NOTIONS, FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

MUTUAL IMAGES

ISSUE 2 – WINTER 2017

Mutual Images

A Transcultural Research Journal

Founded by

Aurore Yamagata-Montoya, Maxime Danesin & Marco Pellitteri

Previously published issues

Issue 1 – *Between Texts and Images: Mutual Images of Japan and Europe*

JAPANESE POP CULTURES IN EUROPE TODAY:
ECONOMIC CHALLENGES, MEDIATED
NOTIONS, FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

EDITED BY

MARCO PELLITTERI

Mutual Images

Mutual Images

A Transcultural Research Journal

Mutual Images

A Transcultural Research Journal

Mutual Images

Issue 2

Table of contents

Editorial

Marco PELLITTERI | Kōbe University, Japan

D ear readers, students, fellow scholars,
welcome to this second instalment of *Mutual Images*.

Mutual Images, the journal, is the intellectual offspring of a small cultural and academic society officially registered in France in 2014.

Two young French scholars, Aurore Montoya and Maxime Danesin (who are now the President and Vice-President of *Mutual Images*), after a very fruitful academic year 2010-11 spent as visiting students at Kōnan University (Kōbe, Japan), decided to take a bold and stimulating intellectual initiative. They therefore embarked in the design and organisation of an interdisciplinary workshop for students and young academics, dedicated to the theme of "mutual images" between Japan and Europe in the fields of arts, social sciences, anthropology, cultural studies, visual media, and literature. As the venue of the workshop's first edition in 2013, they chose Kōnan University itself, thanks to the kind and enthusiastic cooperation of their former professors there.

I myself was, at the time, in Japan, based at Kōbe University, and was asked to join the workshop as its chairperson. Later I would be also asked to join the cultural association that the two talented students, now successfully graduated, had established in France with the goals of

making the workshop an international event and a yearly occasion, and of starting a journal in which having the workshop's papers published.

After the workshop's first edition, the following have been hosted at the University of Tours (France) in 2014, Kōbe University in 2015, Aarhus University (Denmark) in 2016, and the next, just after this journal will come out of the printshop, will take place at Nagoya University (Japan) on 22-23 April 2017.

The noble and at the same time practical objective of *Mutual Images* as a workshop and a journal is to privilege contributions mainly from (1) undergraduate and graduate students, two categories of young scholars who not always can find suitable venues to publish their first academic articles; and (2) young PhD holders at the early stages of their careers. However, *Mutual Images* also welcomes contributions from more mature and accomplished scholars, there included professors, who as a matter of fact actively collaborate in a way or another in the journal – e.g. as authors, reviewers, editorial/scientific board members.

I believe that the structure of *Mutual Images* journal is, in its own way, quite innovative. While its scientific committee has been formed with the help of young as well as of established researchers (who, as said, serve as strategic consultants, article peer/blind reviewers, and intellectual guarantors) and the editorial procedures follow a well-known routine that is typical of most academic journals, *Mutual Images'* attitude towards the writings of young scholars is not haughty but on the contrary, however setting a solid standard for publication, tries to be as inclusive as possible. While the review process is serious and entrusted to valuable minds, *Mutual Images* as a journal is a

continuation of the *Mutual Images* workshop: this means that the process of writing, reviewing, and rewriting the articles for publication is framed as another kind of workshop – as it should always be in academia, I believe.

As such, the journal itself is in a startup phase that look promising and full of energy.

Even before the birth of *Mutual Images* journal, the papers of the workshop's two first editions were pre-published in their "beta" version, in 2013 and 2014, in two issues of *Invene*, a Students' Club journal of the University of Tours. As soon as *Mutual Images* journal was established, all those papers were further revised and thoroughly reviewed, and republished more officially here, in the first issue.

In the current issue of the journal we present the articles coming from the 2015 edition of *Mutual Images* workshop, which I had the honour to host and organise at Kōbe University as part of my research activities during my 2-year term as a former JSPS Research Fellow (2014-16). The interested readers can have a look at the webpage of that edition of the workshop: https://mutualimages.org. It displays the general topics and the programme.

Like the workshop's, the focus of this issue of *Mutual Images* journal is on Japanese pop cultures in Europe today, with the related economic challenges, mediated notions, and future opportunities they entail. The programme of the workshop then, and the Table of Contents of the journal now, were designed around the set of dynamic relations between Japan and Europe through contemporary popular cultures. Over these past decades, Japanese pop cultures (manga, anime on

television and in theatres, video games, toys, gadgets, cosplay, fan-fiction, light novels, dramas, and other forms of current entertainment) have been important vectors of Japanese culture on Europe.

The articles in the following pages interrogate some of the most relevant commercial, media-related, and cultural aspects in the development of Japanese popular cultures in Europe today. They particularly consider the influence of Japanese popular cultures on European societies and mentalities, within a wide range of cultural, social or economic aspects; e.g. from artistic media, such as literary productions, to eating habits.

This is in fact what you will find in the next pages, in the articles by Manuel Hernández-Pérez, Kevin Corstorphine & Darren Stephens (University of Hull), Björn Ole-Kamm (Kyōto University), Bounthavy Suvilay (independent researcher), José Andrés Santiago Iglesias (University of Vigo), Domenica Gisella Calabrò and Fabio Domenico Palumbo (University of Messina and University of Padua), and Maxime Danesin (University François-Rabelais of Tours).

In wishing you to find in the reading of this issue interesting and useful data, theory, and discussion, I encourage you to consider joining our next workshops and submitting your own articles. To do so, visit our webpage: https://mutualimages.org.

Marco Pellitteri
Vice-President of *Mutual Images*

Cartoons vs Manga movies:
A brief History of Anime in the UK[1]

Manuel HERNÁNDEZ-PÉREZ, Kevin CORSTORPHINE & Darren STEPHENS | University of Hull; Durham University, UK

Abstract

This paper has as main objective to explore, adopting a historical and critical perspective, the release of film and anime TV in UK. This would be a first step towards the studio of the peculiar implementation of manganime Culture in Britain.

Compared with other European countries, UK has shown to be slower and even reluctant in importing Japanese television products. Thus, while major markets of anime such as France, Italy or Spain expanded considerably during 1975-1995 period, in a recurrent synergy of television markets, and technological publishing, the implantation of the principal channel (televised anime) in UK has been irregular and unstable. Even today, the catalogue of broadcasting anime is limited to some high success movies, late night television on thematic channels and quite recently, video-on-demand services (Netflix). The offer cannot be compared in importance and diversity to other European countries. This fact, far from being anecdotal, has had an impact on the subsequent implantation of media Japanese cultures such as manga, anime, video games and cosplay.

What can be the reason of this irregular development of Japanese visual culture in United Kingdom? Characteristic having the television market and / or the UK audience? Main hypothesis in relation to these issues can be considered to be of sociological character, but are reflected in the idiosyncrasies of British television culture and production system.

*Thus, compared to other Western markets (including the US) which saw the opportunity to purchase economic products for children's television audiences in the late 70s and early 80s, the British 'telly' already offered a broad catalogue (*Roobarb, Super Ted, Danger Mouse, *etc. ...). The only exception to this children's 'made in Britain' programming was the co-production model. This caused a leak of few products that were not even considered as "Japanese" (*Seven Cities of Gold, Godzilla*) but mere 'cartoons'. This competition with the British children production as well as the wide catalogue of other forms of British Popular Culture would explain why the film, domestic video and later adults programming would be the marginal routes of entry for manganime.*

---

[1] Dates of the shows of the correspond to transmission dates and not to production schedule. This is particularly relevant in the case of Japanese products released in the UK, which is also the main object of this paper. In addition, titles of animated productions will use the English version over the original Japanese title, as this will better reflect the fact that we are talking about translations and/or adaptations of certain products.

Introduction: was the anime market in the UK a "failure"?

According to an article published in *The Guardian* only a few years ago, anime was considered as "invisible" in the British Television schedule (Van Spall 2009). The article does not provide tangible evidence but it does invite reflection. The reporter's intuition and experience reflect sentiments of British anime fan communities. Besides, the paper points out some interesting questions about how the concept of anime that can be extended to other European countries. For example, it is not a coincidence that the author of the article noted a dissociation between anime and other Japanese animation products. There is some debate among fans around the concept of "anime" that has transcended academic discourse. Anime in general is sometimes distinguished from other kinds of Japanese animation such as movies due to the prestige international relevance of the latter. This kind of anime, generally defined as "*gen'an*", or standalone animation films, could be opposed to "*gensaku*", a term that designates urtexts, which quite common as a base of manga-driven franchises (Cavallaro 2010, 7). In Western countries, cinema has been, along with television, a main gateway for anime and manga culture. The appeal of international figures such as Mamoru Oshii, Katsuhiro Otomo and Hayao Miyazaki is due to their success in international festivals and the prestige created through film criticism. Despite belonging to a minor market, these authors still have their place in occasional TV and indie cult cinema sessions. However, it is significant that in the UK the presence of mainstream anime on broadcast television has been relatively scare historically. The main exceptions to this have been the most popular and international

franchises, such as *Pokémon, Bakugan* or *Yu-Gi-Oh!,* and their availability through satellite and cable technologies.

A few other official sources seem to support this idea of "failure". In March 2011, the Japan External Trade Organization JETRO (Japan External Trade Organization 2011b) published the report, "Realities of the content market in the United Kingdom". In this report, a brief history of British anime releases is presented, and the most successful titles in anime and manga sales are highlighted. The report describes how a number of Japanese industries vary in their performance in the UK market. On the one hand, Japanese video games have great relevance in the UK market. Japan is the second largest exporter of games after the US. On the other hand, manga and anime struggle to find a place due to the dominance of other (mainly American) producers. Notably, the report does not seem to be concerned about the real reasons behind this asymmetry, and offers vague explanations, such as the high price of goods, qualifying the British consumer as a "middle-class" or "wealthy" individual (JETRO 2013 18). Our interpretation is that Japanese anime and manga aims for a wider audience including younger audiences. However, the high prices of editions of these products narrow their potential market to teenagers and young adults. This sector has to compete with a larger offer of international products (and, also, their target market are active internet users with access to pirated versions of these materials). These issues might not affect the video game market; this medium has more effective anti-piracy measures. It has also built a reputation established over decades by brands such as Nintendo, Sega and Namco. While the majority of the gamer target market is older,

some video game blockbusters have marketed successfully to wider audiences. That is the case of the *Pokémon* Franchise, which is arguably one of the most successful video games ever released in the UK market context.

Other aspects of the dissemination of Japanese popular cultural commented upon in *The Guardian* article are more difficult to evaluate. There is a preconception within the media that modern Japanese pop culture is only a minority interest, despite the efforts of independent producers and fan communities in the UK. Typical UK events are not just about comics but also subcultures. Mostly, such events adopt the shape of commercial fairs either as popular culture or science fiction conventions. Cultural activities play a secondary role, and their nature is defined by the "brand" of the event, which corresponds to a particular subculture. There is, of course, a presence of *otaku* fan communities at video game and comic conventions targeted to wider fan audiences such as London Super Comic con. It is in fact difficult *not* to find activities and events related to Japanese popular culture in these events, including tea ceremonies, ramen stands, cosplay and karaoke contests. However, it is true that events exclusively dedicated to manga and/or anime are not as popular as in other countries. As an exception to this, *AniMangaPOP* fair in Plymouth has been showcasing Japanese culture and its main related industries on an annual basis since 2013.

This poor evaluation can be considered the result of a failure of expectations, compared to European and American sales. In this sense, it is important to differentiate whether we are talking about a "failure"

in terms of levels of circulation, or of delays between releases. Currently, domestic video sales in the US and Europe are far below those achieved at the beginning of the century during to the so-called "anime boom". In Europe, manga sales have increased in recent years (2006-2011), while anime DVD and Blu-ray sales have stabilized since around 2006 (JETRO Japan External Trade Organization 2011a, 2011b, 2013). According to those same sources, British DVD and Blu-ray markets fell away dramatically between 2006 and 2011. In this way, British sales would seem to follow the trend of other territories, but they would still be small in comparison to France and the US. However, the situation may have changed as there is not yet data for after 2011.

There are, indeed, different routes for cultural and commercial exchanges such as the expansion of anime and manga. Japanese popular culture in Britain may have followed a particular route that stressed the cinema and domestic video markets as the main channels for an engaged user. This would be in distinct contrast to the way anime has been marketed in other countries worldwide, where it has been part of the regular TV schedule. As a result, anime in the UK would not have had the opportunity to create a nostalgia-based audience, which would have made possible a more engaged market similar (in its pro-activeness) to fan audiences.

In this paper, we address the specific case of the British anime market using both synchronic and diachronic perspectives. As we analyse the current situation of the anime market, we will also try to find historical trends evident in imported anime. In this reflection, we will adopt a critical point of view in the analysis of data, monographs and

commentaries. Instead of accepting the perceived failure of anime in Britain as a given, we prefer to focus on the description of the political and historical factors that have determined how Japanese anime has been received in Britain. This will be a way of ascertaining whether that perceived failure is actually the case, and the extent of the significance and relevance that anime has actually had.

Anime in the UK: A Brief History

Before describing the main factors and conditions in the British broadcasting market, we will describe briefly its historical development. Anime history has been considered a global phenomenon and the US, seems to have drawn most of the attention (Levi 1996; Poitras 2008, 49). Sources exclusively reporting on the UK anime history are scarce. Clements (2013, 179), for example, makes little mention of the case of the UK, possibly due to the international scope of his monograph.

We have constructed the following section upon these global histories of the manganime expansion through the stages differentiated in previous studies (Hernández-Pérez 2013, 88). Our aim will be to focus on finding the main turning points of the history of anime in this country. However, we found it necessary to explore complementary sources in order to illustrate the UK's market idiosyncrasy. These sources include official reports, such as those published by British (IPO, BBFC) and Japanese agencies (JETRO). We have also employed journalistic sources, such as TV guides and broadcaster databases (BBC, ITV, and Channel 4).

Of special interest will be the data obtained through the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC), the organisation responsible for content

rating in both the domestic market and theatrical releases. It is necessary to explain the nature and purpose of the BBFC and its database. Any product released on video has to be age rated according to the Video Recordings Act (1984). Cinema releases are not obliged to be part of the process, although it has become a general trend. These may not share the same rating, however, as domestic format evaluations sometimes adopt a more severe approach. This is due to a bigger risk of de-contextualised viewing (BBFC, 2014). Ratings include the following grades: suitable for all (U), parental guidance (PG), cinema/video release suitable for 12 years and over (12A/12), suitable for 15 years and over (15), suitable only for adults (18) and adult works for licensed premises only (R18). The BBFC database is a valuable resource for qualitative analysis. The database offers updated information about the cultural products and the ratings of different versions, but this should not be misinterpreted as a market index. The number of titles in each period reflects the diversification of the medium, its genres and sub-genres and hence its consolidation in the market, but this does not necessarily correlate with sales.

First Period: (1963-1989)

This period corresponds to the beginning of the adaptation of manga products to television. Thus, in contrast to the US, it is surprising not to have found earlier animes such as *Astroboy* (1963) and *Speed Racer* (1965). Classic *shōnen* genre products are difficult to find in TV

programming schedules in the UK[2], with the exception of *Battle of the Planets*, which was broadcast by BBC1 (1979-1980).

As we will explore later, the social and political context of the UK's public broadcasting system (BBC) affected the acquisition of foreign materials and created a filter for potentially harmful products. Private companies were more willing to import, which eventually made possible the importation of serial adventure/action cartoons. Transnational, mainly European-Japanese productions such as *Mysterious Cities of Gold* (BBC-1, 1986), *Ulysses 31* (BBC-1, 1985-87), together with *Dogtanian and the Three Muskehounds* (BBC-1, 1985-1987) were indeed very popular among young audiences.

American cartoons had a strong presence in this period. As with other countries, it is difficult not to find a Hannah-Barbera-animated production on the children's TV schedule: *Scooby Doo* (BBC, 1970-1981), *Top Cat* (BBC, 1962), etc. This American producer also created their own version of *Godzilla* (BBC-1). The series was produced with the participation of Toho Ltd, with the creators of the character profiting from its popularity from decades earlier. Despite almost being an anime (Japanese animation), it does not follow the style of other Japanese productions of the same period, including the *Tokatsu* (special effects) series of films that it is based on. Instead, the series adopted a simple episodic and (self-conclusive) formula and followed the style of other

---

[2] With the introduction of digital formats, since the 2000s, there's also a trend for recovering vintage classics, even when they weren't screened at UK. *Space Adventure Cobra* was released in 2008 to DVD, for example, but his release might be more justified for the release of the movie in 1995 in cinemas with the occasions of the Manga Festival. The event, celebrated at the National Film Theatre screened in London screened also *Patlabor, Wings of Honneamise* and *The Legend of The Overfiend* (The Guardian 1995).

action genre cartoons by this production house, such as *Johnie Quest* (Ryfle 1998, 10). Self-production was another trend that was complementary to importation. ITV's agenda created programming addressed to children, although these included also live-action productions (*Children's ITV*, 1983-1987) and stop-motion (*Thomas and The Tank*, 1984-).

Though the social and institutional reception of anime was not particularly good, reasons for this lack of anime in this period cannot be exclusively attributed to prejudices. In comparison to other European countries, the TV schedule in the UK covered a huge number of hours, and the importation of globally-produced animation had to compete with British children's television productions (see section 'Natural Competitors'). Even with that, there were some exceptions. A Japanese animation could be distributed when it was based on a substantially different selling proposition. Like in other countries, products inspired by children's literature were an alternative to American action and comedy cartoons. While in Spain, Italy and Portugal, adaptations from Edmondo De Amicis (*Cuore*) or Johanna Spyri (*Heidi*) [3] were very popular, in the UK we can find several versions of *The Moomins*, based on the works by Tove Jansson, including two Japanese anime: *Mūmin* (ITV, 1986-) and *Tanoshii Mūmin Ikka* (BBC)

Cinema has been traditionally the other main gateway for anime distribution overseas. In the UK, animation distribution in cinemas presented a diverse panorama, including not just Disney 'blockbusters'

---

[3] We refer here to Marco (*Haha wo tazunete sanzenri*, 1976) and Heidi (*Arupusu no Shōjo Haiji,* 1974), both part of the *Meisaku* ("*Theater Master Pieces*") Collection, released by Nippon Animation.

but also, animation films from European filmmakers. Animation products are primarily associated with children's audiences. However, in the British case, this is not incompatible with the inclusion of elements of drama or adventure. In that sense, European cinema was drawn on for the importation of animations which contributed to the medium's thematic diversification. These include *Wizards* by Ralph Bakshi, 1977, and *Pollux et le chat bleu* (*Dougal and the Blue Cat* in the UK, 1972), which were shown alongside 'home-grown' productions such as *Watership Down* (1976). By contrast, anime releases in cinema are scarce in this period. Regarding to this lack of titles, we note the difficulty of identifying animation productions in databases. In the case of the BBFCO, for example, the label 'animation' as a genre definer/thematic designation was not used extensively until 2009. However, at least two significant anime releases from this period were released in the UK: *Panda & the Magic Serpent* (Golden Era, 1961) and *Alakazam the Great* (Anglo Amalgamated, 1961). Both were also screened in the US and form, together with *Magic Boy* (*Sarutobi Ninja Sasuke*), the pioneers that TOEI productions distributed in the Western market. In short, these anime cinema releases show that UK anime dissemination was not that different from other Western countries.

Second Period: (1990-1999)

This period is of great significance, as it marks the entry of anime into the UK through cinema and television. For the first time, Japanese productions were recognized and identified by audiences as such. Film criticism influenced the coming decades with the assignation of the 'cult film' label to Japanese animation.

As happens in other European countries, the word "manga" began to be used (and over-used) after the release of *Akira* in theatres. *Akira* is a cultural phenomenon that was considered a major influence in its time. The film premiered at the Piccadilly Film & Video Festival in June 1990 as part of a wider programme. After that, *Akira* was released in theatres (ICA Project, 1990) and later promoted as an "intense, fiercely anti-establishment animated film for adults" (The *Guardian*, 1994). It is clear, however, perhaps due to minor consideration of the animated medium, that Broadcast Film Critics talked more about the influence of Otomo's masterpiece in the live-action film. It seems they did not consider, at that time, its relevance as pioneer of an entire industry based on the production committees and its expansion through strategies structured on media-mix.

The anime markets in the UK profited from the development of home video technology, and used the ubiquity of the VHS medium to reach different audiences. However, as a cultural phenomenon, manga video inherits the same oversight by critics of animated productions. *Sight and Sound*, the official magazine of the BFI, reviewed many of the productions. Here, the commentary seems to equate the 'manga' video concept with action, otherness and fantasy. As an example, the movie *Venus Wars* was presented as: "Manga comic heroes go hyperspace in this animated adventure set in the future", while *Odin*, another release of the same period, is summarised as "More comic strip adventures on Japan's manga cartoons" (BFI 1992, 61). The main VHS distributor of the period was Manga Ltd entertainment. Following the strategy of the US

and other countries, the company released titles for adults, combined with other products marketed to the 12-15-year-old audience.
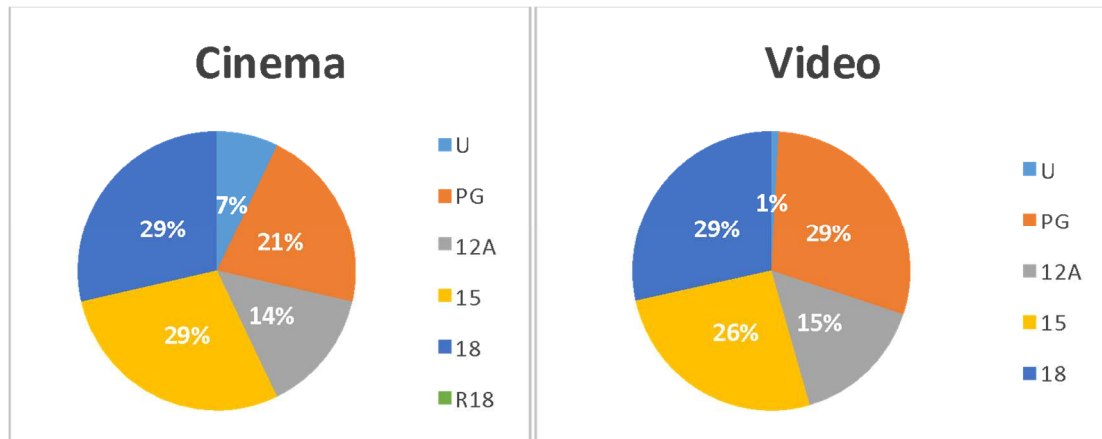
Ratings corresponding to the 1990-1999 period on the video Manga Ltd. Catalogue. Data obtained from BBFCO (May 2016).

Cinema and video catalogues share a similar distribution of ratings wherein general audiences (U & PG) represent at least 28-30%. However, this diversity was hugely misrepresented in public opinion as Clements, the main anime historian in the UK, points out (Jacques and Clements 2005, 4): "The media perception, however, based largely on the *Urotsukidoji* press-pack, was that anime was a cavalcade of depravity".

At the end of this period, the catalogue of Manga Ltd video had increased to 123 titles. We have no access to the data corresponding to the sales during this period. However, it is certain that the video market was key in the creation of committed audiences, especially compared to cinema and television, which had relatively limited impact. However, social impact is not always accompanied by good reviews. *Ghost in the Shell* was released in regular theatres on the 1st December 1995. The movie had already been screened in November during the London Film

Festival but film criticism on this occasion took a harsh tone in general with the film. The storyline was considered "confused", and critics pointed out that it struggled to "take wing" (Malcom 1995, A9), probably in reference to the slow development of the plot. A critic from The *Observer* said:

> "Animated Japanese films have acquired a cult following on video in recent years but on the strength of Mamoru Oshii's Ghost in the Shell, it is hard to see why (..) The characters are blandly drawn, and thought the cityscapes are impressive, they pale beside the live-action sets of Blade-Runner. A soulless film that helps explain why Schwarzenegger and Stallone vehicles are known as 'high-concept' movies". (French 1995, 65)

In the television, Japanese animation distribution could not compete with the American global producers that ruled the British broadcast agendas. The race between these competitors started in 1996 through multi-platform systems via cable and satellite technologies. By 1998, five corporations were established players in the market: the Disney Channel, Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network, Fox Kids and Trouble. From 1986-1996, both terrestrial and new technology operators offered a significant percentage (above 10%) of total television time in the form of children's TV programming (*Ibid*, 92). It is important to highlight that this had a relevant impact on the cartoon programming, not just as producers of new content, but also as curators of important libraries of copyrighted contents. These included the work of Hannah-Barbera (Cartoon Network) or Saban Entertainment (Fox Kids), which contributed to an even larger catalogue of child-oriented products (Buckingham, Davies, Jones, & Kelley, 1999, p. 60). Due to the contribution of new platforms (and the several, already existing broadcasters), there was a huge increase in the contents available for

children. Transnational co-productions such as *Ulysses* (Channel 4, 1993), still have a large presence on the British television schedule.

Third Period: (2001-2008)

Attempts to increase the programmes offered on television continued irregularly during this period, most of it based on cable and satellite technologies. One of these initiatives was a specialized, thematic channel called Anime Central, which operated from September 2007. This hannel offered a limited catalogue based mainly on titles such as *Cowboy Bebop* (1998), *Full Metal Alchemist* (2003), *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex* (2002) and *Bleach* (2004). After reducing anime timetables, it finally closed completely in August 2009.

In relation to the domestic video market, the number of anime titles increased to 172 in DVD and Blu-ray formats for the period between 2001-2010. With the significant contribution of Ghibli titles, which were extremely popular at the time because of the recent international phenomenon *Spirited Away* (2001), this period can be considered the peak for the distribution of anime sales. Existing data from the period indicates that sales for new titles decreased gradually year by year since 2006 (JETRO 2011, 33).
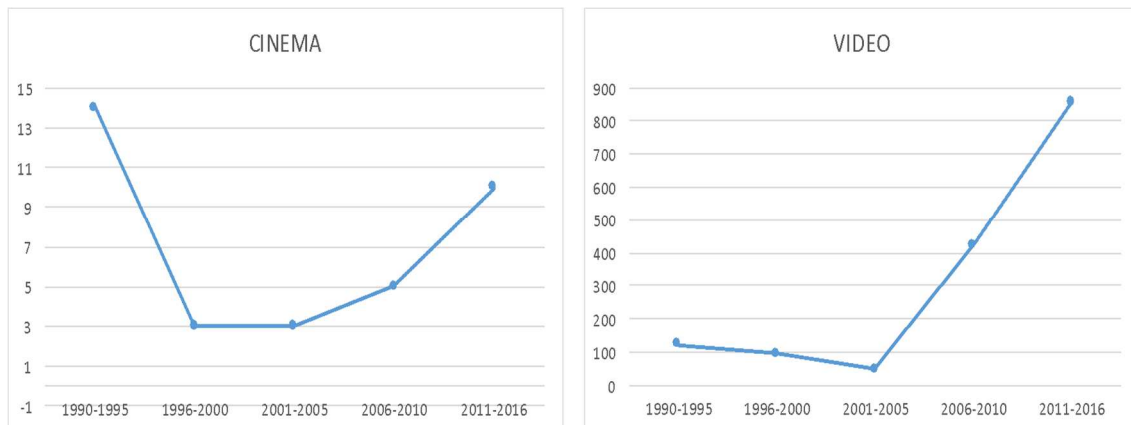
Number of anime titles released in UK cinemas (Manga Entertainment Ltd., ICA Projects Ltd, among others) compared to those released straight to video (Manga Entertainment Ltd, Island World Communications Ltd, Optimum Releasing and others) during the period of 1990-2016. Data obtained from BBFCO (May 2016).

The overall presence of the Studio Ghibli films is the most interesting trend of the cinema market in this period. From 2001 to 2008, of the 9 Japanese animated films distributed in the UK, 6 were produced by Studio Ghibli. The proportion is still larger in the next period when Ghibli's classic films from the 1980s and 1990s are released for first time in Britain. Hayao Miyazaki, one of the filmmakers associated with the production house, is the most recognizable figure in the British market for anime by a significant margin. Together with the fascination expressed by film critics, his international success, has contributed to creating his status as a 'cult' figure among British *otaku* audiences (Hernandez-Perez, 2016).

Through its association with these cult labels, cinema has proven to be an important way of consolidating minor but influential audiences in this period. The Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) hosted some events associated with Japanese visual culture. The majority of these were film exhibitions with a focus on either classical or contemporary

Japanese filmmakers. Even when anime or manga were the main element of the programme, these media productions were usually presented in the wider context of Japanese visual culture. That was the case with the *Manga Matinees* (July 2008) and the *Comica* (November 2008) events. These were complemented by other film cult screenings such as *The Castle of Cagliostro* and *The Girl Who Leapt Through Time* (August 2008). In addition, The Barbican Centre, located in London, began an intermittent series of activities linked to the anime phenomenon ("*Japanimation*") in 2007. Hosted by iconic figures of anime scholarship and criticism such as Helen McCarthy, *Japanimation* activities have surely made significant contributions to the dissemination and understanding of Japanese animation. One of the most popular events took place in 2011, with the screening of a Studio Ghibli retrospective. Its zenith was reached in September 2008 with a retrospective about classical anime called "*Osamu Tezuka: Movies into Manga*", with more screenings and talks happening in the spring of 2009. However, since 2011 its activity has been reduced to selected film authors, most notably Mamoru Oshii and Katshuiro Otomo (The Barbican, 2015). Despite this reduction, the work of these centres was an important complement to the still-limited anime menu offered in large cities.

Fourth Period: (2009s-)

In recent years, the television anime catalogue has completely disappeared from the broadcasted offer. It seems to have found its audience in the children's segment on themed channels such as Cartoon Network (*Yokai Watch*) or Kix TV (*Yu-Gi-Oh Zexal*). *Pokémon* (Children

ITV, 2006), is still the main element of the anime TV schedule. The rest of the channels on Digital TV (non pay-per-view platforms) do not appear to gain much interest. BBC Children's TV channel continues with its historical focus on British production, such as magazines (*Blue Peter*), puppets or costume-based shows (*Teletubbies*) and stop-motion (*Clangers*, *Shaun the Sheep*).

Anime may have acquired a cult status but its presence has been limited to occasional marathon homages to Ghibli Studio and in particularly, Hayao Miyazaki's films. This cult status has contributed to ongoing cultural activities. The ICA (London) continues with its dissemination of Japanese visual culture, with the participation of institutions such as the Japan Foundation. It is hard not to see the relationship between cultural criticism and commercial success in the case of the reception of Miyazaki's films, the screening of which can be considered a kind of social 'indie' event. In 2010, the late screening of *Ponyo* in cinemas has reinforced the presence of Ghibli productions and anime itself on British screens. After its success, vintage productions from the studio's 1980s and 1990s filmography have been re-discovered by British audiences (*Totoro, Laputa, Nausicaa, Porco Rosso,* etc.).

On the other hand, in the domestic market the number of Japanese animation titles certified by the BBFCO increased dramatically with 5337 animation titles, of which 1327 were anime titles. This data contrasts with a low impact in terms of sales, and corresponds to the DVD-box set phenomenon; not a single anime title was found in the Top 100 charts of the last five years (The Official UK Charts Company, 2015).

Judging from the data obtained after the revision of age classifications, anime remains a qualitative different product, at least in the way it is distribute in the UK. Compared with the products of "non-Japanese" animation, the contents of Japanese anime show a more adult profile.
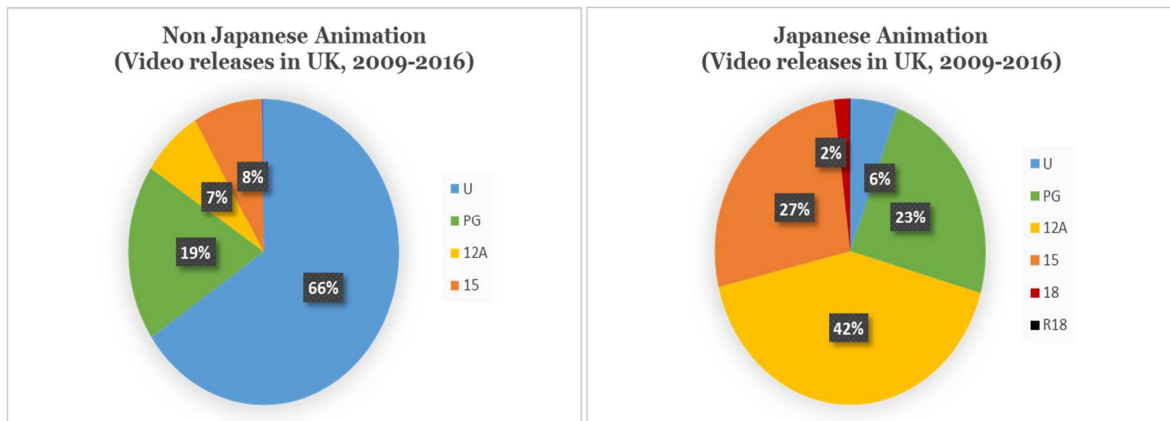
Ratings corresponding to the 2009-2016 period within the 'animation' label and video formats.
Data obtained from BBFCO (May 2016).

The most used tag is 12A: this is not recommended for children under 12, except where accompanied by a parent. This label is usual in productions with lots of action and those stories inspired by a martial arts scenario. Some products classified as 12A include: *Slayers, Magi, Kamisama Kiss, Fate / Stay Night, Naruto* and *Dragon Ball.*

Following this, the next most used classification for anime productions is 15. The reasons are similar; however, the action scenes contain more explicit physical violence. A common cause for this category is usually what is considered to be imitable behaviour, through the use of weapons such as swords and pistols. Violence, understood as the consequences of fighting, so common in the *shōnen* animation, is also a motivation for this classification, as well as sex scenes, which are a

common component in *shōnen* productions but also in other subgenres like "*ecchi*" anime. Finally, horror themes and scenes regarded as explicit or causing disgust are not unusual in this category. Some products classified as 15 include: *Claymore, the Ghost in the Shell, Parasyte, Tokyo Ghoul* or *Assassination Classroom saga.*

Adult content or R18 is not very common. Most of the adult content in anime scenes is considered "gore" or "strong bloody violence". Also, the risk of sexual content ("strong sexualised nudity") can be found. Compared to previous periods[4], such as the first releases on VHS (1990-1995), it seems that the profile of adult content has dropped considerably. In that period, series and movies considered 'adults' (R18) were about the 29% while in this period it barely reaches 2%. These are products as *Hentaipalooza* o *Ringetsu the animation,* which always belong to the *Hentai* (pornography) category and include explicit sex scenes.

The standardisation of video on demand is the greatest achievement of the recent anime market. Although it still constitutes a small market, it is an increasingly popular alternative to illegal distribution. Recent reports by the Intellectual Property Office suggested that legal services such as Netflix have contributed to a decrease in filesharing. Despite having increased the popularity of legal downloads progressively since 2013, piracy is still a danger for the British creative economy, with 25% of internet users downloading illegally (GOV.UK, 2016). Government

---

[4] It is necessary to note that the 1990-1995 sample correspond to the data from the main distributors (Island World Communications Ltd and Manga Entertainment Ltd.). From 2009, BBFCO stablished the consistent use of the "animation" label as a genre, making easier to construct a more complete sample.

and industry are both interested in creating measures to reduce piracy levels. Increasing jail sentences has been one of the most polemic decisions. However, this seems difficult to apply and, as an action, is intended to persuade through fear rather than actually eradicate piracy downloads. This is part of other measures ("Creative Content UK") adopted during the last few years by the Internet service providers under British Higher Court pressures. These include the banning of sites dedicated to illegal downloads and letters sent to households that download illegal content (Curtis, 2014).

In the European market, Video on Demand Systems experienced an increase of 250% in sales during the period of 2006-2008 (JETRO Japan External Trade Organization 2011a, 30). It is expected that official distributors, pay-per-view (PPV) and View on Demand (VoD) systems, and even unofficial channels (mainly p2p and other file sharing systems) may open the gates to new audiences for anime genres.

In the UK, as in other countries, this has been the case with Netflix and the American operator Crunchyroll. Netflix is the most important streaming service in the UK, apart from YouTube, and it represents 44% of the streaming and downloading of films (IPO, 2016). It started to offer its service in the UK in 2014, and since then the company has expanded its offer by including a number of recent international successes (e.g.: *Fairy Tale, Attack on Titan, Psycho-Pass*). It has also recently started to co-produce animes in order to have exclusive rights in their distribution (*Knights of Sidonia,* 2014). Although the UK anime catalogue on Netflix is currently smaller than that of many other countries such as Japan, the

US and Canada, it does not seem to be much different from other countries such as France, which are traditionally larger consumers of Japanese animation.
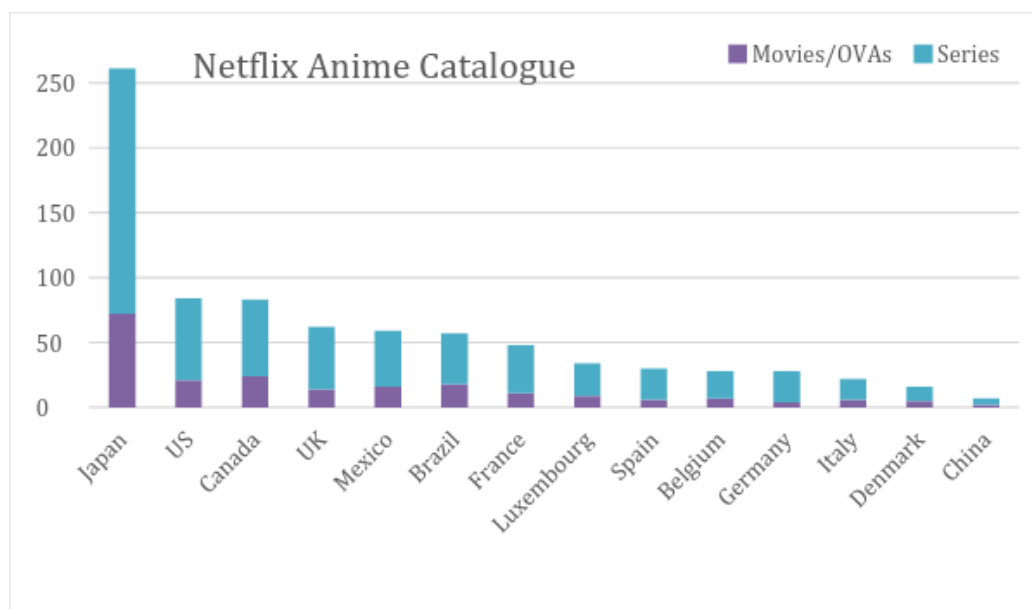
VoD anime titles offered by Netflix (July 2016). Note that it is just recently-at the end of October- that Netflix has been able to expand to Italy and Spain. Data obtained from Netflix.com

Crunchyroll launched a UK website in March 2012 (ANN, 2012). As it is more specifically for anime fans, it cannot compete with Netflix's terms of subscription. Its catalogue, however, is huge. The site offers 464 titles, most of them series, which is nearly the same as the 470 titles offered in the American version (at July 2016). While the categorisation includes Japanese names such as *shōnen, seinen* or *ecchi*, most of the common categories correspond to themes rather than describing a genre. Comedy (18%) and action (14%) were the most used categories while fantasy, slices of life and romance achieved the 9%, being the rest of categories equal in lower rates.

Today, Amazon Prime is also quite popular but has not yet shown interest in this particular audience. It offers up to 150 titles under the category "anime" (July 2015). However, this category is unclear and includes many products that do not correspond to series or movies; including for example, showcases of toys and comic-book related merchandise, some of which is not even Japanese. Of the 25 series and movies, many are just anime-style like the Nickelodeon series *Avatar*. While it is clear that both the original series and its sequel, *The Legend of Korra*, incorporate many elements similar to *shōnen* narrative and style (such as character design), in fact these are entirely American productions. While in the past (1970-1990) Japanese productions and co-productions were not identified as such, now adopting an anime style is a way to build more attractive products and appeal to a particular audience. These "fake animes", together with equals to real animes such as *Pokémon* (*Pokémon the Series: Diamond and Pearl*) reveal that anime is mostly just another form of cartoons, and merely a potential marketing label for these distributors.

Besides, Internet VoD may not be the most accurate way of measuring current anime consumption trends. Internet download distribution may be illegal, but it remains a common practice. In the previous period, there were no legal downloading alternatives. Despite the menace that they were, most popular mangas and animes downloads operated as a guide for producers and publishers who acquired rights following their popularity. This functioned as a measure of the popularity of franchises overseas. Animes like *Naruto* or *Bleach* were very popular in the previous decade, and this popularity was followed by DVD distribution

and transmission on satellite TV channels, as well as the distribution of their corresponding mangas. Besides, it should also be noted that copyright regulation in each country may have been an obstacle to new markets for VoD.

Understanding anime context in the UK

The second step of our research consists of the formulation of some working hypotheses. These may supplement the previous historical analysis while providing a better understanding of the British broadcasting system and its sociological constraints. As explanations, they may not all be equally supportive of the explanation of the anime markets in the UK and their idiosyncrasies. Instead, they are intended to reveal several aspects of the reading of Japanese visual products within British society, at least in a superficial way. These will eventually drive future research toward a better understanding of the history of Japanese cultural industries in the UK context.

1. Protecting from pernicious influences: paternalism or ethnocentrism?

Throughout its long history, British public television has shown a commitment to the regulation of content, especially in the case of younger audiences. This commitment can be traced back directly to the so-called "*Reithian*" Principles of the BBC: Inform, Educate, Entertain, laid down by the corporation's first Director-General, John Reith. This explicit statement leads us to our first hypothesis: the history of British TV regulation, ostensibly to protect the audiences from any content deemed "unsuitable", has affected the acceptance of Japanese animation products, including anime ones.

One of the main examples is the way that schedules were programmed and targeted. Thus, the so-called "watershed" was introduced in 1954, where there was a break in all programming and no transmissions. In this way, it was possible to separate children's programming from the rest of the schedule. In addition to this, from that early period children programmes were distributed according to age, always starting with the content for the very youngest viewers, followed by other content such as drama or literary adaptations which were more suitable for older child audiences (Buckingham *et al.* 1999, 19). These measures contributed to control of the number of broadcasted hours allocated to children's televisions that would not change until the release of themed channels through cable and satellite technologies in the 1990s. Even after the start of commercial broadcasting through ITV in 1955 this tendency continued in the form of a number of different policies. The most important of these was the redistribution of content with violence and sex that was banned from appearing on TV channels before 9.00 pm. Commonly, in the UK as well as later in other countries, the evening news bulletin marks the beginning of adult content. It is not a coincidence that it is precisely the content of the news that is one of the most studied in the area of TV's effects on children (Pecora, Murray, & Wartella, 2006).

While it may be not appropriate to contend that institutions behave like individuals, there may be some evidence to suggest that a *corporate* prejudice might exist. For example, the vision of Japanese animation as a merely violent form of expression was particularly deep-rooted in the British industry. John Marsden, who in charge of animation department at Carlton UK (an ITV franchise in London), commented:

"The Japanese style of animation is particularly graphic; you can see people with their heads chopped off, cracked open with great hammers, etc. . . . I wouldn't want my children to be exposed to that . . . it's just not necessary to show . . . graphic . . . sexual activity . . . In a lot of countries this is an acceptable form of animation (..)".
John Marsden as quoted in Messenger-Davies (2001, 30)

But can this explanation be applied to the scarce catalogue of Japanese media products within British broadcasting? It has been argued elsewhere that there was a "misrepresentation" of Japanese products that may have driven audiences to embrace features such as "otherness", "transgression" or "difference" over "similarities" while avoiding the required cultural contextual keys for its decoding (Hinton 2014, 89). While insightful and valid, this argument presents some problems. First, it might be difficult to sustain that a social representation such as "Japanese" could remain unchanged such a long period. The way western society looks at Japan would of course have changed since the first *Japonisme.* Besides, it is hard to believe that social representation can be as monolithic and homogeneous as it is presented in the article. Hinton articulates the misconceptions around the idea of "otherness" in which sexual violence and gender (especially female) misrepresentation seems to be essential. *Shōjo* girls, *kawaii* and *otaku* male anxiety are elements considered to be equal part of the exported products when, in fact, they are aspects of different stages and genres of a very diversified and complex industry. Over-erotisation of the teenager, together with an appeal to humour through sexually suggestive portrayals (so-called "fan-service") can be, for example, a very frequent trend in *shōnen* and *seinen* manga and anime, while it is less frequent in *shōjo*. He also seems to recognize implicitly that some of the faces of this distinctiveness include positive (or less transgressive) aspects such as the *kawaii* culture and so–

called "*Cool Japan*". Besides, one can hardly believe that anime's image among the British audience can be summarized as merely a cross-cultural misreading of gender representation. There are also other content aspects that are intimately related to the aforementioned British tradition of content regulation. That is the case, as we will see later, with the first anime titles screened by the BBC and Channel 4. These aroused the attention of commissioners, as they were rich in sexual and, perhaps more notoriously, violent content (such as *Akira* or *Urotsukidoji*). As a result, they were usually broadcast well after the watershed.

The paternalism of BBC producers (arguably) may have been reflected not just in the broadcast of so-called "adult content". There is evidence of an anti-Americanisation trend in British cultural life from the 1970s to 1990s (Buckingham *et al.* 1999, 48), but it is unclear if this tendency was influential enough on institutions to create a filter based on the production origin. In the case of the BBC, for example, this focus on its own productions has been explained by the lack of agreement with British film producers and its aspirations to consolidate its dominion over broadcasting contents and media (Stokes 2000, 32).

Nevertheless, the realities of the market are not always in parallel with the world of politics. The UK and US have a long history of collaboration in media production, pre-dating the TV industry. American film producers invested in UK productions due to the lower cost of UK facilities and workers, while the UK became an important second market for American products (Stokes 2000, 14). In the transnational television market, it was soon proven that English-language contents were cheap, as they did not incur dubbing costs. The

acquisition of US and Australian series was a common trend in British commercial television in the 1960s and 1970s, when a significant number of series were imported, creating a trend that was followed by public broadcasters. Looking at children's television programming schedules (BBC Genome, 2015; Radio Sounds Familiar, 2015), we can see several examples in the form of children's drama (*Skippy the Bush Kangaroo* appeared on ITV Yorkshire in 1970), soap operas (*Peyton Place on ITV Tyne Tees in 1965*) and comedies (*The Munsters 1965, Sgt. Bilko*, 1966, both BBC1). Imports also included popular cartoons, among which were Hannah-Barbera productions such as *The Flintstones* (ITV Anglia, 1961), *Yogi Bear* (ITV, 1963), *The Jetsons* (ITV Border, 1964) and *Hong Kong Phooey* (BBC1, 1975). Market rules might be the only way to understand how this spread can co-exist with an old prejudice about American TV productions within the British market. Such prejudices may not just be political ones, but also related to scholarly traditions within media studies, such as the Birmingham School theorists, who also contributed to the suspicious view of ideological superstructures which underpin programmes' origins. "Americanized" features of a rich, class-dominated mass media had already been commented upon in Richard Hoggart's first work, and later became a common trend in texts focused on topics such as "power" and "imperialism" (Rixon 2006, 13). History of British media has highlighted how US television shows were seen as "commercial, 'American' and a source of social violence" (Oswell, 2008, 476). This may be understood as a sign of how academic and political points of view may be linked, or perhaps affected by the same kind of prejudices.

Another perspective, which can be considered more optimistic, points out that this success of the American networks can be also considered the consolidation of children's audiences, not just as "citizens" but also as "consumers" (Buckingham *et al.* 1999, 4). But, it can be also argued that the citizen model has long been less successful, or was never really considered a goal for these global producers. British public opinion (The *Guardian*, 1987) started to register alarm in the late 1980s after the success of toy franchises such as *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe* (1983), *Transformers* (1985) and *Thundercats* (1985), which were always introduced through their own animated series.

Returning to the specific case of Japanese anime, regulation of contents does not explain by itself the absence of anime in the broadcast schedule, although it may explain the existence of an increasing anime market for domestic videos in the 1990-95 period and later, based on the appeal of different contents and the block of the television route for these adult products. As aforementioned, there were other anime released before these products came to the video market and late night shows, which did not fit into that "transgressive" category (*The Moomins*, for example). This is where we will introduce our second explanation about the reception of anime in Britain, which in fact, also sustains the Hinton argument: those permitted materials were not perceived as Japanese animation but just as mere cartoons.

2. The Misleading of Genres, National Producers and Television Formats

Throughout British broadcasting history we can also see some examples of a certain difference in the treatment of television genres.

This can be linked to the circumstances of the US-UK market relationship. Also, that reluctance to depend exclusively upon others' productions (which also came from the film industry) stimulated the networks' own productions. It seems however that there was also a natural preference for some genres linked to a public educational function. A clear example of this was the preference for drama productions over comedy, especially adaptations from literary and historical sources. This may also have had cost imperatives; many of these works were probably out of copyright, and needed less work and cost to adapt. As we have commented, some contents such as drama series were considered more suitable for children and young adult audiences.

Animation in films, for example, is an appreciated form of art, with some relevant films produced by British filmmakers over the years (*Animal Farm*, 1954; *Watership Down*, 1978). There is certainly appreciation and admiration of Studio Ghibli films in the UK, which is reflected in their sales (JETRO Japan External Trade Organization, 2011b). Nevertheless, animated feature films are considered "films" and the use of the term "animated" or "animation" is deliberately different from the words used to refer to animated productions in television, which are traditionally denominated as "cartoons". In fact, cartoons are seen essentially as an innocuous and permitted vice, a "mental bubblegum" (Buckingham et al. 1999, 2) that could easily be better replaced with more useful (educational) content. This might be the reason why many British animation companies (such as Aardman, Cosgrove Hall, Bura and Hardwick) began working in the BBC's

educational provision, especially in schools programming, before creating products that have a greater emphasis on "entertainment".

Again, the regulation of contents and formats by public and private British broadcasters may have been a factor in the relative lack of imported anime products. Early anime released on American television such as *Astroboy* (NBC, 1963), *Speed Racer* (NBC, 1965) and *Jungle Emperor* (NBC, 1965), were not released in the UK. One significant exception to this was *Battle of Planets*, a transnational (though some would say adulterated) version of the series *Science Ninja Team Gatchaman,* which was broadcast by the BBC in 1979. This is in fact a very early precedent for other transnational adaptations that could be found in the British television schedule during the 1990s, such as *Transformers* (BBC2, 1990) and *Galaxy Rangers* (UK Gold, 1993). A common practice in the 1980s and 1990s animation industry was for cels and filming processes to be produced in Japan and other Asian countries, while working from US-sourced storyboards. Even their narratives were also reflected a transnational essence, as they usually presented a science fiction-based narrative, but also some identifiable local (perhaps even American) elements. The logical explanation for their release in the UK is that these kinds of production were not identified as Japanese, even though they were clearly shared some elements of Japanese anime style. In fact, what we mean is that they were not specifically associated with its "transgressive" features.

In this way, anime production in the UK can be assimilated into different categories. The first one, the more "transgressive" content that

is usually known as "Manga Movies", is "adult-oriented production" which is common to both the domestic video market and late-night television. The second category is that of the "cartoon", which includes some *shōnen* and even *shōjo* products from the 1970s and 1980s, that is toward younger audiences and erroneously redirected towards children. This category also includes other American cartoons using anime-style elements. Finally, there is also a third category, which has been traditionally limited to a more exclusive and limited range of products: the "feature-length animated film", a form that requires a format more reminiscent of the *auteur* style.

So, where others see a misconception, we argue for the existence of different routes for Japanese broadcast television with the potential to attract different kinds of audiences. In the first category, "transgressive" contents might find a niche in thematic TV and the home video market, and could create the base of an engaged and rich cultural capital that we could consider as future fan audiences. In the second category, within primetime and available schedules, are the TV cartoons. Though not always recognized as being related to Japanese culture, they will eventually create a group of consumers motivated by nostalgia as audiences get older. The third route would be the more prestigious international festival domain, which may eventually elicit subsequent release on public television.

3. Natural Competitors

American and European products had a strong influence on British TV products during the late 1970s and 1980s. The tradition of content

regulation and the perception of animation as "cartoons" or a genre primarily defined as child-targeted were the starting point for a "Golden Age" of British animation, especially on TV. Our third hypothesis is that Japanese imports were also affected by this strong competition. In fact, it was not just animation, but children's programming in general that experienced notable growth and enrichment during this period, mainly due to the addition of cable and satellite platforms (Buckingham *et al.* 1999, 92). During the period of 1967-1980, UK public broadcasters offered a "mini-schedule" for children and young people within the larger context of general programming (*Ibid*, 33). UK channel schedules included magazines (*BBC's Blue Peter, Thames TV's Magpie*), news and current affairs (*BBC Newsround*), educational shows and a number of other formats.

This situation continued even into the late 1980s, when the British children's TV catalogue was quite different from other European countries. Focusing on anime distribution, we see that Spain, France and Italy saw the release of a wide variety of TV anime during this time. The most common genre in these schedules was the *shōnen spokon*: a serial drama with action-based stories about different sports. A main example of this trend was the success of contemporaneous *shōnen* soon after their release in Japan. Examples include: *Captain Tsubasa* (1983), a story about football competitions, and *Touch!* (1985), a teenage drama with baseball matches as the main theme. The market for this kind of product was quite large in Europe, and included products from earlier decades such as *Aim for the Ace!* (1973).

However, research following the idea of natural competitors could not be proven. Within the UK catalogue we found nothing that could be compared to anime in the sense of "dramatic animation". Competitors were, therefore, usually in the form of the cartoon genre, animated sketches and animated dramas, sometimes based on literary resources. In fact, drama was quite popular among young audiences, but normally in the form of (live-action) single dramas (such as ITV's *Dramarama strand*) or drama serials (BBC's *Grange Hill* or *The Machine Gunners*, or ITV's *Chocky*). The dramatic component in cartoons seems to be much less common, while the classical drama format had a presence in animation tele-films and series such as Cosgrove-Hall's adaptation of *The Wind in the Willows* (ITV, 1984-1987).

Conclusions and Future Research

Through this paper, several aspects of anime distribution in the UK have been examined in order to determine if its distribution patterns could be considered anomalous in relation to other countries. Moreover, the idiosyncratic consumption of anime in the UK has also been commented upon. Anime industries have several meanings among the Japanese audience which may not always find correspondence in Western markets. These differences map onto terms that a Western audience might consider either as "cartoons", "manga movies" or "animation".

The label of "anime failure" may better be assigned to the first TV stages in terms of diversity and accessibility (non pay-per-view systems). Cinema distribution has been proven not to be that different

from other European cases. In this medium, anime differs in terms of critical reception and commercial success within anime movies (mainly Ghibli films) and *shōnen* franchises (singular cases with unequal results). The reception and consumption of anime products also faced singular transformations. The main one is exemplified in the way adult-oriented animation (1990-1995) became more diverse and finally came to address mainly children and young teens audiences (2006-2016). This diversification of genres and content has been a big trend since 2001 in video releases and it will no doubt be even more relevant in the upcoming years due to the consolidation of the VoD market.
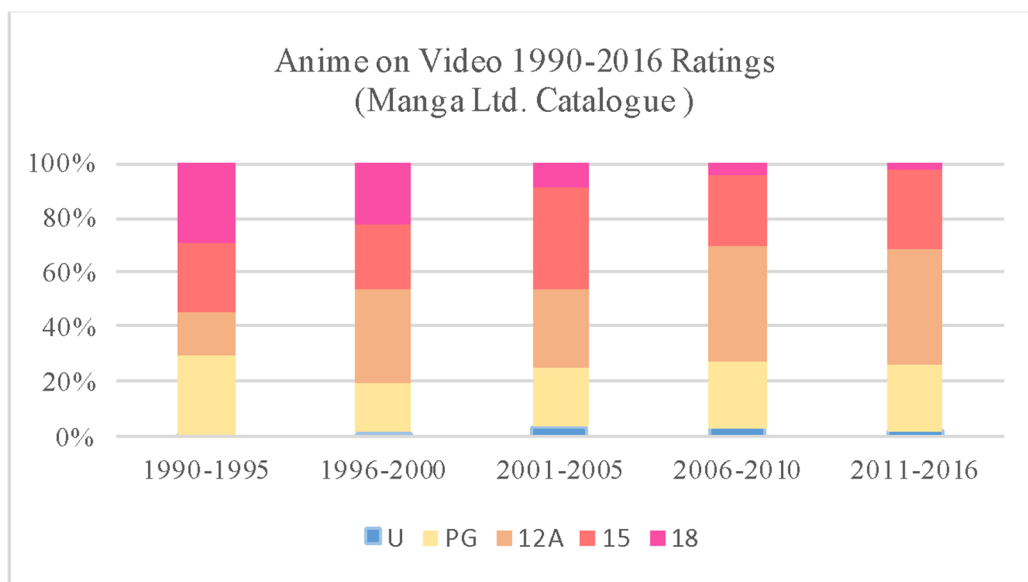
Ratings corresponding to different periods in the video Manga Ltd. Catalogue.
Data obtained from BBFCO (May 2016).

The UK case also reveal us significant information with the potential for a larger discussion in the study of European or Western development of anime distribution.

First, anime distribution may have had an effect upon other parallel markets, such as manga and video games. This idea can be supported by previous studies which pointed out how TV anime is usually the gateway for the rest of Japanese Pop Culture Industries (Levi, 1996). Secondly, as discussed previously, the UK failure could be understood as a reflection of the broader image of Japan in UK/Western countries, an image that can be defined as based on an innate "otherness". This aspect deserves to be more deeply explored in the future in order to be compared with other images of *Japanisme* within European audiences (Pellitteri, 2011).

Also, interestingly, especially for communication and media studies, this case illustrates a significant difference in the cross-cultural reading of products and popular genres, such as the cartoon/anime differentiation. In other countries, anime products have been considered as mere 'cartoons' until a specific (fan) audience developed. The difference between one country and another might lie in the time needed for this audience group to be consolidated and generate a voice in other media such as magazines, conventions and Internet forums. Again, more research is needed in order to examine the evolution of these communities in the UK. Eventually, the future of anime in the UK will depend upon the capacity of these groups to draw the attention of distributors and persuade them that they can be faithful and engaged consumers.

REFERENCES

Anime News Network (2012), Crunchyroll Launches U.K. Page. Anime *News Network. The internet´s most trusted* anime *news source*. [Online] Available from: http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2012-03-20/crunchyroll-launches-u.k-page [Accessed: 24 June 2016].

BBC Genome (2016), *BBC Genome Radio Times 1923-2009.* [Online] Available from: http://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/ [Accessed: 24 June 2016].

BBFC British Board of Film Classification (2016), How does classification work? *BBFC website.* [Online] Available from: http://www.bbfc.co.uk/what-classification/how-does-classification-work [Accessed: 24 June 2016].

Buckingham, D., Davies, H., Jones, K., & Kelley, P. (1999), *Children's television in Britain: History, discourse and policy*. London: British Film Institute London.

Cavallaro, D. (2010), Anime *Intersections. Tradition and Innovation in Theme and Technique*. Jefferson (North Carolina) and London: McFarland & Co.

Clements, J. (2013), Anime*. A History*. London: BFI/Palgrave McMillan.

Curtis, S. (2014), Illegal downloading: four strikes and then... nothing. *The Telegraph (online)*. [Online] Available from:
http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/news/10979918/Illegal-downloading-four-strikes-and-then...-nothing.html [Accessed: 24 June 2016].

Hinton, P. (2014), Representation or misrepresentation? British media and Japanese popular culture. *Necsus, European Journal of Media Studies,* Vol. 1(3), 89-108.

Intellectual Property Office (2016) *Online copyright infringement tracker survey (6th Wave).* [Online] Available from:
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/online-copyright-infringement-tracker-survey-6th-wave [Accessed: 24 July 2016].

Jacques, P., Clements, J. (2005), Interview with Author and Writer Jonathan Clements. *DigViz Blog (Digital Visualizations).* [Online] Available from: http://www.digviz.com/jc_interview.pdf [Accessed: 24 June 2016].

JETRO Japan External Trade Organization. (2011a), フランスを中心とする 欧州の コンテンツ市場 [The European content market research centred on France]

(2011-2012) (February-March 2013)]. *JETRO Japan Investigative Reports,* (March 2011). [Online] Available from:
http://www.jetro.go.jp/world/reports/2013/07001231.html
[Accessed: 24 June 2016].

— (2011b) 英国におけるコンテンツ市場の実態（2011 年 3 月） [Realities of the content market in the United Kingdom (March 2011)]. *JETRO Japan Investigative Reports,* (March 2011). [Online] Available from:
http://www.jetro.go.jp/world/reports/2011/07000546.html
[Accessed: 24 June 2016].

— (2013) 米国コンテンツ市場調査 （2011-2012）アニメ・マンガ編 [US content market research (2011-2012) (January-March 2013)]. *JETRO Japan Investigative Reports,* (March 2013). [Online] Available from:
http://www.jetro.go.jp/world/reports/2013/07001194.html
[Accessed: 24 June 2016].

French, P. (1995), Pedigree chums. *The Observer (1991-2003),* 10th December, 65.

Hernández-Pérez, M. (2013) Narrativa *Cross-Media* en el Contexto de la Industria del Entretenimiento Japones. Estudio del *Manga,* Anime y los Videojuegos [Cross-Media Narrative in the Context of the Japanese Entertainment Industry. *Manga,* Anime and Videogames]. *Information and Communication.* Murcia, Spain: University of Murcia.

— (2016), Animation, branding and authorship in the construction of the 'anti-Disney' ethos: Hayao Miyazaki's works and persona through Disney film criticism *Animation. An Interdisciplinary Journal,* Vol. 3(11), 297-313.

Levi, A. (1996), *Samurai from outer space. Understanding Japanese Animation.* Chicago and La Salle: Carus Publishing Company.

Oswell, D. (2008), Media and Communications Regulations and Child Protection: An Overview of the Field. In: Livingstone, S., Drotner, K., (Eds), *International Handbook of Children, Media and Culture.* London: Sage, 475-492.

Malcom, D. (1995), Insects with a lovebite. *The Guardian (1959-2003),* 7th December, A9.

Messenger-Davies, M. (2001), *'Dear BBC': Children, Television Storytelling and the Public Sphere.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pecora, N. O., Murray, J. P., & Wartella, E. A. (2006), TV Violence: Research and Controversy *Children and Television: 50 Years of Research (ed)*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates (LEA), 183-204.

Pellitteri, M. (2011), Cultural Politics of J-Culture and "Soft Power": Tentative Remarks from a European Perspective. In: Perper, T., Cornog, M., (Eds), *Mangatopia: Essays on Manga and* Anime *in the Modern World.* Santa Barbara, California: Greenwood Publishing Group, 209-236.

Poitras, G. (2008), Contemporary Anime in Japanese Pop Culture. Japanese visual culture: explorations in the world of manga and anime. New York: M.E. Sharpe, 48-67.

Radio Sounds Familiar (2015) TV Times Archive (1955-1989). [Online] Available from: http://radiosoundsfamiliar.com/ [Accessed: 24 June 2016].

Rixon, P. (2006), *American Television on British Screens. A Story of Cultural Interaction*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ryfle, S. (1998), *Japan's favourite mon-star. The Unauthorized Biography of "The Big G".* Toronto: ECW Press.

Stokes, J. C. (2000), *On screen rivals: cinema and television in the United States and Britain*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

The Barbican (2015), Japanimation in Spring 2009, *Barbican (Official Website)*. [Online] Available from:

www.barbican.org.uk/news/artformnews/film/japananimation-in-spring-2009

The Official UK Charts Company (2015), Official Charts Archive *CNN.COM*. [Online] Available from: http://www.officialcharts.com/charts/end-of-year-video-chart/

Van Spall, O. (2009), Why is anime invisible on British TV?, *The Guardian*. [Online] Available from: http://www.theguardian.com/culture/tvandradioblog/2009/jun/09/anime-japan-tv

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Manuel HERNÁNDEZ-PÉREZ *completed all postdoctoral lecturing qualifications for Information Management at the University of Hull with the presentation of his Doctoral Thesis titled Cross-Media Narrative in the Context of the Japanese Entertainment Industry. Manga, Anime and Video Games. He has been visitor researcher in the Universite Libre de Bruxelles and The University of Edinburgh where he has conducted research about Narrative, Psychology and Media reception. In his professional career, he has worked with many agents in the media sphere such as Institutions, TV channels and producer houses. He has been Lecturer in the Catholic University of Valencia 'San Vicente Martir' (Valencia, Spain) where he has taught seminaries about the relationships between Psychology and Media Production. Since October 2013 he works in the University of Hull (Scarborough, UK) as a Lecturer in Digital Design.*

Kevin Corstorphine *is lecturer in English at the University of Hull. His main research interests are in the literary Gothic, the reception of science in literature, ecology, and theories of spatiality. He has published chapters and articles on Ambrose Bierce, H.P. Lovecraft, Robert Bloch and Stephen King. He is currently working on the spaces and places of Gothic fiction and the popular imagination, and is writing a book on haunted houses in fiction and culture. As well as manga and anime, he has a keen interest in Japanese videogames and gaming culture.*

Darren Stephens *completed a Physics degree in Durham University in 1991, before gaining an MSc in Information Technology at Teesside in 1995. Since then he has worked in the IT/Internet industry, and in Higher Education in a mix of technical, teaching and academic support roles, before joining the Web Team of Durham University as a developer in May 2016.*

Brokers of "Japaneseness":
Bringing table-top J-RPGs to the "West"

Björn-Ole Kᴀᴍᴍ **|** Kyōto University, Japan

Abstract

Japanese-language table-top role-playing games (TRPG) stayed mostly under the radar of gamers and scholars in Europe and the US until 2008, when a first English translation of such a game was released. TRPGs made by Japanese game designers had been overshadowed by their digital cousins, computer RPGs such as Final Fantasy, *and Japan has subsequently been imagined as a digital game heaven. Instead of engaging a computer interface, however, TRPG players come together and narrate a shared adventure or story. Using character avatars and following often complex rules, their game world and the plot line of their play exist mostly in their imagination.*

One of the first English translations of a commercial Japanese game was Tenra Banshō Zero *(Inoue, Kitkowski) in 2014, chosen for its "Japaneseness," that is, a plethora of elements, such as samurai, Shintō priests, and creatures from Japanese folklore. Using* Tenra's *English translation as a key example, this paper traces how "cultural brokerage" in the case of this game does not simply translate between cultures (e.g., a supposed to be authentic Japanese one and a vaguely "Western" one) but necessarily assembles and constitutes them as single coherent wholes. By tracking the translation process, this paper seeks to show that the "Japaneseness" of* Tenra *was its selling point but also nothing it simply carried with it: The "Japaneseness" of this game needed to be created first by telling a putative audience what "authentic" Japan looks like.*

Translating Japanese-language Table-top RPGs

Japanese-language table-top role-playing games (TRPG) [1] stayed mostly under the radar of gamers and scholars in Europe and the US until 2008, when Maid RPG (Kamiya 2004; Cluney, Kamiya 2008) was

---

[1] The Japanese term *tēburu-tōku RPG* (table-talk RPG), coined by game designer Kondō Kōshi in the 1980s, is an attempt to make a distinction between digital and non-digital games (Kondō 1987).

released as the first English translation of such a game. TRPGs made by Japanese game designers had been overshadowed by their digital cousins, computer and console RPGs such as *Final Fantasy* (Sakaguchi 1987), and Japan has subsequently been imagined as a digital game heaven. Instead of engaging with a computer interface, TRPG players come together, sit at a table and narrate a shared adventure or story, using character avatars, with the help of dice and – in most cases – complex rules (cf. Montola 2003). The game world and the plot-line of their play exists mostly in their imagination, supported in some cases by elaborate character sheets, drawings, maps, and figurines.

Maid RPG is an amateur-made game (so-called dōjin-gēmu) [2] and remains a PDF-only release in the English version. The first major English translation of a commercial Japanese-language game was *Tenra Banshō Zero* (Inoue 1996; Kitkowski, Inoue 2014), chosen for its "Japaneseness," that is, a plethora of supposedly authentic Japanese elements such as samurai, Shinto priests, and creatures from folklore set in a world inspired by the *sengoku jidai* (Warring States Period, ca. 1467–1603 C.E.). However, it was not faithfully translated. "Unfaithful" is not meant in any morally negative sense but refers to the many adjustments necessary to deliver *Tenra* to an audience that both is perceived and perceives itself as different from the "original" Japanese one. Such adjustments include not only notes and clarifications of "Japan" but also explanations vis-à-vis

---

[2] *Dōjin* stands for "like-minded people," referring to a group of fans or a community of interest. In Japan, these groups often produce their own work, be it derivatives of commercial media they favour or original manga, novels, and software, to sell or share them at conventions. *Dōjinshi*, self-published zines, receive the most attention and are usually incorrectly translated as fan-fiction or fanzine, which obscures that not only amateurs but also professionals create these works (cf. Mizoguchi 2003).

"Western" values.[3] Using *Tenra's* English translation as a key example, this paper traces how cultural brokerage in the case of this game does not simply translate between cultures but necessarily also produces them as a semiotic-material reality. It makes "the West" — by stripping away elements, adding information — and similarly also "Japan," by assembling selected elements into a single coherent whole.[4] By closely tracking the endeavours of *Tenra*'s translator-cum-cultural broker to bring J-RPGs to the West, this paper illustrates this argument and shows that the "Japaneseness" of this game was its selling point and that this Japaneseness was not simply there but was created through telling the audience what "authentic" Japan looks like.

A Primer and Brief History of Role-Playing

The often retold origin story of role-playing games usually links these games to war-gaming in 19th century Prussia ('Kriegsspiele,' cf. Peterson 2012; Appelcline 2013; but also, Morton 2007; Tresca 2010), which had antecedents in ancient India (chaturaṅga, known as chess in Europe). Crossing not only boundaries of today's nation-states but also those of literary genres and theatrical practices, RPGs as they are known today gained a distinct form in the US in the 1970s by mixing elements from war and diplomacy games, science- or pulp-fiction and, last but not least, Tolkien's novel *Lord of the Rings* (1954). Nowadays, the most

---

[3] Japan, the West, and terms such as original, authentic and traditional appear in inverted commas at first mention. This awkward rendition seeks to highlight that throughout this paper these words do not refer to some socio-political or geographical entity out there, but to the image of or discourse about such entities. Similarly, ascriptions of "original" or "tradition" are understood as ex post facto judgments that place value on such qualities regardless of when a so-called tradition was invented, for example.

[4] The phrases "to make" and "to assemble" are borrowed from Latour (2005) and Law (2009) to highlight the performativity of realities: they are done in practices, such as translation, and do not precede our actions.

popular variant of this broad category of games is multiplayer online games (e.g. *World of Warcraft*; Pardo *et al.* 2004) that rely on mechanics refined by Japanese programmers (cf. *Final Fantasy*). Live-action enactments (so-called larps)[5] promoted in Northern, Central, and Eastern Europe have also gained traction elsewhere.

The very first so-called fantasy role-playing game, *Dungeons & Dragons* (D&D, 1st Edition 1974) was jointly created and later promoted by Gary Gygax, a high school dropout, insurance agent and shoe repairman, and Dave Arneson, who had studied history at the University of Minnesota. Most RPG historians and designers accredit D&D for the establishment of core elements and mechanics shared by many games that followed in its footsteps (cf. Edwards 2002; Hitchens, Drachen 2009; Tresca 2010; Peterson 2012; Appelcline 2013). Players create and portray characters distinct from their own selves (e.g. not Jim the sales clerk but Rognar the fighter). These characters have physical and mental traits (such as intelligence and dexterity), usually quantified in levels of capability. They are further differentiated by occupation or profession, such as fighter, wizard or cleric, usually called character classes. There is an additional distinction between those players who portray just one character and the referee (e.g. the dungeon master, game master, or storyteller) who controls the setting and the supporting cast. In the course of a game, the players explore, fight, talk, and gain rewards, such as gold and experience. The latter is collected in a currency of points,

---

[5] Live-Action Roleplay used to be abbreviated as LARP. Recently, however, "larp" (lowercase, as a noun; e.g. "a larp" for an event) and "larping" (the activity) are now widely used in English-language discussions of the practice (Fatland 2005, 12; Holter, Fatland, Tømte 2009, 5). Digital RPGs link directly to D&D. Contrastingly, even though larp shares elements with this "ancestor," such a singular line of development is contested (Fatland 2014). In Japanese, *raibu RPG* (live RPG) is sometimes used interchangeably with the term LARP in the Latin alphabet (cf. Hinasaki 2013).

and one needs a certain amount of experience points (XP) to "level up," to grow from a simple fighter to Rognar the Invincible — which would take many game sessions and probably also many out-of-game years for Jim's character to do. All this is accomplished by verbal tellings, by dialog between the players and the referee, and — this is a legacy from war-gaming — with the help of dice and with optional props such as figurines and maps. The dice are used to determine the result of actions when the outcome is unclear, introducing probability into the game. Thus, if a character wants to climb a wall, then his player needs to succeed at the appropriate dice roll, the outcome of which is usually modified according to the character's traits (a strong character receives a bonus on climbing, for example). If the roll does not succeed or fails, the character either does not climb over the wall or might even fall off it.[6]

D&D soon inspired computer games, such as *Wizardry* (Greenberg, Woodhead 1981), and a broad range of similar games, some of which ventured beyond the sword & sorcery genre. For example, *Call of Cthulhu* (CoC, Petersen, Willis 1981) appropriated the horror tales of H.P. Lovecraft (1928), while *Vampire: The Masquerade* (VTM, Rein·Hagen 1991) took its inspiration from gothic punk and vampire romance novels (e.g., *Interview with the Vampire*, Rice 1976). In particular, CoC and VTM shifted the focus of the games from fighting and heroic adventures to storytelling and imaginary but nevertheless extraordinary experiences. RPGs do not only differ in terms of content and genre — there are over 600 table-top systems and settings

---

[6] In many games, there is a difference between not succeeding and failing or "botching." If the dice roll is below the set target number necessary to climb the wall, the character just does not make it and may try again. If the dice shows a "1" on the other hand (or another respective number designated in the game rules), this is called a "botch" or "critical failure," which often has additional negative consequences, such as falling off the wall in this example.

worldwide that encompass fantasy, science-fiction, horror, adventure, espionage, (alternative) history, satire, superheroes, and steampunk, including numerous adaptations of literature and film (name a popular TV show, comic or manga series, and it will probably have a TRPG version). Not all games feature humans or humanoids as player characters — in *Plüsch, Power & Plunder* (Sandfuchs *et al.* 1991) one plays the role of toys of every imaginable kind, while one becomes home appliances in *Isamashī chibi no suihanki TRPG* (Brave Little Rice-cooker TRPG, Koaradamari 2012). Role-playing games are often differentiated by their mechanics on a spectrum between realist simulation and narrativist playability (Edwards 1999; Bøckman 2003; Boss 2008). Settings, themes and rules may reciprocally encourage certain play styles (Jara 2013, 43) but the agency lies with the players.[7] Regardless of labels for genre or style, how game designers describe their creations, how elaborate or simple their rule systems might be, these do not necessarily determine actual styles of play at the game table — in each and every system one may encounter "roll-players" who favour competition and clear achievement tiers as well as "role-players" who prefer storytelling and in-character enactments.[8] Game designers know this and thus often include phrases such as: "But the rules are only intended to help your imagination. The most important things are your inspiration and your intention to have fun" (Kitazawa, GroupSNE 2008, 9; translated by the author).

---

[7] The high-level, almost limitless agency distinguishes TRPGs from their digital cousins.
[8] Incidentally, the Japanese TRPG magazine *Rōru & Rōru* (Role & Roll, Arclight Publishing) hints at both play styles with its title and markets itself as a caterer to both, role-players and (the often derogatorily used label of) roll-players.

When fantasy role-playing first saw the light of day in the 1970s, Japanese model and toy shops were also selling war-gaming equipment, and some shop owners ordered copies of D&D without knowing what it was. Yasuda Hitoshi, a fiction writer and game designer, together with novelists- and game designers-to-be Kiyomatsu Miyuki and Mizuno Ryō were among the first to encounter the English-language D&D in American science fiction fanzines and in the aforementioned model shops during their student days at Kyōto and Ritsumeikan University (Yasuda. GroupSNE 1989; Mizuno 1997). Intrigued by this new kind of game, Yasuda and his colleagues not only started to play but also to spread the word and create one of Japan's first TRPG game studios. News about games like D&D mostly spread via war-gaming and computer game magazines, for example, in *TACTICS* (Takanashi 1982). Yasuda and his colleagues later incorporated their university circle as "GroupSNE" and sought to teach others about these games. They published their playing as a serialised "replays," which were novelisations of game session transcripts, in the computer game magazine *Comtiq*. The first issue of this serial, entitled *Rōdosu tōsenki* (Record of Lodoss War), was released in September 1986 (Yasuda and GroupSNE, 1986). [9] *Record of Lodoss War* would not only become a multimedia franchise successful in Japan and abroad as anime and manga but also the basis for *Sword World RPG* (Mizuno. GroupSNE 1989), Japan's "gold standard" TRPG throughout the 1990s.

---

[9] Replays today represent the most economically successful part of Japan's TRPG market, as members of GroupSNE, Bōken and other game studios have emphasised in conversations (cf. also sale ranks on amazon.co.jp, for example). Judging from self-introductions on online forums, the number of replay readers far exceeds that of TRPG players. As novelised, verbatim transcriptions of player conversations and game events, they go beyond the brief "example of play" found in English or German rulebooks. Along with the commercially produced light novel replays and those by amateurs, sites such as niconico increasingly feature replays in video form.

Despite a small boom in the early 1990s which saw the release of many popular media franchise adaptations of Japanese TRPGs and vice-versa, TRPGs remain a niche market. Japanese translations of big-name US games, such as new editions of D&D or CoC, continue to be released only a few years after their initial release in English. Indigenous games, however, make up most of this niche. In particular, *dōjin-gēmu*, such as *Maid RPG* and the *Little Rice-Cooker RPG*, flourish and are sold at the tri-annual "Game Market", a convention for analog gaming and the bi-annual "Comic Market" (*komike*), Japan's largest convention for amateur-produced manga, anime, and games. Not unlike the indie genre in the US, many of these games explore not only new mechanics or design ideas, but also over-the-top themes or parodies of other media. *Maid RPG*, for example, takes cues from the figure of the French maid that is prominent in anime and related fan practices. Similar to *Paranoia* (Costikyan *et al.* 1985), in which player characters are at the mercy of a capricious computer, the maid players have to fulfil tasks for a non-player "Master" character, gain rewards, and assist as well as backstab each other during the game. As a light-hearted but still self-reflexive game parodying current (occasionally sexist) anime tropes, *Maid RPG* appeals to fans of respective anime and manga products and goods from Japan.

While most non-gamers in Japan associate the term "RPG" solely with computer games, TRPGs also remain in the shadow of manga and anime from a consumer standpoint outside Japan. Despite the popularity of the *Record of Lodoss War* franchise in Europe and the US, for example, only a very limited few knew that the stories had their origins in D&D sessions played in the 1980s. This changed in the late 2000s, when

"cultural brokers" took the stage to diffuse the hitherto obscure knowledge about non-digital role-playing in Japan.

Studying "Cultural Brokers"

Between the summer of 2009 and the winter of 2014, I conducted fieldwork on sites related to TRPGs in Japan, Europe, and the US to trace the flows and dynamics of role-playing games across national borders. I followed a cyber-ethnographic approach, which distances itself from studies of the "virtual" by not limiting itself to Internet communication alone. Borrowing from thinkers such as Donna Haraway (1991), a cyber-ethnographic approach understands the cyberspacial life-worlds of humans as "entangled" realms of technology and the social: Mediated by computers[10] but also fundamentally linked to allegedly "real" sites. From this perspective, the ethnography of online groups is not limited to investigations online, but means "the ethnography of online and related off-line situations, the ethnography of humans and non-human actors in these related fields" (Teli, Pisanu, Hakken 2007). This perspective corresponds to a semiotic-material image of humanity as "cyborgs" (Law 1991; Law, Hassard 1999; Latour 2005), that is, as networks of human and non-human parts (the "identity" and "performance" of researchers, for example, are linked to books, presentation notes, or voice recorders without which they could not play their role). Consequently, such investigations are not limited to one location – in this case, the Internet – but should follow the human and non-human participants to different places, on- and offline. This

---

[10] The term "computer" also includes smartphones.

approach is similar to and also based on current developments in trans-local anthropology (Hannerz 2003; Rescher 2010; Brosius 2012).

In the course of my fieldwork online and offline, I dealt not only with technologies of (inter-) connection, that is, different types of non-human mediators such as *kanji* encodings or verification protocols of social-networking sites (Kamm 2013), but also encountered a number of entangled human actors who stood out in the sense that they made themselves — or were made — into nodes of translation, that is, into "cultural brokers." The term cultural brokers increasingly gains currency in transculturally inclined histories of interconnected "cultures," of which a recent prominent example is the studies collected in an edited volume that includes this term in its title: *Cultural Brokers at Mediterranean Courts in the Middle Ages* by Marc von der Höh, Nikolas Jaspert, and Jenny Rahel Oesterle (2013b). The editors display a sceptical attitude towards absolute definitions but their conceptualisation of "cultural brokerage" offer a few ideas that nonetheless resonate with my encounters. There is a range of potentially applicable terms: translator, mediator, and opinion leader, for example. But the economic connotations of "brokerage" correspond to how Japanese-language TRPGs are handled by the human mediators I encountered, because their mode of enterprise focuses on transforming what is widely considered a hobby into a source of income.

Broadly speaking, "cultural brokerage" refers to the mediation between environments or spheres, such as the transfer of knowledge, which can be either deliberately ("manifest") or involuntarily ("latent") (Höh, Jaspert and Oesterle, 2013b, p. 9). As the brokers I encountered are translators in the most common sense of the term (mediators between languages), their activities of can be categorised as "manifest:"

Their inter-, cross- or trans-cultural brokerage are intentional acts and the main function in this instance. There are other cases where brokerage appears as a "latent" function; for example, unintentional brokers such as deported slaves (cf. Höh, Jaspert and Oesterle 2013a, 23). A manifest brokers acts as a spokesperson, such as an expert, an insider or a political representative, who speaks on behalf of "silent" entities (such as a group of other humans or games, in this case) and simplifies the networks of these others. Simply put, Japanese-language TRPGs (and often their designers and players) appear in need of such a spokesperson because they cannot speak for themselves to non-Japanese-speakers. This spokesperson displaces these other entities and their goals and ideas to fit his or her representation — such a series of transformations may be called translation (Callon 1986, 214). Translation here does not simply refer to the displacement of one natural language into another but to characterising representations, establishing identities, and defining and controlling network elements. Representation in this sense is always understood as translation in order to "undermine the very idea that there might be such a thing as fidelity" (Law 2006, 48). Many different bits and pieces — such as a plethora of game mechanics, settings, player attitudes, artworks, and so on — are translated into a single group: Japanese role-playing games.

Studying cultural brokerage means tracing how elements are transformed and assembled, how mediators make the dichotomy between the entities they claim to transport, how they keep connections stable. What makes such a spokesperson, cultural broker? What are the requirements, what are the challenges? What is transferred, and what is excluded?

This paper traces one case of cultural brokerage: the translation of the TRPG *Tenra Banshō Zero* into English and the entangled creation of a whole group of (silent) entities, ranging from Japanese role-playing games to Japanese players and Japanese culture.

From Japan to "the West": Andy Kitkowski and F.E.A.R.

Andy Kitkowski appears as the prime example of very active and deliberate brokers of "cultural" knowledge. Kitkowski is known as Andy K on RPG.net, the world's largest English-language platform for non-digital role-playing (where he continuously promoted Japanese TRPGs and talked about his translation projects since 2002), and as the creator of j-rpg.com, a website geared for those specifically interested in Japanese TRPGs. The latter was set up to cater to a specific audience: gamers who spoke a little Japanese and were interested in or already owned Japanese-language TRPGs. The website was designed as a workgroup to some degree, a facilitator of fan translations. In 2011 it offered a rough first English translation of *Ryūtama* (Okada 2007), a low-magic fantasy game, along with a sale of a limited number of copies of the Japanese game imported by Kitkowski to the US (Kitkowski 2011). Kitkowski did not remain not alone on his site but asked others with Japanese language proficiency and access to Japanese games to join him. Posts included brief presentations and reviews of J-RPGs, a term Kitkowski used in the style of J-Pop or J-Culture (see Richter, Berndt 2008) — for example, *Night Wizard!* (a contemporary fantasy game also adapted into an anime; Kikuchi 2007), *Tokyo NOVA* (a dystopian super-power science-fiction; Suzufuki 2003), and *Shinobigami* (ninja fantasy; Kawashima 2009).

Kitkowski and his colleagues also discussed practical issues, such as how to buy J-RPGs when not in Japan, how to study Japanese, how to go to the Japan Game Convention (JGC), and which text recognition software works best with *kanji* and *kana*. The site is also one major outlet besides RPG.net where he made announcements about the progress of his first major project, the translation of *Tenra Banshō* (which took over eight years to finish; Kitkowski 2015, i). Members of j-rpg.com also went to US gaming conventions, such as GenCon, and European trade shows, such as SPIEL in Germany, to offer demo sessions of games they translated, such as *Maid RPG* or *Tenra*, alongside professional convention participants (Cluney 2008), such as Kondō Kōshi and his game studio Bōken, which demonstrated *Meikyū Kingdom* (a dungeon management RPG; Kawashima, Kondō 2010).

Born in the US in 1975 and raised mostly in Sparta, New Jersey, Kitkowski majored in sociology and philosophy, and minored in Japanese in college. Between 1995 and 1996, he lived in Japan for the first time as an exchange student at Sophia University where he joined "Science Fantastica," the university's science fiction club which also played TRPGs.[11] Here he encountered games like *Sword World* and *Tokyo NOVA* but "didn't really have the language skills at the time to play them," he said. After graduating from his college in the US, he went straight back to Japan. Between 1997 and 2000, Kitkowski first worked as teacher at local elementary and middle schools in Gunma, then as consultant for the government and businesses like Fuji Heavy Industries (Subaru). When he returned to the US in 2000 with his Japanese wife, he

---

[11] The following account is based on personal e-mail exchanges and conversations from 2010, 2012, and 2015.

"rebooted" his career and did a number of low-level temporary jobs as a system engineer working for Duke University Hospital, Time Warner, and Cisco Systems. For the English-language comic release of *Bastard!!* (Hagiwara 1988), a dystopian fantasy manga, he was asked by Viz Media, the translation's publisher in 2002, to write some comments on Japanese fantasy role-playing. He reported in one of our interviews, that this was a decisive moment for him because this convinced him that J-RPGs might find an audience in the US. He started his own licensed translation project of *Tenra* in 2004.

Previously, he had made simple translations of *Sword World* to be used within his circle of friends. *Tenra* was different in some important ways: First, he had to obtain the license to do a translation. Email correspondence was apparently not enough, so he ended up calling the original game studio, FarEast Amusement Research (F.E.A.R.), from the US. The studio's president, Nakajima Jun'ichirō, expressed interest in the project but a face-to-face encounter with the president and the original designer, Inoue Jun'ichi, in a Tōkyō café six months later was crucial for the next steps (Kitkowski, Inoue 2014, 34). The studio was very supportive; Kitkowski says: "It was perceived as an honor, because in Japan getting your work published in English is a very high honor worthy of resume boosts, etc. It was a great two-way relationship." This is a common trope in discussing Japan's foreign relations, where we also find comments on how Japanese value recognition from abroad (which usually means Europe or the US), or how changes within Japan are linked to attention or pressure from the outside. Prominent examples are the ratification of the equal opportunity act after women's rights organisations spoke at the UN against discrimination in the Japanese

labour market (cf. Parkinson, 1989) or the turn to manga and "Cool Japan" by government agencies after Japanese popular media began to receive worldwide attention and recognition (cf. McGray 2002; Abel 2011).

Initially, Kitkowski picked *Tenra* for his translation because of its appeal to him as a gamer, its many "cool" characters and its "Hyper Japan as Written by Japanese effect" (Kitkowski, Inoue 2014, 34). Thus, Japaneseness played a major role in Kitkowski's choice: "I particularly wanted to translate *Tenra* because it was clearly the most 'Japanese' RPG in terms of art, focus, setting, and rules." His meaning here is twofold. For one, it is a "practical" summarising of game mechanics as Japanese, which were introduced in the 1990s, combined with artwork and modes of storytelling which follow conventions that developed in manga writing. F.E.A.R. had been at the forefront, according to Kitkowski (cf. Kitkowski 2015, 12, 18), when it came to revitalising the TRPG market in the 1990s with Japanese settings, and producing fast-paced, dramatic games that could be played in spaces where time was a rare commodity, for example in community centres.

F.E.A.R. – which had developed out of a *dōjin* circle, like so many other game studios – introduced ideas and mechanics for scenes to its games. This cut the play experience into smaller chunks, and encouraged meta-gaming.[12] Such mechanics produce a clearly structured narrative instead of an endless series of events without a distinct end, common for many TRPG campaigns before *Tenra*. According to Kitkowski, *Tenra* and subsequent titles focus "on the anime/manga/console gaming generation: With simple rules, a story-focus, etc. They made gaming into an experience

---

[12] Meta-gaming refers to decisions that are based on dramatic effect or narrative plausibility instead of sticking to character knowledge or motivation.

that could not be duplicated on a console. And that was a huge change from the past, which was basically nothing more than translating Western RPGs, or creating classic 'very rules intense' Japanese games."

Fig. 1. "Shinobi" from *Tenra Banshō Zero: Tales of Heaven and Earth Edition* (Kitkowski. Inoue 2014, 22–23).

The artwork of F.E.A.R. games (see fig. 1) and also those of competitors underscores his point and links Japanese TRPG to the broader sphere of stylistic elements globally referred to as manga and promoted by the Japanese government as Japanese. Many illustrators also produce common story-manga in addition to creating images for TRPG books. Inoue Jun'ichi is one of them. Many US games, such as D&D, favour artwork that is closer to neoclassicism and sometimes photo-realism (see fig. 2). When talking to "old school" gamers at the international game

trade-show SPIEL in Essen, they suggested to Kondō from Bōken, for example, that he should avoid the manga-style artwork of his games when attempting to enter the German TRPG market. Furthermore, Japanese game designers explain the desired dramatic pacing by referencing scenes from well-known anime. Again, Western TRPGs of the first hour and their successors, such as D&D or *Rolemaster* (Fenlon, Charlton 1982), aim less at narrativism and more at realism, resulting in often extremely complicated rules that take into account each and every possible situation or circumstance. The game mechanics of current Japanese TRPGs also often borrow from console games, such as *Zelda* (Miyamoto, Tezuka 1986) which was widely popular in Japan and use far less complex rules in order to immediately capture their audience. This paratextual mixture of rules, setting and artwork (cf. Jara 2013) is what Kitkowski calls the Japaneseness of *Tenra* that he found appealing and subsequently highlighted as *the* core difference of J-RPGs.

Fig. 2. Shiba Tsukimi, *Legend of the 5 Rings* "Celestial Edition" (2009)

Kickstarting a Sword & Sorcery *Jidaigeki*: *Tenra Banshō Zero*

The world of *Tenra* adds another layer to the mix, and this is the second entangled meaning of Japanese. Its game world is a planet populated by *daimyō* (feudal rulers), samurai, pseudo-Buddhist monks, Shinto priests and *geisha*-like artisans, but also hosts sorcery, creatures from Japanese folklore (*oni*, *tengū*) and magic-fuelled technology such as mecha and cyborgs popular from sci-fi anime. Set in a world analogue to the Warring States (*sengoku*) era of Japan (ca. 1467 – 1603 C.E.), the game appears like a sword & sorcery *jidaigeki* (period piece, e.g., in the form of a TV show). *Jidaigeki*, however, have been problematized as a specific form of *nihonjin-ron* (theories of the Japanese):[13] a nostalgia for and reaffirmation of supposedly traditional Japanese ways and values.

> [They depict] a 'pure' Japan, untainted by the 'barbarism' of the 'red-haired devils' of the West. People wear kimonos and clothing with Japanese family crests. They have Japanese hairstyles. They eat Japanese food and drink Japanese *sake* or *shōchū*.[14] They live in Japanese-style wooden houses, sleep in Japanese bedding laid out on *tatami* straw matting, and bathe in Japanese baths. They visit Japanese temples and speak a language that is pure and uncontaminated by foreign words (Moeran 2010, 154–155)

The advent of *jidaigeki* coincides with post-war challenges to the *nihonjin-ron* idea of a homogenous society in the form of migrant labourers and Japanese-speaking foreigners. The genre appears as "re-processing" history, and so as a "'structured a feeling' of Japaneseness at the very juncture of its undermining," offering lost Confucian-values and ideals embodied by mythic heroes (Standish 2011, 434).

---

[13] Authors associated with *nihonjin-ron* are often criticised for their self-orientalising search for uniqueness (cf. Dale 1986; Befu 1987).

[14] Usually translated as rice wine and distilled liqueur, respectively.

There are a few US made RPGs borrowing *sengoku* or Edo Period images intermingled with fantasy and folklore, such as *Legend of the Five Rings* (L5R, Wick, 1997; Wick and Horbart, 2010), a fantasy RPG taking its name from Miyamoto Musashi's *Gorin no sho* (Book of Five Rings, mid-17th century) and set in the fictional nation of Rokugan, a feudal pseudo-Japan with elements from other East Asian folklore. What differentiates this game from *Tenra* is "authenticity":

> I think that the setup of the game [*Legend of the Five Rings*] is great, but the language (place names and group names in particular) are often culturally ungrounded childish nonsense words; and lack of Shinto/Buddhism influence are, from both a context and an aesthetic standpoint, a rather inexcusable oversight. Still, it's got a good setup in terms of 'interesting, there are things for the players to do', etc.
> *Tenra* is more authentic than L5R, but I'm not as ostentatious to label it 'better'. It has no real 'deep setting' compared to L5R. It also has a VERY 'everything is for the sake of the characters and the story' rules set with Fates, Damage, etc. However, L5R is very traditional in the way it deals with skills, stats, damage (death spiral), etc. (Kitkowski, email conversation 2010).

The concern over Japaneseness also plays out on role-playing related forums, for example, on RPG.net, where a participant sought clarification on which parts of L5R are "truly Japanese" and which are not (Smarttman 2014).

Kitkowski's nose for authenticity — however nostalgic a reconstruction this concept may refer to — and its appeal to non-Japanese players was proven correct when he launched a Kickstarter campaign with his newly founded game translation firm Kotodama Heavy Industries in 2012 to fund the production of the English version of *Tenra*. Kickstarter is a US based so-called crowdfunding platform on which projects present their aims and ideas and interested "backers" can pledge a certain amount of money in order to fund the project. Over a given period of time, the project has to meet its funding goal or it receives

nothing. If it is successfully funded, backers receive tangible rewards or other forms of compensation. In the case of *Tenra* and, depending on which pledge tier a backer chose, they would receive hardcover copies, PDFs and other merchandise, and would be named in the acknowledgement section of the final product. Also, established commercial studios, such as Onyx Path Publishing, use Kickstarter to gauge the interest in a given product and to make sure that it will find enough buyers (the backers) before they invest in a game project that does not meet with audience approval. *Tenra*'s pledge goal had been 9,000 US dollars, which was achieved within *hours*. When the Kickstarter campaign ended in September 2012, 1,704 backers had pledged 129,640 US dollars[15] — more than fourteen times the original pledge goal and not so far off from what Onyx Path, with its established brands, receives — which made *Tenra* into the highest-funded TRPG project at the time and speaks for Kitkowski's promotional skills. The Kickstarter campaign for the English version of *Ryūtama* (Okada 2007) a year later equally exceeded expectations with 2,056 backers and $97,960 pledged.[16] When *Ryūtama* was published in 2015, *Tenra* had already become a "Gold Bestseller" on DriveThruStuff, [17] a global leader in role-playing PDF and print-on-demand (POD) sales. Those who did not back the Kickstarter campaign have to purchase the game through DriveThru, while the backers received their copies before the public release.

[15] See: https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/diamondsutra/Tenra-bansho-zero-an-art-and-culture-rich-rpg-from (accessed 2016/06/24).
[16] See: https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/diamondsutra/ryuutama-natural-fantasy-role-playing-game?ref=users (accessed 2016/06/24).
[17] See: http://rpg.drivethrustuff.com/product/111713/Tenra-Bansho-Zero-Heaven-and-Earth-Edition?term=Tenra (accessed 2016/06/24).

Right on the heels of the public release followed very positive reviews, even from people who expressed a dislike for anime:

> *Tenra Banshō Zero* is the most exciting new release for me since Apocalypse World. [...] Confession: I am a long-standing anime hater. That said, I'm totally into the crazy-wasabi-coleslaw setting of TBZ. It's a sprawling, melodramatic empowerment fantasy that really gets my players jazzed up. I'm grateful and relieved that I didn't have to grind through seasons of Samurai Champloo or something (B. 2013).

Thus, *Tenra* seems to have hit the mark by offering game mechanics that set it apart from the English-language mainstream *and* by flowing into an interest in an exotic image of Japan (ninja, samurai etc.) that also fuels manga sales abroad — drawing into question the argument that Japanese popular media are so successful due to their "odourless-ness," or "stateless-ness" (*mukokuseki*), or lack of a Japanese "smell" (Iwabuchi 2002; see also Berndt 2007).

Tenra and "Western" Values

However, Kitkowski also received criticism which displaced the translation of *Tenra* from the realms of fantasy into the sphere of "cultures" clashing. Under the title "RPGs and cultural context: a conversation with Kitkowski Kitkowski about *Tenra*" on the blog *Gaming as Woman*, game designer and illustrator Anna "wundergeek" Kreider (2013), who also provided a campaign setting for the English version, discusses the cover art of the original 1997 Japanese edition, reproduced for the translation, in light of possible reactions to it in the West. The central figure on the cover is a semi-bionic female ninja in a "male," active pose (fig. 3). Kreider is rather disconcerted by this image, as she suggests while writing about the game in general: "*Tenra* isn't a Western game

written for Western audiences. It's been translated and adapted for Western audiences, true, but it was initially created for Japanese gamers and anime fans. As such the cultural issues and context surrounding this game are different than what Western audiences are used to dealing with." She poses this question to Kitkowski in an email interview: "But by Western standards, the cover art is pretty damn [sic!] extreme. That's a LOT of crotch right on the cover. So, could you comment on the cultural differences at work there? Because it seems like that 'I don't want to get seen reading this in public' is a very Western reaction."
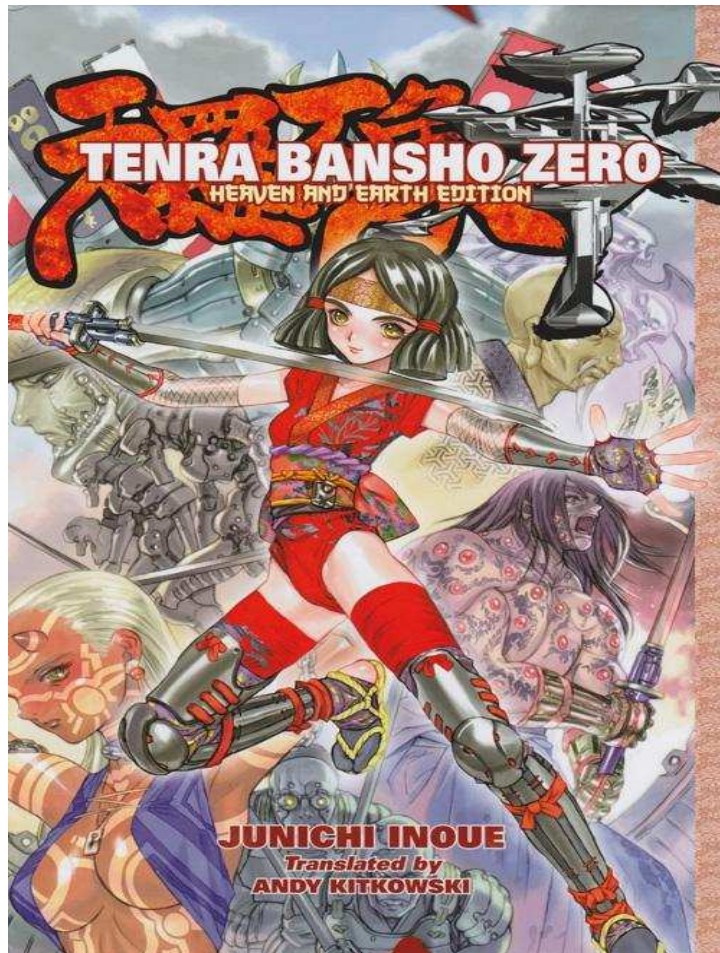
Fig. 3. Cover of *Tenra Banshō Zero* (Kitkowski, Inoue 2014).

Kitkowski first explains cultural differences concerning nudity in the West versus Japan and the rest of Asia, where one might encounter a "non-sexual nudity and casualness that can be strange (and frightening!) to foreigners." Who is meant by "foreigners" appears obscure if one does not consider the blog's target audience, which is predominantly Anglo-Saxon and often critical of seemingly overt sexuality. Kitkowski adds that Japanese culture would also be characterised by modesty and shame (cf. Ruth Benedict's well-known way of brokerage, 1946), which is why buyers could receive paper sleeves for their purchases in bookstores to conceal the nature of their purchases.

However, regardless of supposedly Japanese morals in any general sense, in *Tenra*'s particular case, the cover and other artwork was, in Kitkowski's view, due to Inoue Jun'ichi's *otaku*-hood: The original designer of the game had a history of producing pornographic dolls — with which he earned tremendous success but also criticism — and was merely not aware of how others might react to his illustrations, according to Kitkowski. Being married today "returned him in part to a real world with real people [so that] now his art lacks most of the 'gooeyness' of the past." In order to rescue Japan from being seen as a strange, nudist, crotch-fetishizing "other," Kitkowski deflects criticism to the *otaku* stereotype of a reclusive, asocial media enthusiast.[18] He follows what I call "the disclaiming mode" to highlight what is good and what is deviant: He deflects negative images onto an "other" only to

---

[18] Especially in the English-language discourse the naturalisation of *otaku* as a single but global social group of "fans" proceeds and conflates the different, political and often negative uses of the term in Japanese with the positive self-descriptor of non-Japanese fans of manga and anime. A purely negative view as well as the current "triumphant narrative" about the mainstreaming of *otaku* equally overlook the tensions and contradictions inherent in this debated term (for a detailed discussion, see Galbraith, Kam, Kamm 2015).

strengthen the connection between the negative image and the practices and people it is applied to (cf. Kamm, 2015). Still, Inoue himself attributes the shift in focus of his art and work to his now being part of a family, without condemning his previous work or denying his *otaku*-hood (cf. Yajima 2013b, 2013a).[19]

Kreider's blog post goes on to question why female manga artists also create nude scenes of their adolescent characters or write porn-manga, which Kitkowski again explains with a general casualness towards nudity. The discussion of this blog post and the general arguments of cultural difference resemble similar several thousand posts long debates on RPG.net, when *Maid RPG* was translated (see hyphz 2008) and also after *Tenra's* release (Thrax 2013).

In the instance of their translation and border crossing, these games become node points for (re-) establishing boundaries: the West versus Japan, normal people versus "crotch-fetishizing *otaku*," sexually moral women and Asian women without such moral compasses, females who do not or should not like to create porn and males who do. These boundary creations do not reaffirm the static nature of established and rigid conceptualisations of culture and also continue in a dynamic fashion to become themselves loci for other boundaries: A reader of this blog post took exception to how the West and Japan were represented as monolithic entities in the statements (Yin 2014). Similar voices against "cultural islandism" can also be heard on the RPG.net forums.

As a translator in the most common sense of the term, a mediator between languages, Andy Kitkowski's activities highlight his "manifest"

---

[19] He chose to keep his rather *otaku*-ish self-image in his bestselling manga *Yue to nihongo* (Yue and Japanese) about his Chinese wife's struggles with learning Japanese, for example, because he felt that it better matched the kind of statements he would like to express (Inoue 2013; Yajima 2013b).

brokerage: He has actively enrolled many other actors to build a network that resulted in the translation of *Tenra*, beginning with non-human actors such as Japanese textbooks, OCR-software, and telephones, but also including humans in the form of a fan base — mainly known to him through their RPG.net accounts — which would back his project on Kickstarter. Kitkowski was not a faithful translator of the Japanese language, though again, "unfaithfulness" or "infidelity" are not meant in any morally negative sense here, but refer to the work and changes that go hand-in-hand with any translation (cf. Law 2006) and in particular, to the many adjustments necessary to sell *Tenra* to an audience that is perceived and perceives itself as different from the "original" Japanese one, as Kreider's questions attest:

> This game deserved more than a slap translation into English and then a kick to the presses: It needed to be more than looked at, it needed to be *played*. And to be played, it needed *more*: More history, more information, more cultural notes, more everything in order for people who didn't grow up in Japan watching weeerkly [sic!] samurai dramas and reading ninja manga to be able to understand the game enough to play. So, as I was translating the book, I started adding this "More" myself (Kitkowski, Inoue 2014, 34; emphasis original).

He changed what he transported ('broker as media,' Höh, Jaspert and Oesterle 2013a) and added those notes and explanations as a "nifty culture point" on the "quintessential" TRPG experience in Japan: singing in a karaoke box (Kitkowski, Inoue 2014, 100, Game Rules). Issuing *Director's Notes* with more explanations of cultural concepts and the game's background (Kitkowski 2015),[20] he also addressing the fear that he may have diluted the authenticity of the original with his

---

[20] In these *Director's Notes*, Kitkowski himself addresses the issue of knowledge diffusion himself, e.g. concerning Buddhism (ibid, 4).

amendments (Spike 2015).[21] The interview with Anna Kreider gives the impression that he not only added but also omitted elements, for example illustrations that might be offensive for an imagined Western audience, such as the cover. The potentially offending images he supposedly omitted but just did not include, however, were never part of the core rule book itself but came with supplements, from which he only incorporated some rules and bits of information.

These additions and explanations point to the economic dimension of cultural brokerage: Without the backing of nearly two thousand interested gamers, his project would have failed. It took him almost eight years to enrol enough participants to reach this point. The economics involved go beyond money: Kitkowski was already well known among RPG.net users and with *Tenra* only gained in fame, enabling him to continue his project of promoting J-RPGs[22] and create a space for Japanese game designers to gain recognition. The label J-RPG alone, however, attests to how "cultural brokerage" does not simply translate between cultures but *speaks* for them and thus necessarily produces them as a reality. It makes the West — by adding information — and similarly also Japan. The Japaneseness of *Tenra* is its selling point, but has to be made first through assembling an authentic Japan: a traditionally modern world where *samurai* battle *oni* and giant robots alike. The dynamic process of mediation here rests on the necessary

---

[21] The additions amount to approx. 1.5 pages in total and are mostly limited to sidebars (Kitkowski 2015).

[22] For example, via podcasts on the "Asian Popular Culture" platform Geeky & Genki, http://www.geekyandgenki.com (accessed 2016/06/24).

production of static, nostalgic images, which paradoxically underscores the messiness of such endeavours.[23]

Stabilising Images

How does Kitkowski sustain his network of silent entities and their representation? First and foremost, he does so through the support of shortcomings in language educators and also via the help of the Internet: he has access to recourses neither his audience nor those he translates have.

His main ground of dissemination and promotion consists of only a very limited number of Japanese participants: Between 2008 and 2014, only one poster on RPG.net self-identified as a Japanese. In the past, there had been active Japanese users on English-language platforms, for example during a dispute about the fictional Japan of the science-fiction cyberpunk game *Shadowrun* (Charrette, Hume and Dowd, 1989). Japanese gamers were dissatisfied with the image of a weak Japanese state in a supplemental setting book created by GroupSNE (Egawa, GroupSNE 1996). They created their own setting, in which Japan was an aggressive imperial dictator state — which they found more fitting to the overall dystopian background of the game — and distributed their ideas via the pre-Internet USENET group rec.games.frp.cyber (Nishio 1996, 1997). Since then, the number of active Japanese users of English-language sites seems to have waned. During my fieldwork, I conducted over twenty episodic interviews with gamers from the Kantō, Chūbu and Kansai areas of Japan and spoke to dozens of other players and game

---

[23] Interestingly and adding to the mess, when asked, the original designer, Inoue, posits that players should not be concerned about playing "authentic" Japanese (Kitkowski 2015, 10-11).

designers who by and large said that they visit some English websites but would mostly use Japanese-language sites. The Japanese-language Web has grown to such a degree, also including TRPGs, that they see no necessity for engaging with websites in other languages. Many also admitted (or rather assumed) that their language proficiency would not be sufficient to post on forums, thus they remain silent.

Similarly, TRPG-related sites and groups, for example on the Japanese Facebook-like portal mixi.jp, seem to attract only very few self-proclaimed non-Japanese. As has been discussed elsewhere (Kamm 2013), one reason for this limited participation comes in the guise of non-human mediators. To register with mixi.jp and create a profile page, one is asked for a *keitai* mail address, an address only assigned by Japanese telecommunication companies such as DoCoMo or Softbank, and linked to a Japanese mobile phone. After registration, a verification link is sent to the mobile or recently also to smartphones. On English-language forums, I encountered a number of players who were interested in Japanese games, some of whom also claimed Japanese language skills — so limited knowledge of Japanese could not be the reason for their non-participation. This is where the aforementioned verification script turns from simple intermediary as part of the registration process to an active mediator that blocks anyone from joining mixi who does not reside in Japan and who has no Japanese mobile phone contract. Because prepaid phones are not equipped with browser functionality, a contract phone is necessary to register and for that one needs a *zairyū-kādo*, a residency card gained only with a long-term visa. Thus, despite the Internet's assumed capability to connect anyone with everyone, a few lines of code can become a powerful

mediator that stops flows of communication and creates boundaries, not due to xenophobic "us versus them" mentalities but due to privacy concerns: the script was implemented as an anti-spam measure.

However, mediators often bring other mediators into existence, in this case brokers such as Kitkowski who are able to overcome the obstacle presented by the verification script: His residency in Japan has given him access to Japanese language sites and games, and he has also obtained the language proficiency to translate for all those who cannot come to Japan or speak the language. By doing so, he overcomes the obstacles of non-human mediators (languages, scripts) and their boundaries to as act as spokesperson for the silent entities, players and original games alike.

In Lieu of a Conclusion

Kitkowski is only one of many cultural brokers I encountered who overcome different obstacles and create different networks. Kondō Kōshi and Bōken, for example, continuously bring Japanese-language games to the attention of European and American audiences via international trade shows, such as the SPIEL in Germany, but have difficulties in overcoming major points of passages and centres of calculation, such as customs duties. Kitkowski emerges as one of the most successful cultural brokers, making use of as many materials and connectors as possible, ranging from forums and conventions to crowd funding and podcasts. By crossing boundaries, however, modes of brokerage also rely on and rebuild borders, such as the Japaneseness and the J-RPGs they seek to translate.

The second main characteristic of these modes besides the use of other mediators is that something is at stake when they mediate. All cultural brokers I encountered at least seek to promote something they like and maybe profit from it, even if that only means that they can play more games of a kind they prefer. For some the stakes are higher, seeking a profession that does not only sustain them but gives something back, that produces joy. So, they aim not only at creating a reality in which Japanese games can find a place in the English language market, but in which they can make a place for themselves. This active "reality making" or "world building" by enrolling RPGs as a resource entangles their brokerage with modes of enterprise. Brokers such as Kitkowski focus thereby on bridging language barriers and distributing information to which they have access. Other actors of enterprise play with other cultures, such as the culture of a hobby and the culture of a business. F.E.A.R. have made themselves into the game studio some players — especially those who rely on information filtered by Kitkowski — attribute with "rescuing" the Japanese TRPG market from the recession of the 1990s. For them, all income and prestige are at stake should they fail to enrol the necessary mediators and recourses.

Lastly, the brokers I encountered engender each other so that they often come in "packs;" that is, actors operating from one specific node within the network or from one point of departure, for example J-RPGs, sooner or later cross paths. In this regard, they mediate also between themselves, offering help to trace other actors. This is an on-going, dynamic process, and so a conclusion on how the Japaneseness of Japanese TRPG plays out would silence the many entangled entities.

REFERENCES

Abel, J. E. (2011), Can Cool Japan Save Post-Disaster Japan? On the Possibilities and Impossibilities of a Cool Japanology. *International Journal of Japanese Sociology*, Vol. 20 (1), 9–72.

Appelcline, S. (2013), *Designers & Dragons. A History of the Roleplaying Game Industry - The 70s*. Silver Spring: EvilHat.

B., P. (2013), Tenra Bansho Zero: Heaven and Earth Edition Reviews. *DriveThruRPG.com*. [Online] Available from: http://rpg.drivethrustuff.com/product_reviews_info.php?&reviews_id=87941&products_id=111713 [Accessed: 24 June 2016].

Befu, H. (1987), *Ideorogī toshite no nihonjinron* [Japan Discourses as Ideology]. Tōkyō: Shisō no Kagakusha.

Benedict, R. (1946), *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Berndt, J. (2007), Considering Manga Discourse: Location, Ambiguity, Historicity. In: McWilliams, M., (Ed.), *Japanese Visual Culture*. Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 351–369.

Bøckman, P. (2003), The Three Way Model. Revision of the Threefold Model. In: Gade, M., Thorup, L., Sander, M., (Eds), *As Larp Grows Up - Theory and Methods in Larp*. Copenhagen: BookPartner, 12–16.

Boss, E. C. (2008), Key Concepts in Forge Theory. In: Montola, M., Stenros, J., (Eds), *Playground Worlds. Creating and Evaluating Experiences of Role-Playing Games*. Helsinki: Ropecon ry, 232–247.

Brosius, C. (2012), *Teilnahmslose Beobachtung? Feldforschung in Zeiten medialer Verflüchtigung*. Inaugaral Lecture, July 7. Heidelberg: Heidelberg University.

Callon, M. (1986), Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation: Domestication of the Scallops and the Fishermen of St Brieuc Bay, In: Law, J., (Ed.), *Power, Action and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge, 196–223.

Charrette, R. N., Hume, P., Dowd, T. (1989), *Shadowrun*. Chicago: FASA Corporation.

Cluney, E. (2008), J-RPGs at GenCon. *J-RPG Blog!*. [Online] Available from: http://www.j-rpg.com/talk/discussion/17/j-rpgs-at-gencon [Accessed: 24 June 2016].

Cluney, E., Kamiya, R. (2008), *Maid RPG*. Cary: Kuroneko Designs.

Costikyan, G., Gelber, D., Goldberg, E., Rolston, K., Murphy, P. (1985), *Paranoia*. New York: West End Games.

Dale, P. (1986) *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness*. London: Routledge.

Edwards, R. (1999), System Does Matter. *The Forge*. [Online] Available from: http://www.indie-rpgs.com/_articles/system_does_matter.html [Accessed: 24 June 2016].

Edwards, R. (2002), Fantasy Heartbreakers. *The Forge*. [Online] Available from: http://www.indie-rpgs.com/articles/9/ [Accessed: 24 June 2016].

Egawa, A., GroupSNE (1996), *TŌKYŌ sōsubukku (Shadōran)* [TOKYO Source Book (Shadowrun)]. Tōkyō: Fujimi Shobō.

Fatland, E. (2005), Knutepunkt and Nordic Live Role-Playing: A Crash Course. In: Bøckman, P., Hutchison, R., (Eds), *Dissecting larp – Collected papers for Knutepunkt 2005*. Oslo: Knutepunkt, 11–20.

— (2014), A History of Larp. *Larpwriter Summer School 2014*, Vilnius, 3 August. [Online] Available from:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rf_gej5Pxkg [Accessed: 24 June 2016].

Fenlon, P. C., Charlton, C. (1982), *Rolemaster*. Virginia: Iron Crown Enterprises.

Galbraith, P. W., Kam, T. H., Kamm, B.-O., (eds) (2015), *Debating Otaku in Contemporary Japan: Historical Perspectives and New Horizons*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Greenberg, A. C., Woodhead, R. (1981), *Wizardry*. New York: Sir-Tech.

Gygax, G., Arneson, D. (1974), *Dungeons & Dragons*. Lake Geneva: TSR.

Hagiwara, K. (1988), Bastard!!, *Weekly Shōnen Jump.*

Hannerz, U. (2003), Several Sites in One. In: Eriksen, T. H., (Ed.), *Globalisation: Studies in Anthropology*. London: Pluto Press, 18–38.

Haraway, D. J. (1991), A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century. In: Haraway, D. J., *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 149–182.

Hinasaki, Y. (2013), *LARP no susume* [LARP for You]. Kyōto: graphic.

Hitchens, M., Drachen, A. (2009), The Many Faces of Role-Playing Games, *International Journal of Role-Playing*, Vol. 1 (1), 3–21.

Höh, M. von der, Jaspert, N., Oesterle, J. R. (2013a), Courts, Brokers and Brokerage in the Medieval Mediterranean. In: Höh, M. von der, Jaspert, N., Oesterle, J. R., (Eds), *Cultural Brokers at Mediterranean Courts in the Middle Ages*. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schoningh, 9–31.

Höh, M. von der, Jaspert, N., Oesterle, J. R., (eds) (2013b), *Cultural Brokers at Mediterranean Courts in the Middle Ages*. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schoningh.

Holter, M., Fatland, E., Tømte, E. (2009), Introduction. In: Holter, M., Fatland, E., Tømte, E., (Eds), *Larp, the Universe and Everything*. Haraldvangen: Knutepunkt, 1–8.

Hyphz (2008), [Maid RPG] This Is a Little Disturbing… *RPGnet Forums*. [Online] Available from: http://forum.rpg.net/showthread.php?415231-Maid-RPG-This-is-a-little-disturbing [Accessed: 24 June 2016].

Inoue, J. (1996), *Tenra Banshō*. Tōkyō: Hobby Japan.

— (2013), *Yue to nihongo - Chūgoku-yome nihongo-gakkō nikki* [Yue and Japanese - Japanese Language School Diary of a Chinese Bride]. Tōkyō: ASCII Media Works.

Iwabuchi, K. (2002), *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Jara, D. (2013), A Closer Look at the (Rule-) Books: Framings and Paratexts in Tabletop Role-Playing Games. *International Journal of Role-Playing*, Vol. 4, 39–54.

Kamiya, R. (2004), *Meido RPG*. Osaka: Sunset Games.

Kamm, B.-O. (2013), Ethics of Internet-Based Research on Japanese Subcultures. In: Asato, W., Sakai, Y., (Eds), *Social Innovation and Sustainability for the Future. Recreating the Intimate and the Public Spheres*. Kyōto: Nakanishi, 525–540.

— (2015), Opening the Black Box of the 1989 Otaku Discourse. In: Galbraith, P. W., Kam, T. H., Kamm, B.-O., (Eds), *Debating Otaku in Contemporary Japan: Historical Perspectives and New Horizons*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 51–70.

Kawashima, T., Kondō, K. (2010), *Meikyū Kingudamu* [Maze Kingdom]. Tōkyō: Bouken

Kawashima, T. (2009), *Gendai ninjutsu batoru RPG shinobigami* [Modern Ninjutsu Battle RPG Shinobigami]. Tōkyō: Shinkigensha.

Kikuchi, T. (2007), *Naito Wizādo the 2nd Edition* [Night Wizard! The 2nd Edition]. Tōkyō: Enterbrain.

Kitazawa, K., GroupSNE (2008), *Sōdo Wārudo 2.0*. Tōkyō: Fujimi Shobō.

Kitkowski, A. (2011), Ryuutama RPG with English Translation for Sale!. *J-RPG Blog!*. [Online] Available from: http://www.j-rpg.com/talk/discussion/55/ryuutama-rpg-with-english-translation-for-sale [Accessed: 24 June 2016].

— (2015), *Tenra Bansho Zero: Director's Notes*. Research Triangle Park: Kotodama Heavy Industries.

Kitkowski, A., Inoue, J. (2014), *Tenra Bansho Zero: Tales of Heaven and Earth Edition*. Research Triangle Park: Kotodama Heavy Industries.

Koaradamari (2012), *Isamashī chibi no suihanki TRPG* [Brave Little Rice-Cooker TRPG]. Hiroshima: Self-published.

Kondō, K. (1987), Gēmu no dendō chinmi! Rōrupurei no gēmubukku-mushi (airurando-fu) wo meshiagare -'doragon-fantajī' shirīzu [Delicacies from the Palast of Games! Try Role-Play Game-Damped (Irish Style) - The "Dragon Fantasy" Series]. *Warlock*, 31–32.

Kreider, A. 'wundergeek' (2013), RPGs and Cultural Context: A Conversation with Andy Kitkowski about Tenra. *Gaming as Women*. [Online] Available from: http://www.gamingaswomen.com/posts/2013/01/rpgs-and-cultural-context-a-conversation-with-andy-kitkowski-about-Tenra/ [Accessed: 24 June 2016].

Latour, B. (2005), *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Law, J., (Ed.) (1991), *Sociology of Monsters: Essays on Power, Technology and Domination*. London: Routledge.

Law, J. (2006), Traduction/Trahison: Notes on ANT. *Convergencia*, Vol. 42, 47–72.

— (2009), Collateral Realities. In *Heterogeneities*. [Online] Available from: http://www.heterogeneities.net/publications/Law2009CollateralRealities.pdf. [Accessed: 24 June 2016].

Law, J., Hassard, J., (Eds) (1999), *Actor Network Theory and After*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Lovecraft, H. P. (1928), The Call of Cthulhu. *Weird Tales*, 159–78.

McGray, D. (2002), Japan's Gross National Cool. *Foreign Policy*, Vol. 130, 44–55.

Miyamoto, S., Tezuka, T. (1986), *The Legend of Zelda*. Tōkyō: Nintendo.

Mizoguchi, A. (2003), Male-Male Romance by and for Women in Japan: A History and the Subgenres of Yaoi Fictions'. *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal*, Vol. 25, 49–75.

Mizuno, R., GroupSNE (1989), *Sword World RPG*. Tōkyō: Fujimi Shobō.

Mizuno, R. (1997), *RPG taidan - Mizuno Ryō no yūi kūkan (Gēmu rando)* [RPG Talks - Mizuno Ryō's Game Space (Game Land)]. Tōkyō: Mediaworks.

Moeran, B. (2010), *Language and Popular Culture in Japan*. London: Routledge.

Montola, M. (2003), Role-Playing as Interactive Construction of Subjective Diegeses. In: Gade, M., Thorup, L., Sander, M., (Eds), *As Larp Grows Up - Theory and Methods in Larp*. Copenhagen: BookPartner, 82–89.

Morton, B. (2007), Larps and Their Cousins through the Ages. In: Donnis, J., Gade, M., Thorup, L., (Eds), *Lifelike*. Copenhagen: BookPartner, 245–259.

Nishio, G. (1996), [SR] Review: Tōkyō Sourcebook (in Japanese). *rec.games.frp.cyber*. [Online] Available from: https://groups.google.com/forum/?hl=en#!topic/rec.games.frp.cyber/DqqcVxaP7vM [Accessed: 24 June 2016].

— (1997), *Another Shadowrun Japan*, *JIS-Project*. [Online] Available from: https://web.archive.org/web/19990505050757/http://www.sainet.or.jp/%7Efatcat/another.html [Accessed: 24 June 2016].

Okada A. (2007), *Ryūtama: Natural Fantasy R.P.G.* Tōkyō: Jaibu.

Pardo, R., Kaplan, J., Chilton, T. (2004), *World of Warcraft*. Irvine: Blizzard Entertainment.

Parkinson, L. (1989), Japan's Equal Employment Opportunity Law: An Alternative Approach to Social Change. *Columbia Law Review*, Vol. 89 (3), 604.

Petersen, S., Willis, L. (1981), *Call of Cthulhu*. Oakland: Chaosium.

Peterson, J. (2012), *Playing at the World: A History of Simulating Wars, People and Fantastic Adventures - From Chess to Role-Playing Games*. Kindle Edition. San Diego: Unreal Press LLC.

Rein·Hagen, M. (1991), *Vampire: The Masquerade*. Stone Mountain: White Wolf.

Rescher, G. (2010), Following the Interactions: Taking into Account Translocal Dimensions and Cross-Level/Multi-Dimensional Links in Ethnographic Fieldwork. *COMCAD Center on Migration, Citizenship and Development,* Working Papers 86. [Online] Available from: http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/(en)/tdrc/ag_comcad/publications/wp.html [Accessed: 24 June 2016].

Rice, A. (1976), *Interview with the Vampire: A Novel*. 1st Ed. New York: Knopf.

Richter, S., Berndt, J. (2008), *Japan: J-Culture*. Tübingen: Gehrke.

Sakaguchi, H. (1987), *Final Fantasy*. Tōkyō: Square Enix.

Sandfuchs, R., Schütte, S., Finn, T., Matausch, N. (1991), *Plüsch, Power & Plunder*. Düsseldorf: Phase-Verlag.

Smarttman (2014), [L5R] Which Parts AREN'T Japanese?. *RPGnet Forums*. [Online] Available from:
http://forum.rpg.net/showthread.php?741249-L5R-Which-parts-AREN-T-Japanese [Accessed: 24 June 2016].

Spike (2015), Tenra Basho Zero Heaven and Earth Edition (Review). *theRPGSite.com*. [Online] Available from:
http://www.therpgsite.com/showthread.php?p=849283#post849283 [Accessed: 24 June 2016].

Standish, I. (2011), The Jidaigeki Television Series: Myth, Iteration and the Domestication of the Samurai Hero. *Japan Forum*, Vol. 23 (3), 431–440.

Suzufuki T. (2003), *Tokyo NOVA the detonation*. Tōkyō: Enterbrain.

Takanashi, S. (1982), Bōken no shimyurēshon - shimyurēshon no bōken [Simulations of Adventure - Adventures of Simulation]. *TACTICS*, 29–38.

Teli, M., Pisanu, F., Hakken, D. (2007), The Internet as a Library-Of-People: For a Cyberethnography of Online Groups. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, Vol. 8 (3). [Online] Available from: http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/283 [Accessed: 24 June 2016].

Thrax, D. (2013), [TBZ] This Game Seems a Bit Much. *RPGnet Forums*. [Online] Available from: http://forum.rpg.net/showthread.php?677812-TBZ-This-game-seems-a-bit-much [Accessed: 24 June 2016].

Tolkien, J. R. R. (1954), *Lord of the Rings 1. The Fellowship of the Ring*. 1st Ed. London: George Allen & Unwin.

Tresca, M. J. (2010), *The Evolution of Fantasy Role-Playing Games*. Kindle Edition. Jefferson: McFarland.

Wick, J. (1997), *Legend of the Five Rings*. 1st Ed. Ontario: Alderac Entertainment.

Wick, J., Horbart, R. (2010), *Legend of the Five Rings*. 4th Edition. Ontario: Alderac Entertainment.

Yajima, M. (2013a), *Daihitto! 'Yue to nihongo' sakusha - Inoue Jun'ichi-san intabyū (kōhen)* [Interview with Inoue Jun'ichi, Author of the Big Hit 'Yue and Japanese' (2nd Part)]. *Lncomi.com*. [Online] Available from: http://lnocomi.com/news/view/143/ [Accessed: 24 June 2016].

— (2013b), *Daihitto! 'Yue to nihongo' sakusha - Inoue Jun'ichi-san intabyū (zenpen)* [Interview with Inoue Jun'ichi, Author of the Big Hit 'Yue and Japanese' (1st Part)]. *Lncomi.com*. [Online] Available from: http://lnocomi.com/news/view/142/ [Accessed: 24 June 2016].

Yasuda, H., GroupSNE (1986), D&D Rōdosu-tō senki replay dai 1 bu [D&D Record of Lodoss War Replay, Part 1]. *Comtiq*. 1986 Sept. Tōkyō: Kadokawa.

— (1989) *Fantasy RPG Guidebook*. Tōkyō: Hobby Japan.

Yin, E. (2014), Tenra Bansho Zero. *To The End of The Galaxy*. [Online] Available from: http://kawaiisaa.blogspot.de/2014/02/Tenra-bansho-zero.html [Accessed: 24 June 2016].

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Björn-Ole KAMM *is Senior Lecturer at Kyōto University. His research on the boys' love genre was published as Nutzen und Gratifikation bei Boys' Love Manga (2010), and in Transformative Works and Cultures (2013). Currently, his work focuses on dynamics of networked communities and the agency of cultural brokers within the transcultural sphere of role-playing games.*

The anime VHS home video market in France

Bounthavy SUVILAY | Paul Valéry University, Montpellier III, France

Abstract

In order to understand how transnational exchanges have evolved and how a home video market has been organized in France, this paper tries to trace a history of the beginnings of the VHS industry from the late 1970s to the early 2000s. We will focus on three phases of market development to show how pricing strategy and short-term development prospects damage the image of the product and perceived quality of Japanese cartoons. After a first period, in which anime seem to be treated as non-significant cultural by-products, during the second phase of growing the market is intensified by the activity of amateurs through the creation of distribution networks. They tried to change the image of the product using different methods of legitimation. But in the third era, the rapid collapse of the market is favour by overproduction and the technological transition from the VHS to DVD, and because of the dumping of prices, the cartoon is once again considered a cheap product.

With the development of Internet and digital technologies, exchanges have become faster and the traces left by these are easy to retrieve. Professionals and amateurs can easily broadcast audio-visual contents on online platforms. In order to counter the non-legal offer of anime by fans French publishers were compelled to propose simulcast[1]. But by the end of the 1970s, the transnational circulation of cultural products was more difficult. During its short period of operation, the VHS format enabled audio-visual products to be broadcast globally and not only through official broadcasting networks. There was no invasion of

---

[1] The situation is so tense between the French rights-holders and the pirates that an article on the subject has appeared in a mainstream newspaper. See (Woitier, 2013)

Japanese products as presented in the press of the 1970s but importations and adaptations carried out by entrepreneurs connected with television and by fans. In order to understand how these exchanges have evolved and how a home video market has been organized in France, this paper tries to trace a history of the beginnings of the VHS industry. If there has already been a thesis on the DVD market in France (Beldi, 2013), there is no study of the prior period. This report is made difficult because there are few traces of the non-legal distribution channels and legal deposit did not exist before 1985 in France. Through interviews with people who have worked in the VHS market, we try to retrace the evolution of the anime home video industry from the late 1970s to the early 2000s in order to analyse the change in attitudes towards Japanese cartoons. We will focus on three phases of market development to show how pricing strategy and short-term development prospects damage the image of the product and perceived quality of Japanese cartoons. After a first period, in which anime seem to be treated as non-significant cultural by-products, during the second phase of growing the market is intensified by the activity of amateurs through the creation of distribution networks. They tried to change the image of the product using different methods of legitimation. But in the third era, the rapid collapse of the market is favour by overproduction and the technological transition from the VHS to DVD, and because of the dumping of prices, the cartoon is once again considered a cheap product.

A television-related market: Emerging market of children audience

In 1977, the Japanese manufacturers Sony and JVC launched the first home video recorders on the French market introducing a practice that

was hitherto reserved for a few professionals. In 1979, there were only 50,000 video recorders in France and in 1982 this number rapidly increased to 350,000 units. At the end of 1983, there were 1,500,000 VCR installed in households, 7500 titles, 140 distributors and 3000 video stores (Cotrel 1984, 1).

In late 1970s and 1980s, the home video market was still in its infancy. Only 1.2% of French households with television were equipped with VCRs. During the emergent phase of the home video market, the price of a cassette was very high and few consumers could afford it since the price of a movie on videotape exceeded 600 francs (approximately 92 €). At the end of 1979, the first titles of pre-recorded videocassettes appeared on the French market. In 1980, there were 5 distributors for a catalog of 100 titles of which three quarters were horror movies and pornographic films completely excluded from television channels (Cotrel 1984, 3). Apart from the VCR market in which video functioned as a value added entertainment medium principally dedicated to the movies, there was a niche market devoted to kid programs. These television broadcasts for children were a novelty on French television and were linked to the opening up of competition between channels (Chaniac, and Jézéquel 2005).

By the mid-1970s, Japanese anime series were broadcast on French television as *Le Roi Léo*[2] in 1972 and *Prince Saphir*[3] in 1974 (Faviez 2010). But with the huge success of *Goldorak, le robot de l'espace*[4] in July 1978 on Antenne 2[5] that the history of anime home videos really began

---

[2] *Jungle Taitei,* Mushi Production, 1965.

[3] *Ribon no Kishi,* Mushi Production, 1967.

[4] *Goldorak* is the French title of *UFO Robot Grendizer* (Tōei Dōga, 1975). The name is a creation of Canestrier who had mixed two other titles he enjoyed: *Goldfinger* and *Madrake* (Radenac 1979).

[5] It was one of the three channels available at this time. Antenne 2 is now known as France 2.

in France. Children became so fond of the adventures of "Prince d'Euphor"[6] that Antenne 2 received an avalanche of mail from the young audience. At that time, there were no social networks to show enthusiasm. But two thousand letters arrived daily for *Goldorak* and it was quite a considerable figure. This anime became a social phenomenon[7]. The man behind that success was Jacques Canestrier. He managed to convince the leaders of the public channel to broadcast this Japanese series. This jack-of-all-trades from southern France was a film producer who had the opportunity to work with René Borg on one of the first French cartoon produced in Japan: *Oum, le dauphin blanc[8]*. On this occasion, he discovered the prolific Japanese domestic market and bought the rights of several series. The production of anime was very important and inexpensive: one minute of an anime episode costs three times less to produce in Japan than in France (Lindon 1978). Even if the Japanese do not produce series for export[9], Canestrier decided to buy the rights of several series. Then he tried to broadcast them on terrestrial channels through its audiovisual distribution company: Pictural Films. He successfully managed to sell the rights of *Grendizer*, *Albator[10]* and *Candy[11]* to TV channels. He also quickly understood the

---

[6] Canestrier and his team had changed almost all the names of the characters and all the Japanese references in order to make the series more French for the audience.

[7] The craze was of such importance that the mainstream press denounced the mercantile and violent side of this anime. Journalists believed that children suffer of "goldorakite" and that producers perpetuate a "goldorackett" (extortion of their pocket money). The press is not the only one to criticize the brutality of the images. In his book, the psychologist Liliane Lurcat (1981) warned parents against this series as too disturbing for children according to her criteria. Subsequently, the politician Ségolène Royal (1989) resumed the harangue against the Japanese anime that had supposedly invaded the small screen in his essay.

[8] *Oum le dauphin blanc* (Saga Film, 1971) is a French animated series. The thirteen episodes have been created by Vladimir Tarta and directed by René Borg. It was broadcast in 1971 on national TV channel.

[9] In his book, Bruno-René Huchez describes how he brought back the audiovisual tapes of *Grendizer* in France at a time when there was no company to manage exports of cartoons (Huchez 2015).

[10] *Albator* is the French title of *Captain Harlock* (Tōei Dōga, 1978).

[11] *Candy Candy*, Tōei Dōga, 1976.

interest of home video in the form of magnetic tape. To extend the success of *Goldorak* and *Candy*, VHS tapes containing four episodes per cassette were launched. But the editor never broadcast all the episodes of these series in this format. Furthermore, a film of *Goldorak* is formed from a mounting of some episodes of the series[12]. It came out in cinemas in 1979 and it became the first Japanese anime to become successful in this format.

For the producer, videotapes represented only one way of making the purchase of television rights profitable and they were not its main activity. The Canestrier catalogue was composed of series that he had not been able to sell to TV channels and several movies that he had also bought the rights to. Several *anime* first available on VHS were thereafter broadcast on TV channels with another title. For example, *Hana no ko Lun Lun[13]* was first published with the title *Lulu : le mystère de la fleur magique* in 1982. Then it has become *Le Tour du Monde de Lydie* on the TV channel, la Cinq[14]. *Galaxy Express 999, le Train de l'espace[15]* was released on VHS in 1979, then it was broadcast in 1988 on TF1[16]. *Arō Enburemu Guranpuri no Taka[17]* was initially renamed *Formule 1* when it was on VHS in 1983. It has become *Grand Prix* in 1989 when it was broadcast on la Cinq.

Canestrier was not the only one interested in the new home video

---

[12] They have remixed the episodes 1, 2, 4 and 10 to make a single story that lasted long enough time to broadcast it as a film in the cinemas.

[13] *Hana no ko Lun Lun,* Tōei Dōga, 1979.

[14] Jérôme Seydoux and the Italian Silvio Berlusconi created the French fifth television channel: La Cinq. The network broadcast from February 1986 to April 1992. During this period, the channel had broadcast a lot of anime that was already popular in Italy

[15] *Galaxy Express 999,* Tōei Dōga, 1978.

[16] TF1 (Télévision Française 1) was the first national television channel launched in 1975. It was a government-owned television broadcaster. Since 1987 TF1 became a private national French TV channel.

[17] *Arō Enburemu Guranpuri no Taka,* Tōei Dōga, 1977.

market in the late 1970s; other publishers were getting into this market such as Billy Clap Video, DIA (international audiovisual distribution), Spectrum (brand of PolyGram Video), Cartoon video and Adès Vidéo. But it is very difficult to get an accurate and comprehensive picture of the VHS market of this period. As the legal deposit of video tapes was only compulsory since 1985, it is important to note that there is some variance in the identification of the producer, editor or company who has released the anime VHS. These uncertainties in the copyrights of videotapes were common in the 1980s. To compound this, very few cassettes are available at the BNF. One of the most prolific editors was Fil à Film, an independent company founded by Jean-François Davy. It was renowned thanks to the publication of feature films through the collections "Palme d'or" and "Les films de ma vie". This editor also had the largest duplicating videotapes site in the Paris region (Video Thumb). As Canestrier's company, Fil à Film has mainly published episodes from series that haven't been previously broadcast on TV such as *Edgar, le Détective cambrioleur*[18], *Crocus*[19], *Dan et Danny*[20], and *Super Durand*[21]. The fact that most of the titles of this catalogue has been previously broadcast on national television ensure Fil à Film that the products were already well known by the audience, reducing the need for proper marketing or expansion into the relevant markets.

This tactic was quite common in the 1970s-1980s. René Chateau Video, another VHS publisher rather specialised in French films, also released some anime previously broadcast on TV channels. It has

---

[18] *Lupin III*, Tōkyō Movie, 1971.
[19] *Tongari boshi no Memoru,* Tōei Dōga, 1984.
[20] *Dirty Pair*, Nippon Sunrise, 1995.
[21] *Mirai Keisatsu Urashiman*, Tatsunoko Productions, 1983.

published several series as *Judo Boy²²*, *Le Livre de la jungle²³*, *Cobra²⁴*, and *L'Empire des cinq²⁵*. The company planned to target the young audience with the anime, although several series are in reality aimed to an audience of young adults. In fact, television broadcasters and VHS publishers hadn't really realised at this point that cartoons are not only for children, but can target a huge range of viewers; they didn't seem to worry about such distinction when it came to anime. So, video editors tended to publish series regardless of the original target audience.

Incomplete series and inaccurate Adaptations

For Canestrier, publishing anime in VHS was only a business opportunity, a way to monetise the rights of anime he had obtained. This is why he had not sought to expand the domestic video market or to better understand the expectations of the audience of children. The other companies also had seemed to consider that anime had fewer values than the films they broadcast, which explains the difference in treatment in children's programmes at the level of translation and adaptation. If movies were relatively well treated by Fil à Film, Japanese anime was more problematic and their publications were often poorly realised. Most of these VHS companies never published the entire seasons of anime. He only released the first three or four episodes on the same tape, although the cover of the cassette could mention "dessin animé de long métrage" (sic) which leads the buyer to think that he gets a full movie. If the first tapes registered a successful sale, then some

---

²² *Kurenai Sanshirō,* Tatsunoko Production, 1969.
²³ *Jungle Book Shōnen Mowgli,* Nippon Animation, 1989.
²⁴ *Cobra*, TMS, 1982.
²⁵ *Makyō Densetsu Akurobanchi,* TMS, 1982*.*

other episodes of the series were released on VHS. It was too risky to dub all the episodes and to broadcast them on VHS. This explains why *Candy* and *Goldorak* were the only anime that have been published in several videos cassettes by Canestrier.

The Japanese titles, often too long for the French conventions, were changed to suit the tastes of the public (or what the publishers thought were suitable for young audiences). Canestrier had two labels "vidéo jeunes" and "junior collection" and he renamed all the Japanese names and titles in order to make them less exotic[26] for the French audience. Hence, *Sengoku Majin Goshōgun[27]* became *Fulgutor, le robot des lumières* (literally "robot of lights"), *SF Saiyûki Starzinger[28]* became *Starzinger, les Chevaliers de l'espace* (literally "space knights") and *Genki champion de boxe* is the French title of *Ganbare Genki![29]*. The French editor seemed to enjoy elongated titles with cheesy taglines to appeal to a young male audience. As with Canestrier, all these small publishers had a tendency to expunge the Japanese names and titles. Sometimes the new French title was far from the original, for example *Hi no Tori[30]* (literally "phoenix") of Mushi Prod became *Les Vengeurs de l'Espace* (Literally "Space Avengers") thanks to the VHS editor Cartoon video. The worst modified anime title remains *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind[31]*; it appears under three different titles *Warriors of the Wind, Le Vaisseau fantôme* (Literally "The Flying Dutchman") and *La Princesse des Étoiles*

---

[26] This was a common practice in France. *Calimero, Barbapapa* and other series were produced in Japan but the French viewers were unaware, with all the Japanese names absent in the opening and ending.
[27] *Sengoku Majin Gōshōgun,* Ashi Productions, 1985*.
[28] *SF Saiyūki Starzinger,* Tōei Dōga, 1978.
[29] *Ganbare Genki !,* Tōei Dōga, 1980.
[30] *Hi no Tori,* Tezuka Productions, 1980.
[31] *Kaze no Tani no Naushika,* Topcraft, 1984.

("Princess of the Stars"), with redesigned cover artwork and a tagline unconnected with the plot of the movie: "She promised to protect the future aboard the ghost ship.". Moreover, the illustrations of the cassette cover were often poor copies of the original artwork redesigned by an anonymous artist.

During the first phase of the market development during late 1970s and 1980s, Japanese anime were mostly considered as cheap by-products[32]. The editor merely chose the series they published; they only picked the ones that were already broadcast on TV. Their editorial work mainly consisted in removing the Japanese titles and names and adding bad artwork on the cover. French editors hardly devoted time for the manufacture or the promotion of the titles. They seemed to not care about the real target of the anime, broadcasting them to a young audience. The television broadcasters shared this attitude toward Japanese series. Cartoons were mainly used to fill the gaps in the youth programmes at a lower cost. In both cases, the Japanese credits almost never appeared and dubbing was quickly made by actors, with little interest in the rendering of the episode.

In the early 1990s, most of these small publishers had collapsed and their stocks of cassettes were generally sold in the outlet stores. Even Fil à Film filed for bankruptcy in November 1993 with liabilities of 150 million Francs (approximately 23 million euros) (Williams 1993), leaving the home video market in the hands of film and television major

---

[32] Among all these VHS editors, Scherzo Video was maybe the only independent publisher that has tried to broadcast anime movies with a real editor's choice. One of whose leaders was the film director Christophe Gans and he attempted to market slightly more ambitious films like *Le Chat Botté* (*Nagagutsu o haita neko*, Tōei Dōga, 1969 — film released in 1983), *Princess Millennium* (*Shin Taketori Monogatari: Sennen Joō*, Tōei Dōga, 1982 — film released in 1985) and *Cyborg 009* (Tōei Dōga, 1980 film released in 1987).

companies. The disappearance of these first distribution companies allowed the emergence of new players.

In this first phase, videotapes are essentially used to make a profit on the rights purchased from series on television. Anime was not considered as a cultural product in its own right but as a very short-term source of profit; this is why the quality of the cassette and the time devoted to the adaptation are minimal, especially in comparison with the care taken for movie videotapes. The difference in prestige between the two genres (live movies, cartoons) could explain the difference in treatment.

Growing Phase:
Non-legal exchange and fans VCR as mainstream products

In the late 1980s, 43.4% of households with television are equipped with VCR in France (Cotrel 1984). The installed base was large enough for the market to become mainstream. The French audience, who preferred buying tapes rather than renting them, greatly increased sales. Initially, the recording of television programmes for deferred viewing was the main use of video recorders (Flichy 1991, 115-116 and Arnal and Busson 1997, 954). Because of its purchase price, the VCR was originally a product for the classes with high incomes. In the early 1990s it had become one of the appendices of the television as trivial as the remote control (Mousseau 1991). In 1992, more than 11 million households were equipped with video recorders, accounting for 55% of the 21 million households with television (Alteresco 1994, 144).

Not only the public could record their programmes to watch them whenever they wanted, but in addition they could watch popular audio-

visual products from other countries thanks to the almost simultaneous circulation of media in the world market whether by legal or illegal means. As noted by O'Regan, "VCR provides opportunities for TV and movie producers in particular countries to take commercial advantage of their ethnic enclaves" (O'Regan 1991, 125). In France, some Japanese television programmes were available on videotape among the Asian diaspora through the video rental stores in Paris (in the 9th arrondissement for the Japanese and in the 13th for the countries of South East Asia and Chinese).

During the same period, French television broadcast an enormous number of anime creating an unprecedented infatuation for this type of entertainment. The increasing supply of cartoons in children's programmes had been compared to fast-food restaurants (Neveu 1990, 111). At the beginning of 1987, the creation of the TV show "Club Dorothée" on TF1, granted Japanese anime a larger place in the grid of youth programmes. The producer, AB production, rebroadcast the classic *Candy* and *Goldorak*, but he also released many new series such as *Dragon Ball*[33], *Chevaliers du Zodiaque*[34], *Nicky Larson*[35], *Ken le Survivant*[36], etc. The aim of these anime series was to counter the massive influx of series offered by La Cinq, the first privately-owned free terrestrial television network, which broadcasted anime already available in Italy as *Jeanne and Serge*[37], *Princesse Sarah*[38], etc. The truncated episodes, with the approximate or intentionally-false dubbing,

---

[33] *Dragon Ball,* Tōei Dōga, 1986.
[34] *Saint Seiya,* Tōei Dōga, 1986.
[35] *City Hunter,* Sunrise, 1987.
[36] *Hokuto no Ken,* Tōei Dōga, 1984.
[37] *Attacker You!*, Knack Production, 1984.
[38] *Princess Sarah*, Nippon Animation, 1985.

and the random episode-scattered broadcast pushed some amateurs to search for the source and manage to obtain Japanese anime videos without dubbing or subtitles thanks to the Asian video rental stores. The VHS tapes were duplicated and then exchanged or sold through meetings in front of Japanese bookstores or Asian shops. A lot of illegal copies were available for fan distribution[39]. Early fans would pay for a new episode of *Dragon Ball* even if it was in Japanese and without subtitles. Minitel[40] also allows amateurs to discuss about anime and to exchange pirated cassettes. Some fans could also purchase imported videos tapes with English subtitles (Manga Video published them in the UK). Amateurs could find them in some stores that were specialised in comic books or video games. At that time, the Americans and the Japanese do not use the same types of coding as in France or England. It was possible to play the English tapes (PAL) on VCRs French (SECAM), but you required Japanese transcode video (NTSC) through special VCRs to make them playable on the French VCRs. That did not stop the fans from hacking as many anime as possible. These informal channels of distribution are also networks for information exchange and creation of aesthetic criteria to defend the anime. Amateurs gathered in associations and created fanzines to spread their word. For example, *AnimeLand*, a magazine specialised in cartoon and anime that is still available today, is originally a fanzine whose first issue came out in April 1991. Many fans who were involved in its launch subsequently become key persons in the manga and anime market in France.

---

[39] A similar non-legal distribution network could be seen in the US during the late 1980s (Eng 2012).
[40] Minitel was a videotext online service created in France and available from 1982 to 2012. At the high point, there were nine million Minitel sets installed in households around the country, an estimated 25 million users, and 26,000 services on offer.

Long before anime VHS were sold in shops specialising in manga and anime, fans were able to obtain the anime they appreciated in other ways. The anime VHS market therefore existed, but it was mostly non-legal. None of the big publishers were aware of it and no marketing department was able to target it properly. Fans were then responsible for creating themselves a publishing house and a distribution circuit.

Amateurs becoming Professionals

The anime enthusiasts who grew up with *Goldorak* and *Candy* were old enough to create their own anime broadcasting companies and they were willing to change the perception of anime among the general public. Among them, Pascal Lafine quickly took the role of "manga specialist" of the magazine *Club Dorothée Magazine*. He managed to convince AB Productions to release two new anime for an adult audience: *La Cité interdite*[41] and *Crystal Triangle*[42]. Both OVA (Original Video Animation, cartoons products for the market of home video) are published by Dagobert Video, which also publishes other series broadcast on TF1. It was the first time a fan had made an editor's choice and managed to release an anime that hadn't been previously broadcast on TV. Unfortunately, the mainstream audience was not ready for this type of OAV and the few sales go through *AnimeLand*, which proposes to members of Animarte, association managing the fanzine.

In 1993, the Animarte association offered SECAM videotapes of the OAV *Bubblegum Crisis* subtitled in English. With this success, some members founded a company to buy and distribute Japanese series:

---

[41] *Yōjū Toshi, Madhouse, 1987.*
[42] *Kindan no Mokushiroku Crystal Triangle*, Animate, 1987.

Anime Virtual. Cédric Littardi and Gregory Parcollet created the firm with their own funds and managed to convince a Japanese publisher to sell them the rights of another OAV – *La Légende de Lemnear*[43]. The title was released in March 1994 and the sales were good enough to comfort them in the publishing for the VHS market. Odaje, the company who created the subtitles, was originally a fans association well known for making subtitled films for screenings at conventions. This first release of an OAV by two start-ups composed of anime fans was a bit laborious, but it raised their credibility for other broadcasting on VHS. French anime fans were also pleased by this title because it was subtitled so they could listen to the Japanese voices. French dubbing of anime on TV was so faulty that many viewers demand series with subtitles and no dubbing. The ex-fans became entrepreneurs and started Kazé Animation, a new editor formed by the association Anime Virtual and the Japanese company Ucore (firm in charge of sales of anime rights in Europe). In September 1994, Kazé launched its first VHS in manga stores, whose number had increased in Paris and all the big cities in France. The six OAV of *Chroniques de la Guerre de Lodoss*[44] represented a first real commercial success for the firm. 150,000 units were sold [45]. That achievement fostered other amateurs to build their own company and contributed to enhance the key role of fans in the market. Now they had their magazines, their publishers and they were intended to supersede their ideas over those of mainstream publishers.

---

[43] *Legend of Lemnear Kyokuguro no Tsubasa Valkisas,* AIC, 1991.
[44] *Lodoss tō Senki,* Madhouse, 1990.
[45] Interview with Cédric Littardi, November 2014.

Kazé continued its editorial strategy of original anime VHS with original subtitled version as *Iria* [46] and the anime of the Pioneer catalogue (*Tenchi Muyo*[47]*, Moldiver*[48]). Of course, only fans buy anime in original subtitled version promoted through specialized press. In an attempt to reach a wider range of viewers, Kazé also launched a dubbed version of *Kojiro*[49] in French. And to get some more money, created an erotic label: EVA (Erotic Video Animation). Meanwhile, the publisher had team up with UGC[50] in order to broadcast anime on theater during the summer. Its programme Cinémanga cycle was composed of eight feature films never released in French cinemas before*.* After a long period of screening in the UGC Cinemas complex in Paris, the Cinémanga cycle went on tour throughout France. This was not a commercial success but it allowed Kazé to build an image of reliability and quality, while promoting a different vision of Japanese animation. Only 20,000 tickets were sold in France with more than 8000 in Paris. It must be said that the selection includes lots of old movies and that there were few explanations for an uninformed audience.

While the fans were becoming more professional and larger publishers remained skittish, other entrepreneurs went into this new business. For example, Francis Amato, founder of IDE (International Electronic Distribution), was the founder of a company that imported Japanese by-products (video games, posters, goodies). After the installation of Japanese publishers in France, he stopped his video-games sales to focus on selling goodies. Following the very strong

---

[46] *Iria: Zeiram the Animation,* Ashi Productions, 1994.
[47] *Tenchi Muyo! Ryo-Ohki,* AIC, 1992.
[48] *Moldiver,* AIC, 1993.
[49] *Fūma no Kojirō,* Animate Film & J.C. Staff, 1989.
[50] UGC is major film production and Distribution Company, which aired *Porco Rosso* in April 1995.

demand for products derived from the anime *Dragon Ball*, he contacted AB Productions to buy the movies rights. At that time, the company producing the show *Club Dorothée* had not really perceived the importance of the market for anime home video. Besides the failure of the 1991 OAVs launched by Pascal Lafine, the company was scalded by the poor sales of a video tape composed of three movies of *Dragon Ball*, with was made with TV episodes and movies to make a transition between stories. However, AB Productions had already made the translation and dubbed the movies. So the firm decided to sell them to Amato's company. The label AK Video was then created to broadcast four *Dragon Ball Z* movies. The sales volume was incredibly large despite the fact that supermarkets refused to sell them. In fact, the sales figures of the first videotape released by AK Video in September 1994 were so good that AB Productions and TF1 began to plan other anime VHS releases[51]. Subsequently, IDE was hired by these major companies in order to create the editorial content. It also was in charge of the sales in specialised stores. AB Productions was responsible for the creation and distribution of its anime VHS catalogue via supermarket. AK Video also started to negotiate directly with the Japanese rights holders in order to publish other original series as the OAV *You're Under Arrest*[52] or *Black Jack*[53]. In order to build a collection of series, which could attract the fandom, Francis Amato has hired Olivier Fallaix as editorial director. He was journalist for *AnimeLand* and an anime fan who had created the first radio show about anime. He had been in Japan in order to select series in order to publish them in a way that could appeal to the

---

[51] Interview with a former TF1 employee in December 2014.
[52] *Taiho Shichauzo,* Studio Deen, 1999.
[53] *Black Jack,* Tezuka Productions, 1993.

amateurs. Whereas AB Productions, which had distributed dubbed anime VHS for the mainstream market, AK Video published subtitled anime for the hardcore market. Again, the company Odaje created subtitles. Fans praised the quality of these anime but the sales were not good enough to turn the editor in a big firm[54].

The strategies of the fans were completely opposed to those that were adopted beforehand. Instead of selling videotapes with a few episodes and never broadcasting the end, the new companies offered complete sets. Instead of dubbing the series, they put subtitles. Instead of marketing the fashionable series on television, they sought to extend their catalogue by going directly to Japan to negotiate the rights of unpublished anime. Despite their network and their commitment, they struggled to reach the mainstream market because subtitled series were less easy to access than dubbed titles and because their anime lacked media visibility. What really made AK Video a prosperous VHS publisher were the sales of older series previously broadcast on national TV as *Cobra, Albator* and *Les Mystérieuses cités d'or*[55]. Previously shown on television, these series have both a French dubbing and a significant reputation among the mainstream audience. AK Video is the first publisher to release all the set of episodes, contrary to what is practiced in the 1980s. That was a way to satisfy the hardcore fans (that were longing for a complete set of episodes) and the mainstream audience (which remembered the anime with nostalgia).

During this second stage of development of the market, by becoming professionals, amateurs have introduced new work procedures:

---

[54] Interview with Olivier Fallaix (former AK Video employee) in December 2014.
[55] *Taiyo no Ko Esteban,* Studio Pierrot, DIC, 1982.

publication of all the episodes, subtitling in place of dubbing, creation of catalog with new series not previously broadcasted on television. All these steps aim to give added value to the VHS product but the niche market is too small to make the investments really profitable.

Maturity and decline of the market: Multiplication of publishers

The success of Kazé and AK video attracted other companies to the market. Between 1994 and 1997, many companies were founded by amateurs or by shop owners. For example, two Parisian bookstores created their own video label. The specialty store Tonkam launched its own manga publication label in 1994. In order to obtain the rights of the OAV series *Ah! My Goddess[56],* it had to release two minor titles to be credible with Japanese right holders: *Yokho chasseuse de démons[57]* and *Ushio et Tora[58]*. The Parisian store Katsumi preferred the acquisition of anime rights that were cheaper and more profitable in the short term. The Katsumi Video label was specialised in erotic anime as *Shin Angel[59]*. A small wholesaler of video games had also tried to become a VHS publisher. He created the Dragon Video label and released a few minor titles. The film Editor, René Chateau Video, despite the failures of the beginning of the decade, also released a series anime in 1995, *Robin de bois[60]*. But it remained far from growing sector. Finally, among the publishers who engage in the market, we find the Huchez family that had provided many Japanese series on French television through their company IDDH. It has created IDP (Innovation Diffusion Production) in

---

[56] *Aa! Megami-sama,* AIC, 1993.
[57] *Mamono Hunter Yōko,* Madhouse, 1990.
[58] *Ushio to Tora,* Pastel, 1992.
[59] *Shin Angel,* Pink Pinapple and Triple X, 1994.
[60] *Robin Hood no Daibôken*, Tatsunoko Production, 1990.

1996. After some erotic anime VHS derived from manga *Visionary*[61] by U-Jin, this new publisher essentially released the 1980s anime series previously broadcast on television.

Thanks to the huge success of *Dragon Ball Z* VHS, more traditional players entered in the market of anime videotapes. Media and home video professionals were then focused on those Japanese anime that could drain a large audience. Distributed by the PFC interest group (Pathé, Fox, Canal +), giving it a wide distribution for two years, the English publisher Manga Video arrived in January 1995 after several years of broadcasting in import through specialised shops. While about fifty anime VHS were published in the previous decade, from 1995 the sales of videos tapes went through the roof and the booming market was growing rapidly. Manga Video released several titles a month and they were dubbed into French in order to reach a larger audience. AB Productions joined the market and created two labels for marketing VHS: "Manga Video Power" for specialty shops and "Shuriken Video" for mass distribution. IDE advised the company in editorial choices and kept on specialised distribution outlets.

The excitement around what the French mainstream media call "manga", although the term is inappropriate in the case of animation, could explain why so many new publishers emerged since 1994. The problem was that they all wanted to make profit in the short term and their mass publication of tapes quickly caused saturation in the emerging market. At that time, subtitled anime VHS were sold between 2,000 and 5,000 units[62]. With dubbing, sales were easily doubled. When

---

[61] *Visionary,* Beam Entertainment, Knack, 1995.
[62] Interview with Olivier Fallaix, December 2014.

the series was popular, they could even reach 100,000 units. But these cases are rare and mainly related to those previously broadcast on national television. The nostalgia played an essential part in their success.

The other consequence of the huge number of new VHS publishers was that the broadcasting rights became much more expansive than they were formerly. They rose sharply, due to high demand from the foreign market. In the 1980s, Japanese producers were unaware of the business potential of the French market. It must be said that they were blind to the real success of anime in France. So, when Go Nagai had finally become conscious of the success of *Goldorak,* a dozen years later thanks to trip to France, he sued Tōei Animation. The Japanese companies then adopted the opposite attitude: extreme distrust of Western intermediaries and overestimation of potential sales. In the 1990s Japanese producers were a little more aware of the French market since a lot of French publishers regularly came to visit them in order to acquire the rights of anime series. Furthermore, French fans were better informed by numerous magazines and they were more demanding in terms of quality of translation, dubbing and distribution, hence why VHS publishers couldn't be as neglecting as they were in the previous decade.

The multiplication of publishers, the low pricing strategy and the reduction of margins, the rise in costs related to the purchase of rights and the saturation of the market explain the quick collapse of the market in 1997. The situation was worsened by the disappearance of anime on

television channels[63], which were a form of advertising for their VHS counterpart.

Moreover, since the market of audio-visual equipment had reached maturity, manufacturers were prompted to look for a new growth relay with another video format. Since 1994, the market for audio-visual equipment was bleak and the volume growth of video recorders markets was insufficient to compensate for the general downward trend in prices (Busson 1997, 926). In 1997, 96% of French people aged 15 and over owned a television set in their home (Donnat 1998, 69) and 54% of the video libraries were composed of cartoons of children's programmes.

Crisis of anime VHS and change of medium

In just two years, the anime VHS sector was fully saturated and several small publishers gave up, failing to maximize their investment in the purchased licenses. Tonkam refocused on its manga publishing business. Katsumi stopped the video label. For its part, Kazé must have been restructured following the bankruptcy of one of its founders (Ucore) and a new company (Kazé SA) retrieved the catalogue exploitation rights. But the situation did not improve and the founding members had left the company, which went through hard time before re-emerging during the explosion of the DVD market. The sales figure of anime VHS were still important so AB Production kept on publishing

---

[63] La Cinq has stopped broadcasting in 1992. For its part, AB Productions had reoriented its business towards the production of sitcoms and continued to invest in animated. Besides the company stopped the production of Club Dorothée despite its success in order to avoid the negative reviews of the general public and the media censor, CSA (Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuel). Created in 1989, this French institution regulates the radio and the television, supervises the attribution of radio frequencies and television channel. It could also censor programs.

series that were previously broadcast on their TV show, such as *Nadia, le secret de l'Eau Bleue⁶⁴, Très cher Frère⁶⁵,* and *Saint Seiya Poseidon⁶⁶*. But the company did no further investments in the acquisition of new licenses[67]. Since it had aimed too fast and too high, Manga Video had to deal with a lot of unsold tapes that have later been "recycled" on newsstands with the publication titled *Manga Mania* (a cheap magazine packed with a VHS). From September 1996, all the catalogue of Manga Video had been sold off at the low price of 69 francs (about 10 €), which added up to the market saturation. The publisher disappeared from the market and the broadcasting rights of the series were held by its parent company, PolyGram. Thereafter, the catalogue of titles held by Manga Video reappeared in the show *Manga Manga* on the TV channel Canal Plus. But at that time PolyGram has no intention of buying new licenses since it was preparing its purchase by Seagram. Another publisher carried out VHS price dumping: AK Video. It was not able to acquire new titles; it had been forced to publish back catalogue licenses such as *Humming Bird⁶⁸* and *Princesse Minerva⁶⁹*. During this period, AK Video also sold its VHS box at knockdown prices. The audience was contented, but this method was deleterious to other publishers. It then became more difficult to sell VHS tapes and to maintain their profit margins. Competition became even rougher when Manga Distribution, the main VHS dealer and wholesaler, pushed the publishers to broadcast more cassettes at distressed prices. Originally specialised in video games and

---

[64] *Fushigi no umi no Nadia,* Gainax, 1990.
[65] *Oniisama e,* Tezuka Productions, 1991.
[66] *Saint Seiya Poseidon,* Tōei Dōga, 1988.
[67] At that time AB Productions was trying to launch its bundle of satellite television channels (AB Sat). Moreover, AB Productions kept on broadcasting Japanese series on its channel Cartoons.
[68] *Idol Bōeitai Hummingbird,* Ashi Productions, 1993.
[69] *Princesse Minerva,* Toho, 1995.

accessories import, Manga Distribution grew into the key company of the anime home video segment. Since the publishers had difficulty supplying the market, the company created its own video label in 1999, Déclic images. It adopted an aggressive pricing practice likely to result in an increase in its market share. It sold complete sets of episodes at low prices: *Silent Moebius[70], El Hazard[71]...*

As a result of the very difficult market, companies became more cautious and almost all of them only published series already broadcast on television. There were three exceptions. The first one was Manga Video (Polygram), which launched *Macross Plus[72], Bounty Dog[73],* and *Vampire Princess Miyu[74]*. The second one was Dynamic Visions. This publisher, based in Belgium, was a subsidiary of an Italian company founded in 1995 by Frederico Colpi (journalist specialised in manga) and Takeshi Nagai (elder brother of Go Nagai). Dynamic Visions is a subsidiary of Dynamic Japan established in 1969 in Japan. The company aimed to promote and sell the works of Go Nagai and other Japanese licenses. The direct link with Japan enabled the Belgian publisher to release high quality titles in France, such as *Evangelion[75], Escaflowne[76], Serial Experiments: Lain[77], Cowboy Bebop[78], Utena[79]...* VHS were both subtitled and dubbed, ensuring the publisher a strong reputation among the fans. To recover the costs of publication and dubbing, broadcast

---

[70] *Silent Moebius,* AIC, 1991.
[71] *Shinpi no Sekai Eru Hazādo,* AIC, 1995.
[72] *Macross Plus*, Studio Nue, 1994.
[73] *Bounty Dog,* Animate, 1994.
[74] *Vampire Miyu,* AIC, 1988.
[75] *Shin Seiki Evangerion,* Gainax, 1995.
[76] *Tenkū no Esukafurōne,* Sunrise, 1996.
[77] *Shiriaru Ekusuperimentsu Rein,* Triangle Staff, 1998.
[78] *Cowboy Bebop,* Sunrise, 1998.
[79] *Shōjo kakumei Utena,* J.C. Staff, 1997.

rights were also sold to TV channels (Canal +, Game One, Mangas). Another Japanese firm also decided to enter in the French saturated market at the end of 1990s: Toei Animation. Besides the releasing of oldies as *Le Tour du Monde de Lydie,* it tried to launch new titles: *Magical Doremi*[80]*, Ken 2*[81]*, Slam Dunk*[82]... The quality of dubbing did not convince the fans and the mainstream audience was not interested by these anime. Even if the *Slam Dunk* series was adapted from a bestselling manga, its complete set of episodes had never been published due to poor sales.

The anime VHS market was rapidly restructuring since the crisis of 1997. After having flooded the market, most of the remaining editors had to change the technology used for home video in order to create a new crave for consuming Japanese series. This technology shift corresponded to the practice of the rest of the home video market. DVD is one of the most rapidly adopted technologies in the history of publishing (Tellier 2006). The first DVD videodiscs were marketed in 1996, first in Japan, then in the rest of the world, and almost completely replaced VHS and laser discs. In 2001 revenues of videodiscs surpass those of VHS tapes in the USA (Delapierre and Mytelka 2003, 238). Besides Canal + which released the DVD of *Porco Rosso*[83], AK Video is the first to release an anime on DVD with *City Hunter – Services Secrets*[84] in 1999. All the publishers have quickly followed AK Video and VHS sales dropped and since 2003 this video format is no longer used (Beldi 2013, 5).

---

[80] *Ojamajo Doremi,* Toei Animation, 1999.
[81] *Hokuto no Ken 2*, Tōei Dōga, 1987.
[82] *Slam Dunk*, Tōei Dōga, 1993.
[83] *Porco Rosso,* Ghibli, 1992.
[84] *City Hunter: The Secret Service,* Sunrise, 1995.

But the media change is not enough to boost sales and the remaining editors kept their aggressive pricing pratice, which had previously led to the 1997 market crisis. The same causes have led to the same consequences: the anime DVD market has rapidly been saturated. Moreover, the low prices of the complete box of episodes in DVD or VHS have damaged the image of anime. Neither the fans nor the mainstream audience are ready to pay for an episode at their real price. Furthermore, since the anime are henceforth digitalized, it has become almost effortless to make and distribute pirated copies.

In two decades, the anime VHS has shifted from the status of by-product for children to cultural product for an audience of adolescents and adults. The evolution of the videotape market shows that the film cassettes and the niche of the cartoon developed differently because of the difference of prestige. During the first phase, anime were deprived of most of their episodes because of the cost of publishing. During the second phase, the intervention of the amateurs, who became professionals and formed the market they have largely helped to create. They introduced different work procedures and tried to increase the perceived quality of the product by proposing better translation, better dubbing or subtitling and better distribution. The complete series are now available and the Japanese names of the crew are shown in the credits. However, legitimisation of anime as an art form is not yet complete. The discount pricing strategy of the publishers is partly responsible for the tarnished image of anime as cheap cultural products. The viewers are less and less willing to pay full price with illegal copies sometimes easier to obtain than legal ones. At the end of the 1990s, the

cost remained high but the price dumping of publishers in order to sell on mass encouraged the consumer to believe that it was negligible. Today the price of the complete series on DVD is still much lower than that which is practiced in Japan, which may give the impression that the product has little value. Once this damaged image settled, it is difficult to raise the perceived value and the price of the product.

In the 1990s the domestic video market was favoured by the involvement of fans in the creation of information network and in the formation of publishers. But the current market is threatened by the non-legal activities of new fans that unlawfully broadcast series on online platforms competing against legal platforms. Today in France, publishers have not yet found a way to counter these broadcasting networks. They may need to develop long term strategies in order to reach an audience not limited to the anime fans and to create a positive image of the product while ensuring a satisfactory adaptation work that differs from the non-legal practices of fansubbing. The problem is difficult to solve, but it is essential for the development of the home video market and for the perceived quality of anime.

REFERENCES

Alteresco J.-C. (1994), Les Vidéocassettes. *Réseaux*, Vol. 12 (63), 141-148.

Arnal N. and Busson A. (1997), Les Possesseurs de Magnétoscope : Vers de Nouvelles Pratiques Audiovisuelles. *Sociologie de la communication*, Vol. 1, 949-958.

Beldi, A. (2013), *Le DVD et la Transformation des Séries TV en Œuvres: le cas de la Réception des Séries TV d'Animation Japonaise en Europe.* Doctoral dissertation, Université de Strasbourg. Supervised by Viallon, P.

Busson A. (1997), La Filière Audiovisuelle. *Sociologie de la communication*, Vol. 1 (1),

923-948.

Cotrel, M. (1984), *La Presse Vidéo en France,* Diplôme supérieur de bibliothécaire, Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Bibliothèques. Supervised by Herzhaft, G.

Delapierre M., Mytelka Lynn K. (2003), Cascades d'Innovations et Nouvelles Stratégies Oligopolistiques. *Revue d'économie industrielle*, Vol. 103, 233-252.

Donnat, O. (1998), *Les Pratiques Culturelles des Français. Enquête 1997*. Paris : La Documentation française.

Eng, L. (2012), Anime and Manga Fandom in a Networked Culture. In: Ito, M., Okabe D., Tsuji I. (Eds), *Fandom Unbound: Otaku Culture in a Connected World*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 158–178.

Faviez, P. (2010), *La Télé : un Destin Animé*, Paris: Société des écrivains.

Flichy, P. (1991), *Les Industries de l'Imaginaire*. Grenoble: Presses universitaires de Grenoble.

Huchez, B.-R. (2015), *Il était une fois... Goldorak.* Autoédition, ebook.

Lindon, M. (1978), Goldorak, le Robot Bien Aimé. *Le Nouvel Observateur,* 22 décembre, Vol. 69.

Lurcat, L. (1981), *À Cinq Ans Seul avec Goldorak,* Paris: Editions Syros.

Mousseau, J. (1991) Le Marché de la Vidéo : Naissance et Croissance d'un « Big Business ». *Communication et langages*, Vol. 90 (1), 6-18.

Neveu E. (1990), Télévision pour Enfants : Etat des Lieux. *Communications,* Vol.51, 111-130.

O'Regan, T. (1991), From Piracy to Sovereignty: International Video Cassette Recorder Trends. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, Vol. 4 (2), 112-135.

Radenac, M. (1979), Les Jeunes Téléspectateurs Saisis par la "Goldorakite". *Télé 7 jours*, Vol.972, 100-101.

Tellier A. (2006), Les Stratégies de Régulation dans la Vidéo à Domicile. *Revue française de gestion*, Vol.8, 123-140.

Royal, S. (1989), *Ras-le-Bol des Bébés Zappers.* Paris: Robert Laffont.

Williams, M. (1993), Video Distrib Fil a Film Files for Bankruptcy. *Variety* [Online] Available from : http://variety.com/1993/digital/features/video-distrib-fil-a-film-files-for-bankruptcy-115896/ [Accessed 17 March 2017].

Woitier, C. (2013), Face au Piratage, les Géants Français de l'Animation Japonaise

s'allient. *Le Figaro* [Online] Available from: http://www.lefigaro.fr/secteur/high-tech/2013/09/09/32001-20130909ARTFIG00648-face-au-piratage-les-geants-francais-de-l-animation-japonaise-s-allient.php [Accessed 17 March 2017].

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bounthavy SUVILAY *is a French independent journalist. She has worked for AnimeLand, magazine specialized on manga and anime and supervised several special editions before becoming editor in chief of IG magazine, bimonthly publication on video games. She has supervised several books including RPG, le jeu de rôle : du papier au pixel. She has also written articles in academic revues as "Jules Verne au pays du manga" (Belphégor), "Dragon Ball, du Roi des singes au super-guerrier" (Mythe et bande dessinée), "La representation du corps feminin dans le manga et le dessin anime japonais : robots, cyborgs, intelligences artificielles" (Les Représentations du corps dans les oeuvres fantastiques et de science-fiction).*

Dragon Ball popularity in Spain compared to current delocalized models of consumption: How *Dragon Ball* developed from a regionally-based complex system into a nationwide social phenomenon

José Andrés SANTIAGO IGLESIAS **|** Universidade de Vigo, Spain

Abstract

The development of anime and manga in Spain in the late 70s and 80s and their boom in the early 90s mimics its progression in the two prominent European markets, Italy and France. Most of the mainstream anime series broadcasted in Spain were originally imported from Italian media conglomerate Fininvest as well as French licensing companies. In February of 1990, Dragon Ball, *a TV adaptation of the manga created by the renowned cartoonist Toriyama Akira, premiered in Spain. However,* Dragon Ball *was not an immediate phenomenon. The 'when,' 'where' and 'how' differ from any other broadly popular anime/manga series in Spain or any other major European market, due to the specificity of the Spanish «Autonomous Communities'» cultural, political and administrative division.* Dragon Ball *first premiered in Spain via several regional broadcasters — TVG, TV3 and ETB (Galicia, Catalonia and Basque Country) — with only a few weeks in between, dubbed not in Castilian Spanish but in the respective co-official languages (Galician, Catalonian, Basque), growing into an independent social phenomenon within these regions before it spread nationwide years later. Thanks to* Dragon Ball, *anime as a cultural platform in Spain influenced many people by expanding fandom boundaries to a broader social spectrum, turning anime and manga into mainstream mediums and – while both publishers and merchandising companies failed to anticipate such a significant social impact – setting the foundations of the Spanish manga/anime industry. It is clear that no other anime series has ever triggered such a cultural phenomenon, in terms of general success, social dissemination and broadcast mechanics. Therefore, in this article I will try to examine* Dragon Ball *in Spain as a complex model, and analyse its unique model of intermedia growth.*

In February of 1990, *Dragon Ball*,[1] a TV adaptation of the manga created by the renowned cartoonist Toriyama Akira, premiered in Spain via

---

[1] On February 26th, 1986, *Dragon Ball* first premiered in Japan.

several regional broadcasters staggered over a few weeks. It was an exceptional success and became an unparalleled generational phenomenon. *Dragon Ball* had a thrilling rhythm through the combination of an engaging plot, breathtaking fight scenes and a unique sense of humour previously unseen in western animation, and it fascinated fans of all ages. Now globally famous, *Dragon Ball* has been deemed by many scholars and researchers as the most influential work in the Spanish manga and anime industry, a 'Trojan Horse' that heralded the arrival and popularisation of Japanese comics and animated series domestically.

In this article, I will address the major role of *Dragon Ball* in the initial boom and further development of the manga and anime market in Spain. I will also expand on the particularities of this case study within Spain and the European context, in comparison to contemporary trends in manga and anime consumption in recent years. Furthermore, in order to address this broad social phenomenon without limiting the discussion to only fan culture, I will structure this article in three major sections, as follows:

First, I will present a brief introduction to how anime arrived in Spain as well as the pertinence of this case study. I will also summarize some basic ideas from the referred bibliographical fonts. Then I will address how *Dragon Ball* arrived to and spread within Spain, focusing on the specific circumstances of how it entailed a different progression of intermedia[2] development within Spain compared to other European countries. Finally, I will present an analysis of the growth model and its evolution from a holistic perspective to a complex system. I will also highlight *Dragon Ball*'s transformation of the manga and anime market

---

[2] In the following article «intermedia» is used as in Pellitteri (2010).

in Spain as well as its social impact despite the absence of prior market strategy or advertising.

The first stages of Anime in Spain

The development of anime and manga in Spain in the late 70s and 80s and their boom in the early 90s actually mimics its progression in the two prominent European markets, Italy and France. Most of the mainstream anime series broadcasted in Spain were originally imported from Italian media conglomerate Fininvest [3] (Italy 1978) as well as French licensing companies. Italy played a most important role as the prime market for anime in the late 70s and 80s (Pellitteri 2010), and France as the largest European manga market despite its own strong national comic industry. The flows of manga and anime consumption within Europe have been quite similar, thus what occurred in Spain in the late 70s, 80s and the early 90s during the first anime boom is a reflection of what happened in neighbouring Mediterranean countries, though on a lesser scale.

Liberalisation of the television frequencies in Italy in the late 70s gave birth to an assortment of new channels. One of the most important agents in this process was Fininvest, which aired three new channels. Anime was a prominent part of their new commercial strategy, as it provided an easier and cheaper way to fill the schedule—buying a bundle of Japanese animated series rather than producing their own— with specifically aimed children's content (Puig 2014). Between 1978

---

[3] Fininvest was founded in Milan (Italy) in 1978 by the Italian magnate Silvio Berlusconi. Since 1996 all media activities have operated under the newly-created mass-media company Mediaset. Mediaset is the largest private broadcaster in Italy, owning several channels in Italy and Spain, as well as digital and TV broadcasting networks and a film production company, among other things.

and 1983 more than 183 anime series were broadcast on several Italian channels (Moliné 2002: 68).[4] When the same liberalisation process took place in France in 1986[5], Fininvest followed a similar strategy with the new channel *La Cinq*,[6] and it did the same two years later in Germany with national broadcaster *Tele5*. In Spain, when the private national channels and the public regional channels began to broadcast in the early 90s, an identical process took place. *Telecinco* filled the kids broadcasting schedule with more than eighty anime series[7]—many of which had previously been released in Italy and France—along with major scripts changes, edited and mutilated footage, radically regionalized adaptations, and changes in localisations and names of characters, as seen previously in the neighbouring countries. Yet despite these severe alterations to the already modest animation of many of these series, anime fascinated an entire generation of Spanish children and young people. Compared to American and European animation, anime as a medium reached a far more extensive social substratum,

---

[4] Moliné refers to the source: Eureka 11-12, November-December 1983, p. 5.

[5] Although we are intentionally underlining the leading role played by Fininvest in the anime dissemination within Europe, the core idea is how the liberalisation of tv frequencies was a turning point that lead to the massive anime broadcasting in the late eighties and early nineties. Within this context, *Club Dorothée* – owned by French Private Channel TF1 – must be highlighted as the first and foremost broadcaster of anime in France. *Club Dorothée* was a tv program intended for young people, produced by AB Productions, airing from September 2nd 1987 to August 30th 1997. *Dragon Ball* first aired in France within this daily show.

[6] In 1986 *La Cinq*, a subsidiary channel belonging to the France 5 corporation, first aired. 40% of France 5 was owned by Silvio Berlusconi's Fininvest media conglomerate, while the remaining 60% belonged to different French Businessmen leaded by Jérôme Seydoux. *La Cinq* is considered the first privately owned free terrestrial television network in France (*La Cinq* ceased its broadcasting activity in 1992). In 1988 Fininvest launched *Tele 5* in Germany (closed in 1992). In 1990, the Spanish free terrestrial television network *Telecinco* was established.

[7] Starting in 1991 and in the following years: *Captain Tsubasa*, *Saint Seiya*, *Ranma 1/2*, *City Hunter*, *Kimagure Orange Road*, etc. At first the private broadcasters didn't cover the whole Spanish territory, but rather the big cities and regions with higher population density, followed a progressive deployment, covering the whole Spanish territory within several months and even years in between.

changing people's preferences while also multiplying possibilities (Kelts 2006: 198).

I will not engage in further discussion of the origins of manga and anime in Spain, as it does not lie within the scope of this article. Nevertheless, in order to completely understand the unique case of *Dragon Ball* in Spain, it may be necessary to further contextualize it within the aforementioned scenario. In such case, the bibliography included at the end of this article should provide sufficient background on manga and anime in Europe. Many of the sources quoted in the article are originally written in Castilian Spanish, as it refers to a nation-specific phenomenon. However, Marco Pellitteri's book *The Dragon and the Dazzle* (2010) provides a detailed analysis in English on anime from a broader European perspective.

The Dragon and the Dazzle Phases in Spain

While the popularisation of manga and anime in Spain took place over the late 70s, 80s, and early 90s and was very similar (on a smaller scale) to the Italian and French markets, the *Dragon Ball* case has some particularities that I believe are worthy of examination for non-Spanish scholars. However, I will first address some concepts referred to by Marco Pellitteri in his book *The Dragon and the Dazzle,* as I build some of my statements upon his ideas.

In his book, Pellitteri describes two phases—termed "dragon" and "dazzle"—with regard to how anime actively targets western viewers. Each phase corresponds to a different dynamic, the first (dragon) being more neutral, characterized by western-friendly products and adopting a rather passive attitude towards the viewer and the market. The second

phase (dazzle) is predicated on western viewers being familiarized with manga and anime visual language. It emphasizes a hybrid product reminiscent of a Japanized West, with strong connotations of the Japanese everyday *imaginarium* and a more active discourse.

We cannot extend these two phases, which are based on the Italian and French situations, to the Spanish case without taking into account the distinct time-frame of each stage. Accordingly, though the Spanish model is similar to most European countries as described by Pellitteri, the timing of events differs greatly, and hence the final map was not so homogeneous. Ultimately, different timing led to circumstances specific to each nation, i.e. the *Dragon Ball* phenomenon in Spain.

We might consider a phase-lag of approximately 5 to 10 years between the Italian and French manga and anime boom in the 80s and the one that took place in Spain in the early 90s as a result of the liberalisation of TV frequencies. The "dragon" and "dazzle" phases described by Pellitteri also took place in Spain but with different timing. Therefore, some series that might be considered representative of this phase never gathered momentum in Spain, and vice-versa. In his book, Pellitteri refers to *UFO Robot Grendizer*[8] as representative of the first phase and *Pokémon* as a benchmark of the second stage. Notwithstanding, we might not speak about *Grendizer* or even *Mazinger*[9] in Spain, but rather about *Dragon Ball* (Dragon phase). And

---

[8] Known in Italy and France as 'Goldrake' or "Goldorak*", UFO Robot Grendizer* is an anime produced by Toei Animation based on the homonymous manga by Ōta Gosaku and part of the *Mazinger* franchise originally created by Nagai Gō. *UFO Robot Grendizer* was broadcasted in Japan from 1975 to 1977. Its unprecedented success in Italy is largely analysed in Pellitteri's book.

[9] *Mazinger Z* (Toei Animation, 1972-1974) is the anime adaptation of Nagai Gō's famous manga (first published in *Weekly Shōnen Jump*, 1972-1974). *Mazinger Z* aired in the Spanish State Broadcaster TVE on March 4th, 1978, with the title *Mazinger el Robot de las Estrellas* (Lit. Mazinger, the Robot from the Stars).

while *Pokémon*[10] is indeed a global success, we address *Crayon Shin-chan*[11] – as we shall see later – as the real game-changer of the Spanish market (Dazzle phase).

Up to this point we could discuss whether *Mazinger Z* rather than *Dragon Ball* should be considered as the benchmark of the early anime boom[12] in Spain (the Dragon phase). *Mazinger Z* is indeed a remarkable milestone within the Spanish manga and anime scenario. Its overall popularity almost rivals that of *Dragon Ball*, and we can easily trace the similarities/dissimilarities of both anime in Spain. However, several crucial factors that led me to appoint *Dragon Ball* and not *Mazinger Z* as the Trojan Horse of the Dragon phase in Spain. After *Grendizer* first aired in Italy in 1978, it was immediately followed by the liberalisation of TV frequencies leading to the anime boom previously addressed. However, after *Mazinger*'s broadcasting on the Spanish state channel TVE in 1978, the *anime* industry in Spain remained quite stagnant[13], until the very same liberalisation of TV frequencies took place in Spain almost a decade later. Instead, several co-productions emerged in the late early

---

[10] *Pokémon* first aired in Spain in 1999 in the paid-TV Satellite channel *Fox Kids*. It was broadcasted in Telecinco on December 20, 1999.

[11] Based on the eponymous manga (1990-2010) by Usui Yoshito (1958-2009), *Crayon Shin Chan* (1992 ~ ongoing) first aired in Spain in April 2000, on Canal Super3, a children-aimed Catalonian TV network, dubbed in Catalonian. Lead by its great success, *Crayon Shin Chan* also aired a few months later in Galicia (dubbed in Galician language), Valencian Country (dubbed in Valencian) and Basque Country (dubbed in Basque).

[12] Despite the first attempts to successfully distribute and commercialize Japanese animation in the late 60s and early 70s, it was not until *Heidi*'s (*Arupusu no Shōjo Haiji*, 1974) arrival that anime started to gain the attention of viewers as a standalone medium in Spain. *Heidi* first aired on May 2nd, 1975 on the national public TV channel TVE (Televisión Española). Produced by Zuiyo Enterprises, directed by Takahata Isao, and appointing Miyazaki Hayao as artistic director of the show, it was the first of several series produced under the common label Meisaku (lit. meaning "Theater masterpieces"). Comprising of 52 episodes, it was a major success among children and adults alike. *Heidi*'s popularity led to the arrival of other Meisaku Collection productions under the direction of Nippon Animation.

[13] Some minor exceptions might be *Candy, Candy* (Toei 1976), based on the *shōjo* of the same title by Mizuki Kyoko and Igarashi Yumiko and first broadcasted in TVE in 1984; or *Comando G* ("Battle of the Planets" – *Gatchaman Ninjatai Kagaku*, 1972) in TVE in 1980.

80s, many of them between Spanish producers and Japanese studios, the latter being responsible for technical development. The Spanish media company BRB International which had played a key role in the arrival and rise of anime in Spain – by commercialising *Mazinger Z* in the first place – began to produce its own animated series, most of them in partnership with Nippon Animation[14] alongside other Asian animation studios[15]. *Mazinger Z* was really popular indeed, and it is broadly remembered among several generations of Spanish viewers, but beyond its own significance it did not change the manga and anime industry in Spain as *Dragon Ball* did – the very reason why we can talk about a *Dragon Ball* phenomenon to begin with.

The *Dragon Ball* Phenomenon: The First Distinguishing Feature

From here on I will focus on the *Dragon Ball* phenomenon in Spain. *Dragon Ball* is one of the most successful manga and anime series ever created, and its cultural and commercial impact applies at a broad scale throughout Europe and worldwide. However, the strength of its social impact specific to Spain remains unrivalled. I believe that the specificity of the Spanish case rests on three important factors: atomized expansion, which started on only three regional TV channels and took several years to spread to the rest of Spain; its social success, by aiming not only at anime fans but also at a broader viewer spectrum thanks to an extremely domesticated product; and a clever sales strategy for

---

[14] *Ruy, Pequeño Cid* (*Ritoru Eru Shido no bōken*, 1980), *D'Artacán y los tres mosqueperros* (Wanwan Sanjushi, 1981) and *La vuelta al mundo de Willy Fog* (Anime Hachijūnichikan Sekai Isshū, 1983).

[15] *David el Gnomo* (*The World of David the Gnome*) – produced in 1985 in partnership with a Taiwanese studio – being the most remarkable example.

manga. Three truly specific features ultimately fold into a nearly unique model of intermedia growth.

FORTA was established in April of 1989. FORTA[16] is the Federation of Public Radio and TV channels from different regions in Spain.[17] In the late 80s many of these regional broadcasters were still underdeveloped and had little resources compared to the state-owned broadcaster TVE and other private channels that began operating in 1990, such as Antena 3 and Telecinco. Many of these regional broadcasters produced their own shows (newscasts, documentaries, etc.), but the majority of soap operas, sitcoms, animation series and children's programs were foreign and shared between TV channels affiliated with FORTA.

In 1989, a small licensing company named Marius Bistagne located in Catalonia sold a 26-episode pack of *Dragon Ball* to the Catalonian channel TV3[18]. Marius Bistagne was also a film production company, but most of their revenue came from third-party licenses for TV broadcasting. Marius Bistagne not only licensed other productions, but also produced its own content. Yet for children-oriented content, buying the rights from international producers was cheaper than producing. The company provided many of the animation series first broadcasted by TV3 when it began airing them in 1983. Mario Bistagne, the owner of

---

[16] FORTA (Federación de Organismos de Radio y Televisión Autonómicos [Federation of Radio and Television Autonomous Broadcasters), was founded on April 5th, 1989. It is an association of twelve radio and TV broadcasters from different autonomous regions in Spain.

[17] Many of these channels were already operating years before FORTA was established. The Basque ETB channel first broadcasted in 1982, the Catalonian channel TV3 launched in 1983 and the Galician TVG in 1984, among others.

[18] TV3 had previously broadcasted *Dr. Slump*, an anime adapting the namesake manga by Toriyama Akira. *Dr. Slump* was quite successful in Catalonia (Estrada 2016, p.31), but in Galicia and the Basque Country it was broadcasted by the FORTA partners (TVG and ETB), dubbed in Galician and Basque, only after the *Dragon Ball* success. Toriyama's *Dr. Slump* became more successful after *Dragon Ball* first aired, thanks to the obvious resemblance in character design (Estrada 2016) – which kids instantaneously identified as *Dragon Ball*'s style – and the cameo played in the *Dragon Ball* early chapters by *Dr. Slump* leading characters.

the licensing company, regularly attended the MIPTV (Marché International des Programmes de Télévision) in Cannes in order to negotiate new licensed products from worldwide producers and then sell their rights to Spanish broadcasters. Toei Animation was a major producer with dozens of series involved, and Bistagne became their regular customer: "Marius Bistagne licensed the Toei original series to TV3, while in charge of dubbing those very same series in its own studio, making twice the profit" (Puig 2012).

TV3 shared the first 26-episode pack of *Dragon Ball* with other FORTA partners, leading to *Dragon Ball*'s premier with several regional broadcasters in February of 1990[19]. Only a few weeks apart, the series achieved unprecedented success within the few regions where it was being broadcasted and became a true generational benchmark. The broadcasters assumed that those 26 episodes were a closed season. It was not until the last episode was aired that they realized that the series was incomplete, when they received thousands of phone complaints from fans of all ages. The documentary film *Songokumanía*[20] by Oriol Estrada explores the phenomenon of *Dragon Ball* by collecting interviews with some of the leading agents involved back in the early 90s. The former broadcasting manager at TV3, Oleguer Sarsanedas, states:

---

[19] There are no official records of the air date of *Dragon Ball* in Spain. However, according to TV broadcasting pages from some newspapers in 1989 and 1990, *Dragon Ball* was first broadcasted in Galicia (TVG) on Feb. 8, 1990, entitled "As Bolas Máxicas" [The Magic Balls] and dubbed in Galician language; in the Basque Country (ETB) on Feb. 21, 1990, entitled "Dragoi Bola" [*Dragon Ball*] in Basque language; and in Catalonia (TV3) on Feb. 15, 1990, known as "Bola de Drac" [*Dragon Ball*] and dubbed in Catalan language.

[20] *Songokumanía* (2012) is a documentary film by Oriol Estrada on the *Dragon Ball* phenomenon in Spain. It includes interviews with Oleguer Sarsanedas (TV3 Broadcasting Manager in the 90s), Pere Olivé (Artistic Director at Planeta de Agostini Comics at the time), Cels Piñol (a fanzine artist), Àlex Samaranch and Ana María Meca (Estudio Fénix), Antonio Martín (CEO Planeta de Agostini Comics from 1982 to 2001), Joan Navarro (Glenat Spain and EDT CEO), among others.

> Phone-calls from nine, ten, eleven and twelve years old kids completely outraged, complaining about the finale. «You cannot stop the show now because we are in the middle of a fight and it couldn't have ended yet! It is impossible that the series ended like this!» They were right, of course. We immediately checked what had happened and found out that the first season of Dragon Ball (back then was the only season available) had 153 episodes. So we sought no matter how – by land, sea and air – the remaining episodes of the series.[21]

However, because Marius Bistagne was no longer licensing these products, TV3 purchased the remaining chapters of the series—chapters 27 to 153—from the French AB Group media conglomerate, the rights-holder of *Dragon Ball*'s anime for all of Europe, and immediately broadcasted from July of 1990. This rushed and hasty negotiation is one of the reasons behind some of the dubbing changes following chapter 26. Initially, Spanish broadcasters worked with the French footage—already cut, adapted and dubbed in French; but from chapter 105 the Japanese raw footage was accessible, so *Dragon Ball* could be translated into the different regional languages directly, improving the overall quality[22].

As this chronological account shows, it may seem that *Dragon Ball* was an immediate success as with any other mainstream anime series broadcasted in Spain in the late 80s and early 90s, without larger social impact. However, this was not the case. *Dragon Ball* was not an immediate phenomenon. The 'when,' 'where' and 'how' differ from any other broadly popular anime/manga series in Spain or any other major European market, due to the specificity of the Spanish «Autonomous Communities'» cultural, political and administrative division. Non-

---

[21] Oleguer Sarsanedas, Broadcasting Manager TV3 (1990), in: Oriol Estrada. *Songokumania. El big-bang del manga* (2012). Documentary video.

[22] The inconsistency of the Castilian Spanish dubbing continued throughout the entire series when Antena 3 finally televised it in 1997 for a global Spanish audience.

Spanish scholars should bear in mind that there are 17 Autonomous Communities currently in Spain – as defined in the Spanish constitution of 1978; an autonomous community is a first-level political and administrative region, providing limited autonomy to the nationalities and regions that comprise the Spanish nation[23]. Castilian Spanish is the official language of the entire country, but six regions have co-official languages as well: Catalan/Valencian in Catalonia, the Balearic Islands and the Valencian Community; Basque in the Basque Country; and Galician in Galicia.

Toei's *Dragon Ball* appeared first premiered in Spain in regional televisions—Galicia, Catalonia and Basque Country—with only a few days in between, dubbed not in Castilian Spanish but in the respective co-official languages, growing into an independent social phenomenon within these regions before it spread nationwide years later in 1992, when other channels from Madrid and Andalusia began broadcasting the series. A few years later it was finally aired nationwide on a privately owned television network.[24]

This is the first distinguishing feature of the *Dragon Ball* phenomenon in Spain and other European countries: rather than developing on a larger, national scale, *Dragon Ball* began with atomized broadcasting in Spain[25],

---

[23] The provided definition of «Autonomous Communities» in the text as well as the following explanation is the official definition according to the current legal framework (and it does not comprise the opinion of the author or reflect the national feelings of some regions). According to the same official definition, within the current Spanish constitutional frame, each region has a degree of self-government with their own regional parliaments and political institutions, which legislate at some extent on an executive and administrative level according to the national law. However, since sovereignty resides in the nation as a whole and not in the autonomous communities, Spain is not a federation but a unitary state with some decentralized components.

[24] Madrid (Telemadrid) and Andalusia (Canal Sur) in 1992; and in Spain (Antena 3) in 1997.

[25] While the largest European countries (by volume of inhabitants and importance of television market) have few local/regional TV channels – or have TV channels of a lesser impact – the major role played by regional broadcasters in the development of the Spanish TV industry sets a quantitative difference that is hard to ignore.

thereby comprising networks of fans within a non-interdependent, region-based structure.

The *Dragon Ball* Phenomenon: Domestication

The second distinguishing feature is linguistic, regional and cultural specificity. Using local tropes and deeply codified expressions, *Dragon Ball* was accessible and appealed to a large variety of social groups. Furthermore, since it was only broadcasted in these regions, it contributed to the awareness and acquisition of the regional languages within those territories and in neighbouring regions[26] that had access to the regional television signal due to their proximity.

Like many others mainstream series, *Dragon Ball* was in the media spotlight, and it was highly praised by language professors and regional academics for its contribution to the use and promotion of Galician, Catalan and Basque languages, especially among children and young adults. On the other hand, it received harsh criticism from some politicians, parental associations and conservative groups[27]. Many complaints were directed at the violence depicted and the use of subtle erotic jokes (despite their obvious comical nature). In spite of these complaints, regional broadcasters refused to drop Toriyama's anime based on two compelling reasons: the overwhelming support from general audiences and the undeniable commercial boost behind *Dragon*

---

[26] In some bordering regions, such as the Valencian Community and Aragon, close to Catalonia; or Asturias or the provinces of Leon and Zamora, close to the Galician border.

[27] I will not further engage with the violence/sex polemic regarding Dragon Ball as it is not exclusive by any means to this series. On the contrary, it is a shared debate with many other anime series broadcasted in Spain in public networks. *Mazinger Z* was harshly criticised in the 70s due to the violence depicted, and *Crayon Shin Chan* suffered the same criticism in the late 90s due to the comic outbursts of the characters. The same criticism arose towards many other anime series broadcasted in the early 90s: *Saint Seiya, Dash' Kappei, City Hunter, Ranma 1/2*, etc.

Ball. In this regard, Enrique de Arce, the broadcasting manager of TVG (Galician regional television), stated in an interview in 1993 with the Spanish newspaper El País[28], "*Dragon Ball* has come repeatedly to the first rank of audience, reaching a 40% share. This data disqualifies any objection." Furthermore, Arce repeatedly suggested that *Dragon Ball* did not glorify or encourage violence.

The *Dragon Ball* Phenomenon:
A Groundbreaking Publishing Strategy

After dozens of faxes and phone calls followed by hard negotiations with Shueisha, the Japanese publisher and rights-holder, the publishing company Planeta de Agostini began selling copies of the *Dragon Ball* manga in Spain[29] in 1992,[30] both in Castilian and Catalan languages (separate editions). Aware of the huge market potential of the *Dragon Ball* manga, they had first contacted the French magazine *Dorothée*, then the AB Group in France and finally Shueisha via the Tuttle-Mori Agency, a Japanese international literary and media agency specializing in the licensing of intellectual property rights. With this, Planeta de Agostini became a true pioneer of negotiations between Spanish and Japanese publishers.

---

[28] Enrique de Arce, Broadcasting Manager of TVG in El País, (23/08/1993); in: Puig (2012d).

[29] First published in Spain by Planeta de Agostini in 1992, both in Spanish and Catalan. It was republished in different formats until 2001. Between 2006 and 2007, Planeta de Agostini published the Dragon Ball - Ultimate Edition (34 volumes, 21.5 x 15 cm, 232 pages each).

[30] In 2012, during the celebration of the XVIII Salón del manga de Barcelona (Barcelona Manga Fair), the organization Ficomic succeeded in achieving the Guinness world record for *Dragon Ball* cosplay, gathering 307 people dressed as their favourite characters from Toriyama's original series. This record was organized as a tribute for 20th anniversary of the *Dragon Ball* manga in Spain, as it was first published by Planeta de Agostini in 1992.

"The edition was expensive. Unlike the usual American comics, they had to flip pages to match the western reading direction from left to right, adapt onomatopoeia, translate from Japanese, pay royalties and so" (Puig 2012c). In spite of these difficulties, the Spanish publisher actually managed to sign a very advantageous deal: Planeta de Agostini simultaneously issued the initial chapters of the manga (labelled as the 'white series'[31] due to the colour of the cover) and the chapters corresponding to the arc and events taking part in the *Dragon Ball Z* anime series (starting from volume 28 in Japan and labelled as the 'red series'[32]). This was a clever commercial strategy, allowing fans not only to revisit the stories they already knew and loved, but also to keep pace with new chapters that were aired weekly on TV. This double manga distribution is the third distinguishing feature of the *Dragon Ball* phenomenon in Spain.

Planeta de Agostini launched an initial print-run of 100,000 copies in Catalan and 50,000 copies[33] in Castilian Spanish (Puig 2012c). The difference in print-runs is significant, as the market in Catalan was twice the size of the overall Spanish readership, which supports my previous statements regarding the role language played in the domestication of this product. Puig calls attention to this fact and highlights TV3's leading role, being "deeply integrated within the Catalonian society in comparison to other regional broadcasters." In my opinion, this attribution is partially misleading. It is undeniable that the leading

---

[31] "Serie Blanca" in Spanish; lit. 'white series.'

[32] "Serie Roja" in Spanish; lit. 'red series.'

[33] *Dragon Ball*'s print-run figures are also quite meaningful for understanding the importance of this series within the manga industry in Spain. *Dragon Ball* was selling an average of 60,000 copies while other major titles sold around 15,000 copies (Roig 2000). However, most manga being published in Spain at that time hardly sold more than 3,000 or 4,000 copies annually.

regional catalyst of the *Dragon Ball* phenomenon in Spain is the Catalonian apparatus. The body of viewers—the Catalonian population being greater in number than both Basque Country and Galicia combined—together with the fact that most comic publishers are located in Catalonia, the proximity to the French comic market (the largest in Europe), and the huge success and large-scale advertising of *Dragon Ball* by TV3 are some of the reasons behind the tremendous impact of Toriyama's anime and manga in this region. However, as I have addressed in this article, one of the most important reasons behind the great success of *Dragon Ball* in Spain lies within the regionalisation and extensive domestication of the product, especially in relation to the use of regional co-official languages in dubbing. While Catalonian readers enjoyed *Dragon Ball* edited in Catalan language, neither Basque nor Galician children had access to Basque nor Galician language editions. The fact that none of these readers identified with the Castilian Spanish translation (i.e: expressions, character names and locations) was enough to deter them from reading the printed series. By the time the *Dragon Ball* manga was published in 1992, only Catalonian, Basque and Galician readers were deeply familiarized and engaged with the series, given that in Madrid and Andalusia the series had just been aired. Therefore, I believe that another relevant factor for the differences in print-run between the Catalan and Castilian Spanish editions lies within this simple truth: while Catalonian readers enjoyed *Dragon Ball* edited in Catalan language, neither Basque nor Galician children had access to Basque nor Galician language editions.

The Spontaneous Synergic Model

The second distinguishing feature is linguistic, regional and cultural specificity. When Marco Pellitteri addresses the five levels of intermedia growth in *The Dragon and the Dazzle* (2010), he defines the spontaneous synergic model as follows:

> The spontaneous synergic model [...] originates from a technology that is powerful and popular, the television series. At first, it is little supported by merchandise industries and editorial channels, especially due to the inability of the right-holders to see the commercial potential of the product; moreover, this merchandise turns out to be a mishmash of cheap material, which nevertheless sells out because of the innovative force of the base product.

Pellitteri identifies this model in reference to *UFO Robot Grendizer*, broadcasted in Italy between 1978 and 1980, which achieved unparalleled success. Pellitteri adds: "the explosion of goods has been free and disorganized: based on a sudden, or rather unexpected, popularity of heroes and narratives" (2010). Like *UFO Robot Grendizer* in Italy, *Dragon Ball* replicated a similar market phenomenon and model of intermedia growth in Spain.

However, what Marco Pellitteri terms 'spontaneous synergic model' is what I have come to identify as a 'complex model' as it is usually defined: a system composed of interrelated parts that exhibit properties and behaviors as a group larger than the simple sum of the individual parts—a model that depicts new properties that cannot be explained by single elements. With this stance, I am adopting an idea of complexity closer to mathematical or media technologies discourse rather than a philosophical or purely epistemological approach. Complexity in regards to products, techniques, and strategies is interconnected, interdependent and diverse. Complexity as a model is adaptable and

changes in a fluid manner, is flexible, and ultimately evolves and interacts with its environment. The "spontaneous synergic model" is far from a reductionist model, but the very idea of *synergic* refers to a holistic behavior, while the nuances of the word 'spontaneous' conveys complex, axiomatic thinking. Therefore, the ultimate distinguishing feature of the *Dragon Ball* phenomenon in Spain is its nearly unique model of intermedia growth: a complex model that covers and even exceeds the sum of all the previous three features but cannot be understood without them. Examining *Dragon Ball* in Spain as a complex model, it is clear that no other anime series has ever triggered such a cultural phenomenon, in terms of general success, social dissemination and broadcast mechanics[34]. Because of *Dragon Ball*, anime as a cultural platform in Spain influenced many people by expanding fandom boundaries to a broader social spectrum, turning anime and manga into mainstream mediums and setting the foundations of the Spanish manga/anime industry.

Milestones such as Ōtomo Katsuhiro's *AKIRA* (both the manga and the film) legitimized manga and anime as mediums among critics and hardcore comic readers, but it was *Dragon Ball* that enabled the shift from niche to mainstream. Catalonian essayist Sebastiá Roig refers to *Dragon Ball* as "the dawn of a new era" (Roig 2000, p. 219), as it

---

[34] Especially when compared to other anime series bring broadcasted in Spain in the early 90s, e.g. *Saint Seiya. Saint Seiya* was among the most successful anime series being broadcasted at the time. It first aired in 1991 on TVE, but it was prematurely cancelled and re-broadcasted again on Tele 5 in 1993, once the anime boom in Spain was already in motion. However, *Saint Seiya* manga was first published in Spain in 1993 by Planeta DeAgostini – the same publisher behind *Dragon Ball* – but it was a huge sales failure and therefore was cancelled prior to its conclusion. The whole series were published almost 15 years later by Glenat/EDT only after the *kanzenban* Japanese especial edition was published in Japan between 2005-2006. On top of that, while we could argue that *Saint Seiya* was indeed a very famous and important anime in Spain. The intermedia growth model has nothing to do with *Dragon Ball*: the series aired followed by Panini's sticker albums and Bandai's vintage figurines. It was a whole different commercial strategy, far from the spontaneous success depicted by Dragon Ball.

permanently changed how people thought about manga and anime. The
arrival of Toriyama's bestseller reinforced the publishing industry and
sparked the marketing of many new Japanese works. The following
years were defined by the swift dissemination of manga and the
progressive growth of new publishing groups. "*Dragon Ball and Ōtomo
opened the gates for the great Japanese landing. Two years later…it
became Pearl Harbor*" (Roig 2000, p. 224).

The *Dragon Ball* Phenomenon: Merchandising and Photocopies

We have previously addressed Pellitteri's definition of 'spontaneous
synergic model' in regards to the *Goldorak* phenomenon in Italy.
Pellitteri's 'spontaneous synergic model' highlights the lack of specific
merchandising as a defining feature. When applied to the of the *Dragon
Ball* phenomenon in Spain it reveals another peculiar and distinguishing
aspect of Toriyama's *manganime* when compared to other *anime* series:
the flood of alternative, non-official merchandise such as figurines, toys
and other collectibles included in chips and biscuits packaging, posters in
the inner pages of magazines, candy with stickers included in the
packaging, and so on. As the influential comic critic and essayist Alfons
Moline states in his seminal book *El Gran Libro de los Manga* (2002, p. 70),

> at the beginning, the lack of official merchandising prompted fans to create
> their own. A traffic of photocopies from the original Japanese Dragon Ball
> manga circulated among kids and teenagers, but also adults. The "Dragon Ball
> mania" will be remembered as the perfect example of how a mass popular
> myth can rise from public favor, without any advertising campaigns.

There was no official merchandise, comic books or posters for *Dragon
Ball* in Spain when it premiered in 1990. Within the following weeks and
months, TV journals and weekly magazines sold thousands of copies

because of the inclusion of colour pictures and centrefolds of *Dragon Ball*, overwhelming the market while stunned Spanish comic publishers attempted to understand the phenomenon all of them had failed to anticipate (Roig 2000).

> Back then we were publishing a magazine called «Crazy Comics» and we edited a volume focused on Japanese comics. When opened, there was this picture [of Son Gokū, Dragon Ball's main hero]. A few days after we shipped this magazine, moms with kids began to come to our office, ringing the bell and asking if we could sell them this volume. Always this one. When we finally asked why this one, they told us it was because of that single picture. All because of that single picture![35]

Navarro's anecdote reveals much about the real dimension of the photocopies' merchandising in the months following *Dragon Ball*'s debut in Catalonia, Galicia and Basque Country. In the early 90s, fans were selling black and white photocopies of *Dragon Ball* illustrations and even pictures they drew themselves. They exchanged or sold them as collectibles in schools, copy shops, newsstands or public markets, gathering thousands of people on the weekends who were drawn by these unofficial goods. Most of these copies were of poor quality as a result of being photocopied from a previous photocopy and so on.

The original sources of those photocopies were quite diverse. A large amount of illustrations were photocopies of single pages from the original manga being published in Japan (Bernabé 2009). Due to proximity, the large French market was an entry point for many of those images. *Club Dorothée* magazine included several centrefolds and prints. This magazine was published by the media conglomerate AB Group, producer of the children's program *Club Dorothée* and rights-holder of

---

[35] Joan Navarro, CEO EDT Publishing House, in: Oriol Estrada. *Songokumania. El big-bang del manga* (2012). Documentary video.

Dragon Ball in France (Puig 2012). One year after *Dragon Ball* first aired, Panini[36] launched the first collection of *Dragon Ball* trading cards. The first print-run consisted of 100,000 albums and 14 million trading cards and was sold out in less than a month. A few months later more than 400,000 albums and nearly 70 million trading cards had been sold.[37]

Besides exceptional sales figures, the most noticeable achievement by *Dragon Ball* was the spectacular public response. *Dragon Ball* was not a "flash in the pan" or simply another anime for only anime fans. The animated series was appealing not just to children and teenagers but also university students (Estrada 2016, p. 95), housewives, middle-aged men and women, and senior citizens[38]. The overall impact of *Dragon Ball* exceeded by far the fandom realm, reverberating over a broader social spectrum. In 1992 Alfons Moliné foresaw the future possibilities of *Dragon Ball* within manga and anime reception in Spain from both a scholarly and casual reader perspective: "A few decades from now, when future sociologists analyze how Spanish society was back in the nineties, there is no doubt they will look at this phenomenon: Songoku-mania" (1992).

Conclusions

Up to this point I have discussed the defining particularities of the *Dragon Ball* phenomenon in Spain. It is not my intent to deny the special

---

[36] Panini S.p.A. is an international publishing house focused mostly on comics, books, magazines and trading cards. It was founded in Modena (Italy) in 1961 and named after the Panini brothers. The Spanish branch, Panini España S.A. began its activity in the mid-70s by selling trading cards.

[37] The Spanish population in 1991 was less than 39 million. Source: INE (Instituto Nacional de Estadística). URl: http://www.ine.es/censo2001/historia.htm.

[38] As previously highlighted, according to Enrique de Arce (Broadcasting Manager of TVG, 1993) Dragon Ball reached a 40% share in its timeslot in Galicia, with similar view-ship in other regions. This figure clearly suggests that the target audience was not limited to children.

nature of *Dragon Ball* as a case study since it is largely considered one of the most (if not *the* most) globally successful manga and anime series to date. This notwithstanding, I would like to place special emphasis on how different this success has manifested within the Spanish society when compared to other national markets. Regarding this, we should acknowledge the following specific conditions in addition to the features I have mentioned previously: it was an unanticipated success, preceded by neither advertising campaigns nor prior fame when it premiered; it was spread by word-of-mouth, without a pre-existing network. As opposed to *Dragon Ball*'s growth pattern worldwide, it emerged in limited regions in Spain, dubbed in co-official languages and aired on different dates, sometimes with years in between. It successfully targeted not only anime fans and hardcore viewers – as we may understand them today – but also aimed at the general public. It was a remarkable success among people of all ages and socio-economic backgrounds despite possible lack of any previous interest in anime or manga (Estrada 2016), and initially both publishers and merchandising companies failed to anticipate such a significant social impact.

We have previously addressed *Dragon Ball* as the cornerstone of the 'Dragon phase' in Spain, as compared to the *Grendizer* case in Italy. As for the 'Dazzle phase', I highlighted the importance of *Crayon Shin-Chan* within the regional broadcasters in the early years of the 21st Century. *Crayon Shin-Chan* aired in April 2000 – dubbed in Catalan – on the Catalonian channel Canal Super3, largely aimed at children and younger audiences. Its rapid success was immediately followed by other regional broadcasters – partners within the FORTA association –, with just a few months in between in a similar fashion as what had happened ten years

before with *Dragon Ball*. Dubbed in the official languages in Galicia, the Valencian Community and Basque Country, it took almost a whole year before it was broadcasted in Castilian Spanish in the Andalusian regional TV network (Canal Sur). In 2005, the private national network Antena 3 bought the broadcasting rights for all of Spain. The in-depth domestication of *Crayon Shin-Chan* made it appealing for a larger audience, amused by this slice-of-life *anime*, successfully combining references to Japanese everyday culture and the deeply codified expressions from their closest cultural environment. *Crayon Shin-Chan* partially mimicked *Dragon Ball*'s model of intermedia growth achieving a huge success.

However, nowadays the anime scenario in Spain has changed, from TV broadcasting to Blu-ray retail and *simulcast*. When compared to the current market consumption and broadcast mechanics, we can immediately highlight differences with the *Dragon Ball* scene in the 90s, both in terms of 'viewer' and 'channel'. The main distinction between the two scenarios is the divergence between the mainstream public (understood as non-regular anime viewers) and the hardcore users (understood as fans accustomed to watching anime). Nowadays, most fans and hardcore consumers are familiar with the formal language and conventions typical of anime and manga. Furthermore, recent *fansub* and *scanlator* trends show that we are moving closer and closer to a foreignisation of both mediums, as viewers increasingly demand products true to the original language, including Japanese honorifics, everyday expressions and cultural references that would be incomprehensible to an uninitiated audience. Mainstream viewers' attitude toward these series is generally passive, meaning that these

users access anime and manga through traditional TV networks. In contrast, hardcore users are proactive and seek a broader variety of works via multiple sources. On top of that, disruptive Internet technologies provide dedicated viewers with a myriad of alternative channels. Therefore, the possibility of replicating something similar to the *Dragon Ball* phenomenon in the present Spanish manga and anime scene should be deemed as a complex (if not impossible) task.

The thorough domestication of *Dragon Ball* enabled its success among mainstream viewers and anime fans alike, by adapting language, expressions and contents such as jokes and world-setting references. Nowadays, if TV networks were to broadcast anime for a primary audience of anime fans, they would most likely avoid using domestication strategies. Yet by doing so they risk alienating mainstream viewers who are unaware of relevant codes and conventions. *Dragon Ball* played an instrumental role in the birth of the anime and manga market in Spain, but ultimately the market has changed into a different landscape with diversified needs.

REFERENCES

Bernabé, M. (2009), Las Fotocopias de *Dragon Ball. Mangaland* [Online], Available from: http://www.mangaland.es/2009/11/las-fotocopias-de-*dragon-ball*/ [Accessed 15 August 2013].

Blanco, T. (1992), Dragón Z. Kamikaces Catódicos Arrasan Galicia. *RTVG*, Vol. 29, [s.l.], 4-11.

Estrada, O. (2012), *Songokumanía. El Big Bang del Manga.* (Documentary video [online] 50' 48'').

— (2016), *Songokumanía. El Big Bang del Manga.* Catalonia: Edicions Xandri.

Kelts, R. (2006), *Japanamerica: How Japanese Pop Culture has Invaded The U.S.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Moliné, A. (2002), *El Gran Libro de los Manga*. Barcelona: Glénat.

— (1992), Más sobre *Dragon Ball*. In: Toriyama, A., *Dragon Ball* (serie blanca). Madrid: Planeta DeAgostini.

Montero, L. (2012), Una Conquista Inversa: La Importancia del Anime en el Mercado del Manga Español. In: Fernando Cid Lucas (coord.), *Puertas a la Lectura*, Vol. 24. Cáceres: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Extremadura, 44-57.

Pellitteri, M. (2010), *The Dragon and the Dazzle: Models, Strategies and Identities of Japanese Imagination*. Latina: Tunué Editori dell'imaginario.

— (2016), "'In ten years kids will know nothing about anime and Japan': Framing the progressive vanishing of Japanese animation from the European contexts as a big issue for the cultural and economic goals of *Cool Japan". Communicating with Cool Japan: New international perspectives on Japanese popular culture.* Conference of the Ica (International Communication Association). Waseda University, Tōkyō. 8 June.

Puig, G. (2012), Historia del manga y el anime 1. El Fenómeno *Dragon Ball* (Parte I). *Misión Tokyo*. [s.l.]: Misión Tokyo. [Online], Available from:
http://misiontokyo.com/articulos/historia-manganime/historia-del-manga-y-el-anime-1

— (2012b), Historia del manga y el anime 2. El Fenómeno *Dragon Ball* (Parte II). *Misión Toky*o. [s.l.]: Misión Tokyo. [Online], Available from:
http://misiontokyo.com/articulos/historia-manganime/historia-del-manga-y-el-anime-2

— (2012c), Historia del manga y el anime 3. El Fenómeno *Dragon Ball* (Parte III). *Misión Toky*o. [s.l.]: Misión Tokyo. [Online], Available from:
http://misiontokyo.com/articulos/historia-manganime/historia-del-manga-y-el-anime-3

— (2012d), Historia del manga y el anime 4. El Fenómeno *Dragon Ball* (Parte IV). *Misión Toky*o. [s.l.]: Misión Tokyo. [Online], Available from:
http://misiontokyo.com/articulos/historia-manganime/historia-del-manga-y-el-anime-4

— (2012e), Historia del manga y el anime 5. El Fenómeno *Dragon Ball* (Parte V). *Misión Tokyo*. [s.l.]: Misión Tokyo. [Online], Available from: http://misiontokyo.com/articulos/historia-manganime/historia-del-manga-y-el-anime-5

— (2014), Cómo llegó el manga a Occidente. In: Guiral, A., (Ed.), *Del Tebeo al manga: Una Historia de los Cómics* (Vol. 11). Girona: Evolution Comics (Panini S.P.A), 48-50.

Roig, S. (2000), *Les Generacions del Còmic: De la Família Ulises als Manga*. Barcelona: Flor de Vent.

Santiago, J. A. (2010), *Manga. Del Cuadro Flotante a la Viñeta Japonesa*. Barcelona: Comanegra.

— (2014), Iberomanga: From Mainstream to Gafotaku and Gendered Niches. In: Berndt, J., (Ed.), *Manga outside of Japan (Global Manga Studies Vol. 4).* Kyōto: Kyōto Seika University International Manga Research Center, 265-304.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

José Andrés SANTIAGO IGLESIAS *is a visual artist and postdoctoral researcher at the Fine Arts Faculty (Universidade de Vigo), focused on manga studies in Spain, and currently working as invited researcher at Kyōto Seika University. Member of the "dx5 - digital & graphic_art_research" group – specialized in expanded field contemporary graphic art – and founding member of the ACDComic (Spanish Association of Critics and Researches of Comics) since its inception in 2012*.

Japanese Pop Culture, Identification, and Socialisation: The case of an Italian Web-Community

Fabio Domenico PALUMBO & Domenica Gisella CALABRÒ | University of Messina, Italy; University of Amsterdam, Netherlands

Abstract

Japanese pop culture has influenced Italy over the last thirty years. In the '70s anime started to fill the airtime of emerging private TV channels, marking the childhood of those Italians who grew up in those years and until the early '90s, when manga finally appeared in the Italian market. Globalisation and the Internet have made other aspects of Japanese pop culture available to Italians and the rest of the world alike. It has resulted in a very active Italian fandom spanning different generations, and in a strong fascination with Japan. This paper aims to provide insights into the way Italian fans perceive Japanese pop culture and Japan; on the kind of bonds with Japan they develop, and how they socialize. It does so by considering the biggest Italian web-community, AnimeClick.it, *as a microcosm of the Italian fandom's interactions and emotions. Privileging a qualitative method, it focuses on the people who give life to the website. Their images of Japanese pop culture reveal the recognition of a specific cultural odour perceived as pleasant, which translates into an interest in Japan. Those fans associate Japan with images of fantasy and charming mystery that nevertheless co-exist with perceptions of extreme difference, echoing the notion of Japanese uniqueness, so that Orientalist processes are re-enacted. There are intergenerational differences in the way fans have developed an emotional bond, and look at Japanese pop culture. However, these are mediated and transcended through their socialisation and collaboration in the web-community, opening up new perspectives for the future evolution of Japanese pop culture's influence in Italy.*

Monet's house, a mansion hidden in the small village of Giverny in Normandy, is famous for housing a wide collection of Japanese prints[i]. Going from room to room during our visit in 2013, we marvelled at the presence of "Japan" in what used to be the intimate spaces of the painter. They powerfully recalled the moment when Europe started to learn about Japanese aesthetics and sensibility through the art of *ukiyo-e*, challenging

the long history of diffidence developed during the Edo period; this art particularly influenced Impressionism, generating the phenomenon known as *japonisme*[ii]. In that moment, we joked over Monet's house looking like the precursor to those private houses in some parts of Europe, like France and Italy, whose bookshelves display a collection of *manga* and *anime*, and over *japonisme* having been "revived" by phenomena like fanfiction (stories inspired by *manga/anime* characters written by fans) and cosplay (the practice of dressing up like a *manga/anime* character). Our somewhat irreverent comment was influenced by our own experiences as Italians growing up in the '70s-'80s – when *anime* were a common feature of our country's television broadcasting – and "converted" into *manga* readers during the '90s, when the Japanese comics appeared in our local market (see Pellitteri 1999, 2008, 2015).

Paralleling *manga* with *ukiyo-e*, we did not mean to identify the former as the evolution of earlier Japanese arts. As Jacqueline Berndt (2008, 305-306) argued, this perception developed when Japanese scholars tried to tie *manga* to historical Japanese traditions and downplay the influence of aesthetics and narratives coming from outside. This process can be framed within the spirit of *nihonjinron* — post-World War II theories about the notion of "Japaneseness" conceived in opposition to other countries, especially Western ones, upon which some Japanese scholars have constructed the idea of Japanese "uniqueness" (Nakane 1970; Doi 1973). These claims have been largely criticized[iii]. In this regard, it is meaningful that, at the time of our visit to Giverny, the Museum of Impressionism, situated on the opposite side of the road from Monet's house, was hosting an exhibition on Hiramatsu Reiji, whose paintings, depicting water lilies as a reinterpretation of Monet's *Les Nymphéas*, reminded us of the mutual

aesthetic influence (and desire) between Japan and Europe [iv]. In fact, concerning *manga* and its derivations, Bouissou pointed out how Tezuka, for instance, was influenced by Disney, which he "loved and dreamt to emulate" (2000, 4; see also Pellitteri 2008, 89).

By comparing *ukiyo-e* and *manga*, rather than endorsing an artistic continuity between them, we were referring to the enduring force of the exotic perception of Japan in Europe, which is partly connected to that idea of Japanese uniqueness; and to Japan's persistent ability to introduce new ideas and influence the European peripheral/urban culture in terms of cultural appropriation and consumption (see Vanzella 2005, 45), a process implying the insurgence of some kind of "*neo-japonisme*" in Europe. Those reflections were part of our own approach to Japan. For a long time, we had considered ourselves "detached" and "intellectually critical" enthusiasts of this country's pop culture, and of the country itself. Throughout the years, we had opened up to *manga* and *anime* destined to a more mature public; we had started to explore past and contemporary Japanese literature and cinema, their food and their customs, and tried to get a taste of their pop music and serialized dramas; we had visited Japan, and developed Japanese friendships. That was just a small facet of our lives, a shared interest — something that we enjoyed discussing in cultural anthropological, historical and philosophical terms, due to our own involvement in those disciplines.

Then, nearly two years before our visit to Giverny, one of us had become actively involved in the world of fandom, joining *AnimeClick.it*, the largest Italian online platform of Japanese pop culture, as an editor and news writer[v]. Without him realizing it, the collaboration started to

become for him more and more intense, as well as socially significant. During our own meeting in France in September 2013, one of the topics of conversation was actually the realisation of his cosplay for the annual Lucca Comics & Games convention (hereinafter referred to as "Lucca Comics"), which is usually held between the last week of October and the first week of November, where *AnimeClick.it* hosted a stand. Doing cosplay was something conceived as a mixture of sociocultural experiment, fun with the rest of the staff, and familiarisation with an increasingly visible aspect of Japanese pop culture fandom. At that point, we wondered how detached we both were from Japanese pop culture.

That trip to Giverny called for some self-reflexivity, and generated some questions[vi]. What does the mediation of Japanese culture enacted by *AnimeClick.it* say about the ways Italians perceive Japanese pop culture products and Japan in the era of globalisation? In a process where Japanese pop culture products become part of Italian practices and thus a tool to read Italian contemporary society (Pellitteri 1999, 2008), which is the meaning of the different Italian generations' usage, mediation and negotiation of Japanese culture within the largest and fast-growing local platform? What do these practices mean to them? This article stems from that momentum, and it builds upon the analysis of the practices and opinions of some of the people involved in *AnimeClick.it*, and of the interactions in-between staff and between staff and users within the *AnimeClick.it* website as well as at the Lucca Comics convention, where *AnimeClick.it* participates, playing an active role in the dissemination of Japanese pop culture, and the mediation of images between Japan and Italy. We interviewed fifteen people — twelve staff members, including the founder, and three active users — aged between 18 and 44; and

observed the 2013 and 2014 Lucca Comics conventions. Focusing on *AnimeClick.it*, this article explores two parallel but interplaying themes: the perception of Japanese products and "Japan" by Italian fans; and the appropriation of Japanese cultural products as a way for the Italian fans to "talk" about themselves.

Japanese Pop Culture and the European market: the Italian experience

In the late '70s, Japanese animated productions started to fill the airtime of emerging local and national private TV networks in Italy. As illustrated by Pellitteri (2008, 2015), those networks needed cheap products: Japanese animation could offer plenty of them. The initial absence of TV content regulation favoured the acquisition of different genres broadcasted in their original version (Pellitteri 2008, 312-315). The first wave included many *mecha anime* (robot *anime*), starting with *UFO Robot Grendizer*, broadcasted on Italian public television from 1978 to 1980 as *Atlas UFO Robot* (the Italian audience shortly identified this *anime* as "Goldrake", from the name of its main robot character). Other series drew on European and North American children's literature, mostly belonging to the Nippon Animation's *Meisaku* project, like *Akage no Anne*, *Kazoku Robinson Hyōryūki* or *Shōkōjo Sēra* (respectively based on *Anne of Green Gables* by Lucy Maud Montgomery, *Der Schweizerische Robinson* by Johann David Wyss and *A Little Princess* by Frances Hodgson Burnett); animated versions of *shōjo manga*, like *Versailles no Bara*, widely known in Italy as *Lady Oscar*, or *Kyandi Kyandi* (*Candy Candy*). During the '80s, Italians also became accustomed to the *majokko* ("magical girls") genre (*Mahō no Tenshi Creamy Mami*, *Mahō no Star Magical Emi*) and the *spokon* (sports *anime*) genre, such as *Attack no. 1*

and *Captain Tsubasa* (respectively known by the Italian general public as *Mimì e la nazionale di pallavolo* and *Holly & Benji*). Broadcasting of Japanese animation in Italy started to stabilize and then diminish in the '90s. In a time where television acted like a "nanny", generations of Italian children were massively exposed to, and influenced by Japanese animation: they became the "Goldrake-generation" (Pellitteri 1999; Teti 2011). In contrast, many adults criticized the content of its products and opposed their presence on the TV programming, blaming them for instilling violence and a distorted understanding of reality in Italian children, and their criticisms partly contributed to decreasing the number of *anime* broadcasted on national TV channels in Italy (Pellitteri 1999; Vanzella 2005).

Pellitteri (2008, 5-7) framed the incorporation of *anime* and *manga,* and later other Japanese pop culture products*,* into the Italian taste and cultural practices within the increasing presence of the Japanese cultural industry in the European market. Having identified two phases, he called the period going from 1975 to 1995 the "phase of the Dragon". *UFO Robot Grendizer*, the first *anime* to achieve a large popularity on European television in 1978 (6), epitomized this phase, where Europeans "discovered" Japanese products other than electronics and motorbikes. The turning point between the two phases is marked by the appearance of the videogame and *anime Pokémon*, in 1996-1997 (the *anime* was broadcasted in Italy for the first time in 2000). Pellitteri defines the following period as the phase of the "Dazzle", which is ongoing. During this time, *anime* and *manga* have appeared in the local market; merchandising featuring the most popular characters and series has come to support those products; videogames, that had started to become

popular in the late '80s, have grown stronger [vii] ; and through the development of Internet and globalisation, Italians, other Europeans and other non-Japanese audiences have started to be exposed to further expressions of Japanese pop culture (J-Pop, dramas, cinema, live actions, TV shows) and contemporary Japanese culture as a whole[viii]. Appealed by the competitive prices, the narrative quality, and the distinct aesthetics of the Japanese products[ix], European markets and audiences have played a pivotal role in the international diffusion of contemporary Japanese cultural forms.

Many of the Italians who grew up during the phase of the Dragon have developed an emotional attachment to Japanese *anime* as markers of their childhood and early teen-hood, and as a generational experience, whose nostalgia has been instrumental in the second phase of the Japanese cultural conquest of European markets (Pellitteri 1999). Some of these nostalgic Italian grown-ups started the companies specialized in Japanese video products like Yamato (established in 1991) and Dynamic Italia (1995); several others evolved into *manga* readers and discovered new *anime* (or re-discovered the old ones) continuing their relations with Japanese pop culture, and constructing specific images of Japan (see Pellitteri 2011, 244-246). The founder of *AnimeClick.it*, Tacchan[x], a man from Verona, Northern Italy, now aged 40, is one of these "nostalgic" committed Italians, who eventually opened up to different aspects of Japanese pop culture. *AnimeClick.it* first appeared in 1998, as a page focusing on Japanese animation and *manga*. As its creator noticed, "for quite a while it was just me, myself and I"[xi]. It was the period when *manga* was timidly making its way into the Italian market. As another interviewee noticed, "back then, the comic-shop was like a mysterious

object". Similarly, the first Lucca Comics conventions (or even the Comiket festival in Japan) were small reunions of early acolytes[xii].

We ourselves witnessed and participated in such economic and cultural process. In our own memories, when *manga* made their appearance in the Italian market, we were approaching a black and white, paper version of the kind of stories that we used to watch on TV as kids and early teenagers. *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, one of our first *manga*, emerged as the contemporary vision of the robot world from our childhood days. While there was the sense of reconnection to our past, we also felt a form of complaisance and excitement in approaching a distinct world, which remained unknown to most. *Manga* needed to be read backwards, from the last to the first page, and from the right to the left of the page. They told stories whose underlying distinct codes and practices we were starting to fully perceive and to consciously associate with a certain idea of Japan. Parallel to the emergence of the *manga*, we rediscovered the animated version of such stories, which could no longer be simply described as "Japanese cartoons". The label "*anime*" encompassed the idea of an animated world of its own and enhanced its status, making it accessible when the age for cartoons was officially past and gone.

However, *manga* and *anime* slowly gained in visibility and popularity, and within one decade the solo initiative of the page evolved into a website managed by a trio of fans, Tacchan and two friends of his same generation and area. Today the trio has been replaced by a team of about 40 people, situated in different parts of Italy, and an average of 30,000 users visit the website daily. *AnimeClick.it* has largely expanded, encompassing other aspects of Japanese popular culture — such as videogames, dramas,

cinema, J-pop music and cosplay — and Japanese culture as a whole. It has a significant database hosting an encyclopaedia for *anime* and *manga*, which is updated daily, making it a precious resource not only for fans but also for professionals and researchers[xiii]. It also organises the "Neko Awards" for *anime* through surveys amongst the users. *AnimeClick.it* is equally the only Italian website of its kind to have its own stand at the Lucca festival, and it is increasingly having presence at live events all over Italy. At Lucca and other Italian comic conventions, it organises conferences hosting experts and professionals, in order to disseminate Japanese pop culture and an understanding of Japan. Finally, the website organises seasonal *AnimeClick.it* trips to Japan. This website, which has progressively expanded its presence to platforms such as Facebook and YouTube, brings together different generations of Japanese pop culture fans — the generation that witnessed the arrival of *anime,* the one that grew up at the turn of the two phases, and the new one, for whom Internet plays a primary role to familiarise with or access Japanese pop culture.

AnimeClick.it is not unique in its genre, for similar websites exist in other countries, like *Animexx.de* in Germany.[xiv] It is, however, particularly relevant to the understanding of the Italian scenario. Its history and the frictions amongst the generations that gravitate around the website mirror the different trajectories that define the Japanese pop culture reception in Italy. At the same time, this website provides distinct Italian generations with opportunities for socialisation, and becomes a space for the concerted mediation and use of Japanese culture, and production of images about Japan. In this sense, Japanese pop culture is mediated by the collaboration of different generations, while mediating through the generations themselves. Both these processes and the website size make

AnimeClick.it a space, the observation of which can provide interesting insights into Italian youth's personal and social identifications as mediated by Japanese culture, and into a part of contemporary Italian social experiences and desires.

The people we interviewed included the founder and eleven of the main collaborators. Most of them can be said to emotionally belong to the Goldrake-generation (which, in turn, encompasses different age generations and trajectories): the founder, Tacchan; the event organiser Alessandro from Rome (aged 42, and being the current webmaster); the illustrator and factotum Roberto from Bari (45); Hachi from Perugia (42), who is in charge of news about Japan; Stefano from Naples (34), one of the website programmers; Federico from Rome (33), who is in charge of the videogames section; the accountant Lara from Vicenza (31), in charge of news about J-pop, dramas and live-action movies; Rossella from Messina (32), responsible for the *anime* database files; and Dany87 from Imola (29), collaborating on the *manga* database files. Eretria from Naples (26), editor of the *anime* database, as well as Rossella S. from Turin (22), website moderator and in charge of the calendar summarizing the *anime* legally streamed in Italy, and Ruuby[xv], in charge of the *anime* database files' maintenance, belong to another "era". We also interviewed three *AnimeClick.it* users, playing an active role in the web community: Athena from Varese (25), as well as Miriam from Turin (18) and Giada from the island of Elba (19), who represent the younger generation. There is a striking difference in terms of gender between the different generations, with the older one, which also leads the website, being mostly male[xvi], and the younger ones — its most active fringe — being represented by females. Sociologists have actually pinpointed the

predominance of women amongst the youngest fans in Italy and France alike, and, in several European countries, the more active role of women as *manga* readers, cosplayers, and, more in general, consumers of Japanese pop culture (Pellitteri 2011a, 233)[xvii].

The older ones are all employed: Tacchan as a programmer, Alessandro as sales and marketing agent, Roberto as an artisan, Hachi as a pharmacist, Stefano as a programmer, and Federico as a lawyer. They all have a degree, except Roberto who has a postgraduate diploma as an artisan. Lara is an accountant, Rossella has higher education and is currently working in a kindergarten, and Dany87 is employed in the private sector. Athena has a degree in engineering and is now working. Four are students: Ruuby is studying agriculture; Eretria is a postgraduate student in publishing; Rossella S. is an undergraduate student in Asian languages and literatures; and Miriam is studying international relations and marketing at high-school. Only Giada is currently unemployed and not studying. All of them have various hobbies. These profiles are diverse, but overall they mirror sociological surveys pointing to a mostly medium-highly educated fandom, whose education "leads them to be interested in 'faraway' themes like Asia or Japan" (Pellitteri 2011a, 234), which challenges old prejudices about *manga* or *anime* entertaining a lower social class or people trying to escape a depressing or disadvantaged life (235). Thus, this paper examines the terms in which these consumers perceive Japanese pop culture, and the "faraway" Japanese world. It then explores what these images add to their daily lives, leading them to spend a good amount of money on Japanese cultural products, a considerable amount of time consuming them, and a lot of energy disseminating them in ways that make the website look like

a professional product, and what these practices of consumption and mediation reveal about distinct Italian generations of fandom.

Italy, the Cool Flagrance of Japanese Pop Culture, and the Mysteries of Japan

In his essay *Recentering Globalization* (2002), Iwabuchi explored the international rise of Japanese cultural power (from motorbikes to technology and pop culture) in the era of globalisation, and connected it to products lacking a "cultural odour"— a term whereby he referred to "the way in which cultural features of a country of origin and images or ideas of its national, in most cases stereotyped, way of life are associated *positively* with a particular product in the consumption process" (27). The images that constitute the cultural odour are often associated to exoticism, like the geisha and the samurai — he added — and to specific racial and bodily images (27-28). The cultural odour of cultural commodities can evolve into what he calls a "fragrance — a socially and culturally acceptable smell", developing when "the image of the contemporary lifestyle of the country of origin is strongly an affirmatively called to mind as the very appeal of the product" (28). We understand that being made in Japan — and recognised as such — is not enough to produce a Japanese fragrance: we also need a cultural odour. Japanese producers and creators of animation and videogames have, however, aimed at producing something that would not be defined by the "Japaneseness" celebrated by *nihonjinron*, but would rather be an expression of non-Japaneseness (28-29). Iwabuchi noticed that Japanese animation seems to believe that the absence of Japaneseness in their products is crucial to access a global market, and even though it might not

consciously aim to export, Japanese animation always has a global market in mind (98). This non-Japaneseness is encapsulated in the notion of "*mukokuseki*"*,* literally meaning 'someone or something lacking a nationality', but also implying the erasure of racial or ethnic characteristics or a context, which does not imprint a particular culture or country with these features" (28). Accordingly, Iwabuchi noticed that the characters of Japanese animation or comics do not have Japanese features, and the context is often non-Japanese (ibidem).

Pellitteri questioned this theory when applied to Japanese pop culture, using the metaphor of the "odour [that] always exudes, at least a little bit; especially if it is smelled by people outside the original context of the product, which is supposed to be aseptic" (2008, 69). While acknowledging the Japanese attempts to de-localize their pop culture products, he identifies elements that can be ascribed to a Japanese style. In this sense, he provides the example of Hello Kitty, the popular cat-like character, which in the creator's mind is supposed to be from London, and yet its design incorporates the *kawaii* (cute) style peculiar to *manga* and *anime* (ibidem). Pellitteri emphasizes how Italy and other countries that have been long exposed to the style of *anime* and *manga* can definitely recognise the aesthetics, the registers, and the dynamicity of the products as Japanese, even when the creators maximise the camouflage of the product's Japanese origins (70). He also stressed that the very understanding of *anime* and *manga* as Japanese has played a paramount role in their successful reception in Italy, for their origins were associated with a cultural world, a sensibility, and aesthetics foreign to the Italian ones. Focusing on Japanese pop culture in Northeast and Southeast Asia, Otmazgin (2012) instead used the notion of "faceless"

products versus products with a "flavour". He mentioned the animated character of Hello Kitty too, together with Doraemon, and Pokémon. In his opinion, these characters "do not look Japanese in any objective way. However, they are identified as Japanese because they represent a specific genre of animated products associated with Japan" (13). The "Japanese flavour" is then detected in the genre, and it is "the appreciation shown to Japanese cultural products, due to their quality and high artistic level, [that] creates a recognizable genre of products associated with Japan" (13).

The people who gravitate around *AnimeClick.it* do perceive a cultural odour in the Japanese pop culture products. Similarly to the interviewees of Otmazgin's survey (2012), the people we discussed with explicitly identified a genre that they associated to Japan, whose features (graphic style, narrative and characters) they perceived as distinct and charming. To the Italian noses, this odour has evolved into a fragrance, which has been leading them to explore most of the manifestations of Japanese pop culture (*anime*, *manga*, dramas, cinema, music, games, cosplay, street fashion, food, etc.). At the same time, some have tried to live their passion creatively. For instance, some have been writing fanfictions inspired on characters and works they appreciate. Roberto and Stefano have instead been working on local reinterpretations of some specific forms of Japanese pop culture: the first has developed a local *manga*, made by an Italian *mangaka* and targeting an Italian public, whereas the second, in collaboration with other staff members, was aiming to develop a visual novel taking place at Lucca Comics. The focus of Roberto and Stefano's projects is more on the product rather than on the characters or the themes, and on the concept of local re-interpretation. In this sense, they

re-act the cycle of cultural appropriation of the "Other", which has characterized Japan-Europe cultural relations. All of this suggests a form of "Japanization of European youth" to cite Kinsella (1998b), but in this case the Japanisation stretches to include adults.

When we paused on the elements that the interviewees recognized as typical of Japanese comics and animation (including videogames), the graphic style was overall appreciated as "captivating" and "colourful". Most of the female interviewees paused on the *kawaii* aesthetics. For instance, Rossella believed that the "sweetness of the faces, their 'kawaiiness', the ethereal beauty of the characters" could, in some cases, compensate for a low-quality story. Hachi described *kawaii*, as a Japanese cult, and she appreciated it for "its ability to incorporate the puerile side of life into adulthood and serious matters". Based on our interviewees' perceptions of *kawaii*, the definitions provided by fans we met at Lucca Comics, our conversations with Japanese friends and acquaintances, and Pellitteri's (2008, 192) definitions, *kawaii* could be translated as "cute", and associated to something inspiring tenderness. This sense of cuteness moves from the *manga* pages into the real world. As we noticed during our visits to Japan, it pervades its cities, with billboards and announcements being represented as comic scenes that adopt the *kawaii* style's forms and colours, and the *kawaii* mascots adopted by Japanese railways companies, local authorities, or even the Japanese Communist Party and Japan's Self-Defense Forces[xviii].

Pellitteri (2008, 192-204) identified *kawaii* as an emotional attachment to roundish and small objects, but also a three-faceted (psychological, sociological and aesthetic) concept[xix]. Psychologically, *kawaii* can be linked

to a psychosocial *moratorium*, defined by Erikson (1950) as a time when a person takes a break from "real life" to actively search for their identity, which is affecting contemporary Japanese youth and infantilizing it. Sociologically, it can be interpreted as a "non-ideological confrontation with the values of Japanese society" (Pellitteri 2008, 195). Aesthetically, it refers to the notion of *iki* as developed by the philosopher Shūzō Kuki (1992), a threefold concept implying seduction, spiritual energy and resignation (53-64). In Western philosophy, *iki* was also considered by Martin Heidegger (1999) as a form of "grace" (116).

Through a "pop" influence, Shūzō Kuki's *iki* transforms into *kawaii*, preserving *iki*'s sweetness (*amami*) while making it flashy (*hade*). The semantic halo of *iki* thus manifests in its "pop evolution", namely the "kawaiism". In this sense, *kawaii* is not a subcultural phenomenon, since its roots are embedded in Japanese culture and make it an integrated part of this system (Pellitteri 2008, 198). Nevertheless, the childish style of *kawaii* cannot be separated by a complex range of sociological issues, concerning the juvenile tendency to refuse growth and adulthood (202), or the feminisation of a certain youthful culture (208; Kinsella 1998a), which is strongly connected to the popularity of *shōjo manga* (Masuda 2015).

The *AnimeClick.it* members we talked to, hence, sensed this "kawaiism" and recognized it as a Japanese trait. Interestingly, they appreciated "kawaiiness" for its ability to produce a fantastic world, but also because they did not see it as being disconnected from the gritty realities life is made of, or from any teaching. Hachi elaborated on that, arguing that Japanese pop culture "plays with fantasy, and still, it can relate to reality, with much more brutal stories than the sugar coated Disney world". In

this sense, Japanese animation and comics were lauded for providing hard content through soft looks. Rossella admitted having been inspired by the stories of *manga* and *anime* in different episodes of her life, notably she was influenced by what she perceived as "celebration of team work, collective effort, and happy collective problem-solving [smiles]". An appreciation of the "Japanese genre" also emerged when the respondents talked about the narratives, and the characters associated to this style. The interviewees equally emphasized the "diversification" of *manga* and *anime*, in terms of stories and themes. Federico loved the Japanese videogame, because "the narrative part gets even more attention than the game per se". Concerning the characters, Alessandro praised the "heroes who are violent but fair". So did other interviewees. Alessandro also emphasised appreciating that the Japanese stories rarely portray solitary heroes. In his opinion, the values and the models entrenched in many Japanese products were reflected in the website, its strong cohesion and multiple interactions. An expert of the *yaoi* ("boys love" *manga*) genre, Dany87, argued that *manga* could also help young people become aware of sexuality and gender issues.

This perception of Japanese pop culture strikingly differs from the one of their "predecessors", namely those who were adults between the '70s and the '90s. During those decades, many parents' associations regularly intervened, backed by mainstream mass media, and people revolving around the school and the intellectual world, to protest against what they perceived as a corrosive influence on the Italian children (Pellitteri 1999, 148-156; Vanzella 2005, 37-40). These voices associated the *anime* stories with violence, death, immorality, and sexual ambiguity. They depicted the *anime* as low-quality products. They also perceived their

presence as an invasion due to the large numbers of "Japanese cartoons" on Italian TV. This caused the increasing "de-Japanisation" of the products: Italian names and credits replaced the Japanese ones, too explicit references to Japan were cut, and the *anime* disappeared from the national TV channels, while being more and more subjected to selectiveness on the private networks. As Vanzella stressed, these criticisms echoed the general hostility to television peculiar to that time, and were reinforced by the products' "exotic origin — which stirred some secret xenophobia — and a latent wariness of technology" (2005, 38). The Italian voices that diminished Japanese animation powerfully re-enacted the negative connotations of Orientalist perceptions.

Said (1978) identified Orientalism as the phenomenon whereby Europe and America have constructed an image of the Middle East and Asia as exotic but inferior. The Japanese influences on European art only reveal the particularly strong fascination and desire that Japan has exerted on Europe. However, missionaries and early observers have actually represented Japan as being both exotic and inferior: they portrayed the Japanese as indolent and undisciplined, and since the Japanese traditions that charmed them (like the *samurai* or *geisha* worlds) were vanishing, they believed that becoming "modern" like Europe was the only direction the Japanese could take (Minear 1980). World War II led to the construction of images of Japan associated with violence and lack of emotional control, particularly in the U.S. (Dower 1987). After the war, the famous work *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* by the anthropologist Benedict (1946) crystallised the American representations of Japan as totally dissimilar to the West, while *nihonjinron* theories such as the ones by Nakane and Doi validated such

dissimilarity as uniqueness. Iwabuchi (1994) argued that all of this significantly reinforced both Japan's exoticism, and the European wariness towards Japan [xx]. As Japan advanced technologically, and progressed to the extent of becoming an exporter of technology in the "West", it has become the object of "techno-Orientalism" (Morley and Robinson 1992; Roh 2015). However, Iwabuchi (1994) noticed that media, literary and cinematic representations emphasizing the technological advancement of Asia were counterbalanced by the stereotype of intellectual primitiveness. The historical Western construction of "Japan" is actually quite complex — Iwabuchi continued — for its perception of Japan is constantly shifting, and influenced by the Japanese Self-Orientalism enacted through the *nihonjinron* theories, whose defining traits are, in turn, an appropriation of the features that Western forces had initially attributed to Japan (what Manabe and Befu (1992) labelled as the "samuraization" of Japan). However, in this context we only want to stress how amongst many Italian adults Japanese pop culture contemporaneously roused the fear towards technology as well as the latent European wariness towards the exotic dimension of Japan, and the force that Iwabuchi (1994) identified as the "subversiveness of 'Japan' against the 'West'".

The following generations — those who actually grew up with *anime* and those who were familiarized with Japanese pop culture as teenagers — have modified these perceptions, "re-humanizing" Japan, and "elevating" the status of *manga* and *anime.* This is the time when Japanese pop culture translates into "Cool Japan". Several scholars have discussed the phenomenon in relation to the notion of "soft power" (Iwabuchi 2002; Groot 2006; Kelts 2006; Allison 2008; Otmazgin 2007, 2012; Norris 2010;

Bouissou 2012)[xxi], particularly with respect to America, which dominated Japan culturally, politically and economically in the immediate post-World War II, and Asia, where Japan has been an imperialist force, and even after the collapse of its colonial empire at the end of the World War II, it has maintained a rhetoric asserting the superiority of Japan over the other Asian countries (see Iwabuchi 1994, 2002). Focusing on Asia, Otmazgin (2012) did not see the popularity of Japanese pop culture translating into an extension of Japanese economic/political power. Its power rested in its ability to generate positive images of Japan amongst the new Asian generations, which challenged enduring political tensions, and historical diffidence. Similarly, any form of Japanese "power" in Italy needs to be identified in the de-demonisation of the Japanese products (and, as we will see, in the overall positive perception of Japan itself). To a certain extent, this translates into soft power in economic terms, insofar as it has resulted into a solid market, and brought tourism to Japan (Lam 2007; Norris 2010; Kaneko 2013).

Four collaborators — Roberto, Rossella, Stefano and Federico — joked over the fact that now they act as ambassadors of Japanese popular culture, to the extent that they are hardly reading *manga* or watching *anime.* At the same time, as we hinted to, we witness a phenomenon of appropriation of Japanese pop culture, which gets transformed in the way it mixes with local themes, stories and aesthetics. To this regard, *AnimeClick.it* also organises the IICA (Italian Indie Comics Awards) to award self-produced Italian comics, mostly in the *manga*-style. This phenomenon of cultural appropriation is not unique to Italy. Throughout Europe, America, and Asia, we witness the circulation of an increasing number of comics labelled as "*manga*" that are actually conceived and

created locally or in foreign countries other than Japan, to the extent that we might wonder whether we might have "Japanese comics" without Japan (Brienza 2015). Paradoxically, the "Japanisation" of new European (in this case Italian) generations through Japanese pop culture also manifests in the way they appropriate the domestication of foreign cultural forms which has characterized Japan.

Japanisation also manifests in the fans going beyond Japanese pop culture to embrace (their idea of) Japan. Except for Stefano, whose relation to Japan remained circumscribed to its pop forms, the others have tried to access other aspects of Japanese culture, such as food, literature, mythology, cinema, and history. Two of the youngest ones were studying Far Eastern languages. A few of them had interacted with Japanese people through *AnimeClick.it* live events. Tacchan, Alessandro and Hachi had been to Japan with *AnimeClick.it*, and the rest dreamt of travelling there one day. All of them had developed a specific idea of Japan. The terms in which they interpreted and imagined Japan become meaningful if framed within the dynamics of "complicit exoticism" identified by Iwabuchi (1994) that have marked the construction of Japaneseness. In fact, some interviewees challenged the idea of Japanese extreme difference, arguing that the gradual familiarisation with Japan had enabled them to detect similarities with Italy. For instance, Alessandro identified them in political instability. "Both of them constantly change their government" he noticed, contemporaneously defying stereotypes of a hyper-functional Japan. To Roberto, Japan was, "after all, not so different from Italy, whether it is for the American influence we are imbued in or… and then it [Japan] has the same shape as Italy, I do not know how to explain this, but at the atmospheric level

they are similar". Yet, he noticed how exoticism triumphs over these similarities, with "Japan's distance, its millenary culture, the samurai, and the myths, and all of these legends that are totally irresistible". After describing Japanese culture as "*totally* [own emphasis] different from our way of life", Rossella S. included the charm of the Buddhist and Shinto religions, "which are much more interesting and *mysterious* than the Christian one". This striking difference translates into strong fascination, she argued. She also added how she had come to perceive Japan as a "nearly *utopian* world, where the criminality rate is very low and people are very devout to their religion and their emperor".

Ultimately, our informants talked about an exoticism that equated with inaccessibility. In their words, Japan emerged as unreachable. Geographical insularity was coupled with a cultural insularity that they ascribed to the Tokugawa period (or we should say, what they knew about it). Federico compellingly illustrated this feeling arguing that in a time where travelling is much easier and moving within Europe is particularly easy, travelling to a place like Japan remains a limited phenomenon. In this sense — he argued — Japan can remain mysterious and maintain the charm of difference. Within this scenario, pop culture acts as a bridge. However, this bridge is, in turn, an expression of Japan's exoticism. According to Athena, many Italians and Europeans alike are attracted by Japanese pop culture, because "it is seen with a halo of mystery, something to be unveiled". All of this echoes the latest dynamics of Orientalism towards Japan: the European acknowledgement of Japanese distinctiveness contributes to maintaining the ideas upheld by *nihonjinron*; at the same time, it delegitimizes Japan's technological superiority and charm by emphasizing its "immeasurable difference".

Similar to the surveys done amongst fans in different European countries (Pellitteri 2011a, 251-255), the features that our interviewees attributed to Japan evoked the ones that have come to be associated to Japaneseness, and resulted in an ambivalent image of Japan. Our interviewees perceived (and appreciated) Japan as efficient and organized, and as the country where ancient traditions and technological progress harmoniously coexisted. All those interviewed from *AnimeClick.it* paused on the working culture in Japan, which they perceived as being dramatically different from the Italian one. On the one hand, they appreciated the emphasis on collaboration and teamwork that they pinpointed in many *manga/anime*. On the other hand, they perceived lack of flexibility and excessive work. In a similar way, they viewed Japanese social relations as extremely different and expressed ambivalent reactions towards it. Miriam emphasised this aspect, first lauding the culture of "respect, which in Japan, is tangible everywhere: in the family, at school, at work, amongst peers, colleagues, parents and their children…", then expressing scepticism towards their "totally different ways of approaching one another". "Come on! Do they address one another by their surname even if they are friends? Finally, it is a society of very reserved and closed people", she concluded. Excessive distance in interpersonal relations and extremely strict rules were the aspects our informants perceived and did not appreciate. Some also perceived Japanese people as struggling to express their emotions and feelings — the opposite of the earlier representations of Japan where Japanese were portrayed (and looked down) as emotional (Iwabuchi 1994). Rossella S. was one of them, describing "the social repression of feelings and emotions" as the other side of her utopian image of Japan. In

this case, Japan emerged as a dystopia. When difference became too different, it was negatively connoted, and there was no space left for negotiating identification.

Above all, Japan was a place associated with imagination and the fictional. Napier (2015) highlighted how Japanese pop culture has marked a shift in the Western representation of Japan, moving from Orientalism to fantasy. As a matter of fact, surveys about *manga* readers highlighted that many of the fans wanting to learn more about Japan do not feel the need to meet Japanese people (Pellitteri 2011a, 251). This fantasy was epitomized by Alessandro defining the Japan he had visited as an "an amazing amusement park". Alessandro had spent two weeks in Japan, joining one of the *AnimeClick.it* trips. His expectations were not disappointed; inasmuch as he found the Japan he was looking for. The Japan his mind had imagined based on *manga* and *anime* was there: *sakura* (cherry blossoms), the *hanami* (cherry blossoms viewing in Japan during springtime), the houses, the atmosphere, the technology. To him, "it was as if *anime* had turned into reality". Thus, Japan emerged as a place where to have fun, where to "live" the fantasy. But he definitely believed it would have not been possible for him as an Italian to live there — at least not at his age. The trips organized by *AnimeClick.it* represent a specific kind of tourism: travellers search "for the settings of their favourite characters' adventures (if they were set in a real place), and for the places which are considered cool, such as Tōkyō and its many souls, from the hyper-technological ones to those connected to traditions" (Pellitteri 2011a, 252).

Alessandro contradicted himself, for he simultaneously blamed those Italians whose appreciation of *manga* and *anime* resulted in an idealistic and naïve exaltation of Japan's difference. He equally stressed how *AnimeClick.it* strived to provide an all-encompassing and critical perception of Japan, mentioning Hachi's article on Japanese culture. These do not limit to aspects such as food, traditions and any extravagancies, but also consider social and political issues. Overall, the *AnimeClick.it* people we interviewed revealed forms of self-reflexivity, for they constantly stressed that the Japan they were talking about was just what they imagined. Miriam was the youngest fan we talked to and yet she was very careful as to the way she would talk about the Japanese country (starting from her bracketing "Japan"). Ruuby instead took some distance from that phenomenon:

> Like many people, I initially admired Japan. Then, little by little, this has transformed into mere interest in a country that I indirectly learnt to know through many articles [hosted on AnimeClick.it].

The ambivalence generated by the alternation of self-reflexive moments and exotic and fantastic images of Japan seems to dissolve in the fact that fans are content with their imagined Japan. Japan is there to fulfil the role of fantasy. Here, it might be noted that amongst our informants the enthusiasm towards live-action movies and TV series based on *anime* and *manga* was quite mitigated – a couple really liked them, while the others were not really interested or did not watch them at all. Two of these ascribed it to the Japanese actors' acting. Maybe, the presence of real Japanese incarnating the *manga/anime* characters disrupts the fantasy dimension. Indeed, talking about the appeal of *anime/manga,* Ruuby had consciously connected it to its ability to tell

stories that could not be told by "actors in flesh and blood". However, Alessandro emphasised that this Italian interest in Japan was a niche phenomenon. In his opinion, it was a marker of people who loved reading and were quite educated, suggesting that the imagined Japan remained the object of an elitist subculture.

Emotions and Socialisation: the "*Otaku*" Experience in Italy

The identifications with Japanese pop culture and the perception of Japan as a fantasy that we have so far illustrated translates into forms of engagement with Japanese pop culture products. These tell us about various experiences and emotions of segments of the Italian generations from the '70s until today. The sociologist Otmzagin claimed that the narratives of fans interested in Japanese popular culture point to an emotional bond with Japan (2013, 92). As we have illustrated, the consumption of the different genres of Japanese pop culture elicited emotional responses. There are also emotions that are related to the impact such consumption has had on the consumers' lives. The Goldrake-generation directly or indirectly claimed that their emotional connection, being made of nuances such as nostalgia and familiarity, strongly differed from the attachment of the new generations. Talking about their first memory of Japanese popular culture, their voices and smiles revealed a form of warmth and mythisation, evoking the "Mazinga nostalgia" (Pellitteri 1999). Their first memories of Japanese pop culture were all situated in their childhood and related to the *anime* broadcasted on Italian channels. Several recalled the "*robottoni*" (Italian familiar word for "big robots"). Tacchan particularly appreciated the sports *anime*, which he deemed something unique to Japanese animated works. Rossella

mentioned the "girls' stories", which she remembered watching with her mother. Roberto also evoked the "superbly-made *Meisaku* stories". At some point in their adolescence, the oldest members of that generation experienced a more or less long "period of oblivion", or "hole", or "disconnection", where they were "distracted" by other aspects of life, until they identified a moment that was at the same time one of re-discovery and initiation, coinciding with the second phase of the transnational diffusion of Japanese popular culture goods — the Dazzle. For instance, Hachi explained:

> Thanks to the mythic MTV *anime* night[xxii], I rediscovered a world and I did not abandon it anymore. What attracted me the most was the graphic boost of Japanese animation. I recovered things that were buried in my memory and I started wanting to know more about Japan and its culture. And I discovered a whole world.

For younger members of the "nostalgic group" like Lara, the transition from the first to the second phase did not properly include a moment of rupture, having directly shifted during their adolescence from the unaware exposition to Japanese pop culture on Italian TV to the discovery of *manga* and *anime* in the comic shops:

> Probably *anime* [is my first memory of Japanese pop culture]. I can't really remember, I just have the feeling I have watched Japanese *anime* on television since I was a little child. Maybe Heidi or Creamy… I feel like I have been constantly tied to Japan, one way or another. I used to watch many *anime*, then reading a lot of *manga*, then watching dramas and following the entertainment industry as a "journalist" for *AnimeClick.it*. I have always been particularly interested in Japanese culture and habits, even those not linked to the *anime/manga* industry at all.

As Lara spontaneously pointed out, many Italians are so interested in Japanese pop culture, because "it's probably like getting more in touch with some fond childhood memories". Having grown up with Japanese *anime* also translates into an acute sense of familiarity. Further, there is

the sense of belonging to a specific era in Italian society: the time when up to six-eight hours of *anime* would be broadcasted daily on private networks, one episode a day for each series (in Japan and the U.S.A. the series were broadcasted weekly), and children would then be fed *anime* for breakfast, lunch, afternoon snack and dinner. Hence, we have to situate such bonds within the larger frame of the historical and socioeconomic phenomenon that fostered the massive presence of Japanese animation on Italian TV (see p. 3; Pellitteri 2008). Based on the interviewees' stories and personal experiences, these memories can today become the object of nostalgic conversations, vividly evoking the peculiar images they are made of as much as the emotions attached to them, and sometimes ending with everyone singing the theme songs of the most popular *anime*. In this regard, Stefano joked over the fact that an intimate connection was unavoidable in the circumstances where he grew up:

> Go and watch Captain Tsubasa, 45 million times, always the same season, the same episodes (laughs). It is obvious that sooner or later you develop feeling for it!

As Pellitteri highlighted (2015, 36), this phenomenon created an extraordinarily intense process of loyalisation amongst the young Italian TV viewers, which acted as the solid rock upon which *anime* and *manga* could later build their success in the Italian context. For those who approached *manga* and further learnt about (or rediscovered) *anime* when these first started to appear on the shelves of the comic shops, the notion of Japanese pop culture also calls forth the excitement of those days as well as a form of pride for their role as pioneers. Describing her initiation to *manga* during the late adolescence, Dany87 recalled that

"everything was new and unknown, and at that stage my involvement was at its utmost". Stefano argued that all of this made the emotional bond of the Goldrake-generation particularly strong:

> Our generation is more attached to the *anime*. We underwent the invasion, then the novelty. They [the new generation] grow up in it, now the relation is different. Nowadays they can find whatever they want. We depended on the TV channel… We had to look for what we wanted. We experienced the innovation. I remember I could not wait for the day after to watch an episode of *I Cavalieri dello Zodiaco* (*Saint Seiya*)… The *manga* was a revolutionary product too. […] Although I personally lived this phenomenon in a much more superficial way than others, our relationship was definitely much more profound than it is now.

Finally, having witnessed all of the phases of the international expansion of Japanese pop culture in Italy, the Goldrake-generation has acquired a historical memory of the phenomenon. In this sense, the serious engagement of older generations in a project like *AnimeClick.it* reveals a sense of responsibility (and privilege) in transmitting the history of Japanese pop culture as well as the history of the Italian relation with such cultural forms, and per extension, with Japan.

The Goldrake-generation highlighted other intergenerational differences. For instance, Rossella could not help noticing the generational gap between the staff and the majority of the website users in the way they approached Japanese pop culture:

> There are things… I do not think they are negative per se, but they just do not intrigue me that much. Idols, cosplay, the survey of this, the survey of that… I don't know… finding two hundred news about J-pop. I think that it is, however, fair to cover as many interests as possible. But it is also true that young people have a different approach and a different philosophy. They tend to like things that, when we were 15, we didn't have or we did not find interesting, whereas they grow up with those things.

The narratives of the youngest people we talked to were more diverse. Athena's memories did not actually differ from those of the older generations — "cartoons" as a child and a bit later the "*anime*" broadcasted on MTV. Eretria identified the singer Nika Makashima, who played the character Nana in the live action movie *Nana*, as her first memory of Japanese pop culture. Rossella S. recalled "the *anime* broadcasted on MTV that included references to Japanese culture, like monsters, gods, and mythological figures". Miriam, who confessed to have been initially "skeptical" towards Japanese pop culture, related her first memories to a biographical episode, which also corroborated the fact that today's youth increasingly approaches Japanese pop culture thanks to their friends or siblings (see Pellitteri 2011a, 247-248):

> An old friend of mine told me I looked like a character I ignored. I got curious [...] and found out that the cartoons I watched as a child belonged to Japanese culture. Since that episode, I started to watch them more and more often. As for the videogames, I can't remember my "first time", but I remember me playing as a small child with my brothers to any kind of new game.

Finally, Giada's first memories of Japanese pop culture were related to *manga* rather than *anime*, pointing to new trajectories in an Italian scenario that has been characterized by the *anime* preceding and channelling towards *manga* (see Pellitteri 2011a, 246).

Contrary to the others, the younger *AnimeClick.it* participants did not make comparisons in terms of attachment, except for Miriam, who wanted to minimize intergenerational differences, for "a passion is a passion. If you like a cartoon, you watch it, you talk about it, you play the characters, and that's what the fans in the '70s and the '80s used to do, in my opinion". In terms of consumption practices, Miriam only noticed that

nowadays fans could be more "obsessive" and more "easily influenced" and that "today we can find very young fans". Athena, Rossella S. and Ruuby actually portrayed their own generation as privileged, arguing that back in the day fans had limited options, could not really choose what and when to consume because they depended on TV programming, and could hardly find news about the products they liked. Athena also noticed that given the huge variety of genres, today there is space for everyone.

These distinct stories and attitudes do not imply a minor attachment/emotional response to Japanese pop culture. There certainly must be a special relation with it and Japan in general, given their impact on their daily habits and their life choices. Eretria's "discovery" of Nana was transformative, insofar as it inspired her to open to other Asian cultures like Chinese and Korean cultures, and resulted in her intense involvement in fansubbing — activity that has certainly been instrumental to the expansion of Japanese pop culture (Rush 2009; Lee 2011). Rossella S.'s memories of the traditions and creatures seen in *anime* evolved into her current involvement in Far East Studies. Miriam became so curious about Japan that she wanted to submit a project on Japanese culture for the high-school final exam. 90% of the music Giada currently listens to is Japanese. The emotional and biographical element is ubiquitous. Emotions play out in different ways, but in both generations, they point to a bond with Japan. Further, if older generations have been pioneers and are active in maintaining the history of *manga/anime*, the younger generations are actually more active in other dimensions that play a paramount role in the dissemination of Japanese culture in contemporary society, such as fansubbing, scanlations (the practice of unauthorized translation of graphic narratives; see Fabbretti

2016), and, above all, cosplay. The *AnimeClick.it* staff/users who did cosplay enjoyed embodying their favourite characters and viewed cosplay as a different way to have fun with their friends and socialize.

In fact, Alessandro, who did claim a stronger emotional bond, later lamented what he saw as an increasing form of snobbery towards the new generations' expressions of Japanese pop culture:

> [...] like, some forms of fandom, which have certainly their flaws, as, for instance, cosplay, but cannot simply be labelled as *otaku* or stupid... It is another way to express fandom. OK, I have seen cosplayers who just show off, but I have also seen a group like the one at Naples, who organized all alone the event at the Asian Village. They are guys in their 20s, who, instead of getting drugs or becoming morons in front of videogames, transform cosplay into a moment of fun and a form of socialization, they are all friend, and they also express their love for a form of art. Because it is a form of art... some of them are so talented, they sew their clothes themselves. One must admit that some of them are really good people and deserve visibility.

Despite generational differences, and the divergences and ambivalences revealed by the older generations, the "spirit" seems to be the same for younger and older fans: orienting their efforts towards a conscious and informed consumption of Japanese pop culture and an understanding of Japan as a country. Intergenerational differences do not prevent younger and older fans to collaborate. Further, the shared practice of consuming and (re)producing Japanese pop culture enables Italians spanning through different generations to socialize. Indeed, the initial motivation for participating in an initiative like *AnimeClick.it* is not necessarily the interest in Japanese pop culture consumption. Most of our interviewees told us they had been "dragged in" by friends, and eventually got "trapped" in the initiative. Socialisation seems to be the ultimate factor that "trapped" them. Rossella argued that the social dimension of the website contributed to the

solidity of the working group. Eretria emphasized that "a lot of people who used to superficially participate in the website started to dedicate much more time and energy to this reality once they met the web friends in real life". Similarly, Federico revealed that the socialisation opportunities offered by *AnimeClick.it* motivated him to collaborate again after a two-year break, and to stay despite the increasing commitment it demanded. He argued that the element of socialisation was a relatively recent phenomenon, favoured by the website's participation in Lucca Comics, the growing number of Japanese pop culture related events as opportunities for staff and users to meet, and Alessandro's role as an event organizer, who emphasized and advanced the live dimension of the website.

We could also say that collaboration and socialisation around Japanese pop culture brings together different generations that, in their own way, experience forms of marginality: the older ones are marginal in their nostalgia for a time gone, whereas the younger are marginal for they are not part of a generational phenomenon. Apart from these distinctions, they are all marginal for Japanese pop culture represents a specific niche within the wider cultural scenario, whether it be for the sophistication of its products and their consumption, or for its opposition to those adults who look down on *anime* as products for children or view Japanese pop culture products as trivial or carriers of dangerous influences, or imagine their fans as loners alienated from reality.

Escapism can also be a factor transversal to generations. The emotions that our interlocutors associated with "kawaiism" as well as their perception of Japan as a fantasy suggested escapist desires. Further, attempting to trace the average profile of the *AnimeClick.it* collaborator,

Tacchan ironically identified it as a person with "problems". Federico laughed at Tacchan's considerations, but he then agreed with him:

> Well, you must actually have some problem. What I mean is… Nobody who is mentally sane would stay in it! In a situation where you work yourself out just for the sake of it… We are so strange that we enjoy it…

The surveys of the comparative research on *manga* in Europe actually revealed that most readers aimed to distract themselves from daily life, although this was just one of the reasons why they consumed *manga* (Pellitteri 2011a, 239) However, none of our interlocutors consciously identified the desire of escaping into an alternative reality as the element motivating their consumption of Japanese pop culture or their collaboration to *AnimeClick.it*.

Finally, we could argue that all differences are transcended in the staff/users becoming part of the *otaku* sociological phenomenon, as identified by the philosopher Azuma Hiroki (2010). The "emotional bond" we have so far considered is not certainly unique to the *manga* and *anime* fans. Nevertheless, the *otaku* phenomenon assigns a key-role to the Japanese pop culture products, and the kind of experience they are associated to, where feelings like nostalgia, sentimentality and escapism prevail. According to Azuma, both Japanese pop culture and the cultural practices related to its products are quintessentially postmodern (82), since they all point to a fictional statute of reality and knowledge: in other words, it is a cultural consumption that does not care about the statute of reality of the consumed narratives (92-97), considering that for the consumers there is no more a distinction between an original work and its copies [xxiii]. Following the theoretical framework of postmodernism found in

Baudrillard (1979; 1985) and the French philosopher's theory of simulacra, Azuma (2010) assumes that Japanese pop culture fandom reduces narrative works to a database of simulacra, where there is no longer any difference between the copies (of a copy) and the model, the authentic and the inauthentic (118); more specifically, the database is the deep structure behind the circulation of simulacra as copies of a copy (119).

In his phenomenology of "otakuism", Azuma also draws on the philosopher Alexandre Kojève and his *Introduction to the reading of Hegel* (1996). Kojève identifies "snobbery", conceived as pure form detached from any specific content, as a fundamentally Japanese trait (543n). In Azuma's analysis, the *otaku* attitude becomes a postmodern and someway distorted expression of Japanese snobbery (Azuma 2010, 127). Actually, *otaku* realize a "snobbish" consumption of forms (e.g. erotic images or characters data) regardless of their contents, but their snobbery cannot be compared to Japanese *seppuku* (ritual suicide), as in Kojève's example. Rather, the "snobbish" trait of the *otaku* can be interpreted in terms of a "return to animality" (127) or animalisation, where the consumers, or "database animals" (77), are peacefully adapted to "nature", understood as a fictitious and cynical consumerism (134).

Nevertheless, in the *otaku* experience Japanese pop culture products become tools to understand — rather than embellish — reality, and to connect with emotions (135-139); thus, in the *otaku* subculture we can detect a spreading interest in the "dramatic elements" of a story (135). This leads us to another aspect of Azuma's analysis of postmodernism, that is the statute of narratives. According to Lyotard (1979), due to the advancement of technology and the scepticism towards ideologies or

master ideas, postmodern is permeated by "small narratives", short local narrative practices suitable for segments of the society and useful to define subcultural meaning. "Small narratives" are to be understood as a replacement for the "grand narratives", mirroring a world where ideologies and grand stories seem to be waning. Born in a post-war Japan, deprived of its Father-State, the *otaku* phenomenon has become transnational, evolving into a postmodern experience; according to Azuma, *otaku* are not interested in "grand narratives", rather they seem to focus on "grand non-narratives", i.e. the deep inner layer of the database, while letting themselves be deeply touched by "small narratives", the surface layer of simulacra (146-147). In postmodernity, these two levels are no longer connected, leading to a sense of "dissociation" between database consumption and emotional consumption, a "desire for small narratives" juxtaposed to a "desire for grand non-narratives" (147-148), which, rather surprisingly, does not seem to bother the *otaku* at the level of life meaning.

During and after the Years of Lead (*Anni di piombo*)[xxiv], Italy "nurtured" a generation which Pellitteri (2012) called "children of a lesser nostalgia", whose first "cultural imprinting" consisted of the small narratives conveyed by Japanese *anime* massively broadcasted by local and national television. The Italian fans gravitating around *AnimeClick.it* are, then, a facet of the transnational *otaku* phenomenon, where Japanese pop culture and its cultural consumption become independent from the sources and the ideas that first generated them. The result is an imagined Japan, combining the past with the present.

Paradoxically, one element that distinguished the Italian fans we talked to (and brought together the different generations) was the refusal or a certain malaise at being labelled as "*otaku*". To a certain extent, they confirmed the emotional factor of the *otaku* experience as described by Azuma (2010), but denied their identification as "database animals", i.e. fans particularly interested in a database consumption disconnected from the narrative consumption (indeed, Azuma has in mind Japanese *otaku* in his philosophical approach to the phenomenon). Some informants actually viewed contemporary Japanese creativity as being more and more oriented towards stories devoid of values and rich in clichés that they ascribed to Japanese society, where they felt excluded. Others made sarcastic comments over the Japanese pop culture merchandising machine, particularly Eretria, whose image of Japan as a country of contradictions came from the co-existence of "fantastic, extremely charming traditions" with "a lot of useless merchandising", and Lara, who portrayed the Japanese pop culture industry as a system which "aims to generate in people a severe addiction to its products, so that fans will buy tons of material or appealing merchandising to prevent that world from vanishing too soon". The term *otaku* was then associated with dependence, obsession and alienation: the kind of attitude that Miriam more frequently detected amongst new Italian fans, and that everyone viewed as a Japanese sociological phenomenon. They had internalized the negative connotations that have come to be associated with the term *otaku*, whose practices — first and foremost reading *manga* — are perceived as "solitary — nearly masturbatory", the action of people "shut in their own bedroom to run away into a fantasy world" (Pellitteri 2011a,

238). Hence, they distanced themselves from it, identifying it as Japanese, the uncharmed child of its extreme difference.

Future Trajectories

Focusing on a group of people involved in the largest Japanese pop culture website in Italy, we have explored the terms in which Italian fans recognise the cultural odour of Japanese pop culture and develop a specific image of this country – one that is influenced by the fictional statute of Japanese pop culture's worlds and their own identifications with what they perceive as Japanese, and reproduces the complicit exoticism that has characterized Japan since post-World War II. Under the umbrella of Japanese pop culture, different generations of Italians come together to socialize, each bringing diverse emotions, different relations with Japanese pop culture and practices, and each representing a piece of the history of the Italian relationship with Japanese pop culture. The multiple platforms and the several narrative genres Japanese pop culture is made of favours the encounters of these people, and their dialogue over the consumption and mediation of Japanese pop culture. Cosplay[xxv] is the new frontier, making Japanese pop culture and its practices more and more visible, but could also bridge distances between these generations, being quintessentially a form of socialisation. As Vanzella (2005, 61) pointed out, "cosplay is a practice: to be a cosplayer means to do cosplay and thus participate in the comic events and the competitions" and "it focuses on the body: to enjoy a cosplay event, whether alive or through pictures, means to (recognize) meet some people".

During the interviews, we discussed the future of the consumption of Japanese pop culture, and most of our interviewees trusted that the

phenomenon would remain strong. Some older members had, nevertheless, the impression that new fans would be less oriented towards *manga*, because Italians read less and less. Other older members revealed they sometimes struggled to recognize themselves in the new productions. Despite the huge numbers of *manga/anime* now available in the market, these interviewees could not always find a title really worth reading/watching, or a character they could identify with, for they believed that the latest production contained clichés targeting an audience with specific obsessions, typical of Japanese society — they argued — rather than addressing a large audience. Hence, they complained about what they perceived as Japan's lack of interest in European audiences, which they attributed to Japan cultural insularity. We find again the intergenerational differences, which Stefano dismissed as a "*girella* effect" [xxvi], adding that fans of his generation appreciate old *manga/anime* because "they reflect the values I had ten years ago, to which I am still attached. But they cannot be objectively more beautiful". We equally detect once more the negative perception of *otaku* as well as the topos of Japan's self-referential mind-set. Yet, we know from Iwabuchi (2002) that the Japanese pop culture industry does take into account the European market. Indeed, similar comments are also forgetful of their own cultural marginality. Apart from Studio Ghibli's world-renowned animated productions (and the works of a few other directors), *anime* and *manga* series *per se* are not targeting "all audiences".

At the same time, we notice that Italian fans have started to transcend Japanese pop culture and Japan to open up to other forms of pop culture in Asia. Amongst our informants, Eretria and Stefano had developed an interest in Korean pop culture, particularly Korean dramas and K-pop. Above all, observing the website and the virtual interactions, we detected

a veering towards an "Asian pop culture" community, for it now gives space to Korean, Chinese, and Taiwanese pop culture, and to Far Eastern pop cultures in a wider sense. In this sense, the website is now also interested in festival focusing on Asian culture and cinema, such as the Far East Film Festival in Udine (FEFF), where *AnimeClick.it* was web partner for the 2016 edition.

Finally, the Italian creative appropriation of the Japanese pop culture, more specifically *manga*, might open new routes, which might better reflect Italian values. And yet, Japan provides the "fantasy". Rossella S. concluded that "as long as there will be good titles able to passionately capture both youth and adults, Japanese culture will continue to influence Europe with its traditions and cosplay for a very long time". But this might also mean that an image of Japan as hyper-modern and yet "the last of the exotic" countries or a "real fantasy" may continue to live through the engagement of Europeans with Japanese pop culture.

Finally, socialisation and the terms on which people socialize around the consumption of Japanese pop culture will play a paramount role in the evolution of practices of consumption and mediation. At the 2014 Lucca Comics convention, Roberto offered each collaborator a car shaped magnet with their website nickname on it. He then showed them a stop motion short movie whose characters were the cars he had just given to them:

> The first car was the one of Tacchan, the founder, then other cars joined him, becoming more and more numerous, until they created a total chaos [laughs]. Then everything resolved into a little martial march – Tacchan at the top – with all the cars pulling the *AnimeClick.it* logo. Cars would hit one another, but then, we could say they found an agreement, and collaborated. It is a metaphor of *AnimeClick.it*.

We might wonder if today's younger generation might be the nostalgic of tomorrow leading the cars, and how they will change the awareness of Japan.

REFERENCES

Allison, A. (2008), The Attractions of the J-Wave for American Youth. In: Yasushi, W. and McConnell, D., (Eds), *Soft power superpowers: cultural and national assets of the Japanese and the United States*. New York: M.E. Sharp Inc, 99-110.

Alt, M. (2015), Japan's Cute Army. *The New Yorker*. [Online] Available from: http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/japans-cute-army [Accessed 20 January 2017].

Azuma, H. (2010), *Generazione Otaku*. Milan: Jaca Book.

Baudrillard, J. (1979), *Lo scambio simbolico e la morte*. Milan: Feltrinelli.

— (1985), *Simulacri e simulazione*. Milan: Feltrinelli.

Berndt, J. (2008), Considering Manga Discourse: Location, Ambiguity, Historicity. In: MacWilliams, M., (Ed.), *Japanese Visual Culture*. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 351-369.

Bouissou, J.-M. (2000), Manga goes global. *Critique internationale*, Vol. 7 (1), 1-36.

— (2012), Popular Culture as a Tool for Soft Power: Myth or Reality? Manga in Four European Countries. In: Otmazgin, N. and Ben-Ari, E., (Eds), *Popular Culture and the State in East and Southeast Asia*. London: Routledge, 46-64.

Brienza, C. (2015), *Global Manga*. London: Routledge.

Cantarelli, L. (2009), Dieci "piccoli" siti. La top 10 italiana dell'informazione web su manga e anime. In: *Manga Academica*, Vol. 2. Naples: Società Editrice La Torre, 107-110

Dale, P. (1990), *The myth of Japanese uniqueness*. London: Routledge and Nissan Institute for Japanese Studies, University of Oxford.

— (1994), Nipponologies (Nihon-ron. Nihon-shugi). In: Berque, A., (Ed.), *Dictionnaire de la civilisation japonaise*. Paris: Hazan, 355-356.

Doi, T. (1973), *The anatomy of dependence*. Tōkyō: Kodansha International.

Dower, J. W. (1987), *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Erikson, E. (1950), *Childhood and society*. New York: Norton.

Fabbretti, M. (2016), The use of translation notes in manga scanlation. *TranscUlturAl*, Vol. 8 (2), 86-104.

Groot, G. (2006), Soft power in the Asia-Pacifc Post 9/11: the cases of Japan, China and India. In: Groot, G., Jain, P. and Patrikeef, F., (Eds), *Asia Pacific and New International Order: responses and options*. New York: Nova Publishers, 53-70.

Heidegger, M. (1999), *In cammino verso il linguaggio*. Milan: Mursia.

Inokai, K. (2000), Manga dojinshi-shi. *Comic Fan*, Vol. 10, 4–59.

Iwabuchi, K. (1994), Complicit exoticism: Japan and its other. *The Australian Journal of Media & Culture*, Vol. 8 (2), 49-82.

— (2002), *Recentering globalization: Popular culture and Japanese transnationalism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Japan Local Government Centre (2012), *Yurukyara – a Japanese approach to regional PR*. [Online] Available from: http://www.jlgc.org.uk/en/news_letter/yurukyara-a-japanese-approach-to-regional-pr/[Accessed 20 January 2017].

Kaneko, K. (2013), An Analysis of Japan's Popular Cultural Tourism: Constructing. Japan's Self- Image as a Provider of "Unique" Culture. *Global Journal of Human Social Science, Sociology & Culture* [Online], Vol. 13 (4). Available from: https://globaljournals.org/GJHSS_Volume13/1-An-Analysis-of-Japans-Popular-Cultural.pdf [Accessed 20 February 2017].

Kawamura, N. (1980), The Historical Background of Arguments Emphasising the Uniqueness of Japanese Society. In: Mover, R. and Sugimoto, H., (Eds), *Japanese Society: Reappraisals and New Directions, A special Issue of Social Analysis*, Vol. 5-6. Adelaide: Dept. of Anthropology, University of Adelaide, 44-62.

Kelts, R. (2006), *Japanamerica: How Japanese popular culture has invaded the US*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kinsella, S. (1998a), Japanese Subculture in the 1990s: Otaku and the Amateur Manga Movement. *Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol. 24 (2), 289-316.

— (1998b), Babe Power! Un esempio di cultura giovanile e di giapponizzazione dei giovani in Europa. In: Branzaglia, C., (Ed.), *Nightwave '97. Atti del Convegno (Rimini, 7-9 giugno 1997)*. Milan: Costa & Nolan, 95-103.

Kojève, A. (1996), *Introduzione alla lettura di Hegel*. Milan: Adelphi.

Koyama-Richard, B. (2007), *Mille anni di manga.* Milan: Rizzoli.

Koyama-Richard, B. and Aitken, G. (2013), *Hiramatsu, le bassin aux nymphéas, hommage à Claude Monnet.* Gent: Éditions Snoeck.

Lam, P. (2007), Japan's Quest for Soft Power: Attraction and Limitation. *East Asia*, Vol. 24, 349-363.

Lambourne, Lionel (2005), *Japonisme: cultural crossings between Japan and the West.* New York: Phaidon.

Lee, H.-K. (2011), Participatory media fandom: A case study of anime fansubbing. *Media, Culture & Society*, Vol. 33 (8), 1131-1147.

Little, S. (1996), The Lure of the West: European Elements in the Art of the Floating World. *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies*, Vol. 22 (1), 74-96.

Lyotard, J.-F. (1979), *La Condition postmoderne. Rapport sur le savoir*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit.

MacNeal Lavender, C. (1983), *The Influence of Japanese Prints from the Ukiyo-e School on Selected Works of Edouard Manet, Mary Cassatt, Claude Monet, and Vincent Van Gogh*. New Orleans: Tulane University.

Malone, Paul (2010), From BRAVO to Animexx.de to Export. In: Levi, A., McHarry, M. and Pagliassotti, D., (Eds), *Boys' Love Manga: Essays on the Sexual Ambiguity and Cross-Cultural Fandom of the Genre*. Jefferson, NC: MacFarland & Co, 32-33.

Manabe, K. and Befu, H. (1992), Japanese Cultural Identity: An Empirical Investigation of Nihonjinron. *Yearbook of the German Institute for Japanese Studies*, Vol. 4, 89-102.

Manning, P. and Gershon, I. (2013), Animating interaction. *HAU. Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, Vol. 3 (3), 107-137.

Masuda, N. (2015), Shojo Manga and Its Acceptance. What is the Power of Shojo Manga?. In: M. Toku, (Ed.), *International Perspectives on Shojo and Shojo Manga: The Influence of Girl Culture*. London: Routledge, 23-31.

Minear, R. H. (1980), Orientalism and the Study of Japan. *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 30 (3), 507-517.

Monden, F. (2008), Transcultural Flow of Demure Aesthetics: Examining Cultural Globalization through Gothic & Lolita Fashion. *New Voices*, Vol. 2, 21-40.

Morley, D. and Robins, K. (1992), Techno-Orientalism: Futures, Foreigners and Phobias. *New Formations*, Vol. 16, 136-156.

Mouer, R. and Sugimoto, Y. (1986), *Images of Japanese Society*. London: Routledge.

Napier, S. (2007), *From Impressionism to anime*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Norris, M. (2010), Exploring Japanese Popular Culture as a Soft Power Resource. *Inquiries* [Online], Vol. 2 (5). Available from: http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=253 [Accessed 25 January 2017].

Nye, J. (1990), The Changing Nature of World Power. *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 105 (2), 177-192.

Otmazgin, N. (2007), Contesting soft power: Japanese popular culture in East and Southeast Asia. *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol. 8 (1), 73-101.

— (2012), Japan imagined: popular culture, soft power, and Japan's changing image in Northeast and Southeast Asia. *Contemporary Japan. Journal of the German Institute for Japanese Studies Tokyo*, Vol. 24 (1), 1-19.

— (2013), Meta-narratives of Japanese Popular Culture and of Japan in Different Regional Contexts: Perspectives from East Asia, Western Europe, and the Middle East. In: Koma, K., (Ed.), *Representation of Japanese Contemporary Popular Culture in Europe*. Vytautas: Vytautas Magnus University, 83-94 .

Palumbo, F. D. (2016), L'estetica del mondo fluttuante: il "giapponismo di Deleuze". *Laboratorio dell'ISPF* [Online], Vol. XIII. Available from: http://www.ispf-lab.cnr.it/2016_PLF.pdf [Accessed 20 February 2017].

Payne, C. (2003), Burying the Past: Nihonjinron and the Representation of Japanese Society in Itami's The Funeral. *Graduate Journal of Asia-Pacific Studies*, Vol. 1 (1), 13-20.

Pellitteri, M. (1999), *Mazinga Nostalgia. Storia, Valori e linguaggi della Goldrake-generation 1978-1999.* Rome: Castelvecchi.

— (2008), *Il drago e la saetta. Modelli, strategie e identità dell'immaginario giapponese*. Latina: Tunué.

— (2009), La ricerca e l'informazione sul fumetto e l'animazione giapponesi. Due note sui limiti metodologici in Italia e sull'approccio localistico qui e nel mondo. In: *Manga Academica*, Vol. 2. Naples: Società Editrice La Torre, 9-26.

— (2011a), Manga in Europa. I primi risultati di una ricerca comparativa internazionale in corso. In Casari, M., (Ed.), *Culture del Giappone contemporaneo*. Latina: Tunué, 225-273.

— (2011b), Prefazione. In: Bouissou, J.-M. *Il Manga. Storia e universi del fumetto giapponese*. Latina: Tunué, XI-XXIV, 313-315.

— (2012), Figli di una nostalgia minore: Mazinga e l'immaginario di una generazione. *Lo Spazio Bianco*. [Online] Available from: http://www.lospaziobianco.it/48325-figli-nostalgia/ [Accessed 25 January 2017].

— (2015), Animazione giapponese in Italia: strategie di programmazione e fasi di successo. *Cabiria – Studi di cinema*, Vol. 179 (1), 32-42.

— (2016), Notions de kawaii en France et Italie: un regard esthétique et sociologique. In: Sfej (French society of Japanese studies), (Ed.), *Japon Pluriel*, Vol. 11, *Le Japon au XXIème siècle: dynamiques et mutations*. Arles: Philippe Picquier [Forthcoming].

Pellitteri, M. and Salvador, M. (2014) *Conoscere i videogiochi*. Latina: Tunué.

Poirier, J., Clapier-Valladon, S. and Raybaut, P. (1983) *Les recits de vie*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France.

Roh, D. S. (2015), *Techno-Orientalism: Imagining Asia in Speculative Fiction, History, and Media*. New Brunswick: Routledge University Press.

Rush, A. (2009), Otaku Creations: The Participatory Culture of Fansubbing. *Kinephanos* [Online] Vol. 1 (1). Available from: http://www.kinephanos.ca/2009/imageries-numeriques-culture-et-reception-digital-imageries-culture-and-reception/ [Accessed 25 February 2017].

Shimizu, C. (1988), *Japon. La tentation de l'Occident. 1868-1912.* Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux.

Shūzō, K. (1992), *La struttura dell'iki*. Milan: Adelphi.

Spate, V., Bromfield, D., Hickey, G. and Mabuchi, A. (2001), *Monet and Japan*. Canberra: National Gallery of Australia.

Teti, M. (2011), *Generazione Goldrake. L'animazione giapponese e le culture giovanili degli anni Ottanta*. Milan: Mimesis.

Traini, R. (2007), Tanto per ricordare il salone. *afNews.info.* [Online] Available from: http://www.afnews.info/deposito/TrainiLucca [Accessed 25 January 2016].

Vanzella, L. (2005), *Cosplay culture: fenomenologia dei costume players italiani*. Latina: Tunué.

Warnock, E. and Martin, A. (2013), Red Alert: In Japan, Communists include some colourful characters. *The Wall Street Journal*. [Online] Available from: http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887323664204578609654109631758 [Accessed 20 January 2017].

Wichmann, S. (1999), *Japonisme: The Japanese Influence on Western Art Since 1858.* New York: Thames & Hudson.

---

[i] Our article draws on our own biography, referring both to our life trajectories and to a specific episode like our trip to Giverny. We have considered Poirier, Clapier-Valladon and Raybaut (1983) and their notion of ethnobiography to contextualize discourses and analyses in relation to the narrators and their socio-cultural contexts.

[ii] For a critical understanding of the relationships between European tradition and Japanese art, see, for instance, McNeal Lavender (1983), Wichmann (1999), Little (1996), Lambourne (2005), and the website of Prof. Brigitte Koyama-Richard (URL: <http://brigittekoyama.web.fc2.com/index.html>). To get a wider sense of this phenomenon, see also the catalogue of the exhibition on Japanese arts hosted by the Musée Guimet en 1988; and the catalogue of the exhibition on Monet and Japan hosted by the National Gallery of Australia and the Art Gallery of Western Australia (2001).

[iii] For a critical understanding of *nihonjinron,* see Kawamura 1980; Dale 1986, 1994; Mouer and Sugimoto 1986; Manabe and Befu 1992; Payne 2003.

[iv] On Hiramatsu Reiji and Claude Monet, see Koyama-Richard (2013).

[v] See Cantarelli (2009, 107). Other Italian websites include: *Mangaforever.it* – significantly large, it is more commercial rather than amateur and does not have an active web-community; *Jikogu.it* – once active in terms of community and online streaming, it was closed down and then re-appeared as *Tamachan.moe*, a smaller website; *Nanoda.com* – it has important partnerships with *manga* publishers, but its size has significantly decreased throughout the years.

[vi] We are aware of the limits (and value) of a local perspective over *manga* and *anime* (Berndt 2008), since we are basing our research on the Italian context and we are not using references written in Japanese. On this topic, see Pellitteri (2009, 9-26).

[vii] For a brief history of videogames and videogaming, see Pellitteri and Salvador (2014).

[viii] See, for instance, Iwabuchi (2002) to understand the Japanese cultural presence in Asia; Pellitteri (2011), Bouissou (2012) and Otmazgin (2013) for Europe; Napier (2007) for North America; Otmazgin (2013) for Middle East.

[ix] Pellitteri identified three kinds of aesthetics/archetypes, linked to distinct cultural models (2008, 8-9) — the robot, representing the technological progress; the infant, epitomized by the notion of "*kawaii*" (cute); and the mutation (the metamorphosis symbolized by *Pokémon* characters).

[x] Some of the interviewees decided to be identified by their nickname on *AnimeClick.it.*

[xi] All interviews were conducted in Italian, and the quotations are our own translations.

[xii] For a chronicle of the first editions of Lucca Comics, see Traini (2007). About the Comiket, see Inokai (2000).

[xiii] See Pellitteri (2011b, 314-315n14).

[xiv] For an understanding of the German experience, see Malone (2010).

[xv] Ruuby did not want to disclose her exact age and town. She was a university student and seemed to be in her early twenties.

[xvi] The remaining older staff was also prevalently male (we also count within them one of the authors of this article).

[xvii] All the quotations from Italian references are our own translations.

[xviii] See, for instance: Japan Local Government Centre (2012); Alt (2015); Warnock and Martin (2013).

[xix] For a recent contribution to the conceptualisation of *kawaii*, see Pellitteri (2016). Forthcoming.

[xx] Retrieved at http://wwwmcc.murdoch.edu.au/readingroom/8.2/Iwabuchi.html. It lacks page numbers.

[xxi] They refer to soft-power as in Nye (1990).

[xxii] In the early 2000s Japanese animation nearly disappeared from the programming of Italian channels, except for a few older ones broadcasted over and over again on one of the Italian private channels (Italia 1). MTV revived such tradition, identifying Japanese animation for the first time as *anime.* As a result, MTV became the new platform to access *anime.*

[xxiii] For an aesthetic analysis of the relationship between postmodernism, simulacra and Japanese fine arts and pop culture, see Palumbo (2016).

[xxiv] The Years of Lead (*Anni di piombo*) indicates a period of social and political turmoil in Italy, including political terrorism and killings committed by right-wing and left-wing activists, lasting

from the late 1960s (Piazza Fontana bombing on 12 December 1969) to the early 1980s.

xxv For an understanding of cosplay, see, for instance, Valzella (2005) and Manning and Gershon (2013).

xxvi *Girella* is an Italian sweet snack produced by Motta, which was very famous during the '70s-'80s. The older generations of Italian fans of Japanese pop culture use it to identify a relationship with Japanese animation that is stuck in the past and is not open to contemporary *manga/anime*.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Fabio Domenico PALUMBO *was born in Reggio Calabria (Italy) in 1975. After achieving a Master's degree in Philosophy at University of Messina in 2000, he was granted Bachelor's degree in Psychology at University of Padua in 2011. Currently attending Ph.D. school at University of Messina. His current research interests include postmodernism, psychoanalysis and Japanese pop culture.*

Domenica Gisella CALABRÒ *holds a Ph.D. in Cultural Anthropology from the University of Messina. Her thesis investigated the Maori relationship with rugby. During her fieldwork in New Zealand, she was hosted by the School of Maori Studies at Victoria University of Wellington. Her research interests are now expanding to include Japanese contexts, focusing on Ainu issues and Japanese pop culture.*

Beyond Time & Culture:
The revitalisation of Old Norse Literature and History in Yukimura Makoto's *Vinland Saga*

Maxime DANESIN **|** François-Rabelais University, France

Abstract

Due to unprecedented opportunities of global and cultural exchanges in the past decades, fragments of our past go beyond borders, nationalities and cultural differences. Contemporary popular culture is an important vector to convey them, even on the other side of the Earth, where European's past can become the future inspiration for foreign writers and artists. And Japan is no exception. It has started to be filled with European images from the past, whether it is in the medieval-fantasy backgrounds of video games or in highly praised literary works. Japanese popular literature participates in this movement, assimilating and reorganizing European cultural elements, before sending back to us those same fragments, deformed and/or revitalised. Amidst the various motifs extracted from our History and used by Japanese authors, one has caught our attention: the Vikings and their expedition to Vinland, in Yukimura Makoto's manga Vinland Saga*. Far from presenting stereotyped images of simple-minded and brutal Norse warriors, this historical work offers a new and foreign approach of Thorfinn Karselfni' story and the two Sagas of the Icelanders mentioning him, the* Grœnlendinga saga *and* Eiríks saga rauða*. In this article, I study how Yukimura Makoto reconstructs the Icelandic's Sagas and develops its historical context, in order to create his own rewriting of this famous Norse cultural element. By doing so, I argue that he provides the Japanese readers – and by ricochet European ones – with a transcultural and revitalised Old Norse Literature and History in the 21st century.*

The past decades have seen a massive and worldwide increase in cultural productions featuring medieval elements. Children's literature, novels, comics, even movies are now more than ever feeding our imagination with occasionally historically accurate but often in fact mythical representations. What might be misinterpreted as seemingly

trivial hides a deeper meaning: we have never severed our ties with the Middle Ages. Through the numerous forms it takes in our contemporary imagination, the medieval world remains vividly present, appearing as both a *commonplace* and *common pleasure* (Boulaire 2002, 294),[1] and a means to understand ourselves (Zumthor 1980, 17). In this sense, it is unsurprising that Japanese scholar Iguchi Atsushi has noted that "Europeans are vying to appropriate the Middle Ages for the sake of justifying themselves […] to the extent that the 'real' Middle Ages are no longer recognizable" (Iguchi 2010, 64), such as the political use of Joan of Arc's image in France (Amalvi 1996).

Crossing cultural boundaries, European medieval elements have established a strong presence in contemporary Japanese fiction, compelling Iguchi to mention the significant place they occupy on local bookshelves (Iguchi 2010, 65). Contemporary Japanese works dip heavily into this trend, whether in the form of manga (*Berserk*, *Akagami no Shirayukihime*, *Shingeki no Kyōjin*), light novels (*Slayer*, *Record of Lodoss War*, *Spice & Wolf*),[2] or even highly praised literary masterpieces (Hirano Keiichirō's novella *Nisshoku*). Needless to say, the increase of creations set against a medieval background does not spare us from mythical representations and stereotypes, especially since most of them are fantasy-based. Nonetheless, the diffusion of European medieval elements into late 20th- and early 21st-century Japanese fiction invites us to investigate this trend, as this might enable us to reorganise the pieces of our cultural memory into an original, intriguing and revitalised form, even perhaps challenging our perception of our past and culture

---

[1] Unless otherwise noted, all translations into English are my own.

[2] A variety of entertainment novel in Japan, mainly targeting junior and high school students (Enomoto 2008, 9).

through a new, transcultural, multicultural and globalised prism.

Among these transcultural works, the historical manga *Vinland Saga*, by Yukimura Makoto, winner of the 2009 Grand Prize in the Manga division at the 13th Japan Media Arts Festival, has caught my attention for its singularity, as it is the only manga entirely based on both Norse culture and Icelandic Sagas. The scarcity of historical literary works in Japan pertaining to Scandinavia, in contrast to the widespread references to its mythological elements, emphasizes the uniqueness of this series. The manga database website *Manga Updates*[3] has only 6 references for the keyword "Vikings" – compared to the 203 results for "European Ambient", 79 for "France" or 25 "Norse Mythology". Among them, only *Vinland Saga* can be considered "historical" – putting aside its parodic spin-off *Ganso Ylva-chan*. The others use either a mythological background (e. g. Ashibe Yuho's *Crystal Dragon*) or the word "Viking" as a synonym for pirate (Nakanuki Eri's *King of Viking*). Despite the popularity of the Northman archetype in our literature since the 19th century (Wawn 2000, Boyer 2011 & 2014, Olsson 2011), its presence in contemporary Japanese culture is seldom found. Up until Yukimura Makoto's work, for years the most famous Viking representation in Japan had been the 70's Japanese animation *Vicky the Viking*, adapted from the Swedish writer Runer Jonsson's novel of the same name (1963). Aimed at a young audience and absent of any violence, it mocked stereotypes such as ancestor worship created by Romanticism and Nazi ideologies (Olsson 2011, 118-119).

---

[3] Since its foundation in 2002, this website has been a valuable and essential database for the manga readers' community. Although it might not be perfect, it is a handy reference for researchers. The url: http://www.mangaupdates.com [Last Accessed: 12/06/2015].

Figure [1]. A cameo appearance of Vicky the Viking and his friend Ylvie in Yukimura Makoto, *Vinland Saga*, Vol. 2, Kōdansha, 2006, p. 59. © Kōdansha.

Vinland Saga is centred on the fictional life of Thorfinn Karlsefni,[4] a famous Icelander who carried on Leif Erikson's exploration of Vinland in Norse literature. In the first eight volumes, we follow this Viking mercenary's quest of revenge for his father's assassination during the conquest of England by the Danes, at the start of the 11th century. After a twist of events leading Thorfinn to fall into slavery, the second part is based on his path to redemption and his resolve to go to Vinland. The manga, which is still ongoing, is now in its third arc, starting with the fifteenth volume which is dedicated to the preparation for the expedition. I will focus on the two first arcs in this article.

Since the start of its serialisation in 2005,[5] *Vinland Saga* has become one, if not the main, herald of the Vikings and Sagas in Japanese cultural productions. Its success, and current reception in Europe, is one component of a new dynamic of the representation of Norse culture in contemporary literary works. Therefore, I attempt in this article to determine to what extent this manga rewrites the original Icelandic Sagas and revitalises

---

[4] In order not to confuse the readers, I will keep the manga and contemporary English versions of the main medieval names: Thorfinn (Þorfinnr), Leif Erikson (Leifr Eiríksson), Cnut the Great (Knútr), Thorkell (Þorkell) and even Æthelred (Aðalráðr), Swein Forkbeard (Sveinn Tjúguskegg), Gudrid Thorbjarnardóttir (Guðríður Þorbjarnardóttir).

[5] To be more precise, although the series was first published in the *Weekly Shōnen Magazine* (April 2005), it changed in December of the same year for editorial purposes: it was transferred to the monthly comic magazine *Afternoon*. The pace of productions seemed too quick for Yukimura Makoto.

them – in the sense that it instils a new meaning, life or interpretation. After exposing the intertextuality mechanism, I examine how history and fiction are intertwined in the manga, before finally turning my attention to the representation of Norse culture in the series.

Revitalising the Sagas

Often understood as a synonym for a "tale", the word "Saga" has been used as an exotic term in contemporary Japanese productions, whether in manga[6] (Rikudō Kōshi's *Excel Saga*) or light novels (Kurimoto Kaoru's *Guin Saga*). However, it is important to avoid assuming this implies *Vinland Saga* might be the vessel of a literary exoticism, destined solely to bring readers a feeling of elation through this adventure in a foreign land and time. Through an unprecedented medium – a manga – and a foreign pen, it rewrites one of the most famous works in medieval Norse Literature: the *Vínland Sagas,*[7] supposedly written in the 13th Century and consisting of two main texts: *Eiríks Saga Rauða* and *Grœnlendinga Saga* – hereafter abbreviated respectively as *ESR* and *GS*. Describing the discovery of Greenland and North America, these texts are classified among the *Íslendingasögur* (*The Sagas of Icelanders*), a type of historical saga which portrays the lives of famous Icelanders – mainly between 930 and 1050 AD (Boyer 1978, 12). The *Vínland Sagas* have been widely discussed by historians and literary scholars, who have focused on issues such as their historicity and literary motifs (Frakes 2001), their mutual contradictions (Boyer 1987, 1607-1618; Boyer 2014, 309-341;

---

[6] The Manga Updates database gives more than a hundred titles that contain the word "Saga".

[7] The English titles are respectively: *Saga of Erik the Red* and *Saga of the Greenlanders.* A third saga, *Grœnlendinga Þáttr* (*Greenlanders Tale*), does not concern us in this study since the manga bears no reference to it.

Pálsson & Magnusson 1987, 7-43), and even on the *Grœnlendinga Saga*'s primacy (Boyer 1978, 148).

As the main peritextual feature, the title of Yukimura Makoto's work indicates a more than obvious influence. By putting the singular form of the word "Saga", the Japanese author chose to offer his own original rewriting of the Vinland discovery rather than following strictly either the *ESR* or the *GS*. As the historian Martin Arnold states, both medieval sagas "give quite dramatically different versions of events" (Arnold 2013, 202), thus rendering it impossible for any works based on them to follow both strictly. One could either choose to follow only one of the Icelandic sources, or draw from both of them what one wants based on one's own creative license, therefore devising an alternative and singular saga. Furthermore, the title suggests genre adaptation and intertextuality. Regarding the latter, I refer here to Marc Eigeldinger's conception of this mechanism as the presence of one or several texts in another, "establish[ing] an exchange, a dialogue between [them]". The key function of this mechanism is that the objective "is not the raw reproduction of the borrowed material, but its transformation and transposition [...] in order to introduce, to produce a new signification" (Eigeldinger 1987, 16). In this regard, the work of Yukimura Makoto follows these principles.

As a matter of fact, up until the fifteenth volume Thorfinn Karlsefni has yet to start his expedition to Vinland in 1018. Nonetheless, this faraway land has already been mentioned multiples times. The main representation of its landscape is given by Leif Erikson's narration in the first volume (Vol. 1, 127-138). His description of the newfound shores and settlement is based on the *GS* version (Boyer 1987, *GS*, 361-363);

both the speech and the drawings convey Vinland's original identification as a paradise on earth – a utopian conception which becomes the cornerstone of the manga. This view of an idealized landscape contains more than what meets the eyes, and it goes beyond the Icelandic sources. The *Vínland Sagas* are the heirs of "the larger genre of Eurocentric representation of the Outland or Other World", and they convey the "utopic or promised land motif", a literary pattern that goes back to Greco-Roman tradition and the Biblical tale of Eden (Frakes 2001, 168-170). According to the literature historian Jerold C. Frakes:

> The ideal landscape is generally represented as little short of miraculous in its beauty, fertility and climatic benevolence, while its inhabitants are most often conceived as "primitives" incapable of truly enjoying the natural wonders of the landscape or even of appreciating its bounties. These ideas contribute to the common (especially in the late medieval period) European conception that some paradisical land was to be found to the west across the ocean. (Frakes 2001, 170)

Referring directly to the original sagas, Frakes continues:

> The *Vínland Sagas* also represent the typical signs of the quasi-paradisical lands of the West: an idealized landscape where winters were so mild that livestock could overwinter outdoors, where pasturage was lush year-round, where the dew on the grass was the sweetest thing they had ever tasted, where timber abounded, where grapes not only grew wild but were immediately intoxicating direct from the vine, where wheat grew wild, and salmon all but clogged the rivers. (Frakes 2001, 172)

Although it can be considered less descriptive and mythical in its representations, the manga does convey some of these features and the general atmosphere of an earthly paradise, enhanced by the contrasting discourse on the hardships of living in the cold of Greenland and Iceland (Vol. 1, 143-145). Vinland appears as a symbol of hope and a colonial project that could ensure higher-quality everyday life.

However, the Japanese rewriting is not completely loyal to the original sagas. For example, when Leif mentions his peaceful encounter with the Skraelings – the natives – (Vol. 1, 137-138), the event differs entirely from the medieval texts. In the *GS*, it is not Leif but his brother Thorvaldr who made this encounter, and it was not in the least peaceful, as it resulted in hostilities and his own death (Boyer 1987, *GS,* 365). Whereas in the *ESR*, the first mention of the natives happens later during Karlsefni's expedition, and it was certainly a peaceful encounter (Boyer 1987, *ESR, 349-350*). However, after a second meeting which ended in a scene of trade, or to be more precise, a "systematic defrauding of the 'natives' […] all too familiar to us from later explorer narratives" (Frakes 2001, 181), the third meeting resulted in killings (Boyer 1987, *ESR,* 350). It seems that since there is no trace of hostilities (yet) in the manga, Leif's narration is based on the *ESR*'s first encounter. This can be corroborated by the manga's character making a clear reference to the Skraelings' fascination for the Norsemen (Vol. 1, 137; Boyer 1987, *ESR, 349-350*). Nonetheless, the peacefulness of this meeting is exaggerated in the Japanese rewriting; Leif mentions that they became "immediately *friends* despite not having the same language" (Vol. 1, 137). Furthermore, despite an implied technology gap between the Vikings and the natives (they had "stone spears"), the manga's narration does not represent the Native Americans as inferior, only stating that they were small and beardless with black hair and eyes (Vol. 1, 137). This neutral statement goes against the way the Skraelings are originally described in the medieval sagas, that is to say in accordance with the Eurocentric discourse tradition and its "paradigmatic mode of representing 'native inhabitants' […]":

A cardinal principle of Eurocentric discourse is that European culture is assumed superior to non-European cultures in most respects: economics and material culture, the physiology of the population, intellectual life, religion and morality. (Frakes 2001, 180)

Jerold C. Frakes reminds us that the "physical nature of the non-Europeans is represented as inferior: they are of smaller size, strength, and beauty […]", stating clearly that the *Vínland Sagas* "confirm the pattern" of the way the natives are portrayed (Frakes 2001, 183): Native Americans "were dark (small), ugly, and had ugly hair on their heads" (Frakes 2001, 183; Boyer 1987, *ESR,* 349-350). Hence, the medieval description is clearly Eurocentric. In other words, by removing the Eurocentric discourse, the rewriting of this encounter creates an even ground between the natives and the Vikings. This modification contributes to the rendering of Vinland as a dreamscape free from wars and suffering, far more utopian than the original. This amplification of its idealisation creates an even bigger gap between the cold, harsh and brutal reality of the characters' everyday lives, whether in Iceland, Greenland or on the battlefields of England. This mythical image becomes a leitmotiv throughout the manga (Vol. 1, 126-127, 181; Vol. 12, 115-119; Vol. 13, 170-171, 184-190; Vol. 14, 138-139), and plays a central role in the narrative.

Moreover, by setting Leif's narration in 1002, Yukimura establishes another gap: a small chronological disparity from the sagas. This has crucial consequences for the manga narration, as it delays Thorfinn's original expedition[8] and entwines his fate with the Danish King Cnut, as

---

[8] It is supposed to have taken place around 1010 AD (Byock 2007, 400). This delay also creates a small gap in the carbon dating of the famous Viking archaeological site in North America, L'Anse aux Meadows, where there is "a probability of 68% that the [Viking] occupation occurred between AD 1000 – 1018 and 95% from AD 986 – 1022" (Nydal 1989, 983-984).

this article will show. Despite being anachronistic, this choice firmly anchors the sagas in the historical reality.

Yukimura chose to make Thorfinn the main character of his manga, in the same way the *ESR* does. While the *GS* depicts Thorfinn as a central figure in only its seventh and ninth chapters, the *ESR* portrays him as such in six of its fourteen chapters, thus justifying its second name, *Þorfinns Saga Karlsefna* (*The Saga of Thorfinn Karlsefni*) (Boyer 1978, 147). However, despite this focus on his character, there is but scarce information about Thorfinn's life before his expedition in both original sagas. Karlsefni is described as a rich merchant, a ship captain and a great trader (Boyer 1987, *ESR*, 344-345; *GS*, 368). Neither his birth date nor death is known, and the two sagas even contradict each other regarding his lineage. He is described as the son of Thórdr Horsehead and Thórunn in one (Boyer 1987, *ESR*, 344), whereas the other does not mention his mother (Boyer 1987, *GS*, 368 & 1623).[9] Yukimura uses the information gap left in the *GS* to create Thorfinn's mother, Helga, and designates as his maternal grandfather the Jarl Sigvald Strut-Haraldsson (Vol. 6, 108), chieftain of the Jomsvikings and famous character of the *Jómsvíkinga Saga* (*The Saga of the Jomsvikings*). Owing to the brevity of the *Vínland Sagas* (Boyer 2014, 332) and its scarcity of personal details, this expansion upon the original materials is necessary for the manga's consistency. Similar to the transposition of myths onto novels, this adaptation applies the literary mechanism theorized by Gérard Genette called "amplification", defined as the addition of events, places or even characters (Foucrier 2008, 34-35). Yukimura has plenty of room to

---

[9] Boyer mentions in his translation notes (Boyer 1987, 1623) that Karlsefni's hometown could be Reynines, in the Skagafjörður, whereas Yukimura chooses an unnamed village in the south of Iceland (Vol. 1, ending map).

imagine Thorfinn's physical appearance, his life prior to his expedition, and his reason for embracing his destiny. In the original medieval texts, Thorfinn's ulterior motive for going to Vinland do not seem to differ from his contemporaries: to earn fame and wealth (Boyer 2002, 139), and more particularly in this case discovering wealthy lands that can be colonised (Boyer 1987, *ESR,* 346; *GS*, 369). In other words, his adventure is but the continuation of "the historical Norse movement across the Atlantic", what Jerold C. Frakes terms the "trans-Atlantic colonial project" (Frakes 2001, 195). This being said, if the Japanese writer does use the wealth of Vinland as a motivating factor for the expedition, he freely invents a more profound and personal purpose for his protagonist, that is to say that of establishing in Vinland a utopian country without slaves or wars, where Thorfinn will be able to atone for his past sins as a mercenary. By doing so, Yukimura revitalises the whole meaning behind Thorfinn's exploration of Vinland.

Although the *Vínland Sagas* have been and remain the core of the manga, they are not the only ones that enter into an intertextual relationship with Yukimura's work. Indeed, he combines his reconstruction of the Vinland discovery with elements from three others Icelandic sagas: the *Jómsvíkinga Saga* (*The Saga of the Jomsvikings*), *the Saga of St. Olaf* and the *Knýtlinga Saga* – hereafter abbreviated respectively as *JS*, *SO* and *KS*. Quite singular among the others, the *JS* is dedicated to a legendary company of Vikings mercenaries from Jómsborg. They went down in history as the paragon of Norse warriors after the loss of the famous naval Battle of Hjörungavágr (Boyer 2011, 592; Boyer 1978, 90; Boyer 2012, *JS*, 339-343). The Jomsvikings hold an important place in the manga as a

recurring mercenary force fighting alongside the Danish Kings, and as the group from which Thorfinn's lineage originates.

In addition to his father-in-law being his chieftain, Thorfinn's father was one of the four Jomsvikings captains in the manga (Vol. 6, 107). He fled from the Battle of Hjörungavagr – a deed that becomes the catalyst for his son's fate (Vol. 2, 5; Vol. 6, 106-139). Although Thors is not mentioned in the *JS*, Búi the Stout – one of the original Jomsvikings' captains – shares common ground with him. His nickname suggests a strong build, and he jumped into the water during the battle and was never heard of again (Boyer 2012, *JS*, 335). Furthermore, Yukimura amplifies the familial connection with another famous Jomsvikings captain, Thorkell the Tall, who is appointed as Thorfinn's great uncle in the manga. Thorkell appears in both the *JS* and the *SO* (Boyer 2012, *JS*, 298-336; Sturluson 1983, 30-31 & 275), and he is a well-known historical figure (Boyer 1995, 235-236; Arnold 2007, 118-122; Haywood 1996, 120). Throughout the first narrative arc, Yukimura slightly twists history and the *SO*, by having him play a crucial role in the development of the storyline. Famous for changing sides, Thorkell battled the English camp before defending London against Swein's army in 1013 then joining Cnut in his conquest, as seen in both the original texts and the manga (Vol. 3, Ch. 18-19; Vol. 6, 214). Yukimura takes advantage of his behaviour to portray him as the archetype of the Norse warrior who takes pleasure in battles and seeks a glorious death to enter Walhalla (Vol. 3, 180).

Last but not least, the Danish King Cnut's life is depicted in both the *SO* and the *KS*. The sagas provide information on his conquest of England and his life as ruler of the North Sea Empire. However, he has nothing to

do with Thorfinn in the original medieval texts. Furthermore, as Cnut's life before his father's death is hardly mentioned in the original sagas, Yukimura relies on the mechanism of amplification and his imagination to depict his ascension to the Denmark throne, allowing the readers to follow his development as a man and a king through both the narrative and drawings (Figures 2, 3 & 4). This has a double impact, since it gives a new representation to the life of one of the most famous historical figures of Denmark for both Japanese and foreign readers, in the same way the *Asterix* series has provided young French children with a vivid contemporary image of Julius Caesar.

Figure [2]. First appearance of Cnut, as a womanly and shy man, Yukimura Makoto, *Vinland Saga*, Vol. 4, Kōdansha, 2007, p. 38. © Kōdansha.

Figure [3]. Cnut's dark aura, as he is tormented by the power of the crown, Yukimura Makoto, *Vinland Saga*, Vol. 14, Kōdansha, 2014, p. 107. © Kōdansha.

Figure [4]. Last drawing of Cnut, freed from his father's shadow and appearing as Cnut the Great, Yukimura Makoto, *Vinland Saga*, Vol. 14, Kōdansha, 2014, p. 161. © Kōdansha.

Additionally, an unexpected intertextual inclusion should be mentioned. In the fourteenth volume of the manga, the readers witness Cnut showing the limit of his power against the ocean waves – he tries to use his royal authority, ordering them to stop moving (Vol. 14, 106-115). This event was reported by the English historian Henry of Huntingdon in his medieval chronicle (Henry of Huntingdon 1853, 199). As it was written almost one hundred years after Cnut's death, this episode is very likely to be more symbolic than historical. Nonetheless, it became an iconic representation of both humility/arrogance and God's power over kings. It even acquired a proverbial status in the English language. What is interesting here is that the intertextuality mechanism is clearly obvious in the manga. Henry of Huntingdon starts by indicating that Cnut was at "the summit of his power"; in the manga, the Dane declares that "[he is] the sovereign [and] the strongest Viking of the North Sea" (Vol. 14, 107). Then, the Cnut in the former report invokes his power over the land and that "no one has ever resisted [his] commands with impunity"; the latter his military power and his control of the whole region (Vol. 14, 108). However, if their failures are the same, the results greatly differ. In Henry of Huntingdon's report, Cnut realizes his inferiority and accepts that God is above all, whereas Yukimura

revitalises this scene by giving it an antagonistic and tragic signification: a declaration of insurrection against God. This event is a final challenge to Cnut's image as a Christian king and crystallizes the peak of his philosophical and religious struggle throughout the manga.

Hence, as Yukimura puts into motion his own rendition of *Vinland Saga*, he revitalises not only the original materials of the Vinland discovery, but also a whole part of the Norse literature in the process. By doing so, he also pays homage to one of the main features of the Icelandic sagas, that is to say, by creating an intertextual play between them (Boyer 1978, 13). Lastly, I would like to add that it goes even beyond the Nordic culture and literature, since the first narrative arc clearly refers, through Askeladd's character, to the Arthurian legend – which would require a separate study.

Fiction & History Entwined in *Vinland Saga*

Rewriting the *Vínland Sagas* as a contemporary manga implies genre adaptation. As such, it is necessary to review some essential elements of the Norse literature. A saga is defined as "a story in prose – an essential element –, more or less historical, either based on an oral tradition or not, […] and written in a distinctive style […] (Boyer 1978, 9).[10] The French historian Régis Boyer states that it combines various genres – with epic, heroic, dramatic or even satirical sections (Boyer 1978, 194) – and follows Aristotle's definition of tragedy (Boyer 1978, 159-168). Nonetheless, it never appears to be lyrical (Boyer 1978, 155 & 159). The sagas are "[…] severe and serious, often dark and cruel, extremely tense […]" (Boyer 1996, 54), and were written for the reader's' "entertainment"

---

[10] I base my understanding of the Sagas mainly on Régis Boyer's works (1978, 1996, 2012, 2014).

and "pleasure" (Boyer 2012, 11). They convey as their cornerstone what the French historian named "the dialectic of destiny-honour-revenge", here understood as the fundamental notions of the *Weltanschauung* (worldview) of the Norse. (Boyer 1978, 194; Boyer 2002, 174-175; Boyer 2011, 428-431, 538-541). For an individual, such a dialectic consists of learning his destiny, and accepting and assuming it with honour and dignity; if anyone ever impairs it, the Viking would have then the imprescriptible right to take revenge (Boyer 2011, 428-431). Furthermore, despite "fostering our knowledge of historical facts […]", the sagas are not historically faithful documents (Boyer 2012, 11). Boyer states that the sagas must be interpreted as a type of historical novel:

> "Taking [the saga], as it is, for an objective historical chronicle would mean committing a serious misinterpretation; conversely, solely seeing this work as a literary fiction would mutilate its value. It is really at the midway between these two attitudes that we must be." (Boyer 1978, 146)

Obviously, the manga cannot strictly follow the literary characteristics of the medieval genre. Nonetheless, it respects most of them, whether through the use of a strong historical basis, through the intertextuality mechanism, or with the way tragedy permeates the whole story. For instance, while Thorfinn's desire to kill Askeladd in a fair duel is naïve and contradictory to the saga style (Boyer 1978, 183), the latter emphatically stresses this mistake as he narrates his own past and personal revenge (Vol. 7, 119-147). In this way, Askeladd's cleverness and guile echo the ideal qualities of the Icelandic sagas' characters. Needless to say, the dialectic of destiny-honour-revenge is at the core of Yukimura's narration, from Thorfinn's purpose in life throughout the first eight volumes to Askeladd's youth (Vol. 7, Ch. 46).

This dialectic is one of the most romanticized elements of the depiction of Vikings in popular culture. However, Yukimura is not using this manga to glorify the values of the Norse; rather, he confronts them and he has even mentioned how much he hates the Norse conception of "honour above all" (Vol. 7, author's ending notes). His contemporary view is related to the essential question of "what is a true warrior?", which is continuously repeated in *Vinland Saga*, embodied by Thors (Vol. 2) and passed onto his son during the second arc of the manga. Finding the answer to this question emerges as Thorfinn's true destiny and leitmotiv for his expedition (Vol. 8, 120-122; Vol. 10, 203-205). The Icelander realizes it through his meeting with Askeladd, in his nightmare about Walhalla – dreams as a source of divination being a characteristic of the Norse dialectic (Vol. 10, Ch. 70-71; Boyer 1978, 177). However, this essential question of "what is a true warrior?" is neither Norse nor Christian; it appears in other Japanese manga – even as a central theme in Oh! Great's *Tenjō Tenge*. [11] It appears as the main foreign, anachronistic, and unexpected element of Yukimura's work, and therefore, it interferes with the Norse's *Weltanschauung* by enforcing a contemporary view that questions and challenges the third part of its dialectic, that is, revenge (Boyer 2011, 430). On one hand, as he learns, accepts and assumes his destiny of going to Vinland, Thorfinn does indeed follow the worldview of his culture; on the other hand, through his wish to atone for his sins and to avoid killing and seeking revenge, thus becoming a "true warrior", he firmly rejects his imprescriptible right as a "Viking". This modifies the original meaning behind Karlsefni's exploration of Vinland, which was

---

[11] Published by Shūeisha from 1997 to 2010, the 22-volume series is based on the art of combat conception, and also highlights the fundamental question of what it means to be a true warrior.

most likely to earn fame and wealth, in the usual Viking way. In the manga, Thorfinn's ulterior motive has less to do with gaining such things than it does with striving to atone for his sins. *In fine*, it is by rejecting a fundamental element of his Viking nature that he strengthens his resolve to leave for Vinland. Thus, his expedition appears more as a voluntary and necessary exile rather than one intended to establish a Viking colony as in the original sagas (Boyer 1987, *ESR,* 346; *GS*, 369). However, since the mastermind behind his father's assassination is still alive as of the fifteenth volume, we have yet to witness whether Thorfinn's new resolve to not seek revenge will last.

Despite these disparities between the manga and the original sagas, there can be no saga adaptation without a proper historical setting – a cornerstone of the Icelandic sagas. Through the fictionalised life of Thorfinn Karlsefni, the readers witness not only the events leading to his Vinland expedition, but also the rise of the Danish King Cnut. Thorfinn's story develops simultaneously along with the historic birth of the North Sea Empire (Figure 5).

Volumes	Thorfinn Karlsefni	Cnut the Great
1 – 8 **(Ch. 54)**	Viking mercenary *From revenge to nothingness*	Prince of Denmark *The Rise of the King*
8 – 13	Slave *The path of Redemption*	King of England & Denmark *The path of Kingship*
14[12] **(Transition)**	From *Leysingi (freed slave)*[13] to Explorer *The Two Paradises,*[14] *Toward Vinland*	From Sweinsson to Cnut the Great *The Two Paradises, Toward the* *North Sea Empire*

Figure [5]. The parallel evolution of Thorfinn and Cnut's situations.

---

[12] Published in October 2014, the fifteenth volume opens a third arc, as Thorfinn plans his expedition.

[13] Thorfinn is not yet a *bóndi* (farmer) since he has no possessions. He also never claimed the *Jarl* title (earl) that he could have inherited from his father.

[14] Title of the ninety-eight chapter.

Readers are taken through crucial historical events – often indicated by the captions –, which help advance the narrative. The plot starts with the mention of the St. Brice's Day massacre on 13 November 1002 (Vol. 1, Ch. 5), which saw the English King Æthelred carry out the slaughter of the Danes living in England. This gave the Danish King Swein Forkbeard the opportunity to claim revenge and attack England (Vol. 1, Ch. 5; Boyer 1995, 233). In the manga, this event becomes the triggering factor of Thorfinn's fate – and saga –, as it leads to his father's death (Vol. 2) and transforms him into a Viking mercenary.

Another historical turning point is the London siege by Swein Forkbeard's army (Hagland & Watson 2005, 329) at the end of the year 1013, and its outcome (Vol. 3). Facing the strong defence of Thorkell the Tall's mercenaries, the Danish army was forced to withdraw (Arnold 2007, 119; Haywood 1996, 120). Yukimura Makoto's narration uses this event to alter history slightly. According to the historian Martin Arnold, the London siege was led by Cnut himself, and, in the manga, it results in the Danish Prince becoming Thorkell's prisoner. This leads to the first encounter between Thorfinn and the future Danish King (Vol. 4), which will be the trigger for the rise of Cnut (Vol. 6, 7 & 8) and the fall of the Icelander into slavery (Vol. 8). Moreover, Yukimura exploits the lack of historical documentation to create a dramatic end for Swein Forkbeard (Vol. 8, 96-97). Whereas the *SO* asserts that he dies in his bed in February 1014 (Sturluson 1983, 31), in the manga the Danish King is murdered by Askeladd – thus allowing Cnut to seize the throne. The altered aftermath of the London siege culminates ten volumes later, in Thorfinn and Cnut's fated confrontation in 1018, during which they establish their new resolutions (Vol. 14). Cnut's personality and policies

are strongly influenced by his fictional meeting with Thorfinn and Askeladd. This way, Yukimura's imagination fills in the blanks left by the *SO* and *KS* through intertextual play with the *Vínland Sagas.* On the other hand, by entwining Thorfinn's life prior to his expedition with the historical legacy of Cnut, the Japanese author gives a proper European geopolitical setting to the Vinland discovery that is nowhere to be found in the original sagas.

Blending fictional elements with history necessitates several choices that affect our present perception of the Nordic past, such as the choice to clearly indicate that, in order to achieve his ambitions, Cnut ordered the poisoning of his own brother, Harold II (Vol. 11, Ch. 72), and his enemies, the English Kings Æthelred the Unready and Edmund Ironside (Vol. 9, Ch. 62) – although there is no historical evidence of these acts. This choice reinforces Cnut's unwavering determination to ensure the establishment of his "Arcadian dream" for the Vikings (Vol. 11, 24), even if it means walking down the same accursed path as his loathed father (Vol. 11, 33). Additionally, Cnut's peculiar struggle against the "will of the crown" (Vol. 11-14) appears in the manga as a tragic flaw that creates a singular representation of this character, beyond historical sources. First mentioned by Swein in the manga, the crown has its own will, slowly subjugating its owner (Vol. 7, 40-43). Cnut is tormented by it and the hallucination of his father's head, and his kingship is gradually stained by murders and betrayal. This tragic situation is similar to the fate of kings in Shakespearean tragedies and what the literary theorist Jan Kott described as the "Grand Mechanism" (Kott 2006, 23). The tragic turn of Cnut's reign – visually symbolized by his hallucination –, is cut off by his confrontation with Thorfinn (Vol. 14, 160-161). Yukimura uses

this scene to reintegrate Cnut back into the course of history – where he is viewed as a great ruler (Arnold 2007, 122; Boyer 1995, 238) –, and thus returns the narrative to the events prior to the Vinland expedition.

Hence, Yukimura's adaptation mixes together history, fiction, and the essential characteristics of the sagas. By doing so, *Vinland Saga* conveys not only new significations of Norse literature but, as noted previously by the historian Boyer, it decidedly locates this manga on the "midway" status in the historical manga genre, perpetuating the traditional conception of the sagas.

Conveying Nordic Culture and History Through Manga

Following his wish to showcase t various aspects of Viking culture (Vol. 1, author ending notes), Yukimura Makoto indulged himself in historical reading and even went to Iceland for his documentation work (Vol. 2. 228-229). In the process, he chose to avoid the usual mythical images that have been propagated since the Romantic movement in the 19th century (Boyer 2011; 2014) but which are criticized by historians, such as the extravagant helmets with horns or human sacrifices. The readers are immersed in a more accurate depiction of the Viking era thanks to detailed historical aspects of Nordic culture, conveyed by both the drawings and the narration.

Among those, I must first mention Thors' longhouse – *skáli* – inspired by the famous Icelandic ruins of Stöng, as it is suggested by a quick comparison between the latter's archaeological survey (Byock 2007, 57) and the Japanese drawings (Vo1., Ch. 3 & ending notes; Vol. 14, Ch. 100; Vol. 15, Ch. 101). From the fireplace and its wooden benches along the walls (Vol. 1, 135-136) to the well-known vertical loom and its tools

(Vol. 3, 213-215; Figure 6), every element of the typical Icelandic residence described by historians can be found throughout the manga (Boyer 1992, 90-93 & 100; Boyer 2001, 240 & 249-251; Byock 2007, 57-62). Besides architecture, everyday clothes also reveal the particular attention by the mangaka to create a realistic setting.

Figure [6]. The Icelandic vertical loom. Yukimura Makoto, *Vinland Saga*, Vol. 3, Kōdansha, 2006, p. 213. © Kōdansha.

Moreover, writing a manga about the Vikings necessitates portraying their ships, as the two are integral to each other (Boyer 2002, 136). Yukimura reinforces this relationship with several representations of *langskip* and *knörr* from the very start by depicting them on the cover of the first volume. Even throughout chapter one, the readers can enjoy the

representations of historical navigation elements, from the famous shield-rail *skjaldrim* (Boyer 2011, 348) to the chests used as benches and to store personal belongings (Durand 1996, 74). In addition to the drawings, the author shares with his Japanese readers' historical knowledge regarding the traditions of Viking boats, such as sailor law, mentioned by Leif (Vol. 1, 167), in which the wooden figurehead of the ship is dropped when returning home or approaching friendly land (Boyer 2011, 448; Durand 1996, 64) – it can be seen when Cnut arrives in York (Vol. 7, Ch. 48; Figure 7).
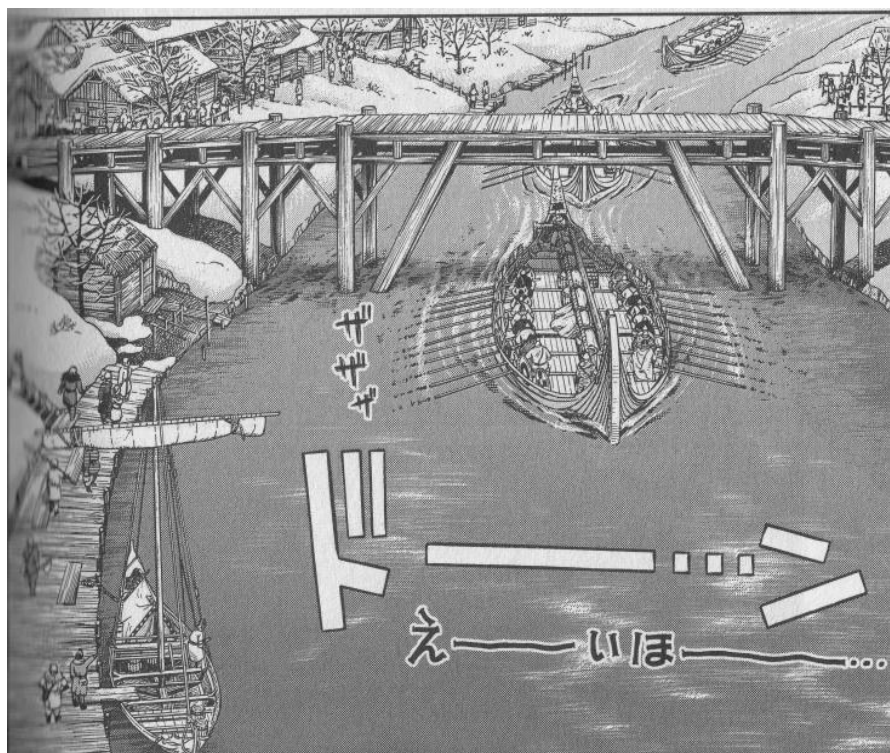

Figure [7]. Vikings ships with their figureheads dropped, Yukimura Makoto, *Vinland Saga*, Vol. 7, Kōdansha, 2009, p. 162. © Kōdansha.

What of the image conveyed by the warriors? Countless mythical images in American or European literature have twisted our perception of the historical facts. In *Vinland Saga*, the Vikings portrayed are not common farmers going on a summer raid. They are Danish mercenaries,

such as Askeladd or Thorkell's troops, professionals in a time of conquest, strong and well-trained men who offer their services to make a living, whether to the Franks (Vol. 1, Ch. 1) or to Swein Forkbeard's campaign in England. Overall Yukimura is respectful in his historical representation of their equipment, which would depend on the character's social status (Boyer 2001, 66-68; Boyer 2011, 312-316).[15] Only the *Jomsvikings* are distinctive in their rather professional-looking uniform; a clear indication of their discipline and unity as a legendary mercenary band (Figure 8).
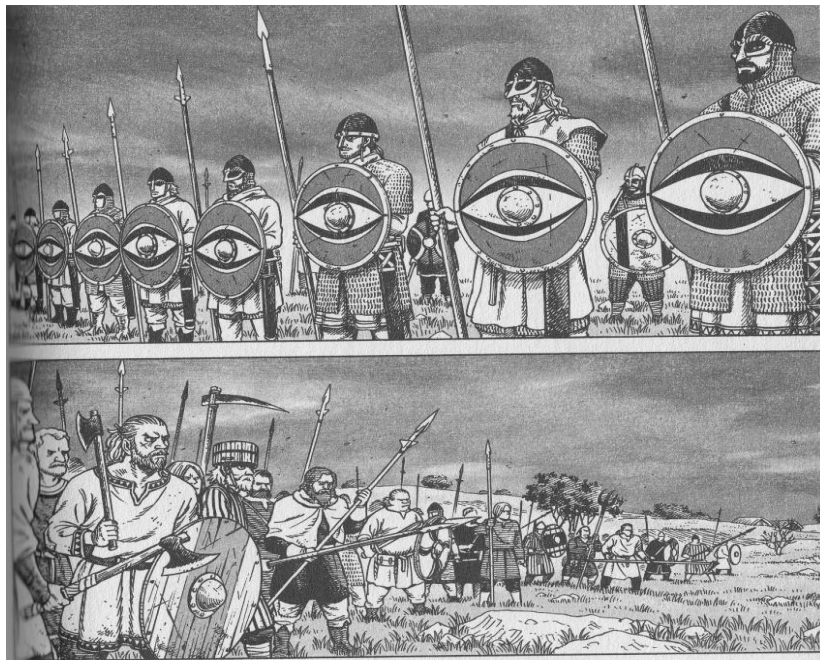
Figure [8]. The Jomsvikings (top) against under-equipped farmers (bottom). Yukimura Makoto, *Vinland Saga*, Vol.13, Kōdansha, 2013, p.100. © Kōdansha.

Another significant element of cultural representation in the manga is slavery, which is depicted in a realistic and historical way, without the usual polarisation of Good and Evil that is typical of an entertainment

---

[15] Askeladd's intriguing armour, a muscle cuirass, is related to his invented Roman ancestry.

medium. Slavery played an important social and economic role, yielding great profit – Vikings were known for having slaves as their main merchandise (Vol. 7, 152-158; Boyer 2011, 395). Nonetheless, slavery in those times was different from our contemporary conception of it (Boyer 2011, 463-465; Boyer 1995, 257-260): slaves could earn back their freedom and were respected as human beings. With the example of Erlingr's farm management narrated in the *SO* (Sturluson 1983, 39), Yukimura applies this aspect of slavery during the second arc of Thorfinn's story (Vol. 8, 182; Vol. 11, 41-49; Vol. 9, 206-207).

Furthermore, the author makes use of this slavery episode to portray the agricultural cycle and medieval farming, such as the wheat harvest (Vol. 8-13; Vol. 9, 57). In the same way, various passages are used to portray Nordic farming lives, through such representations as the wheat harvest (Vol. 9, 5-11; Figure 9). These scenes are not only essential for the evolution of the protagonist, since they serve as humble life lessons for Thorfinn who has spent his youth as a mercenary, but also to the readers who are educated through them about a specific aspect of Norse culture, far from the stereotypical images of barbarians craving for blood. Both the main character and the readers learn from these representations.
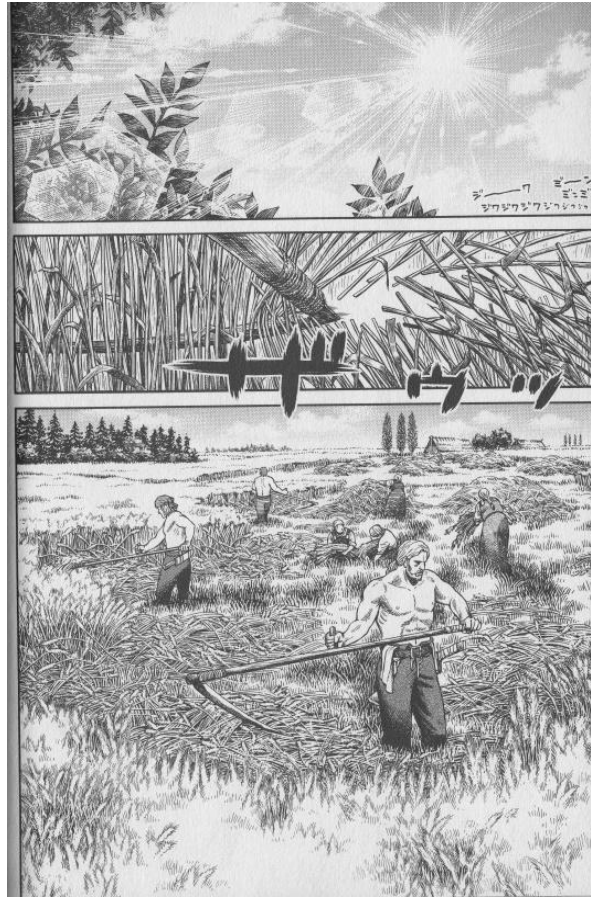
Figure [9]. Harvesting, Yukimura Makoto, *Vinland Saga*, Vol. 9, Kōdansha*, 2010, p. 6. © Kōdansha.

Slavery is even more important for the narration. The background of Askeladd, a former slave himself, is at the centre of the first arc's narration, and it is a contributing factor to his beheading the King Swein Forkbeard (Vol. 7, Ch. 47; Vol. 8, 63-64). It is also a key factor for Thorfinn's expedition. As already mentioned, Vinland is regarded as a symbolic utopia untouched by wars and slavery. The guiding principle of a peaceful land far beyond the horizon is first seen in the young slave Hordaland's words (Vol. 1, 126-127). Her words, remembered by Thorfinn during his time in slavery (Vol. 12, 115-119), become the spark that lead him to decide on starting his expedition. However, chronologically, it was his father, Thors, who first describes Vinland to a dying slave as a utopian place free from wars and

slave traders (Vol. 1, 181). Almost like a magical incantation, the same speech is used by Thorfinn at the death of the slave Arneis (Vol. 13, 170-171), clearly establishing that the Icelander is now walking in his father's footsteps, ready to embrace his destiny. Therefore, slavery is undoubtedly one of the manga essential elements, acting as the cornerstone of the rewriting of the original *Vínland Sagas*. It gives a whole new meaning to Thorfinn Karlsefni's expedition.

Lastly, I would like to mention a linguistic element that, interestingly, reveals itself only through the reception of *Vinland Saga* in France. Although the manga uses some original Norse words, the Japanese edition does not put any helpful notes for the readers, whereas the French version gives definitions and dates in footnotes – which are sometimes confusing.[16] However, the French translators avoided using the word "drakkar" when mentioning the Vikings boats. This incorrect term, which has been sadly overused in popular French books and language for a century, has been subject to criticism and one of the main French stereotypes of the Norse culture (Boyer 2011, 448-449). And the Norse culture being, at best, mentioned in French schools, the efforts of these translators through the introduction of the manga *Vinland Saga* in France provides a good opportunity for young French readers to avoid repeating the mistakes of past generations. Of course, it would be quite naïve to think that this translation will suffice by itself to move the French readership's perception of Norse culture away from those stereotypes, but it is nonetheless an interesting and positive step in that direction.

---

[16] Such as for the battle of Hjörungavágr, first indicated in 986 (Vol. 2, 5) then in 980 (Vol. 6, 109).

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, the *Vínland Sagas* have been subject to a great number of rewritings, "function[ing] as a stage setting for a wide range of contemporary concerns for over a hundred and fifty years: politics, race, religion, and gender" (Arnold 2013, 199-201). As summarized by the historian Martin Arnold:

> From the early nineteenth century through to the mid-twentieth century, Vínland served as a location for expounding ideas about the superiority of traditional white European and/or American racial, religious, and gender values. Since then, the demands for civil rights, the perceived blight of industrial capitalism, an increasing consciousness of ecological vandalism, and a growing sense of shame over the past depredations of colonial powers, have prompted literary artists to see Vínland in increasingly abstract terms as a metaphor for American society. (Arnold 2013, 201)

In this respect, Yukimura Makoto's work can be characterized as representative of a new school of the literary tradition of post-war rewritings. Despite only offering a glimpse of Vínland itself, and it might be too bold to suggest that it is a metaphor for American society, the manga does share the "hallmark" of this post-war approach: an "implicit social critique, partly prompted by wartime disillusionment" (Arnold 2013, 201). Whether it is the leitmotiv of "what is a true warrior?", the way the author rejects the notion of "honour above all" or embraces the question of slavery, or even his early depiction of the Skraelings which is relatively free of the discourse of eurocentrism, all of these anachronistic ideas are post-war postures.

Such a literary heritage does not devalue the originality of the manga. Far from being a raw transposition of the medieval text or another repetition of the usual Viking stereotypes, the singularity of Yukimura Makoto's manga adaptation deserves praise. As an intertextual work,

Vinland Saga achieves an outstanding revitalisation of the Norse Literature, displaying new significations through the reconstruction of its characters' lives and psychologies. As an historical manga, it draws away from the previous generation of representations, and restore the image of the Viking without many of the romantic stereotypes that have been attributed to them since the 19th century. It is a prime example of a new generation of books, which focuses more on realism and rejects past stereotypes.[17] *Vinland Saga* contributes to the growing interest in historical representations in contemporary Japanese comics production's, alongside famous titles such as Sōryō Fuyumi's *Cesare*, dedicated to the eponymous Renaissance figure, or Iwaaki Hitoshi's *Historie*, based on the life of Eumenes, a general under Alexander the Great. This new wave raises such questions as how educational can these manga be? Can they even still be enjoyed as entertainment? Do these Japanese works have the potential to become an influential medium for the revitalisation of medieval literature and culture, in the same manner as children's literature (Boulaire 2002; Cazanave & Houssais 2010; 2011)? Our study answers some of these partially. Alongside the action, the tragedy, the elation of adventuring in a foreign land and time, it contains more than enough material to offer an introduction to the Norse culture, sagas and history to its readers. Therefore, *Vinland Saga* can be perceived to be both educational and entertaining – again, following the original functions of the Norse sagas. In fact, it is the readers themselves that hold the key on how educational these productions can be, if ever their curiosity pushes them to verify the historical elements portrayed. The revitalisation of the *Vinland*

---

[17] A wave already seen in Nordic children's literature (Olson 2011, 121 & 124-131).

Sagas gives the opportunity to the readers – especially those who live outside of Scandinavian countries or who are uninformed about the history of the Viking Age – to discover medieval literature that they may have never heard of before, and to grasp a better understanding of the Norse culture and history, while simultaneously enjoying an entertaining work of fiction that enables them to go beyond their own time and their culture.

As the French historian Boyer often states, there is much to do yet when it comes to changing the perception of the mythical image of the Vikings. Yukimura Makoto's manga undoubtedly participates in the evolution of this perception and that of Nordic literature, whether we – the contemporary readers – are Japanese or European. *Vinland Saga* should draw the attention of future scholars researching how such literary works might challenge our perception of our history and culture in this age of globalisation. European cultural memories, and medieval ones in particular, are being extracted, revitalised, reorganised, tampered with, played with on both intertextual and transcultural levels, such as on the far shores of Japan, before being sent back to Europe in unexpected forms, with unexpected new meanings and perceptions. This ricochet effect should not be underestimated – not to say that we should receive it with caution, uneasy feelings or suspicion. Do *Vinland Saga* and other similar transcultural creations have the ability to participate in the evolution of the stereotypical representations that have been Europe's since the Romantic era? Could they challenge the bias of our national identities and imaginaries? What lies beyond the intertextual and transcultural reorganisation of the medieval material in these contemporary and foreign works is difficult to predict. The outcome

depends on too many factors, such as their reception in local markets, how they might interact with the reader's' knowledge, their national identities, and with other local or translated creations. Will they have an ephemeral impact? A delayed one? We may not be able to decipher exactly the whole extent of their impact, since the contemporaneity of our object of study can be misleading (Gontard 2013, 7). However, this study does assure us that, from an unexpected country, *Vinland Saga* is an inheritor of the many post-medieval rewritings of the *Vínland Sagas* (Arnold 2013, 199-201). It participates decisively in the revitalisation of Norse literature and history in the 21st century.

REFERENCES

Amalvi, C. (1996), *Le Goût du Moyen Âge*. Paris: Plon, Civilisations & mentalités.

Arnold, M. (2007), *The Vikings: Culture and Conquest*. London: Hambledon Continuum.

— (2013) Imagining Vínland: George Mackay Brown and the Literature of the New World. *Journal of the North Atlantic*, Special Vol. 4, 199-206.

Boulaire, C. (2002), *Le Moyen Âge dans la littérature pour enfants*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes.

Boyer, R. (1978), *Les Sagas islandaises*. Paris: Payot.

— (1987), *Sagas islandaises*. Paris: Gallimard, Coll. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade.

— (1992), *La vie quotidienne des Vikings (800-1050)*. Paris: Hachette.

— (1995), *Les Vikings, histoire et civilisation*. Paris: Pocket.

— (1996), *Histoire des littératures scandinaves*. Paris: Fayard.

— (2001), *L'Islande médiévale*. Paris: les Belles Lettres.

— (2002), *Au nom du Viking*. Paris: les Belles Lettres.

— (2011), *Les Vikings, histoire, mythes, dictionnaire*. Paris: Robert Laffont.

— (2012), *Les Sagas légendaires islandaises*. Toulouse: Anacharsis.

— (2014), *Histoires nordiques centrées sur les Vikings et l'Islande*. Paris: Riveneuve éditions.

Byock, J. (2007), *L'Islande des Vikings*. Paris: Aubier.

Cazanave, C., Houssais, Y. (2010), *Grands textes du Moyen Âge à l'usage des petits*. Besançon: Presses Universitaires de France-Comté.

— (2011), *Médiévalités enfantines, du passé défini au passé indéfini*. Besançon: Presses Universitaires de France-Comté.

Danesin, M. (2016), The European Middle Ages through the Prism of Contemporary Japanese Literature: a study of *Vinland Saga*, *Spice & Wolf* and *l'Éclipse*. *Mutual Images* [Online], Vol. 1, Summer, 95-122.

Durand, F. (1996) *Les Vikings et la mer*. Paris: Errance.

Eco, U. (1986), *Travels in Hyperreality*. New York: Harcourt Brace.

Eigeldinger, M. (1987), *Mythologie et intertextualité*. Genève: Slatkine.

Enomoto, A. (2008), *Raito noberu bungakuron* ['*Essay on Light Novels*']. Tōkyō: NTT Shuppan.

Frakes, J. C. (2001), Vikings, Vinland and the Discourse of Eurocentrism. *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 100, 157-199.

Foucrier, C. (2008), Le mythe au fil des genres : cristallisations et inflexions. In: Guéret-Laferté, M., Mortier, D., (dir.). *D'un genre littéraire à l'autre*. Mont-Saint-Aignan: Publications des Universités de Rouen et du Havre, 26-37.

Gontard, M. (2013), *Écrire la crise : l'esthétique postmoderne*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes.

Hagland, J. R., Watson, B. (2005), Fact or folklore: the Viking attack on London Bridge. *London Archaeologist*, Vol. 10:12, Spring, 328-333.

Haywood, J. (1996), *Atlas des Vikings, 789-1100*. Paris: Autrement.

Huntingdon, H. of (1853), *The chronicle of Henry of Huntingdon. Comprising the history of England, from the invasion of Julius Caesar to the accession of Henry II. Also, the acts of Stephen, king of England and duke of Normandy*, edited and transl. by Forester, T. London: H.G. Bohn.

Iguchi, A. (2010), Appropriating the Other on the Edge of the World: representations of the Western Middle Ages in Modern Japanese Culture. *Journal of The Open University of Japan*, Vol. 28, 63-69.

Kott, J. (2006), *Shakespeare notre contemporain*. Transl. A. Posner. Paris: Payot et Rivages.

Nydal, R. (1989), A critical review of radiocarbon dating of a Norse settlement at L'Anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland, Canada. *Radiocarbon*, Vol. 31 (3), 976-985.

Olsson, C. (2011), Comment rendre le Viking présentable : l'ancien scandinave dans la littérature de jeunesse. In: Cazanave, C., Houssais, Y., (Eds), *Médiévalités enfantines : du passé défini au passé indéfini.* Besançon: Presses Universitaires de Franche-Comté, 113-131.

Pálsson, H., Edwards, P. (1986), *Knýtlinga Saga*. Odense : Odense University Press.

Pálsson, H., Magnusson, M. (trans.) (1987), *The Vinland Sagas, the Norse discovery of America: Grælendinga saga and Eirik's saga*. London: Penguin Books.

Sturluson, S. (1983), *La Saga de saint Oláf*. Fr. transl. R. Boyer. Paris: Payot.

Wawn, A. (2000), *The Vikings and the Victorians. Inventing the Old North in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer.

Yukimura, M. (2005-2015, Ongoing) *Vinland Saga*, Vol. 1-16. Tōkyō: Kōdansha.

— (2009-2015, Ongoing), *Vinland Saga*, Vol. 1-15. Fr. transl. X. Daumarie. Paris, Kurokawa.

Zumthor, P. (1980), *Parler du Moyen Âge.* Paris: Éditions de Minuit.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maxime DANESIN *is a Ph.D. Candidate at the François Rabelais University in Tours (France) and one of the vice-presidents of Mutual Images. His field of research is the study of Intertextuality and Transculture in Literature, focusing on the cultural relationship between Japan and Europe and its impact on the literary creation process, with a particular interest in light novels and manga. His doctoral thesis is (currently) titled "The European Representations in Japanese Postmodern Paraliterature: Transculture as a part of the literary creation process".*

The End of Cool Japan:
Ethical, Legal, and Cultural challenges to Japanese Popular Culture – **Mark MacLelland**

New York: Routledge, 2017, 240 p.
Review by Simon TURNER **|** Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures, University of East Anglia, UK

In 2002, Douglas McGray published an article in *Foreign Policy* discussing Japan's status as a soft power superpower, including its use of popular culture. Much attention has since been paid to Japanese cultural and creative industries ranging from examinations of anime, manga, pop music, street fashion, and film, to name but a few. Today, access to Japanese popular culture has only increased with innumerable anime and manga series available (illegally) online through fan sites. With increased access and proliferation has come increased concern. Legal cases related to inappropriate examples of Japanese popular culture have emerged in the West and, within the world of journalism in particular, a critical eye has continued to question and probe any perceived inappropriateness within the output of Japanese creative industries. *The End of Cool Japan* (2017), a collection of essays edited by Mark McLelland, takes this curiosity as its basis and offers readers a seminal and outstanding examination into the problematic aspects of researching, studying, and teaching topics related to Japanese popular culture today. It brings

together researchers working in this increasingly important area of exploration crossing disciplinary boundaries.

In a thoroughly detailed introduction, acting as chapter one, McLelland highlights the conflict between academia and journalism in studies related to Japanese popular culture (p.2). He highlights what has long since become a sensationalist approach found within a great deal of popular press that seeks to stress any exceptionalism or uniqueness of Japanese culture. Readers are presented with an overview of Japanese studies in the West that discusses the lack of attention paid to Japanese popular culture which has been remedied in recent years with more Japanese Studies departments beginning to offer more courses examining the topic. As McLelland states, students and teaching professionals of Japanese Studies have a bounty of potential material to examine. This, however, becomes problematic because when popular culture digitally crosses geographic borders it enters new socio-legal contexts with McLelland citing several legal cases related to indecent and/or prohibited images of children. Therefore, as the title explains, the book examines the ethical, legal, and cultural challenges that face students, researchers, and the general public when engaging with Japanese popular culture.

The book presents readers with two themes. The first, covered by chapters two to seven, provides examinations of Cool Japan outside of East Asia, particularly North America in the United States and Canada. The second examines flows of Cool Japan within and throughout East Asia. There are mentions made of other locations, however the overall applications of the book's ideas and examinations are made to North America and East Asia.

In chapters two and three, Alisa Freedman and Laura Miller, respectively, discuss the increased access and availability of Japanese popular culture in the West, paying attention to the contentions and conflict that this greater availability of Japanese popular culture can create. Freedman, for example, examines the multi-modal series *Death Note* which ran originally as a manga series but which has since seen numerous adaptations across multiple platforms including anime, film, video game, and novelisation. Freedman's essay is a strong example of how international Japanese popular culture has become. Miller discusses the increased use of Japanese popular culture by examining the problems that arise in educational settings where students, who have grown up with access to Japanese popular culture on a daily basis, may be unable or unwilling to critically examine Japanese texts that have been a part of their everyday media consumption. These two chapters construct a frame for the following chapters of the book that examine the ethical, legal, and cultural challenges that increased access to Japanese popular culture can create for students, academics, and researchers in general. In chapter three, Kirsten Cather gives an in-depth, detailed example of challenges that can arrive by taking Japanese popular culture as a serious topic of research. In her chapter, the manga *Misshitsu* (*Honey Room*) is introduced. In 2014, this manga was the first to be prosecuted in Japan successfully on obscenity charges and is thus, according to Cather, unlikely to be used in a classroom for the ethical and legal issues raised. Nonetheless, Cather offers a nuanced argument that texts such as *Misshitsu* which are officially deemed 'obscene' may force audiences and researchers to ask difficult questions regarding sexuality in particular. Nonetheless, whilst Cather correctly argues that

we should not ignore such texts because they can encourage us to investigate a variety of social and cultural topics that may otherwise be ignored, the following three chapters tell us how, in many cases, this can be extremely logistically difficult, if not impossible in a Western/North American context.

In chapter five, Sharalyn Orbaugh examines the legal and ethical issues that are invoked when utilising Japanese popular culture in higher education in Canada. Canada, as it is discussed, has strict and far-reaching legislation regarding obscenity and pornography, particularly child pornography, which means that a great deal of material that Orbaugh, or other educators and researchers in Canada might use, would, in effect, be breaking the law, thus criminalising both educators and potentially students. Patrick Galbraith also gives an example of the difficulty in studying the genre of *lolicon* (Lolita complex) which many are unwilling to discuss for fear of being labelled a deviant through association with a genre that depicts characters many might argue are 'underage'. This kind of stigma, as Galbraith argues, closes down the topic of representation in Japanese popular culture and forecloses any nuanced understanding of the genre resulting in the continued labelling of Japanese popular culture as something odd, strange, or perhaps unduly interested in images of young female, or male, characters. These two chapters, and indeed this first theme of the book, are well contextualised with the inclusion of Adam Stapleton's chapter that approaches the topic of legislation related to 'contentious images of children' in the West. Stapleton outlines how, in the West, there has been a trend of increasingly strict legalisation related to obscenity, indecency, and images of children that, instead of protecting children, in fact closes

off any form of discussion or debate on the topic, meaning that any nuanced understanding of either Japanese popular culture or actual abuse of children lacks attention and in fact may cause more harm instead of offering any actual protection.

The second theme of the book, which shifts attention away from a North American contextualisation, begins in chapter eight with Ling Yang and Yanrui Xu's study regarding reception of BL (Boys' Love) manga in mainland China. The focus of this chapter sets the tone for the rest of the book which highlights instances of conflict between domestic cultures and the imported Japanese popular culture in terms of socio-historical relations between different countries and Japan, as opposed to issues of child pornography and legislation related to obscenity. Yang and Xu's chapter, for example, discusses how mainland Chinese fans of BL manga make a distinction between 'cool' cultural Japan and 'bad' political Japan, highlighting how fans, whilst enjoying and consuming Japanese popular culture, are still aware of fraught contemporary and historical relations between China and Japan.

Similarly, Jessica Bauwens-Sugimoto, in chapter nine, and Kristine Michelle Santos and Febriani Sihombing in chapter ten offer similar perspectives. Bauwens-Sugimoto, taking BL fandom as the case-study for her chapter, discusses the conflict that fans can face between consumption of a genre that depicts male homosexuality and their personal religious beliefs including Catholicism in the Philippines and Islam in Malaysia and Indonesia. Despite any conflict, however, Bauwens-Sugimoto shows how fans consume a genre that may conflict with their religious beliefs in a "creative tension" (p. 24) and how fans activities may actually be hidden by assumptions made about their gender and religion,

with few expecting religiously conservative females in Southeast countries to read a genre focussing on male homosexuality. Santos and Sihombing also take Southeast Asia as their geographic focus and examine tensions between imported Japanese popular culture and domestic industries. The authors highlight how domestic industries take issue with Japanese popular culture, which is seen as destroying local production. Like Yang and Xu's chapter on mainland China, the tension is based on troubled historical relations between Japan and some Southeast Asian nations because, as the authors highlight, US comics are not targeted even though the Indonesian and Filipino comics that are examined are themselves already hybrid forms of local and US styles.

This edited collection is based on excellent and increasingly important research within Japanese Studies which must continue to take an international approach towards issues of popular culture emanating from Japan. There are well researched and documented accounts of cases of transnational flows of Japanese popular culture in North America and Southeast Asia. In particular, the collected chapters show how studying Japanese popular culture is not always a straightforward endeavour, with students, researchers, educators, and publishers often facing the ethical, legal, and cultural challenges as have been described in the book. The book advances understanding of Japanese popular culture as a key form of contemporary Japanese cultural heritage from an international perspective. Particularly in the West, where Japanese popular culture is ignored or derided with stark irreverence, this book offers a clear insight into challenges that scholars have and may face when attempting serious study of the topic. We should not ignore the increasingly transnational nature of Japanese popular culture and, although we can locate the

Japanese origins of media such as anime and manga, it is becoming ever more difficult to isolate its production and fandom to the Japanese archipelago and as popular culture travels across geographic borders it enters new socio-cultural contexts to which it must adapt or, ultimately, be lost. Therefore, the book remedies a gap in the literature by examining Japanese popular culture and its current international reception and study whilst simultaneously paying attention to its contextual position in different countries and contexts. Overall, this is an excellent piece of literature which offers a nuanced perspective on contemporary international Japanese popular culture from which scholars, students, and the public can learn a great deal.

REFERENCES

McGray, D. (2002) Japan's gross national cool. *Foreign policy*, Vol. 130, 44-54

McLelland, M. (2017) *The End of Cool Japan: Ethical, legal, and cultural challenges to Japanese popular culture*. New York: Routledge

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Simon Turner *has completed his PhD at Birkbeck College, University of London (England), in Cultural Studies, with his thesis that utilised a digital ethnographic approach to a Boys' Love manga fan site. His thesis received The John Crump Studentship award from The British Association for Japanese Studies.*

The visual language of Comics:
Introduction to the structure and cognition of sequential images – Neil Cohn

London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013, 240 p.
Review by Francesco-Alessio URSINI | Jönköping University, Sweden

Neil Cohn's *The Visual Language of Comics* provides an interesting introduction to "Visual Language" (henceforth VL) theory, which is a theory about the "language" through which comics are produced and interpreted. The book presents VL as a theory that can capture the psychological and cultural aspects of comics' creation and consumption. For instance, it offers an account on how readers can interpret and memorize complex sequences and pages of panels to form coherent stories. The book also discusses how the visuals used in American comics and Japanese manga can be seen as "dialects": that is, distinct images of a more general "language". The overarching theory of VL can thus be seen as a theory of the mind-internal (i.e. psychological) and mind-external (i.e. cultural) processes that allow readers and comics artists to use this visual language in order to create comics, manga, bande dessinées and so on.

Our goal in this review is to present and analyse the theoretical and empirical import of VL, and of Cohn (2013) with it. As we clarify in our discussion, the book offers an innovative perspective on cultural

differences across comics traditions, and their ability to interact with and reflect one another, as a realisation of the near-universal principle governing VL. Thus, our goal is also to analyse the validity of this overarching claim. For this purpose, we first tackle the book's contents by offering a thorough chapter-by-chapter summary, and then evaluate its key features and empirical import.

Summary

The book opens with an introductory chapter qualifying the definition of VL as a "language" that authors employ to create comics, and readers to interpret them. The two crucial components of this definition are as follows. First, a Language is defined as a communicative system that includes a set of rules (or grammar) to produce information units (e.g. sentences: *Mario loves Peach*) from a basic set of expressions (or *vocabulary*; cf. Yule 2014 and similar introductions). Expressions in a language have meanings, since they can convey any kind of information about the world, and can form a set of building blocks for expressions: a vocabulary. Second, expressions and information units are presented via a modality, which can involve sounds in spoken languages, and signs in sign languages. Therefore, VL can be considered a language insofar as we can define a grammar, a vocabulary and a modality for this language (Cohn 2013, 4-6).

The introduction also sets out the goals of the book, by presenting the research questions that VL, as theory of the language used to produce comics, should address research questions that VL should display insofar as it is a language. The remainder of the book, then, investigates whether and how the grammar, vocabulary, meaning and modality of

this language can be defined, and how they can be used to produce comics. Furthermore, Cohn suggests that VL should meet one further theoretical requirement: it should have a psychological "reality". Speakers usually acquire languages during their developmental period (i.e. grammar rules and vocabularies are learnt and memorized). In a parallel fashion, Cohn argues, they are likely to acquire VL, or one of its many dialects, if they become exposed to and/or interested in them. Thus, as the author argues, VL and other "spoken" languages can be seen as expressions of more general, underpinning cognitive mechanisms, which differ in the modalities by which they convey meaning. The rest of the book, divided in two sections, offers the relevant arguments in support of this claim, which can be summarised as follows.

The first section presents VL and its properties. In the first chapter, two traditional arguments of treating comics as a language are discussed and defused. The first concern is that panels tend to lack specific identifying features such as fixed shapes (i.e. panels are arbitrary signs). Comics lack a finite inventory of basic signs, as some scholars argue (e.g. Duncan and Smith, 2009; Hick, 2012). The second concern is that comics lack a fixed, systematic lexicon of panels and other relevant units. If these concerns are correct, then comics lack a finite inventory of basic building blocks, unlike languages.

Given these arguments, the first concern is tackled by showing that visual representations in comics, from pictures to motion lines, tend to be highly codified and referential. Illustrations of dogs, humans and other "entities" in comics have a strong iconic component, as they resemble the objects they represent. The second is tackled by proposing that panel sequences tend to occur in different patterns, although there

is a limit to this complexity. Much like languages can either have a subject (e.g. *Mario*) before or after the verb (e.g. *sings*), so comics involve a finite inventory of structures through which stories are presented. Therefore, the author clarifies that "comics" are treated as the end result of the processes underpinning VL, rather than a language, i.e. the "system" that creates these works*.* In other words, Comics are *not* a language (i.e. a set of rules defined over a lexicon), but the "results" of these modality-specific language processes.

The second chapter proceeds by discussing the basic building blocks of the "Visual Lexicon", defined as visual morphemes (Cohn 2013, 32). In linguistics, morphemes are defined as the smallest units of identifiable meaning in a language, which combine to form words (e.g. *re-*, *analyse* in *re-analyse*: Fábregas & Scalise 2012, ch.1). Within VL, morphemes are defined as any visual units that appear in illustrations, from hands to planes. These visual morphemes form an *open class* of morphemes, since their number can be unlimited, and they can occur as distinct units. Thus, their properties parallel those of free morphemes in languages (e.g. nouns in English: *cat*, *dog* and so on). A sub-set of visual morphemes acts as bound morphemes, in the sense that they codify possible interpretations of the signs they combine with (e.g. "starry eyes+face=stunned person"). Bound morphemes can also be attested in (speech) bubbles: for instance, a balloon with dashed contours signals the thoughts of a character. Thus, after discussing in detail the morphology of illustrations and (speech) bubbles (i.e. the properties of visual morphemes in VL), the author concludes that one domain of language can also be found in VL.

The third chapter presents an analysis of panels, addressing the perceived lack of a finite inventory of panels in VL and the consequent lack of regular panel structures and sequences that emerge from the combination of these building blocks. The chapter offers a typology of four panel types, based on the content they refer to as minimal attention units. Thus, macro-panels depict multiple active entities, mono-panels depict single active entities, micro-panels offer partial depictions (e.g. close-ups), and amorphic panels offer depictions of static sceneries. Thus, a parallel between VL and cinema studies is created (e.g. Bordwell and Thompson 1997). The chapter also suggests that minimal sequences of panels, or 'constructions', mirror their equivalent structures in language as minimal entities conveying meaning., Crucially, it is argued that the use of constructions does not limit authors' creativity, but provides them with "templates" through which ideas can be organized in a cohesive manner.

The fourth chapter shifts the focus of the discussion from the lexicon of illustrations and panels to visual grammar, analysing how narrative structure emerges from panels. Previous theories of narrative structure in comics are discussed and shown to involve the interpretation of panels as juxtaposed elements (i.e. McCloud 1993), and of the networks that panels can form via their formal and content relations (i.e. Groensteen 2007). They are suggested to be too reductive or too complex, respectively. A similar argument is offered for approaches based on sequential interpretation, adopted from cognitive narratology (e.g. Herman 2003). As Cohn (2013, 69) observes, comics involve more complex narrative analyses, since several "multi-directional" aspects are involved in their production and interpretation. For instance, panels

can present the unfolding of a story from a "bottom-up" perspective (i.e. from the single events to the overarching narrative), but a story can also be organized in a "top-down" manner: a premise, a narration and a conclusion. Thus, a more complex narrative structure theory is needed to analyse the relevant data.

Narrative structure is thus analysed in terms of groupings of panels that can be connected with respect to their "packaging", as proposed in 'story grammar' theories (e.g. Rumelhart 1975). The core categories that make up the structure of a narrative are introduced and discussed. For instance, a panel belongs to the *Peak* category if it marks the key point in the narrative, from which a *Release* panel can then offer the resolution to this tension. Different categories of panels can in turn form arcs, which correspond to the phrases of linguistic analysis (e.g. *the blue cat* being a definite Noun Phrase: Yule 2014, ch.7). The chapter discusses in detail the properties of each category. It proposes that arcs can be combined together into more complex hierarchical structures, represented as diagram trees. Thus, an arc presenting panels that set up a story (i.e. a combination of panels belonging to the *Initial* category) acts as the *Initial* arc of a more complex narrative arc. The chapter concludes by discussing a comparison between VL and theories that apply this analysis of narrative structure to other forms of visual narrative (Stainbrook 2003).

The fifth chapter introduces 'External Compositional Structure', which is a theory of the organisation of panels on the page, and its comprehensibility to readers. The chapter discusses how the different panel layouts that can be found in comics can also impact the reading practices of readers. While standard "2x3" panel structures (i.e. two

columns, three rows) usually invite readers to follow the "Z-path" (i.e. left to right, top to bottom: inverse Z-path for manga), other layouts may counteract this preference. The chapter then discusses the different layouts of the reading patterns readers follow. For instance, if a top-left panel is missing, readers usually start reading a page from the top-most and/or left-most panel, trying to preserve the Z-path. The rest of the chapter shows that these rules can generate reading hierarchies, represented as diagram trees, capturing how readers navigate page layouts of any complexity (Cohn 2013, 103-106).

The sixth chapter discusses empirical evidence supporting the analysis offered in the previous chapters. As the chapter shows, there is growing experimental evidence that comics *comprehension* involves precise psychological processes, since readers must be able interpret illustrations, panels, narratives and layouts to understand a story. One such example is an ERP ('Event-Related Potential') study by the author and associates (i.e. Cohn et al 2012), in which participants were asked to read a short strip in which the *Peak* panel did not present a key event of the short narrative, thereby creating an inconsistent narrative. One result is that a so-called "N400" effect was attested. This effect is known to occur whenever the participant's brain tries to interpret the meaning that a sentence, or a short clip, or other "messages" conveys, without any success (e.g. Kutas & Federmeier 2011). Since participants were often unable to interpret the incoherent narrative of the short strip, an N400 effect was attested. Overall, the chapter presents a wealth of empirical studies based on various experimental methods, which also offer (ample) evidence for the psychological reality of the comprehension of visual morphemes, narrative structure and page layout.

Section 2, which covers the seventh to the ninth chapters, discusses how VL can be applied to the analysis of comics from different traditions, and highlights their constituent properties.

The seventh chapter, for instance, discusses 'American VL', focusing on the morphological, narrative, and external compositional properties that can be found across American mainstream (e.g. superhero), "cartoony" and "independent" comics.

The eighth discusses 'Japanese VL', focusing on the characteristics of Japanese mainstream (i.e. *shōnen* and *shōjo*) manga, and its global impact on other VL languages.

The ninth chapter focuses on 'Central Australian VL', discussing and analysing the "sand narratives" of Warlpiri and Arrente (Green 2014). Sand narratives differ considerably from standard comics, since they are stories acted out on a space surrounding a narrator, who draws "pictures" on the sand. However, their structural properties suggest that their underlying VL is formally similar American and Japanese VLs.

Overall, the three chapters show that the VL theory outlined in the first section can be used to offer an accurate, descriptive analysis of seemingly different VLs across the globe. Therefore, they suggest that VL can be seen as a "general" theory of the language*s* through which comics are produced and interpreted across cultures.

Chapter ten, then, concludes by proposing the principle of equivalence: "*We should expect that the mind/brain treats all expressive capacities in similar ways, given modality-specific constraints*" (Cohn 2013, 195, italics in the original version). The principle is invoked as a way to capture the fact that, if comics are produced via a Visual Language, then this language should share the same features and properties of other forms of human

cognition, including language "proper". The discussion of how different visual languages. have identifiable visual morphemes, panel types and narrative structures (i.e. a lexicon and a grammar) suggests that this is likely to be the case. The discussion of how the aspects and processes involved in the interpretation of comics are psychologically real (i.e. the discussion in the seventh chapter) also offers further evidence. The book concludes by sketching other domains of study, akin to those found in linguistics, that can be investigated by building on this proposal (e.g. the acquisition of VL as a language to produce comics).

As this summary hopefully shows, the book proposes a thorough argument for the validity of VL theory as a tool to investigate comics and the processes that underpin their production and comprehension. Interestingly, even if socio-cultural aspects are not studied in any relevant detail, the book implicitly argues that seemingly different comics cultures can be seen as more specific "images" of a more general and perhaps abstract aspect of human culture. By connecting different aspects of our cognitive faculties (e.g. the ability to create narrative structures, to draw, to identify similarities between real and drawn objects, and so on), humans are also able to turn these basic skills into complex, culturally transmissible skills.

Consequently, since different cultures have developed different and co-existing expressions of this complex cognitive behaviour, it should come as no surprise that manga and comics (and other forms, we hasten to add) have "intermingled" and influenced one another. Under the perspective put forward in this book, this is a natural result of the general nature of "comics". If one general system (here, VL) can produce different expressions as permutations of basic "bits of information",

then inter-cultural exchanges of these bits are to be expected. With this point in mind, we discuss whether the arguments offered in the book can withstand closer scrutiny.

Discussion

In order to discuss the merits and imperfections of Cohn's proposal, our discussion will focus on three key points: the soundness of VL as a language, the validity of its treatment of distinct visual languages, and the general merits of the proposals. We hasten to acknowledge that, although we outline some pertinent/substantial non-trivial theoretical problems with the proposal, the work deserves ample praise for its bold goals and wealth of empirical support. However, at least three problems regarding the theoretical choices made in the text cast a shadow of doubt on the internal consistency of VL and its formulation.

First, Cohn's analysis of what constitutes a VL seems to be based on a non-conventional analysis of linguistic domains as domains which can be mirrored into VL. Linguistics is far from being a field without controversies, but it is commonly accepted that morphology is usually accompanied by syntax, semantics and phonology, respectively the studies of meaning, sentence structure and "oral" realisations of words and sentences. However, Cohn takes "story grammar" as a reference for a syntactic model of comics, even if no actual argument for this choice is offered. Though a type of grammar in the formal sense of the word, story grammar was proposed to account phenomena and stories that are not entirely linguistic in nature. Therefore, this choice brings VL away from a linguistic template, and a motivation is never offered.

A second, related problem is that the discussion of narrative templates is offered by comparing fixed sequences to linguistic constructions such as idioms. Such a choice is surprising, if not incoherent, for only a subset of *linguistic* frameworks falling under the umbrella of "Construction Grammar" takes this approach (e.g. Croft 2003; Goldberg 2006). A similar reasoning applies to external composition structure and the use of hierarchical structures (i.e. trees), choices which are *not* connected to extant proposals in the literature (e.g. Mann & Thompson 1988; Asher & Lascarides 2003). This is theoretically and empirically problematic, since narrative structures are analysed and tested via methods that belong to linguistics, such as ellipsis and other constituency tests. In other words, the tests that VL incorporates lack fully explicit logical connections to the frameworks from which they originate.

A third problem can be found when one looks at the lack of a discussion assessing whether a meaning and an "external" level of VL can be found: a semantics and a phonology of VL. The lack of semantic analysis and a study of the content and content relations that comics can offer is a shortcoming that is left to be resolved by future research. However, this omission raises the problem of which building blocks of comics work like phonemes (i.e. speech sounds), units that allow comics users to "share" the content and form of comics. Although the properties of illustrations, panels, and balloons are discussed in detail, they are argued to be instances of VL and their morphology. This is problematic, as morphology is usually defined as the study of the minimal *meaningful* units of language (i.e. morphemes: Fábregas & Scalise 2012, ch.1) *and* their realisations in a specific language. In other words, the proposal in chapter two collapses morphology and phonology into one domain,

without ever addressing that decision in any detail. It does so, furthermore, by glossing over one identifying aspect of visual morphemes: their potential to be minimal meaningful units. To the best of our knowledge, the separation of morphemes from their phonological realisations is accepted in most, if not all theories of morphology (cf. Fábregas & Scalise 2012, ch.8). Thus, this conflation seems unwarranted.

The upshot of these criticisms can be summed up as follows. VL is presented as a "collage" of linguistic and non-linguistic yet "grammar-like" proposals, and applied to comics without a fully developed discussion of their merits and other theoretical alternatives. Consequently, some choices are problematic because they involve mutually exclusive theories.

For instance, the diagram trees also found in generative approaches to syntax (e.g. Chomsky 1995; Steedman 2012) presuppose an approach to structure that Construction Grammar rejects. Constructions are assumed to be flat, rather than hierarchical. A mirror problem of this approach is that the choices outlined in the book seem also quite eccentric. The use of narrative structure to analyse stories' structure is actually mutated from film and narrative studies, not linguistics. The theoretical choices that are closer to linguistic theory, *per se*, are never entirely given a motivation, and a degree of inconsistency is noticeable. Constructions presuppose the *lack* of sentence structure, at least in some frameworks (e.g. Goldberg 2006). However, to analyse comics' narrative structure and panels' structure, Cohn invokes the hierarchical structures found in generative, non-transformational (Jackendoff 2010) and transformational approaches to syntax (Chomsky 1995). The problem emerges at the level of morphology, too, since both illustrations

in panels *and* entire panels are treated as morphemes, even if no notion of a visual word is given. Alas, the impression is that the author combined theories that can easily account for specific phenomena, but are internally inconsistent when combined into a unified model of VL.

Furthermore, the analysis of comics languages in section 2 tends to present American and Japanese comics and their cultural-specific aspects according to fairly sweeping generalisations. For instance, the assumption that most "mainstream" authors in American visual language illustrate according to the "Kirbyan" dialect may be justified, provided that the case can be really made for the majority of a genre (e.g. superhero comics). We cannot judge whether this is really the case or not, as we are not experts on this genre. However, the apparently exclusive ascription of certain key features (e.g. powerful male bodies) to only this "dialect" is likely to be unjustified. For instance, classic *Weekly Shōnen Jump* series such as *Dragon Ball* featured characters that had the same "body proportions" discussed for the "Kirbyan" dialect (Toriyama 1984-1995). One could argue that different dialects of different VLs share these features because they usually convey action-oriented stories for young men. That is, their content and expected audiences affect these VLs, and render them similar. Cohn's analysis, however, seems to gloss over these facts,

Another problem with the analysis is that its generalisations regarding Japanese VL(*s*) seem to completely ignore *seinen* and *josei* manga, i.e. manga for adult readers, which generally present a much more variegated set of features than those discussed by Cohn (cf. Shodt 1996, ch.2; Bryce & Davis 2010). More generally, Cohn's approach to the analysis of different VL dialects seems to lack the nuanced perspective

that is necessary to account for dialectal variation in languages and, by extension, VL(s). This is not surprising, and it is closely related to the lack of a linguistically-based analysis of syntax and phonology. A well-known fact is that dialects vary with respect to their grammar, phonology and lexicon (cf. Trudgill 2000), and VL only fully presents a linguistically-oriented theory of the lexicon. In other words, the type of variation that these dialects offer cannot be assessed via the incomplete formulation of VL.

A final problem stems from the overall architecture of VL, an issue that we can address by discussing the actual theoretical import of the principle of equivalence. As it stands, this principle echoes Fodor's assumptions underpinning the "language of thought" and "modularity of mind" proposals (Fodor 1975, 1983). In a nutshell, the language of thought hypothesis suggests that each aspect of our cognitive abilities can be represented through a system of rules, or a "language". The modularity of mind hypothesis, instead, suggests that each ability (e.g. vision, language, hearing, and so on) has specific "processing" centres, even though each of these centres operates via domain-general rules (i.e. they share the same "language of thought"). A crucial matter is that these assumptions do *not* suggest that complex cognitive abilities work in the same way. Reading, writing, and other tasks that involve the interaction of more basic abilities probably follow more complex, if not distinct and emergent cognitive abilities (for example, decoding phonological input and mapping onto graphical representations: Beaton 2004 ch.2). Thus, the principle of equivalence does not directly extend to VL theory, at least not in its current formulation.

This problem, unsurprisingly, emerges from the fact that the principle of equivalence and the architecture of mind it presupposes are assumed, rather than thoroughly argued for. Construction Grammar theories, for instance, explicitly reject this architecture of the mind (cf. Goldberg 2006, ch.2). If even the case for a "faculty of comics", like the one advocated for languages in modular frameworks (e.g. Chomsky 1995), can be made on empirical grounds, then a formulation of VL should be consistent with these basic assumptions about how the mind works.

As matters stand, then, it may seem that the book suffers from a lack of theoretical consistency that has some specific empirical problems. The analysis of the various aspects of the language(s) creating comics offer imperfect accounts or "images" of these properties. Furthermore, the proposal seems to have little to say regarding the *production* mechanisms that can be found in VL. One wonders if VL can also offer a theory of the mental processes underpinning authors' "thought processes", perhaps mirroring those found in language production (cf. Levelt 1989).

The book, nevertheless, has some very strong and appealing points, and should be amply praised for them. First, it takes very seriously the fact that comics as complex cultural artefacts also involve complex mental processes, and that these processes can be investigated experimentally. This aspect alone grants the absolute relevance of the work to the academic and *scientific* study of comics. Second, the work also shows a resolute commitment to a scientific approach to the analysis of comics as a cultural and psychological phenomenon. In other words, the work pioneers a direction of studies for the field that is far more promising than descriptive, "theory-light" approaches (e.g. McCloud 1994).

In conclusion, the problems outlined in this discussion can be certainly corrected and expunged from future versions of the book, even if this does not appear to be a trivial task. The crucial contribution of this work is that offers clear, thorough and very convincing proof that comics can be studied in a scientific manner as expressions of the complex behaviour and culture of humans. If this proposal is indeed on the right track, then one would expect that different comic cultures interact and share features of this culture, *qua* reflections of a "general" culture of comics. Thus, it is an invaluable contribution to the field of comics studies.

References

Asher, N., Lascarides, A. (2003), *Logics of Conversation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Beaton, A. A. (2004), *Dyslexia, Reading, and the Brain*. New York: Psychology Press.

Bordwell, D., Thompson, D. K. (1997), *Film Art: An Introduction, 5th edition.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Bryce, M, Davis, J. (2010), An overview of Manga Genres. In: Johnson-Woods, T., (Ed.), *Manga: An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives*. London: Continuum, 34-61.

Chomsky, N. (1995), *The Minimalist Program.* Cambridge, MA: the MIT press,

Cohn N. (2013), *The visual Language of Comics.* London: Bloomsbury.

Cohn, N., Paczynski, M., Jackendoff, R., Holcomb, P. J., Kuperberg, G. R. (2012), (Pea)nuts and bolts of visual narrative: Structure and meaning in sequential image comprehension. *Cognitive Psychology,* Vol. 65 (1), 1–38.

Croft, W. (2003), *Radical Construction Grammar*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Duncan, R. Smith, M. J. (2009), *The Power of Comics.* New York: Continuum Books.

Fábregas, A., Scalise, S. (2012), *Morphology: From data to theories*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Fodor, J. (1975), *The Language of Thought*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Fodor, J. (1983), *The Modularity of Mind: An Essay on Faculty Psychology*. Cambridge, MA: the MIT Press.

Goldberg, A. (2006), *Constructions at Work: the nature of generalization in language.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Green, J. (2014), *Between the Earth and the Air: Multimodality in Arandic Sand Stories.* Cambridge; Cambridge University Press.

Groensteen, T. (2007), *The System of Comics*. Jackson, MI: University of Mississippi Press.

Herman, D. (2003), *Narrative Theory and the Cognitive Sciences*. Stanford, CA: CSLI.

Hick, D. H. (2012), The Language of Comics. In: Meskin, A., Cook, R.T., (Eds), *The Art of Comics: A Philosophical Approach*. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 125-144.

Jackendoff, R. (2010), *Meaning and the Lexicon: The Parallel Architecture 1975–2010*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kutas, M., Federmeier, K. D. (2011), Thirty Years and Counting: Finding Meaning in the N400 Component of the Event-Related Brain Potential (ERP). *Annual Review of Psychology,* Vol. 62 (1), 621–47.

Levelt, W. J. M. (1989), *Speaking: From Intention to Articulation.* Cambridge, MA: the MIT Press.

Mann, W. C., Thompson, S.A. (1988), Rhetorical Structure Theory: Toward a Functional Theory of Text Organization. *Text*, Vol. 8 (3), 243-281.

McCloud, S. (1993), *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. New York: Harper Collins.

Rumelhart, D. E. (1975), Notes on a Schema for Stories. In: D. Bobrow, D., Collins, A., eds, *Representation and Understanding*. New York: Academic Press, 211-236.

Shodt, F. (1996), *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga*. Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press.

Stainbrook, E. J. (2003), *Reading Comics: A Theoretical Analysis of Textuality and Discourse in the Comics Medium.* Ph.D. Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA. Supervised by Gian S. Pagnucci.

Steedman, M. (2012), *Taking Scope*. Cambridge, MA: the MIT Press.

Toriyama, A. (1984-1995), *Dragon Ball.* Tōkyō: Kodansha.

Trudgill P. (2000), *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language and Society.* London: Penguin Books.

Yule, G. (2014), *The study of Language.* 5th edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Francesco-Alessio URSINI *is a linguist at Jönköping University (Sweden) with a background in cognitive sciences. He specialises in English linguistics, but carries cross-linguistics research as well. His main research interests are morphology, semantics and discourse analysis, with a focus on spatial language and cognition. He works on theoretical and experimental topics, using a variety of methods (e.g. corpus linguistics, on-line sentence processing, written questionnaire). In recent times, Francesco has begun to carry out research in comics studies and science fiction literature.*