A Coming of Age in the Anthropological Study of Anime? Introductory Thoughts Envisioning the Business Anthropology of Japanese Animation

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Abstract

This article highlights how Anglophone anthropological studies of Japanese animation (anime) have overlooked its businesspeople (such as producers, investors, merchandisers, and entrepreneurs) by formulaically advocating anime creators and fans as crusaders subverting the global dominance of Euro–American global entertainment capitalism. Contextualising such orientation as an example of what Gayatri Spivak calls "strategic essentialism", the article further explores how to break out of this essentialist impasse of analysis in the anthropological approach to anime. The article suggests that a potential exit might exist through envisioning the business anthropology of anime, i.e. by casting an ethnographic focus on anime's businesspeople as the legitimate interlocutors for anthropological inquiries into anime. The author further explores the preliminary theoretical implications of this analytical turn through his own business ethnography of an international start-up venture of anime merchandising.

Key words

animation, anime, strategic essentialism, creative industries, brokerage

Introduction

Suppose that you are undertaking a fieldwork of Japanese animation (anime) in Tokyo. As part of it, you participate in a fan meeting held by anime creators. During this meeting, the creators talk about their experience participating in a certain anime project, and complain about how their creative ideas were constrained by the "people in suits" representing the entertainment companies that were also participating in the project. The audience (the fans) respond to these accounts in full sympathy by laughing at the creators' jokes caricaturing the behaviour of such "suit" people. During the Q&A session, one audience member asks the creators how they will meet the "needs" of anime fans in overseas countries. One creator becomes grouchy all of a sudden and spits out that anime creators should just care about what they want to make. The audience give this comment a rousing cheer and boo the questioner. One of the audience members sitting next to you shouts at that questioner to "get out of here!" The meeting ends with a sense of coherence between the creators and the audience.

How would you contextualise the above scene if you are writing an ethnographic account on anime? What I try to highlight through this article, in terms of this vignette,[1] is that there has been a strong formulaic tendency in Anglophone anthropological literature on anime to depict this scene as a moment of solidarity between anime creators and fans in an attempt to subvert global entertainment capitalism, ignoring (and sometimes even antagonising) anime's businesspeople – the "people in suits", such as producers, investors, merchandisers, and entrepreneurs. Following this trend, you might also be delighted to note that the person sitting next to you booed the questioner. You might even make fun of the "people in suits" with the majority of the participants, and proudly write in your ethnography that you not only "observed" the scene but also "participated" in it (a practice that is assumed to make for "good" ethnography). I intend to counter-argue in this article that such a contextualisation has begun to advocate too much for anime creators and fans, routinely celebrating their mode of solidarity by overemphasising how important it is to the world.

Against this formulation, and in terms of the above vignette, I would also propose in this article that what we might have to do is think of the people who did *not* participate in the meeting – anime's businesspeople. We may want to approach the host of the meeting and

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[1] The opening vignette has been crafted on the basis of my fieldwork on the Japanese anime sector.

ask why they did not invite the "suit" people to participate, instead of caricaturing them in their absence. It might also be productive to think of the people whose voices were drowned out by the "sense of coherence" shown in the meeting. What you may want to do after the meeting is not so much enjoy a sense of camaraderie with the majority of the participants, but try to approach that booed questioner and ask what (s)he thought about the meeting's atmosphere. In this regard, the key phrase in your fieldnotes would be less "get out of here!" and more "needs" – the phrase that was so much derided by the audience and which made the anime creator "grouchy all of a sudden". Overall, you might want to ask, after observing the meeting, why the majority of its participants hated the "suit" people so much, rather than taking part in such hate. Put differently, if you felt like booing the "people in suits" (and the questioner) at the meeting – and if you felt afraid to break the camaraderie between you and the creators/fans by doing otherwise – then it is a warning sign that your fieldwork is becoming too advocative, and that you are losing your critical edge in your anthropological approach to anime. Paying ethnographic attention to anime's businesspeople – no matter how invisible they have been in your fieldwork (or in the existing literature) – may prevent you from running such a risk when conducting the anthropology of anime.

This article will first review two decades of development in Anglophone anthropological studies on anime, highlighting how it has overlooked anime's businesspeople – the "people in suits" – by formulaically advocating anime creators and fans *vis-à-vis* Euro–American global entertainment capitalism. I will contextualise such orientation as one example of what Gayatri Spivak (1993, 1996 [1985]) calls "strategic essentialism": anthropological literature on anime has been so dedicated to attacking the global commercial dominance of the Euro–American entertainment conglomerates by using anime as their critical alternative that it strategically advocates anime's non-commercial aspects (such as the solidarity between creators and fans) in a somewhat essentialist manner. Although this "strategy" seemed to work during the pioneering days of anime studies in English-speaking academia during the late 1990s and early 2000s, I suggest that it may be time for us to stop pursuing such a "strategy" and to recognise the negative effect of such "essentialism", which routinely celebrates and romanticises anime creators/fans as crusaders subverting the global dominance of Hollywood.

The article will then explore how to break out of such an analytical impasse in the anthropological approach to anime. It suggests a potential exit through envisioning the business anthropology of anime, i.e. casting an ethnographic focus on anime's businesspeople as legitimate interlocutors for the anthropological inquiries into anime. I will further explore the preliminary implications of this analytical turn, mainly through my own business ethnography of an international start-up

venture of anime merchandising. I will suggest that focusing on anime's businesspeople in the ethnography of anime's globalisation might encourage us to see its process, not as a holy battle between anime creators/fans and Hollywood, but as a border-crossing endeavour that penetrates multiple boundaries by involving multiple players with conflicting interests. The agents who play the intermediary role in bridging the separate spheres and resolving the conflicts (i.e. the brokers) and their liminal dual agencies in doing so will, I suggest, provide a key analytical entry point in understanding anime's globalisation.

"Strategic essentialism" in the Anglophone Anthropology of Anime

It is almost two decades since anime gained global popularity. The worldwide hit of *Pokémon*,[2] Hayao Miyazaki's Academy award winning *Spirited Away*, and news photos from anime convention venues in every corner of the world packed with tens of thousands of participants have long been familiar to those who are interested in anime's global spread. Many reports, articles, and books attest to anime's global proliferation (e.g. McGray 2002; Sugiyama 2006; Kelts 2006).

It seems that the "not Hollywood" (cf. Ortner 2013) feature of anime, especially the global nature of its spread, captured the attention of Anglophone academics interested in cultural globalisation. How can we understand anime's globalisation? What does it mean to the world (and to Japan)? To date, a number of arguments have been formulated from multiple disciplines to answer these questions. For example, anime's globalisation has been contextualised as another wave of "*Japonisme*" (Napier 2007); as a sign that the globalisation process is now decentred (Iwabuchi 2002); as something the Japanese government is trying to capitalise on (e.g. Daliot-Bul and Otmazgin 2017); and as the world-wide rise of new immersive media experience (Allison 2006; Steinberg 2012), of political conflict over copyright and freedom of expression (Leonard 2005; McLelland ed. 2017), and of post-Fordist lifestyle (LaMarre 2006).

Anthropology is also involved in this line of debate. The anthropological literature on anime primarily focuses on the behaviours of the individuals who deal with anime, examining the organisational, institutional, and sociocultural settings in which anime is created, produced, distributed, and consumed. As it is especially interested in examining the actual practices of the players who make anime global, the literature has provided influential insights regarding its globalisation which could be summarised as follows: it is the anime fans and creators who make anime global; they are doing so by collaborating transnationally at the grassroots level; such collaborations are driven by

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[2] The *Pokémon* business reportedly earned about 1 trillion yen each from the US, Europe, and Asia (including Japan) (Humanmedia 2013: 30).

their altruistic enthusiasm for anime (facilitated by the Internet); and this mode of globalisation will hopefully subvert the dominance of the Euro–American entertainment conglomerates (such as Hollywood) in the global cultural economy (e.g. Allison 2006; Condry 2013; Ito 2012a, 2012b; Shiraishi 2013).

While the above debates sound persuasive for understanding anime's globalisation, my reading has identified a critical void in this body of literature: the business aspects of anime. It seems that the literature even proactively tries to avoid mentioning them. A Japanese literary scholar, Susan Napier, who pioneered the incorporation of anime into serious Anglophone academic debates, states in her first monograph on anime that "[i]nvestigating anime as a cultural force is even more fascinating than inquiring into its commercial aspects" (Napier 2001: 8). Anthropology seems to comply with this position. For example, cultural anthropologist Ian Condry emphasises in his influential book on the globalisation of anime that anime's global spread should be contextualised in terms of "something other than a game of 'follow the money'" (Condry 2013: 2).

This avoidance of anime's business aspects in the literature appears counterintuitive, especially when we recognise that anime – or at least the titles on which most anime studies base their arguments – could be classified as a heavily commercially-oriented product compared to other types of animation (e.g. cut-out animation, shadowgraph animation, and clay animation) created in other parts of the world (in countries known to have their own tradition of making animation, such as Canada, France, Russia, and the Czech Republic). Historically speaking, in postwar Japan, anime has developed in association with the commercial television sector to provide TV stations with entertainment content (see, for example, Tsugata 2005). Here, I observe a paradox in the existing Anglophone anime studies, which seem to assume that the commercial ground is unimportant or even unnecessary in examining commercially-oriented anime.

Why do Anglophone anime studies, especially the anthropological studies on anime, show so little interest in anime's business aspects and so much interest in its non-commercial activities? I surmise that the absence of business aspects in the literature might be one of the analytical problems in its orientation towards interrogating the Euro–American-led capitalist cultural globalisation through advocating anime. To many Anglophone anime anthropologists, anime's mode of globalisation is something that should be preserved as an alternative path in the globalisation of culture, the features of which could be highlighted as a transnational, grassroots-level, and emergent connectivity between anime creators and fans who are driven by their altruistic (i.e. non-commercial) motivation to share their enthusiasm of anime. It might be this (over)advocation of anime creators/fans that leads them to be

(over)cautious about coping with anime's business side.

Such an orientation can commonly be observed in the Anglophone anthropological studies of anime. For example, Condry (2013) uses the ethnography of anime production studios and relevant players in the Japanese anime sector to emphasise how anime "represents a kind of globalization from below" (ibid., 2), reminding us that globalisation "is not always driven by major corporations and the West" (ibid., 215). He suggests anime's globalisation "from below" is driven by the "soul" of anime – that is, the "collective social energy" (ibid., 2) that is generated between anime creators and fans, and which enables them to collaborate beyond national borders and "corporate underpinnings" (ibid., 217). One may also find the insignificant position occupied by the commercial aspect of anime in his ethnography of an anime production studio in Japan. For example, while conducting a fieldwork of the studio, Condry seemed keen to capture the "camaraderie" (ibid., 139) among the creators who work there, but showed very limited interest in its managerial and administrative staff. He very briefly depicts one "stressful" meeting held in the studio by its production operators, during which young staff were harshly questioned by their boss about why they were unable to gather key anime frames punctually from the animators who were commissioned to draw them. Right after depicting the meeting's "harshness", however, Condry quickly turns his eyes to the "world of the animators" and admires "the social energy and the comfortable camaraderie among" the creative staff in the studio (ibid.).

This is only one example of many. Another cultural anthropologist, Mizuko Ito (2012a), tried to address the culture of transnational enthusiastic fandom (*otaku* in Japanese terminology), including that of anime fans, by "tracing its diverse manifestations as well as the common set of characteristics that make it recognizable as a unique cultural movement" (ibid., xi). Celebrating *otaku* as "arguably the most wired fandom on the planet" (ibid., xi), she depicts it as resistant to "elites and the mainstream" (ibid., xvii) and to "totalizing global narratives such as nationalism" (ibid., xviii). According to her, "[w]hat unifies otaku culture as a whole" is "its malleable narrative platform and mode of participatory niche media engagement" – *otaku*s "gravitate toward media forms and communication platforms that enable them to engage in peer-to-peer exchange of knowledge and appropriative DIY creation" (ibid., xviii). One such "creation" seems to be fansubs,[3] which offer "a window into the complex negotiations between media industries and fans" (Ito 2012b: 179). Ito however rarely examines such "complex negotiations"

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[3] "Fansubs" refer to anime episodes that have been translated into non-Japanese languages by non-Japanese fans, subtitled into the translated languages, and distributed by fans via the Internet, usually for free. A "fansubber" is an anime fan who makes and distributes fansubs. Technically speaking, therefore, to make an anime fansub infringes the legitimate rights of its holders (cf. Mihara 2010: 11).

between media industries and fans, but unilaterally emphasises how rebellious the latter is in relation to the former. In other words, she argues how proud *otaku* is (or should be) for their fansubs, but neglects to ask how happy the media industries are for it (or not). In a similar manner, Allison (2006) evaluates the huge popularity of *Pokémon* in the United States as a significant case of decentralised globalisation, as "this fantasy fare [...] came not from Disney or Hollywood but from Japan" (ibid., 3). Shiraishi (2013) also emphasises that the transnational spread of anime highlights "the new model of globalisation that is not led by large capital", but is initiated by "the proactive movements of consumers" (ibid., 29).

What is problematic in this line of debate, in my view, is that it appears too formulaic in presupposing the confrontation between "major corporations" and anime creators/fans, and in assuming/advocating the latter as crusaders subverting the capitalist power of the former by their non-commercial "energy". This seems to resonate strikingly with what cultural anthropologist William Mazzarella (2004) calls the "Formula of globalization studies" (ibid., 350). Reviewing the literature on globalisation, especially on the globalisation of media, Mazzarella highlights its rigid tendency – its Formula – to assume the incommensurability between global culture/media industries and local/grassroots agencies (e.g. audiences). Studies that focus on the latter commonly put themselves at risk of taking a "vitalist" (ibid., 356) position, romanticising the audiences' "cultural and political integrity" (ibid., 350) and celebrating their "energies" (ibid., 348) to take "pyrrhic insurrectionary acts" (ibid., 350) towards cultural imperialism. According to Mazzarella, this line of debate leads only to an "intellectual impasse" (ibid., 348), in which we fail to deconstruct the audiences' practices as well as "the complex of [...] culture industries" (ibid., 350) to understand how both sides are contingently and ambivalently interconnected ("mediated" in Mazzarella's term) in the contemporary world of globalisation. It seems, at least to me, that the Anglophone anthropological literature on anime is trapped in such a "Formula", running into an analytical "impasse" in understanding anime. In this way, the literature ends up routinely celebrating how great anime creators/fans are without deconstructing their "integrity" as well as diverting the literature's "critical attentions away from" (ibid., 350) anime's businesspeople.

Even if we accept the confrontational dichotomy between the media/culture industries' "large capital" and anime creators'/fans' "collective social energy" in approaching anime, a critical shortcoming still remains in the current debates: they are attacking a wrong target. If they are to interrogate the global capitalistic dominance of the big entertainment industries such as Hollywood, they should do so straightforwardly by advocating the fans who are fansubbing Hollywood

movies, and not those who are fansubbing anime. What anime fansubs undermine is not the Hollywood capital, but the commercial basis of anime industry in Japan – most of its players have little to do with the Hollywood and are far from being major players on the global scale (cf. Mihara 2010: 248-249). It seems to make little sense, at least to me, to triumph over Hollywood by overwhelming the Japanese anime industry.

In this regard, I assume it reasonable for the media scholar Dario Lolli to review Condry's (2013) work as somewhat "ideological" for an academic argument (Lolli 2014: 108). Condry does seem to feed the political confrontation between anime creators/fans and its businesspeople. In my view, however, the more crucial issue underlying this development of the anthropological literature on anime is its essentialist appearance in (over)advocating the anime creator's/fan's "soul", "energy", "camaraderie", and "common set of characteristics". In other words, Anglophone anthropological studies on anime seem so determined to attack the global corporate capitalism that they might be risking their arguments to "go essentialist" in celebrating the solidarity of anime creators and fans. As Condry (2013) elaborates further on his concept of the "soul" of anime:

> I would underscore that this "soul" is not some kind of internal essence, like the problematic notions of the "soul of Japan" or the "soul of the samurai," as if there is some unchanging central, generative core that explains everything about anime. Quite the contrary: The soul I refer to here is best envisioned as a kind of energy that arises from the ways anime connects people; a connection that operates as a conduit of interest and activity; a soul, in other words, that arises out of collective action (30).

This attempt to de-essentialise the "soul" of anime seems at most only partially successful. When stated in such a way, one may wonder how we can draw an analytical line (in terms of essentialism versus constructivism) between the "soul of Japan" as a "generative core" of anime, and the "soul" of anime as "a kind of energy" that "arises out of collective action". In other words, we remain mystified by this account. What does this "soul" consist of? Who has this "soul", and who can represent it? How can we acquire this "soul"? Can, for example, an executive of Hollywood major acquire this "soul" of anime? This is indeed an analytical impasse for understanding anime, at least anthropologically.

Virtually the only way to justify this supposedly-essentialist approach is to contextualise it as what literary theorist Gayatri Spivak calls "strategic essentialism" – the "*strategic* use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest" (Spivak 1996 [1985]: 214, emphasis in the original). This refers to "the ways in which subordinate or marginalized social groups may temporarily put aside local differences in order to forge a sense of collective identity through which they band

together in political movements" (Dourish 2008: 1). In other words, Anglophone anime anthropology's essentialist (over)advocacy of anime creators/fans might become understandable when we recognise it as a "strategic" attempt to contextualise anime creators/fans as such a "subordinate or marginalized group" whose "collective identity" should be "strategically" essentialised to achieve the relevant anthropologists' "political" objectives in deconstructing the grand narrative of global entertainment capitalism. This way of understanding also makes sense of why the Anglophone anthropological literature has oddly excluded anime businesspeople from their scope – because they do not fit into such a "strategic essence".

I do admit that this strategy has been somewhat necessary, and that in the pioneering days of anime studies in the West during the late 1990s and early 2000s it did manage to make anime visible to people who had had little to do with this Japanese visual culture. As Napier emphasised in her first monograph that "anime clearly appears to be a cultural phenomenon worthy of being taken seriously" (Napier 2001: 4), the rise of anime studies in academia (including anthropological ones) can be understood as part of the process of persuasion that anime is worth investigating, as it has important implications for contemporary global society that would otherwise not be highlighted. In doing so, it might have been necessary in some cases to depict anime's affiliates in an essentialist way to make an impact and to reverse the dominant grand-narratives. I do not intend to downplay such contributions.

However, what we should be concerned with here are the side-effects of this strategic essentialism. This approach inevitably excluded people who did not fit into such a "strategic essence" from its scope. The by-products of strategic essentialism in general have been reported in the literature: strategic essentialism may, for example, exclude "less subaltern" people, such as the better-off minority people in Norway who were excluded by journalists looking for "someone who had made it against all odds" (Eide 2010: 76).[4] Thus, one of the most critical issues involved in leaning on strategic essentialism is how to make it a "temporal" one as an intellectual tool, i.e. how and when to stop it (cf. Spivak 1993, 1996 [1985]).

I doubt whether the anthropological studies on anime have been "scrupulously" aware of the exclusivist aspect of their strategic essentialism. It seems that anime businesspeople have been contextualised as "less subaltern" in the Anglophone anthropology of anime, and that their voices have overtly been marginalised and underrepresented in the saga of its rise in Anglophone academia. Spivak

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[4] See also Carpenter (2005), McCormick et al. (1998) and Robins (2001).

(1993) warned that, in the feminist movement, insisting that "the personal is political" often transformed itself into the claim that "*only* the personal is political" (4, emphasis in the original). Given that Anglophone (anthropological) studies on anime have been developing for more than two decades, and given their strategic essentialist orientation, it seems time for us to start being aware of the moment at which *positivist* descriptions of anime creators/fans imperceptibly shifts into *positive* descriptions of them, and when "anthropological anime studies *that do not* follow the money" imperceptibly transform themselves into the claim that "anthropological anime studies *should not* follow the money".

Envisioning the Business Anthropology of Anime

How, then, can we break out of this essentialist impasse of analysis that the Anglophone anime anthropology seems to risk ending up in? The general direction for exit seems to be by casting ethnographic light on anime's businesspeople, i.e. by envisioning the business anthropology of anime. If the existing literature is caught up in the curse of essentialism by over-considering anime creators/fans and under-considering its businesspeople, one of the most effective ways to dispel such essentialism seems to be to counter consider the businesspeople, redressing the literature's existing bias. In the rest of the article, I will explore the theoretical implications of this analytical turn in outgrowing the anthropology of anime into the broader arena of debate.

The first step, I would suggest, may be to admit (or remind ourselves) that anime is a creative *and* a commercial endeavour as a creative industry, driven *dually* by the creative motivation of creators and by the commercial motivation of businesspeople (cf. Caves 2000). Although few may disagree that anime should be included under the definition of a creative industry,[5] the anthropological literature on anime has, as reviewed above, rarely approached it in terms of the *duality* of art and commerce. Rather, it has assumed their *dualism*, i.e. their incommensurability (cf. Jeffcutt and Pratt 2002: 226). Recognising their duality will remind anime anthropologists that they have been critically overlooking (or avoiding) the other side of the same enterprise.

But this step forward may not be enough to escape the essentialist impasse of analysis in approaching anime anthropologically. Even if anthropologists recognise that there are creators/fans and businesspeople involved in anime, they may still be tempted to choose the former as primal interlocutors in their fieldworks (as we have seen

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[5] Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) defined creative industries as "consist[ing] of goods, services, and workforce whose market competitiveness lie not so much in price but in added value of creativity" (METI 2012: 8). Anime was designated as one of the core sectors in their categorisation of creative industries (12).

above). Put differently, there seems to exist a kind of naivety among the Anglophone anthropologists of anime, who assume anime businesspeople are not the "right" group for them to focus on because of their commercialism.

It is on this point that the literature of business anthropology could catalyse the anthropology of anime to see anime businesspeople as its legitimate fieldwork interlocutors. According to my understanding, one of the most critical endeavours of business anthropology is to recognise businesspeople straightforwardly as the legitimate object of anthropological analysis (cf. Jordan 2010) by deactivating the anthropologist's naivety towards the business sector. Moeran and Garsten (2012) designate the mission of business anthropology as being to overcome the "double set of beliefs" (ibid., 8) prevalent among anthropologists – the belief that anthropologists who focus on businesspeople are "tainted" by "commercialism" (ibid.), and that "'small-scale' is good, while 'complex' is somehow bad. […] better the circulation of *kula* objects rather than of advertising agency accounts" (ibid., 9). Interestingly enough, for the purpose of this article, they summon the metaphor of "cultural production in general" (ibid., 8) to highlight the anthropologist's hesitance to go with the businesspeople:

> [T]he world of anthropology resembles that of cultural production in general, where we find a distinction clearly made between 'creative' and 'humdrum' personnel […] with the former praised for their lofty 'artistic' ideals and the latter damned for being concerned with financial administration. 'Pure' anthropologists, then, are to film directors and editors, for instance, as 'applied' anthropologists are to producers and publishers. The sub-text here is that money is the root of all evil. Ironically, this uneasiness in exploring the boundary zones of applied and 'pure' anthropology has stalled the investigation of what business anthropology is, and what its scholarly potentials are (ibid., 8-9).

I would argue that the above situation is not metaphor but actual reality in the "world" of Anglophone anthropology of anime, as we have seen: anime creators/fans are "praised" for their "soul", and anime businesspeople are "damned" for their "humdrum" interest in "evil" money. Maybe the circumstances are even worse, as it is unlikely – at least for now – that the anthropology of anime businesspeople will be recognised as a legitimate anthropology of anything (not even in anthropology's "applied" version) by the mainstream institutions of Anglophone academia. Would the faculty of media and communication be interested in hiring an ethnographer of anime investment over an anthropologist focusing on "indigenous" radio? Would the editors of a prestigious university press be interested in the ethnography of anime distributors to add to their collection of monographs in the "anthropology of popular culture"? It seems anime is one of the most acute areas of study

that needs the intervention of business anthropology to revitalise its "scholarly potential".

What kind of potential, then, could we develop by casting a counterbalancing ethnographic focus on anime businesspeople? One of the most significant advantages of this analytical turn is that we might be able to depict a drastically different picture of anime's globalisation *vis-à-vis* the existing literature. In other words, tracking the globalisation process of anime from the viewpoint of anime businesspeople may provide a critical alternative picture on making anime global to the one that has been prevalent in the Anglophone anthropology of anime, i.e. the idea that it is anime fans and creators who make anime global through their non-commercial enthusiasm.

This was exactly what happened as a result of my own previous research project (Mihara 2017), which ethnographically tracked anime's globalisation process from Japan to India. As part of that project, I intentionally selected anime businesspeople as my primal fieldwork interlocutors, relegating anime creators (and fans) to "backseat roles" (ibid., 35). I followed one entrepreneur (pseudonym: Takahiro Ikeyama), an ex-stockbroker, who started a venture company aiming to establish an Indo–Japanese online merchandising platform through which the Japanese animation sector could distribute its products to the Indian market. The ethnographic reality that I found – by closely following Ikeyama's transnational business activities in Japan (Tokyo) and India (Delhi) over a period of 12 months – is that anime's globalisation is not something that we can take for granted. Far from exhibiting "camaraderie" in making anime global, relevant players face a number of conflicts of interest and mindset when doing so. Moreover, they are not interconnected from the start, and anime's globalisation will not take place if they do not act. Somebody has to go to the trouble of connecting them by intermediating and resolving such conflicts in order to create a globalisation path for anime. Ikeyama was the one who played that role.

In other words, by observing how Ikeyama negotiated with his Japanese and Indian counterparts to keep his Indo-Japanese anime business afloat, I found that the process of globalising anime was being carried forward by the brokerage performed by agents (in this case Ikeyama), who intermediate and reorient conflicts of interest/mindset between stakeholders in Japan and India. Two of the most crucial conflicts were the aforementioned duality between art and commerce, and the clash in business customs between what the involved players understood as the "Japanese" and the "Indian" way of doing business. The ethnography showed that it was the business player's brokering of conflicts, rather than the creators' or fans' altruistic sharing of their enthusiasm, that was making anime global. This attempt to explore the business anthropology of anime thus proposed an alternative way to understand anime's globalisation other than celebrating the transnational

solidarity of anime creators and fans.

I also found this business ethnography of anime eye-openingly rich in revitalising the anthropology of anime. The ethnography touched on topics that have rarely been dealt with in anime studies, but which have a thick accumulation of literature (including anthropological literature) outside the field, including brokerage (e.g. Geertz 1960; James 2011; Lindqist 2015; Stovel and Shaw 2012; Wolf 1956), the duality of art and commerce (e.g. Becker 1982; Caves 2000; Eikhof and Haunschild 2007; Moeran 2009, 2011; Throsby 2001), and cross-cultural management (e.g. Hofstede 1991; Meyer 2014; Ng and Ben-Ari 2000; Sedgwick 2007, 2014; Wong 1999). The above ethnography could be contextualised as embodying the gateway for the anthropology of anime to break through its impasse and connect itself with – and contribute to – wider debates developing in the above three theoretical fields.

The ethnographic observation of Ikeyama's brokerage behaviour (which tried to intermediate and resolve the conflicts between art and commerce and between the divergent business customs) especially highlighted the "liminal" (Turner 1969: 95; Van Gennep 1960: 11) agency of a broker. This "liminality" has been one of the most prominent focal points in the anthropological approach to contemporary business coordination processes (cf. McCabe and Briody 2016). Ikeyama's position was indeed "betwixt and between" (Turner 1969: 95) the two "economic spheres" (cf. Barth 1967: 149) of the Japanese anime sector and the Indian market. In his attempt to create the transnational flow of anime goods from Japan to India, Ikeyama had to persuade the Japanese anime rights holders to distribute their anime goods to his forthcoming Indo–Japanese distribution platform. On the other hand, he also had to persuade the Indian distributors and retailers to deal with the anime products that Ikeyama brought into India via that platform. In terms of the conflict between art and commerce, one of the critical interests (and concerns) of the rights holders in Japan was how the Indian distributors/retailers would (and could) appreciate and preserve the creativity of their products when dealing in the Indian market. Put bluntly, they were worried that their creativity might be "contaminated" or "disrupted" by "commercial" Indian distributors/retailers. It was also the first time that most of the Indian distributors/retailers had done business with the Japanese anime sector: they had little idea of how to behave *vis-à-vis* the sector, let alone how to avoid outraging the creativity of the anime products when dealing with them in the Indian market. Ikeyama brokered (i.e., he tried to resolve) this conflict of art and commerce by simultaneously representing "Indian commercialism" when facing the anime rights holders in Japan and representing "anime creativity" when facing the Indian distributors/retailers. He presented himself to the rights holders as an expert who knew very well about how to get along with "commercial" India (by emphasising his network with

the Indian distributors/retailers), while at the same time presenting himself to the Indian distributors/retailers as an expert who knew very well how to get along with the "creative" Japanese anime sector (by emphasising his networks with anime rights holders in Japan). Ikeyama's agency in this regard thus became liminal: he represented himself as having both creative and commercial mindsets at the same time. This liminality was also observed when Ikeyama tried to resolve the conflict in business customs, the other critical conflict involved in streamlining the flow of anime goods from Japan to India.[6]

Focusing on anime businesspeople in the ethnography of anime's globalisation would thus encourage us to see its process, not as a holy battle against Hollywood, but as a border-crossing endeavour that penetrates multiple boundaries by involving multiple players with diverse interests. In this way, a broker's liminal agency provides a key analytical entry point in understanding how such conflicting interests would be intermediated and reoriented. This modality critically resonates with the field of business anthropology in approaching business enterprises in the contemporary world of globalisation (cf. Gluesing 2016; Miller 2016; Wall and Englert 2016).

This direction also seems to run parallel with that suggested by Mazzarella (2004) when trying to break out of the "impasse" of "Formula", that is, focusing on the "nodes of mediation" (ibid., 352):

> As ethnographers, we need strategies that will allow us not so much to worry the impasse as a conceptual problem but rather to capture its dynamics as a practical challenge in the lives and work of our informants. One way of doing this is to focus ethnographically on what one might call nodes of mediation. These are the sites at which the compulsions of institutional determination and the rich, volatile play of sense come into always provisional alignment in the service of (and always, in part, against the grain of) a vast range of social projects, from the grass roots to corporate boardrooms (ibid.).

Similarly, business anthropologists of anime would, by freeing themselves from their advocacy towards anime creators and fans, be encouraged to focus on the sites or agents in which multiple global forces intersect and are (inter)mediated during the process of anime's

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[6] One of the most critical Japanese words that was used on the site of Ikeyama's business in this regard was "*kao*" – whose literal meaning is "face" but in this context was used to mean "persona". Ikeyama seemed to understand that he was able to show two faces – the Japanese face and the Indian face – to his Japanese and Indian counterparts. Which *kao* should be shown to them, and what kind of mix of such dual personas could be performed towards and between them were considered by Ikeyama and his team as crucial in intermediating and resolving the conflicts between the Japanese and Indian players.

globalisation (see also Lindqist 2015).

The significance of anime's business aspects has started to be recognised outside the realm of anthropology. For example, anime scholar Rayna Denison (2018) points out that anime's "formal distribution" that is "undertaken by authorised distributors" has long been critically overlooked in anime studies in understanding "how anime has become an increasingly prevalent part of global culture". Such players have been marginalised "at the fringes of debates around translation, authorship and fandom" (ibid., 404). Showing her concern that the current debate on anime might be "caught up in a larger set of clashes between media industries and consumers colloquially known as the 'copyright wars'", she emphasises the needs to "challenge" such a "set of binary oppositions" by trying to replace them with "a more nuanced sense of the ongoing interactions between Japanese producers, overseas distribution intermediaries and the audiences that they seek" (ibid.).[7]

Works that recognise the role of mediating agents who facilitate the globalisation process of anime have also started to accumulate recently outside the field of anthropology. For example, examining the anime boom in the US in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Daliot-Bul and Otmazgin (2017) argue that anime's expansion to the US could be understood as having been carried out by entrepreneurs who played "a pivotal role as mediators" (ibid., 86) in "bridging the organizational and cultural differences between Japan and the United States" (ibid., 85). Media scholar Marco Pellitteri (2019) historically examines how the actions of "intermediary businessmen" (ibid., 5) enabled Japanese TV anime titles to be widely purchased and distributed in Europe (especially Italy) in the 1970s by framing such behaviours with the concepts of "cultural mediation" and "knowledge brokerage". Such businessmen "found themselves working both within and in-between the distinctly separate networks formed by Japanese and European companies that, before the bridging action, were totally unaware of each other" (ibid., 6).

Pursuing the business anthropology of anime will, I believe, enrich the above line of inquiry regarding anime's globalisation. This could be done by depicting the ethnographic detail of how brokers perform their liminal dual agency at the level of their everyday business practices when bridging the conflicts between the relevant parties to make anime global. Furthermore, examining ethnographically how brokers intermediate the people with different interests and mindsets – including anime creators/fans and businesspeople – in the process of anime's globalisation may enable the anthropology of anime to contribute to the broader anthropological agenda, i.e. how people make connections with one another "in terms of their differences" (cf. Clifford and Ota 2003:

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[7] See also Morisawa (2015) and Hernández (2018).

510), or, ultimately, how people understand others.

Conclusion

This article has shown how the Anglophone anthropology of anime has critically overlooked and failed to address the significance of its businesspeople. Ethnographers have formulaically advocated (the solidarity of) anime creators/fans in a strategic or essentialist manner and have been "booing" the "people in suits", being driven by their (supposedly-political) orientation to use anime as a tool to interrogate the global dominance of the Euro–American global entertainment capitalism. This article has warned that taking such a line of debate runs into an analytical impasse by going nowhere, merely routinely celebrating how great anime creators/fans are; it has also suggested updating the anthropology of anime by a counter focus on its businesspeople, i.e. envisioning the business anthropology of anime, and by overcoming naïve anthropological "beliefs" that business players are not a legitimate subject for the discipline's study.

The article has also explored how this analytical turn may open up new horizons for the anthropology of anime, especially in terms of its globalisation. My own research, and other emergent like-minded studies, suggests the gateway is less "camaraderie" and more "conflict" between the players involved in that process, and is the brokering agents who try to intermediate such conflicts with their liminal agencies. The ethnographers of anime may want to stop shouting "get out of here!" at anime's business players along with their fellow anime creators and fans, and may want to start asking the creators/fans why they hate the business players so much. They may wish to approach those business players and look for the players who are trying to bridge the conflicts between art and commerce – because too much sympathy towards anime fans/creators might lead the ethnographers to "go essentialist", and also because anime *is* a commercial enterprise (just not Hollywood). Just as anthropologist Derek Freeman's (1983) ethnography counterpoised Samoa's competitive aspects against Margaret Mead's (1928) emphasis on its harmoniousness, laying stress on conflict in the realm of Japanese animation – to remark "the Japanese anime sector is indeed filled with conflicts" (cf. Freeman 1983: 143) – might vex those who have intended to contextualise anime's global sociality as a harmoniously affinitive landscape. This article will, I believe, encourage us to recognise that anime's globalisation is not insulated from such conflict, but rather revolves in the midst of it, becoming enmeshed (and 'mediated') in the web of discrepant relationships between relevant players.

Put differently, this article has highlighted how Anglophone anthropological studies on anime have underrepresented the voices of

anime's businesspeople and overrepresented those of anime creators/fans. In fact, while a number of writings in Japanese deal with anime's business aspects (e.g. Masuda 2007; Sudo 2017), they seem much less frequently quoted in the English literature than it quotes the Japanese works of Japanese scholars in "cultural" fields (e.g. Azuma 2001; Otsuka 2001 [1989], 2005). This is why I persistently use the adjective "Anglophone" when designating the anthropology of anime throughout this article). This imbalance may be, as suggested in the body of this paper, something more than coincidence.

In other words, this article has suggested that the neglect of the role of anime's businesspeople in the Anglophone anthropology of anime may be related to issues of anthropology that are deeper and more general than initially appears. This tendency may resonate with the orientation of anthropologists at large to impose their own moral (Sahlins 1999) or political (Linnekin 1992) agenda on the people whom they study. This includes seeking a "morally laudable analysis" to use non-Western society "as an alibi for redressing" the "evils of Western society", including capitalism and imperialism (Sahlins 1999: v), as well as seeking "politically correct" (Linnekin 1992: 260) arguments to attack local elites (in "suits") while advocating more subaltern people so that their ethnography can be approved as "good" (261) by their fellow anthropologists. This issue is, I would speculate, worth investigating further in terms of Orientalism (Said 1979) and who can (or is trying to) represent anime in "Western" academia at the expense of whom in the field of this popular culture, which developed in the eastern end of Northeast Asia.[8]

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[8] The anthropological perspectives and approaches that I have elaborated in this paper on anime can also be extended to other forms of Japanese popular culture, such as manga (comics: see, for example, Kinsella 2000; Nakano 2004).

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