

# COMPLETION REPORT

## Sites, Subjectivities and Narrative-worlds:

### An Ethnography of Media Fans and their Production in Japan and Singapore

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This research project employs primarily ethnographic methods to explore media fans' practices in the production of artifacts and values that constitute everyday culture in the contexts of Singapore and Japan. Over the summer of 2015, I conducted a number of semi-structured interviews with 10 fans in Singapore and 7 fans in Japan, as well as participant observations at major fans' events, such as the Anime Expo and Cosfest in Singapore and the Comic Market 88. These ethnographic methods allow me to highlight the following (inter-related) themes.

First, specific concrete sites are pivotal to the affects and thoughts of fans. Fans experience the sharing of passion and interests with fellow fans at events. As people, publications, and goods congregate at these events to generate a particular form of atmosphere, some fans feel the diversity of ideas that make them think deeply and differently. At the same time, these very sites are potentially generative of anger and animosity, as fans clash over their shared liking for the same characters. Or as one fan puts it, people gather to have fun at these sites, but when they have too much fun, they start to get angry with each other. These sites hence constitute arenas of cultural expressions that exhibit both camaraderie and conflicts. Sites that serve as destinations for fans' "pilgrimages," in that they are purportedly used as settings for works of *manga* and *anime*, play a vital role in strengthening fans' attachment to and love for these works.

Second, through their encounters with works, characters, and fans' sites, fans develop not only the skills in creating fan-fiction and original works, but also certain outlooks with regards to their objects of interest in relation to the world in general. Works could be intellectually enhancing as they prompt fans to move beyond the pleasure of leisure and entertainment to gain deeper knowledge on topics such as climate and economics.

Third, my research demonstrates the continuing relevance of Ōtsuka Eiji's concept of "narrative-world" in understanding fans' practices. Observations at *manga* specialty stores and fans' events do point towards the popularity of characters with distinctive visual characteristics (e.g., blonde hair) and ways of speaking and acting (e.g., using English words). They hence corroborate with Azuma Hiroki's argument that fans are motivated by what he calls *moe*-elements that agglomerate into a cultural database. Nonetheless, fans I spoke with relate their attraction to particular works and characters to the settings, i.e., what Ōtsuka calls narrative-worlds, and what could be done with them. Fans respect other fans who can expand such worlds. In fact, the less concrete "official" settings a media franchise establishes, the more it is able to capture the attention and attraction of fans, the more prominent examples being *Tōhō Project* and *Kantai Collection*. This is because fans feel that they are given a sandbox to play with.

Part of this research was used a poster presentation at the Rutgers University's School of Communication and Information. This research laid a solid foundation for a longer-term dissertation project, which I will be undertaking over the coming year. I also intend to present some of the findings at future conferences and journal articles.

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

Verbal Presentation (Date, Venue, Name of Conference, Title of Presentation, Presenter, etc.)

Kam, Thiam Huat. *Producing and Consuming Narrative-worlds*. Poster presentation at Rutgers University's School of Communication and Information, New Brunswick, April 27, 2016.

Thesis (Name of Journal and its Date, Title and Author of Thesis, etc.)

Book (Publisher and Date of the Book, Title and Author of the Book, etc.)