

moe has occurred during a time when these issues are reaching a crescendo. In any case, it becomes quite clear that *moe* is very much admixed with the Japanese psyche, character, and modern culture.

If, then, the tropes most commonly associated with *moe* are seen as merely culturally dependent trappings, the general concept of *moe* – as the simple response to the ‘concentrated appeal’ – should alternatively be seen as universally valid. Indeed, this concentration of the appeal is clearly displayed in *all forms* of popular art, not only anime and manga, and not only in Japanese art. For example, a possible comparison might be the ‘appeal’ of such films’ ever-increasing levels of explicit violence and gore in American horror movies, such as the *Saw* franchise (2004-2010), originally created by James Wan and Leigh Whannell. Of course, in this case the nature of the viewer response is to the increasing concentration of this ‘appeal’ and, as such, is very different from the nurturing response engendered by the Japanese expression. It is, nevertheless, a product of the same broad phenomenon found in contemporary popular culture. Indeed, the backlash that developed against the *Saw* franchise and other examples of ‘extreme’ horror cinema might also parallel a growing backlash against the oversaturation of *moe* in the *otaku* market.

However, if we are to talk about *moe* as a response to concentrated appeal in this universal way, it would be best not to refer to these other incarnations as ‘*moe*’ and instead leave that term to refer specifically to the Japanese manifestation. A more suitable term for this other more general occurrence of the phenomenon in popular art is the “M-phase” (that is, the “*Moe*-phase”). In the end, then, is the true significance of the *moe* phenomenon that has been completely overlooked by anime and manga scholars: *moe* is symptomatic of an occurrence of a much more universal, and possibly necessary, trajectory of popular art, with its Japanese manifestation merely the most obvious form. It is also a trajectory in which a viewer’s response to the *moe* or M-phase image, whatever it is intended to be (whether the ‘nurture’ of Japanese *moe* or the ‘thrill’ of the explicit violence and/or gore in contemporary horror cinema), is maximized by the ‘appeal’ that triggers it becoming increasingly saturated and focused in *moe* products. In this way, *moe* has relevance not only to scholars of modern Japanese culture and art in addition to those *otaku* who consume *moe* images, but also to all who are concerned with modern popular art and who inhabit any region of the world. If *moe* is finally to be understood as a path that all popular art can take, the question really then becomes – what is the next step? Only time will tell.

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Reviewing the ‘Japaneseness’ of Japanese Animation Genre Theory and Fan Spectatorship



Jane Leong

Since the 1990s, anime has been gaining considerable recognition outside of Japan. This popularity has, and continues to be, bolstered by both our current climate of intense globalisation and the dynamic practices of cultural production which anime fans engage in. It is this intersection between globalisation, popular culture and fandom, which makes anime a fascinating subject of cultural analysis.

In particular, anime poses a unique counterpoint to the traditional discourse of globalisation as presented by scholars such as George Ritzer (1993), who had suggested the inception of a homogenised global industry moulded on American popular culture. Such a traditional model has been challenged by the way anime as a non-Western cultural product has been enthusiastically received across the globe, due in a very large part to the dedicated involvement of fans who created more exposure for anime by translating and circulating it to audiences worldwide. Furthermore, this global appeal has been attributed to anime’s hybrid nature, which refers to the mixing of Japanese and non-Japanese elements that at the same time signifies neither one culture nor another.

However, I argue that anime cannot be completely dissociated from the ‘Japaneseness’ which typically frames its creation. The challenge here, of course, is to then ar-

ticulate a discourse of ‘Japaneseness’ for an era of global or transcultural influences and flows. This article suggests that one way to do this is to address Japaneseness as a process of genre formation. More significantly, it emphasises the cultural studies approach to genre, which aims “not to posit the inherent value of value, nor to ascribe positive value to any particular entity ... but rather to vindicate the *activity of evaluation*” (Burgass 347) which underlies the way non-Japanese fans engage with anime.

Hybridity and the *Mukokuseki* Factor

Some scholars have attributed anime’s ability to appeal to so many diverse audiences worldwide to its perceived hybridity, whereby “distinctive Japanese aesthetics and Western cultural forms and values coexist,” and can therefore be “appreciated by Japanese and Western audiences alike” (Bainbridge and Norris 243). While anime undoubtedly draws on Japanese traditions of art, the first Japanese animators in the 1910s were also inspired by early American and European animation (Patten 278). For example, acclaimed Japanese animator Tezuka Osamu, hailed as the pioneer of anime, acknowledged the influence which Western animators like Walt Disney had on his work (Schodt 63). This hybridity is likewise reflected in the story

narratives of the anime themselves, from the retro series *Samurai Champloo* (2004-05), characterised by a fusion of hip-hop and samurai/*chambara* culture, to *Tenkuu Tenshou Nazca* (1998), which revolves around a group of modern-day Japanese individuals who discover that they are the reincarnations of ancient Incan warriors. Some of these narratives, furthermore, appear devoid of Japanese cues altogether, like the pseudo-European setting premised on the medieval art of alchemy in the series *Hagane no Renkinjutsushi (Fullmetal Alchemist)*, 2002-04), or the post-apocalyptic landscape of *Trigun* (1998), with its eclectic blend of science fiction and cowboy/Wild West motifs.

Anime as a hybrid form thus might be seen to represent “the mixing of elements of multiple cultural origins” (Iwabuchi 71). At the same time, its mixed nature enables anime to occupy a space that signifies neither one nor another culture, but is instead ‘stateless’. It exists “at a nexus point in global culture; this position allows it to inhabit an amorphous new media territory that crosses and even intermingles national boundaries” (Napier 2005: 23). To that end, some commentators have argued that anime owes its appeal to what has been described as its *mukokuseki* quality.

The Japanese term *mukokuseki* literally means “something or someone lacking any nationality,” but also implies “the erasure of racial or ethnic characteristics or a context, which does not imprint a particular culture or country with these features” (Iwabuchi 28). In analyses of anime, this concept is most obviously addressed through the discussion of human characters that are decidedly non-Japanese in appearance. Usagi Tsukino, the main protagonist of the series *Bishōjo Senshi Sērā Mūn (Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon)*, 1992-93), for example, is a regular Japanese schoolgirl who nevertheless has blonde hair and blue eyes. This *mukokuseki* quality becomes further pronounced in anime series that adapt their narratives from non-Japanese texts, such as *Watashi no Ashinaga Ojisan (My Daddy-Long-Legs)*, 1990), which is based on the American novel *Daddy-Long-Legs* (Webster, 1912), and *Akage no An (Red-haired Anne)*, 1979), which is an adaptation of the 1908 novel *Anne of Green Gables* by classic Canadian writer L. M. Montgomery.

Acclaimed Japanese animator Mamoru Oshii (*Ghost in the Shell*, 1995 and *The Sky Crawlers*, 2008) has been oft quoted for his suggestion that Japanese artists view Western bodies as the ideal over ‘realistic’ Japanese characters in their works (Iwabuchi 2002; Napier 2005). Furthermore, non-Japanese viewers unfamiliar with anime’s visual designs have been known to “cast such representations as possessing putatively Caucasian features” (Bryce, Davis and Bar-

ber). Susan Napier argues, however, that a more accurate description of these *mukokuseki* characters is not that they look Japanese or Western, but rather that they have been created in a “nonculturally specific anime style” (Napier 2005: 24). Napier also notes that there are some “virtually standard aspects” of this “anime style” (Napier 2007: 175), which include examples such as large, sparkling eyes



and hair of every colour imaginable, and comic or cute ‘super deformed’ characters with small torsos and oversized heads. The appeal of this ‘anime style’ for both Japanese and non-Japanese fans might thus be that it provides a ‘stateless’ space, neither distinctly Japanese nor distinctly Western, for exploring what Napier describes as fluid, “postethnic” identities (Napier 2005: 26) against the background of a postmodern world. This argument is supported by the way fans identify with values or themes that, while embodied in an anime character or setting, are universal in the way they relate to the human condition: like the determination to never give up, the empowerment of women, nostalgia for childhood or the uncertainties of adolescence (Napier 2007: 179-85).

Anime’s *mukokuseki* status, as informed by its hybrid nature, thus serves to demonstrate the understanding that “the ‘Japan’ in ‘Japanese popular culture’ is always already dislocated, contaminated, cross-pollinated and criss-crossed” (Allen and Sakamoto 3). Indeed, in his study of cultural globalisation against the backdrop of Japan’s progressive rise as a cultural power in Asia, Koichi Iwabuchi observes that Japaneseness as a nationalist discourse has

historically been addressed through Japan’s perceived “sophisticated capacity to culturally indigenize the foreign, in which terms the putative Japanese national essence is imagined” (18). Iwabuchi further argues that, in response to Western domination, the capacity to assimilate the foreign became defined “as a unique Japanese characteristic” and was moreover considered “evidence of Japanese superiority

to the West” (55). In the 1990s, the surge in and consumption of Japanese popular culture worldwide prompted Japanese commentators to confer a distinctive Japaneseness on cultural products like anime, by claiming that such worldwide “appeal of Japanese popular culture lies in its subtle indigenization of American popular culture” (Iwabuchi 19). The *mukokuseki* quality which informs the hybrid nature of anime hence becomes articulated as a key feature of Japaneseness itself; the Japanese ‘essence’ of anime is thus ironically derived from the blending of cultures to create a ‘stateless’ space that might be viewed to be absent of any ostensibly Japanese markers, or indeed, racial or ethnic markers of any kind.

Yet I would argue that the concept of *mukokuseki* is challenged even in the very utterance of the term ‘anime’. While ‘anime’ simply means ‘animation’ in the Japanese language, the processes of globalisation have absorbed and translated the word for an emerging global lexicon; as such, it is used in Anglophone discourse, by fans and in academia, to refer specifically to *Japanese animation*. Such an understanding indirectly distinguishes anime from other analogous visual media as ‘different’. At the most obvious level,

the reasons for this difference are naturally linked back to anime being ‘Japanese’. In this respect, its *mukokuseki* nature notwithstanding, the ongoing use of the term ‘anime’ confers a Japanese ‘cultural odor’ on these products, which Iwabuchi defines as “the way in which cultural features of a country of origin and images or ideas of its national, in most cases stereotyped, way of life are associated positively with a particular product in the consumption process” (27). Iwabuchi goes on to cite anime as a key example of a Japanese commodity, which is “culturally odorless” in that it does not “evoke images, or ideas of a Japanese lifestyle” (28). But this is a very broad generalisation to make, which can be disproved by considering specific examples of anime series as well as audience responses toward anime. Just as some series take place in markedly non-Japanese settings, like the ‘pirate fantasy’ adventure *One Piece* (1999-present), others still are grounded in the Japanese landscape, such as the portrayal of contemporary suburban Tokyo life in *Sazae-san* (1969-present). Furthermore, Napier’s empirical study shows how an interest in anime has led to an interest in Japanese culture for some fans, such as learning the history and language of Japan, cultivating knowledge of contemporary Japanese politics or even cooking dishes depicted in some anime series (Napier 2007: 185).

Thus, despite the view of anime as a *mukokuseki* product, it cannot be completely dissociated from ideas of Japaneseness. Attempting to locate this Japaneseness in anime is a complex task, given that it has to take into account its global distribution, the Japanese national or cultural backdrop against which it was created, and translation of anime for non-Japanese sociocultural contexts. Significantly, the difficulty in articulating Japaneseness itself is evocative of the wider contemporary discourse of globalisation as it is understood by Arjun Appadurai (1996), in terms of fluid, interconnected flows in a postmodern world. While a fixed definition of Japaneseness cannot be determined, it is safe to say that an awareness of the concept exists nonetheless, and this “notion of Japaneseness simultaneously influences, and is altered by, cross-cultural communication” (Bryce, Davis, and Barber). One way in which we might articulate a discourse of Japaneseness within the complexities of cross-cultural communication is to frame it within the cultural studies approach to genre formation.

Japaneseness as Genre

Traditional genre theory has typically offered formalist and generalised definitions of genre that are primarily interested in “identifying the abstract theoretical ‘essence’ of a genre in an idealized form” (Mittell 4). Such approaches have attempted to delimit genres as formal

categories that are characterised by specific core elements, or to interpret the textual meanings of genres within historical or sociocultural contexts (Neale and Krutnik 1990; Tulloch 1990). My consideration of Japaneseness, however, draws primarily on Jason Mittell's cultural studies approach to genre theory, which is more concerned with how genre is actually defined and conceived in everyday use or cultural

The crux of Mittell's study is his proposal that genre be re-envisioned as "discursive practices": "by regarding genre as a property and function of discourse, we can examine the ways in which various forms of communication work to constitute generic definitions, meanings, and values within particular historical contexts" (12). Mittell argues that it is more fruitful to view genre as a textual category rather

Cartoons in Japan cater to every conceivable viewer demographic, and thus express a vast range of subjects to accommodate these various audiences...

circulation. More specifically, I refer to how non-Japanese fans might understand and articulate ideas of Japaneseness through their engagement with anime.

For his study, Mittell (2004) draws on Rick Altman's *Film/Genre* (1999), arguably one of the most significant works in contemporary genre discourse. In *Film/Genre*, Altman makes a compelling argument for an analysis of film genres not as textual properties, but as cultural categories, which emerge through cultural processes. While Mittell has adapted this process-based approach for his own work, he is critical of the way "textual structure still remains the centerpiece of [Altman's] approach, making it difficult to provide an account of how genre categories operate outside the bounds of the text" (15). Additionally, given his focus on television studies, Mittell is careful to emphasise how film and television are "distinct medium[s] with vitally different industrial structures and audience practices", which would necessitate "carefully adapt[ing] the theoretical advances offered within film studies to the particularities of television genres" (16). Mittell argues that the existing theoretical tools for genre analysis, which have been developed primarily in literary and cinema studies, are inadequate for a consideration of television, one reason for which being that television "rarely has pretensions toward high aesthetic value," unlike literature and film; to apply the same analytical tools to television hence "dooms television to evaluative failure and misrepresents the way the majority of television viewers and producers engage with the medium" (xiii). This argument holds true for anime, which like television circulates in contemporary culture as a popular cultural artefact which fans engage with first and foremost as a product of entertainment.

than in terms of textual components – that is, genres do not emerge from intrinsic textual features of texts, but instead "work to categorize texts and link them into clusters of cultural assumptions" (xiv). This is achieved through the processes of definition, interpretation, and evaluation, which Mittell describes as "the three primary ways genres circulate and become culturally manifest" (16). Accordingly, considerations of genre in this framework should be less preoccupied with "interpretive readings or deep structural analysis" than with the "surface manifestations and common articulations" (Mittell 13) of genre. In other words, cultural genre analysis should examine the way discursive utterances of genre are articulated across a breadth of generic discourses in order to discern larger patterns of definitions, meanings and hierarchies that in turn constitute the larger understanding of genre as a cultural operation.

The global circulation of anime poses interesting complexities for its articulation in genre discourse. While the narratives that have taken this form would in Japan simply be viewed as the representation of the cartoon genre, elsewhere in the world anime has become a genre unto itself within a cartoons discourse. Some of the various ways in which this distinction has been addressed in Western understanding are encapsulated in the definition which a simple search of the *Oxford Dictionaries Online* website gives for the term 'anime': "Japanese film and television animation, typically having a science-fiction theme and sometimes including violent or explicitly sexual material" (*Oxford Dictionaries Online* 2011). Such a definition ignores the scope of subject material that is represented in anime: following the conventions of traditional genre analysis, anime as a genre is thus reduced to the textual components of 'science-fiction' and 'violent or explicitly sexual material'.

Western criticism of the uncompromising portrayal of violence and sex in anime in particular lends weight to Mittell's assertion that genres are culturally practiced categories. Cartoons in Japan cater to every conceivable viewer demographic, and thus express a vast range of subjects to accommodate these various audiences, violence and sex being just two of the many facets of this subject matter. On the other hand, cartoons elsewhere are "culturally defined as a genre whose primary audience [is] children, and [are] not legitimate entertainment for adults as part of a mass audience" (Mittell 62). Anime has thus been viewed unfavourably by some Western commentators because the medium does not adhere to their generic expectations for cartoons – the condemnation of violence and sex in anime is based on the assumption that anime is targeted primarily at a child demographic in the same way that Western cartoons are.

Returning to the above-mentioned dictionary definition, a second way that anime in global circulation has been differentiated from other cartoon forms is in its description as 'Japanese.' The very utterance of the word 'anime,' whether by worldwide audiences and fan groups, in industrial practices and academic literature – to use Mittell's terms, as "surface manifestations and common articulations" (13) across cultural discourses – acts to confer a putative 'Japaneseness' on anime. In the same way that the claim to a national Japanese 'essence' has been constantly redefined and reinterpreted to accommodate the changing historical and political landscape of Japan (Iwabuchi 2002), Japaneseness in anime is often less a textual essence than it is a manifestation of the cultural practices of definition, interpretation and evaluation which non-Japanese audiences, industrialists and social and academic commentators bring to bear on this cultural artefact.

Iwabuchi's demonstration of the ongoing reinterpretation of Japaneseness to accommodate the historical transformation of Japanese nationalist discourse is also a reflection of another important understanding of genres: they are not "ahistorical and static" but "shift and evolve in relation to their cultural contexts" (Mittell 5). At the same time, Mittell argues that "although genres are constantly in flux and under definitional negotiation, generic terms are still sufficiently salient that most people would agree on a similar working definition for any genre" (17). To accommodate this understanding of Japaneseness as a 'stable' category in flux, Mittell stresses that genre analysis must shift from simply "asking what a genre means" to "what a genre means *for specific groups in a particular instance*" (5). These ideas form the basis for my research focus on non-Japanese anime fans as a specific cultural group, and for the argument that Japaneseness as a 'generic term' can and does constitute a categorical frame of reference for these fans. I tested this

premise by asking a sample group of non-Japanese anime fans to identify elements in anime which they felt were specific to Japanese culture (Leong 46-53), extrapolating from Mittell's assertion that though "genres are not defined by textual elements, cultural practices constituting generic categories through definitional discourses typically focus on textual features" (108).

Japaneseness in (Fan) Perspective

Mittell uses the term 'discursive cluster' to describe the way genres exist as 'stable' categories in flux – that is to say, "a generic cluster functions as a stable cultural convenience, a shorthand label for a set of linked assumptions and categorized texts, yet these discourses (and associated texts) are bound to shift meanings and definitions as a genre's history transpires" (17). This notion is exemplified in my analysis of non-Japanese anime fans, which demonstrates a conceptualisation of Japaneseness that is characterised not by 'essentialist' textual components, but by the discursive and fluid practices of definition, interpretation and evaluation with which fans engage (Leong 46-53). These processes are reflected in the way the anime fans in my academic audience study define Japaneseness on multiple levels of discourse.

Some examples of Japaneseness given in my study were straightforward enough, such as *sushi*, Japan's *Shinto* religion and even Tokyo Tower. Fans also defined Japaneseness as "spirituality," "rituals" and "festivals," with their traditional connotations, alongside more contemporary phenomena like "technology," and the gambling game "pachinko" (Leong 46). Others still demonstrated a view of Japaneseness as continually evolving alongside Japan's historical and social landscape, for example in tracing the use of swords in anime series like *X* (2001-02) and *Bleach* (2004-present), which take place in contemporary Japan, back to Japanese "samurai tradition" (Leong 47).

Most fans in my research also cited the prevalence of Japanese language conventions in anime as a significant indicator of Japaneseness. At the same time, however, some fans were able to point out that while such Japanese phrases and honorifics are specific to the cultural contexts in which they are used, the *concepts they communicate* are not (Leong 48). In a similar fashion, while some fans defined certain story tropes used in anime, such as "the importance of friendship" and "the importance of protecting others as the key to being strong", as features of Japaneseness, this is differentiated from the notion that they are *specific* to Japanese culture – for fans, these tropes are Japanese simply because they recur prominently in anime (Leong 51). Conversely, the use of specific visual techniques in anime, like a sweat-

drop on a character’s head to symbolise embarrassment or bemusement, are defined as Japanese because they accrue their meanings in a Japanese context – to put it another way, it is the way these visual cues are coded as symbols and propagated in Japanese culture which enable them to produce meaning (Leong 50).

The disinclination by some fans to specify examples of Japaneseness in itself was revealing. One fan felt that the “scope is just too big” and it would be “like trying to list the elements of American culture that appear in Hollywood films” (Leong 51). Yet even in articulating the difficulty of defining Japaneseness, such a comment draws attention back to the observation that anime is first and foremost an “original product of the concatenation of circumstances that have created the culture of modern Japan” (Napier 2005: 27), thereby reaffirming the link between anime and Japanese culture.

My scholarly study of non-Japanese anime fans, therefore, demonstrates a conceptualisation of Japaneseness that is diverse in its scope, whether as textual features or as an evolving concept, according to their frequency or prominence in anime narratives, in comparison to Western cultural paradigms, and even in explications of the difficulties of delimiting a discourse of Japaneseness (Leong 46-53). In Mittell’s terms, Japaneseness here can be constituted as a genre through the way these individual fan interpretations are linked into “clusters of cultural assumptions” (16) in anime fandom. Hence, rather than downplay the Japaneseness of anime to account for its global popularity, its formulation as genre within a cultural studies framework allows for a more sophisticated negotiation of the complex mix and also an exchange of transcultural values and flows which characterise today’s global climate.

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The *Higurashi* Code

Algorithm and Adaptation in the Otaku Industry and Beyond

John Wheeler

How do you kill the player and resurrect them as a spectator? This question haunts those charged with adapting video games from their interactive form to one that puts an insurmountable barrier between media and the individual – an impossible translation taking place on the most basic structural level. The dilemma surrounding the adaptation of interactivity is visible within the Japanese *otaku* industry, where media forms must be constructed to survive fluid translation from one media form to another.

An adaptation between forms tends to function within a hierarchy of mediums: a book is usually awarded more artistic significance than its film adaptation, the film more than its licensed video game form (Hutcheon 4). Yet, in some ways, the Japanese *otaku* industry works outside of this paradigm, with narratives easily and repeatedly crossing the seemingly impermeable barriers between print, film and digital forms without much respectability lost or gained – manga, for instance, carries little more or less cultural significance than anime or the ‘light’ novel. But as the medium specificity that defines how a form functions and is received cannot be smoothly overcome, one of the innovations of the Japanese *otaku* industry is the way creators either consciously or unconsciously anticipate the inevitable adaptation of their properties on levels of structure, narrative and aesthetic. 07th Expansion’s *Higurashi When They Cry* (*Higurashi no naku koro ni*, hereafter *Higurashi*), a major multimedia franchise in the Japanese industry, exemplifies this trend and also reveals ways in which the creators

driving the *otaku* popular culture industry manipulate narrative and structural elements to ease adaptation.

Higurashi began its commercial life as a “visual novel” in 2002 at the Comiket (Comic Market), a large biannual convention in Tokyo that showcases *dōjin* – self-published print comics and video games that are either derivative versions of popular *otaku* properties or, as in the case of *Higurashi*, completely original works.¹ According to the creator of the 07th Expansion’s website, from its humble origins as a serialized PC visual novel sold in limited quantities at consecutive Comikets, *Higurashi* expanded wildly over the following eight years, crossing mediums through adaptations into an anime television series, manga, novels, a live-action film and finally returning across the barrier of interactivity as a first-person shooting game for the Nintendo DS video game console.

Each of the *Higurashi* PC games is a self-contained story about the rural, isolated world of Hinamizawa and the encounters of its residents with entrenched familial politics and a murderous Shinto cult. The beginning of each story is always the same: teenager Keiichi Maebara moves with his family from Tokyo to the fictional, rural town of Hinamizawa. He adapts to life away from the city and befriends many of the other students, building an idyllic, contained world far from the madness of the city. The narrative turns on a local festival where the same two adults

1. *Dōjin* producers range from single artists/writers working alone and publishing comics (analogous to American underground “zines”) to small independent companies such as 07th Expansion. For an analysis of how Comiket functions within the *otaku* industry, see Azuma 25-26.