Online Communication and Girl's Subcultural Practices – Cosplay Cultural Community in Asia.

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Introduction

This article examines the attraction of young Asian women to Japanese manga and anime, and how this attraction translates into a form of self-realization and self-expression. In particular, it reveals how young women, despite their various global location and time zones, communicate online to exchange information on Japanese manga or anime, communicate and create new cultural and public online spaces that transcend borders. Online fan practices related to Japanese pop culture have created micro global spaces that exist "between the public and the private" (Harris 2008,487).

In the past, it was assumed that the media plays a role in the formation of an imagined national community (Anderson 1983). However, having entered the age of online communication in which global information flows are commonplace, and there is increased cultural exchanges and hybridization, the role of the media in forming a national community is steadily diminishing (Georgiou 2007). Moreover, as the singular national community erodes, it is being replaced by "multiple public sphericules" (Sinclair & Cunningham 2001) and "mutually interrelated transnational spaces" (Georgiou 2006). These communities comprise people who identify with each other not because of geographical proximity, the traditional determinant of global division, but cultural affinity and mutual resemblance. Such transnational online communities constitute what is referred to as the "blogosphere" (Harp & Tremayne 2006). According to Lampa(2004), this produces "an imagined community

based on a new form of amateurized and personalized journalism practiced by persons who may never meet one another yet can engage in conversation and share a common identity."

Young women interested in Japanese manga and anime use computers for various purposes: as communication media, as an information archive, and as a tool for cultural production and activism (e.g., creating pamphlets selling photo collection CDs, or using the web to globally announce their activities). Recent studies have investigated women's web usage. According to such researches, the web can be described as "a clubhouse for girls" (Takahashi et al. 1999), where they "congregate [...] to rant, rave, and review" (Strapinksi 1999). Girl culture was born, developed, and diffused via the web. In fact, the expansion of cosplay culture, fan fiction, and participative fan activities coincides in particular with the advent of Windows 98 and the proliferation of digital cameras.

Thus, young women's cultural expressions and practices are generated through new technology, new lifestyles, and culturally related consumer goods and products. Using consumer goods and products help to empower young women. This has been researched, analyzed and discussed using the concept of "girl power," a much-discussed notion in the English-speaking world. Banet-Weiser (2004) argued that girl power contains contradiction and tension, "The dynamics between the ideological claims of this cultural phenomenon——girls are powerful, strong, independent——and the commercial merchandising of these claims demonstrate a profound ambivalence about these feminist politics in general."

Might this perspective also be applied when considering the practices of young Asian women? As economic growth has progressed in Asian countries over the past 20 to 30 years, the lifestyles of school, and young women living in urban areas have changed greatly. Economic independence and equal opportunity in employment have

made it possible for women to invest economic and cultural capital in their interests and hobbies. In addition, as has occurred in most other country over the last decade, this young generation has mastered using the smartphone to engage in cultural activities. The information-gathering capabilities of young Asian women have improved tremendously.

However, their practices and online communication have yet to be empirically investigated. Therefore, this study conducted interview with a proximately 30 girls in Japan, China, and Thailand, and compared fan practices in these three countries.

I have been conducting field research on young female cosplayers since 2006 (Tanaka 2013; 235). Through this research, it has become clear that even overseas, many young women participate in Japanese pop culture, engage in cosplay activities, and/or writes fan fiction. Even without physically visiting Japan, China, or Thailand, they are able to gather information about Japanese anime/manga, and communicate with local Japanese young women through the Internet. Thus, I sought to compare and research similar cases in multiple countries.

First, I will explain the research field selection. These appropriate fields needed to be places in where many young women who are interested in Japanese pop culture reside. Therefore, I chose sites in which "cosplay," an easy-to-view fan activity, is the most commonly practiced and favored form of Japanese pop culture. According to Miya Tomoko, the director of Cure, a company that operates an international cosplay website (http://ja.curecos.com), "Recently, within two to three years, there has been a large increase in the number of Chinese subscribers." Based on this statement, I selected the Chinese cities of Peking and Yantai, to represent East Asia. In addition, I chose to interview multiple subjects from Bangkok, Thailand. This is the only location in Southeast Asia where *Cosmode Thailand* (a spin-off of the original Japanese cosplay magazine *Cosmode*) is published; Bangkok

also hosts numerous large cosplay events. In recent years, there has been an increase in the numbers of Japanese pop culture's fans and Cure subscribers. Furthermore, because many Japanese companies are emerging in various areas overseas, there are opportunities to study the relationship between pop culture and economic activities.

China and Thailand have both reported tremendous increases in their recent economic growth rates. Comparing GDP growth in various countries, Japan reports 2.0% and Australia 2.8%, while Thailand reports 6.5% and China 7.8%. During Japan's economic bubble in 1988, when many youth cultures formed that are considered the basis for those that are popular today, the growth rate of the GDP was 7.15%.[1] An analysis of the data shows that China and Thailand are currently experiencing rapid economic growth. Consequently, the ratio of middle-class citizens in the larger cities of China and Thailand is growing, and middle and high school students now have more disposable income. Thus, they can now buy genuine, Japanese-licensed products, as opposed to pirated products. As a result, Japanese pop culture is rapidly becoming more widespread.

I interviewed female anime and manga fans/activists from Japan, China, and Thailand (10 subjects from each country). Some of the subjects had traveled to or lived in Japan in the past; therefore I was able to contact and communicate with them online through Facebook, Twitter, and Pixiv before traveling to the fields. In these interviews, I inquired about their activities and their relationships with friends both in person and online; I also asked about the methods of information technology they used and their personal connections to Japan through its pop culture.

In the next section, I will explain the premise of the study. First, I will discuss the spread of Japanese pop culture throughout China and Thailand and how young women in these countries use the online space——for what kinds of exchanges, and in what communities. Next, I will report the results of an investigation into the types

of Japanese pop culture activities young women prefer. From those results, I will extract and analyze what I have learned so far, along with any other considerations.

Background

Several factors facilitate global communication between young women in Asian countries. The first factor is the production and distribution of common interests in these areas——such as anime, manga, and music——as well as fan activities such as cosplay (a portmanteau of the English words *costume* and *play*, which originated in Japan). These interests serves as foundation for building relationships among these young women. In fact, for the past 20 years, Japanese pop culture (especially manga, anime and cosplay)[2] has had a strong youth appeal.

What is the market size of the manga and anime industries? The manga and anime industries total one trillion and 3,393 billion yen (including related product sales), respectively[3],; the comics market totals 3,903 billion yen[4], and electronic comics 545 billion yen[5]. As these numbers suggest, the market is very large. Compared to Korea, which exports contents overseas due to the small market size within the country, Japan's cultural market focuses solely on domestic sales. Nevertheless, anime and manga continued to be exported overseas from Japan, thus earning global fame.

During the 1990's, many Japanese animation films aired on Chinese television. Because of this, many Chinese citizens now aged 20 - 30 favor Japanese manga and anime. Magazines like *Hua Shu Da Wang* (画書大王) and *Man You* (漫友) came to be published, and Japanese manga/anime became widely known. Moreover, these magazines introduced cosplay in China. According to an apocryphal Chinese story, the first Chinese player appeared in Canton in the 1990s. Since Canton is geographically near Hong Kong, residents were able to receive information on

Japanese cosplay faster than people in other areas. In the late 2000s, however the Chinese government strictly limited imports of foreign animations, and the State General Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT) / (国家广播电影电视总局) disapproved of such works. In 2006, the State Council of China, in an effort to promote domestic animation, issued "Several Opinions on Promoting the Development of China's Animation Industry" (关于推动我国动漫产业发展的若干意见). Thus, importing foreign animation was strictly limited. By May 1, 2008, prime-time broadcasts (5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.) of foreign animation were prohibited by law, under SAPPRFTs "Notification Relates to Strengthening the Management of TV Anime Broadcasting" (広电総局关于加强电视动画片播出管理的通知). The only foreign animation works that received an "anime distribution permit" (电视动画片発行许可证) to broadcast after 2005 were *Bugs Bunny and Tweety Bird* (傻大猫和崔弟) (2005), an American cartoon imported by Peking Television, and *Prince of Tennis* (网球王子) (2006), a Japanese anime imported by Shanghai Media Group (上海文化広播新闻伝媒集团).[6]

Nevertheless, most foreign animation works can be viewed via the Internet. Since access to foreign video submission websites like YouTube is prohibited in China, anonymous technical experts redistribute downloaded (and subtitled) videos from YouTube onto original video submission websites. Conversely, the production of Chinese anime is accelerating, and China is currently the top producer of anime.[7] By 2010, the aanime and manga market totaled 208 billion yuan (a 22.4% increase from the preceding year); in 2012, they reportedly increased to 320 billion yuan.[8]

The anime market in Thailand increase by 10% each year, with sales totaling 56 billion 2300 million baht (65.7% of the contents is imported).[9] Moreover, the manga industry has rapidly expanded since 2008, with sales totaling over 10 billion baht in 2009.[10] Government institutions such as the Thai Animation and Computer

Graphics Association (TACGA) and the Software Industry Promotion Agency (SIPA) have been promoting the development of digital contents. However, 90% of the anime series for television are still imported, and most are purchased from Japan.[11]

It is difficult to calculate the exact number of youth culture and subculture fans/activists. However, it is somewhat possible to grasp the cosplayer population by examining the number of Cure subscribers. According to Cure, there are 900,000 Japanese subscribers (750,000 non-cosplayer and 150,000 cosplayer) and 150,000 overseas subscribers (120,000 non-cosplayer, and 30,000 cosplayer). In addition, WorldCosplay (http://ja.worldcosplay.net/, a website administrated by Cure for cosplayer overseas) has 68,000 foreign layers and 5164 Japanese layers.[12] Overseas cosplayer tend to use social networking services (SNS) (Facebook in Thailand, Weibo in China) instead of Cure; thus, the total population of activists becomes higher when accounting for layers who uses methods other than Cure. The percentage of male subscribers/layers is 12% while females comprise 88%. Moreover, 72% of subscribers are in their teens and twenties, while 28% are in their thirties and forties.[13]Thus, young women constitute the majority of people engaged in fan activities such as cosplay worldwide. In addition, cosplay easily crosses borders since it involves costume and photography, which do not require verbal exchange. Furthermore, when personifying manga and anime characters who are not representative of real people (hair/eye colors that does not naturally exist, unknown nationalities in fantasy settings, and sometimes nongendered characters), it is easier to remove the constraints of race and gender and participate in these activities. Such nonrealistic factors facilitate limitless costume possibilities, and arouse the desire to disguise oneself.

The second factor that has made global communication between young women possible is the diffusion of the Internet and mobile devices. Every young woman

(teens or twenties) I met in Tokyo, Peking, Yantai, and Bangkok had the latest smartphone devices in her hands. They could respond quickly to requests such as "Please show me your pictures" or "Please give me information about your activities" by accessing different SNSs online and built-in IC data chip in their phones. In addition, they helped me find additional subjects online by taking videos of me and uploading them to Facebook and other SNSs to generate interest. It is clear that their technological literacy has advanced as compared with the findings of past studies that sought to answer the stereotypical question of whether young women are unskilled at handling machines (Kennedy 2000; Broos 2005; Stavrositu & Sundar 2012).

For such female fans of anime and manga, the Internet primarily serves as; (1) a tool to gather and share the latest contents and information, (2) a place to report the results of each fan activity, and (3) a space to communicate with fellow fans and consequently build communities.

(1) Tool to gather and share the latest contents/information

Accessing official websites and viewing/downloading various contents available online allows young women to obtain information regardless of time zones, even if the content is only available within Japan. Many young women obtain information in Japanese or English by accessing the official websites of publishing/broadcasting companies and/or official Facebook pages. Although considered a legal "gray area," activities such as translating and sharing contents and information from "fansubs" are practiced internationally. According to Condry (2013: 216), fansubbing is "the practice whereby hundreds of fan groups digitize the latest anime broadcasts, translate them, add subtitles, and make the media available online." "Fansubs are produced not only in English but also in Chinese, French,

Spanish, Italian, Brazilian Portuguese, and more" (168). There is, of course, a Thai version as well.

Cultural simultaneity and interactivity are beginning to appear in Asian areas through the use of the Internet. Because the young women are in an environment in where they can instantly view anime aired in Japan, there are almost no differences in the popularity of each work. This makes it easier to analyze and compare fan activities in different countries.

(2) Place to report the results of each fan activity

Through advancements in the Internet and digital technology, the younger generation's interests are shifting from fan activities that only include acquiring information/contents to productive activities, such as reinterpreting/reprocessing acquired contents and publicizing it. Before the diffusion of the Internet, viewing anime and manga was considered passive consumption. Of course, there were activities such as the production and sale of fan fiction by a small base of passionate fans, but their activities were not well known and were considered minor. However, as digital technology and the Internet became widespread, the popularity of participatory activities such as cosplay and the production of fan-made works, increased among fans. Fan fiction often takes the form of a single illustration, manga, or novels about one's favorite work. These activities include printing and binding these works and selling them at conventions. Currently, the main method of disseminating one's work is to allow audience to view it for free. Regarding cosplay events are generally held every weekend at convention centers and office buildings located in the central areas of cities. Young women (10% to 20% of the attendees are young men) gather, costumed as their favorite manga/anime characters, and participate in photo shoots. Furthermore, through the use of tools like Voaloid and

DTM, methods for conveying one's creativity are becoming more advanced and widespread. Currently, anyone with a computer and the appropriate software can compose and distribute music (and possibly become a hit-producing composer) without having to spend a lot of money or acquire musical skills.

Fan fiction illustrations and novels are uploaded to Pixiv (http://www.pixiv.net/) and/or personal blogs; photographic works are uploaded to Cure/WorldCosplay or SNS such as Facebook and Twitter. For musical works, original illustrations and/or image animations are attached and shared on content-sharing websites such as YouTube and Nico Nico Douga. For popular works, additional mangas and novels inspired. There is even a website called Piapro (http://piapro.jp/) where users upload image novels, poems, and illustrations inspired by popular Vocaloid music. This website is open to anyone in an Internet-accessible environment and allows users to create profiles and share their works online. In China, where access to Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Nico Nico Douga is prohibited, China's own SNSs (QQ [腾讯], Renren Network [人人网], and Weibo [微博]) and video-sharing websites (bilibili [哔哩哔哩], AcFun) can be used by fans to engage in similar activities.

The idea of shifting from viewing to active interpretation, or what Certeau (1990: 251) called, "nomads braconnant" (nomads poaching), is further explained by Burgess. According to Burgess (2006 or 2007), in recent years, increasing numbers of people have begun to "make use of the worlds/atmospheres in their favorite man-made works, and participate in creative production activities." The term "participatory turn" is used to describe this phenomenon (Burgess, 2006; 2007). It is quite interesting to analyze contemporary cultural production and representation from this perspective. In Japan, such changes have occurred gradually over the last 30 years. In the rest of Asia, however, since the late 1990s consumption activities

(viewing anime and reading manga) and production activities (producing illustrations/fan fiction and cosplay) have been practiced simultaneously. This is made possible by the Internet and high-speed information networks that allow the dissemination of fan activity as soon as it becomes public.

(3) Space to communicate with fellow fans and consequently building communities

Young women are using the Internet, e-mails, and messengers (as well as SNSs) and communicating with each with surprising quantity and speed (Stern 1999). Harris (2008, 488) said, "There is a case in which social networking is a way for young women to create new participatory communities for and by their peers." Even in my field of research, new connections are created daily through fan fiction, photographs, audio, and other works presented online. This new network is a platform for fond emotions and affection. Many works are randomly uploaded by Pixiv and World Cosplay subscribers regardless of nationality. These works are organized according to original classifications called "tags,"[14] connecting presenters and audiences online. These services have features nearly identical to Facebook and other SNSs including comments, messages, and the ability to follow users. The only difference is that people connect based on their passion for characters and/or work (e.g. original work, fan fiction, photographs, illustrations), and not other relationship, such as those based on family, school, occupation, shared experiences or ideology. Furthermore, in Asia, online communities formed by participating fans are primarily maintained by women.

Result

1) Research results in Japan (Tokyo)

In Japan, cosplay culture which is representative of participatory fan activity,

began to increase rapidly and become visible in the early 1990s. This increase resulted from the transition from analog camera to digital cameras and the rise of online space. Digital cameras facilitated picture processing and data verification for young women. Further, the accessibility of online spaces allowed, women to easily upload their photographs and share them with peers. In particular, cosplay culture expanded in Japan through businesses, such as cosplay cafes, and the participation of young people who use cosplay to address social issues, including, antiglobalization, and the LGBT parades.

Cosplayers who participate in weekend cosplay event, bring rollaway trunks to the meeting site to transform themselves into manga/anime characters. This trunk contains costuming gear, the costumes themselves, unique personal items (e.g., swords, shields, magic wands, musical instruments, mask), wigs, makeup, and shoes. Upon arrival at the event, participants go to the registration area at the entrance and pay a fee that is typically 1000-2,000 yen, which is—an affordable range for teenagers.

There are changing rooms inside the event space where participate can drop off luggage. Cosplayers spend approximately one hour changing into their outfits and applying makeup. The women's changing room resembles a girls' school just before gym class. The space is filled with the sounds of happy reunions. Clothing and other implements are strewn on spare sheets or atop rollaway trunks. The girls quickly change into their costumes while having conversations. The makeup, which is diligently applied using handheld mirrors, requires the most time. Once they are fully costumed, the young women leave the changing room and go to a special space for taking photos. They don colorful wigs and the colored contacts, wear fancy clothes, and frolic in the event area. Many people gather in that space, and group into specific peer clusters. They spread out their luggage to lay claim to their own spaces.

Some groups take photos continuously, peer into mirrors to fix their hair and makeup, and check their pictures on camera displays. Others ignore the picture taking and become immersed in conversations to acquire new information about manga and anime, their favorite characters, or recent happenings at schools or work.

Japanese cosplayers not only buy their costumes but also modify them. For example, to more closely resemble the character they adopt, they may cut a wig with scissor, and shape it using a hairstyling agent. By cutting the cloth she buys to fit the pattern, a cosplayer can finish sewing in just a few days. Great value is placed on handmade costumes. Of course, cosplay costumes are sold commercially, but many layers indicated that "we cannot respect her even if she is a nice cosplayer if she didn't make the clothes herself." They believe that ready-made clothes do not reproduce the characters' costumes in sufficient detail. In contrast, they cautiously reproduce the costume from a two-dimensional realm to a three-dimensional one. This creative activity is a labor of love, and the "do-it-yourself" mentality is considered crucial. In many situations, in contrast to utilizing commercial labor, a cosplayer mights produce a costume, devise a plan for event participation, consider the composition of a photograph, and perform all processes alone. Characteristic responses to the question, "What is cosplay to you?," included "It is an activity that presents the interpretation of anime or a comics and shows a view of the world." and "It is a creative activity for me." Such responses are common among not only cosplayer, but also Vocaloid -composers and creators of fan fiction.

2) Research results in China

Due to recent issues surroundings the Senkaku Islands and the "deterioration" of the Japanese constitution, relation between Japanese and China have worsened. Japan's mainstream media deliberately reports bad news about China, and vice versa,

as if practicing negative campaigns against each other. However, official political stages are not the only spaces for communication. There are women who travel down roads where anti-Japan demonstrators marching to attend events related to Japanese anime/manga.

<Yantai>

I chose to stay in Yantai because Q, a 25-year-old woman who inspired me to research this topic, is from there. Ms. Q was born in Yantai, China, in 1988. She came to Japan to study in her a third year college and is currently pursuing a doctorate at a Japanese graduate school. Her father teaches history at a technical school affiliated with the Communist Party and her mother is a company employee. Q had helped me as a Chinese translator during a symposium held in Tokyo. My presentation was on the relationship between Japanese anime and political themes. When I asked if she liked Japanese anime, she shyly replied, "Yes. In fact, I had been cosplaying in China." When I informed her that my research in Tokyo was related to cosplay, she quietly began talking about her favorite anime. I must have appeared as a "safe" person to her. This sense of safety is very subtle. Simply put, it is very important for a young female anime/manga fan to know whether it is OK for her to talk about her personal preferences with the other person. She must know that the person she is talking to will not insult or laugh at her. This may be similar to a situation in which a nonheterosexual is cautious when opening up about his or her sexuality. The voices of young women have always been and will continue to be threatened.

Q said she used to participate in cosplay with her colleagues in Yantai. Her story seemed like a very "twinkling" (きらきらした [kira-kira sita]) experience, which I conveyed to her. She replied, "Yes. It was what the Japanese would call, a

twinkling/kira-kira memory. I liked that word, so my cosplay name was Kira-Neko [a meaning for a twinkling, cute cat]." I empathized with her words. I sensed a similar "twinkling" feeling in my high school memories. Even though we lived under different state systems, social, norms, cultural forms, and generations, we shared surprisingly common feeling in terms of her memories and my personal experiences with friends through anime and manga. Thus, I had a need to find the essence of this communal remembrance from young women's sensibility.

Yantai is a port town that was the first site China -opened to Western countries. The ruins of what were once European consulates and trading houses occupy the pre-settlement areas. Western buildings occupy the "new settlement area," which was constructed to resemble the pre-settlement areas. Similar to other cities in the coastal areas in where capitalism is prevalent, numerous companies (which attempt to use a Western image to operate restaurants and commercial wedding photographs) reside in Yantai. One day, Q and her friends, who were raised in Yantai and were mesmerized by Japanese anime, developed an idea to shoot cosplay photos using the scenery of the new settlement area as the background. They found that *Rozen Maiden* (薔薇少女) a Japanese anime with Western costumes and setting, perfectly matched the atmosphere of their city. After applying makeup at a friend's nearby house and changing clothes at the beach, they began taking pictures. During their high school years, anyone was allowed to enter the still-developing new settlement area. It became a temporary autonomous zone (T.A.Z.) for young women to freely use and occupy. In what was once an area of half-colonized buildings, commercial buildings attempted to infringe upon and use this area for profit. In opposition, young female anime fan attempted to occupy the area to secure a recreation ground. Until entry to these buildings was prohibited and they were locked due to full commercialization, the young girls continued to take photographs in the area.

Thereafter, Q set out to study abroad in Japan, O was born in 1988 in Yantai, China. She earned a master's degree form a graduate school in Peking. In 2014, she began to study at a language school in Tokyo (with plan to apply for doctoral study at a Japanese graduate school). Her family runs a trading company. She is a colleague of Q and organized many large, noncommercial anime/manga and cosplay events in Yantai. There was a need for these events and a site for fans to communicate in the provincial areas since commercial event groups (for anime/manga) were still undeveloped. On one occasion, over 5,000 participants arrived at the venue, and the entire event was canceled by the authorities. O's activities were supported local manga/anime fans. Q and her colleagues who had gone on to further their education in different parts of the country would come home to Yantai every vacation and participated in cosplay musical performance events.

As O continued to host cosplay events, 23-year-old A was born in 1990 in Yantai, China, where she still resides. She currently studies at a Japanese-language school while working part time at a TV station in Yantai. A has gained popularity as a cosplayer, engaging in cosplay events organized, who was a Chinese representative of the 2013 World Cosplay Summit[15]. A had stayed in Japan for one week as a Chinese representative and communicated with other foreign representatives. When asked why she was so serious about cosplaying activities, she replied, "I can gain friends and acquire an independent mindset. I can also enhance my planning and organization abilities, as well as media/stage acting skills, video editing skills, performance, and dance skills. I wish to work with the media in the future, and this is the perfect opportunity to gain the skills I need."

<Peking>

In China, cosplay is closely related to on stage performance. Full-fledged

cosplayers form performance groups know as "circles." A top-notch cosplay circle that focuses on performance activities usually consists of 50-70 members. In addition, cosplaying contests are held by players in large cities like Peking and Shanghai, with large sums of money awarded to the winners.

For example, 26-year-old N was born in Peking, China, in 1987. She currently studies at a graduate school in Germany. She maintains close contact with her friends in Peking through the Internet and runs a cosplay performance circle. Her parents are both doctors. N manages a well-known circle in Peking that won the grand prize for a play featuring characters from *Axis Power Hetalia (APH)*, a manga that became a huge hit in Japan. *APH* is a historical comedy manga that takes world history as its theme and represents the different customs, trends, characteristics and environments of various countries. Though the work is largely supported by young women in Japan, it is rife with politically in correct issues. First, as suggested by the term "Axis Power," the main characters in the story deprive from the Axis countries of World War II. Second, it has few, if any, references to Japan's military interventions in other Asian countries; the personified happy-go-lucky countries (i.e., =characters) peacefully coexistence. Third, the naïve, fixated national images are problematic; for example, Germany is depicted as a serious person, and France as a romantic playboy. This work relies heavily on stereotypical national image, and ideas in a way that totally eliminates "race."

Nevertheless, *APH* has achieved great popularity among manga/anime fans like N and other young women in China. When asked, "Do you like this work, even if it does not consider the historical issues between Japan and China at all?" N replied, "More importantly, I love this work because the characters are very attractive. Among Chinese girls, Wan, a personified character of China, is especially popular."

N's script is a sequel play about the Opium War. The N's original story

concerns Wan, who personifies China and, protects the country from the invasion of Japan and powerful Western countries. N's story and play has mesmerized about 1000 people. Using a Japanese manga that lacks a recognition of history (and is thus likely to spark controversy in China), N skillfully created a story that shows a love for the characters and the original work but can also, be approved for production in China. N and her circle used their prize money to set up a studio that creates cosplay costumes, and a shop that distributes the products. Furthermore, they are requested to perform at various events throughout the country. For a successful circle like N's, which has won many contests, cosplay performance activities often lead to professional occupations.

This example shows that participating in recreational activities may lead some to become administrators of costume production studios and anime shops, manga artists for event organizers, and even scenario writers. Needless to say, most people "graduate" from youth culture and become employed once they reaches a certain age. However, it is not impossible to build a career through the experience of youth culture.

"So, why do many people in your age range come to love Japanese manga and anime?" When asked this question N answered, "We're a lonely generation due to the one-child policy in China. Because we do not have any siblings, it is very fun to gain friends through online communities or subculture fan activities. Many Japanese manga and anime stories are based on discovering friends or peers, and we empathize with that. The fact of liking Japanese manga and anime itself becomes a chance to find similar friends."

Should we study this phenomenon as a kind of "brainwash" activity by the Japan, who politically opposes China? Or should we view these activities as attempt to rebel against a state system that poses political inconveniences by using of pop

culture to expand their unrestricted territories as much as possible?

3) Research results in Thailand

<u>*<Bangkok>*</u>

One year ago, Y, a fan of Japanese manga and anime, arrived at my university as an exchange student from Thailand. Y was born in 1991 in Bangkok, Thailand. She graduated from the tourism department of a university in Phetchaburi Province and now works for a travel agency in Bangkok as a tour escort accompanying tourists to Japan. Her father is a military officer and her mother is a housewife. I showed her Japanese anime shops and cosplay events because she had informed me that she was a layer. Since then, even after she returned to Thailand, we have continued to exchange messages through Facebook. Relying on Y's community, I sought to conduct a research in Bangkok.

Anti-Thaksin demonstrations have been occurring in Bangkok since early 2013. The city's middle class, which has grown rapidly, conduct daily demonstrations to protest the current government which favors regional peasants over middle class citizens. I visited Bangkok and witnessed these demonstrations——a democratic right guaranteed by the state——which were used as a means to protest nondemocratic administration.

Since 2000, young girls (and some boys) engaged in cosplaying activities have begun to appear in Bangkok. As they gathered information online about their favorite manga and anime, they began many cosplay photographs which led them to engage in cosplaying activities themselves. They began to apply makeup following the examples of their predecessors. Those who understood Japanese translated Japanese cosplay magazines and blogs, delivered them to local girls, and eventually communized cosplay among girls in Bangkok. Today, participants are said to be

increasing in the larger cities. Girls in Bangkok acquire costumes using the following methods. They purchase low priced materials (cloth, buttons, parts) in Indian wholesale cities like Talat Phahulat, or more popular marketplaces like Talat Pratunam, and have local tailors make the costumes. Alternatively, they purchase low-priced Chinese-made costumes and wigs online, and customize them themselves. Many create "gears" such as various weapons and items by themselves. One costume set is said to typically cost around 1000-3000 bahts.

From 2000 to 2006, there were only small private events organized by a few fans. Beginning in 2007, however, many commercial cosplay events were held in Bangkok, sponsored by companies, shopping malls, and Japanese-language schools. In Bangkok, "JAPAN FESTA," a large event that features Japanese anime, manga, and cosplays, is held annually. In addition, Oishi, a large beverage company, hosts a sample fair called the Oishi Comic Party that features Japanese anime/manga. Furthermore, *COSMODE Thailand*, the only cosplay magazine in Southeastern Asia, contracted with the Japanese *COSMODE* and was published in Bangkok from 2010. Because of these various events, information sharing grew even more rapidly.

Today, in large cities like Bangkok and Chiangmai, many anime/manga-related events (including private ones) are held every weekend. I studied a private noncommercial event held by fan girls. P, who organized the event, was born in 1994 in Bangkok, Thailand. She is a 19-year-old student studying digital art at a well-known private university. Her family runs a real estate firm. P draws illustrations and engages in cosplay activities. Inspired by the broadcast of her favorite anime *Attack on Titan* in Thailand (originally aired in Japan in spring 2013), she and her friend planned to manage and host an event. The rented a building a business district that is usually populated by businesspeople during the week but is vacant on the weekends. This method is similar to the way Japanese cosplay events

are held. Inside the building, there were booths featuring fan-made products, a stage for performances, and a large screen used to view *Attack on Titan*. Such equipment is essential for manga/anime fan events held in Thailand. In the garden outside the building, there was a space prepared for taking photographs. According to P, more than 1,000 participants attended the event. The fact that two college students were able to attract over 1,000 participants——not only from Bangkok, but from nearby cities and provincial areas as well——is simply astonishing.

During the event, I interviewed K and Z. K was born in Bangkok, Thailand in the late 1980s. She graduated from the same department of the same university as P and now works at a government-affiliated bank. Her family runs a trading company. Z is K's sister and was also born in Bangkok, in the late 1980s. She works for an animation production company in Bangkok as an animator. They were selling fan-made manga consisting of characters from *Attack on Titans*. Using Japanese-like pen names, K and Z submitted numerous illustrations and manga using Pixiv. Their fans consist of both Thais and Japanese. Although neither has ever visited Japan, Kand Z communicate with Japanese girls online. Today, they often participate in online drawing competitions though E-Cha (絵茶) (online chatting service) by adjusting their time zones with Japanese girls while talking on Skype. Although it is an "online" relationship, they have a friend who lives in Sendai whom they call their "best friend." When they lost touch with her for several weeks because of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, they cried together anxiously as they monitored international news.

P aspires to become a professional illustrator. K, who shares the same hobbies as P, works at an anime production company in Bangkok. Furthermore, some of the more famous layers, who are often featured in WCS and are often invited to events in Japan and China, operates shops in Bangkok that deals in cosplay costumes and

wigs. They purchase costumes while participating in cosplay events in Japan and China and sell them in Bangkok to make a living.

In addition, many girls engaged in fan activities land jobs with high salaries in Japanese companies because of the Japanese-language skills they acquire through their love of anime and manga. Girls who love Japanese manga/anime and/or cosplay tend to learn Japanese in college and/or go to Japan as exchange students. Although it is merely an afterthought based on the results, many of them are eventually hired by Japanese companies and earn relatively higher salaries than other workers in Thailand. Their love of pop culture such as anime and manga unexpectedly leads to career upgrades and maintenance. The march of Japanese culture into the world might be criticized as a new form of colonialism; however, many women obtain more choices in life as a result of the high salaries they eventually receive as a result of their interests. Financial independence helps them maintain their fan activities, and is an important foundation for independent living and maintaining strong ties with friends. They have no choice but to embrace the contradictions of pursuing to their dreams while also earning a living in the consumption-based society.

Does this suggest that the abilities of these young women are enslaved by capitalist society? Or, do they secretly manipulated capital by using pop culture as an intermediary, to achieve career advancement and maintain a space of freedom?

Conclusion

What can we learn from this study?

First, participation in fan activities and the acceptance of pop culture are accompanied by conditions of mature modernization, the establishment of consumer society, and the advancement of young women's economic power. In fact, many of

the women who host events or participate in a fan activities belong to the middle class of their societies. In China, their parents' professions many include medicines, laws, or teachers in higher education institutions. In Thailand, it is highly probable, that many of these young women come from wealthy Chinese. About half of Japanese women in fan activities work part time or have non steady employments, but they have higher incomes compared to global levels. Based on their actions, they may be criticized as hedonistic users of consumer culture. However, they are still young, and despite their youth, they are acquiring the skills needed to make connections, to organize groups, and manage events of various. Their networking skills, communication skills, and organizational knowledge must be utilized in for various future opportunities.

The development of online communication presents an opportunity for young women to create global and local bonds; as such, it is useful to maintain it. Regardless of the legalities of Japanese anime and manga content distribution online, these young women have an opportunity to make friends by connecting online over Japanese anime and manga. At first, they simply receive and consume these content. Soon, however, by reediting or modifying the content, they aggressively engage into self-expression activities. While taking cosplay photos on the coast of Yantai, Q once said to her five friends, "If I'm with you, I would feel any place is paradise." They are adults now, living and working in many cities in China or abroad while continuing to encourage each other online. Moreover, the online space is a micro-global community. Activities such as using SNS, posting to sites, chatting, exchanging comments, and shopping online have made the Internet a place for the formation and maintenance of young women's global friendship, the exchange of opinions, and the distribution of goods and content a kind of macrospace of politics and economies. Friendship may be local, but the topics are global. Young women in

Thailand, for example, could perhaps buy clothes sewn at N's studio in China. These women are engaged in a daily life that vacillates between dependence on them to be consumers and their desire to create free spaces to enjoy pop culture. I want to carefully ascertain the direction in which this practice is heading.

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1 International Monetary Fund. Retrieved on December 10, 2013, from http://www.imf.org/external/ns/cs.aspx?id=28.
2 Cosplay is defined as "a form of costuming where one dresses as a preexisting character, wearing their clothing, makeup, and accessories to become that character, striking recognizable poses, dancing, and modeling for photographs" (Kyoko Koizumi, 2011, 211)
3 The Association of Japanese Animations (AJA). Retrieved on December 10, 2013, from http://www.aja.gr.jp/data/doc/sangyodata-20130401.pdf.
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5 Yano Economic Research Institute Co., Ltd. (ed.). Survey results for "otaku" market 2012 ("Otaku" Shizyo ni kansuru Chosa Kekka 2012). 2012/10. Retrieved on December 10, 2013, from http://www.yano.co.jp/press/pdf/1002.pdf.

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7 ibid., p. 115.

8 ibid., p. 111.

9 Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) (Ed.). Thailand market research of content (Tai no Kontentus Shizyo Chosa). 2013/3, p. 47. Retrieved on December 10, 2013, from http://www.jetro.go.jp/jfile/report/07001291/th_contents_market.pdf.

10 ibid., p. 55.

11 ibid., p. 49.

12 The actual number of registrants of December 4, 2013 from an interview with Cure's director, Miya Tomoko.

13 From "Cure Company Profile" (from the internal documents of Cure)

14 In the tags, there are keys such as "name of the character," "title of the anime," and "trend of work." Young women tend to use extensive jargons and abbreviations in the tags that can only be understood by the group.

15 The World Cosplay Summit (WCS) is an international cosplay event held in Nagoya for fans of Japanese anime/manga to create a new form of international cultural exchange. Twenty countries currently participate. Each representative competes in contests related to costumes and stage performance. See the official site of the World Cosplay Summit (http://www.tv-aichi.co.jp/wcs/).