



Ian Condry, *The Soul of Anime: Collaborative Creativity and Japan's Media Success Story*

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THIS BOOK is a valuable contribution to studies of Japanese animation (or anime) and of the globalization of popular cultural media products more broadly. Ian Condry is an anthropologist, and the analyses he presents in the book are based on the fieldwork he conducted intermittently between 2004 and 2010 with several anime studios in Tokyo (5). The methodological premise is the first strength of *The Soul of Anime*; it is unusual in its focus on the production of anime, broadly defined. The book's key concepts are "collaborative creativity" and "the social in media," through which Condry examines the ways in which anime exists as "a kind of portable creative platform" (2) across various media and communities of fans and creators alike.

Anime studios mobilize an elaborate and complex division of labor in the production process. Some core divisions are hosted in-house (for example, director, character designer, producer), but many others are subcontracted to smaller studios specializing in specific processes (for example, background art, filming/digital composition) as well as to freelancers that make up the majority of animators and episode directors (that is, those who direct particular episodes in a television series). While the Japanese animation industry is clustered in western Tokyo, the two most labor-intensive divisions, that is, in-betweening and coloring, are now mostly outsourced to large-scale subcontractors in China, South Korea, and the Philippines. In the first instance, the author's emphasis on collaboration in anime production reflects this reality of a closely jointed but expansive network of production. But collaborative creativity means a lot more than a network of freelancers and subcontractors.

Each chapter aims to advance the understanding of anime as a labile media product by departing from the individualistic, author-centered model of creation and incorporating social contexts in which particular creations or fan practices take place. The author's call to pay more attention to world views and characters in a given series as significant aspects of anime creation, as opposed to stories, is a good case in point (chapter 2). Noting how the designing of characters and the world they inhabit took precedence over the actual writing of a story during an early phase of project development, Condry invites the readers to think: "How do our interpretive methods change if we consider not primarily the stories of anime but the combination of characters and worlds?" (56).

Anime characters typically move across various media platforms with supple ease, be it video games, manga, toys, magazines, and so on. This is partly due to the extensive character merchandizing that accompanies any large project but, in a more democratic sense, also because characters are themselves the portable creative plat-

form on which fans can build and expand their own social worlds with other fans, such as through “cosplay” (that is, posing as particular characters), “fan-subbing” (that is, the unofficial online distribution of anime series with fan-made subtitles; see chapter 6), or large-scale conventions. The concept of collaborative creativity Condry proposes is both expansive and inclusive in that it analytically incorporates a series of fan practices which would otherwise be labeled “consumption” as part of a wider network of collective creation of value regarding the given anime series. In fact, the success of an anime project ultimately hinges on the extent to which it succeeds in generating this kind of collaborative momentum that engages both creators and fans—what Condry calls “social energy” throughout the book, as an open platform for participation.

The author is careful to avoid the type of cultural essentialism—for example, anime *is* the window into Japanese society, anime comes from the depth of Japanese culture—that often paralyzes the sober analysis of anime and other forms of popular culture in contemporary Japan, and he should be applauded for it. This is particularly the case in chapter 7, where Condry critically engages with the sensationalized stereotype of alienated *otaku* (defined as a young person who is obsessed with particular aspects of popular culture to the detriment of their social skills) men who profess their love for anime characters. The ways in which he uncovers the underlying social contexts in which this happens and shows how the phenomenon underscores larger changes in contemporary Japan about the values of love, masculinity, and productivity, not only shows his commitment to the ethnographic method, but also to the effectiveness of the notion of “the social in media” as an analytical cue in the book.

As the author acknowledges at the outset, one potential drawback of the book is the possibility of gender bias, in that the ethnographic materials discussed show a discernible “lean toward the male end of the anime spectrum” (6). With respect to the content of ethnography, the author successfully juxtaposes a wide range of materials, from anime studios to voice acting to fan conventions and even online communities, but many accounts appear to be based on interviews, rather than in-depth participant observation. For instance, three studio ethnographies in chapter 5, while illuminating in demonstrating notable variations across anime studios, are a little repetitive, given that a similar account was also given in chapter 1. One aspect where a thicker, more in-depth ethnography would have strengthened the book concerns the generally favorable treatment given to the notion of collaboration in anime production. However, are all collaborators equal in their collaborative endeavors? We are given some glimpses of the larger political economy in which this industry operates and the potentially oppressive hierarchy through snippets of a young assistant producer describing the production meeting with his boss, the producer, as *ijime*—bullying (139). Yet the dynamics among different ranks of managers, or indeed the relations between managers and creators, largely remain unexplored in the book.

That said, given the author’s stated goal to “explore the ways cultural movements succeed” where they “gain value and go global through forces of collective action” (1), these are not critical shortcomings. Chapter 3 and chapter 4 respectively give succinct overviews of the postwar history of the Japanese animation industry and the emergence of “robots” as a canonical genre in anime. The discussion of the

online sharing/piracy of anime by overseas fan communities in chapter 6 is a timely addition that also serves the larger debates surrounding issues of intellectual property and fair use on the Internet.

Over the past decade, the literature on Japanese animation has seen steady growth in the interdisciplinary field of Japanese studies, drawing in scholars from anthropology, cultural studies, literature, sociology, film studies, and more. Contributing to this emerging field, Ian Condry's *The Soul of Anime* breaks new ground by offering its readers a fieldwork-based analysis of the production of anime through a readable and engaging ethnography. The book is an important achievement and can be recommended to both students and scholars interested in the topic.

Tomohiro Morisawa
Stockholm School of Economics