Hybrid Identities: Filipino Fansubbers of Japanese Media and Self-Construction

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Abstract

Along with the increasing accessibility of Japanese media to audiences outside Japan, fansubbing has become a widespread online activity as well. This study focuses on Filipino fansubbers and poses the question, "What hybrid identities do fansubbers construct upon engaging in the activity of fansubbing?" The study makes use of Steve Bailey's "hermeneutic subject" in analyzing the responses of five Filipino fansubbers to an interview. The study also employs interpretive textual analysis in examining some of the works of these fansubbers. The conclusion of the study highlights that, within the space of fandom, Filipino fansubbers are hybrid in two ways: (a) they are "prosumers" who both consume media and produce a new product out of it, and (b) they rely on a culturally hybrid identity where they capitalize on an imagined Japanese identity and an intermediary English-speaking one.

Keywords: fansubbers, hybridity, self-construction, Japanese media

THE MEANING of the word "hybridity" varies according to field, but among its most recent and most salient uses today is a definition that functions hand in hand with globalization.[1] In many cases, cultural hybridity is seen as one end of a binary with the theory of cultural imperialism as the other.[2] Whether hybridity is indeed the antithesis of the homogenizing power of cultural imperialism is perhaps a debate that will continue for a much longer period; the point of the matter is, however, globalization can no longer be considered seriously without the idea of hybridity. As Kraidy (2005) puts it, hybridity is the logic of globalization.

Our society today is not just rapidly globalizing but also being media-saturated, which is why hybridity is readily seen in various media texts. The popularity of Korean dramas on Philippine television, for example, is one of the ways globalization and hybridity enter our consciousness. While these dramas indoctrinate their Philippine audience with South Korean culture and lifestyle (albeit fictionalized), they do not come untampered. For South Korean dramas to become palatable to Philippine audience, their scripts have to be translated and dubbed into Filipino, Korean names changed into Christian ones,[3] their various cultural cues adapted to Philippine context, etc. In short, Korean *durama* have to be *Koreanovelas* first before they can be marketed to a Filipino audience.[4]

This process of hybridity, however, does not stop with the (re-)production process of Philippine TV networks. As Filipinos consume these dramas, they too provide their own interpretations to what they watch. These interpretations would of course vary according to their background, upbringing, etc., thus giving more space for hybridities to take place.

Yet it is not only the text and the interpretations of which that turn out to be hybrid. In the process of consumption, media also serve as a reflexive tool that aids in self-construction.[5] What hybrid identity comes out from consuming media produced in and by other countries therefore provides an interesting point of study. However, I would like to add other existing elements to this question. Given the intricate relationship between

globalization, hybridity, and self-construction, I focus on discussing a particular type of media consumers—the fansubber.

Various forms of media have become easier to access, thanks to the Internet, although the ways through which these media are being distributed do not always comply with laws on copyright. Given such accessibility, consumers can watch TV shows or films without the "tampering" of local television networks. Language becomes a barrier, however, when the consumer has little or no knowledge of the language used in the media. This is where the intermediary function of the fansubber comes in handy.

The term "fansubber" is portmanteau of the words "fan" and "sub," the latter referring to subtitles. Fansubbers are fans who overlay English text onto a non-English media text (e.g., Japanese, Korean, etc.) for the purpose of sharing it with other fans who hold the same interest in but lack the ability to understand the language native to the media text. This process requires not only consumption but also production, in a sense that these fansubbers use these media texts and remodel them to serve their own ends. "Fansubs," the products of these fansubbers, are also distributed over the Internet and enjoyed by other fans from elsewhere in the world. Such transnational activity, I argue, requires a certain hybrid identity to achieve.

The assumption that a hybrid identity lies in the fansubber is what led me to work on this research. The aim of this study therefore is to describe the hybrid identities that these fansubbers construct upon engaging in the activity of fansubbing. To achieve this, in-depth interviews with fansubbers were conducted as well as some interpretive textual analysis on their fansubs. In discussing my findings, I also make use of Steve Bailey's theoretical model of the hermeneutic social subject to illustrate how media—Japanese in particular—and a transnational community of fans aid in the self-construction of the Filipino fansubber.[6]

In doing this study, I hope to present fansubbing as one of the ways Filipinos engage in the transnational flow of media. There have been studies about Filipino fans and media consumption, but little has been

researched about fansubbing. I also hope to provide an example of how identities are constructed and negotiated through the consumption and production of media. As Pertierra (2010) puts it, "Understandings of the self, the family, religion and society are being reformulated as the world is transformed by forces of globalization, economic rationalization and capitalist consumption. The new media is both an agent of this transformation as well as a lifeline to earlier cultural understandings." Lastly, this study was done in hopes of providing more insights into the ideas of hybridity, globalization, and self-construction.

Fansubbing: From offline to online

Most of the papers on fansubbing thus far focus on the power tug-of-war between producers and consumers. From its inception to its continued practice today, fansubbing has had a much-debated relationship with commercial enterprises and underground businesses. In studying its history, one is confronted by such dilemma which, if not met with a discerning eye, could lead to much confusion. At this early point, I would like to clarify that my short retelling of fansubbing history differentiates and classifies fansubbers as "fans who make Japanese media more accessible to a larger community sharing the same interest, by appending translated text onto the original video, for the mere purpose of pleasure." While clearly, they violate some copyright laws in doing so, I differentiate them from pirates, who turn fansubs—the products of these fansubbers—into moneymaking businesses. Having said so, I now proceed to discussing the relatively short history of fansubbing, from the available literature at hand.

The earliest practice of fansubbing dates back to the 1980s (Cintas & Sanchez 2006), a time when Japan was enjoying a period of affluence, after recovering from desolation that the war brought (McClain 2002). Hatcher (2005), in tracing the history of this fan activity in the United States, notes that back then, Japanese media, particularly anime, were available only to a select few. Anime clubs in universities propagated them among members by paying for translations and using expensive equipment

to overlay the video with English text. Some of these made profit when sold in fan gatherings like anime conventions; but taking into consideration the time, money, and effort it entails, as well as the small community that consumes it, one could hardly say that a significant profit was made from these fansubbed videos.

Noticing the growing market, private companies started tapping into this unrealized industry, making the consumption of subtitled anime a legal activity. These companies, of course, invested in titles with an already large following, and in this kind of system, fansubbers played an important role. Through their works, some titles became more known by the community, and upon growth of an available market, companies bought the copyrights. It was also an "unwritten" ethical rule for fansubbers to discontinue fansubbing a title once it has been licensed, an act done in support of the artists who made them.

Similarly, TV networks picked up on the growing market and started airing more Japanese shows for public consumption.[7] In the case of anime, however, this was not met without problems. Traditionally, at least in the West, cartoons and animated shows were made for children—something parents would let their kids watch without worry. The difference in target audience and censorship laws applied to anime, however, made some titles unsuitable for non-Japanese audiences of young age. Cintas and Sanchez (2006) write that in Spain, in particular, some parents protested against the broadcast of such shows. As a result, some of these remained accessible only through fansubs, and such events helped the role of fansubbers as gatekeepers of information remain intact.

The phenomenon of piracy was not unique to the areas mentioned, however. Following fansubs, piracy became a norm in areas where Japanese media consumption was observed. Noticing the growing demand, pirates used the subtitled videos of fansubbers and made profit from them. Because of these pirated ventures, fansubbing became a questionable activity in terms of law. Its earlier role in creating market niches for private companies was nullified by the pirated competition. Within the fansubbing community,

groups that continued to fansub despite the licensing of titles also came into existence, giving an even lesser market share for commercially sold products. Such problems continue to this day.

With the coming of the Internet and the development of digital technology, fansubbing became a comparatively less exhaustive endeavor. While earlier practices imposed collective effort in producing fansubs, the availability of new software programs dedicated to subtitling has made it possible for a lone fan to produce his or her own fansubs. Nevertheless, with new technology comes sophistication that can only be achieved in a shorter period of time with a group effort.

The fansubbing etiquette established in the past also continues to the Internet age. Much like old practice, there are groups who stop once a title has been licensed locally. In the same way, there are also fansubbers who disregard licensure, but a common feature among them is a disclaimer that no profit is made from their releases, as well as a clear expression of contempt for those who do. Fansubbed videos are also at times appended with messages urging the viewer to buy the original product to support the artists who made them. Using such stance, fansubbers are able to maintain their identity as gatekeepers of information, whose time and energy spent on fansubbing gain no monetary rewards, much unlike the companies that benefit from the expansion of their markets, or the pirates that turn fansubbers' projects into moneymaking ventures.

Studies of fansubbing, aside from being scant, mainly focus on the different power struggles that fansubbing brings. Fansubbing is either a strategy to pull people toward a certain product or a transgression that violates copyright laws.

There are, however, many other dimensions to this activity that beg to be explored. The question of identity and self-construction in fansubbing, for example, remains a relatively unchartered terrain. It is for this reason that this study focuses on the matter.

The fansubbing process

To understand fansubbers further, it is important to take a look at the roles the members assume. Looking at these processes gives us an idea of the time and effort fansubbing takes.

Fansubs come in two types: soft and hard. Soft subs are usually scripts that a viewer can watch with the raw video file, which can be seen only when loaded onto a player. Some viewers prefer this kind of subs because they can disable the text display whenever they want to. It allows them to have the raw video file for their own use, which could be for graphics making (user icons, wallpapers, etc.), fan music videos, and/or many others.

Hard subs, on the other hand, allow fansubbers more control on how they want the text displayed but give no room for alteration to its viewers. Unlike soft subs, hard subs cannot be removed from the video once it has been encoded. Hard subs, however, usually offer more coded information, like romanized lyrics for opening themes stylized in the style of karaoke, or color-coded text for different characters.[8]

The process described below follows the production of hard subs:

Acquisition of raw video

Raw videos may be obtained by ripping videos from TV, DVD, radio, and at times streaming video. Providers of these may or may not be part of fansubbing groups; however, it is part of unwritten fansubbing etiquette to credit the source of the file. It is common for dramas and anime to be recorded by dedicated rippers, and then uploaded to a file-sharing system like torrents or clubboxes for fansubbers to pick up.

Translation

Using the video as reference, the translator translates the video from Japanese to the target language. This may be done while doing the "timing" or at a separate time.

Timing

Timing is the process of matching up the text display with the audio. A timer may preset the specific points when the text is to be displayed; in such case, the translation is filled in later. A timer may also wait for the translated script before timing the lines. In cases where the translator also acts as the timer, translation and timing are done simultaneously.

Typesetting

This part of the process refers to the task of styling the text: picking the colors, the font size, the position on the screen, etc. Typesetting plays an especially important role in shows where the speakers' lines overlap, as in the case of variety shows or live broadcasts. There are also times when translated text is overlaid onto an object on the screen, to replace, for example, the title of a book or the name of building.

Karaoke

Karaoke may be considered a subprocess of typesetting, but what differentiates it from the former is that aside from the stylized text, karaoke also deals with matching up the syllables of the words with the song featured in the show (thus the rubric of "karaoke"). A member may take on the role of both typesetter and karaoke, but in many cases, they are done by different people.

QC

While a series of reviews may be done within and after each and every stage, the final review of the output is called "quality check" or "quality control" (QC). In this process, the translation, timing, typesetting, and karaoke are checked for mistakes.

Encoding

Generating subtitles for a video may cause the file size to increase. It is the encoder's job to make sure that the video retains a reasonable file size with the best possible quality.

Distribution

Some fansub groups assign members to make sure that the files are uploaded and hosted in sites where they want them to be. File transfer, especially through torrents, is usually slowed down when there are more people who download (leechers) than there are people who upload (seeders). Members in charge of distribution make sure that the files are seeded properly.

These stages constitute the basic fansubbing process. While the order and execution of these may differ according to fansub group, this shows the general process that they follow, as well as the time and effort it entails.

Fans and media: A complex relationship

Given that fansubbing is such a tedious task, one is led to question what kind of person would endeavor it. This kind of activity requires dedication to the object of interest, a criterion that regular consumers do not possess. What this task requires is the enthusiasm and passion of a fan.

Traditionally, fans have been pathologized to fit images of the socially inept or, worse, the psychopath. This is evidenced by how they are portrayed on TV or in publications. With the words "geeks" and "nerds" as catchphrases for males, the immaturity or social inabilities of fans are highlighted by these representations. Similarly, female fans are often depicted as overweight and unhappy (Hills 2002; Jenkins 1992).

Japan provides a somewhat similar sketch of fans with the term "otaku." At best, the otaku is often constructed as socially incapable of conversations outside his subject of fixation (anime, military uniforms,

trains, etc.), and at worst, he is thought of as a pervert, sexual predator, or even a murderer.

In the case of women, the popularity of the boys' love genre[9] has also given birth to the term "fujoshi" (腐女子), which literally means "rotten woman." This is because of her deviant interest in romantic or sexual relationships between men (Tou as cited in Aoyama 2009).[10]

While these negative images permeate society even to this day, positive constructions have also been offered by other scholars. Jenkins (1992), in particular, focuses on media fans and notes how their resistance to mainstream media has impacted the industries to which they belong. Moving away from the construction of fans as passive consumers brainwashed by the media, Jenkins asserts instead the ability of fans to resist impositions by appropriating what they consume and reconstructing it according to their desires. Writing fan fiction, drawing fan art, and making fan videos, for example, allow them to borrow characters of their favorite shows and use them to one's own entertainment.

In Jenkin's definition, media fans are largely female, largely white, and largely middle class. This, of course, applies to Western, mostly American, fans. Drawing from Jenkins, Kelly (2004) also provides his own description of what fans are. He provides six propositions for this: (1) fans are the most aggressive appropriators and the most brazen producers among consumers; (2) fans both know more and care more; (3) fandom is serious play; it is about one's identity, not leisured entertainment; (4) fans seek intimacy with the object of their attention; (5) being a fan can be a solitary private pursuit—or a richly collective sociality; and (6) fans test the limit of the excessive and the obsessive. They tread a fine line between the pleasures of fan-tasy and the pathology of fan-aticism (pp. 8-11). Kelly also adds, in giving these descriptions, that fans are inseparable from fandoms.

The rise of a more positive view of fans as media consumers is arguably brought about by developments in media studies, in particular, the development of the two opposing theories of media effects and media

uses and gratifications. Noticeably, these two theories also run along the lines of binary of cultural imperialism and hybridity, with media effects and cultural imperialism arguing that the consumer is a passive victim to homogenization that media bring, while hybridity and the uses and gratification model argues for the agency of the consumer. Morley (2006), however, questions the effectivity of these binaries, and suggests that there is more to the black-and-white categorization of the relationship between media and fans. Picking up on this dilemma, Bailey (2005) has come up with a new model for social selfhood, which he calls the "hermeneutic social subject."

Steve Bailey's hermeneutic subject

Like Morley, Bailey (2002, 2005) realized the weaknesses of the active/passive binary that media studies has prescribed scholars in studying audiences. He emphasized the need for a new model that could better describe the processes of self-definition and self-formation that the "easy binaries of the passive and active audience" (2005, p. 8) cannot account for.

In suggesting the new theoretical model "hermeneutic social subject," Bailey draws mainly on George Herbert Mead's ideas of selfhood and the neo-Meadian interpretations of Hans Joas, Ernst Tugendhat, and Hans-Herbert Kögler. He focuses on Mead's ideas of the development and functioning of identity, particularly the division of the self into an "I" and a "me," where "'I' is the aspect of the self that acts in the present and is thus capable of innovative action, while the 'me' describes the conventional aspects of the self, those that conform to the symbolic norms provided by the social environment" (Bailey 2002, pp. 2-3).

> For Mead, there are two sides to the social self. There is the objective presence of the self within the group which acts as the stimulus to others; and then there is the subjective attitude of reflection which treats as an object the responses of the body to others in interaction. Mead has labelled these two faces of the self, which are continually in

> dialogue, the 'me' and the 'I'. Both faces are social and only emerge together in discourse, but 'me' represents a unique identity a self develops through seeing its form in the attitudes others take towards it, while the 'I' is the subjective attitude of reflection itself, which gazes on both the objective image of the self and its own responses. (Burkitt as cited in Bailey 2005, p. 30)

This model thus explains that the process of identity construction involves both being an object and a subject, and that one cannot exist without the other. This interplay between the "I" and the "me" continuously creates and resolves problems, because "me" is subjected to the demands of social norms that he must comply with, while "I" calls for innovations and transformations.

Furthermore, Mead adds that "the self emerges through a secondary engagement with various forms of otherness"; this otherness starts from physically proximate others (parents, siblings, etc.) and later expands to a set of social expectations that Mead dubs the "generalized other" (Bailey 2002, p. 3).

Applying these concepts to media studies, Bailey labels media texts as a symbolic environment or a "generalized other" through which "me's" and "I's" of the self are formed. Bailey sees the appropriateness of this model in media research because it holds "the additional advantage of avoiding the persistent (and seemingly insurmountable) disputes among media scholars regarding the passivity or activity of the audience by resisting a binary between the subjects (an audience) and structures (mediated messages) with an argument that "the subject" herself is a mediated, reflexive entity built from (and thus limited by) "a set of communicative practices" (Bailey 2002, p. 7).

It is thus Bailey's model that the study employs in answering the question of what hybrid identity fansubbers form and perform in fandom. Identifying the "I" and the "me" in this symbolic environment is key to understanding the hybrid identities born of such activity.

Methodology

To describe the hybrid identities Filipino fansubbers form in the consumption and production of media, interviews were conducted with Filipino fansubbers. Finding candidates for this was a challenge, however. The anonymity that the Web endows its users, and the varying nationalities that populate fandoms made identifying the Filipino subbers among them a trying endeavor.

The assumption that a Filipino fansubber does exist comes from my own experience, however. While not dedicated to fansubbing alone, I have some experience in doing the said activity. It is also my familiarity in Japanese media fandom that allowed me to meet another Filipino fansubber, years before I became interested in doing this study. Armed with only this tiny scrap of knowledge and an imagining that there might be more of us, I pursued this topic.

My first approach was to post advertisements about this study in highly populated communities. This proved to be unsuccessful, however, so I took a bolder step by e-mailing fansub groups and asking them if any of their members were Filipino and would be willing to be interviewed for the study. This earned me more responses, and overall I was able to identify ten potential respondents. Out of this sample, only five were successfully interviewed, two gave favorable responses but were unreachable after some time, two did not respond, and one refused.

The interviews were conducted through the Internet because of two reasons. One is that the Internet is a medium that the respondents are largely familiar with. It is through this space that they are able to assume their identities as fansubbers, and their familiarity to it provides a sense of comfort and control. The other reason for conducting the interviews online is that geographic and time constraints made face-to-face interviews an unfeasible option.

Three of the interviews were done through an exchange of e-mails, where the respondents were given a set of questions to answer. In occasions

where I had follow-up questions, I e-mailed them back. One of the other two interviews was done through real-time chat and the other through an internet call.

To support the interviews, interpretive textual analysis of the fansubbers' fansubs was also made, although not extensively. The point was simply to check for consistency and to find details that could reinforce the findings from the interviews. The ages of the interviewees indicated in this article are those as of 2010.

Study sample

Interviewee 1: JM

JM is 24, male, and lives in Manila. He is single and currently helping in the family business, a liner bus that provides transportation between Dasmariòas and Manila. He has also studied the Japanese language and has passed level 3 of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) in 2009(?) . He plans to continue his study of the language in the future.

JM has approximately two years of experience in fansubbing, but he considers himself a novice in the practice. According to him, he has done tasks such as rough translation, timing, and karaoke, but he adds that these were mostly minor roles given to someone who has less experience. He belongs to more than one fansubbing community, and his subs range from Japanese dramas to Filipino ones. He also subs videos related to the idol agency Johnny's Entertainment" as well as J-pop (Japanese pop) promotion videos (PVs).[12]

JM's interest in fansubbing began with anime, and from there he joined fansubbing groups. He answered to various recruiting advertisements, and learned timing and karaoke from senior members. He continues to fansub to this day, taking on "small" roles as he gathers more experience in the field.

When not fansubbing, JM spends his time watching anime and dramas, as well as listening to J-pop. He also reads Haruki Murakami novels.

Interviewee 2: Badstar

Badstar is 22, female, and lives in Manila. She is single and works as a preschool teacher. She claims not to be proficient in Japanese at all, but she has a fansubbing experience spanning six years.

Badstar is a dedicated fansubber of the Korean boy band DBSK (Dong Bang Shin Ki). She has followed the group's rise to stardom from their very debut, and it is her interest in them that led her to fansub their videos. Badstar relates that when the DBSK first started out, she found many other fans who wanted to understand what the artists were saying, so she looked for translators who can help her subtitle the videos in English.

Much like many artists who have gained massive popularity in Korea, DBSK eventually promoted their music in Japan. Today, THSK (Tohoshinki), as they are called in Japan, enjoys success in the Japanese music industry, as many of their songs have made their way to and even topped the Oricon charts. Moreover, recent developments have caused three of the five members of the group to file a lawsuit against their Korean agency over contract conflicts (Lee 2009), and it was because of this that Tohoshinki can mostly be seen in Japan instead of Korea today.

Throughout these changes, Badstar has continued subbing the group's activities, adapting accordingly. While she mostly did much of the subbing on her own when she first started, Badstar now oversees one of the most popular fansubbing groups for the band. As one of the group's founders, Badstar manages the projects the group undertakes, and checks the final output for errors. Badstar states that the group has around 150 members, housing different nationalities altogether.

Interviewee 3: Shiri

Shiri is 19, female, and, like the first two interviewees, based in Manila. She is a student of the University of the Philippines Diliman, at the time of the interview in her third year of Library Science. She is also a part-time research assistant. She says that Japanese media aside, her main interest in Japan lies in the language. She is currently studying beginner's Japanese, and plans to continue to intermediate.

Shiri says that her curiosity in fansubbing led her to study online tutorials and practice on her own. She started out as a timer in a fansub group, and from then she has tried different tasks such as quality control, typesetting, and karaoke, with the last two as her areas of specialty. Presently she is part of only one fansubbing group, which mainly subtitles the different videos of the Johnny's Entertainment idol group, KAT-TUN. To date, she has been fansubbing for five years, and aside from filling in for whatever task that calls for her skills, she acts as one of the moderators of her fansubbing group.

When not fansubbing, Shiri enjoys reading books, watching movies and TV shows, listening to music, playing musical instruments, food trips, and taking care of her dogs.

Interviewee 4: Fansubcrazy

Fansubcrazy is 38, female, and single. She lives in Cagayan de Oro and has two jobs: a full-time personnel head in a small-scale company and a part-time college and graduate school professor. She says she knows very little Japanese, and mostly picks up new vocabulary from fansubbing Japanese media.

Fansubcrazy has been fansubbing for approximately three years, and together with Shiri, she moderates the same fansubbing group. Aside from this, she is also in charge of encoding, timing, and quality control. She studied subbing on her own when she first started out, and learned even more techniques when she joined groups. Presently, she is part of

two fansubbing groups: one dedicated to KAT-TUN and the other dedicated to PVs and performances of various J-pop artists.

Fansubcrazy's interests in Japan include dramas and travel. Aside from doing fansubs, she spends her free time reading, cross-stitching, and hanging out with friends.

Interviewee 5: Jeffer

Jeffer refused to disclose her actual age, but she did say that she is in her 20s. She lives in Baguio, is single and a certified public accountant. She is also a JLPT 4 passer. She took some classes in Japanese two years prior, but due to conflict in schedule, she opted to study on her own. She plans to continue studying the language despite the slow progress.

Jeffer first started fansubbing by studying different software programs. After observing different fansubbed videos, she joined a fansubbing group and has continued ever since. She is presently part of two fansubbing groups: one whose works revolve around the Johnny's Entertainment idol group Arashi, and another who focuses on Johnny's Entertainment talent Ikuta Touma. Jeffer's tasks in these two groups involve timing, typesetting, quality control, and encoding.

When asked about her interests related to Japan, Jeffer says she is mainly attracted to its popular culture. Other than that, her hobbies include music, film, literature, and writing.

Findings

Fansubbing as a symbolic environment

In the neo-Meadian sense, fansubbing functions as a symbolic environment, a "generalized other" with whom the subject, the fansubbers, interacts. Thus, in "conversing" with Japanese media, they also converse with themselves and build an identity upon it.

When asked for the reasons why they fansub, the interviewees all claimed that it provides them a sense of relief or escapism from the daily routine of their lives. Despite the time, energy, and effort that fansubbing requires, fansubbing gave them a sort of "me-time" where they can indulge in their objects of interest and, at the same time, learn more about themselves.

For example, Shiri mentions that one of the rewards of fansubbing for her was that she is able to train herself to be more disciplined and work toward her set goals. She uses the toils and labors of fansubbing to test her limits and measure her strengths, which she notes she can apply to similar activities that require effort and discipline (studies, work, etc.).

Other interviewees also expressed the same idea, claiming that releasing a finished product to the rest of the community is a reward in itself. The act of completing something that took time and effort gives them a sense of achievement. Seeing the potential in "me" makes them actualize an "I" that produces their desired results.

The hybrid prosumer: A dialogue between the submissive "me" and the rebellious "I"

As mentioned earlier, fansubbing challenges copyright laws and legal distribution. When asked about this matter, all the interviewees confirmed that they are aware of the violations they might be committing in practicing fansubbing. Their answers show a sort of ambivalence—and here I highlight that there is a struggle between the "me" who must conform to what is expected of them, and the "I" who senses the need for a transformation.

JM, mindful of the law violations that he might be committing, said that he researched on the topic and found security in knowing that no lawsuit has been filed against a fansubber for this activity. He does add, however, that he knows of some fansubbing groups who have been cautioned by networks to stop. He says that if such case happens to him, he will heed to the request.

Fansubcrazy says she would do the same thing if it does happen. She does say, however, that she is willing to take down a particular video or so, but not stop fansubbing altogether. Jeffer, on the other hand, simply wishes that Japanese TV would be more forgiving in this matter, and made no further comment.

On the contrary, Badstar expresses a strong disagreement with the copyright infringement law. She says that such laws should distinguish between fansubbers and pirates because only the latter benefits from the work that they do not do. She goes on further to explain that fans "need a connection, something they can keep, something that can let them feel that they are not outsiders, and subs help them with this." Furthermore, she faults the producing companies for expanding their merchandise without considering language barriers; while they sell their products abroad, they make no effort in adding English subtitles. She explains that the companies themselves profit from what fansubbers do, as it is actually their fansubs that are able to make fans out of passive or even nonconsumers. For Badstar, copyright laws should be reviewed in lieu of fansubbing and its positive effects.

Similarly, Shiri acknowledges the complexity of the topic and, like Badstar, sees the role of fansubbing in promoting artists. Her suggested solution to the problem is for companies to hire fansubbers professionally. She contradicts this, however, by saying that she cannot see for sure if there is a career in fansubbing since everyone does it for free.

The interviewees thus show that their fansubbing activities produce a "me" that is expected to comply with social norms—in this case engaging in lawful activity—but is reacted upon by an "I" who chooses to test the limits set by the law. Even more interesting is the empowered, autonomous "I" drawn upon an imagined producer in oneself. These fansubbers participate in fandom not only to be entertained or to escape from "real life" but also to find agency in assuming the role of producer and facilitating the distribution and thereby promotion of their favorite artists.
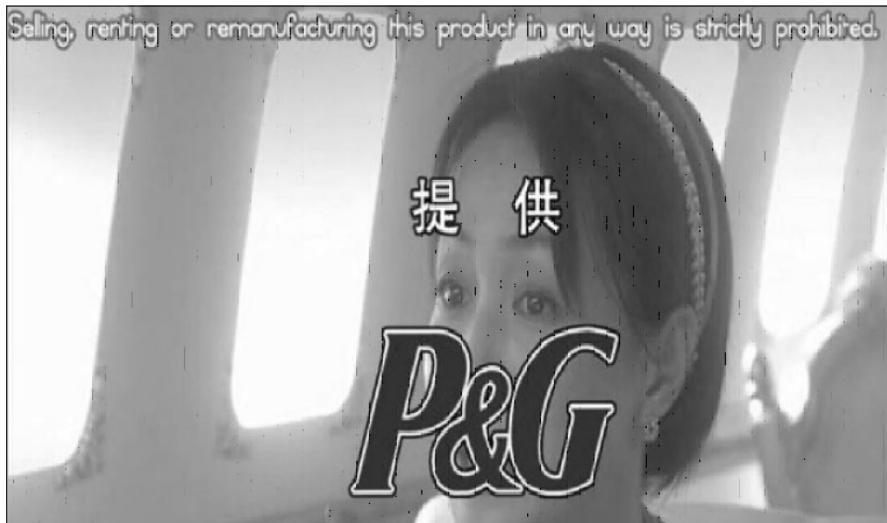
Figure 1. A message from the fansubbers prohibiting the viewer to use the fansub for piracy.

These views exhibit, in a postmodern sense, a blurring of the lines separating consumer and producer. The resultant identity brought about by the dialogue between the submissive "me" and the rebellious "I" in the symbolic environment of fansubbing is therefore hybrid—that of a "prosumer" who challenges existing models and understandings of capitalist production and consumption.

Engaging in transnational fandom

The interviewees find engaging in a transnational community of fans both rewarding and trying. All of them mentioned "meeting friends" who share the same interest as one of the benefits of fansubbing. They also find pleasure in receiving "thank you's" for their hard work. Social relationships in fandom do not always go smooth, however.

For example, Fansubcrazy and Shiri identify conflict within the group as a problem. They both describe cases wherein members have differing

values that result in misunderstandings. Fansubcrazy notes in particular that there are people who are in it for the glory—a notion that places popularity and recognition over the supposed cumulative and cooperative effort that fansubs promote. It is also important to note here, however, that both interviewees who mentioned this problem belong to the same fansubbing group, and while the other interviewees make no mention of similar conflicts, it is inconclusive whether this problem is specific to their group or is a phenomenon observed by others as well. Nevertheless, it is a property worth mentioning.

Conflict with other fansub groups also exists according to the interviewees. Jeffer describes the Arashi fandom as competitive in such a way that fansubbing endeavors sometimes turn into a race to see who finishes first. Fansubcrazy also mentions that there is stress in being compared to other fansubbing groups who finish projects sooner than they do. In addition, Shiri mentions that there are those who don't observe this unwritten "fansubbing etiquette" where other groups should not take on projects that have already been "claimed" previously.

Shiri also mentions that other fans also become difficulties when they harass fansubbers into releasing the projects sooner. In relation to this, "proper fan etiquette" is again mentioned, this time by Jeffer, citing those who do not abide by the rules that the fansub groups establish. These rules mostly concern the uploading of fansubs to streaming websites such as YouTube. Fansubbers generally frown upon streaming media, as it exposes them to private companies who may be seeing them as violators of the copyright law and classifying them as competition that must be taken out.

For the same reasons indicated above, both Shiri and Jeffer note that people who profit from their work pose as problems. Piracy turns them into targets of networks and private companies and thus endangers their position as fansubbers.

What is interesting here as far as hybrid identity formation is concerned is that despite the differing backgrounds and values of the fans

within the community, there is a set of rules (though not always formally codified) that participants of the fan culture are expected to follow. This produces a sense of "me" that must adhere to the guidelines set by the fan community as a whole, lest they want to risk estrangement.

Rules

1. Please do not upload our releases onto **online streaming sites** that include but are not restricted to Youtube, Crunchyroll, Veoh, Dailymotion, Tudou, v.youku, dramacrazy, mysoju, asianrice, megavideo etc.

2. Feel free to redistribute our releases the day after it was released on the community but please credit the team properly.

3. **ABSOLUTELY NO HOTLINKING OF FILES.** Please either direct them to the post at the community or the community itself.

4. It is forbidden to share our softsubs outside our community for purposes other than your personal viewing

5. For use of our releases especially our softsubs as a basis to translate into another language, please feel free to contact us via the jorsubs email at   with "permission to use softsubs" as the subject. Also, please don't forget to state which language you are translating it into, the name of your subbing team --if applicable-- and a link of the site where you'll be sharing it. Of course, this rule is only applicable to OUR releases.

If it does not have the   logo embedded on it, and is subbed by another team, even if the release is found on our community, please contact the people responsible for them accordingly as this is outside our jurisdiction already.

6. Our releases are free fansubs for all. Not for sale, rent or redistribution for profit in any form.

Figure 2. A fansubbing group's rules, published on their profile page.[13]

While it is also important to ask who sets these rules, such question perhaps needs to be explored elsewhere. What is important from the data that we have here is that there seems to be an expected abstraction of one's locality to participate in transnational fandom. This is something that I will further elaborate in the next two sections.

Imagining Japan

Essentially, what holds these fans together despite their different backgrounds is their common interest in Japanese media. When asked about why it is Japanese media in particular that they fansub, the interviewees' common answer is simply interest in Japanese media and popular culture, making no distinction of the society they reflect. All interviewees were aware that they are consuming cultural products, but aside from the language, interest in other areas of Japanese society, or the study of which, was not mentioned.

Aside from JM, the interviewees showed medium to no interest in Philippine media. While Shiri mentions admiring local artists, her interest does not lead her to do the same fan activities she does for Japanese media. Also interesting to reiterate here is Badstar's shift from Korean to Japanese media to follow the activities of the group DBSK. Such evidence suggests that the countries which produce these media are secondary to the cultural products themselves, and that they only serve as a background to make these images of dramas, music, or artists possible.

Cultural hybridity

Both the appropriation and consumption of English fansubs involve the imagining of an international community. As the interviewees have mentioned earlier, fansubbing groups are usually populated with people from different ethnic groups. In the same way, consumers of their fansubs also come from different countries. In such case, there seems to be a necessity for the fansubbers' abstraction of nationality or a particular locality.

Fansubbers' notes, as mentioned earlier, flesh out the presence of the fansubbers to the viewer. Not only do these notes come in the form of reminders or disclaimers; at times, they are also appended to explain to the viewer a certain custom or concept specific to Japan. Cintas and Sanchez (2006) note that this kind of practice is particular to the fansubbing community, as professional translation should "pass unnoticed to the viewer" (p. 47). In this manner, fansubbers act as intermediaries who are expected to facilitate the better understanding of not only the text but also the culture behind it. Sufficient knowledge in Japanese is therefore expected from the fansubber.

My many years of participation in the consumption of Japanese media has also given me the impression that knowledge in basic Japanese terms as well as culture-specific terms enables one to gain more status in the fandom. There are cases, however, wherein the overuse of which leads to the opposite effect. In any case, participation in both the appropriation and consumption of Japanese media requires a certain amount of

"Japaneseness" or, to a certain degree, an imagined Japanese identity in oneself.

        This emphasis on Japanese culture in fandom somewhat subdues the nationality that the fansubber performs—at least in this space; her/his choice of what kind of English to use is also another proof of this abstraction. It may be observed that the English used in fansubs is neither too American nor too British, nor does it contain references to specific cultures other than Japan. While the ability of the translator may also affect this factor, such choice may also come from the idea that accessibility is considered by fansubbers. Not all viewers (and fansubbers) have English as their first language; using a culture-specific type of English would thus be impractical.

        The Filipino fansubber—presumably as part of an international group—appears to be no different from the characteristics mentioned above. Fandom, as performed in the space of the Internet, does not require them to emphasize or capitalize on their Filipino identity—which is the very reason why they were hard to locate in the first place. I therefore argue that the hybrid identity of the fansubber requires an abstraction of a specific local identity, and capitalizes more on a fictionalized Japanese one, not to the extent that one is a native, but enough to assume a role that stands in for two cultures: that of the Japanese, and an international English-speaking community of consumers.

Self-doubling: Separating the offline from the online

        The culturally hybrid identity described above leads one to question if such abstraction of locality extends to the fansubbers' offline lives. Thinking along these lines would of course lead us back to the hypodermic theory of media effects, where media take total control of the passive subject. Similarly, if the answer to such question is yes, then the idea of globalization as homogenization would be proven right after all. The interviewees of the study, however, provide a different answer.

All interviewees noted that offline, they make no special effort in establishing their identities as fansubbers. They say that a close few know that they fansub—some of them are understanding and supportive, whereas others do not understand what they do or why they do it, or are otherwise nonchalant about it. Simply put, they cease assuming their identity as fansubber, or perhaps even as fans, when the person they are talking to does not belong to the fandom.

What happens here is what Bailey calls "self-doubling"—that the virtual community of fandom gives rise to autonomous selves that are performed only within the space designated for them. Bailey cites the fandom of cartoon *Futurama* as an example, whose online fan community is mostly described as "geeky." Bailey explains, however, that fans of the show choose to assume such role only within the virtual community—the reason being that "geekiness" is socially undesirable elsewhere.

Similarly, Filipino fansubbers seem to abstract their Filipino identities only within the virtual communities they participate in. For them, extending such identity offline is pointless because it doesn't provide them a connection with the people they interact with.

Conclusion

Fansubbing is one example of how globalization and hybridity go hand in hand, between different cultures, and between the overlapping roles of the producer and the consumer.

This paper sought to describe the hybrid identities that are constructed through the symbolic environment of fansubbing. From the insights of the interviewees, it seems that media and fandom as a community do facilitate the formation of hybrid identities. Hybrid in the sense that the roles of producers and consumers are blurred, redefined, and negotiated. These fansubbers challenge the existing notions of what consumers can or cannot do with the media texts presented to them. Hybrid also in the cultural sense, given that these fansubbers capitalize on an

imagined Japanese identity and an intermediary English-speaking one. This identity, however, is performed specifically within fandom. These fansubbers leave their virtual identity within the imagined walls of the fan community, just as they partially shed their offline ones to participate in online fandom.

This study has generated, in my belief, some insights that can help us understand globalization, capitalist consumption and production, hybridity, and identity formation more. However, much still needs to be done to explore the various aspects of fandom and how it is performed. With our increasingly media-saturated age, there is a need for more studies that draw away from the already dragged out discussion on structures. The individual is just as crucial as a point of study, and in saying so, I also highlight the need to study the plural identities that people form when engaging in relatively new symbolic environments, such as online fandoms.

Notes

1   This paper was first presented at the Second Philippine Studies Conference held at the University of Tsukuba in November 2010. It has undergone several revisions ever since, and I am grateful to the guidance of Dr. Michiyo Yoneno-Reyes and the insights of Dr. Raul Pertierra as well as the two anonymous reviewers who carefully examined this essay.

2   One popular example is Jan Neverdeen Pieterse's *Globalization as Hybridization* (1993), among many others.

3   Some dubbed Koreanovelas, however, choose to retain the Korean names.

4   I would like to thank Prof. Lily Ann Polo for pointing this out.

5   This, I argue in detail in the succeeding parts.

6   I chose fansubbers of Japanese media because of my familiarity with the community. I should also add that I have ample experience in fansubbing, and was, for a certain period of time, using the activity to practice my language skills.

7   For works related to the rise in popularity of Japanese dramas in East Asia, see Iwabuchi (2004).

8   Color coding becomes useful in cases like variety shows where celebrities tend to speak at the same time. The use of color codes helps the viewer distinguish who is saying what.

9   Boys' Love is a genre of media that features homoromantic or homoerotic relationships between males.

10   It must be noted here, however, that while "fujoshi" may be used as a derogatory term by people outside the fandom, some fans indulgingly use the term to define themselves.

11   Steve Bailey derives from the neo-Meadian interpretations of the following: Hans Joas, Ernst Tugendhat, and Hans-Herbert Kögler.

12   Promotion videos are music videos released upon or prior to the sale of a single or an album.

13   The name of the group has been removed per the fansubbers' request

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