Subversion and Reification of Cultural Identity in Global Fandoms

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As nations continue to open up to the global market and invite the commercialization and appropriation of native texts, a renegotiation process regarding the power dynamics of cultural influence for both native producers and international consumers occurs. In the context of the anime fandom, these power dynamics become particularly subversive, as fans/consumers often become the primary vehicle of translation and cross-cultural communications, despite the fact that many international fans are not from the text’s country of origin. In particular, this subversion is exemplified through the informal translation practices of the anime fandom, where fans take Japanese texts and translate them for non-Japanese speaking fans, often for no monetary compensation. Whether these fans can be considered valid interpreters of anime culture is a point of contention that will be discussed in this paper.

By constantly interacting with media subcultures abroad and creating social practices and vernaculars specific to the worldwide fandom, anime fans create nation-like global community that simultaneously consumes, destroys, and recreates cultures in a manner that suits their local environment. I conclude that international fandoms like the global anime fan community are sites that may have the potential to undermine national boundaries, despite the fact that local cultures continue to exercise hegemonic influence over our cultural identities.

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Within the past few decades, international media corporations have opened themselves up to the global economic markets, inviting the commercialization and consequent displacement of native media texts. The transnationalization processes of these narratives and the localization methods in which the content is translated and made palatable for foreign communities complicate the notion of consumer citizenship in relation to the politics of cultural identity formation. As information/communication technologies and popular social media platforms like YouTube ease the barriers of access to international media and art, passion communities have organically risen which celebrate these mediums and the national cultures that have allowed these narratives to exist and thrive outside of their intended native audiences. Contemporary examples include the anime fan community, which celebrates Japanese animation, in regard to its distinct aesthetics and narratives. Often, by extension, anime fans develop a broader interest in Japanese culture. These media manifestations of national soft power have become a kind of cultural capital in the global economy, and those nations that have adopted the ability to accommodate for global tastes are often awarded monetarily and through global recognition for their efforts. Within the context of this essay, I will refer to the groups that celebrate and support international media as “global fandoms.” Fandoms are voluntary passion communities that form around a particular subject of interest, whether it is video games, movies, fantasy worlds, activities, franchises, etc. In this context, global fandoms include those passion communities that rise around subjects whose origins come from different nations and have constituents that span national boundaries.

In this paper, I will explore the ways in which the Japanese anime fandom in the West has become a site of contemporary globalization, where fans have the potential to subvert and reconstruct the “flow of symbolic systems of meaningful ideas, images, and goods” (McKevitt 2010, 895). The performative aspects of the anime fan community encourage the proliferation of hybrid cultural practices that are enacted in fandom spaces, such as anime conventions and meet-ups. In particular, I will explore the role of fans as the primary purveyors of Japanese animation culture for the West, as they take it upon themselves to be translators and spin-off content creators. In conclusion, I will support the claim that these liminal arenas of intercultural play are an integral part of the negotiation procedures of a fan’s cultural identity. In the process of re-commodifying anime and related Japanese pop culture phenomena for a non-Japanese audience, the role of Japanese culture in the Western fandom is simultaneously deprived of its sociocultural and historical roots, which may lead to accusations of inauthenticity in the fandom space. However, despite these blatant acts of appropriation and re-appropriation that occur, there is a simultaneous manifestation of a new kind of hybrid culture that arises from these passion groups that is unique from both Japanese culture and Western cultures. By shamelessly borrowing and altering local Japanese texts and re-localizing them for the Western fandom’s consumption, fans become agents of cultural exchange, apart from the hegemonic influence of formal localization industries. One way they achieve this is by borrowing common Japanese narrative tropes and words and making them into a concept, usually in the form of memes or repetitive linguistic practice (interlanguage). In this form, concepts that may be foreign to the West can be subsumed into the transnational
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media flows and are made palatable for communities across national lines.

Driven by a largely participatory culture, anime fandom is unique because there is a need for continuous localization processes in order to make the content accessible to those who live outside the country of origin. These efforts are primarily sustained by the enormous fan community that labors out of love, often engaging in translation or other semiotic practices specific to their fandom for no monetary compensation. This, in turn, creates an alternative subcultural economy that allows for global fandoms to proliferate. When foreign subjects continuously act as intermediaries that define and redefine cultural texts from different nations for their own consumption, the ways in which global fandoms can affect and complicate the concept of consumer citizenship within multicultural societies becomes apparent. Fandoms, and the consumer identity narratives that are formed within them, whether derived from their beloved texts or from other fans, are comparable to the formative narratives that are created by citizens in order to cement national and cultural cohesion. It is a nuanced and multilayered process, combining practice, ideology, and repetitive indoctrination to create a core sense of collective identity. According to scholar Nestor Garcia Canclini, people often “ignore the sites of consumption where the aesthetic foundations of citizenship take shape” (Canclini 2001, 151).

In order to address this claim, I offer that global fandoms, and in particular, the global anime fandom, is one such site of symbolic consumption that deeply affects a fan’s understanding of citizenship in a manner that orients communal identity towards internationalization. Specifically, the linguistic practices that anime fans engage in, such as fan translation and meme creation, act as a means for fostering a dialogical relationship with a foreign text, and encouraging the development of a hybrid culture within the anime fandom community. Thus, I will explore whether this hybridism is an affective factor in one’s cultural citizenry or merely a means of reifying cultural boundaries that is unique to the context of the global anime fandom and their social practices.

Fandom Scanlation Practices and Fans as Purveyors of Japanese Culture

In order to analyze the cultural significance of fandoms on one’s self-identity, we must first understand the development of international fans as purveyors of Japanese culture, and not simply one-dimensional consumers. Contrary to “traditional” depictions of fan identity, which often emphasize anti-social behavior, fans tend to be meshed into a web of sociality even before their initiation into a fandom. This is particularly true for the case of globe-spanning fandoms that center on international texts. For Japanese anime and manga (Japanese graphic novels), content did not enter the American market until the 1970s, when VCRs began to proliferate in households (Napier 2007, 134). Content initially trickled in through grassroots methods, often by individuals who had the means of getting anime VHS to the States through connections abroad. Despite the cultural and linguistic gap, initial viewers were drawn to the unique visual style of the small selection of videos that circulated via word of mouth. By the late 1970s, anime had a small following at science fiction conventions, where individuals began to recognize the appeal of joining this subcultural niche with exclusive and ritual-like processes in which anime fans regularly engaged (Napier 2007, 134).
Import companies did not begin to officially bring anime into the United States until 1989. Prior, “fan communities existed solely because of grassroots, do-it-yourself initiatives” (McKevitt 2010, 896). However, anime fandom’s humble beginnings encouraged many of the participatory practices that continue to define the dynamics of the transnational community today. For example, the practice was fan-subtitling and the ensuing piracy practices that allowed underground cultural markets to flourish through peer-to-peer networks. Most importantly, however, these communities ultimately made anime content more accessible to a larger audience.

Recognizing the growing popularity of anime outside of Japan, television stations abroad began to air a handful of popular anime shows, such as *Sailor Moon* and *Dragon Ball Z*, in the United States. What television stations deemed worthy of airing heavily mediated how anime fans in the early to late 1990s were introduced to anime. Certain franchises benefited from being “gateway” shows for fledgling fans, and the influence of large corporations continued to shape the structure of the global fandom. Fans today often cite franchises such as *Sailor Moon*, *Dragon Ball*, *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, *Cowboy Bebop* and *Akira* as the shows that drew them into the world of Japanese anime, establishing these shows as the canonical texts for anime fans.

For many fans, these shows were not only the gateway to anime, but to Japanese culture itself. The values that these shows presented were starkly different than the norms of American cartoons, both in the level of complexity of narrative and the explicitness of the creators’ explorations of otherwise “taboo” content. Examples of such content include alternative sexualities and the realistic depictions of trauma that comes with experiencing overwhelming violence. LGBTQ anime fans have often cited shows like *Sailor Moon* as safe havens where they could gain exposure to positive depictions of alternative sexualities that are typically not seen in Western media (Fujimoto 2015). The cultural gap expressed through animation was one of the primary reasons anime fans were drawn towards these foreign texts. However, as American media companies took on anime dubbing projects for a wider national audience, many of the provocative elements that made anime such a captivating medium for viewers were altered to conveniently fit American cultural standards, ultimately sterilizing them of the subversive and seductive content that appealed to non-Japanese viewers in the first place.

One particular egregious example of this sterilization was the American version of the “gateway” anime show: *Cardcaptor Sakura*, which was shortened to *Cardcaptors*. This original Japanese production was compelling in its positive depictions of gay relationships, characters that refused to be configured conveniently within the gender binary, and its strong female protagonist. However, when popular channels, such as Cartoon Network and WB Kids ultimately aired the American adaptation, it was clear that they had actively tampered with the narrative. Romantic relationships between homosexual characters were changed to be “just close friends” and gender fluid characters were forced to be confined within the binary of male/female. Most notably, in order to make a male character the predominant presence in the show, there was an active process of devaluation of the female protagonist (Cubbison 2005). Examples of this devaluation in the American adaptation include: the removal of the female protagonist’s name, *Sakura*, from the show’s title and the elimination of certain
episodes in which the male character was not shown at all. Reception of the Western adaptation was largely negative by fans who had seen both versions: “fan objections to the Americanization of Cardcaptors were so strong, that [its producer] Nelvana and its distributor Pioneer Entertainment (now Geneon), which distributes a substantial percentage of the anime available in English-speaking countries, were compelled to release subtitled-only VHS and DVD versions of Cardcaptor Sakura as well as VHS and DVD versions of Cardcaptors” (Cubbison 2005).

Other massively popular franchises, such as Sailor Moon, underwent similar alterations when exported to the United States. Due to localization practices, all of the characters’ original Japanese names were converted to English and were scrubbed of most Japanese-centric cultural indicators. In particular, relationships implying alternative sexualities and gender performances that went against Western cultural standards were altered in a manner that would have been deemed acceptable for the American public audience. Similar to the example of Cardcaptors, the original Japanese title, Bishoujo Senshi Sailor Moon, directly translated as Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon, was altered to just Sailor Moon because of the contradictory message that it sent to the intended female audience. In the gendered approach that media production companies often take with Western children’s media, the words “pretty” and “soldier” are rarely seen together. The decision to remove these seemingly contradictory concepts altogether may have been an informed business decision, but continues to reify cultural boundaries by removing what is so attractively subversive about the ideology, aesthetics and narrative complexity of anime. Though it may be the case that in recent years, “media has become deterritorialized and [is] no longer

reined in by the boundaries of the nation-state – boundaries, both real and imagined” (McKevitt 2010, 905), such localization practices headed by media corporations show how these boundaries continue to be a hegemonic force in confining and altering the original narrative in order to suit local values.

The cases of Cardcaptors and Sailor Moon are only two examples of many where the western localization practices were less about the desire to showcase the unique cultural values of Japan and preserve the integrity of its narratives, and more to do with active censorship. This trend led to the proliferation of fan-subtitling practices, otherwise known as “subbing,” which is the process of creating informal translations for international texts, usually done by small passion communities, often for no monetary compensation. Unsatisfied with these egregious changes in narrative, fan “scanlation” and “subbing” communities began to flourish not only from the desire for “free” content, but also from a code of conduct that members of the fandom developed for themselves. Fan-subtitling was not only about bringing anime content to those who could not access it otherwise; it was also about maintaining the integrity of the original text to the best of their abilities (Lee 2009, 10).

In this way, piracy and the informal localization processes that are fueled by fans have played a huge role in structuring “regional confluences of popular culture by facilitating and accelerating the diffusion of popular culture products and images throughout restrictive conditions” (Otmazgin 2013). The combination of the ease of access to these “controversial” materials and the implied affirmations of alternative lifestyles (LGBT, gender expression, and so on) found in many of the
“gateway” anime shows, like *Sailor Moon*, *Cardcaptor Sakura*, and *Cowboy Bebop* has made the anime fandom a place where minorities have found solace and positive media representation. In this sense, anime can be seen as a site of resistance for certain Western values that are commonly imbued in children’s cartoons.

The comparative practices of how each culture deals with representations of alternative sexualities and gender expression reveal how joining an international fandom has the potential to explicitly impact and develop one’s sense of identity (Hendricks 2015). If fans are the advocates of these Japanese cultural values at least in so far as it is depicted within anime narratives, could one claim that their fandom has altered their cultural identity through their development as consumer citizens? If there exists a potential for the anime fandom to alter one’s social values in regards to gender and sexuality representation in media, then it may be that the socialization processes of becoming an anime fan does play a role in how we adopt sociocultural values through media consumption. If the figure of the fan is shown to be a purveyor of anime culture for the West, and also a driving force for preserving the integrity of the original Japanese narrative, then it may gesture towards a reorientation of the international fan community as agents of cultural exchange and globalization, regardless of their national origins. In order to explore the fan’s role as an agent of cross cultural communication, it is necessary to first address the issue of the how “Japaneseness” has been defined by globalizing processes and what role Japan plays in the fandom, both as a concept and as the national origin of the texts that fans so eager to translate, consume, and represent.

The Role of Japan in the Global Anime Fandom

The fundamental question in the legitimacy of fandoms as a genuine mediator of cultural identity, is whether the in-depth understanding of one’s passion communities, is enough to overcome the fact that these experiences occur inside an altered environment, where national history has been torn away, or at the very least, fundamentally changed, replaced by a fragmented global subculture. The Japan that is represented within the anime fandom is not, by any means, the Japan that is the lived experience of actual citizens. Part of the appeal of anime, according to Japanese culture scholar, Koichi Iwabuchi, is the anime creator’s ability to neutralize the unfamiliar “cultural odor” of Japan from their creations, and instead, replace it with a global familiarity. In doing so, the undesirable and unfamiliar odor becomes a socially acceptable fragrance. Iwabuchi defines cultural fragrance to be “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” (Iwabuchi 2002, 27). In other words, in ensuring that their production is not “too Japanese” for foreign viewers, but “Japanese enough” to provide an enticing and convincing view of the oriental other, anime is easily subsumed and dispersed into the global media flow. While this may explain why anime has been adopted without excessive resistance by so many cultures, it problematizes the idea that fans can engage with Japanese culture through anime in a genuine manner and can in turn, be valid cultural interpreters.

Perhaps Japan, as an “authentic” cultural place, is irrelevant in the scope of the anime fandom. In many ways, fans fetishize and
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redefine “Japanese-ness” within the scope of their passion communities, which is most explicit at anime conventions. During these conventions, people gather to celebrate their love for the culture through events and artistic practices, such as cosplay, fanart, fashion shows, concerts or panels, all of which revolve around anime. Some larger conventions include displays of Japanese culture that do not explicitly involve anime, such as tea ceremonies, lessons in dance forms that are only found in Japan, martial arts demonstrations, traditional games and more.

In these spaces, fans constantly communicate through an organically formed Japanese/English interlanguage that often mixes Japanese phrases and tropes into English. Words and concepts like kawaii, moe, tsundere, and senpai are just a few of the many words that fans who do not speak Japanese, yet engage with fandom, have come to understand from the collective vernacular. Whether to fill lexical gaps or to serve as an indicator of cultural literacy, these phrases are adopted into the fan’s regular speech, typically through engagement with other fans. These are phrases that are often repeated in anime series across the board, causing them to be integrated into the fan vocabulary of the native Japanese fandom as well. Fans who either have extensive experience with the Japanese language or are adept at discerning patterns within anime narratives usually pick out these concepts and incorporate them into the lexicon that is often proliferated through online forums. Like with the adoption of slang into colloquial dialects, those who are inside the fan culture soon become literate in these concepts, regardless of whether they have experience with the Japanese language, through participating and consuming the collective knowledge base of the community. While these words and tropes sometimes have linguistic equivalents in the native language of the non-Japanese fan, more often than not, these concepts are nuanced and specific to their cultural context, and this literacy is something that fans can only pick up through repeated exposure in anime narratives and fan-to-fan dialogue.

For example, within the past decade, the term moe has become a popular concept in the lexicon of the anime fandom, both within Japan and abroad. Stemming from the Japanese word moeru, which means to bloom or to sprout. This word has been applied to the affectionate, but not necessarily erotic, responses of fans to a certain archetypical character in anime narratives. Often, though not exclusively, applied to female characters, moe is related to the feeling one gets when viewing the transient figure of the bishoujo (young, attractive girl) and is a concept that has extended beyond just physical appearance, to include vocal and behavioral characteristics that inspire affection and warmth in a fan. To recognize the common tropes that make a moe-triggering character (i.e., vulnerability, energetic personality, maidenly, etc.) and discerning the various factors that lead to this fan affective response is a kind of literacy in itself.

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1 cute, loveable.
2 to bloom. Slang term for an affectionate reaction that a fan has to a particular archetype of character.
3 An archetypical character trope in anime where the character initially acts coldly, but develops into a more affectionate character throughout the course of the narrative.
4 Japanese linguistic signifier for an upperclassman or senior member within any formal and informal organization.
According to Japanese pop culture scholar, Patrick Galbraith, moe is first and foremost “a response, a verb, something that is done. Second, as a response, moe is situated in responding to a character, not a character itself. Third, the response is triggered by fictional characters” (Galbraith 2014, 5-6). Moe has become an amorphous and abstract concept because it can be applied so widely to anime culture. Its usage requires a multilayered understanding of visual and auditory cues, as well as an in-depth knowledge of anime character tropes, in order to understand how this affective response comes into being and is consumed. Regardless of the rather ambiguous and elusive definition of moe, many fans use the term in regard to their favorite characters, because it fills a lexical gap that cannot otherwise be expressed in a fan’s native language (Bloem 2014, 9). In being able to internalize and use these concepts to communicate otherwise verbally inexpressible ideas, anime fans show a cultural literacy that has been fostered within the fandom, that gestures towards an emergence of a hybrid culture.

This multimodal literacy transcends words, extending toward the semiotic practices of translating the cultural significances of image-based signifiers and tropes as well. The creation of this fan language stems not from one franchise or one region, but from global participation and the ever-expanding compilation of popular anime works that fans relentlessly draw upon. Much like a traditional foreign language, non-fans who are not literate in Japanese, and more specifically, anime culture, will not be able to find meaning in this mish-mash of hybrid linguistic and image-based practices that fans seamlessly traverse through.

![Fig 2-4: Massively popular memes within the anime community. An example of fan interlanguage and multimodal literacy.](http://m.memegen.com/4zwgs0.jpg, https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/originals/05/d0/46/05d046694f64a20604f4686914ec94de.jpg, http://i3.kym-cdn.com/entries/icons/original/000/007/426/Gasai_Yuno.jpg, all accessed 09/20/2016)
With its own kind of “language” and literacy, as well as a unique set of ritualistic practices, perhaps it’s not too much of a leap to see fandom as a kind of subcultural “nation.” In fact, as though fandom is a foreign nation in itself, Japan often sends cultural ambassadors to these conventions, viewing them as intercultural spaces. Guests include Japanese rock bands, fashion celebrities, voice actors, idols, and industry professionals. These efforts are seen as necessary, in order to make cultural ties with the fans that act as primary meaning-makers and interpreters of Japanese culture to foreign communities.

The common thread between all of the cultural displays within anime convention spaces is that they are all entirely performative. Western absorption of Japanese influences in the past has been “primarily decorative and involved the borrowing of Japanese motifs and design elements. Oriental views provided the West with spectacle” (Holborn 1991). Whether anime and the global fandom continues this tradition and simply imbibes in the spectacle-ridden illusion of Japan, or is genuinely connected in some manner to a global culture that subsumes both the West and Japan remains unanswered.

One manner in which to tackle this question is to consider whether anime has some nuclear core that is representative of “Japanese-ness” beyond the performative aspects, that is inaccessible to foreign viewers. In Napier’s essay on the thematic resonance of “apocalypse” in anime and its reflection on Japanese identity, she posits that Japan’s turbulent wartime history, rapid rise to modernity, and catastrophic events like the atom bombing, have deeply impacted Japanese identity, tying it to the idea of apocalyptic pain and suffering. The fatalistic approach that is often seen in anime when powerful outside forces encroach upon a protagonist’s life is reflective of the national and economic vulnerability that arose due to events following World War II and economic malaise of the 90s (Napier 2005, 219). For the Japanese, “apocalypse seems both personal and suprapersonal, a disaster visited upon both the individual and the collective” (Napier 2005, 256). Many notable anime works, including films like Grave of the Fireflies and Princess Mononoke and popular series like Neon Genesis Evangelion, portray these themes explicitly, often using unstoppable god-like beings and mechanical personas as antagonists that decimate both a character’s physical body and psychological state. It is not coincidental that these works are considered foundational to modern anime, because they speak to the post-modern sensibilities of cultural identity and the ambivalent position that Japan has in regards to technology and outside “foreign” influences. This ambivalence is also reflected in the Western imagination of Japan, as it remains a kind of imaginary space that is almost always either a romanticized and nostalgic vision of Japonisme or a country doomed to the ravages of a techno-orientalist dystopian future (Napier 2005, 24). However, as younger generations of Japanese continue to separate themselves from the traumatic events of the past and incorporate themselves deeper into a more globalized culture, the enduring relevancy of this apocalypse-centric identity comes into question.

Of course, Japan is not the only country to focus on apocalyptic themes as a central form of national identity formation. The World Wars of the 20th Century also brought about similar traumatic sentiments in the West, which consequently led to dramatic shifts in cultural identity, particularly for nations like Germany. More recently, the 9/11 terrorist attacks in America and the allegorical image of burning skyscrapers has
left a deep impression in the minds of the millennial generation who grew up with the cultural and economic uncertainties that followed the tragedy.

Consequently, these shifting sociocultural features are reflected in American media as well, such as with the rising popularity of the classic good versus evil superhero genre in cinema and young adult dystopian fiction. In short, I would argue that apocalypse is no longer a unique characteristic of a local Japanese identity, but a global one. Perhaps it can be argued that the nature of such trauma differs depending on the tragedies inflicted upon a nation, but that observation also begs the question whether those differences matter in the face of the apocalyptic. In Elaine Scarry’s book, The Body in Pain, she explains that “pain, more than any other phenomenon, resists the objectification in language” (Scarry 1985, 5). Pain can only be expressed with abstractions and allegories, and is ultimately, not shareable, because pain and suffering actively dismantles the structure of language. Therefore, it may be the case that in the face of apocalyptic trauma and pain, nuance and expression become null and void. Pain, and more specifically, apocalyptic pain, simply exist as global white noise, regardless of physical and ideological boundaries, and is a fundamental building block to a globalized culture. In regards to new, global-spanning media, animation has become a potent medium in representing abstractions and spectacle, which makes it all the more convincing in representing ideas that refuse to be put into words. Combined with the willingness to explore a provocative array of thematic elements, and distinctive visual and cinematic styles, it may be the ability to portray human suffering and emotion convincingly, which has allowed anime to spread globally.

If apocalyptic trauma and pain is no longer an inherently Japanese facet of national identity, then it may be the case that the nuclear core of anime that once represented “Japanese-ness” may no longer exist, or it may be something else altogether. Iwabuchi has suggested that the core feature of Japanese identity in the postwar modern era, ironically, is the ability to constantly consume foreign cultures and appropriate them in a manner that suits Japanese localism. It is the ability to absorb the cultural hegemonic forces of the West and transform it into something that is uniquely “Japanese.” Cultural hybridism, far from being a force that creates liminal spaces within Japanese culture, is one that reaffirms national boundaries and cultural purity, at least in the national rhetoric of cultural identity formation (Iwabuchi 2002, 57). If this is symptomatic of anime as well, then despite the global reach of the fandom, it is because of anime’s remarkable ability to be localized and forcefully re-nationalized within a myriad of communities that has led to its massive rise in popularity. In this sense, local practices and unbridgeable national boundaries may still be a dominating feature within global fandoms instead of a unifying international convergence of cultures.

Local Practices, Global Identity

It remains unclear whether local practices differ vastly from one another depending on national communities or how much influence national boundaries exert over the international anime fandom. Certainly, there is a minority of nations that actively censor Japanese cultural products. By leveling the usual boundaries, the circulation of anime content tends to be quite steady, even if it is in the form of a digital black market. Likewise, the fundamental fan practices that have been fostered by a participatory culture, such as creating original fan content,
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scanlations, subbing, conventions, and informal meet-ups seem to be comparable across national lines. These practices ultimately revolve around the processes of localization; however, having common source materials and social practices are a gesture towards a cohesive cultural body that has learned to undermine the oppressive influence of national boundaries. Of course, the particularities of one’s experience as a fan will always be mediated by those that are most closely associated to her; however, the consistent need for the necessary major localization activities mentioned above within the anime fandom seems to be suggest that there is a degree of uniformity and cohesion fostered by a network of shared interests, regardless of nationality.

Local practices continue to be a dominating force in characterizing the anime fan’s experience outside Japan, which indicates that the dynamic of global media flows does not move in a unilateral direction from local to global. Instead, it goes from local to global, and then back to local, reintegrated into a different context. While the local continues to be the dominant hegemonic factor of our cultural identities, the anime fandom is an example of how certain liminal sites can challenge fans to become hybrid cultural individuals through their participation in a transnational network. Anime and Japanese media manifestations of soft power such as video games continue to act as an entry point for further cultural study for many fans. Particularly driven fans often go on to learn the Japanese language or other cultural arts in order to expand their knowledge. By devoting themselves to a deeply participatory culture, fans use their skills in order to translate and interpret anime culture for those who cannot easily access the content, transforming themselves into agents for the global circulation of these media texts. Through their fan culture, they create a community that spans national boundaries and affects cultural identity through their linguistic practices and desire to participate and engage with a global community. Fans and their desire to protect the integrity of native texts inform a kind of consumer citizenship as they consume certain ideologies present in the anime that they translate and work with. In turn, they are able to present an alternative viewing experience to others that is subversive and perhaps, even more genuine, than what is provided for by corporate media localization teams in the United States. As more people who are outside the national boundaries of anime become cultural intermediaries, it will be interesting to see how this affects anime culture for the native market and what new discursive practices will occur between different national fandom spaces.
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