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Japanese Animation and Glocalization of Sociology¹

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Globalization of Japanese Comics and Animations

Barcelona, Innsbruck, Seoul, Paris, Durban (South Africa), Beijing, Cairo, Krakow, Trento..., these are the cities where I have delivered my talks about Japanese animation (Anime) and comics (Manga). Especially through the enthusiasm of the young audience of the classes which had nothing to do with whether my presentation was good or not, I have been impressed by the actuality of globalization.

There are at least three reasons to pick Japanese animation and Manga up in sociology as its subject matter. First, pluralization of centers ("origins of dispatch") of globalization. Second, globalization of culture and consciousness. Third, relationship between post-modern social settings and sub-cultures (cultural production).

Talking first about the second point, globalization of culture: "Characters" in Manga and Anime can be considered as a sort of "icons" in the sense suggested by J. Alexander (Alexander, 2008:a, 2008:b). Icons are "condensed" symbols in the Freudian meaning (Alexander 2008:782). According to T. Parsons (alas, in the good old days we used to have "main stream" so to speak, and nowadays we have the cliché that goes "contrary to Parsons I argue..." instead of "according to Parsons"), there are three aspects in culture as a symbolic system: cognitive, affective-expressive, and evaluative orientations.

In Parsons' age, globalization was not such a significant issue in sociology as in the present. Now we can set the new question: which aspect of a cultural symbol can be most feasible to be globalized, to be able to travel easily in the world? It would be unthinkable or at least very difficult to imagine a situation in which we would share the evaluative aspect such as a religious, moral or ideological orientation globally. The evaluative aspect is the toughest aspect of a culture, seen as a symbolic system, in resisting to be invaded by global "others."

How about the cognitive aspect? We can relatively easily exchange with each other scientific arguments organized on the cognitive criterion. For intellectuals including sociologists, exchanging ideas is a key activity and not to be committed to this sort of dialogue can lead to a fatal deficit. As a cognitively organized symbolic system can go beyond the embedded nature of locality, its symbols can be exchanged.

¹ Parts of this essay, namely parts of the second and third section, are a modification and adaptation from a Forward written by the author to *The Dragon and the Dazzle: Models, Strategies, and Identities of Japanese Imagination, An European Perspective*, by Marco Pellitteri.

Then, how about the affective-expressive aspect? It is often said that in enjoying music there are no national borders. All those phenomena called “costume play” in Manga / Anime conventions throughout the world are appearing because of this floating (rootless, unembedded) nature of the symbols of this aspect. People can *feel* instantly what is going on out there with the expressed images, sounds and icons of the cultural symbols, for example, comic characters like Mickey Mouse, Pokémon, Doraemon, Sailor Moon and so forth, no matter how different ideologies they could actually be harboring. Icons are condensed meanings and representations that appeal to sentiments / affections. This is an aspect of symbols that can be transmitted and accepted beyond borders easier than other aspects of culture.

Thus the most “globalization-friendly” aspects of a symbolic system would be, first, the affective-expressive one and second, the cognitive one. The evaluative aspect come last to be globalized.

In the Parsonian sense of sociological explanation of social order, the interconnection of norms (relatively concrete level of regulation) and values (higher level of regulation that is transcendent over each concrete situation) has been crucial. And this interconnection presupposes the collectivity that is involved in the shared value-orientation. This collectivity has been called a “community” and beyond that, “society”, that Parsons himself termed “societal community.” What we are facing, it seems, is the shift of sociological explanation from one based on this kind of “societal community” towards one characterized by the following two directions: first, from value to affective / sentimental in orientational dimensions, and second, from transcendental value over each situation to inherent “norm” or code within each situational type in spatial allocations.

I am *not* saying that, in our society, the societal community has disappeared. Instead, we still need to talk about that in the following two senses: First, because it has not disappeared but still remains with us, second, because to a society exposed more intensely to “global others”, efforts concerning borders become more and more strong and searches for one’s own identity become more intensified, sometimes even aggressive.

Thus, I have been giving talks of this abstract nature in the classrooms in the cities mentioned above. Nevertheless, if the audiences of young students still kept their attention, even with enthusiasm towards my talk, it is because of the power of the icons called Manga and Anime, obviously not because of any sort of teaching skills of mine, I am afraid.

Post-modern settings and Animation/Manga

As A. Appadurai once put it, “the link between the imagination and social life, I would suggest, is increasingly a global and deterritorialized one.” (Appadurai, 1996, p.55).

In my view, Appadurai talks about the intermesh between the process of glocalization and the post-modern experiences. All the cultural products generated and distributed through electronic media have the same fate of being intertwined by these two contemporary tendencies: post-modernity and glocalization.

In this regard, there is a basic difference between Manga and Anime: Anime is truly a production of electronic media and always a harbinger of Manga in the global arena before Manga arrives to the world as a printed media. "Otaku" (the tribe of fan groups for Japanese Anime and Manga) in the world tend to be exposed to Anime first and then they become interested in Manga with its more detailed contents and complex information in the background. Ironically, for the creativity of this entire business of the Anime / Manga industry, Manga is a treasure house which has been providing the core image of the media-mix strategy: TV Anime series, movies, games, character goods, cards, and so forth (this has been called an "Image Alliance" by Shiraishi, 1998). For this entire media-mix strategy it is Manga that is the historical starting point, just contrary to the actual, time-sequential process of penetration of Anime into the world. To search for the real core of the creativity of the industry, world "Otaku" are now looking for this treasure house of (original) Manga.

The popularity of and readiness to accept Anime (and then Manga) in general but especially in the younger generation, is indicative of a deeper predisposition toward the post-modern condition. I will describe the features of Anime / Manga in connection with the following post-modern tendencies / conceptions.

It is said that the following conditions are central to the notion of the post-modern:

- 1 Fragmentation of time and space: this is closely related to the process called globalization. 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 selected group of the upper or middle class who are dwelling in a metropolitan area that presents a wide variety of choices and can accommodate a vast range of taste. Now, however, this tendency is spread out all over the society in almost all the advanced capitalistic countries.
- 3 De-centralization of the self or deconstruction of the subject: As a consequence of the fragmentation of time and space, "the modern man," described by D. Riesman for instance, who has internalized one transcendental value system, no longer exists. Here "transcendental" means a value system which is not embedded in each concrete context but is transcendent beyond different contexts. Instead of this type of modern man, "the other-oriented" person, as Riesman put it, is now dominant.
- 4 De-differentiation of borders: Between high-culture and low-culture, between nation and ethnicity, between original and copy, between real and virtual, between the genres like art, objects, visual arts, novels, games, etc, all these borders tend to be blurred.

Regarding the issue of the breakdown of grand narrative in the arguments of post-modernity, we are facing so many different small narratives and stories from every corner of the world, each having its own “exotic” flavor. It is easy to see the connection between this phenomenon and the fragmentation of time and space, and then the connection of this with the process of pluralization of centres for globalisation. That we can find Japanese Anime and Manga in almost every “Globe Corner Bookshop” in the world is one example of this plurality.

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

Japanese syncretism concerns almost all the features of the post-modern condition. The fundamental image of Riesman’s “modern man” who internalizes one single transcendental value, was, I am afraid, already alien to the Japanese historical / social process of modernization. The “situational self,” a changed self-disposition according to each situation, a kind of allocation of different selves according to each different context, is not so “strange” arrangement in the Japanese mind-set and social settings all through the eras of pre-modern, modern and post-modern. Although, westernization is one of the basic aspects of Japan’s modernization, due to Japan’s pattern of importation, the authentic borders or distinctions between genres, areas and hierarchies said to be typical of western modernity, had already been blurred during the era of Japanese modernization.

Finally, Japan is known as the land of aestheticism. But why is that? Again we can start with the model of western type modernization: one transcendental value super-ego (in Freudian sense), and asceticism (in Weberian sense). From a Japanese point of view, this model is not a historically universal framework even during the process of modernization. I am not saying that there are no such thing in Japan like the asceticism, the suppression of desire by the super-ego, instead, there are some important areas (situations), mainly public domains where the “suppression” is very essential for Japanese society and mind-set, but there are other social domains as well that are quite free from such suppressions. This is again the allocation of fragmented time and space in society. In each domain, people have a different code for behaviour. In short, the expression of desire is different in Japan from that of the “West.” This difference allows Japanese society to develop its aestheticism of daily life relatively “easily,” and continuously from traditional to modern period of time.

Thus, with this background and where post-modern characteristics and glocal movements meet, there are favorable conditions for the Japanese pop-culture, Anime and Manga to flourish.

Acceptance of Japanese Anime and Manga in the World

As for all texts, both sides of creator / sender and reader / receiver, Manga “literacy” should matter. On the basis of this “literacy” on both sides, Manga / Anime industry and its Image Alliance strategy, assure creativity of the area. We have well known arguments about the Japanese medieval art of Emakimono (illustrated hand scrolls) as a root of Manga and Anime (Takahata 1999). Takahata did not stop his links of arguments at this point. He argues that the Japanese language itself is the real root of Manga / Anime because of its peculiar hybrid characteristics as a language. In the sense that almost every tradition is an invented tradition, Japan also is inventing these traditions *after* we have seen the “success” of Anime and Manga in the world, and in this context it can be connected to cultural nationalism. At the same time, these arguments of heritages can also be resources paradoxically for hybridization or glocalization.

The issue of the “anti-harmful Manga campaign” in Japan in the early 1990’s can be important considering the process of acceptance of Anime and Manga in the world. It is said that the typical supporter of this movement or campaign was a housewife and the motive was to hide pornographic Manga from children’s eyes or at least diminish such Manga. In my view, the same basic logic lies in the processes of the wider permeation of post-modern condition and its effect of the blurring borders. Because of this process of de-differentiation, “pornographic” Manga came to be exposed to housewives and seen by them in case of Japan.

The same type of campaign occurred in the world when it faced the Japanese “harmful Anime” full of erotic expressions. People were shocked by the nature of this “de-differentiation” of borders in Japanese Anime, namely a “borders invasive” nature in itself.

Though, as Tamaki Saito put it, because Japanese Otaku are not perverts they can enjoy the perversions in the fictional world of Anime, or exactly speaking, the border between fiction and reality is fundamentally different in Japan from that of the “West”. This is the crucial point in the issue I just briefly touched upon before.

Acceptance of Japanese Anime and Manga, it seems, tend to start with resistance. Japanese Anime was or still is supposed to be perverse, full of violence and sex, and to be no good for children to watch. Sometimes ethical codes of the “host” country banned Japanese Anime to be broadcasted. From this starting phase, standpoints towards Japanese Anime gradually moved to the second phase in which people recognize a quality in Japanese Anime and Manga and see it as entertainment in a more normal way. In the third phase, Tezuka’s Anime for example, and above all, Miyazaki’s many qualified Anime gained world-wide reputation and celebration, getting important prizes in the world movie festivals. In the fourth phase, which is the phase of present

day, Oshii Mamoru's *The Ghost in the Shell*, Ohtomo Katsuhiro's *Akira*, and Mizuki Shigeru's *Nononba* have gained a reputation of artistic achievement as a sophisticated, even avant-garde art. In my impression the flow of acceptance has moved from phase one to four, that is from a more centrifugal positioning of Anime (characterized by more refusal) from the standpoint of the "host" country over an evaluation of just cheap entertainment to a more centripetal positioning of Anime (characterized by more acceptance) and then to an evaluation of highly artistic skills and now even to an evaluation of avant-garde achievement. The last could make Anime the object of centrifugal forces again (thus being regarded as perverse) again, but this time it could be so in that it shows some "dangerous" radical images as a new type of *art*. It could be perverse as an avant-garde art. I am not saying that the blame of Japanese Anime as full of violence and sex does no longer exist, instead, the blame is still with us but at the same time, reputation of Anime and Manga in these days is not quite confined to it.

Travelling Cultures and Travelling Sociology

In these years of my travelling around different countries doing talks on Manga / Anime in different universities, from Poland, Austria, Italy via France to Egypt, and from China to South Korea, I have been basically using the sociological conceptualization mentioned above.

To put it differently, I have been trying to catch up this sub-culture from Japan that had already travelled away in advance of my sociology, yet explaining it in sociological terms. It involves the process of a travelling sociology with a travelling sociologist talking about travelling cultures. I am also certain that so many other sociologists are doing the same thing on this globe. Without this travelling nature, the development of our current sociology could not be envisioned. In this regard, this summer, on the occasion of the world congress of the ISA, the International Sociological Association, in Gothenburg, Sweden, I proposed a session to its Research Committee of the History of Sociology, for dialogues between young Japanese sociologists and sociologists from all over the world. Fortunately, the idea was accepted and thanks to the organizers and the people who have been active in this research committee, we were able to initiate a good start. We are planning the next step in two years with an eye on the next ISA world congress four years from now, 2014, in Yokohama, Japan.

Recently, this autumn 2010, a small research group in Japan (represented by me) received a funding from Japan's Ministry of Education and Sciences to do a study on Manga and Animation in the world. It can be the case that subcultures are able to keep their genuine energy and power because of them keeping distance from governmental control and if so, they might also keep a distance to our investigation. We shall see. Though, there appears to be a good chance to do really global research on the subject. Actually there is a research network called "(European) Manga Network" founded by Dr. Jean-Marie Bouissou at Sciences Politiques, Paris and with this Network I have been in close contact for years. The Network has organized already

four or five conferences in Paris. I am now proposing an extended world congress on the subject to be held in Japan next year, 2011, for the first time in cooperation with the European Manga Network, yet this time not confined to Europe but extended to the world. I hope that this conference will be the basis for a next stage of explosion of world-wide travelling cultures and travelling sociologies / sociologists on the subject. The conference in the “homeland” (if there exists such a thing) of Manga and Anime will show our longstanding mutual influences and the inter-textuality of our cultures.

Finally taking this opportunity, as a member of the Local Organizing Committee of the ISA world congress in Yokohama, let me suggest to you, the readers of Sociologisk Forskning, to make your furthest travel into the Far East in 2014 in order to let your sociology travel the furthest.

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Biographical note

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