

“Has fan subbing caused an increase in cultural exchange between Japan and the western world?”

Fan subbing is the translation of a media (in particular anime) and then sharing it with a wider audience, who are incapable of understanding the media's original language. Fan subbing has played a major role in increasing the extent of cultural exchange between Japan and the western world. As time has passed, there has been fan subbed material and therefore more access. However, this increased access also contributes to piracy as those who fan sub do not have the rights to distribution. One major argument supporting fan subbing increasing cultural exchange between Japan and the western world is that it forgoes the localisation of media – it instead presents it with all the ideals of the original work, rather than altering them to fit to the target country. In addition, another reason fan subbing may have increased the cultural exchange is that it provided an avenue for the Japanese market to target outside of its own country, without reliance on expensive advertising. Besides these, fan subbing also helps open up a completely different market from film media; merchandising. Even with a perceived loss of revenue caused by fan subbing, some content producers use this in order to sell merchandise which otherwise would not have turned up in western hands, a manner of physical cultural exchange. Also important to note is that fan subbing has had an influence on the amount of tourism between Japan and the western world. Fan subbing has also had an effect on the amount of individuals studying the Japanese language. Each facet demonstrates a clear correlation between fan subbing and the increase of exchange of culture.

Fan-subbing is something that increases cultural exchange between Japan and western society by forgoing the localisation of media. Instead, it presents the media while displaying the ideals

of the original work, rather than presenting the media in a form which blends into the ideals of western society. When anime is officially translated into English, it often has elements of it which are altered in order to make it more suitable for a western audience (Chambers, 2012). In fact, American companies were adept in altering media so much that there would only be the scantest references to Japan, if any at all (Leonard, 2004). Another important factor to note is that ever since the nineteen-eighties fan subbing has been practiced by overseas fans within clubs. Fan subbing is a controversial issue due to often being a non-commercial effort in order to increase recognition of anime within the community at large. As such, there are often many practices recommended for consumers of the fan-subbed content in order for them to support the professional translation industry. It is within this manner, that fan-subbing can be seen as holding a dual nature of both helping and fighting the professional industry: The professional industry relies on fan-subbed content in order to gauge interest while at the same time competing for views (Ito, 2012). This demonstrates a clear association between fansubbing and an increase in cultural exchange between Japan and western society.

Another important factor of how fan subbing has contributed to the cultural exchange between Japan and the western world is that it has allowed for the Japanese market to target outside of its own country, without relying on expensive marketing techniques. While fan subbing was recognised as piracy by Japanese production studios in America, these companies did not attempt to stop them. They could not officially endorse the practices of those who fan subbed anime and views of the said anime as they did not have the authority and they were aware that if they asked the head offices in Tokyo, they would be rejected. The anime industry has had a unique relationship with piracy. Due to the fact that fan subbers were not profiting from their actions, the studios did not attempt to stop them. Some websites, such as Anime News

Network, actually opted to give a list of ethics that fan subbers often followed. These ranged from allowing those who spoke the English language to see anime they would not have seen otherwise, to the fact that fan subbers should act in a manner which minimizes the impact on commercial interests ("A new ethical code for Digital Fansubbing", 2003). Due to this, Japanese studios attempted to make use of the fans which wanted to popularise the anime media. While rejecting to give official permission to air screenings of fan subbed anime, Tatsunoko said to fans as a side note "by the way,... Could you show them your copies of these cartoons?" (Leonard, 2004, p.20). Due to the non-profit nature of fan subbing, rather than being hostile, it was possible to make use of the fan subbing fans in order to market Japanese anime without it costing anything (Leonard). This demonstrates how fan subbing has been used as a cheap marketing tool by the Japanese market. This also shows insight into how fan subbing has acted as an intermediary in order for Japan and western culture to increase the exchange of culture.

In addition to this, a curious effect of fan subbing is the increase of studios relying on merchandise, rather than only being dependant upon the anime media itself. Merchandising is one of the largest amounts of profit for the anime industry. In 2015, the industry managed to earn approximately 655 billion yen (8,138,081,502.558 AUD), twice the amount it earned in television airings. This itself shows how the anime industry earns more from merchandising than it does from the media itself (Anime Industry Data, 2015). However, in addition to this, there are some Japanese studios which ignore the fact that those who view fan subs access their content for free, instead relying on the fact that these fans may instead buy their merchandise (Chambers, 2012). In the Anime Industry Report, it is also claimed that "While sales in Movie, Video and Music categories shrunk, those in... Overseas... categories

increase”(Anime Industry Data). Also backing up how merchandising is being increasingly relied on is Crunchyroll’s new partnership with Loot Crate™. They claim that the partnership will extend the experience of their customers, with both an extensive amount of anime as well as the exclusive content from Loot Crate (Marketwired, 2016). As crunchyroll once supplied copyright infringing materials (“Funimation, Bandai Entertainment Respond on Crunchyroll (Updated)”, 2008), this demonstrates how fan subbing has lead to anime becoming a tool to further the exchange of culture between Japan and the western world via merchandising.

There is also the factor of tourism to account for when considering the exchange of culture between Japan and the western world. Since fan subbing has become increasingly prevalent, tourism has also increased to a large degree. The degree of tourism into Japan has been rapidly increasing since fan subbing has become extremely prevalent. The two, as well, have an intriguing relation contrary to the common belief of the public. In around nineteen eighty-two, most Japanese studios left America, however a few remained (Leonard, 2004). A few later, however, when fan subbing increased a substantial amount, the amount of tourism began to increase quite substantially (“Historical Statistics - Visitors to Japan”, 2016). Relevant as well, are the extensive amount of sites which aim to invite English speaking fans of anime to invite to experience the world of anime and manga comics. While this displays some importance, it is also furthered by how there are anime museums and theme parks designed in order to capture the attention of anime enthusiasts. In a broad sense, these types of museums and theme parks may attempt to attract anime enthusiasts from both within Japan and out of Japan without care. In fact, “Anime tourist sites have been developing... for more than a decade” (Denison, 2010). Fan subbing has lead to anime becoming popular and in turn, lead to anime causing tourism to

expand. This is just one other demonstration of fan subbing causing the cultural exchange between Japan and the western world to increase.

Also important to take note of, is how fan subbing has had an impact on the amount of individuals learning the Japanese language. Anime is one unique aspect of Japanese culture which creates an attraction for individuals who might not even have other Japanese speakers around. When asked, many individuals learning Japanese responded that they had an interest in discovering more about the Japanese culture in their studies. They expected to be able to learn about such as the life of living in Japan as well as the between the cultural practices of American and Japanese people (McEown, Noels & Saumure, 2014). There are individuals who attempt to learn Japanese for the sole reason of watching anime without subtitles. Kbgghost (2013) states he has been wanting to "...learn Japanese to watch anime without subtitles..." (kbgghost, p.2). SHiN (2016) makes a note that he is learning Japanese in order to carry on his fan subbing group. He states that he is learning Japanese through his own methods, although he believes them to be inefficient. These are just some ways in which anime and fan subbing has impacted upon the amount of Japanese learners, in turn leading to Japan and the western world having a heightened amount of cultural exchange.

One more idea in regards to how fan subbing has increased the cultural exchange between Japan and the western world has to do with gender roles. Within the anime, Cowboy Bebop, standard heterosexual characters are created in order to comply with the standard perception of heterosexuality. Both the art style and language used within the anime puts focus on the "masculinity or femininity of the characters" (Hiramoto, 2013, p.74). In contrast, the less desirable characters are made to appear unattractive and have speech patterns that do not

comply with the standard views. The reason the major ideology succeeds is due to its ability to convince individuals that it is the proper way of life. Standard traits such as males should be “macho” (Hiramoto, p.74) while females should be “babes” has become extremely commonplace in media such as anime. The reason Cowboy Bebop became an international success was due to the fact that the viewers “believed in and expected such hegemonic heterosexual ideology”. In both Japanese and American English, by relying on Normative and non-normative language expressions, they could remove complications of peculiar natures from characters personalities. In Cowboy Bebop, this was used to erase information that might interfere with the clear cut right and wrong interpretations of the identities of the male and female characters (Hiramoto, 2013). This gender role interpretation shows how the exchange of culture between Japan and the western world is possible. Due to having similar ideals, it was possible for media from Japan to become an international success, furthering the amount of individuals exposed to Japanese culture.

A large amount of data shows that there is a higher than ever exchange between Japan and western society. By avoiding the pitfalls which official translations of Japanese media succumb to, fan-subbing allows for individuals from the western world to learn of cultural differences in the form of entertainment. Thus, fansubbing has caused an increase in the exchange of culture between Japan and the Western World.

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