

JAPANESE ANIMATION: A POST-MODERN ENTERTAINMENT IN GLOBAL CONTEXT

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In this paper I will observe some of the features of Japanese modern, pre-modern and post-modern in a broader context of globalization through a “window” of the phenomenon called Japanese Animation.

1. As the first step, let me suggest a basic analytical framework expressed in the Figure 1.

In the center of the figure, there appears a phenomenon called Modern or Modernity that has substantially been consisted of Nation-States.

It seems to me that the modern world, consists of nation-states, is splitting off to two different directions; 1. Phenomena “less than” nation-states (Prof. Kouto), such as regionalism, tribe, ethnicity. 2. Phenomena “more than” nation-states (Prof. Kouto), such as MacDonalidization, information society. However, at the same time, there are phenomena that are a sort of hybridity of these two tendencies, such as NOP, NGO movement in that slogan of “think global, act local.” In a sense, MacDonalidization can be seen as a rather simple extension of modern in terms of its basic logic.

Here I will treat the Anime (Japanese animation) as this sort of hybrid phenomenon.

These phenomena of hybridization can also be termed "glocalization" as R. Robertson put it. Seen from the background of the "splitting off", "differentiation" (T.Parsons), however, these phenomena may also be considered as a "seed" for "re-integration" (Parsons) of split social structure for the next stage of social "evolution."

2. As the second step, let me point out some numbers and statistics. "Japanimation" or simply "Anime" is a global phenomenon.

Anime has spread all over the world gaining considerable popularity especially among the younger generation. It also involves the indication that can be termed "plurality of centre of globalisation", in contrast with a phenomenon called McDonaldization.

The base for the Anime industry is the Manga industry in Japan. In 1995, Manga accounted for 40 % of the entire number of publications in circulation in Japan including journals and books. And the all the weekly comic Journals within the top 10 circulation have more than a million circulations. In 1996, seventy--five million dollars worth of Japanese Manga and Anime were exported to the USA (Iwabuchi, Koichi, 2001, p.35). In 2001, more than 100 TV animation programs were broadcasted in Japan. *Doraemon* and *Sazaesan* have been on the air for some 30 years. In the entire world market, it is said that the share of Japanese Anime amounts to can be 60 %, with a whole scale market value of approximately one thousand billion yen. In August 1996, the Journal of American Billboard Ranking announced that No.1 selling video in America was a Japanese Anime entitled "Ghost in the Shell".

In addition, there followed the booming of Miyazaki Hayao's animation series. "Chihiro's Journey" (*Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi*). It is a story about young girl who lost her way with her parents and wandered deep into a strange world. This Anime was awarded the Golden Bear Prize at the Berlin Film Festival. "Chihoro's Journey" broke the sales records in Japan formerly held by Titanic.

Viewers who saw this Anime were not confined to children; adults were also interested in it. Of course this is the reason that the Anime became so popular.

These figures may give you an understanding of the enormity of the presence of this comic and Anime industry in Japan and around the world.

3. The aspects of Manga and Anime as an industry as such

There has been pointed out that there exist a system can be called a "Image Alliance" and the importance of this "Alliance" for the prosperity of those Anime and Manga in today's world (Shiraishi, Saya, 1998).

In this system of the "Image Alliance", the key player is an advertisement agent or company. First of all, the company starts by choosing a certain popular Manga character as the center or core image for the entire promotion. The image of this character may be a symbol of the whole Alliance. Then they try to get sponsors in the form of production and distribution companies. Once they can catch the sponsor, then, they will ask Anime production to make an Anime movie based on this very core character or image they have chosen, and at the same time, they contract the time zone with a TV broadcasting company in which this Anime can be broadcasted once a week. Because this Anime will be broadcasted once a week, the character image easily penetrates the viewer, consumer's daily life and becomes a part of their lives. Once this is achieved, the sponsor can sell the characters--related goods with the development of efficient advertising. Thus, you have the "Alliance" system that started with a certain character or image of Manga, then involve various goods and commercial activities related to this image.

The players involve in this Alliance are the advertisement agency, the publisher of Manga, the original Manga writers, the sponsor, the TV station, the Anime production, the production and distribution company for those Manga characters, and so on.

This is the "Image Alliance". But the point here is that you cannot guarantee the success of this system anytime when big capital is invested in this system. The key lies in the character of Manga. Popular Manga characters should always be

be creating and supplying to this Alliance in the Manga industry as a “treasure-house”. The creation of the soft is the key and it is supported by Manga industry in Japan.

As you know Japanese Anime achieved a degree of world—wide popularity. From this base they can develop that “Image Alliance” strategy outside Japan as well. The result of this strategy there has been a breakthrough of Japanese Anime character in the world. This is a global strategy from the point of view of supplier side, sender’s side.

But the issues concerning this sender’s side are not confined to this “Image Alliance” by big capital. For instance, “Ghost in the Shell” is originated as a Manga written by Shiro Masamune. He has a special career to debut as a Manga writer. Usually Manga writers make their debut as a contributor to a major magazine, journal within the industry. But Shiro first appeared as a writer of one full volume of a complete Manga story. Why was it possible? There has been huge population of young fans and writers as great supporters and readers of Manga. From this community he was able to make his debut as a writer of a book of Manga from the very beginning. The point here is that there is a deep and huge supporting community which also serves as a resource of creative energy for this industry. Without the creativity flowing from this base, the industry could loose its on—going energy for world promotion.

4. Japanese cultural heritages and the prosperity of Anime.

The background of the prosperity of the Anime in Japan set a foundation for a rich culture and tradition of the Japanese comic. What, then, is the secret that makes this Japanese comic so rich and prosperous? One can argue that the deep and plentiful heritage of Japanese comics can be traced back to the 12th century. It is said that the roots of the Japanese comic may be found in the illustrated hand scrolls called “Emakimono” in 12th century.

In a sense, such conjecture may fall victim to criticisms of “invention of tradition”, yet this new “invention” had to arise from somewhere, it is not a creation from nothing. Something had to be the core for this invention. Shigisan Engi Emaki, drawn in the 12th century may provide one example. This is

is a funny story about a miracle. In it, there is a Buddhist saint who lives in a temple located deep in a high mountain and who had with super—powers. In one scene, a rich villager wants to donate bags of rice to the saint but wonders how he can, as the saint lives deep inside the mountain. Suddenly the bags of rice start flying to the saint’s cottage in the mountain, and people are now looking up at this unusual happening with surprise.

Chojuugiga ; the literally translation of which is something like “Caricature of Birds and Beasts” provides another example. Again this was drawn by Buddhist priests in medieval period Japan. It is not an Emakimono in terms of genre, but the texture of the drawings and nature of the movement are similar enough that it would be fair to call it one of the roots of Manga. Ban Dainagon Emaki, drawn in the 12th century, has the same qualities as Shigisan Engi Emaki. These are hand scrolls people enjoyed in the following way: they unroll them from right to left and open for certain breadth each time and read it for certain period, and then move on to next scene enjoying the movement of the scenes. This is just like the way modern people read comics page by page.

The point here is that there were so many hand scrolls of this kind from this time in Japan’s history. The Shigisan Engi Emaki here is just one example. Perhaps Europe has its own illustrated stories like this in its Christian tradition. But the point again here is that this texture of the drawings by a hairbrush, along with the funny story and especially the nature of the movement in these hand scrolls, make up characteristics of expression very much correspondent with Manga today in Japan.

Yet another point is that you need some literacy to “read” or enjoy Manga. There are some conventions or grammar employed in the drawing of Manga and also some background knowledge required to decode and to be really familiar with this world of Manga. These illustrated hand scrolls provide a fundamental base for that sort of literacy.

So one can assume that Japan has some longstanding cultural background for this comic industry.

5. Manga and Anime as a Text

Manga and Anime have some particular basic structural qualities as texts. One of the well known and a leading creators of Anime (working with Miyazaki) named Takahata once said : "the roots of Japanese Anime are those Illustrated Hand Scrolls in 12th century Japan, but behind these, there is a real root of Manga : that is the Japanese language itself." (Takahata, Isao, 1999, p.7). According to Takahata, the real root of Manga is the peculiar linguistic system of the Japanese language. This is summarised in the quality of the language as "ambiguous and multi-dimensionally stratified structure of visual symbols and phonetic symbols."(Takahata, Isao, 1999, p.7).

As a matter of fact, the Japanese language has three different systems of written expression: *Kanji* (Chinese letters), *Hirakana*, and *Katakana*. Hiranaka and Katakana are sets of phonetic symbols, while Kanji are of course ideograms, visual symbols that have meanings. When Kanji, Chinese Letters were introduced from China, Japanese people had their own language but did not have proper orthography, or a means of expressing it in letters. So Japanese people at that time started rendering or borrowing the pronunciation of Chinese Letters to express their own original pronunciation of Japanese language. This occurred sometime between the 8th and 9th centuries. But the correspondence between Chinese characters and their pronunciation in Japanese is not a rigid one. For example, there were 87 phonemes in Japanese speech at that time but to express these phonemes there were 970 Chinese characters.

From this corresponding system, Japanese invented two genuine phonetic systems of symbols called Hirakana and Katakana. Yet at the same time, the tradition of using Chinese characters still remained. This is the starting point of the "ambiguity of the relationship between Chinese characters and Japanese pronunciation." In other words, in Japanese language, the visual symbols, or Chinese characters (pictures), and phonetic symbols, or voice (reading), which is the Japanese rendering of a Chinese ideograph, do not necessarily hold a one to one correspondence with each other.

In those Emakimono illustrated hand scrolls, just beside the pictures, or set off on

on the other pages of the same hand scrolls, there usually also appeared the words, script lines that explain the situation. Takahata insists that these Emakimono are combinations of pictures and phonetic symbols, words, and that pictures can be more eloquent than phonetic symbols while phonetic symbols can be more accurate than pictures. But not necessarily rigid one by one correspondence. He asserts that the combination of pictorial and phonetic symbols is quite similar to those in Manga. Sometimes a contradictory combination such as a smiling face and crying speech lines are possible in Manga. He insists that all these things basically derive from the "ambiguous and multi-dimensionally stratified structure of visual symbol and phonetic symbol" in Japanese language.

I am not sure whether this theory is quite right or not in terms of genuine linguistic theory but the ideas contained here are "interesting," to say the least.

Three years ago, there was a TV program featuring *Ghost in the Shell*, and in this program some Manga experts stated that the basic grammar of *Ghost in the Shell* lies in its "overlapping character of organic things and inorganic things, and various heterogenetic entities." (Natsume Fusanosuke). Examples of these heterogenetic things as expressions of Manga are lines made by ruler and freehand, colored by computer graphics and by hand, and the interface between the fleshy human body and electronic cyber space.

In other words, this is a fusion of a series of systems of different origins, such as visual symbols and phonetic symbols, organic hand written lines and inorganic lines produced with ruler or computer on a flat picture plane. These things are separated from their original context, and made "fragmented" (one of the key words in post-modern discourse), and arranged on the flat one plane.

Thus, we have at hand not just the matters of the heritage of Japanese illustrated hand scrolls in the 12th century, but matter of globalization and the post-modern condition.

Theoretically, three different elements are of concern here: (1) the peculiar quality of Manga and Anime as a Text, with their "ambiguous and multi-dimensionally stratified structure"; (2) the fitness of this character to the quality of post-modern condition; (3) in the huge trend of globalization, the

fitness has been flourished fully and resulted in the world—wide popularity of Japanese Anime.

6. Glocalization and Anime

In the *Modernity at Large—Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Arjun Appadurai states that “they[electronic media] are resources for experiments with self—making in all sorts of societies, for all sorts of persons....Because of the sheer multiplicity of the forms in which they appear (cinema, television, computers, and telephones) and because of the rapid way in which they move to through daily life routines, electronic media provide resources for self—imaging as an everyday social project.”(Appadurai, 1996, p.3-4). “ The link between the imagination and social life, I would suggest, is increasingly a global and deterritorialized one.”(Appadurai, 1996, p.55).

In these passages, it seems to me that Appadurai talks about the intermesh between the process of glocalization and post-modern experiences. Also the passages may remind one the episode of the Wachowski brothers. The Wachowski brothers, the directors of the movie *Matrix* once said after viewing “Ghost in the Shell” at the theatre that they wanted to make a movie like it.

This episode may be interpreted three or four.

(1) The Japanese market may prove quick lucrative for Hollywood so the director said this as a sort of promotion?

(2) Secondly, we can read it as a symbol of the pluralization of the center of globalisation. I mean that under recent conditions, it seems that the West and Western countries can no longer monopolize globalisation. Things and events to be globalized are not necessarily dispatched from the West. Japanese pop culture in general is one of reflection of this recent change. At the same time, the Western hegemony has been so deeply and strongly imbedded in our world system in Wallerstein’s sense, that people cannot deny the structural inequality and on going cultural hegemony of the West.

It is easy to see that Japanese pop cultures including animation, has been influenced deeply by western culture. For instance, the faces of heroes and heroines—especially heroines—are usually not typically Japanese. Sometimes they

they have blond hair, blue eyes, and big round eyes. At the same time, in my impression, these are not just purely western faces either. Instead, we have invented a sort of face of a new species who inhabit only in the world of Anime. In other words, after heavy influences from the West, we have Japanese them and then redistributed them around the world.

(3). A third interpretation of Wachowski's comment, involves the glocalizing process itself; the mixture or hybridity of world cultures themselves. This entails a process of arranging or fusing different elements from around the world. Then this arranged or fused new invention can circulate all over the world. As a result of this circulation or "travelling culture" (James Clifford), yet another new arrangement or fusion will take place. The process is an ever-repeating one in our glocalized world.

(4) This brings about a fourth interpretation of Wachowaki's episode. It seems to me that the process of the transformation of the "Ghost in the Shell" into the *Matrix* required something "special". I mean the translation process that occurred in making the film of the *Matrix* was neither easy nor automatic. Generally speaking, I think, for the crystallization of cultural elements that are circulating in the world to take place, to rise to and for the crystallized product level of new and highly organized masterpiece such as the *Matrix*, there must be a local tradition or heritage of culture in place. In the case of the *Matrix*, that was Hollywood know how; the ability to make and launch a smash hit movie film in the world market.

Also in the case of Japan, we have such a long tradition and heritage for Manga civilization from 12th century. The recent prosperity of Anime should be interpreted as a consequence of the mixture of the following elements:

- (1) The heritage of Japanese illustrated hand scrolls;
- (2) Influence of American comics just after the WW□;
- (3) Genius like that of Osamu Tezuka, who he said he was influenced by Disney yet invented quite a different world from Disney.

To sum up, we can describe Fig.2 as a theoretical map for reading the phenomena concerning Manga and Anime. As the figure suggests, we have seen the Anime in terms of social context first, such as "image alliance" and coterie magazine in the

coterie magazine in the sender, production side, and grass—roots fan and readers in the receivers, consumer's side. On the opposite pole of the vertical axis, we have seen anime as a particular “text.” In these boxes, we have seen the manga or anime literacy on both sides of sender and receiver. Also we have seen concerning the both sides, cultural heritage from Japanese tradition, characteristics of linguistic system of Japanese, and the post—modern condition in general.

7. Post—Modern and Anime

The popularity of and readiness to accept Anime in general especially among the younger generation, is indicative of a deeper predisposition toward the post-modern condition.

The following concepts are central to the notion of the post-modern:

(1) Fragmentation of time, space arrangement; this is closely related to the process called glocalization. You can imagine daily life with MTV and the Internet that can take you to every small corner in the world at once, in the blink of an eye. This situation can transform your life into a fragmented space and time.

(2) Aesthetisation of daily life. This process concerns the generalization of the urban lifestyle. Georg Simmel has already mentioned this process of aesthetisation of life, but for him this tendency is limited to a select group of the upper or middle class dwelling in a metropolitan area that presents a wide variety of choices and can accommodate vast range of taste.

(3) De-centralization of the self or deconstruction of the subject. As consequence of the fragmentation of time and space, “the modern man” described by D. Riesman as a human being who has internalized one transcendental value system no longer exists. Here “transcendental” means that value system which is not imbedded in each concrete context but is transcendent beyond that. Instead of this type of modern man, “the Other—oriented” person, as Riesmann put it is now dominant.

Also there has been, it seems to me, taking place the process of so to speak the “de—humanization” of philosophy or quality of value. Ironically, however, as the concomitant process, or reverse side of the same process, industries of healing, therapy or psychotherapy are flourishing. The culture of seeking after oneself is

oneself is now in a state of boundless proliferation.

8. Conclusion

In above-mentioned sense, glocalization and post-modernization are now in the process of mutual interpenetration.

Regarding the issue of the breakdown of grand narrative, we are facing so many different small narratives and stories from every corner of the world that have their own “exotic” flavours.

It is easy to see the connection between this phenomenon and the fragmentation of time and space, and then the connection of the phenomena with the process of pluralization of the centre for globalisation.

Finally, this fragmentation of time and space is correspondent with syncretism on the level of a value system. Japanese syncretism is in direct correspondence with both the processes of modernization and post-modernization. The basic task of the modernization in Japan was quite different from that of West. In Japan, since acceptance, adaptation and a short-term catch-up strategy were the key issues, Japanese syncretism, and a patchwork of the religions had some functional relevance. Thus Japanese modernity already had some elements of post-modernity in its own modern process, and now these are coming to the fore. But if we note the differences between modern and post-modern Japan—as I say—while in the modern process, “catching up” was the key issue, in post-modern settings invention and creation are now the issue of importance, and emphasis falls on Japan as the one of the pluralized centres for glocalization.

It was mentioned at the beginning of this paper that the two tendencies of “splitting—off” from the modern structures, namely the phenomena “less than nation-state” and “more than nation-state”. Also mentioned that there have been some new phenomena that can be called bridging activities between the two, such as NOP or NGO. In the field of cultural phenomena, Japanese animation can be seen as one of these bridging movements. Anime is a combination of the local, cultural heritage and the global market system creating one of the plural centers of globalization and fitting to the post-modern conditions in the cotemporary world.

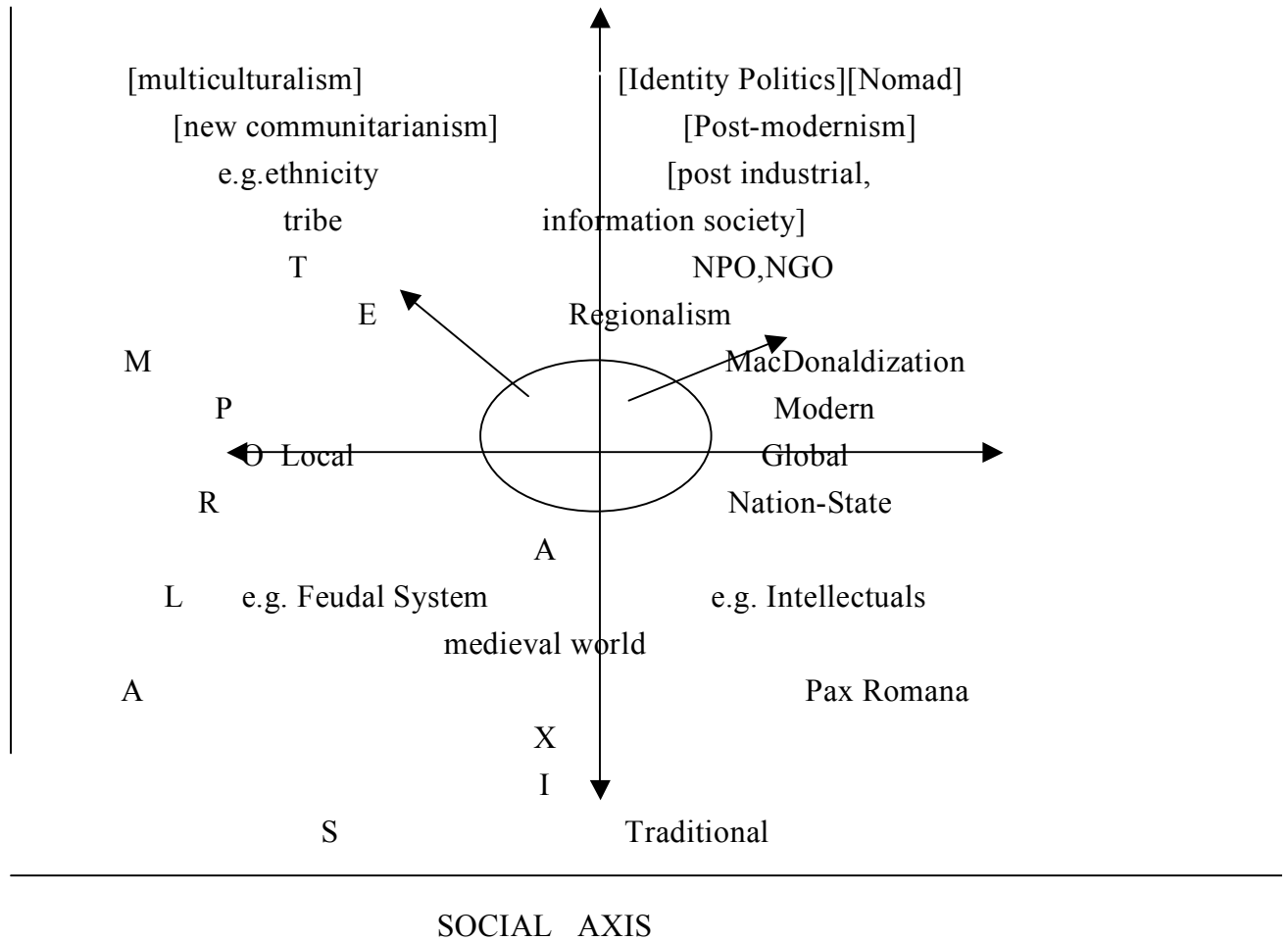
In this sense, the process of “re-integration” or “inclusion” that Talcott Parsons

once put it, seems to be getting into a new, really interesting yet unpredictable route of bringing it into being.

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Figure 1
Post-modern (High Modern)



It seems to me that the modern world, consists of nation-states, is splitting off to two different directions; 1. Phenomena “less than” nation-state (Prof. Kouto), such as regionalism, tribe, ethnicity. 2. Phenomena “more than” nation-state (Prof. Kouto), such as MacDonalidization, information society. However, at the same time, there are phenomena that are a sort of hybridity of these two tendencies, such as NOP, NGO movement in that slogan of “think global, act local.” In a sense, MacDonalidization can be seen as a rather simple extension of modern in terms of its basic logic. Here I will treat the Anime (Japanese animation) as this sort of hybrid phenomenon. These phenomena of hybridization can also be termed “Glocalization” as R. Robertson put it. Seen from the background of the “splitting off”, “differentiation” (T.Parsons), however, these phenomena may also be considered as a “hope” or seed for “re-integration” (Parsons) of split social structure for the next stage of social “evolution.”

Figure 2
Analytical Scheme for “Reading” the Phenomena around Anime

