

The cultural dynamic of doujinshi and cosplay: Local anime fandom in Japan, USA and Europe

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Abstract:

Japanese popular culture unifies fans from different countries and backgrounds. Its rich participatory culture is beyond any other and flourishes around comics (manga), animation (anime), games and music. Japanese storytelling showcases elaborate story worlds whose characters are branded on many products. The sub genres of Japanese pop-culture and the lingua franca of their audiences shape Western fandom. In this article, I scrutinize the global dynamic of manga. I specifically focus on the creation of fan manga ('doujinshi') and dress-up ('cosplay') as two migratory fan practices. The form and content of fan works, and the organizational structure behind them, varies intensely per country. If manga is an international language and style, where is its international fan identity located? In this article, I explore this uncharted territory through ethnographic views of diverse Western and Japanese fan sites where these creative practices emerge. This ethnographic overview is thus concerned with the heterogeneous make-up and social protocols of anime fandom.

Keywords: Anime fandom, doujinshi, cosplay, conventions, ethnography

Introduction

Japan's global and exotic identity is historically rooted. In the nineteenth century, Euro-Americans performed their fascination for the island through 'Orientalism' in Western impressionist art, Zen gardens and architecture (Napier, 2007; Said, 1978). When World War II penetrated this culturally rich image, the fascination for Japan became more ambivalent, characterized by both fear and curiosity. By now, the country's global identity, which lingers between East and West, inspires Western corporate businesses, art and media as it represents a mixture of spiritual traditions, strong labour and family morals, as well as an advanced technocapitalist model (Ivy, 1995; Wolferen, 1995). Today, the relationship between Western countries and Japan is also significantly performed in relation to its pop-culture.

Japan's visual language has been hailed by consumers all over the world. Through mass media, consumers align themselves with Japan's exotic, fantastic imagery which in the industry has also been dubbed 'cool Japan' (McGray, 2002). The Western reception of Japanese content underlines the country's soft but pervasive power, that is, a cultural power that resides in attraction, achieved for instance through positive media imagery, rather than coercion (Nye, 2004). Nowadays, Japan exports media products such as games and animation series that are widely recognizable by consumers all over the world. This highly marketable softness has also been characterized as a '*kawaii*' (meaning cute) culture by Dutch scholars, dominated by Hello Kitty and the influential fashion of 'gothic lolitas', inspired by Victorian and French attire (Smits & Cwiertka, 2012). Most influential, however, is Japan's export of manga products. In a narrow sense, manga refers to Japanese comics but manga is a transmedia phenomenon, a media mix composed of different types of content (Ito, 2005). Manga culture dovetails animation or 'anime', games, figurines, visuals, and consumer articles. Its visuals also manifest in high art through pop-art of artists as Takashi Murakami. Manga aesthetics inspires consumers all over the world.

The influential culture of manga is worth studying by itself as an important, cultural-economic flow but also provides fundamental insights into the subcultural behavior of mass media audiences. Japanese popular culture reaches a broad Western demographic as it inspires both children through products such as *Pokémon* and simultaneously draws cult fans with adult titles. Analytically, the grouping of fans around Japanese content has been captured as 'anime and manga fandom' or more commonly 'anime fandom' (Ito et al, 2012). This global reception solidifies cosmopolitan identity, construed through different cultural repertoires. I refer to the interactions of anime fandom as a 'cultural dynamic' of manga. Dynamic suggests a cultural play of differences and similarities - a complex circulation rather than easily identifiable pattern. This dynamic is composed of local patterns and global media that amplify each other. The term 'glocalization' is perhaps more adequate to define these patterns as it captures a cultural dynamic where universalization and standardisation go hand in hand with particularization and appropriation. Anime fandom is not about an authentic activity that spreads globally, as globalism is often understood, but is an iteration of localized practices that spread globally and create cultural conjunctures.

This study details my participant-observation at various fields of anime fandom in the United States, the Netherlands, Germany and Japan. In this article, I make the global and local dynamic of manga visible. I specifically focus on 'doujinshi' (fan comics) and 'cosplay' (dress up as existing or original fictional characters) as two migratory fan practices in which the local-global patterns emerge. While both activities are also common in fandoms of Western fiction - and cosplay in fact originated there - they are nowadays more associated with the practice of anime fans. I focus on local cultures rather than national ones to account for the fact that fan cultures, for example in the United States and Japan, draw members from different nation states. For the purpose of this article, I select a few aspects that are important in terms of creativity and fannish self-organization.

Thus, I investigate the cultural dynamic of anime fandom by focussing on four different countries and representative events. I argue that anime fandom is not easily understood as a global phenomenon but rather is composed of different, heterogeneous values and communities. The local iterations of cosplay and doujinshi, which may seem homogeneous activities, are read as manifestations that are firmly anchored in particular traditions. Still, even here international standards shape expectations and outlets of anime fans. Whereas doujinshi is more overtly local because of language differences, cosplay lends itself to be more international because of its visuality. I set off this study with a literature overview and description of the methodology; then I cross compare local practices of doujinshi and cosplay that surfaced in my ethnography. This is followed by a preliminary analysis of the cultural climates in which these patterns of difference and similarity emerge.

Studies on anime fandom

Japan exports a flow of products that is widely recognizable and hailed by consumers all over the world. Anime fandom exemplifies this dynamic. On a macro level, scholars signify the flow as 'cultural globalism' (Burn, 2006), 'transculturalism' (Hills, 2002; Jenkins, 2006b) or even a 'global space' (McLelland, 2001). On micro level, the mentioned studies explore the figure of the Anglo-American '*otaku*', the fan of Japanese popular culture. While the *otaku* is pathologized in Japan as a deviant and obsessive fan (Galbraith & Christodoulou, 2012), in Western countries the term has been introduced to connote a more positive identity: the cult-fan interested in Japanese content. The *otaku* is also a gate keeper that makes Japanese content accessible. Since much Japanese content does not cross the borders officially, Western fans are prone to, for instance, translating comics, games or animation themselves (Denison, 2011). The *otaku* is thus a liminal figure, someone that hovers between the official industries whose products s/he honours but at the same time, always struggles to get access to the culture at all.

The popular culture of manga thus already creates difficulties in terms of language, accessibility and circulation. This cultural dynamic is uneven, particularly when we consider that manga culture suggests a hegemonic relationship in which Japan influences the West with its soft power but hardly talks back. For instance, Japan's media industry is not all that interested in seeing how its industry is developed in other countries and hardly caters to its international audiences. Still, it would be wrong to portray this dynamic solely as Western 'Japanophilia' that expresses a longstanding cultural appreciation and even obsession with Japan (Napier, 2007). The Japanese are interested in Western countries and their narratives in their own right. Ito, Okabe and Tsuji (2012) rightly point out that Osamu Tezuka, Japan's preeminent author, was inspired by Disney productions in his work, while today's most celebrated animator, Hayao Miyazaki, embraces European culture in his movies. Despite shared cultural imagery, however, Western and Eastern audiences are largely divided by local protocols, specific interests (e.g., in particular game genres) and language differences.

This study bridges the fields of manga studies and fan studies. Manga studies flourishes both in Japan and increasingly in Western countries, with the English journal

Mechademia at its forefront. Fan studies is disconnected from this field as it is predominantly inspired by the creativity of Western fans. To reflect on anime culture means connecting the capital of these two fields. Anime fandom in Japan and abroad has not been considerably researched in Anglo-American traditions but is the subject of several edited collections (Ito, et al., 2012; Kelly, 2004).

For this study, I have selected two fan practices that deserve more attention. Both doujinshi and cosplay are among the most visible activities that anime fans engage in and have Western counterparts too. However, they have not systematically been studied thus far. Previous research on media fans has often looked at fan fiction and fan videos in particular (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Hellekson & Busse, 2006; Jenkins, 1992; Pugh, 2005). Doujinshi has mostly been researched in the context of Japanese manga studies with some Anglo-American exceptions (McLelland, 2005; Thorn, 2004). Cosplay however is mentioned in some studies but rather as an illustration of fandom rather than an activity that could be analyzed further (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Crawford, 2012; Pearce, 2009; Taylor, 2006). In previous work, I introduced cosplay as a performative phenomenon that solidifies fan identity, especially in terms of gender and sexuality (Lamerichs, 2011). My upcoming book charts this activity as an internal affective process that is performed at the convention space. This study is part of an ongoing endeavour to provide insights in fandom as it is lived, embodied and felt in different contexts.

Fan studies often focus on fan communities online that are globally accessible and have made fandom more visible and open to a mainstream audience. Existing studies have often captured fans as forerunners of internet culture or ideal users of today's participatory culture (Baym, 2010; Jenkins, 2006a). However, the bias in fan studies to turn towards online sites downplays both the creative aspects of fandom as well as the importance of traditional spaces in which fans still meet up. The history and culture of fan conventions is only touched upon briefly in fan studies even though these sites are flourishing at the moment. The San Diego Comic-Con, for example, drew over 130,000 visitors in 2012 as estimated by the organizers. Cosplay and doujinshi are amply visible at these sites as practices that motivate fans to closely interpret existing texts, perform them, and extend them with their own narratives and ideas.

I discuss fan conventions of Japanese popular culture as a site of research, and the fan products that are exhibited there. Fan conventions are not set apart from internet traditions and modes of communicating, but do have practices and norms of their own. The contribution of this study and its relevance thus lies in examining two important fan practices that have not been amply studied in their local traditions. Moreover, I contribute to the discussion of fan spaces by opening the field up and directing attention towards offline sites. This is an important methodological point that I would like to press. Fan conventions are exemplary sites to observe the global dynamic of manga, and to participate in the culture inspired by this Japanese media flow.

Methodology

This article is based on insider ethnography that I performed the last four years as a researcher and also draws from my experiences before that time as a fan artist. While my experience of fan conventions goes back many years, my data stems from my participation in fan conventions in Europe, North-America and Japan (2010-2011). I focus on two European countries, The Netherlands and Germany. The participant-observation was enriched with interviews and conversations with staff members as well as visitors. I used additional documentation (e.g., web sites, fan zines and doujinshi) to incorporate a historical background.

I attended a few of the largest events within these countries and tried to attend various events when possible to allow for further comparison. In Japan (2012) I visited the fan-driven doujinshi events Comic City, Comiket and the international World Cosplay Summit (WCS) hosted by TV Aichi; in The Netherlands, Animecon, Abunai, YaYCon and Tsunacon (2009-2012); in Germany, Dokomi (2010-2012) and Animagic (2009-2010); in North-America, Otakon in Baltimore (2011). It is my aim to show that these fan cultures are individual events with their own ecologies, not to signify the influence of the nation-state on fan practices. These events draw members with different national backgrounds after all and are structured along different local and global patterns. Thus, when I speak of 'German' and 'Japanese' fans, I am more interested in their language cultures and the cultural-specificity of the fan events, rather than the national identity of these fans. I use these denominators to create coherence throughout the article but I realize that these fan spaces also draw participants from other countries and non-fan visitors.

In the various fan events, my stance varied from that of a critical insider to a more observant outsider. As an insider, I have participated in the Dutch anime scene as a researcher from 2010 onward. Before that time, I attended the conventions already as a cosplayer and doujinshi artist of OpenMinded. From 2010-2012, I was also a staff member at YaYCon that arranged the internal communication and organized events. In Japan, however, I was more of an outsider, who only understood parts of the language and observed rather than participated. During the WCS, which brought together fans of different nationalities, it was easier for me to talk to people and participate partly with the permission of the international organizers. Here, I also was employed as Dutch press for the anime magazine *Aniway* to communicate the event to our home country.

Doujinshi

The term 'doujinshi' is derived from 'doujin' (literally 'same person' which refers to one or several persons that have a common interest or goal) and *shi* (generally refers to 'magazine' or 'periodical'). Colloquially 'doujin' stands for the self-publication of fan works in mixed media (e.g., games, music, and comics) and underlines the community aspect that brings the fans together. 'Doujinshi' refers to self-published as a medium which includes comics, light novels and art books. Doujinshi can be homages to existing texts, inspired by anime, manga

or game and even Western texts (e.g., *Harry Potter*, *CSI*). Some belong to the genre 'original', meaning that they feature characters and stories that the artist conceived of him or herself. Historically, doujinshi developed as an important fan practice in Japan in the seventies and is intimately related with the popularity of certain fan conventions, notably Comiket. In Western countries, this art is generally found in artists alleys that take up a part of the convention.

I roughly define doujinshi as fan-created manga that circulate within the fan communities of Japanese popular culture. Doujinshi are often described as 'amateur manga' (Kinsella, 1998), amateur being a term that stems from the Latin '*amare*' or 'to love'. Nowadays amateur implies the engagement in non-professional activities which partly resonates with doujinshi. These comics are non-professional as they are often created as labour of love rather than for financial gain. However, the term amateur does not sit easy with the fact that doujinshi are also produced by professional artists. Many influential mangaka in Japan started out in the doujinshi scene and participated in it even after their debuts (e.g., CLAMP; Ozaki Minami of *Zetsuai*). Even outside Japan, the relation with the industry in doujinshi practices can be problematic as artists may create doujinshi alongside their professional activities or professionalize the fan labour itself.

This account of doujinshi will focus on what the actors in the fan cultures treat as doujinshi but takes fan-created manga as its lead. In most countries, the term doujinshi is deployed but not in a systematic way. Especially in The Netherlands, doujinshi is a colloquial term to distinguish self-financed publications from more professional, local manga. In The States, the term appears to be used much less and often to qualify those formats of derivative comics that closely resembled the Japanese fan comics in terms of style and printing. In Germany, the term has been increasingly used to correspond with the emerging independent comic scenes. This term doujinshi is thus understood differently in particular language traditions. I adopted a more open outlook to see what fan comics and media the fans embraced and focussed on fan-created manga. At the end of the section, the findings are summarized as cross comparisons to help the reader.

Exclusivity in Japan

Fan texts in Japan have an authentic status and high visibility compared to the West. Doujinshi come in limited copies and primarily circulate at widely attended doujinshi conventions that are often organized by fans themselves. They are not dismissed as amateur productions or copies, but rather viewed as unique creations in their own right and function as collector's items for fans. Fan artists can achieve a high status as authors of exemplary fan texts. As a result of the high status of some fan authors, and the tendency towards limited and exclusive copies of doujinshi, some products are rare and can be sold for high prices online and offline.

Some doujinshi can be found at second-hand stores such as Mandarake or online sites such as the Japanese Amazon. Rare comics are sometimes sold for a price ten times as high as the original one. This cultural shift is important as it re-distributes fan texts that

emerged in a 'gift economy' (Hyde, 1983; Mauss, 1970) - a model of passionate exchange at conventions from which fan artists hardly profit – into an economic market as they are commercialized by third parties such as stores. However, this economic flow also preserves fan works, documents them, and makes them culturally accessible as opposed to the Western grassroots movement in which fan works circulate underground or online. The logics of fandom in Japan thus manifests between the industry and the fans themselves. While some upcoming doujinshi artists become professionals (not always as mangaka but also as assistants), many of them do not achieve this status or want it. Doujinshi grants artists a certain liberty to create what they want and at the same time, prestige as fan artists. These derivative texts are seldom framed in a discourse of amateurism but are perceived to be art in their own right.

Doujinshi are thus considered to be primary fan objects in Japan that are worthy of attention, circulation, collection and preservation. Japanese buyers are selective and seek fan texts that suit their desire and that fulfill elements of the source-texts that appealed to them. These often female fans look for specific characters, 'pairings' (romantic couples) and genres, and take pride in having an extensive doujinshi collection that reflects their interpretations and imagination. Japanese fans collect these fan memorabilia as tokens of their affect and as ways to relive their connection to the source text. However, their activities are not fundamentally different from Western fans, such as fan fiction authors, who also collected and circulated fanzines before the prevalence of online text. Even today fans carefully bookmark texts, share them, and store printed copies in binders. While doujinshi circulate in a specific economic context, the purchase and collection of these fan texts has similar value as in other countries.

The fan convention Comiket, also known as 'Comic Market', heavily influenced the status of fan comics and the institutionalization of fan practices in Japan. Comiket shaped the history of manga itself since many professional artists debuted there (for a detailed history see Tamagawa, 2012). The first Comiket was held on December 21, 1975, with about 32 participating artist groups or '*sākuru*' (circles) and an estimated 700 attendees (Comiket, 2012). By now, the convention is held twice a year in Tokyo and roughly half a million visitors attend every edition. Though the event is very popular and well-received, Comiket is still run by a non-profit organization of volunteers, the Comic Market Committee. It is still, in other words, a fan organization at heart and not a commercial enterprise. By now, different comic markets flourish in Japan while the culture around Comiket is perceived to be the most influential and has been parodied in many manga and anime. Comiket's own catalogue, that features gags about the norms at Comiket and the etiquette of its visitors, helps solidify this cultural status even more.

Comiket views doujinshi as exclusive objects. As the organizers of Comiket state in their catalogue and online: 'The Comic Market (Comiket) is a marketplace where individuals can offer their own self-produced creations to a community that appreciates and supports such creative personal activities. Comiket primarily focuses on acting as a communal exchange place for self-published books, known as *dojinshi*. Japanese dictionaries define

dojinshi as self-published material aimed toward likeminded individuals' (Ibid.). To equalize the event, the organizers use the term 'participants' to denote buyers, sellers, cosplayers, and organizers that all take part in the circulation of fan content (Fanlore, 2012).

Though doujinshi commonly refers to self-published comics, Comiket offers all kinds of media and hosts different artists every day. Most doujinshi are comics, inspired by existing texts, some artists also sell games, music, jewelry, non-fiction (e.g., essays about manga and anime; yoga tutorials) and comics or photos of their pets. The doujinshi that are sold at Comiket are often exclusive as some circles hardly reprint their material. The lines for particular artists and booths are therefore very long. While Comiket highlights the diversity of fan products, Super Comic City in Osaka emphasizes doujinshi's origin as a comic medium. In 2012, Super Comic City drew a largely female crowd of all ages. Though there were also some men, a few head counts showed that one of every eight visitors was male. The main comic genre was 'boys love' or the more erotic 'yaoi', a type of emotional queer romance that particularly caters to women and explores existing as well as original characters.

In general, Super Comic City resembles Comiket's Saturday which is colloquially known as 'girl's day'. While Comiket shows new repertoires every day, and also caters to men with erotic heterosexual and lesbian comics on 'boy's day', Osaka's event appeals to women. This culture is associated with queer comics for a female readership. Reasons for this phenomenon are beyond this study but have been tackled by Matthew Thorn (2004), amongst others. Where Comiket evolved broadly in terms of content and seems diverse in its gender population, the smaller Super Comic City still functions as a female space.

Even though the anime community in Japan gets together at different events, each with their own practices, it corresponds closely with some developments in Western societies. The fannish reception shows that both industrial traditions have more in common than we might presume. Still, we should not exaggerate the dialogue. While fans may connect through manga and show similar narrative interests, the different fan communities still operate in isolation. However, at times it seems that the Japanese fans also want to further relationships with Western fans. For instance, at Comiket I bought a travel book from a young man that detailed his experiences of German convention and provided travel information to other Japanese fans. This minor example shows that some Asian fans are also eager to share experiences with Western fans.

American prints and commissions

However, Otakon shows a very different tendency towards prints and hand-made drawings rather than full-fledged comics. This small-scaled ethnography of one convention may not be taken as fully representative of the diversity of manga culture at American conventions, but Otakon is among the most prominent and largest conventions that focus specifically on Japanese popular culture. The artist alley in Otakon (2011) shows different trends in doujinshi than the Japanese examples. Though America's small-press, independent comic scene flourished for many years. Comics are largely absent as most artists sell prints (e.g., self-printed posters or cards), fan merchandise (e.g., buttons, phone straps) and

traditional art works (e.g., paintings, sketches on request). The different visual styles and genre inspirations at Otakon stand out, and reflect the remediation of both Western and Japanese content (e.g., realistic interpretations of manga characters; fantasy-inspired paintings with wide manga eyes).

Many artists also sell prints of original works with their own characters in styles inspired by manga, cartoons, and even fantasy art. They also offer 'commissions' (drawings on request) of popular existing characters by drawing exclusive artwork for other fans for a small amount of money. The artists may work on their commissions during Otakon, but if they get too many commissions they will send them to the fan by mail. At Otakon, I observed that commissions seem to go quite well and popular artists sometimes draw a line of fans that have specific requests. This thriving commission culture opposes that of The Netherlands and Germany, where commissions at conventions are often expected to be done on the spot as sketches for a small price or for free.

The relative absence of fan comics physically present at Otakon does not imply that this genre is absent. On occasion, I do spot a printed web comic in the artist alley, such as *Ensign Sue must die*. Moreover, some self-published manga seem to be sold outside the artist's alleys in small-press boxes in the main dealer room. Moreover, from online platforms I know that there is much more content. American fans publish many fan comics online at media platforms as SmackJeeves and Deviantart. Some of these are original works within manga genres such as the boy's love comics *Teahouse* (Emirain, 2012) and *Star Fighter* (Hamletmachine, 2009-2012). One blogger does note that in 2012 American doujinshi appeared in the alley and lists three examples inspired by Japanese fan comics (Reverse_Thieves, 2012).

In terms of social coherence, the American artists also do not organize in artist groups as extensively as the Japanese do. Most of the tables are run by individual artists or shared by two of them. A trend towards fan authorship manifests in the self-promotion of individual artists as well as in the interest in commissions as personal, requested gifts that express the imagination of the commissioner and artist.

Professionalizing manga in the Netherlands

Dutch and German doujinshi circles overall show a tendency to professionalize their work and circulate it in the mainstream comic industry. The term doujinshi is used by Dutch fans to qualify a variety of local manga-inspired comics that circulated grassroots. Historically, Dutch manga had its first wave in the late nineties in fan zines such as *Onomaga* (of the fan club 'Oranda no manga'), *FAniManga*, *Aniway* and the semi-professional *AnimeniA* which was published by the company Gamesworld, now known as Futurezone. Simultaneously, solo-artists such as Karin Barend and André Masee provided self-published works for free or small prices at the earliest Dutch fan conventions (pers. comm. Léon van Hooijdonk, 3 November 2012). The earliest Dutch fan manga show tendencies towards original comics which stayed an important characteristic of Dutch doujinshi until today. Many of these fan

zines disappeared after a few issues with the exception of *Aniway*. Since 2001, when Goldfish Factory was founded, Dutch doujinshi experienced its second wave and organized in the Japanese model of circles. Doujinshi became used more often as a term, also to refer to earlier local manga. The foundation of three major circles (OpenMinded, Cheesecake Studios and Neutral) coincided with *Aniway's Fanthology* (2004) project that published the best Dutch fan manga.

Japanese doujinshi is used as a model in the Netherlands to bring together artists inspired by the narrativity and visuality of manga. Dutch circles include as little as two artists (e.g., Circle Pegasi) and go up to over ten artists (e.g., Cheesecake; OpenMinded). Whereas some European countries such as Germany publish local manga in their own language, the Netherlands has notably published in English to reach a larger audience. The tendency in the Netherlands is to create original doujinshi with unique characters and plot lines. There have been fan comics about *Sailormoon* (Goldfish Factory), *Black Butler* (OpenMinded; Celestial) and Clamp's oeuvre (Neutral) but these are outweighed by original work. This is comparable to tendencies in Germany, where doujinshi is also associated with original German manga. However, the Germans often publish in their own language, and except for circles also run small professional publishing companies so that they can pay their artists.

These Dutch manga remediate Japanese popular culture in several ways. First, they may partake in Japanese genres. OpenMinded, for instance, publishes 'yaoi' and 'yuri', while Popsiclesuicide's prominent gag doujinshi, *Magical Cow Girl Marieke* (featured in *FAnimanga*, *Orandoujin* and later, the mascot of J-Pop's Animecon) is a local parody of the 'magical girl' genre and Dutchness in gag comic style (figure 1). Second, Dutch doujinshi artists appropriate the panelling of manga and its formats, such as the four-panelled gag comics 'yonkoma'. Third, the Dutch doujinshi are often drawn in an art style that reflects Japanese qualities (e.g., detailed and wide-eyed characters, cinematographic panelling). In some cases, the artist uses a more American-inspired style or develops a hybrid style, but feels affiliated with the fan community of manga and anime, and thus chooses to publish doujinshi (e.g., Roderick Leeuwenhart; André Masee, Marissa Delbressine), such as seen on figure 2. Thus, sociality with the fan community can also be a reason to publish a comic as doujinshi, or both as a doujinshi and a web comic.

In contrast to America and Japan, the Dutch artists show a tendency towards original comics rather than merchandise or fan art. Though some artists offer prints, cards, painted mugs, pillows and prints, the overall emphasis seems to be on comics. What is quite unique to the Netherlands is that many of these fan works are published not as thin volumes but as larger anthologies of 100-300 pages (e.g., work of Neutral, OpenMinded, Cheesecake) or as magazines that are published on a regular basis (e.g., *Tea Tales magazine*; *Orandoujin*). Some circles offer commissions at conventions, but certainly not all of them. The Dutch artists have a habit of signing their booklets with small drawings for free, which is also not a given in other countries. In Germany, for instance, fans bring sketch books or 'Con-Hons' (convention books) that artists and friends alike can sign but artists will often consider this a commission that requires a small payment. Anne Delseit, editor of publishing house

Fireangels, also explained to me at YaYCon (pers. comm. 1 April 2012) that the expectation of gifting free sketches can cast a negative light on some doujinshi artists who expect to get paid.

The role of doujinshi artists cannot be seen separately from the promotion of anime and manga altogether, which is a young phenomenon in the Netherlands. Anime conventions are a fairly new phenomenon in the country altogether, where Animecon hosted its first edition in 1999, inspired by English anime conventions (Niels Viveen, pers. comm., June 20, 2012). In the past years there has been an increase in conventions that last for a day rather than a weekend. The main publishing houses of manga are Glénat that published Dutch manga since 2006, and Kana, who offered *Dragonball* since 2001. Since Dutch translations emerged late, many fans still read English translations and the overall portion of manga sold at conventions is Anglo-American (figure 2). Fan conventions and doujinshi thus help showcase Japanese popular culture.

In Europe, doujinshi cultures often closely coincide with the local comic industry. Germany, for instance, developed a thriving publishing culture in which local manga is scouted and published by companies as Carlsen Comics. As an effect, fans professionalized their work in the late nineties in publishing houses such as Schwarzer Turm and Fireangels (figure 3) that could pay their artists. Others worked on their portfolio or stuck to web manga. Editor Anne Delseit however speaks of a ‘renaissance of doujinshi’ as different independent artists are now slowly organizing in casual artist groups again (pers. comm., February 19, 2013). However, the large publishing companies carefully set their professional status apart from independent groups and circles.

Dutch doujinshi artists partake in the professional comic industry as well but not such a professionalized way as in Germany. In the Netherlands, however, the role of doujinshi in the industry is emancipative. With the interests in comics declining in the Netherlands, doujinshi artists help to promote comics as a medium. The doujinshi artists have always added general comic markets or ‘stripbeurzen’ to their activities (e.g., stripbeurs Haarlem). The artists organized themselves on external events as Mangafique, which was formalized in 2006, to signify a collective interest in local manga and to represent the fan communities that they come from. Their status on comic fairs is problematic where they are situated among young professionals that work in the field of European and Western comics who are often unfamiliar with manga and have a different ethos of self-publication.

The interaction with the industry seems part of the reason why Dutch artists focus on originals rather than derivative works: the works partly cater to audiences that are not familiar with the manga characters from existing narratives and function as a cultural space to make manga visible. Since 2011, the Dutch manga award has been organized as a ceremony at Animecon. The award nominates various small-press authors – regardless of aesthetic style or membership to fandom - with the idea that doujinshi does not only emerge in anime fandom but also refers to self-published alternative comics. This categorization shows that the definition of doujinshi as fan works is not self-evident and brings together different grassroots practices.

Country	Japan	USA	The Netherlands	Germany
Art/comics	Derivative works	Derivative/original	Original	Original
Distribution	Circles	Individual artists	Circles/magazines	Publishing houses/independent
Artist signature	Unsigned	Commission	Signed doujinshi	Con-Hon

*This Table summarizes local tendencies that emerged in the ethnography.



Figure 1: Mystic Cowgirl Marieke by Michel Kok, Man-Hung Tse and Michel Vissers



Figure 2: Heart of Golem by Marissa Delbressine



Figure 3: China Blue by Anne Delseit, Sai Nan and SlippedDee

Cosplay

The different local cultures of doujinshi show their own practices and ethos. Doujinshi flourishes within specific fan cultures of countries that may vary widely. Cosplay, however, tries to achieve a more international ethos, especially in terms of competitions. Within these sections I pay attention to the different local structures of cosplay but also the nexus that they share.

Historically, the fan practice of dressing up or 'cosplay' dates back to American science fiction conventions in the 1960s and 70s at which fans wore outfits from series such as *Star Trek* or *Star Wars*. Another subtype of fan costumes in Western culture is inspired by the tradition of Renaissance fairs and historical reenactment which have also resulted into practices as live-action role-playing. In the latter, enthusiasts base costumes on genre-fiction (e.g., fantasy) or historical periods in a co-creative game for which original characters are designed and reenacted. The term 'cosplaying' was coined in the eighties by the game designer Takahashi Nobuyuki when he encountered the costuming practices of American fans on a visit to the United States (Bruno, 2002; Winge, 2006, pp. 66–67). In Japan, cosplay has become very prominent since then. In Western settings, there seems to be much overlap between cosplay and other forms of dressing up such as (live-action) role-playing, but also digital dress up such as customizing one's avatar. In cosplay, games and anime are embodied and transposed to new, physical settings. Players explicitly relate their own body and behaviour to fictional characters (Lamerichs, 2011).

Though fans wear their outfits in the hallway of conventions, they also use them in specific settings or events such as cosplay competitions, fashion shows or photo shoots. The competitions, also known as masquerades, are often theatre skits that involve a performance in which the player really acts out the character. Fans enjoy having their picture taken in their outfits. Photographers in turn can specialize in photographing cosplayers as a creative hobby. Though a cosplayer can perform the character in part, for instance by walking around with his or her attitude, the overall idea is a visual one. Cosplay is based on recognition, more than reenactment as fans are not, and cannot be, in character at all times since the convention is also a social sphere in its own right. I compare the various conventions based on how they facilitate cosplaying (e.g., competitions) and the different roles that cosplayers and other participants (e.g., spectators, photographers) take up in the process.

Cosplay culture and regulations in Japan

Cosplay in Japan is restricted to specific places: the event area of the convention or specific urban locations (e.g., Yoyogi Park in Harajuku). Going to an event in costume is not common and young girls will often dress up at the site itself. Though handmade costumes are appreciated, it can be appropriate in Japan to buy a costume, as long as the fan expresses that it is bought (Okabe, 2012, p. 234). This is generally favoured over individual attempts to make a costume that is ultimately flawed. While in Western countries the creation of your

own costume grants status, the Japanese ethos highlights modelling more. This also shows in their fan events, and more specifically I shall focus on Comiket.

Comiket motivates cosplaying but does so within careful boundaries. At Comiket, visitors are obligated to wear regular clothing in the doujinshi area and they can rent lockers for 800 yen where they can store their outfits. There, they can dress up in their cosplays and then move to the 'cosplay area': the courtyard of the building where they can pose and get their pictures taken. Tokyo Big Sight itself is too crowded to cosplay, leaves little room for photography and is generally too warm. Moreover, some cosplayers may want to bring props (e.g., fake swords, shields) which also pose a safety issue (Comiket, 2012). Though these rules may seem strict, they are necessary because of the immense size and crowdedness of Comiket. Casual cosplays are tolerated at the market area though.

Many of the cosplayers at Comiket (2012) were women (figure 4). Crowds of men and occasionally some women lined up to take their pictures. Some of these were clearly 'kameko' which Okabe defines: 'men who show up at events with professional-quality cameras to photograph cosplayers and women working the booths at industry events' (2012, p. 241). Though they asked for permission, in line with Comiket's policy, they were not always considerate. Some knelt near the women to take 'panty shots' of their underwear and scarcely clad women drew all the more fans. The guide lines also warn cosplayers to be careful with this: 'Exposing too much skin may cause legal problems, so if you do wear clothing that is very revealing, wear tights or something that matches your skin color to avoid accidental excessive exposure.' The 'legal problems' pertain not only to public nudity but also to possible sexual harassment. This is also apparent at Japanese convention spaces where the cosplayers do not hide embodied, gendered connections but further them. The women express their femininity by portraying female characters in short skirts or bikini and often further these aspects through daring poses. Not all cosplayers favour this trend as some cosplayers describe such women as 'torareta' or attention seekers (Okabe, 2012, p. 241).

In Japan, cosplay is not only performed by wearing the outfits but through the production of merchandise. Some cosplayers sell photographs at Comiket that may be more mainstream or erotic. The cosplayers sell photos cards or booklets, but also DVDs, that may include movies or slide shows that tell an entire story through photos. Though most content is geared towards men, some women also sell 'boy's love' photography or photo comics. These transmedia products are understood as cosplay doujinshi by the Japanese, showing that the two practices can be combined in interesting ways.

American and European competitions

In the Western fan events, however, cosplay has a fully different function than at Comiket. The space is less restricted than in Japan as cosplayers are allowed to wear their outfits in the hallways and wear their outfits within the surrounding shopping malls and town areas. Otakon emphasizes photography more than European countries that I visited, but is still largely a self-organized fan activity that is less structured than at Comiket. The American

fans organized their own large photo shoots according to the fandom that they were in. They often met up in the large hall of the building and then went outside, or possibly stayed indoors at The Baltimore Convention centre. In Germany, I have seen similar arrangements at Animagic, where fans of the same series met up to get their pictures taken together. Sometimes, they also planned this on the convention itself.

In the Dutch context, shoots are more private, and often held within small groups of friends, but when it is known through Facebook or *Aniway* that a series is well-represented, some fans may suggest a time and place for a shoot. The Netherlands has a few renowned photographers that scout for interesting cosplayers or take separate shoots of fans that they know (figure 5). Photography is not spatially restricted as in Japan, but permission is needed before you take a picture of cosplayers. Larger Dutch events (e.g., Elf Fantasy Fair, FACTS) have a less clear policy on photography. There, photographers will also take shots from a distance, or even up close, without permission.

Cosplay is more liberal in Western countries where it manifests in the convention's hallways but is also structured through competitions. These competitions take different shapes at local events. At Dutch conventions, the competition is composed of short theatre pieces or skits, which are often limited to three to five minutes when there are many contestants. The ideal is to limit the entire down to one or two hours. Dutch conventions frequently organize a separate fashion show whereas in many countries such performance are allowed to shortly go on stage and show their outfit during the competition itself. At Otakon (2011) the skits could be up to five minutes and the event lasted for several hours. A large arena was booked just for the competition and concerts. However, at other American conventions the time limits are stricter. At Animagic, individual and duo acts tend to be separated from group acts that are generally two or three minutes, but ample opportunity is provided for large show groups to perform one or two hours. One of the most famous groups, *Tsuki no Senshi* (since 1998), originally a Sailormoon musical group, has not only performed at Animagic and Konnichi, but also abroad.

Interestingly, cosplay events are increasingly internationalized and, along with online platforms as cosplay.com, construct international cosplay communities. Events such as WCS (2012) involve twenty participating countries and increasingly grow bigger (figure 5). Within Europe, the most important competitions are the EuroCosplay Championships, held at London MCM Expo with twenty three competing countries, and the European Cosplay Gathering (ECG), held at Japan Expo in Paris, with eleven competing countries. ECG offers both an individual track as well as a group competition. The two biggest fan conventions of the Netherlands focus on electing candidates for these competitions, and may offer minor prizes to those that do not want to compete internationally.

The past years, participations in Dutch competitions became eligible for these international competitions, which restructured Dutch fan activities. For instance, only two cosplayers can go to WCS, which contributed to the near-disappearance of larger group acts at Animecon (2011; 2012). Since then, events became more homogenous. The emphasis is now on shorter skits that fit the international formula rather than five minute pieces. The

Dutch ethos now increasingly emphasizes costume craft and fidelity towards the source text over theatricality to match international rule standards. In terms of language, the Netherlands have always looked outward by hosting many conventions (e.g., Animecon, Abunai) in English. This international outlook is similar to that of doujinshi, in which the Dutch favour publishing in English even if that only draws a few extra readers.

The influence of the large, international contests is noticeable. Smaller conventions have noticed that there is less interest in cosplay competitions and even cancelled the competition or fashion show altogether because of lack of interest (e.g., Tsunacon, 2012). It seems that the internationalization and professionalization of cosplay also distances some fans from the activity as it is performed on stage. They favour casual cosplay in the hallway with their friends. While an ethos of sportsmanship is motivated, many fans seem to prefer casual cosplay with friends and kin over a competitive environment. This is furthered by the age of Dutch convention visitors, that is estimated to be about 22 years old at Animecon, the biggest convention in the Netherlands, and even younger at other conventions (e.g., Tsunacon). This suggests that many visitors may have limited funds to travel, even if the convention sponsors part of their travelling expenses. Though this ethnography reveals some local tensions within the cosplay scene, more interviews could help clarify how fans make sense of cosplay practices in light of these international competitions and structures.

Country	Japan	USA	The Netherlands	Germany
Costume	Bought or made	Favours handmade	Favours handmade	Favours handmade
Events	Diverse shows; modelling	Competition and parades	Competition and separate fashion show	Competition and show troupes
Photography	In restricted areas	Organized shoots	Hallway/small shoots	Organized shoots

Cultural analysis

At first sight, anime fandom appears to be a homogeneous community but after these observations, local practices emerge. Doujinshi and cosplay make the balance between the local and international identity of fans visible and show its practices and social make-up to be locally anchored. Doujinshi, for instance, appeared to be grounded in different convention scenes. European artists even demonstrate locality as they form ties with the mainstream industry and emancipate the comic industries of their own countries.

Whereas in America, graphic novels already tend to display hybrid visual and narrative styles, the continental countries see it as their project to innovate and diversify their more traditional, local comic industry. Doujinshi artists there focus on creating original German and Dutch manga and participate in the mainstream industry with this. Such locality is also expressed in prizes as the Dutch manga award or Carlsen Comics' endeavours to scout new

talent. However, these local manga artists differ from other comic artists in that they have the ties to, and recognisability of, anime fandom. Many of these artists also have considerable prestige online and a market there which also influences their status offline, as some fans at a convention might recognize their work from platforms as DeviantArt.



Figure 4: Shoujo Kakumei Utena cosplayers.
Photograph by Nicolle Lamerichs

Similarly, cosplay also has a few striking local differences. The most notable is that Japanese cosplay culture is more visually oriented and that the cosplayers carefully model as the characters. While this is also important in Western countries, the Japanese women seem more concerned with posing and taking shoots rather than socializing. This could be explained in relation to the Japanese audience attention to character resemblance. Japanese transmedia products, such as doujinshi, are also intimately interwoven with ideas on characters and stories that can be shared and expressed anew, a thought that Azuma has furthered as a 'database' of narrativity (Azuma, 2009). This metaphor suggests that Japanese stories are increasingly dispersed and exist out of small databases or elements consisting of characters and tropes, rather than grand narratives that signify socio-political engagement and world-building. These Japanese trends, also represented in the fannish affect towards character features (or '*moe*'), reveal specific practices of storytelling and reader involvement. This ethos thus fundamentally differs from Western thoughts on transmediality which increasingly display a desire for world-building and complex narratives

(Jenkins, 2006a). This ethos emerges in the discourse on fan comics that, especially in Japan, are bought because they explore and visualize the affect for existing characters and pairings anew.



Figure 5: Bayonetta cosplayer Kimberley van den Hurk.
Photograph by Melissa van den Hoogen

While these local differences clearly come forth, there is also a pull towards internationality. The rise in European cosplay events shows that in some fields a community is in the making but the fact that there are two big European competitions already suggests that this is a problematic and spread community. Though cosplay shows international aspirations, we should carefully examine where these affinities are located and how they add up to the global interests and sentiments that are expressed, and possibly exaggerated, online. Similarly, online platforms do not outweigh print culture in these scenes. In Western countries, as well as in Japan, much activity takes place in small press or professional models such as magazines or publishing houses. The locality of doujinshi is not surprising as the narratives are bound by language and genre traditions.

These activities can be contrasted to the international aspirations in cosplay, which is less locally embedded, possibly because the activity can be framed easily as the characters are universally recognizable. However, language barriers also occur within the cosplay scene. WCS hosts its event in Japanese, for instance, thus excluding the fans of most of its participating countries from enjoying this international competition. The national acts have to be translated into Japanese which means that the participants also need good translator that can help voice their characters well. Though these rules are understandable, they also distance the interested fans at the home country that may be more qualified in English or their local language.

The cultural dynamic of transmedia fan texts is not only given shape by these different language traditions, but also by the production of local meanings. The interpretation of doujinshi (and printed fan art), for instance, differs widely per country. Whereas in Japan, a small fan comics a collector's item by itself, in Western countries the tendency is to treat it as an expression of fandom that is not different from online fan fiction or fan art. Western doujinshi steer towards thicker anthologies more than Japanese doujinshi, and features a tendency to publish short stories in fan magazines or online. Though Western fan comics are also printed and created with much care, they are not collected for their materiality as art works but for their narrative value. Similarly, bought costumes seem to have a lesser status than in Japan where buying is sometimes favoured over failed individual attempts (Okabe, 2012, p. 235). These different value systems show that fan texts - even if they may follow similar content logics - are interpreted in particular traditions.

Conclusion

Based on ethnography at several fan events and documentation, I gave an overview of local fan practices and signified some of their notable differences, based on representative fan events. This leads to two important findings concerning the cultural dynamic of anime fandom. First, though manga culture seems homogeneous, local practices emerge at all sites that varied from the social structuring of the community to the reception of fan comics and costumes. Second, internationality plays a different role in these two fan practices. Whereas doujinshi circulates widely online, offline there is little evidence of its internationality. The European artists especially emphasize locality and innovation of the mainstream comic industry over internationality. In contrast to doujinshi, the organizers of fan events strive for a more international organization of cosplay. However, international competitions also confront cosplayers with local differences such as language. Moreover, the international standards are met with response in the Netherlands where cosplayers seem to shy away from official cosplay activities and rather organize their play bottom-up.

Anime fandom successfully demonstrates a circulation of global visuals and social protocols. Even in these different industrial contexts, reception studies reveal similar affective patterns and concerns (e.g., queerness to explore a text; an ethos of small-press). However cultural dynamic of manga allows for new cross-fertilizations as it, for instance, is

mixed with other traditions (e.g., the graphic novel). Though anime fandom shows the soft power of Japan and could be considered normative, it is also expressive as fans invent themselves and their art through diverse social and creative repertoires. While this data leaves ample room for forthcoming studies, this flux of practices illustrates the complex cultural dynamic generated by mass media.

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