Does Anime Really Accelerate Teenagers’ Problem? : Analysis of Anime in Taiwan

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I. Introduction

1. Motivation of the Study

Taiwanese tend to have negative impression and harsh criticism on anime. Fans of anime are often considered ignoramus, otaku\(^1\), erotic, or people who indulge in his or her own world. But why do people regard the act of watching anime shallow and childish? It is probably because of the inseparable bond between Japan and anime. Since Japan is notorious for its erotic industry, anything related to it is vulgarized. For example, the CNN news considers Tokyo, Japan a city of lust, stating “Tokyo is like a dirty old man in a teenager's body. But one who celebrates his lewd desires with the gusto of an exhibitionist poodle on heat.” Since Japan, labeled as “a city of lust,” is closely related to anime, it is inevitable that anime would be denigrated. But why does the majority believe so? On the other hand, the habit of watching anime is often described as the addictive and void behavior. For instance, Kuo-kuang Huang, the professor in the department of Psychology of National Taiwan University, compares passion for anime to drug addiction, severely criticizing the fans of anime for zealous activities, such as FF(Fancy Frontier), CWT(Comic World in Taiwan). For these reasons, we are to find out why Taiwanese are biased toward anime as well as to justify the value of anime. Hence, we conduct this study to figure out the answers to the research questions mentioned below.

2. Background of the Study

The following is to discuss the origin of manga and animation respectively. First, the history of manga was first developed in 12\(^{th}\) century. During the 1950s, manga have steadily become a major part in the Japanese publishing industry. Second, the earliest Japanese animation could be traced back to 1917; many nascent Japanese animations were produced in the following decades. The characteristic of animation style is developed in the 1960s and became known outside Japan in the 1980s. Among these works, Osamu Tezuka’s was the well-known one who enjoyed international fame.

In 1997, anime, the term referring to both animation and manga, was prevailing throughout Japan. Following Japan’s step, the anime in Taiwan was in its heyday probably from 1995 to 1997.

\(^1\) originally “otaku is one person who can adapt to the era of visual image” in Japan; in Taiwan, this word is imposed with a negative implication.
3. Purpose of the Study

This essay aims at overthrowing the stereotype opinion of anime in Taiwan. To justify our point of view, we will analyze this social phenomenon—the discrimination against animation and manga—from the following two perceptions: culture background, education system.

4. Research of the Study

To understand more about the viewpoints from the public, the research questions suggested this study be presented as follows.

RQ1. What people think about people who watch anime?
RQ2. Why people have negative impression on anime in Taiwan?
RQ3. Why don’t parents allow their children to watch anime?

II. Thesis

1. Two factors that contribute to the stereotypes of anime

1.1 Culture background

The biggest obstacle hindering the development of anime in Taiwan is that the public fail to realize the value of anime, and even discriminate against anime. Though this phenomenon has changed gradually, most people still believe that “only children will watch the anime.” Why do people tend to have this stereotyped opinion? Because the anime in early phase was mostly created for children, most people now still think so, which cripples the development of anime in Taiwan. On the other hand, it is creativity and originality of art that generates the most important characteristics of anime, which can later lead to more commercial potential. However, once its commercial potential was overemphasized, anime will become a “commodity” instead of a “creation”. Writers would create their work according to the expectations of companies or customers but at the cost of originality and creativity. Due to these reasons, development of anime in Taiwan will be hampered.

If government only emphasizes the dimension of economy and industry, it will become a shallow discourse, overlooking the possibility and approach to strengthen it.
For a long time, Taiwan society regards anime as an unorthodox “popular culture,” focusing on its “popularity” sphere but not its “culture” sphere. This way of thinking needs to be changed immediately.

Yoshinori Kanada once asked, “Why should we watch anime?” Actually the answer is very simple: we can obtain wonderful experience by watching anime. In other words, we are “able to understand each other” and thereby have happiness. Who is the so-called “each other?” Yoshinori believes that “each other” refers to the characters in anime, the producer of anime, and the audience of anime. We are not imprisoned by the anime nor merely watch anime. Instead, we are trying to understand others’ feeling, connecting with different countries.

1.2 Education system

In Taiwan, with the deep-rooted traditional thoughts, the elder think characters are much more important than images. They prefer to use the characters in regulation to expound moral lessons, but they forget the fundamental fact, that is, character is actually made up of images. Take Cangjieii for example, he created character based on images. In other words, without images, there will be no characters. The public should by no means overlook the importance of images.

Nowadays, the Martian languageiii is popular among teenagers. Such ways of expression originate from anime or Internet. In litterateur’s opinion, it is a deterioration of language, but in juvenile’s opinion, it represents the ideology of visual composition in their generation. Also, Chen Jingzhi, the vice-president in Taosheng publisher, said that “character isn’t the only way to present language.” He even took e-book and audio book for instance- “the essence of books is to convey the knowledge, and character is not the only approach; picture, animation, and even sound can also be taken into consideration.” He emphasizes that although human beings read book mainly for knowledge or the great goal of education, some read just for amusements. On the other hand, Mark J Penn, the author of Microtrends, believes that some video games require high IQ and can provide players more advantages than disadvantages. The video game can be transformed into the means of education and even strengthens the ability of crisis management. Both video game and manga can stimulate the

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ii Cangjie is an important figure in ancient China. He observes all things, including the sun, moon, stars, clouds, lakes, oceans, as well as all manner of bird and beast to create characters.

iii The term is popular on the Internet; the young Internet users begin to use massive homophone and special symbols to express character for the sake of convenience and individuality.
mental ability of innovation. For young generation, it can foster their imagination.

The tide of anime formed, educationists shouldn’t exclude this subculture, but swim with the tide to reach the purpose of education. For example, Tanikau Akihide, a professor in Tsukuba University, Japan, and a researcher of manga, uses manga as a teaching material. He spares no efforts to promote the teaching methods by combining textbook and manga. In fact, he compares the difference between manga and textbook to that between a person’s left and right brain. Textbook, belongs to “public” world, symbolizing correctness, rationality and learning capacity. Manga, belongs to “private” world, representing adventure, dream and critical capability. In other words, one is sense, another is sensibility. During the process of study, what people need is not just the part of “public” but more importantly the realm consisting of dream, adventure and critical capability. In short, the essence of manga and education is the same, that is, it gives the children a dream.

2. Methods

Our study aimed at overthrowing Taiwanese stereotype opinion of anime. This chapter described the following two parts: the introduction of participants and the instruments we employed.

2.1 Participants

There were 330 participants taking part in this questionnaire survey. They are people aged from 10 to over 50 randomly selected from school and Bei-men road in Tainan. Most senior high school students are from Shin-Hua Industrial Vocational High School. Among these participants, there were 191 female and 137 male.

2.2 Instruments

A quantitative method was mainly used in this study. The instrument was a questionnaire survey (see Appendix) used to assess the study of why Taiwanese people have negative impression on anime. The questions listed were used to collect background information on the participants, such as gender and ages. The other 10 questions aimed to know their impressions on anime.
RQ1. What people think about people who watch anime?

The result seems to point out that people who watch anime is filled with imagination (Figure 1). In fact, the meaning of anime is to “express life.” By combining the frame of anime with acousto-optic effect, anime makes the pictures and the images alive. The most vital merit is that the anime supervisor makes a lot of efforts to improve anime. So originality and particularity of anime in Japan come into beginning. Furthermore, most people do not consider the people who like watching anime as otaku (Figure 2). Actually, the meaning of “otaku” in Japan is different from that in Taiwan. In Japan, otaku are not only fans of anime, but people believing that watching anime is a means of social practice. They think anime is a way of “sculpturing” the quality of life. Therefore, they discuss unceasingly, create anime, and communicate with other community. In addition, Toshio Okada said that we can call people watching anime “anime fans”, not otaku. Otaku refers to someone who has the ability of adapting to the era of imagination and searching for the information throughout different domains. However, the meaning of otaku is changed into a negative one in Taiwan. If someone loves anime, they are called otaku. To make things worse, if someone who does not go out for a long time or does not care about his appearance, they are also called otaku.

Figure 1 What do you feel about people who watch anime?
RQ2. Why people have negative impression on anime in Taiwan?

The survey shows that the majority regard anime as recreation while the minority still has negative impression (Figure 3). The results also explain why Taiwanese have such negative impression on anime, and the major reason can be attributed to the mass media’s influence (Figure 4). The mass media makes us believe that anime will accelerate social problems. Yet is anime really connected to pornography or violence? Will watching anime accelerate the crime rate of violence and sexual assault? Loveday and Chiba (1986) indicate that there is no reliable evidence proving that anime is related to pornography and violence. Yet, this unproven belief will cause more and more parents prohibit their children from watching anime. This disapproval of watching anime would add pressure on children. On the other hand, comparing the manga’s sales volume and the violate crime rate of America with those of Japan. Schodt (1996: 49~50) finds out that manga sold in Japan is ten times as much as in America; on the contrary, the murder and violate crime rate in Japan is one-tenth of that in America. Consequently, it is exaggerative to believe that manga is equal to social problem.
RQ3. Why don’t parents allow their children to watch anime?

The outcome shows that most parents will worry about their children watching anime based on the following four reasons. First, they are worried that their kids might contact something violence, erotic, bloody, etc. Second, they are worried that their kids might not be engaged in schoolwork because of anime. Third, they are worried that their kids have impractical thought due to exaggerative plot. Fourth, they are worried that their kids will become otaku (Figure 5). In fact, from parents’ viewpoint, the most important thing for teenagers is to be concentrate on their study. With the media exaggerative reports about anime, parents worried more that watching anime may cause degeneration and worse grade, etc. Osamu Tezuka states his viewpoint, “Parents should not attribute children’s reluctance to study to manga. Modern children literature describes daily life in tedious way. As far as children are concerned, they are tired of following the same pattern, aren’t they? Also, I thought that there is no ‘dream’ in modern children literature. Although some might consider my manga ridiculous or vulgar, it does give children dreams. For this particular reason, I keep drawing manga incessantly.” Modern children literature is short of the vividness and modernity. Therefore, children nowadays are lack of the ability to dream vastly and infinitely. It is in manga that children can search for their dreams.
III. Conclusion

The tide of anime has become overwhelming among teenagers and continues to expand through peers’ interaction. In such a free and open society, people should not restrain this trend, but instead, they should think how to swim with the tide to realize the ideal education—teaching through anime. After all, a good comics or animation could never be accomplished without efforts, creativity, and brainstorming. It is a compound product of culture consisting of a great script, character, drawing skill, and storyboard. However, some anime may include sexual plots, which, in fact, is not the emphasis of anime. Without realizing its real implication, people should think twice before judging it. As far as we are concerned, anime may not be others’ preference, but they should at least respect it. We hope those who have never watched anime should stop criticizing anime and try to make out the essence of anime. From our perspective, the essence of anime is not merely its amusing and touching plots or knowledge it teaches us, but “what” anime really convey to us. Everyone can find his or her own treasure from anime. Manga is more than entertainment; it is an exploration and a dialogue. In fact, a good work can inspire our thoughts and let us experience different life and ideas.

IV. References

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V. Appendix

Hello, we are the students of the Department of Applied Foreign Languages, HHVS. We conducted this survey to understand more about the viewpoints of public. This survey was just designed for our study. Please answer the following questions based on your case. Thank you very much.

1. What’s your gender?
□(1)male □(2)female

2. How old are you?
□(1)10~20 □(2)21~30 □(3)31~40 □(4)41~50 □(5)50↑

3. How do you feel about anime?
□(1) I love it. □(2)I hate it. □(3)Neither like nor dislike.

4. What anime have you seen?
5. Do you view people watching anime as otaku?  
□(1)Yes, I do. □(2)No, I don’t.

6. What do you think are the effects of anime on young people?  
□(1)I can learn all sorts of things from anime.  
□(2)It will not only endanger juvenile’s personality but also result in negative outcome.  
□(3)Both good and bad.

7. What do you feel about people who watch anime?  
□(1)their motivation is impure □(2)their thought is childish □(3)they are full of imagination □(4)they can comprehend things easily

8. What is your impression on anime?  
□(1)erotic □(2)violent and bloody □(3)hot-blooded □(4)cozy and heart-warming  
□(5)humorous □(6)recreational □(7)non-constructive □(8)others: __________

9. Why do you have this impression?  
□(1)mass media □(2)self-feeling □(3)family □(4)friends

10. Do you feel repulsive to people who disregards others’ feelings and talks about anime in public loudly?  
□(1)No, I don’t. □(2)Yes, I do, and feel uncomfortable. □(3)Yes, I do, but don’t care about it.

11. Do you agree to let your children watch anime?  
□(1)Yes, I do.(Please ignore question 12) □(2)No, I don’t.

12. If disagree, why?  
□(1)I’m worried that my kids might contact something violence, erotic, bloody, etc.  
□(2)I’m worried that my kids might not be engaged in schoolwork because of anime.  
□(3)I’m worried that my kids might have impractical thought due to exaggerative plot.  
□(4)I’m worried that my kids will become an otaku.  
□(5)Above all.