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BRIDGE OVER THE RIVER *KAWAII*: EXAMINING THE CONSUMPTION OF  
ANIME AND MANGA IN THE UNITED STATES

By Luke Daniel Schwalm

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for completion

Of the Bachelor of the Arts degree in International Studies

Croft Institute for International Studies

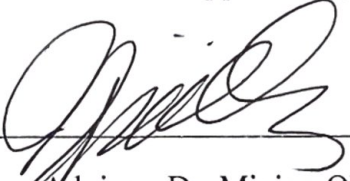
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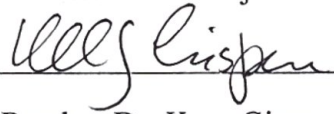
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May 2011

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Luke Daniel Schwalm

## Abstract

The sale of manga, Japanese comic books, and anime, its animated counterpart, in the United States has become a multi-million dollar enterprise and both mediums have gained an increasingly large fandom. Based on the framework of Said's conception of orientalism and using information gathered from observing seven popular anime and manga internet forums and five semi-structured interviews this thesis seeks to understand how a segment of this fandom, namely those of its members who are active in online discussion, consume manga and anime and how this consumption affects their views of Japan. In conducting this research I found that the fandom tends to not focus on Japan but instead to be generally inward looking, focusing on the content of consumed works and the establishment of boundaries and expertise within their respective forum communities, and to be based to a significant degree on media "piracy." While this does not preclude orientalist thoughts or discussion, it does draw some attention to how the fandom deals with what is within rather than what is without even though its members are consuming works foreign in origin.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This thesis was made possible by scholarships given to me by the University of Mississippi, the Luckyday Foundation, the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College, and the Croft Institute among others, and I wish to thank them all for both their support and generosity. I would like to acknowledge Leah Nodar's contribution to this paper as she discussed it and its topic at length with me, providing valuable insight and possible changes. I would also like to thank the various professors, of whom there are too many to list, who helped shape my time at the University which has culminated in this paper. I would specifically like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Minjoo Oh and my third reader, Dr. Ross Haenfler, both of whom gave generously of their time and even more generously of their experience in the field of sociology to assist me in writing this paper. Without their help it is unlikely this paper would be of the caliber I hope that it is. ASA style was used in references in this work.

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	5
Chapter 1: A Shorty History of Anime and Manga in the US.....	13
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	19
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	28
Chapter 4: Analysis.....	32
Chapter 5: Discussion.....	65
Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	79
Appendix A.....	93
Appendix B.....	95

## Introduction

In 2007, the manga<sup>2</sup> industry in the United States made \$210 million, reflecting the height of the medium's success (Reid 2010). Anime<sup>3</sup> was also doing well, and both mediums were becoming increasingly visible and successful. Sometimes derided and sometimes lauded, anime and manga have been creeping into the American public landscape for decades and are thoroughly established in their respective sub-cultural communities as important artistic mediums. Both mediums have come a long way since their introduction to the United States in the 1980s. A short photo essay about 1980s fandom in New York City by Michael Pinto shows that not only was anime and manga fandom extremely limited in the United States, but fans struggled to obtain any material they could, including going so far as to buy untranslated works from Japanese book stores (Pinto 2011). Since 2007 manga industry profits have declined along with the American economy, possibly helped along by an increase in online piracy; but the fandom of the medium is still strong and growing (Reid 2010). Now, through the ubiquity and speed of the internet, manga and anime are available to to just about anyone with a fast enough connection. How has this change affected the way Americans consume manga and anime? For that matter, how do they consume manga and anime generally? How has this consumption affected their views of Japan? It is my hope that this thesis answers some of those questions.

I was introduced to Japanese manga in late middle school, in the form of Akamatsu Ken's popular *Love Hina* series. I fell in love with the medium, and later with

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<sup>2</sup> Japanese "comic books"

<sup>3</sup> Japanese animated cartoons

anime, almost immediately and have been reading it ever since. As I became older my collection of manga and anime grew and my enjoyment of the mediums is at least partly responsible for my interest in Japan overall. With the rise in popularity of anime, and subsequently manga, the two mediums have begun to brush up against mainstream American culture. I worked at a GameStop, a video game retailer, in 2007; and the store carried a wide selection of games including quite a few originally from Japan. Around that time a series of games based on a popular anime and manga series had gained a following and thus we carried quite a few copies of them in the store. One day a middle-aged Caucasian woman entered the store during the yearly Christmas rush, trailed by her pre-adolescent son. The pair meandered through the store, the boy expressing interest in various things. I was doing some restocking and happened to look at them when the boy picked one of the anime-based games off the shelf and presented it to his mother; she took one look at it and said, “No, I don’t want you to have any of that anime stuff. It’s from the *devil*.” She promptly returned it to the shelf and they moved on. At the time I found the whole thing amusing; I was unsure if this was part of her actual personal theology or simply an expression, but this episode has stuck with me through the years as an example of the unfortunate misunderstandings circulated in mainstream culture concerning manga and anime.

That said, the unfamiliar are not the only people who draw stereotypical conclusions about Japan or manga and anime or the relation of the two. I have seen manga and anime aficionados, those who would presumably be the most knowledgeable about the origin country of their hobby, slide into stereotypes about Japan and Japanese culture, though their bias often builds what is perceived as a positive image. For instance,

many fans will express appreciation for what they assume is the day-to-day hypersexuality of Japanese life based on the sometimes risqué depictions found in manga and anime.

Like any society, Japan has its problems. These problems are unique to Japan, and the country and its people deal with them in unique ways, but the problems, such as racism and poverty, are not absent. Sexism is also alive and well in Japan. I attended the opening ceremony of a Japanese University in my time abroad and, while I did not catch everything that was being said, I did notice that none of the school's senior faculty, a group that must have comprised fifty or more individuals, were female. In fact, the only women on stage, other than a new student enlisted to give a short speech, were two statuesque women who led the esteemed professors onto and off of the stage. In between they stood at attention near the back, feet together, smiling, for nearly two hours.

I set out to do this study in the hopes of understanding the nature of these extreme views of Japan on the part of Americans. Neither familiarity with nor distance from manga and anime seem to grant a realistic perspective of Japan some of the time. American views of Japan are the crux of the questions I hope to ask, particularly focusing on those who *do* consume manga and anime as a means of making the data sample and the range and application of conclusions more manageable. I have a long personal history with manga and anime so I find these questions personally interesting, but I also feel that answers as to how Americans consume manga and anime and how that consumption affects their views of Japan may contribute to the broader knowledge base of cross-cultural consumption in a society that can still seem very closed and myopic despite its international reach and relations.



My initial question of how Americans consume manga and anime and how this consumption consequently affects perceptions of Japan were based solely on a cultural studies theoretical framework. However, during the execution of the study it became increasingly clear that piracy (the illegal distributing or downloading of manga and anime files) is an important and nearly ubiquitous part of online American fandom. This realization necessitated another research sweep looking for information on how to deal with this phenomenon not only from a cultural perspective, but also a socio-economic one. I feel that this has been reasonably successful and has provided a level of clarity and specificity that is easier to gain when discussing financial matters than when discussing the vagaries of cross-cultural transference and the possible power imbalances entailed.

### *Relevance of Research*

Manga and anime have become increasingly popular and visible in the United States and thus make up a larger and larger part of the information about Japan available to Americans. As the share of the two mediums increases, its importance to how Japan is portrayed and understood by Americans goes up proportionally. Thus, understanding how manga and anime are consumed, how Americans understand and reify the images they read and see, is integral to understanding the current views of Americans on Japan. Both of these questions and their answers are important because of the increasingly globalized world in which Americans find themselves. In order to answer how the consumption of manga and anime affects Americans' views of Japan, I have focused on a specific subset of American consumers: avid fans of anime and manga. While these fans do not represent the totality of Americans and their views cannot be generalized, I chose them because of their proximity to the mediums in question. Anime and manga fans are the closest people

to the works in America and they are the engine that drives the way the works are dealt with by American culture at large in the sense that their appreciation for the works has slowly but surely begun to force anime and manga into the mainstream.

Current research on the consumption of manga and anime in the United States (Schwartz & Rubinstein-Avila 2006, Allen & Ingulsrud 2005, Armour 2010) seems to be limited to relatively preliminary surveys of what actually constitutes the medium and theorizing about how this has affected its sales. Of particular interest seems to be the media's sometime erotic nature and depictions (Perper & Cornog, 2002), and I feel this lack of narrowly focused research itself sheds some light on how manga and anime are viewed. I wrote this thesis as a study of how manga and anime works function as units of cultural transmission for Americans on a sub-cultural level and how the reception of this information has affected the sub-culture's views of Japan.

### *Research Design*

Research to answer the questions detailed above has been conducted in two ways: in-depth semi-structured interviews and critical discourse analysis of Anglophone internet forums devoted to anime and manga in general (as opposed to specific series).

Five in-depth interviews were conducted through snowball sampling. Interviewees were asked a series of questions (see Appendix A) about what manga and anime they consumed and how. For instance, subjects were asked if they felt their consumption of anime and manga has affected their views of Japan (or if this was possible at all). Answers that seemed to provide opportunity for greater depth were

followed up with other questions intent on understanding the interviewees' thoughts on Japan or their relationship with anime and manga.

Critical discourse analysis was conducted on posts in the forums of seven internet fan sites (see Appendix B), primarily in February of 2011 (though many of the posts are older than that), devoted to manga or anime in order to parse how manga and anime aficionados consume the forms, how they interact with each other, and how this interaction in turn modifies their consumption habits. Sites were selected based on three main criteria: (1) the size of the forum population, (2) the frequency with which posts are made, and (3) the variety of frequent posters. The final criteria was added because of testing observations that, even on sites with very large overall memberships and a reasonably high frequency of posts, some forum members can post a disproportionately large number of times thus skewing the results to place more weight on them. I felt analyzing a large number of sites was important because of personal observation that different sites develop different cultures which can vary widely from each other; this means that a broader sample overall is required to establish any kind of average. Because of the inherently multi-national nature of sources drawn from the internet, this set of data can only best be described as "Anglophone." Attempts were made to narrow the sample to Americans only, but I am unsure if these attempts were successful.

### *Structure*

Chapter 1 provides a detailed history of manga and anime in the United States along with a more complete definition of the mediums than that given above. This

knowledge provides a grounding upon which the theoretical framework and methodology are constructed.

Chapter 2 gives a review of the literature read in preparation for writing this thesis as well as a detailed overview of the theories behind it. The literature is categorized into subsections in order to provide some structure. The two major sections are works dealing with “less active” and “more active” modes of consumption.

Chapter 3 provides more detail on the methodology of the study which was split into a critical discourse analysis component in which seven online forums devoted to anime and manga were analyzed over the course of a month and five in-depth, semi-structured interviews with University of Mississippi students.

Chapter 4 gives the analysis of the seven forums and the interviews and discusses trends in both areas. This section begins with “ethnographies” of each forum including information on the total posting counts and active members. Following this is a discussion of the similarities among the forums and then an analysis of these trends across both research components. A section focused specifically on piracy is also included.

Chapter 5 is a discussion of the four major findings of this work as to how the American online anime and manga fandom consumes anime and manga. The community is content focused, dealing primarily with the characters or narratives of works as opposed to its cultural trappings; this focus also leads to the establishment of boundaries about who *is* a manga and anime fan and who *is not*; with these boundaries members of the fandom become experts in their “field” of manga and anime and bristle at extra-group

criticism such as accusations of piracy by lawyers. Finally, the fandom exists within a “hyper-consumption culture” buttressed by the near ubiquity of piracy and the easy accessibility of pirated works via streaming or download on content aggregator sites.

Chapter 6 details the conclusions of the research and the final summation of this work.

There are also two attached appendices, the first of which, Appendix A, is the structure of questions for the interviews and the second, Appendix B, is a simple table of the attributes of the seven forums.

## Chapter 1: A Shorty History of Anime and Manga in the US

Manga is a printed comic form native to Japan. The word is often interpreted as “comic book,” though this appellation does little justice to the distinct differences between manga and the American works to which the phrase is usually applied. In Japan manga is generally printed in large serialized anthology magazines which are targeted toward a specific demographic. A popular example would be *Shounen Jump*, published by Shueisha, which is mostly geared toward pre-adolescent males. One chapter of a work is printed per issue and works in a given magazine can vary widely in genre and tone. Immensely popular series can have staggeringly long lives; some spanning hundreds of chapters and taking years to print. Chapters of a popular series are generally later collected into a volume of ten or so chapters, “tankoubon” in Japanese, and sold separately with a few added extras such as author commentary or concept art. Anime is manga’s animated counterpart and many series of the former are derived from the latter. For instance, Takeuchi Naoko’s seminal *Sailor Moon* was first printed as manga before being adapted into an anime. In order to summarize the history of manga, and to a lesser degree anime, in the United States I have referenced Casey E. Brienza’s “Books, Not Comics: Publishing Fields, Globalization, and Japanese Manga in the United States” (Brienza 2009).

Anime became nominally popular in the United States in the 1970s. Anime’s popularity in America remained relatively niche throughout the 1980s and into the 90s, mostly confined to a relatively small group of die-hard enthusiasts (Pinto 2011). Several

companies eventually began attempting to import anime and marketing it to a wider audience.

*Sailor Moon* is perhaps one of the best known and most enduring of these shows. The show tells the story of a group of female middle school students suddenly gaining magical powers and the ability to transform into warriors in order to do battle with demons bent on draining humanity of its life-force. The show's unique premise and all female leading cast made it an instant hit, and *Sailor Moon*, along with other shows like *Dragon Ball Z* or *Ruroni Kenshin* put anime on the map for an increasingly large segment of American youth.

In the late 1990s several companies theorized that the popularity of anime, which was increasingly associated with its origin in Japan, could be replicated in the graphic novel market by importing manga. Initial attempts proved to be largely unsuccessful for several reasons. Manga was introduced into the US market by graphic novel publishers who attempted to release the works on the same schedule and via the same distribution channels as they did American comic books. This meant that single chapters of manga works were released separately instead of in an anthology or volume as they had been in Japan. This often conflicted with the natural arc of the story and the relatively small number of manga works being released had little exposure each month among the torrent of domestic works (Brienza 2009: 107-8).

The importation process was also a grueling gauntlet of aesthetic and translation modifications. For instance, manga is printed right to left in Japan as the Japanese language is read in that direction. Early attempts at importation almost always involved

mirroring images to make the work readable left to right. Not only was this a painstaking process, it also led to continuity problems, for example when characters expressly mentioned the relative location of something or a directional detail such as which of their hands was dominant. These modifications, along with the modified release schedule, meant that manga was initially released at a glacial pace, often as slow as one chapter per six months. This did little to draw new fans to the medium or to reinforce the affection of prior aficionados (Brienza 2009: 108).

Furthermore, Brienza claims that the distribution channels used by nascent American manga distributors, namely comic book shops, were fundamentally unsuited to effectively selling works in the new medium. The author states that comic book shops often cultivated an environment that was at best myopically self-centered and cloistered and at worst actively exclusionary and sexist. As a significant number of potential manga enthusiasts were female, this hardly proved to be a winning environment for propagating the new medium (Brienza 2009: 105-6).

It was not until 2002 that manga really came into its own in the United States, primarily due to the novel efforts of the newly renamed publishing imprint, Tokyopop (formerly Mixx). Tokyopop did away with the majority of modifications such as the left-to-right mirroring or erasing the copious Japanese lettering serving as sound effects in the backgrounds of many panels. The company also began selling works in volumes similar to those of re-released works in Japan. This meant that Tokyopop could release manga at a massively increased rate, generally about one volume per month, similar to that of domestic works (Brienza 2009: 110-2).



With Tokyopop's success, other manga imprints began imitating their style and what was initially a trickle of works printed at high cost and a slow pace became a river. Companies also shifted from distributing works through comic shops to using large chain bookstores, such as Barnes and Nobles, for retail. By 2007 manga reached its peak in the United States, earning its own, self-titled shelving area in many stores and, to some degree, a place in the popular imagination of the country at large (Brienza 2009: 112-3). Manga also underwent an interesting demographic shift in its consumer base; Lisa Goldstein and Molly Phelan state that the vast majority of manga readers, something like 75%, are young women (Goldstein & Phelan 2009: 32).

Goldstein and Phelan view manga's nascent popularity in the United States as a possible extension of young adult literature. Essentially, the author states that manga, in the tradition young adult literature, acts as a safe conduit for teens to search for their identity, especially in a sexual context. The authors give the example of the popularity of homosexual male erotic manga among young women, stating that this attention is not so much due to a paraphilia as it is to the genre's ability to provide a safe place for readers to situate themselves. Essentially, young women are able to read this kind erotica without being subjected to the objectification of women so common in pornography. The reader can choose to identify with either male character in the relationship, or both, or something in between, all while maintaining a comfortable distance from the matter at hand (Golstein & Phelan 2009: 33-37).

Like manga, anime continued to grow through the early 2000s, making record profits when a great deal of other broadcast media was facing flagging ratings, viewership, and DVD sales (Roth 2005). This is attributable, to some degree, to what

some industry producers saw as the often close-knit and sometimes fanatical nature of the fandom. They felt that the truly hardcore fans, often self-described as “otaku” (based on a Japanese word meaning maniac, but with a more negative connotation), drove the fanbase, and that appealing to these fans at conventions would continue to increase sales. They also attempted to stay up with technology, making forays into digital distribution and the possibility of providing content to mobile devices. The industry also formed a surprisingly cozy relationship with “fansubbers”, fans who would record, dub, and digitally release Japanese manga and anime that had not yet been licensed in the United States at the time. They often did this work for free. The industry viewed this as a form of free publicity as opposed to the sales-destroying piracy it was and is condemned as by so many other industries.

Everything was well and good between the industry and the pirates-cum-beta testers; at least until 2007 when sales began to falter. The industry began turning a wary eye toward fansubbing groups and the increasing number of aggregate internet sites. Fansubbing groups, or at least the aggregators, were also beginning to break what was once considered an ironclad rule of stopping production on a given work once it was licensed in the United States and then attempting to scour any previous fansubs of that work from the internet. The industry became increasingly concerned about piracy while fans claimed, and still claim, that fansubbers perform a necessary service of providing access to the general fandom of works that otherwise may never have been licensed (Reid 2010). The increasing omnipresence of piracy in the online fan communities of both manga and anime will be discussed later, but it is important to note the quick souring of

relations between the two groups, the aftereffects of which still strongly influence the community and industry.

It is also important to understand manga and anime's place in the long-term conception of "media fandom" in the United States (Coppa 2006: 41-42). Media fandom is a special kind of fan community that forms around specific works or genres of work, making them distinct from fans of a specific person or group. Coppa states that media fandom began in the US with early science fiction fan magazines in the 1920s. Fandoms continued to grow and shows like the original *Star Trek* and *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* catalyzed this process in the 1960s. This evolution has continued through the 1970s with *Star Wars* and into the 2000s with anime and manga. To Coppa, an important element in the creation and maintenance of media fandoms is the ability of fans to communicate with each other. Early fans communicated via direct mail and later through fan publications. As printing capability became more widespread the number of fan publications increased; and the internet has eased this process even more, allowing just about anyone to publish whatever fan work they want (Coppa 2006: 42-58).

Coppa views these fandoms as increasingly intertwined sub-cultural groups that are sometimes at odds with each other. *Star Trek* fans originally found *Star Wars* fans to be members of irritating splinter groups siphoning off fans from what truly deserved attention (Coppa 2006: 50). Anime and manga are relative new comers to the American media fandom landscape, but they have obviously established some level of dominance, at least among the young and internet-savvy.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

John Fiske's conception of "cultural function" has proven of significant use to this paper. Fiske's theory is that the consumption of pop cultural materials is not a passive act, that the reader or watcher chooses what to use and what to dispose of when he or she consumes a work (Fiske 1998). People take cultural objects and modify them for their own benefit; when a person reads a book or watches a show they necessarily attach more significance to some parts of it than to others, interpreting it through their own lens of personal experience to create an interpretation of the work that is individual to them. This interpretation may be extremely close to the creator's vision, but it is by its nature slightly different. This means that there is a spectrum of ways in which people interact with and consume a work, and this consumption is always at least partially an active endeavor.

To give a personal example and expand on this theory slightly: one of my favorite forms of media is video games, but I find that, unfortunately, the medium is often dominated by sexism and sexist portrayals of women. Instead of forsaking the medium entirely, I choose which parts of it I accept and which I do not. I may consume a given game and say that I enjoy the gameplay or its general art direction, but find the scantily clad, vapid female characters intellectually offensive. Presumably the creators of this hypothetical entry found at least something compelling about these characters (at the very least their marketability) and thus my distaste for them compels me to a different interpretation of the work than the creators. In effect, I "create" my own version of the work in my head while playing it.

Taking Fiske's ideas on active consumption I have categorized the works that informed the sociocultural theoretical framework of this paper and divided them into "less active" and "more active" subsections rather than the more traditional model of active versus passive. The division between these two areas is very fine, but a significant contribution to consumption in what I call the less active framework is drawn from experiences outside of the consumption the work in question or the fandom around this work. A pertinent example would be the difference between reading a manga work and writing a fan-fiction of it, something that would be more active consumption, and reading a work through an orientalist lens, which would be less active because not only does it not require significant non-mental action on the part of the consumer, it also draws on preconceived experiential information. Other works have informed this thesis as well, such as Holsapple et al.'s work on software piracy, and these are detailed in a separate section.

### *Less Active*

The theory that Edward Said puts forth in *Orientalism* is essentially the idea that societies are colored by the perspectives of other societies in media they consume (Said 1978: 1-4). He explains his theory by laying out the history of Western interaction with the rest of the world, particularly with the Middle East. Said states that because the West has had the power in many, if not most, of its inter-civilization contacts and relationships it has been able to forge images in the mind of the Western body-public of other peoples that are almost completely disconnected from reality. Instead of actually observing other groups, or allowing the groups to speak for themselves, Western scholars created a

branch of study based on understanding the Orient in terms increasingly abstracted from the truth.

The most important historical facet of this imagining of the rest of the world was how it was reified in the minds of Western scholars and by proxy the rest of Western society. Western scholars took a piece of a foreign society and molded it via subjective ideas about the world such as morality or art or religion, often simplifying concepts for the sake of brevity or the appearance of coherence. This vision was grafted onto the society and the society's inability to counter the image meant that the image was eventually accepted as true. From there conceptions about other parts of the foreign society were molded to fit the prior notion. This process went on until the entire society was described by people and in terms completely foreign to it. This image became the common conception of foreign people in Western society who in turn reified it in their own minds, the media they created, and the interactions they had with each other. The abstraction continued until other societies were stripped down to an idea of what constitutes their bare essentials which were often utterly divorced from reality. Said's preface to a new edition recounts his concern with the contemporary political situation regarding the Iraq War and what he viewed as the involvement of orientalism in the decisions that led to the United State's pre-emptive strike. To Said, this process is still very much alive (Said 1978: xvi-xviii).

This "orientalizing" often serves an express purpose in Western society of vilifying (or deifying) another society. Said gives a careful accounting of the West's relationship with the Middle East and it is a roller coaster ride at best. In times of war the Orient is filled with savages and slavers, in times of peace with foreign poets and

mysterious princes. These notions often reflect how the West thinks of itself: as the seat of civilization, of logic, of true art, and of the true religion, in contrast to the Orient's irrational passions and sexuality. (Said 1978: 59-60, 113-123).

While Said primarily focuses on the Middle East, his theory is still very applicable to the West's interaction with the world at large and, as is relevant for this thesis, Japan in particular. America has had a turbulent relationship with Japan and it follows a similar path as that of the West and the Middle East. Japan has been considered in turns a backwards feudal state in serious need of foreign intervention; an amusing, aping younger sibling; a surprisingly successful (but still unequal) military power; an imperialist legion set on world conquest; a vanquished and pitiful foe; and an unfair economic adversary.

All of these images are completely in the minds of the American observer and almost totally divorced from the reality of Japan and the Japanese people. Such constructs often take a subset of the diverse whole and hold it up as monolithic. Manga and anime consumption in the United States currently is an important part of the creation and maintenance of this image. Readers or viewers consume a product and then filter what they see through a set of conceptions shaped in them since birth and come out with a final product. This filtering is often done with little knowledge of the source material or the context of its creation or what may have been modified in translation. Unless this process is tempered by careful inspection and a genuine attempt at understanding, it can repeat itself again and again until the consumer's view of Japan is not based on any real interaction with or knowledge of Japan.

Even the very act of translating a work could be said to be fraught with this sort of exercise. The translator reads a work and conceptualizes how he or she thinks it should be translated into his or her native language and in doing so minutely changes the meaning to fit pre-conceived notions of what it should be.

It is important to note that there is no real way to avoid the problem of assuming things about another group or society based on pre-conceived notions; pattern recognition is a fundamental part of being human. Said's point in *Orientalism* is that the historical power differential between the West and the Orient meant that not only was it easy for the West to create and maintain images of its counterpart, it was able to interact with the Orient with those images as a baseline with little negative consequence to the West. The Orient, on the other hand, was severely hampered in its dealings with an often significantly stronger military and economic power group that had wrong-headed or condescending notions of it (Said 1978: 6-9).

While the power differential between current day America and Japan is nowhere near as severe as its historical antecedents, it is still important to understand whether or not Americans develop a perverse view of Japan based on media and historical stereotypes because of the increasing interconnectivity of today's world. This study aimed to understand if this orientalizing occurs in American anime and manga fandom at all and, if so, to what degrees and in what ways. An important part of this thesis is understanding how Japan is viewed in the United States today, particularly in the minds of young Americans who consume Japanese pop cultural exports.



Said's conception of orientalism as explained in his work serves as an important theoretical framework that undergirds this paper, but his theory could be seen as slightly polemic. All societies wield the intra-cultural power necessary to dominate and reify depictions of external groups. While Said's point about power imbalance still stands, but is the reality of that imbalance necessarily pressing on how the in-power group views those out of power? Historically this has often been true, but the interconnected nature of today's world makes more accurate information about exterior groups more available than ever before. Even more important, the jingoism of old may be being replaced by a significantly more cosmopolitan outlook among the younger generation.

#### *More Active*

John Fiske's ideas also informed one of his students, Henry Jenkins, who went on to write *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* in which Jenkins performs an ethnographic study of various fandoms in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Jenkins 1992). Jenkins, who describes himself as a fan, attempts to walk the fine line between being a member of a group being studied and doing the studying himself. His work is most useful because of the careful way in which he navigates this boundary. Though the content in question may not be exactly the same as manga and anime, and the current means of transmission are significantly faster and more accessible, Jenkins' description of a group set apart from mainstream culture and his techniques has proven useful in studying the general attitude of American consumers of manga and anime and the culture around them.

In a similar vein is Lisa Goldstein and Molly Phelan's work, the overarching argument of which is that manga continues the long tradition of young adult literature in

allowing teenagers to develop a personal identity often outside the acceptable mainstream. Manga does this for young women primarily by addresses themes of sexuality in gender in ways that may be more open or comfortable than mainstream works.

The main point that the authors bring up concerning manga's aid as an identification tool for young women is the concept of gender and sexual fluidity inherent in many manga works. The authors assert that this fluidity allows young women to define a fantasy space where sexuality and gender exist and intersect in ways they are comfortable with. Because of the often gender-ambiguous nature of the characters, readers can choose for themselves the sex of the characters and what this means about the hetero or homosexual nature of their relationships. This fluidity allows readers, particularly homosexual readers, to deal with the issues of sexual maturity in ways they find enjoyable. Goldstein and Phelan's work is within the "more active" framework because it details how the manga works are actively used by young adults in the construction and exploration of a sexual identity (Goldstein & Phelan 2009).

Similarly, Emily Regan Wills' work on X-Files fandom has also informed the "more active" framework in its focus on how a fandom consumes and politicizes the content of the X-Files show. Though not about manga or anime, the paper's focus on a pop cultural artifact and the fandom around it has been useful. She draws from Fiske and others to discuss the ways in which X-Files fans, often referred to as X-Philes, deal with and politicize the work of their affection, particularly dealing with its feminist and non-feminist facets (Wills 2009).

## *Piracy*

These works have helped construct and frame the cultural investigation and analysis of this thesis, but research yielded another important facet of American fans' consumption of anime and manga: piracy. The illegal downloading of manga and anime and the unlicensed streaming of anime from various sources around the internet is rampant among the fan community, something that became increasingly visible as I spent time on forums. As this facet of consumption became an increasingly important part of the analysis, beginning to rival the original framework of orientalism and creative capital, it became necessary to return to literature research in the hopes of finding a theoretical framework useful in discussing piracy.

To this end, Holsapple et al.'s work on establishing parameters for software piracy research has been immensely useful (Holsapple et al. 2008). Holsapple built on Cohen and Felson's Rational Activities Theory to develop an eleven part set of criteria for analyzing and discussing software piracy. Though their deals specifically with software piracy as opposed to the piracy of music or movies, which they define as "digital piracy," the framework they provide and then empirically test is applicable to the piracy of manga and anime. Because of the complicated nature of their framework, the particulars of it will be discussed in the analysis section of this work, Chapter 4.

The works cited above laid the groundwork for this study and show that a number of academic forays into studying anime and manga in the United States have been made, but many of these have focused on either the economics of manga and anime or discuss it in a broader context of other literature while a host of others discuss manga and anime in

Japan. This study hopes to assist in the process of broadening academia into studying manga and anime not only in the sense of reviewing the works as art or as sociological symbols but also as a mode of transmission in a relatively new and increasingly powerful cross-cultural current between Japan and the United States, particularly the reception and reification of the images provided in these conduits in the latter.

With the literature that has informed this study thus laid out I move on to a discussion of the methodology and data that composed the bulk of this thesis.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This study was conducted using a two-pronged approach: a critical discourse analysis of seven popular internet fan sites and forums and more in-depth analysis of responses to semi-structured interviews conducted with five people familiar with manga and anime. The point of this two tiered division was to provide breadth as well as depth of content for analysis and to attempt to minimize gaps in information that could occur if only one part was conducted.

The sample for the critical discourse analysis segment is composed of the forums of seven fansites. These forums were chosen based on a number of criteria including the size of the forum's membership, its total number of posts, and the individual activity of its membership. The first two criteria were designed to insure that the sample included a reasonably large number of manga and anime aficionados. The third criterion assures that the sample is not dominated by a relatively small cadre of active users among a relatively large posting base. This criterion was added after it was observed during testing that many forums do have a sizable membership but that this is often dominated by a select few who post on almost every thread. Appendix B at the end of this work provides a simple table detailing the characteristics of each of the seven sites.

At this point it may be worthwhile to clarify some terminology. Forums are collections of user comments grouped into conversations referred to as "threads." Each thread is started by an Original Poster (OP) who sets the topic for the thread and is generally the default moderator of that thread. A moderator watches over the thread, making sure that it conforms to his or her wishes and to the forum's guidelines overall.

Many forums maintain general purpose moderators, often the forums' proprietors, who make sure that threads stay on topic and that the conversation is at least reasonably congenial and coherent. Most forums have a posted set of rules which all members and posts are expected to follow though the strictness of these rules and stringency with which they are enforced varies widely from site to site depending on the overall topic and the amalgamated wishes of the community. Threads are often grouped into large sub-headings which are then further grouped into general headings all the way up to the overall topic of the forum. This forms a hierarchy through which users can browse to find an appropriate area where they can discuss what they wish within the broader context.

I began the critical discourse analysis process with relatively little personal knowledge of anime and manga fansites. I had been to forums before and assumed that such fansites existed but I had never visited them myself. So after hammering out an outline of what I would be looking for I began to search for sites I thought suitable for my purposes. I settled on a collection of sites which will be detailed in subsequent sections; sites I felt fit the criteria mentioned above. They run the gamut of professionalism, but all of them have members that display a passion for anime and manga and an openness to discussion that proved immensely helpful in understanding the communities and their relationships with manga and anime.

The actual analysis was conducted by looking at all the posts in relevant subsections of each forum (such as those that deal with manga or anime generally as opposed to specific series) over the period of February 2011<sup>4</sup> in order to have a reasonably similar sample size for each forum though Otaku Center and One Manga

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<sup>4</sup> This is with the exception of Anime Forum the sample of which goes back to October of 2010 due to the significantly smaller size of this forum compared to the others.

make up a disproportionate part. Roughly 50 threads were read per forum with some having many more. As the posts were read, posts that seemed indicative of certain trends were pulled out and stored in a file for each site. Once a trend seemed prominent enough or seemed to appear across many of the forums it was used in the final analysis. Though this method allows for only a brief contact with the fandom, essentially their discourse over the period of a month, it has allowed for a reasonable level of thoroughness.

The other section of this thesis, the interviews, were designed and conducted in the hopes of gaining a deeper insight into the personal connection between American consumers and Japanese anime and manga. The sample interviewed was drawn from respondents solicited via advertisements distributed to University of Mississippi students and then via word-of-mouth. These students were not reimbursed or compensated in any way and were told that the interview was completely voluntary and would not affect their grades. The interview was conducted with the approval of the University of Mississippi IRB and carried out with maximum attention to the well-being of the participants. Participants' names have been kept confidential and have been replaced with military code (Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, etc.). Volunteers were given the opportunity to clarify anything they had said at the end of the interview.

There are obvious limitations to this sampling method: the pool is relatively small and self-selected. By soliciting interviewees with the specific caveat that they already have some knowledge of manga and anime, the results obviously have little bearing on the feelings of Americans in general about anime and manga or the effect of these feelings on their perceptions of Japan. Temporal and monetary constraints have restricted me to dealing with people with prior knowledge in the hopes of parsing how one

particular group has consumed anime and manga and how it has affected their relationship with Japan. Other problems with the sample include its demographic and geographical narrowness; the interviewing of only students of the University of Mississippi is necessarily limiting and problematic, but I feel that the conclusions that can be drawn from even such a limited data sample are still worthwhile to a burgeoning area of study.

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format and took from forty-five minutes to an hour to complete. A prepared list of questions was used to keep the interviews reasonably similar, but whenever an interviewee provided a response that seemed to open up another avenue of questioning, this line was followed. If a theme seemed to be a recurring feature across a number of interviews, special attention was paid to it and it became an active part of the interview process. So, in a sense, the interviews could be seen as an evolution: each interview benefitting from the previous and narrowing the focus to what seemed to be the most relevant questions. Still, as mentioned before, attempts were made to standardize the interviews enough to provide a level of foundational support and similarity on which to base comparisons of the answers provided.

It is also important to note that the two sections necessarily inform each other. Habits or thoughts that seemed prominent among observed forum posters were worked into the interviews and lines of questioning that picked up recurring themes were used as part of the analytical framework applied to the sites. Still, the two parts remained mostly separate with comparatively little overlap, which I feel maintains their worth in regard to their originally stated goals of providing breadth and depth respectively.



## Chapter 4: Analysis

Online interaction between fans and works can take a host of different forms. Fans post YouTube videos featuring clips from their favorite shows set to songs they like, they post translations of chapters not yet released in the United States; they redub works using their own voice talents; and so on. When the fandom of a work gets a hold of it, the work becomes the raw material which fans shape within and without their own minds. This is an important part of the consumption process and every consumer of a work engages in it to different degrees and in different ways. Most fans are content to read or watch a work and filter it through the subjective lens of their personal experiences, but some go a step further and forge their mark on the work through creative use of the material presented in the canon (crafting what is often referred to as “fanon”). Some fans try very hard to stay true to the base work while others reshape it drastically, sometimes even creating works of such caliber that they are arguably better than the original. In some cases, this creative re-forging transgresses copyright and intellectual property laws, but the decentralized nature of the practice makes it difficult to effectively prosecute. This lack of prosecution could also be due to the popularity and visibility brought to a work by fan recreations, and some creators may find the imitation and homage flattering.

Some fan projects have been immensely elaborate and far-reaching. For instance, the popular anime *Yu-Gi-Oh*, the story of a young man who deals with evil forces via a complicated trading card game, was re-crafted in a series of parody videos done by a fan who did all the voice work himself. The humorous spin-off was an internet sensation and

garnered millions of hits on YouTube. So far he has done over 50 episodes of his own show, dubbed *Yu-Gi-Oh: The Abridged Series*, and has begun to build his own canon filled with references to the original show and a significantly more genre savvy cast.<sup>5</sup> This original series has spawned dozens of other works in the same vein, often parodying other high profile anime works.

Many fans take to writing “fanfiction,” often abbreviated simply “fanfic,” as a means of engaging with a given work. Sites such as fanfiction.net brim with hundreds of thousands of fan writing drawing from or completely rewriting thousands of different origin works. These retellings can be as simple as additions to the basic canon or just giving it a different point of view or format. Others are novel length appendices to the main work and others still tell completely different stories with just the character names and a few traits common between them.

But while these types of animated fan interaction are immensely interesting and do reveal something about how fans deal with the work in question, they are comparatively scant relative to the massive amount of simple communication between fans regarding anime and manga works on the internet. For that reason critical discourse analysis has been restricted to postings and a select few fan forums and their parent sites. That said, the broader culture of fan consumption and recreation of works has necessarily informed this analysis.

Before conducting the main segment of critical discourse analysis I tested my methodology on several smaller fan forums devoted to the Sailor Moon manga and anime

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<sup>5</sup> “Yu-gi-oh: The Abridged Series.” No Year. No Publisher Retrieved March 23, 2011 (<http://www.yugiohabridged.com/index.php>).

series. The sites often had a Web 1.0 style to them, dominated by small animated icons and bright colors, mostly pinks and reds, that often bordered on the distracting. Many of the sites maintained large galleries of pictures, both canon and created by fans, along with the forums of primary interest. Judging by the English language ability of some posters, and some of their unusual grammatical mistakes, many were not native English speakers.

One of the most important themes of these sites was that of fan-identification with the work in question. For instance, a large number of forum members had avatars or usernames that were pictures of or derivations of the characters of the show. Many members seemed to have a deep, personal attachment to the characters and, more importantly, their relationships with each other; many members maintained a favorite couple (often referred to as a “pairing”) that was proudly displayed in their forum signature which appears at the bottom of every post they make.

It is arguable that this identification is the fuel that drives the engine of fandom and, to a degree, facilitates interaction between fans. For example, posters on Sailor Moon Center<sup>6</sup> seemed to have a high degree of personal identification with Sailor Moon’s main character, Tsukino Usagi (Sailor Moon), and disliked her male love interest because they feel he is repeatedly mean or rude to her. On the other hand, some posters defended his actions as necessary because he was compelled to shun her out of fear that a vision of her death would come true if they continued their relationship.

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<sup>6</sup> “Sailor Moon Center” No Year. No Publisher Retrieved March 23, 2011  
(<http://www.sailormooncenter.net/forum/index.php>).

The denizens of the forums Moon Princess<sup>7</sup> and Sailor Moon Center display an impressive depth of knowledge about their object of affection. Fans on the boards, though relatively slim in number and dominated by a few posters, discuss various subjects in extreme detail and query each other on possibilities not made explicit in the canon of the work. Some of the posters mentioned personal issues and many claimed to be quiet or non-mainstream in real life.

Another important facet of fan interaction on some fan sites is the “dub vs. sub” debate, shorthand for the continued conflict between fans of the Sailor Moon translation and voice dubbing done in the 1990s and fans of subtitled versions of the original work. This debate also came up in the main critical discourse analysis component and will be further discussed there.

The dubbing versus subtitling debate still raged in the communities observed for the test. On one hand, some commenters, one in particular, saw the American dub and its subsequent censorship and modification of the original content as a logical extension of the cultural climate of the US at the time. The poster stated that without some of the modifications the show would not have been aired in the US and thus not acted as a gateway for anime to become even nominally mainstream here. Other posters responded that the censorship modified the original intent of the series too greatly and that bowing to cultural pressures was unacceptable. Earlier posts showed that the pro-dub poster was a homosexual male and, even though he found the censoring of two of the characters’ gay relationship irritating, he said he understood that it was a culture-based decision, and that he liked the dub simply because it was through *it* that he came to enjoy the series.

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<sup>7</sup> “MoonPrincess.com – Sailor Moon, Sailor Moon Pictures, Sailor Moon Images, Moon Princess” No Year. No Publisher. Retrieved March 23, 2011 (<http://www.moonprincess.com>).

Posts on many of the small forums I visited as tests seemed to be more along the lines of a poll or short question/answer format rather than the debates or discussions more common to some other forums. For instance, the original poster would pose a question to the community and they would in turn answer in relatively short sentences or fragments. Following posts generally did not ask for explanation. To a degree this could be seen as stagnation or possibly just a lack of new source material to deal with. Posters have to rehash old material in this way in order to remain connected and involved.

These test forays set the stage for the main component of this thesis comprised of seven fan forums. All of the forums deal with either manga specifically, anime specifically, or both together. Some of the forums had similar names which were modified slightly to make differentiation easier. The forums were: Otaku Center, Anime Forum, Anime Forum dot Com, Anime-Forums, Anime Nation, One Manga, and Anime Suki.

The purpose in choosing forums that focused on manga and anime at large was the hope that this would help to diversify and mediate the sample. The Sailor Moon forums were generally sparsely populated with relatively few active members and their subject matter was necessarily small in scope. In contrast to this, the seven forums used in this research product each maintained sizable total memberships which provided a larger number of active posters.

This analysis is split into four segments. The first gives details of each of the seven forums and acts as a sort of ethnography explaining the particulars of each before discussing trends that became apparent during research. The next section discusses the similarities among the forums. Following that is an analysis of the interviews, and finally

is a discussion of piracy in both the context of the critical discourse analysis of the forums and the interviews, along with a full discussion of Holsapple et al.'s theoretical framework. Quotes are used to illustrate some of the trends discussed. I have chosen to leave the quotes unmodified in order to maintain their original "feel."

The quotes themselves are often grammatically incorrect with a host of spelling and formatting problems. Many lack punctuation and are written in a stream of consciousness style that can be hard to follow. Most of the quotes contain references that the reader may not be familiar with and are generally not further explained unless relevant to the broader subtext of the quote or the theme which is its undercurrent. Quite a few make use of "emoticons", series of symbols or alphanumeric characters that form a face or some part of the face in order to convey emotions, such as >< which looks like someone squinting their eyes in frustration. These emoticons can become elaborate and increasingly abstract such as >///< which indicates someone closing their eyes and blushing in embarrassment. Words between two asterisks (such as \*faints\*) indicate that the writer is performing that action. While these symbols are not necessary to understanding the text of the quote overall, in some cases they are arguably contrary to that goal, they do allow for a slightly more nuanced emotional communication which is often difficult to transmit in a purely text interaction.

### *Otaku Center*

The Otaku Center site is modern, functional, and professional. Primarily white, pink, and orange, the site's streamlined design is visually pleasing and reasonably easy to navigate despite the amount of information presented on the front page and other pages.

Like most of the sites surveyed for this study, the main forum is split into sub-forums by topic. These are often divided again into smaller sub-forums. Most relevant to this study was the “Anime and Manga” sub-forum. Given the large volume of posts a month on Otaku Center, this ethnography is primarily centered around postings of in the January-February 2011 period. As of February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2011 the site had 44,548 members and 1,494,023 posts across 58,478 threads. While many of the members do not give their exact age, several of them indicated that they were in high school.

Otaku Center is heavily involved in the aggregation and distribution of fan translations and fansubbed works. The front page has two different dynamic lists which show new uploads of shows and series respectively. The site maintains several sub-forums devoted to posting links to or imbedding videos viewable online.

*Hey all, i've been into the Japanese culture for some time now, but I never was a big fan of Anime, but I've recently bounced into two that I cant stop watching (both are old shows) : Golgo 13 an Samurai Champloo. Can anyone recommend me another anime series to check out that has the action of Golgo 13 and/or shares the comedic side of Samurai Champloo?*<sup>8</sup>

The most common type of post on Otaku Center is the recommendation thread. The original poster (OP) makes a post asking for recommendations of manga or anime series he or she has not seen, often based on enjoying a mentioned series or a set of criteria that range from exactingly specific to relatively vague. Forum members respond with myriad suggestions or ask for clarification. Some recommendation threads, such as the one above, ask for shows that would provide a gateway into manga or anime, and many of the respondents to recommend their favorite shows. Posters rarely criticize each

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<sup>8</sup> “Recommend me an Anime to watch – OtakuCenter – Forum.” 2010. Otakucenter.com. Retrieved February 23, 2011. (<http://www.otakucenter.com/recommend-me-anime-watch-t58348.html#post1381672>).

others' recommendations unless they see them as completely at odds with the stated criteria.

*another awesome series is Welcome to the N.H.K. it has the drama, comedy and a lil bit of romance it took almost all the general problems of japan starting with the hikikomori, otaku, group-suicide, Multi-level Marketing or Pyramid scam, Online Gaming that uses RMT (Real Money Trading). overall its very entertaining and at the same time you can learn a lot* 🤖<sup>9</sup>

Also common are review threads in which members review series they have watched. The administrator of the Otaku Center forum does a weekly review feature detailing a chosen series and recommending it to the forum's members. The choices are often met with acclaim and lauded as excellent series.

*Yea I download my naruto and bleach off torrents and I read the posts from datebayo himself and he said the next one won't be out till the 21st and the one after will be another 2 weeks >< I dun think I will make it D.*<sup>10</sup>

The program "torrentspy" that this poster mentions is a client program that facilitates peer-to-peer filesharing via a type of control file called a "torrent." Torrentspy, and a host of other programs like it, use a type of file called a "torrent tracker" hosted on aggregator websites to separate and spread data transfer across a cluster of computers in order to speed up transfer and mitigate connectivity problems. For instance, if a user wanted to download an episode of a popular show, he or she would search for a tracker that contained that episode, download it, and open the file in a torrenting program such as

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<sup>9</sup> "What do you think about "welcome to the nhk"? – Page 2 – OtakuCenter – Forum." 2011. Otakucenter.com. Retrieved February 23, 2011. (<http://www.otakucenter.com/recommend-me-anime-watch-t58348.html#post1381672>).

<sup>10</sup> "How long until the return of action in Naruto – OtakuCenter – Forum." 2007. Otakucenter.com. Retrieved February 23, 2011. (<http://www.otakucenter.com/how-long-till-return-action-naruto-t4163.html#post39358>).



Torrentspy. Torrentspy then searches for other torrentspy users who have the tracker and file. It then proceeds to download whatever parts of the file are available; it may attempt to download parts 1 through 50 (of a hypothetical 100 part file) from one user, parts 51 through 55 from another, part 56 from another, and so on. Even if the connection is lost to the user seeding part 56, the torrent program can simply search for another user with that part and continue to download. Once all the parts have been downloaded it assembles the completed file which can then be seeded to other users looking to download it. The major technological breakthroughs of the torrent compared to prior forms of filesharing are its mostly decentralized nature and speed. Files are downloaded and uploaded in tandem by hundreds if not thousands of users as opposed to being downloaded by thousands of users from a single source.

The importance of this explanation resides in the prevalence of this kind of torrenting among Otaku Center forum goers. Many posters indicated that they torrent and there was little discussion of the legality or morality of it. Many of the recommendation and review threads mentioned above directly linked to the suggested content.

The availability, and relative statistical legal safety, of this method of distribution has given rise to a cottage industry of fan translation groups. These groups are referred to as “scanslators” in the case of manga (physically scanning and then translating pages of manga) or “fansubbers” in the case of anime (in reference to the translation and subtitling they do). Many of these groups focus on a specific series, Naruto in the quote above. Though some of the series translated by such groups eventually become available for purchase in the United States, or are released free of charge in some cases, fansubbers and scanslators maintain a loyal following because they are often significantly faster than

their corporate counterparts. The process of licensing, translating, and eventually releasing a manga or anime in the United States can be lengthy and involved and the time between the original airing of a show in Japan and its release in the United States can be over a year. Fansubbers and scanslators are able to cut down on production time and often release episodes or chapters in English only a few days after they are released in Japan, handily beating their official counterparts.

*you cant decide something like that out of the blue, many dubs really suck and the most preferable is almost always subs. besides many phrases in japanese cant be described in dubbed very well (that happens a lot in comedies and your not able to sync the image with the actual accent or dubs). though there are series that i would prefer to watch in dubs like Yugioh or bepop, ya i could watch Bepop in dubs.<sup>11</sup>*

The subbing versus dubbing debate raged to some degree on every forum in this survey. The disagreement is waged over the superiority of subtitling anime series in English or dubbing them with English voice-overs. Proponents of dubbing claimed that the rendering in English was more emotionally stirring or that it helped them identify with the characters more. Subtitling fans stated that English dubbing was almost always bad or that that too much of the meaning is lost in translation given the difficulty of moving from Japanese to English. The majority opinion on Otaku Center seemed to be that, given the choice, subtitling was better; but, as with the quote above, this opinion was almost always mitigated when it came to a few select series. These exceptions were generally because the quality of the voice work of the English dub was thought superior or it was simply a beloved childhood series originally watched before subtitling became popular or accessible.

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<sup>11</sup> “Dubbed or Subbed anime? – Page 2 – OtakuCenter – Forum.” 2010. Otakucenter.com. Retrieved February 23, 2011. (<http://www.otakucenter.com/how-long-till-return-action-naruto-t4163.html#post39358>).

## *Anime Forum*

The somewhat ambiguously named Anime Forum site is sleek, trimmed in blue with a white background. Like the other forums this one is split into sub-forums, the most relevant of which will be the Manga Discussion forum, the Anime Discussion forum, and the General Anime/Manga Stuff forum. As of February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2011 Anime Forum has 2,321 members who have made 21,745 posts across 3,955 threads. Compared to Otaku Center, Anime Forum is significantly less active, the last posts in the two Anime and Manga Discussion forums were both made on the 18<sup>th</sup> of January 2011 and the last post in the General Anime/Manga stuff post was made on October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2010. For this reason the scope of survey on this forum will extend backward several months to provide a comparable sample to other forums.

Anime Forum maintains a Download Section sub-forum which is further divided into different forums each hosting links to or embedded versions of anime and manga content online. The sub-forum's short description reads "Section for downloads, please no illegal stuff..." which seems somewhat ironic, but could also possibly be a plea to not upload content that violates obscenity laws as opposed to infringing on copyright.

*I watched a lot of stuff that I didn't even know was anime, like Dragonball Z and Pokemon etc. and then when I grew up I realized what I was watching.*<sup>12</sup>

This quote demonstrates the "arc" of understanding mentioned by posters and several of the volunteers interviewed for this project. Shows consumed in early life were consumed not knowing their cultural origins, and it was only later that the viewer realized that what they were watching was anime, a product of Japan.

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<sup>12</sup> At the time of publication the website from which this quote came had become inaccessible.

## *Anime Forum dot Com*

Not to be confused with Anime Forum, Anime Forum dot Com sports a straightforward design dominated by light and dark blues. The forum is impressively large and its anime and manga general category is further subdivided into forums for different genres such as Feudal Era, Space, Supernatural, Magical Girl, and Romance. There is also a general anime and manga sub-forum and a Japanese language sub-forum meant to aid members in learning Japanese. As of February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2011 the forum has a membership of 144,399 who have made 2,309,569 posts across 87,267 threads making it a surprisingly active forum. Due to the sheer number of posts the survey will be restricted to posts in the February 2011 period.

Anime Forum dot Com maintains a large group of fan content sub-forums and does not have an immediately apparent area designated for posting links or embeds of illegal anime and manga content online.

*Different ppl like to collect different items such as stamps, bottle caps, currency notes and painting etc... So why are ppl who love Anime and collect Anime figurines are referred to Otaku or wierldo? So who cares about these "dirty" looks and comments as long as we love them! Right here, right now, I am going to proudly present my love ones to the world out there! So join me and show ur love ones to others as well! Take their photos and post it here! Be their proud Goshuujin sama!<sup>13</sup>*

This post opened a thread asking for respondents to proudly display their collection of figurines based on anime and manga characters. These figurines ranged in size from a few inches tall to nearly a foot with varying levels of articulation and detail.

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<sup>13</sup> "Come share your proud anime figurines collection~!!!" 2010. Animeforum.com. Retrieved February 24, 2011. (<http://www.animeforum.com/showthread.php?96622-Come-share-your-proud-anime-figurines-collection-!!!&p=2450283&viewfull=1#post2450283>).

The prices could be immense, the original poster saying that his collection cost more than \$20,000 NZD in total.


While the original poster is not from the United States, the discussion he or she starts and some of the comments he or she makes are indicative of broader trends on Anime Forums dot Com and the sample at large: the positive use of the term “otaku” in self-reference.

In Japanese the term “otaku” literally means something like “honored house” and is used to discuss someone else’s home politely. It is also used to describe people deemed a member of a breed of shut-ins obsessed with a specific subject of varying fineness. There are train otaku, military otaku, anime otaku, and so on. The term is generally derogatory and being called one would be an insult of some magnitude.

In America “otaku” has mutated into a word with significantly more positive connotations as someone who is a fan specifically of manga and anime and sometimes Japan, Japanese, or the Japanese culture. As indicated by the site name, Otaku Center, being called an otaku is not a bad thing, and many fans of manga and anime on the forums surveyed refer to each other and themselves positively as otaku.

The use of this term has provided a sort of anchor for the online communities surveyed, giving them word to rally around and an identity with which to associate themselves. As inclusive as the use of the word can be, it is also used to exclude otaku from the mainstream. Consistently, this self-exclusion is paired with a perception of victimization and mistreatment derived from a fundamental misunderstanding of what the otaku, and the objects of their affection, are. Many posters believed themselves to be

more open-minded than their “mainstream” counterparts and more freely able to express themselves. Some commenters argued against this notion, but it was still the prevailing sentiment.

*Wouldnt it be fun to play a part in a Manga/Anime? ^\_^ Run around with  
our heros! Ahhh!!! \*dies\*  
Hmm... for me... I think Death Note would be fun... and scary... >.<  
Id like to help Ed and Al in FMA YOSH >   
Ahh and be a regular for the Ouran High Host Club >///<*

*Hahaha its actually really fun imagening being part in them XD  
Even though it would never happen... \*sigh\**

*So what would you like to be in and why????? X3<sup>14</sup>*

This post typifies the underlying point of a great deal of the back-and-forth on Anime Forum dot Com and the other forums: the want to be a part of the object of interest. The main reason many fans congregate on these forums is to discuss manga and anime in ways that let them become part of the series they enjoy. Many thread dealt with topics like the one above such as asking who a favorite character is or what character other posters have a crush on or which character is most attractive. Many of the answers to these questions gave answers in the context of “if this were real” implying that a great deal of why anime and manga fans, as with fans of any medium, enjoy the media is because of the creative framework it provides them for fantasizing.

Fans on anime and manga forums are not passive recipients of entertainment, but active players in shaping a “fanon” forged from the malleable elements provided by a given original work. Many fans discuss the works online ad nauseam, constantly

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<sup>14</sup> “If you could be part of any Manga/Anime what would it be?” 2011. Animeforum.com. Retrieved February 24, 2011. (<http://www.animeforum.com/showthread.php?100586-If-you-could-be-part-of-any-Manga-Anime-what-would-it-be&p=2519803&viewfull=1#post2519803>).

questioning who is the strongest, the prettiest, the toughest in an attempt to collectively understand, interface with, and to varying degree modify a fantastical world which has gripped their imaginations for one reason or another.

*Others here have talked about how much more appealing and epic anime can get when you think of all the music, voices, and other animated goodness that comes with it, yet I haven't heard anyone talk about doing something about it with manga. There's an entire **plethora** of music out there, anime related and otherwise. If a manga bores you because of that, doesn't it only make sense to go out there and find a soundtrack to bring it to life for you?*

*A manga doesn't have a voice to go with it? What nonsense. You're there, aren't you? More often than not there will be a character there that you can identify with; so why not speak for him/her? To be able to indulge yourself so fully into a manga; what greater satisfaction could there be for us?<sup>15</sup>*

Aside from the debate about subbing and dubbing, discussions of whether anime or manga are the superior medium in general or of a specific series are commonplace on Anime Forums dot Com. Many anime series are based on a manga that became popular in Japan and thus most series have a version available in each of the mediums. Many of the comments posted to the forums that were critical of an anime series pointed to its deviance from the manga as a primary grievance. The debate about which medium is superior in general is usually more tepid than this quotation, but it can sometimes flare up into a more severe argument if the right catalyst of insults is perceived by one side or the other.

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<sup>15</sup> "Anime vs. Manga." 2010. Animeforum.com. Retrieved February 24, 2011. (<http://www.animeforum.com/showthread.php?99641-Anime-vs-Manga&p=2508236&viewfull=1#post2508236>).

## *Anime-Forums*

Very similar in design to Anime Forum dot Com, Anime-Forums is primarily a simple black and white scheme. Of primary interest is the Anime & Manga sub-forum which is active enough that it will necessitate a sample restricted to February of 2011. As of February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2011 Anime-Forums had 63,474 members who had made 3,100,019 posts in 116,680 threads. Anime-Forums also had a separate statistic dubbed “Active Members” which totaled 916 members, a small sliver of the total membership. This statistic provides some insight into a possible significant disparity between the total membership of the sites surveyed and the number of members who actually make significant contribution to discussions. Anime-Forums does not have an obvious area devoted to manga and anime downloads.

*All scanlations are illegal. I'm not trying to bust anyone's chops here, but they are not sanctioned copies and distributing them online is against the law. If you want to continue reading them, you're more than welcome to do so. I'm not here to judge you, just do not post links to torrent sites, scanlation group sites, or general manga upload sites that host viewable scans or direct downloads.*<sup>16</sup>

Of the seven sites surveyed, Anime-Forums was the only one that not only did not seem to actively endorse scanlations or fansubs and their consumption thereof but to actively banish it from the forums. The quote above is from an administrator laying down this rule, but it is obviously one very qualified by the administrator’s personal feelings on the subject, feelings which are not so hardline. This general lack of condemnation was the consistent refrain of every site visited and several of the interviews conducted in the

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<sup>16</sup> “It is against forum rules to mention where you download or read illegal scanlations.” 2009. Anime-forums.com. Retrieved February 24, 2011. (<http://www.anime-forums.com/showthread.php?97642-It-is-against-forum-rules-to-mention-where-you-download-or-read-illegal-scanlations&p=2737403&viewfull=1#post2737403>).



course of this research. The free availability, relative legal safety, and ubiquity of scanslations and fansubs makes their use by members of the online anime and manga community almost a given. Only one other site, which was later stricken from the sample due to its generally non-US base, Anime News Network, had such a disclaimer prohibiting pirated works on it. Presumably, this was to help defend against legal trouble.

*I'm always curious to hear about Japanese society. It seems so strange to an outsider. I get a taste of it from all the anime I watch, but it's not quite the same. Japan seems like one of the strangest places in the world.<sup>17</sup>*

Posters on all the forums surveyed shade between orientalizing Japan as per Said's theory and displaying a very capable and inclusive knowledge of the country. This post demonstrates the prior. The poster obviously views Japan as "strange"; a notion he or she expresses with little qualification and indicative of the environment surrounding discussion of Japan in the anime and manga community, one that is not always as empathetic and culturally sensitive as it could be.

### *Anime Nation*

The design of the Anime Nation has an old Web feel to it; simple and square edged, the forum is trimmed in blue and gray with a white background. Anime Nation is divided into several sub-forums the most pertinent of which were the Anime and Manga forums; also of interest was the Japanese Culture forum in which members discuss various aspects of Japan and its culture. Anime Nation also has a Mature Discussion

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<sup>17</sup> "Anime The Differences between Japanese Otaku, and Foreign Anime Fans." 2011. Anime-forums.com. Retrieved February 24, 2011. (<http://www.anime-forums.com/showthread.php?117764-The-Differences-between-Japanese-Otaku-and-Foreign-Anime-Fans&p=3218332&viewfull=1#post3218332>).

group which is composed of the Hentai, an intensely pornographic medium, and Yaoi/Yuri subforums, yaoi being works containing male homosexual erotica and yuri being works containing female homosexual erotica. The forum has 31,666 members who have made 1,430,892 posts across 42,028 threads.

*I used to say that I would have no preference without a doubt, but now... I seem to watch dubs more, maybe my ear is just more tuned to the English language.*

*I still prefer to hear it in Japanese if it's set, say, in ancient Japan.<sup>18</sup>*

The quest for authenticity is a clouded, but important, part of manga and anime consumption on the forums surveyed. It meshes with the debate over subbing versus dubbing and the one between manga and anime. Many posters seem to be asking themselves, and others, what is the most *appropriate* way to consume manga and anime? Which ones bring the posters closest to the creator's intent both in a creative/canonical sense and a cultural one?

This poster makes the point that to him or her a dubbed anime is more pleasing to the ear in most cases, but in the case of ancient Japan, *Japanese* is preferable. In this instance ancient Japan is seen as more Japanese, or at least more capably rendered in the Japanese language, than other shows set in other times and places. Ancient Japan is privileged as an unusual and exotic place, set apart from others as “more Japanese.”

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<sup>18</sup>“AnimeNation Forums – View Single Post – Subs or dubs – what’s your preference?.” 2011. Animation.net. Retrieved February 24, 2011. (<http://www.animation.net/forums/showpost.php?p=7019885&postcount=7>).

## *One Manga*

One Manga has a relatively old design trimmed in crimson on a white background. The forum has the usual discussion areas, but its section dealing with manga is subdivided into eight smaller forums each dealing with the titles of series in a range of the alphabet. In order to focus on more general discussion in the hopes of dealing with perceptions as opposed to discussion of specific series the Otaku Chat/Anime will also be of primary interest. Due to the number of posts across a large number of forums sampling will be restricted to February of 2011. As of February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2011, One Manga has 123,003 members who have made 4,927,720 posts across 84,603 threads. The forum's statistics showed that it has 5,570 active members.

One Manga was the most active of the seven forums; even in its comparatively small Otaku Chat/Anime sub-forum a large number of long discussions were posted, many of which spilled over the thread page limit and had to be continued in another thread linking to the prior one. These chains were surprisingly common.

*So, finally read the chapters:*

*Naruto>OP=>Bleach.*

*Naruto: Plenty of split scenes, I like that. Zetsu's an interesting fellow. The Hyuga clan scenes were touching, I always liked them. STILL no freakin' Kakashi, did he get killed or something?!? Now we have a set up for Gaara and tsuchikage, can't wait to see them kick as\$*

*OP: I didn't think the princess fell for Luffy; if she does, it's a twisted version of the Little Mermaid (very twisted). Van Der Decken looks interesting, what's up with his hand? And if he does have a fruit, I don't think it's special (Luffy wasn't caught off guard). Ok Chapter.*

*Bleach: Another ok chapter. Riruka's cute, Mr. Pork's funny, can't wait to see mad beast mode. Oh, and "badge" fullbring, huh? That sounds interesting.*

*Overall not bad, Naruto was best.<sup>19</sup>*

This quote comes from the longest of those chains, totaling over 900 pages across at least 90 parts and probably encompassing some 10,000 individual posts. The chain is a discussion of the relative merits and problems of the “Big 3” shounen manga series currently in circulation: Naruto, One Piece, and Bleach. All three series are published by Shounen Jump in Japan and are immensely popular both there and in the United States. The three are consistently mentioned on all the forums surveyed and a great deal of discussion is devoted to them. On One Manga, Naruto was the most liked while Bleach was most often maligned. The debate over which of them is better is often heated, but the many posts in the chain discussion show that most posters read all three, or at least two of them, and rate them relative to each other.

*My new manga idea is a mature manga called Shadow Fyres.t was insppired by a dream I had.<sup>20</sup>*

This quote was taken from a thread about poster’s ideas for a new manga series. Many respondents gave complicated and thoroughly fleshed out replies, some stopping dramatically at the end of their hypothetical first chapter. This highlights the importance of creation in the anime and manga fan consumption process. Many of these posters have ideas, good and bad, that they think about, often in great detail. The vast majority of these ideas will be discarded, forgotten, modified by later consumption, or perhaps parlayed

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<sup>19</sup> “OneManga.com Forums – View Single Post – Best of the Big Three Shounen (Part 88).” 2011. Onemanga.com. Retrieved March 1, 2011. (<http://forum.onemanga.com/showpost.php?p=5081011&postcount=1>).

<sup>20</sup> “OneManga.com Forums – View Single Post – Your Manga Stories Ideas.” 2010. Onemanga.com. Retrieved March 1, 2011. (<http://forum.onemanga.com/showpost.php?p=3325564&postcount=3>).

into something else; but the depths of creation shown in this thread reveals the strength of this impulse in a large number of posters.

*If you could go into the future and read one completed manga series that is currently ongoing, which manga would it be?*

*Mine would be Hajime no Ippo as it seems that this manga will take the longest to actually complete.<sup>21</sup>*

Aside from thinking of their own stories, One Manga posters are also very willing to theorize and hope about the futures of some of their favorite series. Many posters responded to this question with a series they saw as slow moving or one that was on a hiatus they wished to skip over.

*Basically, what do you look for when you're reading a manga and what makes a manga interesting to you? Romance, artwork, humor, fights?*

*And since I probably should start first being the OP, I usually look for adventure, well made fights, and good conclusions. For adventure, I really enjoy it when writers expand their world and characters, so I find it kinda disappointing when writers make a huge fantasy land and then just ignores 7/8 of it. For fights I'm usually looking more for choreography than just giant waves and beams, or else it gets kinda repetitive or boring for me. As for conclusions, I just like to see things tied up well. No deus ex machinas and cop outs, those always really bug me. I also like a lack of cheesiness. A little bit is fine, but when a character spends a whole chapter talking about friendship before powering up, it just feels... really wrong.*

*Yeah, that's my list, hoping to see some other interesting opinions. 😊*

*And hopefully someone else didn't make this already, I skimmed through the list, but I'm pretty good at missing stuff. :/ <sup>22</sup>*

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<sup>21</sup>“OneManga.com Forums – View Single Post – Go into the future for one manga.” 2011. Onemanga.com. Retrieved March 1, 2011. (<http://forum.onemanga.com/showpost.php?p=5106471&postcount=1>).

<sup>22</sup>“OneManga.com Forums – View Single Post – What makes a good manga?.” 2010. Onemanga.com. Retrieved March 1, 2011. (<http://forum.onemanga.com/showpost.php?p=4646537&postcount=1>).

Posters on One Manga have nuanced views on what constitutes good manga which they happily discussed in this thread, but more often their views are expressed in the more subtle form of making recommendations or reviewing. When exposing their views on what makes good or bad manga they do not mention Japan, such as how Japanese culture or references or language affects the final product. This further reinforces the possibility that the inherent “Japaneseness” of manga is not at the perceived forefront of consumers’ enjoyment of the medium. Instead, they think of what they enjoy in broad terms which are mentioned as if concrete, but are rarely hashed out more specifically. In response to this post, another member cheekily suggested, “u should have just said it should not be like bleach ☹️”.<sup>23</sup>

*Answer the question above for me. What do you think? Is manga truly literature or just some type of cartoon with no real meaning what-so-ever?*<sup>24</sup>

One Manga’s manga fans search for at least some artistic validation of the medium that they enjoy, and many of the other themes mentioned above reveal themselves in their answers. For instance, the first reply to this post was, “In Japan, yes, here, no (To the non-Otaku, I mean)”<sup>25</sup> again bringing up the perceived exclusion of otaku from the mainstream.

The vast majority of answers to this post were affirmative, though many stated that they thought manga was art rather than literature.

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<sup>23</sup> “OneManga.com Forums – View Single Post – What makes a good manga?.” 2010. Onemanga.com. Retrieved March 1, 2011. (<http://forum.onemanga.com/showpost.php?p=4646629&postcount=2>).

<sup>24</sup> “OneManga.com Forums – View Single Post – Is manga considered literature?.” 2009. Onemanga.com. Retrieved March 1, 2011. (<http://forum.onemanga.com/showpost.php?p=2510221&postcount=1>).

<sup>25</sup> “OneManga.com Forums – View Single Post – Is manga considered literature?.” 2009. Onemanga.com. Retrieved March 1, 2011. (<http://forum.onemanga.com/showpost.php?p=2510226&postcount=2>).

Anime Suki has a newer feel to its simple, straightforward design with a gray/white scheme. The site maintains a huge number of sub-forums devoted to specific series along with a group of sub-forums dealing with torrenting shows. As of February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2011, the site has 123,623 members, 11,405 of whom are listed as active and 3,450,785 posts in 80,181 threads. Due to the volume of posts surveying has been restricted to the month of February 2011.

*Well, looks liken i'm gonna cospasta from the TAF threads:  
guys, ur misuderestimating this bill.*

*As much as i oppose this, the effects of it won't kill the anime industry.*

*shows like To-Love Ru will survive and be made. But they'll be less riskier and at the same time, they'll be +18 instead of +15, which i don't mind.*

*But the bill is still stupid because it's very stereotypical and it will affect Japanese anime in terms of economy. Japan needs its anime to survive as a cultural superpower just like how Britain needs the Beatles, Rolling Stones and Rave music to survive as a cultural superpower.*

*The bill is uneforcable. If it is, wait until the Japanese economy takes a huge downturn. You'll also see a closure of 1/3 of shops in Akihabara, and Akiba will look like Detroit within a few months after that.*

*I bet the bill will be either ignored or repealed because of the effects on the economy itself. The Japanese government would be scared to enforce this bill on public because of pressure from the investors in the anime and manga industry at stock markets.*

*And since this only affects Tokyo, i'll expect a rise in indie anime studios within a few years in Kyoto and Hokkaido, just like the French New Wave and New Hollywood scenes popping up after strict censorship laws in both France & USA in the 50s and 60s.<sup>26</sup>*

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<sup>26</sup> "AnimeSuki Forum – View Single Post – Tokyo's Youth Ordinance Bill." 2010. Animesuki.com. Retrieved February 24, 2011. (<http://forums.animesuki.com/showpost.php?p=3389378&postcount=2>).

This post references a new Tokyo municipal ordinance which imposes significantly firmer restrictions on what kind of illustrated or animated content can be sold to children.<sup>27</sup> Many posters decried the bill as censorship and worried that it would kill the industry. This post, and the ensuing discussion, showed a view of Japan and a depth of knowledge of its goings on that, while not necessarily logical, is at least nuanced.

### *Commonalities*

While the seven forums were disparate in size, object of discussion, and activity, they all had common themes across them that are indicative of underlying trends in the online American manga and anime fan community. “Piracy” of anime and manga works through the downloading or streaming of scanslations or fansubs is rampant in almost every community, and at least tacitly condoned by all of those analyzed. The scale of this activity is staggering, as must be the lost revenue to manga and anime publishers or licensors in the United States. Referring back to the lengthy Big 3 One Manga thread, many of the posters appeared to have read at least one of the series online as it was released by scanslation groups at relatively regular intervals. Assuming that a hundred posters read even ten volumes worth of scanslated manga, which retails for around \$10.00 in the United States, licensors could be out over \$10,000; and this figure is lowballing the frequency mightily.

The relative ease of piracy could be one of the reasons that recommendation threads are so popular on these forums. If manga or anime works are so freely available

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<sup>27</sup> “Full Tokyo Assembly Passes Youth Ordinance Bill.” 2010. Anime News Network. Retrieved March 25, 2011. (<http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2010-12-15/full-tokyo-assembly-passes-youth-ordinance-bill>).



for the taking with little chance of consequence, then it makes sense that fans would constantly be in search of new works to consume. In a way, piracy is the lifeblood of the online fan community and it fundamentally alters the ways in which the mediums are consumed and perceived. Rather than being an expensive hobby, manga and anime become entertainment that can be easily plucked from thin air and enjoyed. The argument could be made that this damages the industry, or at the very least the creators of the works, or that it could be morally troubling in a way congruent with theft, but these arguments against piracy are very rarely made on fan forums.

### *Interviews*

Five University of Mississippi students were interviewed in order to provide detail and depth to the findings of the forum critical discourse analysis. Volunteers were found through a combination of advertisements looking for volunteers and snowball sampling. All of the interviewees were familiar with manga and anime and had read or watched works in the mediums for several years prior. All of them were older than eighteen years and had spent the majority of their early childhood in the United States. While the interviewees were disparate in gender and ethnicity, and none of them actively or frequently participated in online forums, they did display some commonalities that speak to trends in the wider fan audience of manga and anime that do not for the most part discussion their fandom online.

In the opening of the interview demographic information was collected: age, hometown, gender, ethnicity, and religious affiliation (if any). From there interviews were asked a series of questions about how long they have been reading manga, what

their first series was, and favorite series and characters. These questions were asked in the hopes of understanding not only what series fans enjoy, which the forums and the interviews indicate is a broad spectrum with a few points held in general regard, and why. Next, interviewees were asked about Japan: if they had ever been there, if they spoke any Japanese, and then how they felt manga and anime portrayed Japan and if that portrayal affected their perceptions.

As with the forums, the majority of the interviewees indicated that they downloaded manga or anime from the internet at some point. When asked about the possibility that this was hurting the industry, one interviewee responded that rather than hurting the industry online streaming and downloading was helping in that the free availability gives them a significantly larger target audience some of whom may later buy the works. He also stated that many anime works could not be accessed by an American audience any other way. Another interviewee replied that the price of anime, \$35 for a season, is exorbitantly high and should be brought down.

Female interviewees tended to enjoy works that featured strong female characters and often selected such characters as their favorites. Two male interviewees who were friends selected the same character from the same show for similar reasons: both liked his almost over the top “can-do” spirit in the face of long, even impossible, odds.

In response to a question about the possibility that the consumption of manga and anime in the United States leads to a racialized or sexualized view of Japan, one interviewee stated that the ability to separate fiction from reality was necessary. She felt that it is possible for people who read manga or watch anime to not do this and draw

wrong or hyperbolic conclusions about Japan. Other interviewees phrased their responses carefully, one stating that she thought Hayao Miyazaki's works (*Spirited Away*, *Ponyo*, and many others) appropriately captured the moral environmentalism of Japan. Miyazaki was mentioned several times by other interviewees as an example of an excellent creator.

Though none of the interviewees participated in online discussion with any regularity, all of them had a circle of friends within which they had some discussion. One interviewee mentioned that each of her friends had different tastes but that they were all generally fans of the medium; others said that they tried to hang out with people who did not make fun of the mediums.

### *Piracy*

An article titled "Japanese, U.S. Manga Publishers Unite To Fight Scanlations" appeared on Publishers Weekly website in mid-2010 detailing the creation of an international group focused on legally fighting anime and manga piracy. The article claims that the 30% decline in manga sales between 2007 and 2009, from \$210 million to \$140 million, is possibly attributable to piracy (Reid 2010). It is apparent from the seven forums observed and the five interviews that piracy is still a very large part of how manga is consumed in the United States, but why is the piracy of anime and manga so popular?

Holsapple et al. establish eleven parameters for research in software piracy based upon Rational Activities Theory. These eleven parameters are grouped under three major headings: target, guardian, and likely offender, and are used to explain the incidence of piracy. Though their work is specifically targeted toward providing criteria for research in software piracy and then using those criteria in judging the current academic climate of

software piracy, the framework they provide is applicable and useful in the study of piracy of manga and anime on the internet (Holsapple et al. 2008: 199-200).

The first section, target, is subdivided according to the VIVA scheme, Value, Inertia, Visibility, and Accessibility. This framework was originally designed for a more general variety of crimes, but Holsapple et al. adapt the logic of it to fit software piracy skillfully and only slight further adaption is necessary to fit it to the piracy of manga and anime. Value is essentially the worth of the object being pirated to the pirate. Inertia is “mobility” of the object. For instance, it is difficult to steal a house but less so for a car or a small, pocketable item. Holsapple et al. redefine this as the amount of computer memory a piratable object takes up on a storage device. Visibility is essentially the popularity of a product; works that are popular are highly visible and take up a larger part of the public thought while works that are low in visibility do not. Accessibility is the ease with which potential pirates are able to access a piratable object.

The next section, guardianship, is split into two sections: legal and technological. Legal guardianship is the use of the law to protect an object from piracy, such as cease-and-desist letters to sites hosting illegal files or actively pursuing known or highly active file sharers. Technological guardianship is the use of technology, such as Digital Rights Management programs, to make it more technically difficult for pirates to hack and make accessible a product.

The final section, likely offender, characterizes the personal traits and social climate of the potential pirate in order to explain what makes him or her actually commit the crime of piracy. This section is subdivided into possibility of formal legal sanctions,

possibility of informal sanctions, effect of low self-control and ethics, perceived sense of legitimacy or fairness, perceived benefits of non-compliance, and other factors such as gender, age, and computer literacy (Holsapple et al. 2008: 201-203).

### *Value*

The value of manga to pirates in the anime and manga fan community varies from work to work and is difficult to define, but manga and anime in the United States can be expensive. Manga works often run \$10 a volume while one interviewee mentioned that a season of anime can cost \$35.

### *Inertia*

One of the major possible reasons why manga and anime are pirated so often in the fan community is the relatively small size of the files involved. Manga chapters, even at reasonably high quality, can be compressed down to comparatively small file sizes that can be transmitted rapidly via the increasingly standard high-speed cable internet connection. Anime episodes are significantly larger, but still not much of a challenge for the average home internet connection in America. This means that the downloading of manga and anime can be done with ease and rapidity.

### *Visibility*

Referring back to the One Manga Big 3 thread, posters apparently wait poised to download the next scanned chapter of Bleach, Naruto, or One Piece. A posting in another thread expressed the poster's displeasure that there was going to be a few weeks

delay between Naruto releases. These comments show that highly visible works, such as the Big 3 or other popular series, are on the minds of manga and anime pirates.

### *Accessibility*

Manga and anime are undeniably accessible on the internet. One can casually search for any series of even nominal popularity and find a way to download or stream it. Manga and anime are ubiquitous on the internet, essentially there for the taking.

### *Legal Guardianship*

Defending manga and anime from piracy in the United States is a difficult enterprise. While manga imprints and anime licensors may be imprints of subsidiaries of significantly larger corporations, they are still relatively small fish up against a deluge of piracy. The decentralized nature of piracy, such as the use of torrent downloading, and its redundancy, many episodes or chapters can be found in far more than a single place, probably makes it difficult to effectively crackdown on illegal distribution. Some distributors, such as FUNimation, have taken attempted to curtail piracy and the industry is aware of and discussing the problem; but the fruits of these labors remains to be seen.<sup>28</sup>

### *Technological Guardianship*

Technology also presents a problem. Technologically protecting manga is, at least right now, a bankrupt enterprise as scanners can simply scan in a physical copy of a work and modify it in a design program such as Photoshop. There is really no way to

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<sup>28</sup> “FUNimation files lawsuit against 1,337 illegal uploaders of One Piece.” 2011. UK Anime Network News. Retrieved March 22, 2011. ([http://www.uk-anime.net/newsitem/FUNimation\\_files\\_lawsuit\\_against\\_1,337\\_illegal\\_uploaders\\_of\\_One\\_Piece.html](http://www.uk-anime.net/newsitem/FUNimation_files_lawsuit_against_1,337_illegal_uploaders_of_One_Piece.html)).

encode Digital Rights Management into a book. Though anime is entirely digital and could thus logically be protected by DRM, this is not necessarily a good solution. Holsapple et al. states that DRM is only as good as the best hacker and only needs to be cracked once to render it totally useless (Holsapple et al. 2008: 210-211). The cost of developing effective DRM could be negated by the persistence of one person, something that most likely does not come out favorably in a cost-benefit analysis.

#### *Possibility of Formal Legal Sanction*

As was mentioned before, manga and anime distributors in the United States are not in a particularly good position to formally sanction transgressors of their copyrights, and the sheer scale of anime and manga piracy on the internet, along with its decentralized nature, means that each potential pirate is statistically unlikely to actually be caught. The forums themselves speak to the almost nonexistent fear of legal action on the part of anime and manga fans; for instance, one site's maintenance of a large database of pirated materials rather boldly flies in the face of any kind of legal threat. The manga and anime industry also lack a huge, well-known organizing body which could be used to organize and publicize anti-piracy campaigns or legal action. It also lacks a more general level of notoriety among the public which might aid its efforts.

#### *Possibility of Informal Sanction*

With a very low possibility of formal sanction, it is left up to society to unofficially sanction transgressors of a given law or social code, but almost all evidence detailed above points to the normalization of piracy in the online anime and manga community. There is very little discussion of the legality or morality of piracy and little

of that is actively against it which means that pirates, at least in the context of the online community, have essentially no fear of informal sanction. For instance, many of the comments on the Publishers Weekly article mentioned above are against the anti-piracy measures detailed, saying that this will invariably hurt the industry. The interviews also reveal that the many people are comfortable pirating in offline communities as well and face little possibility of shunning or shame there. Again, manga and anime's status as comparative unknowns render it difficult for society at large to impose unofficial sanctions from outside the fan community.

#### *Effect of Low Self-Control and Ethics*

Holsapple et al. explain this parameter as the presence of "high Machiavellianism", meaning that a person is more prone to being manipulative or self-absorbed and has difficulty empathizing with the harm of their actions (Holsapple et al. 2008: 202-203). It is significantly more difficult to actively and accurately apply this parameter to anime and manga pirates, and it is more likely that the lack of threat of formal and informal sanction normalizes piracy in the community meaning that they either do not come into contact with, or possibly never consider, the consequences of their actions. That is not to say that their actions are without consequence or that they are somehow acceptable, but that their actions may be more explainable as naivety and normalization than as an almost malicious lack of empathy.

#### *Perceived Sense of Legitimacy or Fairness*

When asked about why they downloaded pirated materials, several interviewees responded with rationales for their actions. One said that the current price of anime in the



United States is simply too high and, until it comes down, the interviewee will continue to pirate it. Another stated that he believed anime and manga creators are not in the industry for money and would prefer that their works be consumed by as many people as possible, and that piracy allows a work or series to become more visible in the community thereby increasing legitimate sales. He also pointed out that many pirated works are never available in the United States legitimately.

### *Perceived Benefit of Non-Compliance*

The benefit of pirating manga and anime is fairly obvious: free, quick, and often early access to series that a potential pirate enjoys. There is also essentially no cost or risk in piracy other than the maintenance of a reasonably high speed internet connection.

With the application of these eleven parameters to anime and manga piracy it becomes apparent that the mediums are in a highly vulnerable position. The works themselves make prime targets for piracy both because of their size and their easy accessibility. The manga and anime industries also have difficulty protecting themselves either legally because of lean financial and legal power or technologically because it is not financially feasible or particularly effective. Finally, the pirates themselves exist in a state where there are few legal or social sanctions for their actions because it has been normalized in the fan community.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

While the discussion that takes place on the seven forums analyzed for this thesis are not representative of manga and anime enthusiasts as a whole, or even of manga and anime enthusiasts who take part in discussion on the internet generally, the discourse does reveal a series of trends that can be grouped into four themes. I have named these themes content focus, boundary work, expertise maintenance, and “hyper-consumption culture.”

### *Content Focus*

I call fans’ attention to anime and manga as works to be consumed as opposed to works *from Japan* “content focused.” Rather than congregate and communally orientalize Japan through assumptions drawn from manga or anime, American manga and anime fans tend to discuss the content of the works they read or watch on a minute scale.

For instance, the Big 3 Shounen thread mentioned above spanned thousands of posts from hundreds of different users. Many of the posts were detailed comparisons of two or more of the series, generally dealing with the content of the respective works. Fans were much more interested in discussing the introduction of new characters and theorizing about the source of his or her powers. These exchanges were often conducted with significant nuance and demonstrate the fans’ collective commitment to the worlds their favorite series are set in. For instance, several of the recent posts in the thread

discussed a new villain's powers in terms of the series' cosmology, crafting theories and elaborating on the canonical logic of their ideas.<sup>29</sup>

A large number of posts, something like a fourth, discuss details of characters or ask which character other posters find interesting, attractive, or unlikable. There is significant discussion of the quality of the artwork of a given manga or anime, and in reviewing anime many posters place emphasis on the skill and stylistic flourishes of the animators. As is shown in the quote above dealing with the relative merits of manga and anime (see pages 43-44), even musical scoring is up for debate and discussion. This was true in the interviews as well where many of the interviewees' answers dealt with the content of the works as opposed to their origin in Japan.

The impact of the consumption of manga and anime on American fans' perceptions of Japan is difficult to discern. On the one hand very few posters and none of the interviewees mentioned notions of Japan that were expressly racist or exoticizing; most stated that what drew him or her to manga was its unique stories, characters, or ways of dealing with relationships. On the other hand, the framework of orientalism that Said puts forth can be expressed very subtly. There were distinctly othering or incorrect assumptions about Japan posted on the forums surveyed: Japan seems strange or that being an otaku is generally acceptable there, but these did not seem to be the majority of posters.

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<sup>29</sup> From the same thread as that of the quote on pages 49:

*"I just realised, Dekken is a Fishman...with a DF....and his powers...work underwater. I thought that the sea weakens your DF powers?"*

Another user responded to this with:

*"imo, you only lose your strength, hence not able to swim or move at all underwater. you still can use your df power,"*

Many of the posts that do mention Japan or discuss reasons for liking manga and anime do not go into very great detail. “Storylines” or “characters” are vague reasons to like something at best, and it could be possible that these are inadvertent covers for the real reasons behind forum-goers affections for the mediums: its difference from the norm with which the posters are familiar. Though this may not be as damaging as the eroticism grafted onto the “Orient” as mentioned by Said, it is still an interest based on an assumption of difference for the sake of difference. This notion fundamentally distances its holder from its subject.

But again, most of the posts seem, if taken literally, to indicate an enjoyment of manga and anime of their own merits and on their own terms. Essentially, the works are used by fans as raw cultural and creative material actively consumed for enjoyment, always reshaped in their minds, and by many in their creative endeavors. A literal reading of these posts, one that takes them at their absolute face value, could conclude that manga and anime fall under the same purview as domestic television or domestic comic books in the minds of American consumers and are used in similar ways devoid of extra-cultural connotations based on preconceived notions.

My initial hypothesis when writing this thesis was one heavily informed by Said’s idea of orientalism in extra-cultural consumers, something I expected to see in the American online fan community; but after the execution of this research I observed that the fans do not explicitly orientalize Japan via manga and anime or that they hold particularly orientalist notions of the country on average.

It is very important to point out that there absolutely are orientalizing people and influences in the online fan community in America. Some of the posts quoted above clearly show a conception of Japan as a strange or intractably mysterious foreign other (see pages 37, 42, and 47) and that this idea is gained at least in part through the consumption of anime and manga. Some fans in the sample very much do draw a skewed, exoticizing, and eroticizing view of Japan from the works that they consume, but my finding in this thesis is that this view is not the primary one expressed over the internet.

It is possible that online fans may be racist or orientalizing in thought or in word in the real world though they do not do so in their online interactions, but this is difficult to determine purely from online postings and would require a sample broader in scope to reliably establish as a general trend throughout the manga and anime fandom. It is my observation that rather than thinking of and discussing anime and manga works in orientalist terms online anime and manga fans tend to think of the works in terms of creative raw material that they can consume, re-interpret, and re-imagine or discuss communally. Though this axis of the anime and manga consumption paradigm in the United States does not negate one that could be generally orientalist as per Said's definition of the term, its prominence does suggest that, at least in online discourse, this aspect is more important in the minds of online fans.

I include this characteristic because it is necessary in answering how consumption in the anime and manga community in the US operates. It is not enough to say that the vast majority of the posting community is not explicitly orientalist; this has to be complemented with an explanation of what the community does in the absence of this activity, and that is this framework of "content focus." This general focus on content

informs all of the other findings listed below and anchors the online discussion to material and relatively concrete ideas in the sense that the community does not generally discuss the abstract ideas of orientalism or racism or sexism, but instead focuses on the content of the works as a consumable canon of entertainment.

### *Boundary Work*

A consistent theme among forum posters was the separation of the self from the mainstream. Posters wondered why otaku are so maligned in America, and others responded that it was because the mainstream did not understand manga and anime or their fandom. Posters did not expressly say that it was because they were worldlier, an idea that would indicate that Japan is held as an outside object, and works crafted there retain that property, and that would be indicative of Said's orientalism; but they did assert that they were more open to expressing themselves. Other fans claimed that this distaste on the part of the mainstream is not directed toward them, the members of that discussion or that forum generally, but toward people who try to emulate Japan too much, people who try to *be* Japanese. For instance, this boundary is marked by one poster: "THB its prolly cos of the naruto rp retards,and trying to act japanese to much and acting like emo's."<sup>30</sup> This poster dislikes fans who "role-play" or try to "act Japanese" too much; though he or she goes on to say that they personally do not care what someone does in expressing their fandom, the language of this sentence indicates a rather strong disdain.

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<sup>30</sup> "Why do people hate otakus – Page 3 – OtakuCenter – Forum." 2007. Otakucenter.com. Retrieved February 23, 2011. (<http://www.otakucenter.com/why-do-people-hate-otakus-t37203p3.html#post842776>). This means something like "To be honest, it's probably because of the *Naruto* role-playing retards, and trying to act Japanese too much and acting like emos [that otaku are so disliked.]"

This is his or her boundary, one that contributes to the collective establishment of an otaku identity via social boundary creation.

Posters situate themselves between what they see as the artistic jingoism of the mainstream and the embarrassing shenanigans of fans they think are too in to manga or anime. This situating is a form of “boundary work” in which the fans observed on the boards created an identity for themselves both positively by attributing characteristics to their in-group and negatively by defining themselves as *not*, or in opposition to, something else. This may be true in the non-online fandom as well. One interviewee stated that many of her friends read manga or watched anime and that she would not want to deal with someone who made fun of the mediums.

This delineation does indicate that in the minds of posters there are ways of consuming manga and anime that are not acceptable and one aspect of this type of conception of appropriateness is attempting to become too close to the source material or to its source culture. On one hand this may be an appellation to sensitivities; attempts at “becoming” Japanese by non-Japanese would almost necessarily devolve into stereotyping because being Japanese necessitates becoming integrated into Japanese society. Anyone outside of this group probably could not become Japanese because they do not share the aggregate experience that defines “being Japanese.” On the other hand this could be subtle race policing, that the unacceptability of this action rests not with the attempt to become something else, specifically Japanese, but to attempt to escape the trappings of their own race or culture.

Posters on the forums showed a consistent identification with the word “otaku,” even using the appellation in the title of one of the sites; but the posters also perceived distaste for themselves and their fascination with manga and anime in the wider mainstream American culture. Though they acknowledged their difference from the broader culture, they railed against the idea that this made them inferior or that manga and anime were inferior art forms. In some cases, they argued, their status as fans made them superior to the mainstream.

The posts showed that some self-described “otaku” think of themselves as more accepting of new ideas, for instance one poster stated:

*i wanna say this people hate otakus because 1.they don't like anything different 2. they are trying to statisfy an emptyness in their soul by picking on others who are different 3. they see themselves as more mature not watching as they would call "cartoons" 4. they havent seen any really good ones with blood and gore like hellsing so they have a poor opinion of it<sup>31</sup>*

Others believed that otaku are more capable or willing to express themselves than the average American.<sup>32</sup> In making statements that acknowledge the differences of their subculture from the mainstream culture and portray a belief that this difference is not only not bad but actually positive, anime and manga fans on the internet are performing boundary work, drawing lines between themselves and the broader culture, essentially staking out their territory in an intra-cultural conflict.

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<sup>31</sup> “Why do people hate otakus – Page 3 – OtakuCenter – Forum” 2009. Otakucenter.com. Retrieved April 17, 2011. (<http://www.otakucenter.com/why-do-people-hate-otakus-t37203p3.html#post848309>).

<sup>32</sup> “lol this is funny me and my friends were talking about this yesterday. The reason I think people hate Otakus is the fact that they can openly express themselves while the people who hate can't because they are afraid of what other people think. This doesn't only apply to Otakus but many other people.”

“Why do people hate otakus – Page 6 – OtakuCenter – Forum” 2011. Otakucenter.com. Retrieved April 17, 2011. (<http://www.otakucenter.com/why-do-people-hate-otakus-t37203p6.html#post1491081>)



In 2002, Michele Lamont and Virag Molnar conducted a broad literature review of sociological papers dealing with this kind of boundary work including papers by Fiske and Jenkins whose theories, particularly their application of those theories to fan cultures, have been instrumental to the writing of this thesis. They separate boundary work into two different areas: symbolic boundary work where individuals split themselves into groups on the basis of a created, shared identity; and social boundary work where these demarcations result in “unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources [...] and social opportunities.” (Lamont 2002: 168). Essentially, symbolic boundary work is the means by which people split themselves into groups and acquire status within those groups while social boundary work defines what is and is not appropriate interaction between these groups, such as the permeability of a given social group (Lamont 2002: 167-169).

With this framework in mind we can begin to define the boundary work that is being done by American anime and manga fans in regard to constructing a group identity. If the American cultural landscape regarding manga and anime is thought of as a spectrum where the middle point denotes neutrality, the left side levels of dislike of manga and anime, and the right side varying levels of enjoyment, the fans on the boards observed see themselves as situated somewhere on the right-hand side of the spectrum. They are far enough away from the center to feel that they are legitimate fans of manga and anime, that they have accrued enough experience reading manga or watching anime to know significantly more than the layperson and be qualified to comment on manga and anime works. Anyone between the center point and this boundary is an amateur who is not a true fan.

But fans also draw a second boundary that delimits acceptable fandom from unacceptable fandom. Beyond this boundary are those that indulge in manga and anime too much or in ways that are not acceptable. One poster stated that this is where the mainstream dislike is rightfully directed, not toward posters like him or herself on that board but toward those that he or she deems to fall beyond the acceptable bounds, in this case acting too Japanese:

*Now, if we would say that Otaku is someone who besides of liking anime constantly use Japanese phrases and words in their own language (Especially those REALLY common like kawaii desu ne =^\_^= or w/e), makes Japanese poses everywhere, and get angry whenever someone says something remotely bad about Japan, it would be understandable if people looked down on them, or even got pissed off. Seriously, that's NOT very cool...<sup>33</sup>*

Both boundaries are constantly shifting and are not hard limits, but rather gradated areas the demarcation of which varies from person to person. The boundaries also vary from forum to forum in the seven sites analyzed, but because they have a relatively large posting base and are not dealing with a comparatively niche subject within the manga and anime fan community their outliers are averaged out to provide a clearer idea of what the median American manga and anime fan who posts online thinks qualifies.

The creation of these boundaries is symbolic boundary work done primarily on the grounds of a shared affection for manga and anime. Requisite in being an anime and manga fan with any clout in the American fandom is falling between the two boundaries mentioned above. One must like manga *enough* to be accepted into the community. As

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<sup>33</sup> "Why do people hate otakus – Page 3 – OtakuCenter – Forum." 2009. Otakucenter.com. Retrieved April 17, 2011. (<http://www.otakucenter.com/why-do-people-hate-otakus-t37203p3.html#post842760>).

mentioned before, this boundary is fluid not only in terms of changing over time but also from person to person already established in the fandom.

### *Expertise Maintenance*

The online fandom situates itself between these two boundaries and collectively performs a nuanced and almost endless cycle of media criticism. Many of the posters on the forums displayed an incredible depth of knowledge about manga and anime and a powerful and abiding interest in manga and anime works, their creators, their voice actors and actresses, and anything related to the mediums. They are undeniable experts in their selected field, and they guard this expertise carefully.

The recommendation threads which make up the bulk of the posts read for this thesis are evidence of the importance and utility of knowing a lot about a large number of manga and anime series. When a poster asks for recommendations he or she is making requests of the expertise of other forum members, many of whom reply, sometimes with great detail and insight.<sup>34</sup> Here, responding posters are able to show what they know about manga and anime, how many works they have consumed, and their dexterity in relaying that information; in essence, they are able to publicly demonstrate control over the subject of manga and anime. This is not to say that the recommendation thread responses are ego-stroking and competitive preening among the replying posters but that the posts show a *command* of manga and anime. This also shows a communal

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<sup>34</sup> One poster made the request: “Basically what the title says does anyone know a good romance manga (or anime) for guys? I saw a movie called (500) Days of Summer which proves such a thing exists but is there in in this world?” and was answered with a host of different suggestions such titles such as *Clannad* while other stated that probably any romance manga would suffice.

“romance manga/anime for dudes? – OtakuCenter – Forum.” 2011. Otakucenter.com. Retrieved April 17, 2011. (<http://www.otakucenter.com/romance-manga-anime-dudes-t62342.html>).

“ownership” of manga and anime; to some degree, online fans think of manga and anime as being their thing, something that is set apart and sets them apart from the mainstream. Some posters go so far as to quantify their command of manga and anime by including images that detail the number of manga they have read or anime episodes or series they have watched, or which episode of a series they are on. Some of these numbers can be quite impressive, such as one poster that was on the 341<sup>st</sup> episode of *Bleach*, the 491<sup>st</sup> episode of *One Piece* and the 204<sup>th</sup> episode of *Naruto: Shippuuden*.<sup>35</sup>

When this expertise comes under fire from an outside source, such as legal experts discussing the severity of online piracy in the community, the online fandom responds with acrimony. The authority of legal experts in legal matters is one held in high esteem and one that outranks the media-database knowledge of many online fans in the eyes of the mainstream. When faced with expertise such as this online fans respond not by addressing the specific legal questions involved, something that would require significant legal training and plays on the skill of legal experts, but by discussing the ethical, moral, and financial issues involved in ways that do not generally address the law. Essentially, manga and anime fans are manga and anime experts who maintain a genuinely deep and nuanced knowledge of manga and anime and within the bounds of the online community are able to exercise this knowledge in a way that grants them a measure of control of the mediums. This is similar to the findings of Matt Hills study concerning how subject of “media theory” is controlled and policed by academics who decide what is and is not acceptable (Hills 2004). Much like these academics, manga and anime fans build up a canon (and fanon) of knowledge that they feel entitles them to

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<sup>35</sup> “Last anime you completed. – Page 3 – OtakuCenter – Forum.” 2009. Otakucenter.com. Retrieved April 12, 2011. (<http://www.otakucenter.com/last-anime-you-completed-t25858p3.html#post747935>).

make commentaries on or about manga and anime. When this knowledge is challenged the fandom reacts negatively.

### *Hyper-Consumption Culture*

To the American online media fandom of manga and anime, the mediums are fundamentally digital in nature. The near omnipresence of piracy in the community and its normalization ensure that a significant portion of consumption of manga and anime is done via the internet. The ubiquity of piracy also ensures that new works are released constantly and that there is a near limitless backlog of unread or unseen works to go through. Essentially, the online manga and anime fan in American is connected to an almost limitless supply of entertainment available for free, a hyper-consumption culture.

As was shown by the analysis above, piracy is an important, and generally undiscussed, feature of the fan community. Anime and manga works are pirated through an efficient and stream-lined work pipeline and posted on a large number of easily accessible websites which are used by a huge number of online fans. This entire process has been normalized in the fan community, and is so insulated from the threat of legal repercussion that high profile sites can freely aggregate, distribute, or link to pirated works. This is important in its distinction from other industries that deal in digital media, such as movies, that often have significantly greater legal and social sanctioning power which allow them to halt such high-profile distribution.

In this environment of accessible consumption the morality of piracy is left up to American manga and anime fans to negotiate within their community. How this negotiation is performed can be seen in the ways in which the fans react to allegations of

piracy, threats of crackdowns on piracy, and accusations of the immorality of piracy. Often fans respond to such accusations by saying that piracy benefits the industry in some way or that piracy is not as widespread or as damaging to profits as official reports or sources state. The truth of these responses can vary between rationalization and keen insight,<sup>36</sup> but all of them reveal that, outside of any kind of officiating system, fans are left to negotiate the moral boundaries of their culture themselves.

The hyper-consumption culture of American online manga and anime fandom also informs the above characteristics of identity work and a comparative lack of overt orientalism in the fan community. The speed at which works can be consumed allows online fans to gain expertise quickly and communicating over forums provides an excellent vector for establishing, propagating, and maintaining authority in a visible format. The members of this culture are also responsible for establishing trends in the broader culture of general manga and anime consumers in America, such as the five interviewees. Though none of them stated any significant interaction with the online forum culture, they are affected by the ways in which it creates and maintains the high availability and low cost of manga and anime on the internet.

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<sup>36</sup> One poster stated in response to criticism of piracy: *"I pretty much agree with their interviewees. The speed you can get a variety of shows, many of which may not even get licensed in the US, at a higher quality than what hulu offers with much better translations than the "professionals" makes it obvious why people pirate over purchasing legally or using the streaming services offered. It does seem like some sites (crunchyroll) are doing pretty well but they offer better quality streams and a larger number of shows than Funi or hulu."*

"Anime Why anime fans pirate despite legal resources." 2011. Anime-forums.com. Retrieved February 24, 2011. (<http://www.anime-forums.com/showthread.php?118208-Why-anime-fans-pirate-despite-legal-resources&p=3224075&viewfull=1#post3224075>).

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## *Summation*

All four of the findings of this thesis work in tandem and affect each other. The hyper-consumptive nature of the fandom allows for the media criticism which fuels the creation of an American otaku identity via expertise, and it also means that the focus of online fan interaction in the United States tends to be the discussion of works as creative material rather than discussing them in terms of national origin or culture which could more easily shade into orientalism. Taken together the four themes provide a beginning overview of how the American online anime and manga fandom consumes anime and manga. This overview builds on the framework established by the host of prior research which informed this thesis.

Though Said's conception of orientalism did not turn out to be the all-encompassing aspect of consumption it was initially expected to be, its comparative absence, and the filling of that absence with content consumption and boundary work, still makes it a relevant framework for this study in the sense that rather than orientalizing, the fandom is doing something different. In this case the fandom is inward focused and much of its interaction is utilitarian in nature such as the recommendation or review threads. The observed fandom spends a great deal of its time focusing on the content of the works it collectively consumes and discussing them in minute detail, and, though Japan does infrequently come up in this conversation, the fandom deals primarily with itself.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

The modified application of Holsapple et al.'s Rational Activities Theory shows that piracy of manga and anime is extremely likely, something borne out by the observations of this study. So the next logical question is how could the industry reduce piracy? As outlined in the parameters, the manga and anime industry makes not only an excellent target for piracy, but also lacks legal protection and is dealing with a community that normalizes the practice.

Making manga and anime less desirable targets for piracy would presumably be a good first step, but it is not feasible to increase the inertia of the works shy of finding a way to bloat the file sizes of scanslation chapters or fansubbed anime untenable for high speed proliferation. Reducing the visibility to the works would obviously be counterproductive to marketing for legitimate sales and the industry has little control over the accessibility of a work once it is pirated. Furthermore, there is no immediately obvious way increasing the guardianship of anime and manga short of massive investments of time and money on the part of distributors. Pursuing legal recourse may stop some pirates from pirating or exact some monetary retribution, but the sheer scale of piracy, as evidenced by the observations of this work, would hardly be affected by this. Technological defenses in an offline sense are also almost inevitably ineffective. The industry also has little hope of changing the fan community's feelings about piracy through force of will or persuasion, and its inability to impose statistically significant



risks on the act of piracy means that the mental balance of the act of pirating still weighs heavily on the side of benefit.

The industry acknowledges the problem and has taken some steps to deal with it, including forming a coalition of American and Japanese publishers in mid-2010 in order to fight piracy. Several popular piracy sites shut down soon afterward, but observations gained throughout research for this paper obviously indicate that piracy is still vibrant among the communities analyzed, both on and off the internet.<sup>37</sup> In order to combat piracy the industry needs to be able to take away one of the main attractions of piracy: speedy access. If the industry is able to find a way to distribute manga and anime online in a timely manner compared to the Japanese release, such as a program similar to iTunes for music, it could begin to circumvent the productivity and time-wise upper-hand of scanners and fansubbers. Doing this would require a significant amount of cooperation and some forward thinking pricing, but the benefit of beating or nearly beating pirates at their own game would most likely pay off in the long run. Observation also shows that the industry already has a highly internet literate consumer base which could support a digital distribution application. The industry would also benefit from a decrease in, and perhaps eventual total lack of, the necessity of physical media production.

As stated before, firmly discerning what the American anime and manga community fundamentally believes about Japan, and how this belief is influenced by the consumption of anime and manga, is a difficult, and the ambiguities of the communicative medium of the internet complicate the matter further. However, the

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<sup>37</sup> “U.S., Japanese Publishers Unite Against Manga Scan Sites (Updated)” 2010. Anime News Network. Retrieved March 10, 2011. (<http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2010-06-08/u.s-japanese-publishers-unite-against-manga-scan-sites>).

ubiquity of piracy is one of the defining features of the community and apparently offline manga and anime consumption as well. This affects how the community perceives the mediums, as entertainment out of thin air with little to no cost, and its conception as inherently linked to the internet further expands its sprawling popularity.

Henry Jenkins discusses his conception of “pop cosmopolitanism” in his work *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers*; he defines this as a global convergence of both corporate and grassroots forces on modern media (Jenkins 2006: 152-172). Pop cosmopolitans consume media from around the world both through mainstream mediums such as television and through underground networks such as niche websites or stores. He discusses how pop cosmopolitans in American culture have sampled media from all kinds of national stripes and how this consumption has driven, and been driven by, corporate marketing efforts as well as low-level cult campaigns. Jenkins describes how some of his students were troubled by the assimilation of foreign works into the United States and how these were reconstituted with the American populace in mind while others applauded the efforts. The author is careful to note that his cosmopolitans can be motivated as much by genuine cultural sensitivity as by narcissistic, orientalist fantasies.

I feel that this paper has made several contributions to the field of sociology and the study of manga and anime in the United States more specifically. First, this paper has studied manga and anime as consumable mediums and focused on how Americans read manga and watch anime rather than on what manga and anime are. Rather than looking at creation as indicative of cultural values this paper has looked at the consumption characteristics of a particular culture and what they imply about that culture. This paper has also conducted specific “online-ethnographies” of several fan sites which, to my

knowledge, have not been performed before regarding anime and manga. That is not to say that the many useful and nuanced theoretical studies that informed this paper are somehow inadequate, but that I view this paper as an application of many those theories. Finally, this paper has taken a serious look at piracy in the manga and anime community and made some initial attempts to understand why it happens so often, something that has not been done before, at least not with anime and manga specifically.

Though I feel that this thesis was generally successful in accomplishing its goal of answering the questions of how Americans consume manga and anime and how this consumption affects their views of Japan, I also believe that it has its problems. The sample size of both for the critical discourse analysis component and the interviews is relatively small and had no overlap other than some engagement in downloading. The components had less affect on each other than was hoped and the interviews would have been more helpful if they were conducted in greater number and were drawn from forum posters as well as through snowball sampling. The critical discourse component also could have benefited from a significant increase in range both in terms of size of the sample, particularly focusing on fan communication mediums beyond forums such as YouTube comments or manga and anime related blog comments, as well looking at a longer length of time.

Future work could correct these flaws by focusing on a larger sample and attempting to integrate the two components more fully. I also believe that significantly more real world ethnographic work is necessary such as conducting more interviews and observing real world American fan interactions such as at anime and manga fan conventions or at club meetings. In regard to piracy, further work could be done to

determine how manga and anime fans negotiate the ethical and moral boundaries of piracy in a mode of transmission, the internet, that affords them almost unlimited access to it without, currently at least, any real risk.

I believe that anime and manga fans in the United States are part of the group Jenkins defines as pop cosmopolitans. They consume works from a foreign country and their use of the term “otaku” is not only playfully self-deprecating, but also a means to form a tenuous link with the origin of their favored works and to distance themselves from a mainstream they see as stuffy and conformist. They have sufficiently established what Shiriaishi, quoted in Befu, terms “manga literacy,” the necessary transplanting of the memes and idioms needed to understand manga (and presumably anime as well) (Befu 2003: 10-11). These American fans consume manga and anime for both positive and negative reasons, each situated somewhere on a plane marked by the axes of creative materials and cultural familiarity. Some points on this plane are distinctly orientalizing. If a fan enjoys manga and anime purely because it is Japanese and therefore different and exotic, pop cosmopolitanism has not been served well. Other points are more culturally sensitive and empathetic; when a fan loves manga and anime because of the narrative qualities of its stories and he or she explores its cultural and national background with thoughtful nuance and consideration, pop cosmopolitanism, and the American anime and manga fandom, shows its best form.

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## **Appendix A: Interview Questions**

### *Personal Information*

What is your age?

Where were you born?

What is your nationality?

What is your primary language?

What gender do you consider yourself to be?

What race or ethnicity do you consider yourself to be?

What, if any, religious group do you consider yourself to be a member of?

### *Manga and Anime*

Do you read manga or watch anime?

How often?

How long have you been reading manga or watching anime?

Which do you enjoy more, manga or anime?

Why?

What was the first manga or anime you consumed?

Why did you start with that one?

What is your favorite manga or anime?

Why?

What is your favorite genre of manga or anime?

Why?

Could you describe your favorite scene from any manga or anime?

Why do you like that scene?

Could you describe your favorite character from any manga or anime?

Why do you like that character?

Do you enjoy manga or anime more than other media forms?

Do you like subbing or dubbing of anime more?

Why?

### *Japan*

Could you describe Japan?

How do you think manga and anime portray Japan?

How do you think of Japan in terms of the manga and anime you have read or seen?

Have you ever been to Japan?

Do you speak any Japanese?

Some scholars say that consumption of manga and anime in the United States leads to a racialized view of Japan on the part of consumers, how do you feel about that?

Do you feel like there are certain forms of manga or anime, or certain ways of consuming them that are more authentic than others?

### *Internet*

Do you or did you discuss manga or anime on the internet in any fashion (YouTube comments, forum posts, etc.)?

If so, how often?

Why?

Did you feel like you were part of a community?

What were some of the features of that community?

### *Closing*

Do you have any further comments or anything you would like to clarify?

## Appendix B: Critical Discourse Analysis Fan Forums

#	Name	Total Membership	“Active Membership”	Total Thread Count	Total Post Count
1	Anime Forum	2,321	Not listed	3,955	21,745
2	Anime Forum dot Com	144,399	Not listed	87,267	2,309,569
3	Anime Nation	31,666	Not listed	42,028	1,430,892
4	Anime-Forums	63,474	916	116,680	3,100,019
5	Anime Suki	123,623	11,405	80,181	3,450,785
6	One Manga	123,003	5,570	84,603	4,927,720
7	Otaku Center	44,548	Not listed	58,478	1,494,023