

Controlling the spreadability of the Japanese fan comic: Protective practices in the *dōjinshi* community

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Abstract:

This article examines the practices of Japanese fan artists to navigate the visibility of their own works within the infrastructure of *dōjinshi* (amateur comic) culture and their effects on the potential spreadability of this form of fan comic in a transcultural context (Chin and Morimoto 2013). Beyond the vast market for commercially published graphic narratives (*manga*) in Japan lies a still expanding and particularizing market for amateur publications, which are primarily exchanged in printed form at specialized events and not digitally over the internet.

Most of the works exchanged at these gatherings make use of scenarios and characters from commercially published media, such as *manga*, *anime*, games, movies or television series, and can be classified as fan works, poaching from media franchises and offering a vehicle for creative expression. The fan artists publish their works by making use of the infrastructure provided by specialized events, bookstores and online printing services (as described in detail by Noppe 2014), without the involvement of a publishing company and without the consent of copyright holders. In turn, this puts the artists at risk of legal action, especially when their works are referring to the content owned by notoriously strict copyright holders such as *The Walt Disney Company*, which has acquired *Marvel Comics* a decade ago.

Based on an ethnographic case study of Japanese fan artists who create fan works of western source materials (the most popular during the observed timeframe being *The Marvel Cinematic Universe*), the article identifies different tactics used by *dōjinshi* artists to ensure their works achieve a high degree of visibility amongst their target audience of other fans and avoid attracting the attention of casual audiences or copyright holders. These navigation tactics serve the purpose to curb visibility to non-fannish audiences, but they also

serve as markers of cultural capital within the community, achieved by members who abide by the rules.

Finally, the physicality of the Japanese fan comic in its printed form and the attendance of in-person events are the most important factors helping artists to control the visibility of their fan works. *Dōjinshi* events are perceived as safe spaces of like-minded people, and the face to face interaction creates a sense of control for artists concerning who is reading their comics. At the same time, these navigation tactics help avoid a global spread of Japanese fan works.

Keywords: Fanzines, Fan Comic, Otaku, Ethnography, Fan/Producer relationships

Introduction

As fan cultures have largely moved to online and digital spaces, the practice of printing fanzines seems outdated. However, in Japan the printed fan zine (*dōjinshi*) has stayed the dominant medium of expression for fannish narratives. Bertha Chin and Lori Morimoto discuss digitalisation of fandom and online spaces as a facilitator for transcultural fannish exchange (Chin and Morimoto 2013, 105), allowing fans to surmount barriers of language and availability. Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford and Joshua Green (2013) discuss spreadability of media as an important factor for proliferation in a networked culture.

In how far does this hold true for Japanese *dōjinshi*? *Dōjinshi* culture is a significant object of research, because it seems to resist digitalisation and globalisation, seeming firmly tethered to a local context. Do Japanese *dōjinshi* have the potential for transcultural spreadability? Asking myself these questions, while at the German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ) in Tokyo, I embarked on ethnographic field research in the summer of 2017. I conducted participant observation at *dōjinshi* exchange events and interviews with Japanese fan artists, who create fan work for western media properties. I used the approach of the comprehensive interview by Jean-Claude Kaufmann to learn from my interview partners about the way they navigate their own place within the community and the visibility for their fan works.

I chose to focus on Japanese fan works of western media because not only does this suggest a global context of fandom, but with the source material not being Japanese, it is interesting to examine in how far this global dimension is being navigated by the Japanese fan artists. For a white European ethnographic researcher, field access to Japanese fan culture may seem a difficult endeavor, however, in choosing to examine *dōjinshi* culture based on western media properties, I encountered a greater openness of my interview partners because they were fans of Anglophone media. Finally, *dōjinshi* of western media were at a point of critical growth during my field research stay from April to October 2017 in Tokyo. Fuelled largely by popularity for the *Marvel Cinematic Universe* (hereafter: MCU) and other successful film franchises, Japanese *dōjinshi* for western media soared to a new popularity.

In this article I will give a brief overview of *dōjinshi* as a fannish medium of expression in Japan as well as the development of Japanese *dōjinshi* of western media since the new millennium. I will then examine the visibility concerns for Japanese fan artists that paradoxically lead to the fandom being in some regards more closed off and locally tethered. I will examine the different tactics and practices that Japanese *dōjinshi* artists use to control the visibility of their works.

A number of written and unwritten rules are being followed and obeyed within the community, as has been observed in the context of other creative fan communities by Sophie G. Einwächter (Einwächter 2015; Einwächter 2018). Some rules to curb the spreading of information – especially in online spaces, which usually facilitate transcultural exchange in fandom – are stated in writing at key hubs within the *dōjinshi* community. However, more intricate, sometimes conflicting rules are communicated through word of mouth and are crucial to the initiation of new community members. Finally, I will discuss the physicality of the printed *dōjinshi* as a crucial property of managing visibility and the face-to-face exchange event as a safe space for artistic expression in *dōjinshi* culture.

***Dōjinshi* as a Fannish Medium of Expression in Japan**

In the abstract to this article, the translation used for *dōjinshi* is ‘amateur comics.’ This is, of course, too simple a definition of what *dōjinshi* are. The word *dōjinshi* is a shortened form of the two words *dōjin* and *zasshi*, *dōjin* meaning, simply translated, ‘same person’ and *zasshi* meaning ‘magazine.’ A more useful, direct translation for *dōjin* here would be ‘like-minded person,’ in the case of fannish work, another fan. The meanings implicit in this word suggest that the creator and the intended audience for this work are a part of the same community. Nele Noppe, however, cautions in her extensive discussion of the term *dōjinshi* that to translate it simply as ‘fan comic’ disregards the status that fan comics carry as a mode of expression in Japanese fan culture. Compared to Anglophone fan culture, where the textual mode of expression of fan fiction is by far more common than the creation of fan comics (let alone in printed form), the fan comic remains the dominant form of expression in Japanese fan culture (Noppe 2014, 68–9). Thus, while *dōjinshi* may also contain written prose or even non-fiction content, comics are most common. To translate *dōjinshi* as fan or amateur comics, however, also does not cover all the bases, because not all *dōjinshi* are derivative works based on a commercially published source material, even though since the 1980’s the volume of fan work far outweighs the volume of original content that *dōjinshi* creators produce. Furthermore, not all *dōjinshi* are created by amateurs. There are also professional *manga* artists amongst those who publish *dōjinshi*, who might use *dōjinshi* as an opportunity to practice their art outside of a work-related context or to publish content that they cannot publish at their day job. Rather, the label ‘amateur’ does not refer to the creator of a *dōjinshi* but to the means through which the work is published – outside of the commercial publishing system, by using specialised printing services. Thus, the translation as ‘amateur comics’ remains at its core correct, with a few caveats in mind.

Dōjinshi are published by so-called *saakuru* (derived from the English word ‘circle,’

which I will continue to use below). The expression circle can be traced back to the origin of literary circles of intellectuals that self-published magazines discussing literature in Japan in the nineteenth century (Noppe 2014, 82). In contemporary *dōjinshi* culture, the word circle is still used to refer to a group of people that create and publish *dōjinshi* together. However, today the practice of the individual circle (*kojin saakuru*) is far more prominent, meaning circles that consist of only one person. All my interview partners were individual circles.

Even though the practice of self-publishing magazines beyond the commercial publishing market, targeting a specific audience, has a long history, it makes more sense for the scope of this article to understand *dōjinshi* as a fannish medium in the context of the fan activity around the central *dōjinshi* event, the *Comic Market* (usually shortened to *Comiket*). Fan conventions have existed in Japan since the beginning of the 1970's, but it was a dissatisfaction with these industry-focused conventions that led the founders of *Comiket* to create a new event that was run by fans for fans and would offer fans more space to exchange their fan works (Galbraith 2019, 26–7; Noppe 2014, 102; Tamagawa 2012, 108). Opportunities to publish non-mainstream content in alternative *manga* magazines were also dwindling, raising the demand for a venue in which artists could exchange their works without interference from publishers. Thus, the first *Comiket* was held in 1975 and hosted 32 circles.

Participation at *Comiket* has steadily risen over the decades, reaching its limit at about 35 000 circles in the mid-nineties. This was then capped as the maximum amount of circles that *Comiket* could possibly accommodate, filling the largest convention center in Japan, the Tokyo Big Sight (Noppe 2014, 120), over the course of three days. While *Comiket* continues to operate approximately at this limit, generally hosting two three-day-events a year, other conventions have appeared to offer more target-group specific spaces over the decades.

Beyond those events, *dōjinshi* can also be obtained through bookstores, online auctions or even through websites that sell *dōjinshi* digitally (Noppe 2015). However, the *dōjinshi* events, where people meet in person to buy and sell *dōjinshi*, are most relevant to the practice that I observed, because most often, the event will be the first time that the creator and the readers get to see the work in printed form. Events are, for all my interview partners, the primary way of distribution for the work they produce and it is also where they will get direct feedback from the community. Furthermore for the scope of this article it is important to get a brief overview of how *dōjinshi* of western media proliferated in Japanese *dōjinshi* culture, which I will outline below.

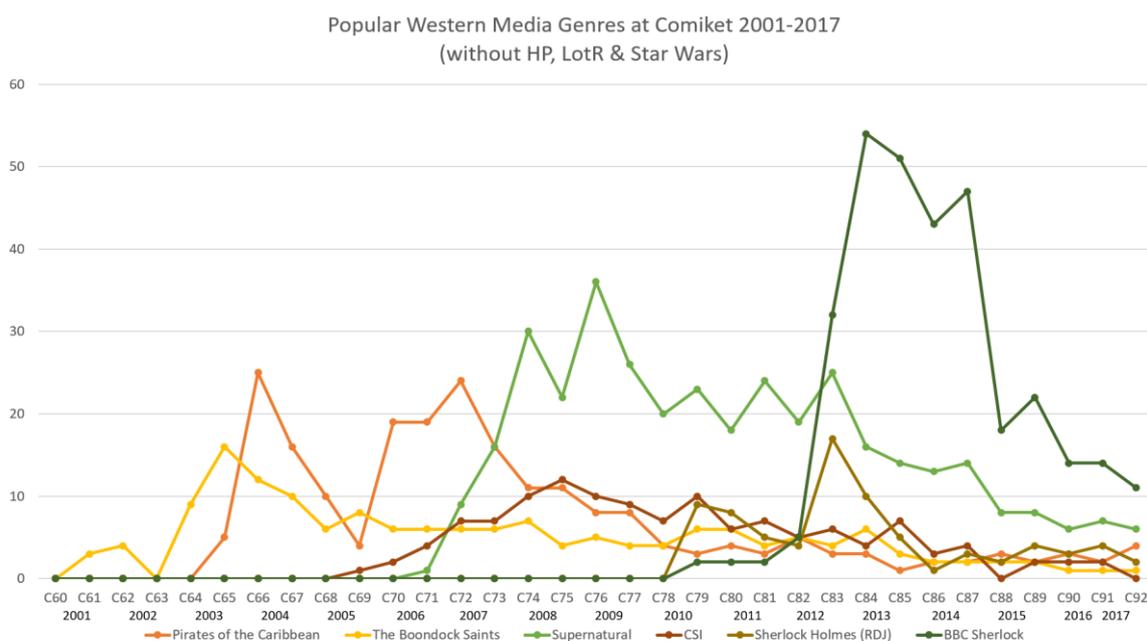
***Dōjinshi* of Western Media**

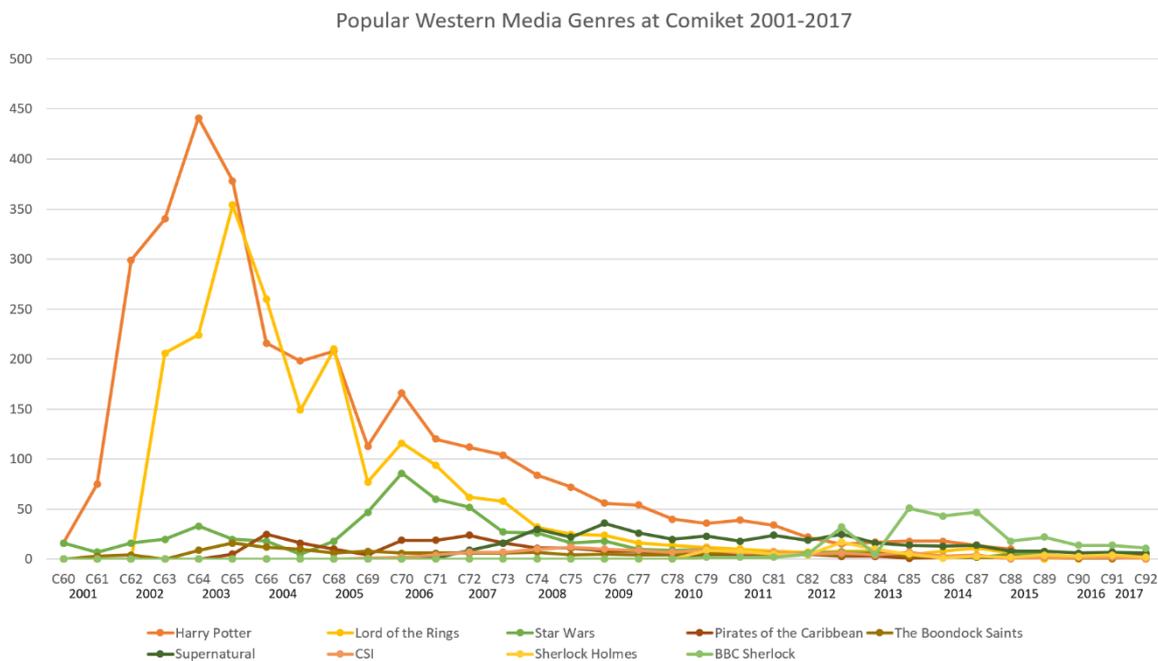
From the beginning, *dōjinshi* creators used western media personalities (such as David Bowie) and properties as source material for fan works, as James Welker points out in his *brief history of Shōnen'ai and Boys Love* (2015, 54). The access to quantitative historical data on *dōjinshi* events and fan works, especially in the sub-genre¹ of the so-called *yōga* (western movies) or *kaigai dorama* (overseas television series) is limited. The data of related events is

usually not stored online indefinitely, so I turned to the Yonezawa Yoshihiro Memorial Library at Meiji University in Tokyo². I took the approach to focus first and foremost on the *Comiket* catalogues between 2001 and 2017, because *Comiket* is arguably the most important and well-known *dōjinshi* event in Japan (Lam 2010, 232; Noppe 2014, 39), and its catalogues are fully archived at the Yonezawa Library.

I chose 2001 as a starting year for gathering data, because it is the year that both the first *Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* movies were released. *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* are two of the most prolific fandoms since the new millennium (Coppa 2006, 229) and were discussed extensively as examples of fan work in the digital age (Lackner, Lucas, and Reid 2006; Willis 2006). Both franchises were quite popular with Japanese fan artists as well, therefore several studies on Japanese fan works take them as examples (Noppe 2013, Orbaugh 2010). Considering that *Comiket* takes place in August and December, starting my data collection with the year 2001 also allowed me to glimpse at the state of the genre right before the movies came out in Japan (December 2001 for *Harry Potter* and March 2002 for *Lord of the Rings*). Finally, setting the starting point around the beginning of the millennium allowed me a manageable scope of data in my limited field research and archival work time.³

The data is gathered from both summer and winter *Comiket* between 2001 and 2017⁴, thus spanning 33 events. It can be observed in **Fig. 1** that the three genres *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings* and, to a lesser degree, *Star Wars* clearly overshadow all the other genres dealing with western media, so much that it makes sense to compose a new graphic, excluding these three genres for the sake of better readability (**Fig. 2**). There is a significant disparity between *Harry Potter*, which consistently reaches a circle number of over 100 between the years of 2002 and 2007, and the other genres.



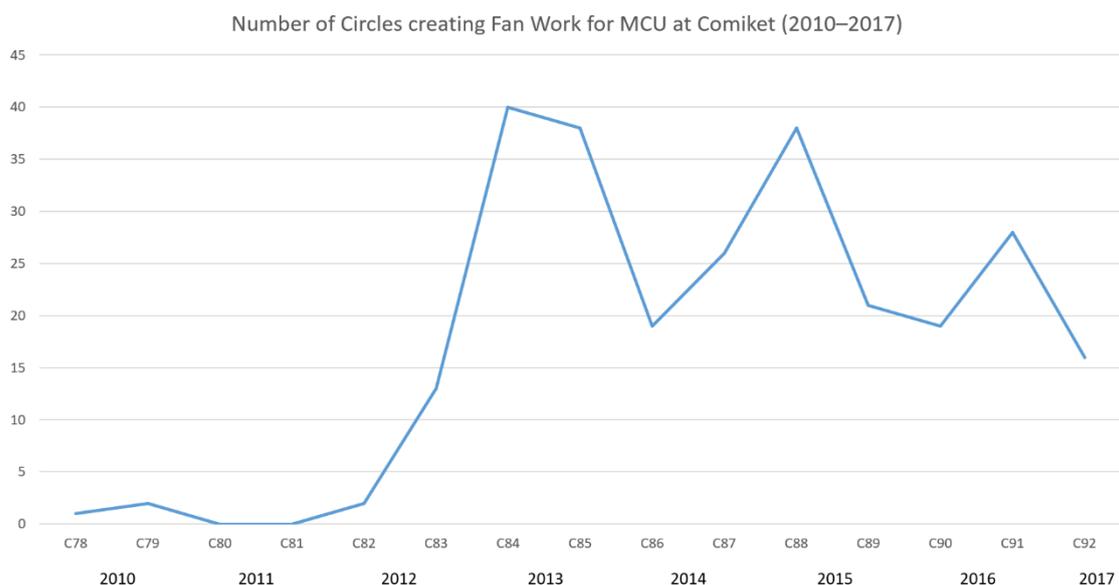


Harry Potter dōjinshi at *Comiket* peaked at 441 related circles participating in the summer of 2003, which marks the end of the so-called three-year-summer in *Harry Potter* fandom. The three-year-summer describes the period between the publishing of the fourth and fifth *Harry Potter* novel, during which many fans were, according to *Fanlore*, inspired to either turn to fan fiction to satisfy their reading needs or to create their own fan works while waiting for new material to be published. It is thus not too surprising that the amount of fan works of *Harry Potter* at *Comiket* 64 were particularly high as well. After 2007, the popularity of *Harry Potter dōjinshi* slightly wanes, falling to about 50 circles between 2009 and 2011, then falling steadily until disappearing in 2015.

Lord of the Rings soared to a similar popularity in the latter half of 2002, starting with a circle number of 206, peaking at 354 circles the year after, and again falling to 149 circles in 2004, rising slightly again to 210 in 2005 and finally steadily falling, remaining above 50 circles at least until 2007. *Lord of the Rings dōjinshi* largely disappear from *Comiket* in 2015 as well, with one brave circle returning once, in 2016.

Other popular western media genres at *Comiket* during the observed timeframe were *Star Wars*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *The Boondock Saints*, *Supernatural*, *CSI*, the *Sherlock Holmes* movies starring Robert Downey Jr., the BBC *Sherlock* television adaption with Benedict Cumberbatch, and the *MCU*. The relatively low numbers of circles creating fan work of western media compared to the earlier higher numbers for fandoms like *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* suggest that fandom of western media properties is either waning or migrating elsewhere.

For *Star Wars*, *CSI* and *Supernatural*, it is possible to trace the migration of Japanese fan artists from the *Comiket* to another venue, the specialised event called *Movies Paradise* (hereafter: *MP*), which I will be examining in the following paragraphs.



A fact speaking towards the significance of Japanese fan work of western media, even if circle numbers are small compared to those of popular Japanese media genres, is the development of specialised events that deal with this genre in particular. This is where the artists may have found their creative venue away from *Comiket*. Even though several smaller events geared towards western media fan works were started by different companies, the event that proliferated most and showed the greatest popularity during the examined timeframe was *MP*.

MP is a so-called ‘only event,’ which means a *dōjinshi* exchange event that is oriented mainly towards one specific sub-group of fandom, in this case, western movies, western television series and real person slash. It is hosted by the event company *Kettokom*, which also hosts the largest online event calendar for *dōjinshi* related events in Japan. I gathered data on the number of participating circles and their respective genres from *MP* 28, 29, 30, 31 and *MP* Special, which took place between June 2016 and October 2017. Moreover, I surveyed the archived data of the event calendar hosted by *Kettokom* to trace back the history of the event of *MP*.

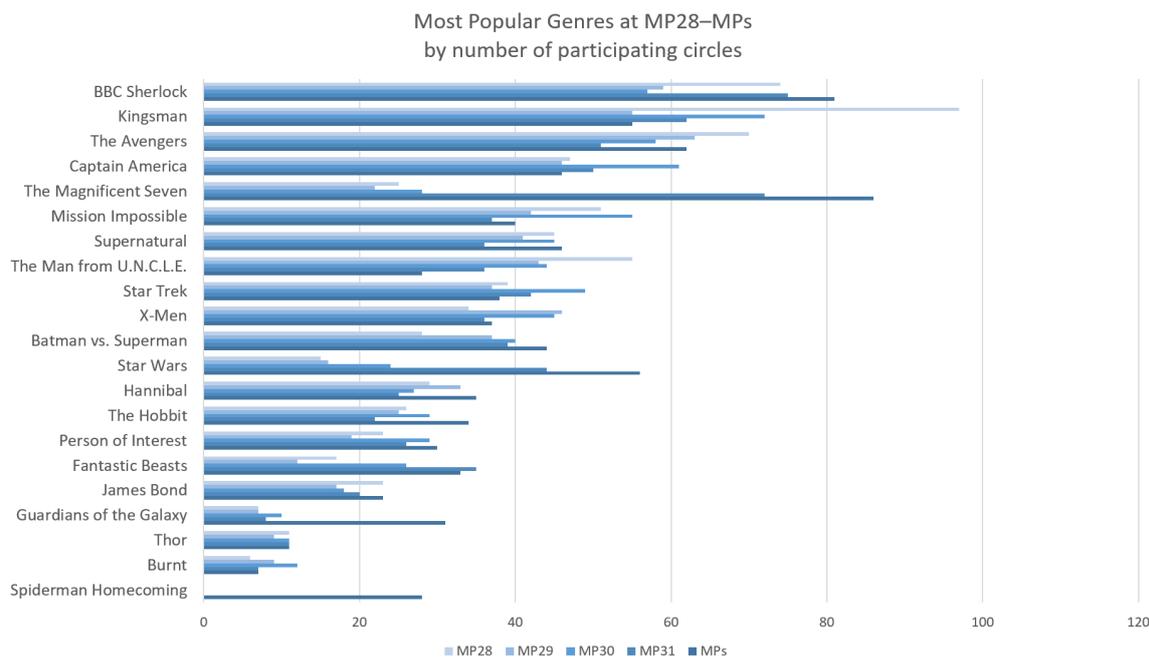
The event first took place in 2003 at *Time24 Building* in Tokyo (which is a part of the facilities of Tokyo Big Sight, where *Comiket* takes place) and hosted only 24 circles. In 2005, the event took place a second time, hosting 204 circles at the *Tokyo Municipal Industry and Trade Center Taito Building*. From 2005 on, the event was held generally twice a year, either at the *Tokyo Municipal Industry and Trade Center Taito Building* or at the *Ota City Industrial Plaza PiO*, and the circle participation remained between about 300 and 350 circles. Circle data between *MP* 14 and 19 is unavailable, but the event continued to be held at the same venues until November 2013, which allows us to assume a similar but rising attendance. 2013 was the first year that *MP* was hosted three times; in January (circle number

unknown), June (512 circles) and November (873 circles). That year is an important year for the development of the event because it also moved on from its previous venues into *Ikebukuro Sunshine City*. 2012 also marks the year that the first Avengers movie was released in Japan, thus inspiring a lot of fan work in its wake. While there was some popularity of *Iron Man* and *Thor* as source material, fan works focusing on the *MCU* became much more numerous after the release of *The Avengers* and *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, as can be observed at *Comiket* as well (**Fig. 3**). The first *MP* of 2014, held in February, took place at a slightly smaller venue, the *Bellesalle Shibuya Garden*, hosting 634 circles. Subsequently however, *MP* remained at *Ikebukuro Sunshine City* and fairly consistently had an attendance of well over 800 circle participants.

The most important year in the development of the event yet was 2017, which is why I chose this event and its participants to focus on during my field research in 2017. On 11 and 12 February 2017, *MP* was, for the first time, hosted as a two-day-event. This allowed 955 circles to participate. In July, the event was again hosted as a one-day-event and 972 circles participated. Then, finally, in October 2017, *MP* moved on to take place in the East Hall 7 of Tokyo Big Sight. Moving into a new venue also allowed a rise in circle participants to 1209. The change of venue was not permanent. *MP* has since been held in *Ikebukuro Sunshine City* again, but has twice more taken place in Tokyo Big Sight, in January 2019 (970 circles) and January 2020 (1136 circles), suggesting a continued popularity.

As mentioned above, in the case of *Star Wars*, *CSI* and *Supernatural*, a migration of fandoms from *Comiket* to *MP* can be observed. In the years of waning popularity of these genres at *Comiket*, from 2006 onwards, a rising number of participating circles for these genres can be observed at *MP*. It can be speculated that *MP* thus offered a more attractive space for Japanese fan artists of western media to share their works. Indeed, some of my interview partners report they never participate in the bigger, so-called all-genre-events (large *dōjinshi* events that do not have a specific focus on a certain genre), but participate exclusively in the events geared to their preferred genre.

The timeframe from which precise circle participation data is available spans *MP* 28 (June 2016) to *MP* Special (October 2017). The most popular genres during this time are depicted in Fig 4. During the observed timeframe, the *MCU* was clearly the most popular genre amongst Japanese fan artists that participated in the event *MP*. Most globally successful Anglophone film and television franchises during the selected timeframe are represented at *MP*. However, it is striking that certain television series that were very popular internationally, such as *Game of Thrones* and *The Walking Dead*, did not foster a lot of fan work. In the case of *The Walking Dead*, two of my interview partners have explained that it is difficult to 'ship' anyone. They might watch the series and find the character that Norman Reedus is playing attractive (and indeed, *The Boondock Saints*, another film series in which Norman Reedus plays a leading role, has a persisting popularity), but they do not find an appropriate partner for him in the source material. Most of the source materials that are very popular at *MP* have one thing in common: two or more prominent (white) leading men, offering the opportunity for transformative fan works that fit the slash or *yaoi* genre.



Summarising the observed data, it becomes clear that while Japanese fan work of western media properties is a relatively small subcategory in *dōjinshi* culture, it is a significant and growing sub-genre that offers enough commercial interest for event organisers to continue to harness the popularity of western media and fan productivity. 2013 and 2017 were defining years for the genre in Japan, because the growing popularity of western media fandom allowed the primary specialised event, *MP*, to grow and move on to ever bigger venues. While Thiel claims in her article on *dōjinshi* and copyright that *dōjinshi* of western media properties will falter because of copyright concerns (Thiel 2016, 147), the quantitative data that I gathered suggests otherwise. However, copyright concerns, especially when it comes to overseas rights holders, are a significant issue that influences the sense of legal safety of participating circles. Thus, amongst Japanese fan artists for western media, a number of tactics are used to manage the visibility and spreadability of their fan works.

Approach

It is impossible to research Japanese fan practices solely online and from afar. While some information might be available digitally and online, as I have surveyed above, this information is not stored indefinitely and it is by intra-fandom standards not meant to be accessed by ‘outsiders.’ Nowhere has this been made clearer than on the main website for *MP*, hosted by Kettokom. Its design is plain black text on a grey background, stating the name of the event at the top, followed by a lengthy disclaimer:

This event is an **amateur dōjinshi event** aimed at the exchange between fans of western movies. There is no relation whatsoever to the people concerned or

the film production companies. We ask people who do not understand *dōjinshi* to kindly refrain from entering. Please refrain from unauthorised publishing of any banner images or any information contained in this website. If you post a link, make sure to link to this top page only. Please cooperate by only posting this URL on Twitter if it is private.

It becomes obvious that while the information about the event is technically publicly available, measures are taken to avoid unwanted attention by people who have nothing to do with the fandom. The plain text design of the website and usage of solely Japanese language also discourages overseas visitors from clicking further, thus no intelligible information is given to an audience that can't read Japanese.

Einwächter observed similar use of disclaimers in the context of online fan creativity of German and Scandinavian fans who share their works online. While digitalisation enables fan communities to network more closely (Einwächter 2018, 97), it also presents a higher potential for unwanted exposure and legal action (Einwächter 2015, 26), if information is accessed by copyright holders. These disclaimers, while they may prove to be legally ineffective, nonetheless are a testament to copyright being a source of uncertainty and fear within the community (Einwächter 2018, 93) and a reminder for a researcher to tread with caution and to not endanger their research subjects.

Because of these restrictions, in lieu of examining the fan works themselves and exposing them to academic attention, I chose ethnographic interviews and participant observation as a way to comprehend the practices and the community dynamics of Japanese fan artists that create work based on western media properties. I used Jean-Claude Kaufmann's (1999) approach of the comprehensive interview, since it allowed me as an interviewer to not be entirely unaffected but instead build a rapport with my interview partners and engage with them during the interviews. This was extremely necessary for the subject matter because in many cases, the interview partners would early on in the interview question my knowledge about *dōjinshi* or *MP* in particular. This required me to reveal my knowledge as both a fan and as a researcher of fan culture and thus show that I possessed a baseline of fan cultural capital.

Finally, the strongest reason as for why I chose the ethnographic approach is that I could gain clear, informed consent of my interview partners and would create a corpus of material to analyse and draw conclusions from. I guaranteed my interview partners complete anonymity, including their real name as well as their pen name. One of my interview partners explicitly asked me to additionally anonymise the genre that she created fan work for as well. I have also taken the approach to occasionally anonymise the genre when quoting other interview partners, to minimise the chance of them being identified (see also Aida 2016).

Visibility Concerns for *Dōjinshi* Artists of Western Media

During my field research from April to October 2017, I conducted nine interviews⁵ with

Japanese *dōjinshi* creators that created fan work of western media properties, such as the *MCU*, *Marvel Comics*, *DC Comics*, *Kingsman*, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, *Mission Impossible*, *Hannibal* and other movies and television series. Most of my interview partners created comics, while one of them created critical essays and others created written prose and also travel reports of fan-object related pilgrimages. The ages of my interview partners range from mid-twenties to mid-fifties, and seven of my interview partners were women, while two were men. While the common factor between them was their creative activity within the genre of western media, as any group of individuals, there are also a number of characteristics where they differ, such as the duration of their respective fan activity. Some of them have been active for a decade or longer, while others just started a few years ago. The volume of their creative output also differed, with some of them just publishing a few volumes a year and others more than a dozen; some of them participating only in the genre of western media and others also creating fan work of *manga*, *anime* or video games.

Nevertheless, there are common threads in the narratives about their fan work that create a distinction between their sub-genre of fandom against Japanese *dōjinshi* culture as a whole as well as a distinction between their fan productivity in a Japanese context against overseas fandom and the looming entity that overseas copyright holders are being perceived as. To distinguish the fan activity that they partake in, as opposed to fan work of Japanese *manga* and *anime*, my interview partners brought up the term ‘nama-mono,’ which is a different reading of the two characters that also comprise the combination ‘seibutsu,’ meaning living thing. As ‘nama-mono,’ you would generally describe uncooked food. It is a code word that, according to my interview partners, refers to the fact that the source material for their fan works are living things in the sense that the characters they depict are played by real, existing actors in the three-dimensional world (‘sanjigen’) as opposed to *manga* and *anime* characters, which only exist in a fictional, two-dimensional world (‘nijigen’)⁶. While both sorts of characters, those depicted in *Marvel* movies or in *manga* are fictional, the involvement of real life actors in the depiction of *Marvel* characters, makes the depiction of them in fan work seem more problematic to my interview partners, as the fictional characters depicted in *dōjinshi* might then resemble the real life actors.

Some of my interview partners refer to ‘the law’ and ‘copyright’ when explaining why works dealing with characters portrayed by actors are problematic, as the following statements show: ‘When it comes to films, of course, it’s ‘nama-mono’. The law is very difficult. *Dōjinshi* of *manga* are pretty much in the [legal] grey zone, so they are not being contested. But *dōjinshi* that have to do with actors, that’s handled strictly in Japan. (A-san)’ Here my interview partner A-san contrasts her fan works against fan works of *manga*, stating that it’s a more difficult matter. E-san, who creates fan work for *The Avengers*, gives me an interesting evaluation of the term *nama-mono* and its meaning for self-regulation within the *dōjinshi* community:

Works of the third dimension, hmmm, works that use real existing beings,

compared to works of the second order, it's very strict. It's nothing really juristically binding, but... uhm, there are a lot of local rules. And if you don't obey them, it's not a legal matter but it's more the people surrounding you, bullying you, it's a bit like a kangaroo court. That's why usually people who do fan work of the second dimension and the third dimension are separated. (E-san)

Contrary to the quote by A-san above, E-san denies that the strictness of the rules when it comes to creating *dōjinshi* that involve real people has a legal base. She states that it is instead a rule that is defined and followed by the community itself and is used to keep people in line, sometimes restrictively, as she criticises.

Besides copyright, another reason for keeping a low profile when creating fan work involving 'nama-mono' that is brought up by my interview partners is the possibility of the works being discovered by the people (depicting the characters) depicted in them:

I would like to show my work on the internet but in my case, I am using people that really exist as source material so, they could see it (laughs). They might get mad. For example, if [name of the actor] saw my pictures he would probably go 'Woah!' (laughs), and because I am scared of that... (trails off). In Japan, that's called nama mono. [...] There's a possibility of upsetting people. That's why people who draw nama mono are a bit hidden. (J-san)

It is mostly in the realm of the internet that my interview partners seem to fear discovery by the actors or by media representatives. As Paul Booth (2015) noted, fan/producer relationships become more complicated in the age of social media, and as Bertha Chin (2013) describes, the fan and media producer occasionally inhabit the same 'symbolic space' on social media.

When asked directly, some of my interview partners said they generally do not worry about copyright problems because *dōjinshi* remain a prominent medium of fannish expression in Japan and the perception of the community being somewhat 'hidden' offers a sense of security. However, it seems to be a difference whether the copyright holders are overseas companies or Japanese *mangaka*. My interview partner C-san explains: 'Because other people are doing it and because it is somewhat hidden I am thinking 'well, it should be alright'. [...] I don't really know about movies but when it comes to Japanese manga and games, then fan works are a big market.' C-san views the market for *dōjinshi* based on Japanese source materials as an already established infrastructure and furthermore explains that because other people all around her are practicing this fan culture in a somewhat 'hidden' environment, there is a sense of security.

My interview partner E-san, however, recounts an incident that she heard of from a friend about a *dōjinshi* printing service denying to print a *dōjinshi* because it was *Avengers-*

themed and contained adult content:

I don't really worry about [copyright]. In reality, there has never been a lawsuit when it comes to *dōjinshi*. That's why I am not worried. But there has been someone who has been denied service at a printing company. When my friend sent in her manuscript for an adult-themed Captain America / Iron Man *dōjinshi*, they said 'Because this belongs to Disney, we can't print it.' That happened once. But other than that, that's it.

While E-san's assessment that there has never been a lawsuit about *dōjinshi* is incorrect (prominent cases involving popular franchises such as *Pokémon* and *Doraemon*, cf. Thiel 2016, Noppe 2014), her anecdote shows that there is an awareness of *Disney* as a restrictive overseas company amongst Japanese fan artists as well as other parties involved in the production of *dōjinshi* in Japan. Another interview partner, H-san, also talks about the discrepancy between making *dōjinshi* of a Japanese source material and of a source material whose copyright holders are overseas:

When it comes to Japanese manga, everybody knows that it's a grey zone. And if fan art becomes popular, then the source material becomes popular as well. When it comes to Japanese anime and manga, then everybody is doing it pretty openly. But when it comes to overseas... I don't know about the norm there. So when maybe the copyright holder sees what I sell, it's possible that something happens and this genre will become forbidden.

In the view of H-san, the reasoning that fannish work is free advertisement and leads to an increased popularity of the source material seems to be accepted by Japanese copyright holders. However, she is unsure about the precise situation with overseas copyright holders and the possible consequences that might arise from being discovered.

Disney as an especially strict company when it comes to copyright does come up in a few of my other interviews. While A-san recounts an incident where, according to her, cosplayers of *Disney* characters have been disciplined, J-san also recounts how the making of fan work gets more difficult as more and more media properties are being bought by *Disney*: 'The people who draw Star Wars have a hard time. Marvel, Star Wars, it's all become Disney now (laughs). The company Disney is pretty strict. (J-san)' In general, my interview partners do not use very precise language when speaking about copyright issues and *dōjinshi*, especially when they speak about possible legal consequences. Frequently, the descriptors that they use when talking about the consequences are simply 'this will become a problem' or 'this genre will become forbidden.' Casey Fiesler, Jessica L. Feuston and Amy S. Bruckman (2015) describe a similar confusion about copyright law and how it pertains to fan works amongst Anglophone fan artists who share their work online, stating that some fans might be well informed but that there are also 'many instances of incorrect information or simple

bad advice' (Fiesler, Feuston, and Bruckman 2015, 126).

The sense of general caution when it comes to copyright holders and the impact that this has on the fan practices is very well described by Mel Stanfill in *The Long Arm of (Beliefs about) the Law* (2019). For the examination of fan practices of this specific fan community, it does not matter how international copyright law would actually pertain to Japanese fan work of western media properties. It matters more to examine what the participating members of the community perceive the law to be. As they write: 'Because beliefs about the law shape behavior, then, what people believe about the law and when and how they appeal to it are important to examine' (Stanfill 2019, 104).

Even though there may be moral justification for their fan productivity (fan art as free advertisement), my interview partners are conscious of the power that comes with overseas media companies such as *Disney* or *Marvel*. F-san, who writes critique of American comics, for example, states:

Yes, I am very worried. The books I create contain reproductions of images. That is a violation of copyright. Even though there are not many copyright lawsuits in Japan. And even though copyright allows academic citation... (trails off). But if Marvel or DC came to me, I could only say 'I am sorry!' (laughs) and ask: 'How much do you want me to pay?'

F-san seems to contradict himself in this explanation. On the one hand he explains that his *dōjinshi* make use of the right to academic citation, but on the other hand he illustrates the supposed viewpoint of the copyright holder, declaring his own work to be technically copyright violation. In the end, he concludes that he would likely end up having to pay reparations. He doesn't even mention going to court, he describes his hypothetical reaction as immediate surrender. Fiesler and Bruckman (2014, 2556) point out in their examination of the perception of copyright law and the comprehension of terms of service agreements within the fan community that fans often do not understand complex legal writings and thus argue that information should be made more accessible to combat misconceptions. However, as Stanfill (2019, 117) describes, the looming threat of lawsuits and, indeed, the fear of the law is actively used by the industry to try and make fans docile and compliant.

To deal with the seemingly higher stakes of their fan productivity being discovered by overseas right holders, *dōjinshi* creators in the western media genre use a number of tactics to minimise their visibility to undesired audiences, while maintaining a degree of visibility to their desired audiences of fellow fans. These tactics can be grouped into two categories: Rules that might be stated in writing at central points within the fan community space, but also rules that are not stated in writing and are only learned when becoming a part of this fan community. It is the latter set of rules that can only be discovered through ethnographic field work, and those rules also play a vital part in restricting the spreadability of *dōjinshi* culture, because they ground the individual fans as members of a local community, whose laws must be adhered to.

Tactics for Navigating Visibility

Written Rules

For the majority of intra-fandom rules in *dōjinshi* culture there is no written documentation at a central place within the community. However, some written rules can be found when searching for information about *dōjinshi* activity. For *dōjinshi* of western media, one central hub is clearly the website for *MP*, where all information pertaining to the upcoming events is posted. As shown above, the top page consists almost entirely of a lengthy disclaimer to dissuade an audience not already knowledgeable about *dōjinshi* from entering and spreading the information accessible on the website. While it remains unclear how the rules stated on this website can be enforced (as the website is not protected by a password or other measures), the disclaimer can be seen as a statement of intent of keeping the information from spreading beyond the community. Even though this information is publicly available, as danah boyd (2010) cautions, not all data publicly available is meant to be widely distributed. Some publicly accessible data is merely public to facilitate usage by the community participants (e.g. not having to remember passwords, etc.).

Another instance where clearly written rules can be found within the *dōjinshi* community are the *dōjinshi* themselves. They usually contain a written disclaimer, sometimes even in Japanese and English, to instruct the reader not to scan, digitise and distribute the work through the internet, as well as to forbid re-sale via bookstores or internet auction. These disclaimers use the same terms as the disclaimer on the website of *MP* and can usually be found with only minor variations on the first or last pages of printed *dōjinshi*. A variation that is common for *dōjinshi* of western source material is also a declaration, just like on the website of *MP*, that these fan works have nothing to do with the actors or movie production companies and that they should not be shown to any of the people involved.

An extreme example of visibility management can be found in an *Avengers dōjinshi* that I purchased. Additionally to prohibition of resale, reprint and unauthorised sharing of the work, the author asks the reader that in case the book is no longer desired, it should be put through a shredder before disposing of it in the burnable garbage. In this case, clearly all bases have been covered to avoid a spreading of the fan work beyond its intended audience. One of my interview partners also explains to me that there is a rule stating that *dōjinshi* of western films cannot be sold outside of events, such as *MP*:

Alright, first of all it's strict because when it comes to where you can sell them, there is only one place, that is *MP* – you can only sell them at events, that's the first thing that is strict. For example, in the case of Yuri [on Ice], you can sell it in a bookstore, like Tora no Ana, on commission. This is a local rule you must obey (E-san).

In theory, if all of these written rules were adhered to, the *dōjinshi* artists would remain in control of who gets to see their work, which would be limited to the people that buy their fan works at conventions. Similarly, Kristina Busse describes the relationship between reader and writer of fan fiction as a tense relationship, and states that while it is the author who provides the story, the reader ultimately has control:

Even though readers may be seen as subject to the writer's whims, on another level, they have ultimate control: the stories can be saved, printed out, edited, passed on, sold, or plagiarized, and nothing but community conventions protect the writer (Busse 2017, 118).

While this is in reference to fan fiction hosted on websites, of course Japanese *dōjinshi* are scanned and distributed online as well, and they also do appear in second hand bookstores. The *K-Books dōjinshi* store in East Ikebukuro had, at the time of my field research in the summer of 2017, no less than three shelves dedicated to *dōjinshi* of western media. I confronted my interview partner C-san with the observation that even though these disclaimers exist, a lot of *dōjinshi* of western media are available in second-hand bookstores as well. She replied: 'Yes, even if you write that, there are people who will resell it. [...] It's a sad thing. I have seen my works being resold in bookstores without my knowledge and also on Yahoo Auction and sometimes for quite a high price as well.' In this case, resale is doubly frowned upon because not only is it done without the artist's permission or knowledge but furthermore it is used to create more profit, not for the artist but for the reseller themselves. A-san on the other hand recounts how somebody took a story that she wrote and uploaded it to *Pixiv*, simply changed the names of the pairing and uploaded it into another genre. She remarks: 'But because we are doing *dōjinshi*, and we are using an original work to make a derivative work (*nijisōsaku*) from it, you can't complain about something like that' (A-san). Here she implies that because she herself is making use of an original (and copyrighted) work, she cannot claim full ownership over her own fan work. While companies might send cease and desist letters if their content is being used, A-san, as a *dōjinshi* author, has little authority to control what happens to her fan work once it is out there.

However, more critical than the written rules is adherence to rules that are not stated in writing and that can only be learned by interacting with the community. My interview partners told me about a number of these rules that exist to curb unwanted attention and exposure of their fan activities.

Unwritten Rules

Code Names and Passwords

As explained above, the top page of the *MP* website is not very inviting to visitors, especially visitors who cannot read Japanese. While linking to the top page is allowed, my interview partner H-san explains that the name of the event is never to be stated in full online, on social media: 'Most of the time, on *Twitter* or something like that, you don't write 'Movies Paradise.' It's always shortened to Mu. Or Mupara (laughs). It's of course always hidden, because it's western movies' (H-san). This mysterious 'Mu' caught the attention of my interview partner C-san, who recounts how she finally found out about the event due to a direct message on *Twitter*:

I got my own Twitter and more and more otaku friends. And suddenly everyone, without directly writing it, everyone was talking about this 'Mupara.' They were tweeting about how they have started drawing and writing their books for an approaching event, and I didn't know what it was and it made me so curious. Everybody was just shortening it to 'Mu' and I didn't know what 'Mu' was. And because you can't ask anybody what kind of event this is in a place where anybody can see it, I got an explanation, hidden, in a direct mail.

In this passage, C-san clearly expresses her feeling of being left out of the group, her lack of fan cultural capital (Fiske 1992) when she doesn't understand the code word that her new *otaku* friends are using. It becomes very obvious in this moment that she is new to the group and has to ask more experienced members of the community for information. It also becomes clear that the secrecy surrounding this event will inevitably create even more of a desire to know, to belong, in newer members of the community.

Many personal fannish websites and some event websites are protected by a fandom-specific password. This practice is not exclusive to the genre of western media or even to Japanese *dōjinshi* culture. Busse (2017, 118) also mentions password-protection as a way for authors of fan fiction to take control over who gets to view their work. Of course each genre might have its own specific code words to use as passwords. Early on in the interview with C-san, she recounts how she started her *dōjinshi* activities, and how she learned about the existence of *MP* in the first place. She then stops herself to ask me how I even know about it. After I explain that the knowledge was shared with me by a fellow fan from Japan, she is satisfied with my explanation and continues the narration of how the secrets of western media fandom are being kept and that at first she also did not know about all the rules: 'For example, people who have a website about western film [*dōjinshi*], they absolutely need to lock it with a password. Did you know that? You always have to enter a password. It's always the same one but if you don't know it, you have to be told.' I then admitted to her that I knew at least one password within the western media genre to be a word that is a fannish term for a fan fiction and fan art genre and she went on: 'Yes!

Well, for example, of course normal people, normal fans will not get to know something like that' (C-san).

Thus it becomes clear that the passwords are a barrier not only to ordinary people, but also to ordinary fans who are not interested in those specific types of narratives. Crucially, in this passage of the interview there were two instances where I managed to use my knowledge and my prior connection to the community to prove myself as an in-group interviewer who neither belongs to the 'normal people' nor the 'normal fans,' because I have a fannish interest in this genre myself. The level of trust that I established persuaded C-san to not only give me information about the rules of the community but to also share with me her personal view on those rules.

About half an hour into the interview, when asked if there are aspects she does not like about her fandom, C-san criticises the existence of such strict rules because, by her own perception, she still doesn't know them all and the danger of being judged is high:

It doesn't have anything to do with the books, but it's that my way of thinking sometimes doesn't fit. Not a lot of time has passed since I started participating in MP, since I became a fan of [actor name] and since I have been making dōjinshi, so I have not been otaku for a long time, even though I did publish some dōjinshi when I was young as well. But the rules, those vague Japanese rules, uh, things you don't say out loud, like, that MP is so secret, those rules. And of course there are still a lot of rules that I don't know, so, unknowingly, something that I do can be seen as a rule violation [...]. That is a bit strict.

Here she talks about negotiating her own place within the community. It becomes clear that while adherence to the rules is an important factor in showing one's belonging to the community, there will always be people that have more fan cultural capital and that are in the position to criticise one's behaviour, despite one's best efforts. By using the words 'my way of thinking,' she also clarifies that she has her own point of view, which might not be one hundred percent compatible with that of the fan community, and thus the relationship between her and the community will always be fraught with some degree of tension.

John Fiske (1992) drew on Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital to underline fannish productivity as a source of cultural capital within the fan community. However, in the second wave of fan studies, Matt Hills (2002, 46) revisits Fiske's perhaps overly positive notion of fan cultural capital and points to competitiveness as an underlying factor in fan communities. He reflects on Bourdieu's hierarchy of classes and examines how fannish participation relates to the different classes such as the dominated fraction of the bourgeoisie or the petit bourgeois lifestyle and points out that not only working class individuals participate in fan culture (Hills 2002, 47–8). Hills concludes that the social hierarchy of fandom must be more explicitly analysed in further studies (Hills 2002, 56). The fan cultural capital that is achieved through knowledge of intra-fandom rules, such as

evident in the quote above, is one such marker for cultural capital that determined the position in the hierarchy within the observed fan community.

Another interview partner, E-san, also recounts finding the rules of secrecy to be restrictive, especially in light of the fact that the event *MP* is growing and moving on to bigger venues:

I think the development of MP is good. Uhm, how to say it, I really love movies, so I connect to people who like watching movies, I am thinking, like, 'Ah, there are so many people who love movies!.' I also want there to be more events, I want the events to grow. I want to move past all those local rules about half-rare (han-nama) genre stuff. Those small and limiting rules were simply made by people who have nothing to do with the law, so, when there are more and more people, I think things will change. I think it would be good if [rules] like that disappear (E-san).

As quoted above, E-san sees the rules as entirely made up by the community and denies any relation to actual copyright law. While C-san highlights the fact that her adherence to the rules are a marker for how well she is integrating herself into the community, E-san rejects the rules and points out that they make the affective exchange between fans more difficult. She wants the exchange between fellow fans to be free from the 'made-up' rules and surmises that with an influx of new people, adherence to the rules will be less of a factor within the fan community.

Visibility and Protection of Fan Works on Online Platforms

The 'rules' do not end with restricting online discussion about the event. My interview partners also shared with me a number of rules regarding posting their own fan work online. As Lam (2010, 240) writes, with the rise of the internet *Comiket* might have 'lost its monopoly as the center of otaku and *dōjinshi* culture.' However, *dōjinshi* circles have not completely migrated online but instead use the internet mainly 'as an informational and marketing platform for themselves and their creations' (Lam 2010, 243). Sharing their fan work on the internet is a common practice amongst my interview partners, too, but they were quick to point out certain rules when it comes to this activity as well. As touched on above, communication and sharing of fan work over *Twitter* happens largely over private feeds.

Four of my interview partners (C-san, D-san, E-san and I-san) also use *Tumblr* to share their works or to connect to the community. C-san, however, explains that she abides by different rules than 'overseas' users when posting 'slashy' fan art on *Tumblr*:

When it comes to slashy pictures, I would never upload them in a place where [director of franchise] could find them. But compared to that, people from overseas for example, they do not care. But when I upload a slashy picture on

Tumblr, I do not tag it with [name of the franchise]. I don't use hashtags. But people from overseas don't care. They tag it. That's why I think [the director] could easily find it.

Here she describes the way that she navigates the tagging system of *Tumblr*. While tagging can generally be used to gain more visibility for your blog entries, because the entries will then show up in the feed for the tag, C-san actively avoids tagging her works to curb visibility on this international blogging platform. She also contrasts her behaviour against the supposed behaviour of 'overseas people,' whose practices of tagging their work with the name of the franchise expose them to more visibility. While C-san's works are visible on *Tumblr*, they do not show up in the feed of the fandom tags, thus positioning them, again, in a semi-public space, where they can be found, for example, by people who know her *Tumblr* account name but not by people who are using the tag navigation system of *Tumblr*.

However, *Tumblr* is used as a platform to occasionally interact with international fandom of western media. E-san describes how she sometimes reads English fan fiction: 'I have seen it on the internet. I have found it on *Tumblr*. I was told that something like that exists, so I thought it was great! [...] Sometimes I read English fan fiction. I really make an effort' (laughs). E-san describes that she uses *Tumblr* to access English-language fan work of her preferred genre, namely *dōjinshi* about Steve Rogers and Tony Stark as a couple. While it is not easy for her to read fan fiction in English, *Tumblr* is the place where she found out about the trope of 'Super Family,' a genre of *Avengers* fan work where Steve Rogers and Tony Stark live together and adopt Peter Parker to form a family of Superheroes. E-san explains:

At first I didn't think of it at all. But then I was told that there exists a parody style in overseas fan fiction, called Super Family, where Spiderman as the child forms a family. I found that cute and my fan work was always ordinary everyday kind of stories where nothing crazy happens and there is nothing erotic either. So I found it interesting to imagine what would happen if a child was added to that couple and I wanted to see them both interact in that situation.

This is a concrete example of Japanese fan work of the *MCU* being influenced by a trope that originated in Anglophone fan fiction. The transcultural dissemination of this storytelling trope can only happen because, even though fan work is generally intended to be only seen and read by other fans, platforms like *Tumblr* offer (albeit difficult to navigate) means of visibility management to their users. It is possible to mainly target an audience of fellow fans, even though posts on *Tumblr* are generally public. While *dōjinshi* artists may refrain from tagging their own work to avoid visibility, even to fellow fans, they do interact with international fandom to some degree.

Japanese fan illustrations might also find their way onto *Tumblr*, however, through authorised and unauthorised repostings. I-san recounts how she was asked by an overseas fan if she would consent to her illustration being posted on *Tumblr*: 'Somebody posted it. I said 'It's okay', so they posted it, neatly adding a credit of who made the picture. That is alright with me' (I-san). Under the condition that the fan work is credited back to her, she consented to her work being shared on *Tumblr*.

Beyond *Twitter* and *Tumblr*, Japanese platforms are of course also popular for sharing *dōjinshi*-related works on the internet. Most of my interview partners were active on *Pixiv* as well, a site that focuses on fan work and operates similarly to *Deviantart* (Noppe 2013). *Pixiv* is a typical venue for posting 'advertisement' of upcoming new releases at *dōjinshi* events. In the time directly leading up to the event, *dōjinshi* artists might post a so-called 'menu' on *Pixiv* or *Twitter*, containing their space number, the cover images of new books they are publishing, older books that they are bringing, or even little items of merchandise they produce or items you might receive as a gift when you buy their new release, such as a tote bag. The menu can thus be viewed as an online equivalent or supplement to the information that the circle-cut provides in the catalogue of events.

While posts on *Pixiv* are generally public and can even be viewed by unregistered users, other sites require you to log in, such as *PictBLa*, a Japanese site that focuses on *yaoi*-themed content. H-san explains to me the difference in how she uses these sites and *Twitter* to advertise her fan works as follows: 'If it's just an illustration, I upload it to *Pixiv* and to *Twitter*. On *PictBla*, I upload a menu. Well, it's locked, right? So, uh, anything where you can see the price, I upload it to *PictBla*, I do it like that' (laughs).

This shows that while all platforms are being used with a fannish audience in mind, out of all of them, *PictBLa* seems to offer the highest sense of security because it is a locked site, aimed not at an ordinary fannish audience, but explicitly at fans of *yaoi*. The menu that a *dōjinshi* artist publishes, with prices included, is the most obvious documentation in the online sphere of the amount of money that is involved in *dōjinshi* activity.

I-san talks about the rule of not uploading a precise menu to social media sites as well. However, she tells me that recently, more and more new people are joining the community:

Recently, new people who do not know about this rule have been increasing. I am one of those. So, on social networking sites, they are posting about their books, they are proclaiming, like, 'I'm going to participate in this or that event' or 'I am going to publish this or that book.' Because people like that are increasing, I think more people find out about *dōjinshi* and are being like, 'I am participating too!' And thus they increase.

It is interesting how paradoxically she positions herself here. On the one hand, she says that she is one of the new people coming into the community, as she earlier told me in the interview that she has been active for only about two years. She likens herself to the new

people that do not know the rules, even though now she knows about and obeys them. So, implicitly, she shows that she has more cultural capital than those new people that do not know about the rule of not posting a 'menu' on the internet. At the same time, she points to changing dynamics within the *dōjinshi* community and the rules becoming weaker due to an influx of new people, as E-san was also surmising above. Finally, the menu already touches on a subject that puts the production of *dōjinshi* in a different sphere than the fannish productivity of fan fiction. While fan fiction is mainly shared online and zines have become largely a thing of the past in Anglophone fandom, *dōjinshi* remain a primarily physical medium, printed, bought and sold in the third dimension.

The Physicality of *dōjinshi*

In her work on fan creativity online, Sophie G. Einwächter points out that fans make use of a number of strategies to protect their own work. She emphasises that through increased access to editing software in the digital age, fandom has become more professionalised, internationalised and mainstreamed and she views fannish cultural production as first and foremost innovative (Einwächter 2018, 97–9). While Fiske in 1992 still stated that it is difficult to transfer fan cultural capital into economic capital, Einwächter points out that many fan activities in the digital age can lead to fans acquiring professional skills, citing bestseller author E.L. James and German internet phenomenon Kathrin Fricke as examples for fans who turned their fannish creativity into careers (Einwächter 2018, 101–3).

I have shown that the usage of tactics to control the spreadability of their works by my interview partners draws on similar motives as the strategies observed by Einwächter. Even though *dōjinshi* are not primarily a digital medium, the protective practices that *dōjinshi* creators employ function along the same lines as what Einwächter describes. These practices can then also be viewed as entrepreneurial practices to protect the quasi-professional activities of my interview partners.

The physicality and tangibility of *dōjinshi* harbours in itself its own set of joys and problems. C-san, when asked what the most fun part of events is, describes to me in detail the process of producing a *dōjinshi*, especially lingering on the tangible aspect of it:

Of course the fact that what you have drawn yourself is turned into a book. That it becomes a reality, you can pick it up and touch it, that makes me incredibly happy. If it's on the internet and not a book, you can read the work but, if it becomes a book, there's your imagination when you make the book. I really love it to think about what paper I will use for the cover or what paper I will use for the inner pages. Those things are really fun.

First and foremost, the tangibility of *dōjinshi* is a great source of joy and excitement, as it brings the drawing from the digital medium of the manuscript that the artist has worked on into the three-dimensional world. *Dōjinshi* printing services offer a wide selection of different paper qualities and beautiful printing techniques for the cover, with optional

holographic decoration or glitter. However, C-san also sees the physicality of *dōjinshi* as a potentially dangerous property, as it directly implies that money is involved: 'The difference [to fan fiction] is that, if it's on the internet then there is no money involved. But if I sell it at MP, then of course there is money involved. Because of that problem, I cannot openly say "hey, I am making books!". It's like a secret, a secret world, right?'

So while it might be satisfying to see a physical representation of the creative work, it automatically means that money is involved. C-san here uses the involvement of money as a distinction against digital fan fiction on the internet, where she says no money is involved and it is thus safe to admit to being involved with this sort of fan productivity.

One justification for selling *dōjinshi* regardless is that the artists don't make money off of it and simply recoup their printing and participation costs. I-san explained to me her thought process when going from digitally sharing her illustrations to producing actual physical *dōjinshi*:

In the beginning, I didn't make any books, I was putting my work on the web. The hurdle to making a book and having money involved is high. [Pause] Well, I was aware that with making a book and having money involved, there comes a responsibility. So I thought about it a bit and I researched. Like, what sort of thing might become a problem, for example. Basically, it seemed to me that the most important thing was that there would be no profit. So I do it like that, I set the price according to getting back my printing cost and having the cost for my circle space covered.

She explains to me that from her point of view, there is a considerable difference between publishing her works on the internet and to publish them as physical books, the primary difference being that money is involved and brings with it a responsibility. She finally concluded that as long as no profit is being made, her production of *dōjinshi* is fine. Most of my interview partners point out that *dōjinshi* activity requires them to spend money rather than offering them an opportunity to earn money. Even H-san, the person who out of all the participants that I surveyed attended the most events and published the most books within a year, tells me that she makes only so much profit off of her work that it allows her to continue her *dōjinshi* activity: 'Of course when it comes to people who participate in *Comiket*, there are also people who can make a living off of publishing their books, off of the profit that they make. Compared to that, I only make so much that I have enough funds for making the next book' (H-san). Here, again, a distinction is made between her own productivity and the fan productivity of people who might participate in the same event, but in a different genre. Of course *dōjinshi* artists that can live off of their work exist, but H-san completely contrasts her own activity against this.

While the involvement of money in the printing and exchange of *dōjinshi* seems to entail an obvious problem, the physicality of the fan work also offers the *dōjinshi* artists a level of control over their own work that is different from the level of control if their works

are digital. As outlined above, the written rules in *dōjinshi* are sometimes ignored by readers and the works are being scanned and shared nonetheless, but the act of physically selling *dōjinshi* at an event provides the artists with an opportunity to actually meet their readers in person. C-san explains that she is very curious about the people who buy her works:

It's always when I am busy, so I can't ask, but I really want to ask: 'Why do you buy my book?' but I haven't managed to ask yet [...]. A Chinese man came and bought my book and I asked him: 'Do you like it?' and he said 'yes, I like it.' But in China it's a bit suspicious. I have Fujoshi friends in China and it seems that there is also a sort of business where they buy *dōjinshi* in Japan and make pirated copies off of them.

Here C-san demonstrates a desire to know what might happen to her book once it leaves her hands. She states that she would generally like to ask people about their motivation for buying her works, and concern about her works potentially being pirated is definitely one of the reasons as to why she is interested in who buys them. Her knowledge of practices in China and her connection to fellow fans in that country have cautioned her that her work might end up being spread beyond her control. However, as she herself mentioned and I pointed out above, the disregard for an artist's wishes when it comes to the means through which their fan work is spread is not something that is unique to China or overseas. In Japan, fan work is also being resold in book stores and online auctions.

Conclusion

I have shown that the spreadability of Japanese *dōjinshi* is controlled by their creators through the use of a number of tactics and protective practices. I used the community of Japanese fans who create *dōjinshi* of western media as an example because at the beginning of my field research, I surmised that fan productivity referring to a foreign source material, such as the *MCU*, might entail more openness to global flows in fandom and a stronger desire to participate in fandom on a global level, as opposed to the local context that the physical *dōjinshi* mainly exist in. However, my field research shows that while *dōjinshi* culture continues to flourish in Japan, it is also particularising and creates spaces for fans that might be perceived as hidden and closed off and thus all the safer.

The stronger desire for safety for the fan productivity of artists, who are creating fan work for western media, comes first and foremost from the perceived stronger legal threat that overseas media companies like *Disney* pose. *Disney's* reputation for being 'strict,' which might be a euphemism for litigious, is well-known amongst Japanese *dōjinshi* artists. Another reason as to why the threat of exposure seems higher to *dōjinshi* artists creating fan work of western media is the fact that the works use characters that are portrayed by real people, unlike *anime*, *manga* or games, which make use of drawn characters. Thus, when sharing or advertising their work on social media, Japanese *dōjinshi* artists are especially conscious of the fact that they are sharing the same space with the actors or

directors of the franchises they are referring to in their fan work and therefore must take measures to avoid detection.

To answer to this heightened need for protection of their works, the *dōjinshi* community shares a number of written and unwritten rules that are followed by most participants. Written rules can be found at central hubs within the community, like the website for the events, illustrating that the target audience for these events are fellow fans and not people that do not already possess knowledge about *dōjinshi* culture. The individual *dōjinshi* also contain rules in so far as there is an almost standardised disclaimer printed in most of them, asking readers not to digitise, re-sell or otherwise spread the comics beyond their intended original audience, which is strictly limited to other fans.

Beyond the written rules that can be found, there are also many unwritten rules within the community that have to be learned after initiation and that are a marker of fan cultural capital for the community members. It starts with the knowledge about fan work of western media even existing, which is most often found out directly through friends, online or in person.

In online spaces, code words (such as not writing out the whole name of the event one participates in) and passwords are used to protect the discussions and the posted fan works within the community. On social media sites like *Twitter* and *Tumblr*, protected feeds are used to keep visibility to the outside to a minimum. Tagging fannish content, especially of homoerotic nature, with the names of franchises or actors, is avoided.

Special caution is deployed when it comes to the sharing of information about the monetary aspect of *dōjinshi*. Advertisement of new releases is kept to Japanese fannish sites, where the visibility for overseas audiences is perceived as quite limited. Furthermore, the surveyed participants generally adhered to the rule that no profit should be made from their fan work, to avoid legal trouble.

In conclusion, the rules that exist within the *dōjinshi* community first and foremost curb visibility and spreadability of *dōjinshi* as a medium. Artists follow the rules because they offer a sense of protection from undesired visibility (from non-fannish audiences) or even legal problems. However, the established rules within the *dōjinshi* community also function as a marker for cultural capital that the participants have attained. By knowing code words and adhering to certain community standards when posting and producing their fan works, the participants show that they belong to the community.

However, the rules are also criticised by the participants that I interviewed. The genre of western media is a growing genre within the Japanese *dōjinshi* market, which is demonstrated by particularising and growing circle numbers since the beginning of the 2000's and a migration of circles from *Comiket* to the now middle scale event of *MP*, that hosts about 1000 circles and has even been held in the same venue as *Comiket* a few times. With the growth of this genre also comes, in some cases, a bigger desire for openness. While secrecy is on the one hand desired because it offers protection, some of my interview partners also perceived the intra-community rules as being too strict and hindering the affective exchange between fellow fans.

Dōjinshi of western media have a limited amount of spreadability due to the protective practices employed by Japanese *dōjinshi* artists. It is not because fan culture operates completely differently in Japan due to a sort of ‘Japanese mentality.’ *Dōjinshi* artists referring to western media source material, however, face a higher perceived legal threat from international media conglomerates that exert legal and financial pressure to protect their brands compared to artists that use *manga* as a source material, because amongst *manga* creators, *dōjinshi* are generally an accepted form of fannish expression.

Furthermore, *dōjinshi* are, as the expression states, created with a specific audience in mind, the audience of ‘like-minded people,’ fellow fans. Thus, *dōjinshi* artists create their works primarily for an immediate audience that they, in most cases, even get to interact with in person, when they share their works at events. The community of ‘dōjin’ is an imagined community of like-minded people sharing affection for the source material, the characters and also a regard for certain rules that have to be followed within the community.

However, as I have shown with multiple examples, *dōjinshi* of western source material do possess spreadability, either through piracy, be it online or physically through pirated copies in another country, or through individual negotiation. As some of my interview partners surmised, the rules within the community are always subject to change and in the future a different approach to integration of online spaces within *dōjinshi* activity is quite possible.

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Notes:

¹ Within *dōjinshi* culture, the Japanese word 'janru,' stemming from the English/French word 'genre' is being used to distinguish *dōjinshi* belonging to different fandoms (Noppe 2014, 106; Aida 2016, 60). A single source material, like a specific *anime*, can be counted as a genre, as well as broader selections of fandom, such as 'movies' or 'western movies' can be grouped together as a genre. I will continue to use the word 'genre' in this sense, to refer to a sub-group of fan work that refers to a certain source material.

² The Yonezawa Library is the best resource for historical information on *dōjinshi*. It houses the collection of the late Yonezawa Yoshihiro, one of the founders of *Comiket* and a prominent *manga* critic. The collection at Yonezawa Library is as of date not fully catalogued yet and comprises hundreds of thousands of books, amongst them *manga*, *dōjinshi* and magazines on science fiction, *anime*, films, music, etc. The library is open to Meiji University students and associates as well as accessible by anyone after signing up for a membership (a one-day-membership coming at the price of 300 Yen, while a 1-year-membership costs 6000 Yen). In-house borrowing costs 100 Yen per volume, which allows you to read the volume in their reading room. Photocopies can be made for the price of 50 Yen, but *dōjinshi* are exempt from being photo-copied. These restrictions show that data about *dōjinshi* history is only semi-publicly available.

³ Collecting the data meant going through each *Comiket* catalogue by hand, identifying the participating circles by examining their so-called 'circle cut' (a small picture advertising the main fan work that the participating circle would offer at the event) and marking them down.

⁴ Only Summer *Comiket* in 2017 because my field research ended in October 2017.

⁵ I have also conducted an interview with a US-American comic artist taking part in *Comiket* and other Japanese *dōjinshi* events, but since his experiences understandably differ significantly from those of the Japanese fan artists that I talked to, I am excluding his example from the analysis that builds the core of this article.

⁶ Patrick W. Galbraith discusses the way that the terms ‘nijigen’ and ‘sanjigen’ are being used by fans of *anime* and *manga* to distinguish between the fictional world of *anime*, *manga* and games and the real, human world in greater detail in *Otaku and the Struggle for Imagination in Japan* (2019, 7).