

Moon Prism Power!: Censorship as adaptation in the case of *Sailor Moon*

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Abstract:

Taking active audiences seriously means recognizing that they are not innocent or unproblematic crusaders against censorship by governmental and corporate interests. Particularly in the case of cult media, audiences often engage in or advocate for censorship of their own. I map out an archival reception history of the English-language adaptations of *Sailor Moon*, a 1990s Japanese anime series featuring a team of feminine, butt-kicking magical warriors. Fans split into two camps, both seeking to influence the censorship process through manipulating the image of the Anglophone anime audience: perfect industry-friendly consumers or hostile subcultural denizens best left alone. This case shows how censorship is guided by imaginations of the audience and is an on-going process conducted as much through distribution as through changes at the level of the text.

Key words: censorship, anime, fan studies, television industry, reception studies

Introduction: Censorship and Adaptation

Studies of censorship have long focused on the structures for production and dissemination of media. The intent of censorship, after all, is for audiences never to see the uncensored versions of media. But this is at the same time an odd situation, as the need for censorship and the decision of what material to censor is intimately informed by imaginations of the audience and anticipations of its response to media. Advocacy for censorship often invokes 'an image of the child audience – sometimes as a specific group that is particularly in need of protection, sometimes as a metaphor for the docile, unresisting nature of the audience as a whole' (Brooker and Jermyn, 2003: 51). At its furthest extent, the image of the audience at large as susceptible and corruptible leads to the wholesale banning of texts or, as in Frankfurt School theory, the implication that society is doomed because such restriction is not feasible. Audience and fan studies have long pushed back against these theories

(Jenkins, 2008; Hendershot, 1998). Likewise, the studies of censorship which do address audience activities often center around audience attempts to evade censorship, such as ‘the Soviet phenomenon of samizdat, which relied on interested readers to reproduce and circulate forbidden texts, or the thriving black market in foreign literature that arose in response to the Russian reader’s demand for works of world literature’ (Baer et al., 2012: 95).

These are all important debates to have, but we must move past false binaries of passive/active, vulnerable/empowered, child/adult audiences. Taking active audiences seriously means recognizing that they are not always innocent or even anti-censorship. In their role as distributors and commentators, particularly for lesser known or more cult media, audiences often engage in or advocate for censorship of their own.

Censorship is most often associated with governments and political agents, for instance the growing body of work on the Chinese government’s sophisticated censorship of the internet (MacKinnon, 2009; Morozov, 2011; Mina, 2011). And censorship is not, of course, only propagated by totalitarian states, as ‘the widespread assumption that censorship is largely confined to non-democratic societies is a prejudice’ – which examination of the United States or United Kingdom’s media industries quickly proves false (Baer et al., 2012). But censorship is also and perhaps even more commonly conducted by businesses and market agents. The entertainment industries in the United States have often moved to censorship via voluntary self-regulation in attempts to avoid explicit governmental oversight. Many businesses also censor via their assessments of what will garner profit, and it is on this basis that much of the most conservative censorship, such as blocking the access of marginalized people to media representation, takes place. For instance, children’s television executives’ anxiety over how to depict characters of color resulted in their wholesale exclusion from American children’s television in the 1960s (Mittell, 2003). Multi-racial casts, where characters of color do regularly appear even if often only at a token level, became a commonplace in children’s television only when strategies of niche marketing and a recognition of the possible value in ‘marketing the ‘urban’ to young, white middle-class Americans’ came to industrial prominence (Banet-Weiser, 2007: 152).

Before going too far, it is necessary to explain what I take censorship to mean. I define censorship broadly, as making alterations to an existing text in the course of distributing that text to a new audience or in blocking the distribution of the text entirely. Thus while many definitions of censorship focus only on cuts and reduction, I consider making overt changes to an original text, such as re-writing dialogue or changing background music, and then distributing the edited text as if it were the original to be included in censorship’s purview. National governmental institutions and national commercial structures also heavily influence media’s adaptation and distribution – rights negotiation, intellectual property licensing, paratext creation, and so forth, are just as essential to its circulation as is translation (Katsuno and Maret, 2004; Brienza, 2016; Allison, 2000; 2006). Like reception, censorship is not a one-off or isolated action. Rather, it is an

on-going process that creates a multiplicity of new texts (Hendershot, 1998). This is a broad definition, but I aim to remove some of the kneejerk morality attached to the term.

Debates about whether or not to censor a particular text often ‘assume a freedom no one has. Censorship *is*. One can only discriminate among its more and less repressive effects’ (Holquist, 1994: 16).

Openness to censorship as an enduring reality rather than a harm to be necessarily avoided is essential when considering the movement of texts between national and, particularly, linguistic boundaries. Translation necessitates changes to the text but also implies that audiences can, through the translation, access the original work. Some scholars of translation have provocatively argued that ‘by its very nature translation lends itself to either conscious or unconscious acts that bring it extremely close to what we understand as censorship’ (Kuhiwczak, 2011: 363). While these changes are usually more oblique than, for instance, removing references to a political event such as Tiananmen Square or the Vietnam War, they can have important ideological effects nonetheless (Baer et al.). Katsuno and Maret show how the American adaptation of *Pokémon* sharpened moral distinctions between characters so that viewers are no longer occasionally invited to empathize with the main characters’ nemeses, Team Rocket, and are encouraged to focus more on the main character Ash’s ‘heroism and courage’ than on his friendships with Pikachu and the other characters (2004: 84–85). These are significant alterations to the series’ moral themes in the direction of mainstream American culture even as producers explain their aim as ‘not to Americanize the show per se but to culturally neutralize it’ (Allison, 2006: 150).

Theories of media adaptation must be attentive to the structure of established national and regional power relations. Adapting texts from one national culture field to another, or to many others, is often called ‘localization’ (Brienza, 2016; Allison, 2006). But Brienza argues that the work of the American manga industry is better theorized as ‘domestication’ than localization. Whereas localization seems almost power-neutral, as if each locale simply requires its own adaptation, she argues that domestication can ‘take into account the ways in which manga’s success overseas has had a subsequent impact upon the genesis of new product in Japan [and] the ways in which transnational cultural production can be unevenly, even irrationally, constrained by the nation of origin’ (2016: 34). As American licensing companies often required Japanese companies to grant them all licensing rights outside of Japan, Japanese texts were often adapted to sell ‘first to American kids, and then to ‘global kids’ in the international marketplace’ (Allison, 2006: 117–118). *Pokémon’s* American adaptation, then, meant that the TV series seen across the non-Asian world was more like the American *Pokémon* than the Japanese (Katsuno and Maret, 2004).

The cultural impact of an influx of texts from the United States into other countries is often referred to critically as ‘Americanization,’ a dilution of the receiving country’s cultural distinctiveness and the economic viability of their domestic production industries. Both national governments of culturally periphery states and minority community media outlets often respond to concerns about Americanization by creating censorship policies. Sometimes these policies reinforce repressive cultural and social regimes; for instance,

some ultra-Orthodox Israeli newspapers digitally remove images of female politicians from their coverage of world events (Cohen, 2015; Associated Press, 2015). But this is not always the case. Canada, a democratic and first-world country, has such a policy in the form of Canadian Content, or Cancon, requirements (Edwardson, 2008; Henderson, 2008; Yee, 1997). In the popular music industry, Cancon has both facilitated the rise of a vibrant national music scene and, ironically, made it increasingly difficult for newer, smaller artists to get airplay when ‘the well-established – and often foreign-residing – Canadian acts no longer in need of the regulatory assistance’ monopolize that scene (Edwardson, 2008: 5; Henderson, 2008).

As this example of Canadian popular music suggests, media increasingly circulate on a global – or at least first-world global – trajectory rather than a national or even transnational one. Some scholars, prominently Koichi Iwabuchi, argue that anime and manga are less the product of Japan than of global, transnational media corporations (Iwabuchi, 2004; Yano, 2004; Brienza, 2016). They point to the *mukokuseki*, or ‘culturally odorless,’ aesthetic of many original Japanese texts and character designs, including *Sailor Moon*’s own blonde, blue-eyed, light-skinned appearance. This design aesthetic, in which (nominally) Japanese characters and locations created by Japanese artists do not necessarily resemble people of Japanese descent or locations in Japan, did not develop because of an interest in foreign audiences for anime (Iwabuchi, 2004). It has, however, almost certainly facilitated its spread in a global market where white faces still remain the norm (Katsuno and Maret, 2004).

Iwabuchi’s argument that anime are the product of global corporate production and distribution, rather than of Japan, is convincing from a political economic point of view and an important check on overly nationalistic interpretations of popular culture trends. However, it is not as useful an analytical frame in studies considering audiences and cultural reception. Theories of adaptation and censorship often overly ascribe power to texts, as if all that is needed for cultural changes to occur is the physical movement of media. Audiences do still note and react to texts’ national origins, even if all do not interpret that knowledge in the same ways. For example, the explosion of Japanese popular culture’s popularity in the United States, particularly among children, caused a well-documented moral panic that was influential even if unfounded (Yano, 2004; Brienza, 2016; Wasylak, 2013).

I take a step back from both ‘localization’ and ‘domestication’ as descriptors for the adaptation of media texts between national and linguistic fields. Localization is too heavily inflected with the intonations of corporate-speak to be entirely appropriate for theorizing the adaptation of anime, which occurred in a very significant way through non-commercial, audience-initiated channels. Domestication carries many of the same negative connotations as does censorship, bringing moral judgment to the motivations and results of media adaptation that is less useful in a multi-lingual, multi-national context where some adaptation is necessary. Both localization and domestication also imply that the adapted text becomes the only text in its new home. In the case of *Sailor Moon*, the overlapping

existence of multiple adaptations accessible to many of the same audiences is key to understanding the text's reception and the processes of censorship it underwent. As such, I will refer to *Sailor Moon's* transformations as media adaptation. Censorship is a key component of this process, particularly for animation where it is technically possible to alter music, sound effects, vocal delivery, and footage editing as well as the dialogue and visual images present in manga.

Bishōjo Senshi Sēra Mūn Transforms into Sailor Moon

In this paper, I map out an archival reception history of the English-language adaptations of *Sailor Moon*, a 1990s Japanese anime series based on the manga by Naoko Takeuchi. The series' storyline follows a five-woman team of 'Sailor Scouts,' each a seemingly normal Japanese middle school girl who actually contains within herself the spirit of a magical warrior aligned with a particular planet. Each episode, the girls use mystical wands and shout their planetary prism catch phrases to transform into their alter egos and fight monsters in defense of the Earth and its inhabitants. The series also depicts the misadventures of daily life as a Japanese middle schooler, wherein characters deal with everyday problems like tests, crushes, diets, and friendship conflict. The Sailor Scout universe is expanded in later seasons to include older scouts aligned with the outer planets and other cosmological bodies as well as to delve into the histories of the magical planetary warriors.

Anime fans were likely the first to adapt *Sailor Moon* for Anglophone audiences. In a process called 'fansubbing,' fans accessed recordings of media in its original language, created and attached their own subtitles, and then distributed their new versions, called 'fansubs.' In the 1980s and 90s, this process was conducted entirely through very imaginative technical use of VCRs, and the resulting VHS tapes were distributed fan-to-fan through the mail for a token amount of money. Fansubbers later began to use computers, DVDs, and editing programs to create fansubs, which were then distributed for free online via BitTorrent and other file-sharing services (Leonard, 2005; ChibiBoi, 2012; Lee, 2011a). Fansubbers often worked in teams and under pseudonyms. In the case of *Sailor Moon*, one of the most well-known fansubbers was a Canadian man who went by the moniker VKLL (WikiMoon Editors, 2014; Bednarski, 2000). Most fansubbers in the 1990s and 2000s, including VKLL, would cease distribution of their fansubs once a title became licensed for official English-language production (WikiMoon Editors, 2014; Itō, 2012; Crystal, 2001). Their Anglophone 'otaku ethic' emphasized the importance of monetarily supporting the American anime industry, then in its infancy, through purchasing the officially produced VHS tapes and DVDs, even if one already possessed fansubs of the series (Itō, 2012; Lee, 2011a).

Sailor Moon caught the attention of American production companies in 1994 after it garnered impressive television ratings in Spain, France, and Hong Kong. DIC Entertainment and Renaissance Atlantic competed in negotiations with Tōei, the large entertainment production and distribution company behind *Sailor Moon*, for the *Sailor Moon* adaptation rights. Each saw the series as 'an action-adventure show where the heroes happen to be

girls...aimed at girls and boys ages 4-10' and hoped to replicate the massive televised and toy store success of *Power Rangers*, which was adapted from another Tōei property titled *Jyū Renjā* (Galloway, 1994). Toy company Bandai, also galvanized by the incredible sales of *Power Rangers* merchandise in the US and other Tōei properties in Japan, helped the *Sailor Moon* negotiations along and assisted in also bringing *Dragon Ball Z* and *Masked Rider/Kamen Raidā* across the Pacific (Allison, 2006). DIC's eventual acquisition of *Sailor Moon* kicked off what would become a tangled and lengthy chain of corporate adaptation and distribution, involving at the least tacit governmental input from both Canada and the United States.

American anime and manga fandom is often rightly pointed to as an exemplary model for productive fan-industry collaboration (Jenkins, 2008; Itō, 2012; Brienza, 2016). Like all cultural groups, however, fandoms are heterogeneous, and their cultural norms, such as the ethical commitment to stop fansubbing and distributing a series once it was licensed for North American distribution, are continually discussed, debated, and even transgressed rather than taken as law. Itō found that while most 'leechers,' or fans who download fansubbed episodes of anime but do not contribute to their creation, 'exhibited a strong desire to support the anime industry' and referenced the otaku ethic, many still downloaded fansubs of licensed series for a variety of justifications and sometimes under self-imposed rules (2012: 198). As the international anime industry and global anime fandoms have grown, fans have also become more critical of the industry and protective of the pleasure of and sociality in fansubbing itself (Lee, 2011b).

The issue of censorship is very potent within this history of audience-industry relations, particularly in the earlier years when corporations localized Japanese anime, with its wide range of themes, content, and target audiences, exclusively into the more narrowly defined genre of American cartoons, often associated solely with the child audience (Katsuno and Maret, 2004). This genre metamorphosis inspired cuts, visual cover-ups, and the censorship of entire episodes, even in Japanese series such as *Sailor Moon* that had originally emphasized the child audience (Kronke, 1995). The great cultural value that otaku put on information means that such changes, even when small, will attract extreme attention from fans (Eng, 2012). In the case of *Pokémon*, fan anger about three episodes that had been entirely censored from the English release 'culminated in 'The Lost Episodes Campaign,' which inundated 4Kids and the Kids WB with e-mails, faxes, and phone calls' and the eventual limited market broadcast of one censored episode – that was still never included on the series' DVD releases (Katsuno and Maret, 2004: 81).

The reception history of *Sailor Moon* offers the opportunity to analyze how corporate imaginations of their preferred audience guide censorship-in-translation, particularly when they assume such interventions will not come to light, in tandem with how a dedicated and expert audience of fans identified and reacted to censorship. American and Canadian *Sailor Moon* fans roughly divided into two camps – one which vigorously advocated for corporations to continue adapting the series, and one which bitterly opposed this process. Both groups sought to influence the corporate localization

process through more or less self-consciously manipulating the image of the Anglophone *Sailor Moon* audience. In the process, fans themselves sometimes engaged in censorship via their own adaptations of the anime text and practices of passing – or withholding – information from other fans.

‘American girls don’t like Japanese anime’

Sailor Moon was a highly anticipated title and potentially very lucrative gamble for DIC, Bandai, and the ten other companies who partnered with them via licensing deals (Brennan, 1995). ‘Girl power’ was in ascendance in popular culture, particularly for children’s media, and *Sailor Moon*’s particular blend of butt-kicking, world-saving, fashionably and femininely accessorized superheroines seemed poised to appeal to both consumers and cultural critics (Banet-Weiser, 2007; Allison, 2006). The challenge was successful adaptation. Renaissance Atlantic proposed re-shooting the series entirely in live action, following the approach which led their transformation of *Jyū Renjā* into the blockbuster *Power Rangers* series (Galloway, 1994). This approach was expensive, however, and DIC eventually triumphed in licensing negotiations with a proposal pithily summed up as ‘if it’s not broken, don’t fix it – too much’ (Tyrer, 1994).

DIC proposed making as few changes to and investing as little start-up capital in *Sailor Moon* as possible. However, they also proposed inserting the program into a children’s media field in which the dominant approach to foreign texts was ‘reader-centered,’ wherein every effort is made ‘to fully assimilate the source text into the linguistic values and cultural context of the target audience’ (Katsuno and Maret, 2004: 85). Children’s media is subject to higher levels of regulation and governmental scrutiny than are other types of media. At that time in the United States, the Children’s Television Act required broadcasters to ‘serve children’s information and educational needs’ and slightly restricted advertising (Hendershot, 1998: 133). Any series broadcast on American television also needed to conform to industry standards for the number of episodes per season and the rhythm of commercial breaks within episodes. DIC partnered with Canadian production company Optimum to reach a middle ground of dubbing the existing series, toning down or cutting potentially problematic elements, and adding educational ‘Sailor Says’ segments to the end of each episode detailing the lesson children should take away from that day’s show. This first adapted season retained, on average, 67% of the original Japanese footage per episode and censored some episodes entirely.¹

Companies adapting Japanese licensed series often received what one reporter described as ‘direct, often bizarrely obtuse English translations of the Japanese dialogue’ to use as the basis for adaptation (Fowler). While in dubbed live action texts actors’ mouths are necessarily out of sync with their words, animation offers the possibility of seamlessness – seen as particularly desirable in the mainstream American market where dubbed content is significantly less common than elsewhere around the world and is often received as comedic (Gallagher, 2004). Optimum utilized the ‘Rythmoband technique’ in which ‘detectors write dialogue in frame-by-frame sync on 35mm white leader in order to obtain

high-sync graphical representations of the rhythmic structure of the mouth movements and text' (Rice-Barker, 1995). As such, rather than relying on translating the dialogue, per se, the writers created English scripts that matched the characters' Japanese mouth movements and actions. This often meant heavily re-writing or altogether throwing out the original Japanese storyline and allowed further reader-centric translation practices like including colloquial slang, accents, and cultural references specific to an English-speaking (read American) cultural audience. The newly written English dialogue would then be 'projected on a soundstage studio screen above the image during rerecording and ac[t] as a precise synchronization prompt for actors,' giving them the very difficult challenge of conveying emotion while also speaking in a highly precise rhythm (Rice-Barker, 1995: np).

Executives in both America and Japan perceived that this adaptation process created an English *Sailor Moon* virtually – even troublingly – identical to the original *Bishōjo Senshi Sēra Mūn*. This perception is a poignant illustration of the industry's imagination of the American audience. They saw American children as potentially interested in and excited by Japanese difference, but only if it seemed to already belong to them (Allison, 2006). Unfortunately for all involved, *Sailor Moon* was a ratings flop in the United States. It only managed a .5 Nielsen rating in its premiere weeks in broadcast syndication on stations like Fox's KCOP in Los Angeles, and it was cancelled in the US after its first season (Benson, 1995). Three years after this initial cancellation, the overwhelming perception among both Japanese and American executives was that 'the producers of *Sailor Moon* in the US had failed to sufficiently adjust it for American tastes and were therefore projecting characters that girls in the US simply couldn't relate to' (Allison, 2000: 83). Bandai executives went further, arguing that 'the show's failure in the United States was due not merely to inadequate localization but to the very medium in which it was transmitted – Japanese animation...the construction of stories, images, and even fashion in the medium of anime was simply too alien for the mainstream tastes of young American girls' (Allison, 2006: 152). DIC, Bandai, and Tōei were content to leave it at that.

SOS: Save Our Sailors!

The pervasiveness of the industry perception that American girls simply did not like anime was ironic, as numerous fan and academic researchers documented *Sailor Moon's* role as a 'first fandom' for many people in the West, particularly women (Napier, 2007; Brienza, 2016; Fanlore Editors, 2016). This perception is even more surprising considering the manifest success of *Sailor Moon's* simultaneous debut in Canada, where the same text was screened. Hendershot argues that a myopic focus on regulating the content of children's television distracts from analyzing (and regulating) the structure of the media industry as a whole. A focus on clear-cut cases of censorship, particularly by governments, elides questions about implicit and corporate censorship, such as 'what kinds of programs will Disney and Turner choose to block out?' (Hendershot, 1998: 218). This question is not rhetorical in the case of *Sailor Moon*.

The series debuted when the structures of American broadcast television were particularly unfriendly to syndicated programs, as blocks like ‘The Disney Afternoon’ dominated most of the favorable timeslots. If a network or station wanted any Disney or Fox children’s programming, they had to take all of it and put it in the timeslots with the highest young viewership. Local stations had little economic investment in *Sailor Moon*’s success because of the industrial barter system under which the series was sold, and many broadcast the show at 5:30 am or during school hours on weekdays, particularly unfriendly hours for young viewers (Miller, 1996). The structure of the American television industry was manifestly stacked against content not produced or signed off on by a major network, particularly ‘risky’ content like *Sailor Moon* with its foreign origins and prominent female characters.

In Canada, by contrast, the stars of governmental policies and economic incentives combined in *Sailor Moon*’s favor. The country’s Cancon policy requires broadcasters to screen a certain percentage of content produced in Canada or by Canadians during prime times, and they incentivize this practice by allowing Canadian stations to show more commercials during these programs as well as through government financing for television production (Yee, 1997; Edwardson, 2008). One of these governmental financing programs was Telefilm Canada’s Versioning Assistance Fund, which supported Canadian dubbing companies with an eye towards preserving Quebecois French-speaking culture (Rice-Barker, 1995). But companies, such as DIC and Cloverway’s partner Optimum Productions, could also receive support to dub content originally produced elsewhere. With the Canadian labor involved in dubbing, the adapted *Sailor Moon* fulfilled enough of the CanCon requirements – and did not cost network YTV capital to produce – such that it became a lucrative program for YTV’s afterschool viewing hours and for the show’s primary Canadian sponsor Irwin Toys.

Many Canadian and American *Sailor Moon* fans were certain that, given the proper chance, the show would reach an appreciative audience in the United States as well. Ming, then a college student, and members of his online *Sailor Moon* fan mailing list founded the S.O.S: Save Our Sailors (SOS) campaign after the series’ first North American cancellation in 1996 (‘The Official SOS FAQ v0.05.1.1’). SOS fans were highly organized and presented themselves as media savvy, researching and writing long and detailed explanations about industry practices and their potential impact on the series, such as the structure of television advertising and the difference between local and syndicated spots (‘Why Is Sailor Moon Being Cancelled?’).

The SOS initiated a series of actions and campaigns over an eight-year period aimed at getting and keeping *Sailor Moon* on North American television. Their first petition, aimed at getting *Sailor Moon* back in syndication in America, collected tens of thousands of signatures online and offline and became particularly well-known as an early example of successful fan activism (Ortega, 2000; Levi, 2006). As a well-organized, active, and responsive force in an inchoate American anime industry, the SOS even found themselves in the surprising position of fielding and re-directing third-party requests ‘when [DIC] lawyers and staff stopped returning phone calls and letters from companies wishing to license the

property' ('Campaign Headquarters'; Brienza, 2016). Even an adversarial fan group, who hotly disputed the SOS's claims of industry access and influence, admitted that the SOS 'bandwidth and hits would suggest that they were BY FAR the most popular unofficial Sailor Moon site on the net' (Wheeler, 2004).

The SOS worked very hard to present themselves as the perfect audience from an industry standpoint. Instead of boycotts, the SOS organized 'pro-cotts' targeting first companies who had advertised on *Sailor Moon* and then a Canadian retailer of *Sailor Moon*-licensed toys. They advised the companies of their intentions to evidence that *Sailor Moon* fans were the 'loyal audience' that advertisers wanted, as 'nothing could be more loyal than over 50,000 fans buying one product all on the same day across Canada and the United States!!!' ('Procott'). The SOS utilized the advertising-focused nature of commercial television, often a target of critique and sometimes governmental regulation, to influence that very system. In a prescient statement that forecasts contemporary struggles between media industries and audiences, the SOS argued that 'Saatchi & Saatchi [advertising agency] now knows and fears that the public may soon be dictating their media buys. Agencies can either develop a relationship and understanding of how this new dynamic is going to work or they can fight it until they are extinct' ('The Official SOS FAQ v0.05.1.1'). Illustrating *Sailor Moon's* complicated adaptation history, the procott was credited with inspiring the most attention and action not from Kellogg, the procott target, but their competitor General Mills and its advertising agency Saatchi & Saatchi ('The Official SOS FAQ v0.05.1.1'). When DIC and Saatchi & Saatchi's syndication division The Program Exchange again offered the show for syndication, the SOS created a map whereby fans could find the relevant station in their area to lobby and several letter templates, as well as writing instructions to make the letters more effective. Playing to the industry focus on children as a target audience, they suggested that 'if you're a younger fan, it'll also be nice if you can make a simple sketch of Sailor Moon or your favorite SM character in your letter' to enhance its emotional impact ('Local Stations').

The SOS's attempts to speak for and represent a large and diverse body of fans unsurprisingly also garnered critique from within Anglophone *Sailor Moon* and anime fandoms more broadly. Much of this tension is evident on their list of 'frequently asked questions,' where they pose and answer questions like 'Is the SOS composed of just a bunch of DiC dub-worshippers who don't appreciate the original?' ('The Official SOS FAQ v0.05.1.1'). They strongly answer in the negative and, indeed, a great many of the SOS had access to fansubs of the show or had otherwise seen it in its original Japanese form (Levi; 'The Official SOS FAQ v0.05.1.1'). As ahead of their time as the SOS were in anticipating the increased access and influence that fans could have on the media industry, their case also foreshadows tensions that have become ever more acute. The SOS performed a great deal of unpaid labor for the companies involved with adapting *Sailor Moon*: coordinating publicity, collecting national viewership demographics, maintaining an active web presence, and so forth. Despite this, they were never publicly credited for their efforts and even sometimes derided in industry press.² While the SOS advocated for themselves and other

fans, such as engaging ‘some of the parties involved in this issue...in the hope of making clear how fan support is dependent upon less editing’ or imploring Cartoon Network, *Sailor Moon*’s eventual home, to see the importance of the 66% of their audience who were over eleven years old, the companies involved had no responsibility to comply or even to answer back (‘The Official SOS FAQ v0.05.1.1’). And the SOS, who saw the corporate adaptation of the series as the best means towards the ‘evangelization’ or ‘proselytization’ of English-speaking audiences to the good news of anime, had little recourse but to support whatever actions the corporations took (Wasylak, 2013; Leonard, 2005). To the SOS, this meant accepting moderate censorship as a necessary evil of popularization and undertaking the social and material labor of encouraging their fellow fans to see things the same way.

***Sailor Moon* Uncensored**

One of the SOS’s most vitriolic and persistent critics was the fan group *Sailor Moon* Uncensored (SMU), who actually maintained an ‘anti-SOS’ section on their website (Wheeler, Bednarski, and Gould, ‘*Sailor Moon* Uncensored’). The SMU website’s main purpose is to point out, episode by episode, and in a highly critical manner the differences between the Japanese and English versions of *Sailor Moon*. They focus particularly on footage editing, such as cutting, re-ordering, and changing timing, but they also critique dialogue, music, and voice acting. SMU occasionally praises aspects of the adapted series, particularly when an element they anticipated being censored was retained or to show support for some of the voice talent. The SMU fans were some of the most visible and thorough opponents of *Sailor Moon*’s adaptation by DIC and later companies, and I will use ‘SMU’ as a shorthand to describe this viewpoint. But they were far from alone. One evocative fan page reported the news that later *Sailor Moon* seasons S and Super S had been licensed and would be dubbed for North American broadcast with an image of a crying Hotaru Tomoe, one of the characters introduced in *Sailor Moon S*, and the text, ‘As the saying goes, all good things must come to an end’ (Crystal). Another site entitled ‘Haruka and Michiru are Lovers’ was established by a fan angry and offended at ‘a slew of posts [in the *Sailor Moon* usenet newsgroup] from newbies and experienced users (oldbies? -_^) alike stating that two [female] characters from *Sailor Moon* are not lovers’ (‘HAMAL - About’).

The relationship between Haruka, Sailor Uranus, and Michiru, Sailor Neptune, was one of the most overtly censored and hotly debated aspects of the text. Homoeroticism and same-sex romantic relationships are much more common in Japanese than in American popular culture and take center stage in genres such as Boys’ Love (BL) and *yuri*, roughly translated as Girls’ Love (GL), which exist in both fan works and official titles. BL, in particular, has proved essential to the American manga industry as ‘an important moneymaker for small presses [that] continued to help keep them afloat in hard times. Even corporate-owned imprints such as Yen Press and market leader Viz...have gotten into boys’ love’ (Brienza, 2016: 91). Western BL fandom is extremely active, both in English and other languages, in producing their own works, creating scanlations (the manga equivalent

of fansubbing) of existing manga, and communicating with manga publishers (Pagliassotti, 2008).

Particularly during this period of time in the United States, however, same-sex attraction was a politically fraught topic. While children's television and media reform advocates such as ACT and even media censors would sometimes try to create 'positive' representations of women and characters of color, for 1990s 'children's TV censors, there is no such thing as a positive gay character,' and representations of homosexuality were simply discouraged (Hendershot, 1998: 54). Even a news programme that tackled the topic of homosexuality and homophobia through discussing gay and lesbian parents brought cable network Nickelodeon 'more than 100,000 letters and phone calls opposing the show, primarily from the ultra-conservative organization the Traditional Values Coalition' (Banet-Weiser, 2007: 14). One manga editor explained the changing cultural context by pointing to a title he had worked on several years ago. Originally, he had censored images of young male and female couples in mildly suggestive sexual situations so they only appeared in silhouette, but he 'didn't have to anymore [in the recent iPad release] because three years later *Glee* is on TV and gay high school students are fine' (Brienza, 2016: 123).

The adapted *Sailor Moon* had censored previous instances of same-sex romance in the series by adjusting one of the character's voices from male to female. *Sailor Moon's* shōjo art style, which often depicts both male and female characters with long flowing hair and traditionally feminine features, made these alterations fairly seamless within the adapted text. As the newly female characters, mostly villains, lacked the overtly sexualized breasts of many originally female characters, this homophobic censorship had the inadvertent effect of increasing the diversity with which female characters were depicted. This is particularly important given the history of depicting 'female sexuality (and power) in children's media...[by] associat[ing] it negatively with corrupt female villains' (Banet-Weiser, 2007: 108). For Haruka and Michiru, however, this was impracticable. Both characters were originally female and wore the hyperfeminine Sailor Scout uniforms after transforming into Sailors Uranus and Neptune. As central characters, it would be impractical to entirely cut out their presence – not enough material would be left to fill a sixty-five episode syndication package.

In a challenging episode to censor, Haruka and Michiru enter the 'Heart World' competition where couples attempt to demonstrate their love for each other on stage in front of a crowd. Cloverway, the adaptation company handling this season, made the decision to present the pair as cousins, to the distress of many. The SMU wrote:

O.O.....You're kidding! Not only is the line stupid.....but did she just say 'cousins'???? COUSINS? OH DEAR GOD NO! This is every Sailor Moon fans' worst nightmare, they've made Haruka and Michiru RELATED so as not to lead fans to believe they're lesbians.....Oh MY GOD NO. Not only that, but because of poor treatment to the dub, Cloverway forgot to remove a lot of lines concerning 'Amara's' [Haruka's] flirting, so now, fans will be led to

believe they're cousins AND lesbians. INCEST! (Wheeler, Bednarski, and Gould, 2000)

With limited options, including a lack of capital to undertake the rotoscoping airbrushing process for visual censorship of animation that Warner Brothers would later use aggressively for *Pokémon*, Cloverway censored Haruka and Michiru's relationship almost entirely through re-writing dialogue (Allison, 2006). This created a text with cracks and fissures running through the meaning it presented, inviting audience members to perform interpretive work suturing them together. The results of that work varied, as indicated by the HAMAL site. The SOS were highly criticized by other fans for allegedly posting an article suggesting that the more masculine-coded Sailor Uranus was in fact 'Prince Uranus, who was in love with Sailor Neptune [and] transferred his soul into his sister' ('Proof'; WikiMoon Editors, 2007). The argument, by SMU viewpoint fans, was that the SOS were, at best, unconcerned with the depiction of Haruka and Michiru's relationship so long as the dubbed series was able to air on American television and, at worst, one of 'the larger more homophobic Sailor Moon sites' ('HAMAL - About').

It is overly simplistic to characterize the SOS as pro-censorship and the SMU viewpoint as anti-censorship. As scholars of censorship point out, 'although opposition to censorship seems to stand outside the process of censorship, it is in fact inscribed into the process and the social structures that generate the censorial mechanisms' (Kuhiwczak, 2011: 362; Hendershot, 1998; Holquist, 1994). Symptomatic of this is that Western fans who decry the impact of American censorship on *Sailor Moon* and proudly declare Haruka and Michiru to be 'lesbians' rarely, if ever, consider problematic the ascription of a Western sexual identity to non-Western characters and the intentions of a Japanese author (Altman, 1996; Robertson, 1998). WikiMoon editors, for example, take statements by Naoko Takeuchi referencing the all-female Takarazuka theater – in which some women specialize in playing male roles – as her inspiration for the characters to be proof that the two are lesbians despite the theater's insistence that all the actresses are heterosexual (WikiMoon Editors, 2007; Robertson, 1998). There is serious debate among scholars and activists as to the extent and nature of the connection between Japanese audiences' engagement with BL and GL genres and their thinking about people who experience romantic attraction to those of their same sex, even as a correlation between reading BL and supporting gay rights might seem commonsense and indeed holds for many readers in the West (Pagliassotti, 2008). Similarly, the SMU viewpoint often confuses the Japanese original series with Western English fansubs. Fansubs are already adapted versions of anime, even if their logic of translation requires the reader, rather than the text, to stretch towards understanding (Katsuno and Maret, 2004).

The SMU viewpoint has the elitist potential to be far more censorious than the SOS or even the industry. While the SOS want as many people as possible to come in contact with anime, SMU fans would restrict it to those who prove themselves worthy by finding access to the content on their own, writing 'we're NOT happy that Sailor Moon is in America

(especially the DiC version)' (Wheeler, 2000). This pairing of informational scarcity and subcultural capital is the darker side of the otaku ethic's value on knowledge (Eng, 2012). Rather than evangelists, SMU fans are 'true fans' for whom *Sailor Moon's* status as cult media provides prestige, rather than distress, to those in the know (Wasylak, 2013; Eng, 2012). The cultural designation of censored materials as prestigious (and the more censored, the better) is another of the unintended outcomes of censorship for audiences (Baer et al, 2012.). Here, it is the SOS who make the traditional anti-censorship plea: if you don't like it, look away.

Conclusion

At every step along the way, an image of the audience guided *Sailor Moon's* transformation and distribution. These three scenes evoke the conflicting and contrasting visions by which both corporations and fan groups adapted and distributed the text: Canadian Mary Long voices *Sailor Moon's* girl-next-door friend Molly with a heavy New York. The television industry deems the resulting program a failure: too Japanese for American audiences. Hearing of their show's impending cancellation, American fans videotape its broadcasts across the country. They don't want the footage – they possess that in a higher quality version without commercials already – but to catalog and document advertisers on the series who might be persuaded to support a new run. Toronto-based Club Anime's first meeting is visited by *Sailor Moon* voice talent ready to sign autographs for fans. The club screens the three most heavily censored *Sailor Moon* episodes – in fansub form, rather than the texts in which the voice talent performed (Punter, 1996).

Most of the fans I have discussed did not need the American anime industry in order to access their beloved text. Fellow fans had already adapted it for them via fansubbing and distributed it at or below the cost of production. Nevertheless, the SOS fans were evangelizers who saw their mission as helping anime get as much exposure in the West as it possibly could. They advocated for moderate censorship to help *Sailor Moon's* corporate adaptation along, facing a significant amount of fire from fellow fans for their efforts along the way, with the ultimate goal of seeing *Sailor Moon* and other anime in the US mainstream. SMU fans were fiercely protective of the text's integrity. If a quality, subtitled distribution was not possible – and they did not suggest that it was – then they advocated for the most extreme censorship, whereby the program would never reach those not first initiated into fandom. For them, the image of *Sailor Moon* in the Western cultural mainstream was distasteful at best and, at worst, a harbinger of the coming dilution and dissolution of their subculture.

The American anime and manga fandoms and industries have successfully altered the image of American audiences as xenophobic, unable to connect with anything that seems Japanese. The SOS declared their campaign a success in 2004, and anime is still regularly broadcast on television, through streaming video services, and in fansubbed electronic forms. Tōei has even recently produced an entirely updated anime adaptation of Naoko Takeuchi's manga *Sailor Moon Crystal*, which is streaming in simulcast across the

world. But just as fansubs are adaptation done differently, rather than not done at all, the new image of the audience is not purely progressive. The Cartoon Network, Canada's YTV, and many of the distributors and adaptors who have come after emphasize (rather than obscure) the obviously Japanese aspects of their texts, leading at its worst into exoticization and fetishization. This is not a condemnation, just a reminder – progress occurs even while censorship is, and audiences are active but not innocent.

This reception history of *Sailor Moon* highlights the importance of analyzing censorship as a continual, on-going process responding to a tangle of economic interests, audience passions, and governmental policies rather than the fiat of any one decision maker. It is enacted as much through the distribution policies surrounding texts as it is through changes made to the texts themselves – though both are heavily influenced by imaginations of the texts' potential audiences. Audience studies will only become more essential in discussions of censorship as audiences and producers work ever more tightly with each other and little content is so obscure that it cannot be circulated via grassroots methods. But even for audiences who already possess the original – or differently adapted – versions of the texts, censorship processes still have enormous cultural and social meaning.

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Notes:

¹ I rely here on the *Sailor Moon Uncensored* website's percentage tallies of original footage retained in each episode. The percentage excludes the episodes which were skipped.

² One common mistake was the attribution of the SOS's existence to the first American broadcast of the series, conjuring the image of a cult who had become diehard fans after first catching the show at 5:30 am.