

ORIENTALISM AND WESTERN FANS: A LOOK AT FANDOM SURROUNDING
MASASHI KISHIMOTO'S *NARUTO*

A Thesis
By
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Abstract

ORIENTALISM AND WESTERN FANS: A LOOK AT THE FANDOM SURROUNDING MASASHI KISHIMOTO'S *NARUTO*

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Edward Said's concept of Orientalism has been influential in literary studies, allowing new methods of insight into cross-cultural interaction. Said posits that the western idea of an eastern "Orient" is an illusion, created by and distinguishing western culture through contrast (Said 20-21). Masashi Kishimoto's *Naruto* is a popular manga and anime title with a large following in the United States. As a point of cultural connection between Japan and the US, *Naruto* serves as a locus around which we can observe the interaction between western readers and an eastern text.

This thesis examines western fandom of anime and manga to see if those fans Orientalize, stereotyping in their perceptions of Japan. It specifically examines western fandom of the popular anime and manga, *Naruto*, and the attitudes that fans hold toward Japan. A textual analysis of *Naruto* is utilized to determine if it is self-Orientalist, pandering to an Orientalist audience. Following this, I examine fan forums to determine if fans of *Naruto* hold Orientalist views.

Ultimately, I assert that Orientalism does exist within fan communities, but that it is a minority among a culture that largely resists Oriental tendencies. This thesis suggests the idea of the stereotypical (and stereotyping) fan as a misconception, the result of negative hierarchical perceptions in US popular culture as well as within fan communities themselves. I also gesture toward the increasing enmeshment of Japanese cultural products in the lives of Americans, a blurring of “foreign” and domestic intellectual consumption.

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I could not have completed this thesis without the patience and guidance of Dr. Craig Fischer. His constant encouragement and helpful criticism made it possible to take on what seemed like an insurmountable task. The careful reading and suggestions by Dr. Holly Martin helped keep several aspects of my argument on track. Dr. Thomas McLaughlin provided several theoretical insights during the conception of this essay and his advice was indispensable in writing this thesis. Special thanks to Donna Corriher, who helped me through the formatting of my front-matter and several other process issues. I would never have dreamed of writing something like this if I had not met Christopher Slezak, who introduced me to anime, and Adam Carhart, who introduced me to *Naruto*. My interest in Japan and cultural awareness is, I see now, at least an indirect result of these friendships.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Michael and Karen Garrison, who have believed in and supported me all along the way. Through a revolving door of career changes, they have always been there.

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INTRODUCTION

I have been a fan of Japanese animation (anime) and manga (comics) for almost a decade now. As happens with many college kids, my roommate decided to introduce me to anime. *Trigun*, a title that is now nearly 20 years old, was funny, action packed, and resonated with me in its treatment of philosophy and themes that I hadn't realized could be housed within a simple *cartoon*. This, of course, opened the door to viewings of other anime titles over the next few years. I began reading manga to see what would happen later in a series I was watching. Friends would recommend other titles, animations and comics that reached deep into my imagination more readily than any live-action show I had ever watched. Like many fans, I couldn't really articulate *why* I liked anime and manga (and by no means did I enjoy everything that I watched), but something about the two kept me engrossed.

Years later, I was presented with an opportunity to live and work in Japan. The pull I felt toward that country was something I now realize was at least partially a result of my love of anime and manga. For a few years, I worked as an English teacher in Fukushima and Tsuchiura, Japan. During this time I was able to talk to friends and colleagues about anime and manga culture and observe the act of reading manga in its "natural habitat."

In a way, some of my expectations were fulfilled. I was struck by the pervasiveness of visual cues (what Neil Cohn, of the University of California, calls Japanese Visual Language) in Japanese culture – manga visuals were everywhere, more so than the cartoon imagery of the States. I ordered from Pizza Hut once and was surprised to see a manga-style

rendition of a delivery girl on the box, offering me a discount on my next order. Despite this, Japanese fans seemed to be fans of a specific series of manga or anime more than of the genre as a whole. In fact, anime and manga fandom, though pervasive, did not seem to coalesce into one definitive group in Japan. There were definitely differences between Japanese and Western fandoms. One of these was the use of the word “Otaku,” which is often proudly used by Western anime fans. During a discussion with a coworker concerning Otaku culture, I was told that the term could refer to someone with an obsessive interest in anything. There are train Otaku, math Otaku, food Otaku – the best way to translate the meaning would be “nerd.” The word Otaku is removed, though not completely separate, from the western meaning of “anime/manga fan.”

The disconnect between Japan as perceived and as a real place was made especially clear when I visited Akihabara, the Mecca for fans of manga and anime. In this ward of Tokyo, initially known for electronics, anime and manga is available on a massive scale. Girls dressed as maids passed out advertisements for maid cafes, an establishment popularized in “Akiba” and visited by Japanese as well as foreign customers. The occasional cosplayer (literally taken from “costume play”) would walk by dressed as a favorite character, distinct from the plainly dressed citizens around him. Something else I noticed was the sheer number of other foreigners roaming around this supposed anime paradise. The most noticeable aspect was the absence of any real place that actually represented what we were all looking for. There were shops, hundreds of them, filled with every kind of manga imaginable. Video games saturated the atmosphere in dusty corner-shops and flashy, fluorescent-lit superstores. But they were just that – shops and businesses. Even the maid cafes, a kind of role-playing restaurant, were a form of fabricated reality that barely

maintained its illusion. It seemed a bit empty to me. I had always known, of course, that the industries themselves were just like any other – manga and anime both revolve around commerce. The significance of this simply didn't hit me until then. The fantasy culture created by manga and anime simply wasn't there – it was a phantasm existing only on paper and in the mind.

This is how I started thinking about the difference between western perception and the reality of Japanese culture. It isn't that I actually expected any of the grandiose posturing of Ultraman in everyday life, nor that I would suddenly gain superpowers or cat ears after setting foot in Japan. I just thought that being in the country of origin would bring me closer to the – well – origin of stories that I had enjoyed for so long. The idealized, fantasy-world version of Japan that had existed (perhaps subconsciously) in my head was gone.

After returning to the United States for grad school, I continued to notice that in discussion of Japan there is sometimes a gap between cultural perceptions and reality. This was often tied in with anime fandom. One caucasian student in a Japanese language lab I audited a few years ago constantly spoke in a high, cartoonish voice and would often giggle in an uncanny emulation of stereotypical “anime girl” mannerisms. She would also dress in a style similar to the “Harajuku girls” made famous in America by a Gwen Steffani video about ten years ago. Striped tights, baby-doll dress, a hat with cat ears on it: she wasn't totally off, but to someone who has been to Harajuku recently (fashion is always changing) and experienced real Japanese culture and talked to (and taught) real Japanese girls, this behavior can be a bit annoying.

This and other incidents where I noticed a disconnect between western perception and the reality of Japanese culture prompted me to wonder if there was a link between anime and

manga consumption and our understanding of Japan as a culture. Once I read Edward Said's *Orientalism*, there was finally a theory to match with the questions I had been pondering. Said's concept of Orientalism has been highly influential on literary studies with regards to culture. By claiming that all knowledge is political, Said posits that texts involving the East do not reproduce a true representation of the Orient, but rather a westernized version of it (Said 20-21). This illusory "East" is a culturally constructed stereotype, pervasive and replicated through firsthand experiences with the East that are *perceived* through a western worldview or gaze.

Said assigns several meanings to Orientalism, "all of them... interdependent." He claims, "The most readily accepted designation for Orientalism is an academic one... a style of thought based on an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'" (2). In other words, Orientalism is defined by the setting up of binaries, a juxtaposition of the East and West. The second function of Orientalism is as a strategy for domination. Said describes this as "the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (3). Orientalism, then, is a controlling mechanism that informs western discourse concerning the East, ensuring that the West always has the upper hand.

Pertinent to my interests, Said asserts that while Europe has been more preoccupied with the Middle Eastern "Orient," American Orientalism more likely involves the Asian "Orient." He claims, "the American understanding of the Orient will seem considerably less dense, although our recent Japanese, Korean, and Indo-Chinese adventures ought now to be

creating a more sober, more realistic ‘Oriental’ awareness” (2). This is especially relevant when discussing Western, and especially American, perspectives on Japanese Manga and Anime.

My initial question when starting this thesis was “Do western fans view Japan through an Orientalist lens as a result of anime and manga consumption?” To fully cover such a subject would require a book-length project. Even then, the subject is so wide that entire volumes could be spent examining different facets of the fan community. For the sake of time and sanity, I decided to focus on one of my favorite anime/manga titles, Masashi Kishimoto’s *Naruto*, and its surrounding fandom. After finishing much of my research, I believe that the answer to my questions is basically “no.” As in my earlier story concerning the wannabe “Harajuku Girl,” there are outliers. Incidences certainly still occur where fans fall into the trap of Orientalist stereotyping and there are definitely aspects of manga that lend themselves to this. However, my research indicates that most manga and anime fans, specifically of the *Naruto* series, maintain a fairly balanced view of Japanese culture and are mindful that manga and anime cannot fully represent Japan.

In this thesis I will examine the text around which my chosen fan community revolves. Kishimoto’s *Naruto*, a long-running serial manga, is a prime example of Shonen (boy’s) manga. Set in a world of ninja warfare, *Naruto* follows the adventures of a young ninja named Naruto who desires to one day become *hokage*, leader of his village. Naruto is no ordinary boy – he contains the spirit of a demon fox, the Kyubi, that decimated his village on the day of his birth. Through hard work and dedication, Naruto not only becomes a competent ninja, but also makes friends and obtains the desire to bring peace to the ninja world.

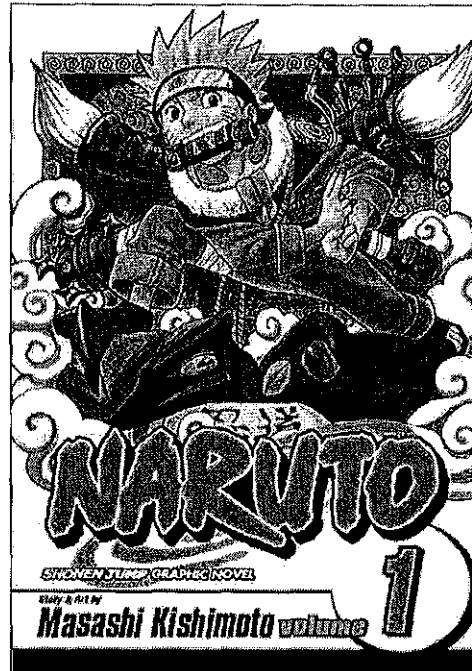


Figure 1. Cover of *Naruto*. Kishimoto, *Naruto*.

Naruto (see fig. 1) is interesting because it weaves Japanese mythology with contemporary references and fast-paced action. While it is never said that the world of *Naruto* represents Japan, the association cannot be missed. Despite possessing a wholly different geography made up of several different nations, the world of *Naruto* possesses traits that are very clearly Japanese. The soundtrack to the anime often features traditional Japanese instruments such as the *shamisen* (a four-stringed strumming instrument) and *shakuhachi* (flute) along with electric guitars. Shinto gods or goddesses, such as Susanoo-oo, are occasionally referenced in the text. The setting itself is very much a fusion of myth, history and modern culture – images of old temples and other traditional settings are seen in

tandem with modern villages featuring water pipes and electricity. Characters dress in clothing that is reminiscent of traditional Japanese wardrobe as well as contemporary style.

Because of this blend of mythological and contemporary iconography, *Naruto* lends itself to discourse on Orientalism with relative ease. Set in a mythological fantasy realm analogous to both ancient and contemporary Japan, the series reflects an ongoing dialogue between Japanese visual culture and the western consumer. Perhaps because of the hybridized content of *Naruto*, I feel that this title is fertile ground for discussion about Orientalism and our perceptions as western readers. From my initial observations, it is clear that Japanese cultural “flavor” is a large part of the world of *Naruto*; it does represent some cultural aspects of Japan. However, through close-readings of various *Naruto* chapters and artwork, I will gesture toward the ways in which this manga/anime is also influenced by western comics and thus does not exist simply as an Orientalized “exotic” text. If that were the case, *Naruto* would be a West-centric discourse on the East, specifically Japan. This would be achieved through dehumanizing Japanese culture either through exoticism and elevation above other cultures (“those Japanese sure are ahead of the rest in technology”) or negative stereotyping.

I will then turn to the *Naruto* fan community. I will argue that many perceptions of fans as Orientalist are propagated by misconceptions of anime and manga fandom and by fans themselves as a reaction to these very misconceptions. Often, the accusation is that fans play out fantasies of what they want life to be like (and what they perceive Japan as being) in their own lives. Like the wannabe “Harajuku girl” from my Japanese class, the stereotypical Orientalist fan decides to live in a Japanese fantasy land that reflects his or her ideal rather

than the real country of Japan. This perception is best expressed in Henry Jenkins' summary of perceived stereotypes of fan culture, namely *Star Trek* fans, in his book, *Textual Poachers*.

While Jenkins' work does not address anime and manga fandom, several points he makes translate to common perceptions of anime and manga fans. The most applicable trait Jenkins attacks is the assumption that fans "are unable to separate fantasy from reality" (10). I will argue, like Jenkins, that this stereotype is untrue (aside from the occasional outlier) and that anime fandom actually provides a rich background from which fans can springboard into real, useful skills and knowledge. I am operating under the assumption that Japan as a place and culture exists within our perceptions, but also in solid reality. As Said says, "There were – and are – cultures and nations whose location is in the East, and their lives, histories, and customs have a brute reality obviously greater than anything that could be said about them in the West" (5). By providing several examples drawn from fan discussions, I will show that fans are, in fact, very conscious of the cultural realities concerning Japan. While I acknowledge that Orientalism does occur on a small scale, I will argue that these perceptions are the result of individual biases and not a symptom of the fandom as a whole. I will also point to the concrete cultural knowledge that fans acquire, including Japanese language.

I will finally discuss the possibility that rather than Orientalizing, western fans of anime and manga are creating a new hybridized identity formed by appropriations of both eastern and western ideals. Identity construction of this type, rather than saying anything about Japanese culture, says more about the person who internalizes these ideals.

Consumption of anime and manga, like any reading, allows the reader to pick and choose what they want to incorporate into their identity. More than anything, as anime and manga become a more prominent part of Western life, the less they will be associated with the

country of origin. Thus, anime and manga cease to be Orientalist, as they then do not represent an “Other,” a marginalized stereotype, but rather the transformed culture of the fans themselves.

Chapter 1: A Closer Look at *Naruto*

One reason I would shy away from identifying *Naruto* as Orientalist is that producers of manga and anime cannot, as Said himself says, remove themselves from the culture in which they exist (10). For this reason, manga will always have a certain degree of Japanese flavor whether it is intentional or not. Because *Naruto* was originally produced for a Japanese market, I cannot imagine that it was created with the goal of exoticising Japan in mind. At the localized and creative level, I doubt very seriously that *most* manga are created for that purpose.

I believe that inclusion of Japanese cultural signifiers, rather than to promote any image of Japan with western readers, is actually there because Kishimoto himself is fascinated with his own culture. Kishimoto has mentioned that he strives to include and play with “Japanese elements” in *Naruto* (*The Art of Naruto* 133). “I like Japanese culture and do research on it in my own way. So I have lots of things that I like to refer to, such as family crests and folding fans...I often visit Japanese gardens and go to Kabuki performances” (Kishimoto, *The Art of Naruto* 145). On the surface, it could be assumed that *Naruto* is an Orientalized text. However, I don’t accept that Japanese “flavor” necessarily indicates Orientalism. In this section, I will present a series of readings of *Naruto* to show how, as a text, *Naruto* is not intrinsically Orientalist.

Naruto develops relationships with various characters along the path to becoming a powerful ninja. Initially, his relationship with his immediate teammates from Konoha (“Leaf Village”) takes center stage. Sasuke, his sullen and revenge-driven rival, is arguably the oldest and most complex of these friendships. Sakura, his long-time crush, displays initial disdain for Naruto but eventually comes to accept him as a teammate. The leader of his team, Kakashi, serves as a mentor to the three and his responsibility in training them as ninja is highlighted during the first portion of the series. Along with this team, Naruto travels in order to complete specific missions that they are assigned by the Hokage, the highest ranking ninja in their village and a position that Naruto himself aspires to achieve one day.

The scope of *Naruto* later expands as he befriends other young ninja from the same graduating class. In order to advance in rank, he and his comrades participate in the Chuunin (Journeyman) exam, battling against ninja from other ninja villages. These friends include specialized ninja such as Shikamaru, a genius strategist who utilizes shadows as weapons; Ino, who serves as rival to Sakura and who is capable of taking over a person’s mind and body for short periods of time; Lee, a tenacious fighter who does not utilize any of the magical attacks that ninja of the *Naruto* universe commonly practice; and Hinata, a shy girl who has nourished a crush on Naruto for years. Naruto also meets, fights, and eventually befriends the ninja of the Sand Village – Gaara and his siblings Kankurou and Tamari. Gaara serves as host (bijin) to a tailed beast similar to the one within Naruto and is eventually freed from his self-hatred and isolation by an encounter between the two.

War, enmity, and the struggle for power between ninja villages is highlighted in the series – Pain, one of the most important villains of the series, decides to destroy Konoha because of the role that it has played in various civil wars that ravaged his own home.

Orochimaru, a force of pure evil, will destroy anything and everything that stands in the way of his quest for ultimate power and eternal life. Power is generally equated with *ninjutsu* (magical ninja techniques), *genjutsu* (illusions), and *taijutsu* (physical fighting techniques). Naruto, while mastering many of these techniques, learns and exemplifies that a strong will and a sense of forgiveness are necessary to usher in an era of true peace.

Japanese Flavor

One helpful way to observe the concepts that comprise *Naruto* is by looking at its cover art. One very stylized cover is from *Shonen Jump* number 17 (2002). On this particular cover, Sasuke sits perched on the top of a clay-tiled roof, a *shamisen* (four-stringed musical instrument) in his hands, overlooking cherry leaves as they blow in the wind. Naruto crouches a few steps below him, a barbecue pot strapped to his back and a headband tied tight around his head, resembling a festival reveler. Sakura sits above Naruto, arms resting on a *bento* lunch box, enjoying a snack of *dango* (Japanese dumplings).

Within *Naruto*, there are myriad signifiers of Japanese culture. The *kanji* (Japanese adaptation of Chinese characters) for “Shinobi,” meaning “Ninja,” are all over the place in the comics. Some elite ninja characters, known as Anbu, wear masks that are reminiscent of Noh Theater. Buddhist imagery, such as prayer beads and statues, is incorporated into the manga. Characters use chopsticks when they eat. Some signifiers are anachronisms; on one cover, Naruto and Sasuke hold signs that resemble feudal samurai banners (Kishimoto *The Art of Naruto: Uzumaki* 85). Sasuke dons a traditional *dogi* and *hakama* (a white fold-over top and a black skirt-like bottom piece



Figure 2. Sasuke. Kishimoto, *Naruto*.

worn by swordsmen) later in the series (see fig. 2). Scrolls are constantly used for magic summonings and for carrying messages. Tamari carries and fights using a giant fan. Jiraiya constantly evokes Kabuki Theater through his movements in some scenes. The stylized clothing of several other characters also gestures towards a more traditional, feudal setting.

Another prominent feature of *Naruto* is the not-uncommon inclusion of Shinto elements. Animals that are often associated with Shinto are often part of the action – higher-level ninjas are often able to summon magical, anthropomorphic animals with whom they are allied. This often includes giant frogs, snakes, and even the nine-tailed fox. Naruto himself possesses the power of the nine-tailed fox, known as the Kyubi.

In Shinto mythology, a fox with nine tails is essentially immortal and possesses untold strength. Sasuke’s family, the Uchiha clan, possesses a number of techniques named after several gods and goddesses of the Shinto pantheon. Among these are “Amaratsu,” a



technique named after the Shinto sun-goddess that summons unquenchable flame, and “Susano-oo,” an impenetrable defensive

Figure 3 Tomoe, Gardener, Shara and Mara Bleu. *Sacred Symbols.*

barrier named after a mythological dragon slayer. The symbols that one antagonist, Orochimaru, utilizes to bestow power on subordinates are based on the Shinto *tomoe* icon, which appears as three flames. The Uchiha clan’s eye technique, *sharingan*, also draws from the image of the *tomoe* (see fig. 3).

There is also the trope of the magical ninja that is often perpetuated in manga and anime. Ninjas of the *Naruto* universe utilize *chakra* in combat. *Chakra* is the magical force, similar to the concept of *Chi* (or *Ki*), that ninjas use to activate special abilities. Ninjas generally use hand signs, the formation of various shapes using the fingers, as a way to

harness this power. This trope is used in various anime other than *Naruto*. It could be said that all of these contribute to the “mystical Orient” trope that is often associated with Asian countries. This isn’t the case, however. In fact, Kishimoto subverts the typical ninja approach – Naruto is not silent. He typically announces his presence, to the chagrin of many of his comrades. In the course of the series, the stealth aspect of the ninja mythos is discarded within the first few chapters (see fig. 4).



Figure 4. Naruto - a loud ninja.
Kishimoto, *Naruto*.

The landscape of *Naruto* also contains Japanese flavor. Mountains and forests are prominent, resembling the landscape of Japan (see fig. 5 and fig. 6). However, as Kishimoto explains, “The location is totally original. I didn’t set my story in any specific place” (*The Art of Naruto: Uzumaki* 145). This is not to say that Japanese culture is not present through the manga; people cannot, after all, separate themselves from the culture in which they are enmeshed. Kishimoto has clearly taken what he knows – Japanese landscapes – and worked them into his art. However, Kishimoto has at least *consciously* chosen to set *Naruto* in a

space that is not tangibly real. By playing out in an unnamed fantasy world, *Naruto* refuses to represent Japan as a geographic location, despite the visual similarities.

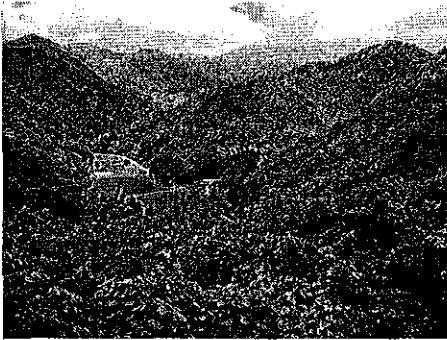


Figure 5. OjisanJake, “Togawa prefecture.”.



Figure 6. Unnamed area in *Naruto*. Kishimoto, *Naruto*.

Some of Kishimoto’s covers even reference classical Japanese art. Here, for instance, is a cover from *Naruto* compared to one of the famous views of Mt. Fuji (figures 7 and 8). Of course, appropriation of nationally recognized visual cues does not instantly equate to Orientalism. In taking into account that the primary audience of *Naruto* is (initially) Japanese, it is certain that the waves are intended as an aesthetic signifier, but not an

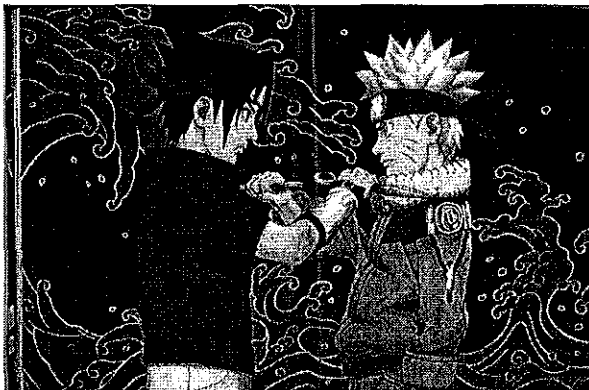


Figure 7. Naruto and Sasuke with stylized background. Kishimoto, *The Art of Naruto: Uzumaki*.

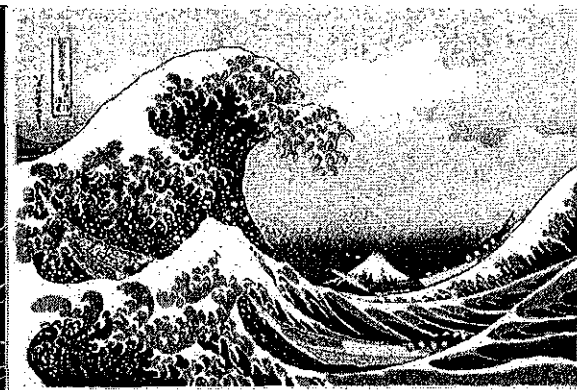


Figure 8. Hokusai, *The Great Wave Off Kanagawa*.

Orientalist one.

So there are many things in *Naruto* that maintain Japanese “flavor.” How, then, is the series not Orientalist? The simplest answer is this – these are themes and motifs that have been circulating in Japanese culture for years. They are (though this is simplifying years of history) authentic Japanese cultural ideas. Cherry blossom viewing is a real activity in Japan, performed by real Japanese people not for the sake of appearance or exoticism, but because it is an ingrained cultural practice. Sasuke is playing a *shamisen* on the cover? Well, it is a Japanese instrument that people actually learn – *shamisen* are played in parks and coffee houses all around Tokyo. All of these ideas are actually present in Japanese culture; Kishimoto’s art may intentionally include Japanese imagery and cultural information to enrich his fantasy world, but it does not mislead readers. And as I will show in a later section, readers do not respond to the text in an Orientalist manner either.

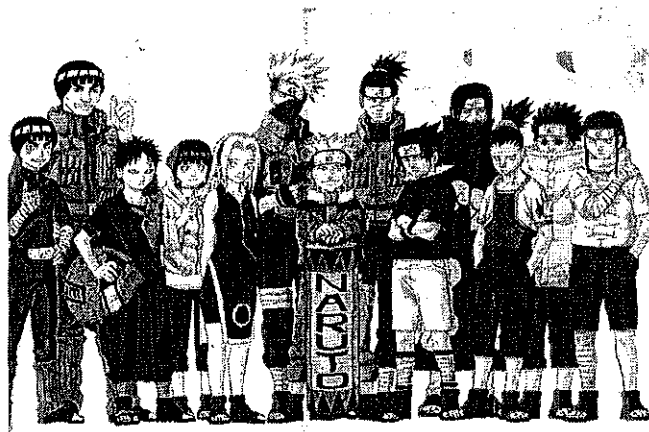


Figure 9. Konoha Ninja. Kishimoto,
The Art of Naruto.

Another area that is often examined when discussing manga is character design. As I stated earlier, much of *Naruto* is a combination of both traditional and modern iconography. Characters generally wear costumes that signify traditional Japanese culture, modern styles, or some hybrid of both. Most characters wear clothing that is not at all reminiscent of

traditional Japan. As we can see, looking at Naruto and his comrades, the design of most characters is not based on traditional imagery (fig. 9). Sakura, sporting a red dress with leggings, comes the closest to possessing an “Oriental” design. However, several characters do have designs that have Japanese influence. Sasuke, during the second part of the series, wears a very traditional-looking ensemble. Jiraiya carries a large scroll, wears a headband, and wooden sandals or *geta* (see fig. 10). There probably isn’t a particular goal here – Kishimoto, who admittedly enjoys the Japanese aesthetic, includes characters like this because they bring more depth to his fantasy world.



Figure 10. Jiraiya, with sandals. Celtic, *Saiyan Island*.

There are also non-Japanese signifiers as well. Naruto wears a night cap to bed, for instance.

Criticism of manga often focuses on the appearance of characters. Most manga titles are noted for having characters that do not appear Japanese. Instead, many consider them to have Caucasian features. Some *Naruto* characters such as Ino are blonde and have prominent blue eyes (see fig. 11). Sakura has pink hair and green eyes (see fig. 12). Naruto himself does not look very Japanese at all. Across the board, most character designs include large eyes and seemingly Caucasian features.

Figure 11. Ino. Kishimoto, *The Art of Naruto*.



Figure 12. Sakura. Kishimoto, *The Art of Naruto*.



However, as Marco Pellitteri points out, the non-Japanese appearance of anime characters may not necessarily exist as Caucasian, but rather “as types in which Japanese heritage and American and European influences are mixed together” (219). The idea is that many manga and anime character designs are formulated especially to resemble no specific ethnic group. Pellitteri cites an interview between Peter Carey and Yoshiyuki Tomino, creator of *Kido Senshi Gundam*. Tomino, through his interpreter, explains that he was trying to “remove all cultural elements” from his characters. The idea is that the characters are intended to be universally human (218). Though this universalism is most likely impossible to obtain, the point is that there is an attempt to branch out rather than to generalize (and stereotype) one specific ethnic group. I believe this mentality translates to a lot of manga and anime, including *Naruto*. After all, is there any ethnic group on Earth with pink hair like Sakura’s?

With no overtly Japanese characters, it is hard to accuse Kishimoto of Orientalizing on the character front – indeed, how can one Orientalize where there is nothing “Oriental” in characters to highlight and exploit? *Naruto*, for all of its Japanese iconography, is largely similar to most other manga in this respect – its characters do not possess any distinguishable Japanese features. In effect, this is another indicator that the world Kishimoto portrays is *not* Japan, but an unnamed world that contains signifiers of various cultures.

With all of this said, I think that Japanese cultural flavor will always be present in products created within Japan – inclusion of cultural flavor sometimes happens without the author even knowing it. As Said mentions in *Orientalism*, “No one has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his

involvement (conscious or unconscious) within a class, a set of beliefs, a social position, or from the mere activity of being a member of society” (Said 10). Along with scholars, no person can escape the cultural constraints within which they have been placed. It would make sense, then, that even if Kishimoto were to try to eliminate all Japanese images and design from his work, some Japanese cultural flavor would still exist in *Naruto*. As Pellitteri puts it, cultural flavor “is therefore almost always an inextinguishable feature of the Japanese product even when there is a deliberate wish to cover it (221).

Western Influence

Comics critic Scott McCloud makes an interesting and convincing attempt at explaining manga in relation to western comics. By analyzing frame transitions, McCloud claims that manga is essentially different because it utilizes a different ratio of transitions, the space and relationship between frames. One of the key points of this analysis is that American comics tend to favor action-to-action transitions (see fig. 13). A transition between panels “featuring a single subject in action to action progressions” is known as an action-to-

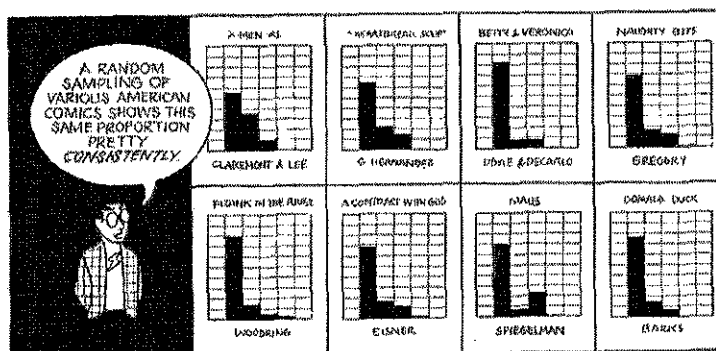


Figure 13. McCloud's chart of American comic transitions. McCloud, *Understanding Comics*.

action transition (70). This kind of transition may be as simple as a before and after shot of someone hitting a baseball or a car moving, frame by frame, down the road. Generally, these transitions feature panels from the same perspective. Subject-to-subject transitions take the reader “subject-to-subject while staying within a scene or idea” (71). A subject-to-subject transition may focus on different faces to gauge different character reactions. It may also show different strikes and blows from varying angles during a fight scene. For this transition, action between frames is implied and the reader is required to add meaning. While American comics favor the action transition, manga tends to follow a slightly different pattern according to McCloud. He explains that while action-to-action transitions still dominate manga conventions, they do so at a much lesser degree. Subject-to-subject transitions are almost as prominent in manga, along with particular use of aspect-to-aspect transitions (see fig. 14).

However, this observation doesn't take into consideration that many modern comics rely on subject-to-subject transitions more than action transitions. McCloud's analysis serves to categorize, showing a general difference in storytelling methods of western comics and some manga, but not accounting for other manga that do not fit this model. My analysis of *Naruto* certainly does not fit McCloud's perspective, mostly because I don't find as much of an emphasis placed on the fifth transition – aspect-to-aspect, but also because I find that *Naruto* reads much like a western action comic in its use of subject transitions. This may be because of a difference in date between the publication of *Naruto* and that of *Understanding Comics*. It seems that in the

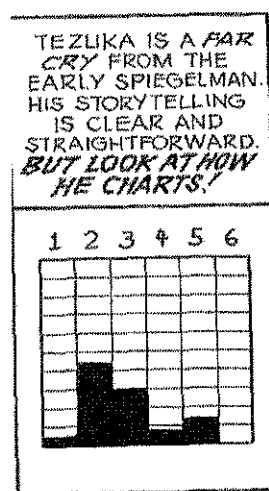


Figure 14. Tezuka's transitions. McCloud, *Understanding Comics*.

roughly ten years between their publications, something has shifted. Perhaps this is the result of a continuing mutual influence between both manga and western comics.

As McCloud points out, manga generally uses a fifth transition, *aspect-to-aspect*, that cuts away to a seemingly unrelated scene. The panel is typically descriptive – a tranquil garden – rather than narrative in nature. Manga also contains a fairly even ratio of subject and action transitions. He examines Tezuka in particular, pointing out that as a manga artist, he utilizes subject-to-subject transitions almost as much as action (78). This is, to be sure, very different from the sampling of western comics that he analyzes before. However, if we look back up at the chart for *X-Men #1*, we see that it is very similar to Tezuka's chart, excluding the use of aspect transitions (McCloud 75). What this tells me is that *X-Men*, an action comic and the only “superhero” type in McCloud's sampling, is similar in storytelling technique because of its focus on action as well as story. Because much of *Naruto* focuses on combat and story exposition, subject transitions are very prominent in most chapters.

Japanese and western, especially American, cultures have been in constant dialogue, especially after post WWII occupation. To separate Japanese and western comics as two separate entities is problematic, as they serve as a very stark example of how the two cultures have influenced each other. Osamu Tezuka, widely considered the father of manga and animation in Japan, was greatly influenced by Disney. According to Otsuka Eiji, Tezuka was influenced by Shaka Bontaro, a manga artist who appropriated Disney characters in his works (116). As a postwar manga artist, it is clear that Tezuka was influenced by the deluge of Disney animation and US comics introduced during the Allied Occupation of Japan (Norris 243). As the father of manga, Tezuka influenced most manga that we see today.

Essentially, anime and manga (*Naruto* included) are products of both eastern and western influence.

Daisuke Nishihara writes on Japan and Orientalism, essentially destabilizing Japan's position as simply part of the exoticized "Orient" and pointing out that it also functions as an Occidental country. "Japan has characteristics of both the Orient and the Occident... There is no doubt that the country is geographically situated in what is known as the Orient, but in a political sense it has tried to become a 'Western' nation" (Nishihara 244). I believe this is part of the appeal of anime and manga, especially one like *Naruto* – while being distinctively different from western products, it also does reflect characteristics of both Japan and the West.

I find this concept fascinating. In my understanding, if Japan has in fact undergone such a transition, this would be visible in cultural artifacts such as manga. My next step, then, was to examine the transitions in a typical chapter of *Naruto* and see how it compared to a western action comic. I chose to examine issue five of *Avengers vs. X-Men* because of its focus on both action and plot. What I found as I read was that the Avengers title utilized a relatively similar amount of subject-to-subject and action transitions as *Naruto*



Figure 15. Emma Frost battles Iron Man. Aaron, Jason, Brian Michael Bendis and Ed Brubaker, et al., *Avengers vs. X-Men*.

(see fig. 15). Notably on this page, each transition is a subject-to-subject transition. Every punch, kick, or other form of action is depicted, but the flow of the fight must be interpreted

by the reader; in this fight between Iron Man and Emma Frost, each frame jumps between each motion of the fight.

Now here is a page from chapter 69 of *Naruto* (fig.16). Looking at *Naruto* frame-by-frame, it is clear that the manga shares much in common with its western comic cousins.

Kishimoto fits one more frame in but the transitions are essentially the same. Cutaways that focus on facial expressions capture the emotions of the scene while, again, individual motions of the fight are presented sequentially, but with room for interpretation in between frames and with variation on which subject is focused on. Like *Avengers vs. X-Men*, *Naruto* requires a certain balance of action with story. Because of this, most frames are not action-to-action, but rather subject-subject. The only difference is the occasional aspect transition, which rarely pops up in *Naruto*.



Figure 16. Shino and Zakuo face off. Kishimoto, *Naruto*.

At the very least, I think this similarity in form demonstrates the mutual influence that eastern and western visual cultures have on each other. However, I also think that this influence goes deeper. Just as Tezuka was influenced by Disney, so too has Kishimoto been influenced (perhaps unwittingly) by western comics and by other manga that have been influenced by western comics. What these similarities of form tell me is that, more than anything, manga is a global product. I don't think that the medium of manga itself, at least in *Naruto*'s case, indicates any kind of Orientalism.

Because of Kishimoto's intended inclusion of Japanese themes and iconography, plus the inescapable cultural lens through which he writes, it makes sense that there are cultural aspects of *Naruto* that are culturally true, that are real. By encountering these aspects, fans are learning elements of Japanese culture whether or not they are aware of it. The main problem may be that they are only learning part of the whole. What little of Japanese culture fans can glean from manga and anime is a pittance compared to everything there is to learn. I will later show, through fan comments, how *Naruto* serves as a jumping-off point for fans to learn more about Japanese culture.

Self-Orientalization

The function of Orientalism has always been to create an "other" from which the Orientalizing culture wishes to distinguish itself. In effect, Orientalism is a way to construct the self. Said's work deals with the perceptions elicited through material written by the marginalizing group rather than the "other" that it describes. His examples are written by western, typically British, French, German, or American authors. However, in the case of Japan, the accusation of self-Orientalization is occasionally levied against Japanese writers themselves. In his article "Said, Orientalism, and Japan," Daisuke Nishihara points to Japanese texts, including those of Junichiro Tanizaki, as Self-Orientalizing. Chien-Ching Su's "Orientalism in Kawabata's Fiction" gestures towards stereotypes imposed by another of the better known Japanese authors upon his own work.

It is problematic to assume, when the group represented is presenting and producing the material, that the consumer is the only side creating meaning from what is read. In the case of Japan, self-representation in literature is fraught with accusations of Orientalism. Manga exists in a market that is essentially Japanese, but is now beginning to cater to

western consumers. As a result of this dynamic, it is possible that manga and anime are self-Orientalized to appeal to foreign markets.

In examining manga and anime for Orientalism, we must take into consideration the fact that Japan and the West have been in dialogue for the greater part of a century. At its core, manga represents an amalgam of both east and west. Throughout this thesis, I will assert that Orientalism is not exactly an appropriate accusation against fandom because these manga represent a new facet of globalization more than the culture of one country alone.

Why would anyone play into stereotypes of his or her own culture? Self-Orientalism may very well be intended in many cases: It could actually have positive effects on the culture it depicts. As J.J. Clark explains,

While Orientalism has undoubtedly been...a means by which the West has achieved a measure of control over the intellectual and religious traditions of the East, the growth of Orientalism has in other respects been marked by a growth in mutuality, in dialogue, in knowledge and in sympathy. We must take into account that the East...has achieved power over the West by becoming a counter to and critique of fundamental aspects of Western culture. (*Oriental Enlightenment* 209)

To this, I also add Joseph Nye's concept of *soft power*, an idea that has been endlessly quoted in anime and manga scholarship in recent years. Essentially, soft power is the cultural influence that a country has over other countries. Roland Kelts clarifies this as "the capacity to get what you want through attracting others, rather than forcing or paying them..." (113). This is often achieved through exports, mostly of the intellectual or aesthetic variety. Essentially, soft power is very real and effective because it affects perceptions of and

dispositions toward a nation, playing on the sense of pleasure that the target audience receives from encounters with that nation's cultural aesthetic.

For Japan, this power is increasing. As Douglas McGray observes, "...Japan's global cultural influence has quietly grown. From pop music to consumer electronics, architecture to fashion, and animation to cuisine, Japan looks more like a cultural superpower today than it did back in the 1980's, when it was an economic one" (44). As a result of this newfound popularity, it is possible that Japanese flavor *may* be highlighted in cultural products such as anime and manga to serve nationalistic purposes.

In the past, Orientalism toward the Japanese depicted them either as inhuman monsters or exoticised sexual objects, reducing their power in the world. Now, however, Orientalism could actually mean more power for Japan. Rather than creating an "Other" against which to distinguish themselves, Japanese authors like Kishimoto could Orientalize their own culture as a way to promote themselves and cash in on their culture.

Japan, long known for its technological exports, is now becoming even more known for its visual culture. Anime, especially, is the medium through which most of the world has been introduced to Japanese visual culture in recent years. Craig Norris, in *The Cambridge Guide to Modern Japanese Culture*, notes that "Japan is the largest provider of animation worldwide, with approximately 60 per cent of animation shown around the world made in Japan" (254). With this popularity, there are several factors to consider.

First, this means big money for Japanese producers. "The revenue earned from film, game, and merchandise agreements has been estimated at more than 20 billion yen per year" (Norris 236). Anime and manga are a huge economic boon for Japan. Such titles are readily marketable as merchandise, video games, and limitless possible adaptations such as light

(short) novels and movies. With such a large economic draw, anime and manga have gained traction in the world market.

The globalization of anime has been in motion since the initial overseas popularity of titles like *Akira*, but has really only recently begun to factor into the actual production of manga and anime. Now, instead of simply exporting titles that were first popular domestically, “Japan is actively targeting the foreign market with new anime” (Norris 254). This means that western fandom as an interest group actually affects which titles are released to and licensed in America and other countries. Since my early years of fandom, during which the best DVDs we could find were pirated copies made in China, companies such as Funimation have taken great strides in licensing and making popular anime titles available to western viewers.

Likewise, “The co-production and co-financing of anime by foreign businesses has increased” (Norris 254). The creation of anime, then, is becoming more beholden to foreigners, including American and European companies. There is certainly a chance that as a result of western influence, Orientalism within the material of manga and anime could occur. Essentially, producers of manga and anime may be tempted to increase the Orientalist images of their works to appeal to western audiences (and investors).

The globalization of anime and manga is not only poised to affect those mediums, but also the cultures that are becoming entwined as a result. As Roland Kelts, in his book *Japanamerica*, puts it, “The Mobius strip of interrelations between American and Japanese artists has become *Japanamerica* in the twenty-first century, when Japan’s contemporary popular culture is winding its way into America’s awareness” (69). “Japanamerica,” as Kelts describes it, is the blending of cultures, in this case through visual media such as comics. The

2006 publication paints a picture of a growing market, with Japanese Television companies broadcasting a whopping eighty new anime titles a week. This market is increasingly becoming more and more interesting to, and entangled with, western consumers. Kelts quotes one senior board member of Toei Animation as saying, "It amazes me. For the past two years we have had overseas buyers here all the time! [They] have so much information about which animes have been popular in Japan, and these are the ones they go for. I have no idea how they accumulate all this information" (74). *Naruto*'s acquisition by Viz Media in 2005 is a clear indicator of western commercial interest in manga. With more shows being licensed in America every year, the market is only growing.

The discussion of Japanese soft power dominates discussion of manga and anime in the academic realm. It is reminiscent of an episode of *South Park* that I saw years ago. The episode, entitled "Chimpokomon" (a play on a cutesy Japanese word for "penis" and "Pokemon"), details to a hyperbolic degree the explosion of fandom that occurred in the late 90's and early 2000's surrounding *Pokemon*. The cartoon/video game is parodied as a brainwashing device, hidden behind a cute and non-threatening image, that is intended to turn American children into Kamikaze pilots who will then attack their own country.

While there is no insidious plan within the anime market to infect western youth with Japanese ideals, soft power has certainly been recognized by the Japanese as an important advantage. Notably, the Japanese Commissioner for Cultural Affairs, Tomotsu Aoki was focused on the connection between "soft power" and Japanese visual culture's popularity (Norris 237). There have also been government initiatives to encourage the production and distribution of manga and anime as a way to increase Japan's soft power. Writing while attention was first being drawn to the potential power of Japanese visual culture, Roland

Kelts mentions that, “The pop culture campaign will start in 2007 and will be promoted directly through Japan’s global embassies. Diplomats...will now be promoting anime on the Japanese taxpayer’s yen” (113). Clearly, soft power is being taken seriously. By manufacturing and perpetuating an image of cuteness and coolness, officials of Japan hope to reap the benefits of that perception, at least economically.

This doesn’t mean that using soft power equates to Orientalism, however. By utilizing such a strategy, Japanese artists and officials would not be contributing to the domination of Japan by western ideology, but rather accruing cultural power that would ensure that Japan is *not* marginalized. By becoming intertwined in the consciousness of a country with which it is in constant dialogue, I think that Japan is working toward becoming anything *but* Other.

To put it simply, *Naruto* is not a ploy to accumulate soft power. It was popular in Japan long before getting attention in the United States. At the time of its conception, acquisition of manga and anime titles by western companies had typically relied on the popularity of those titles in Japan – a precedent that, though shifting, is still widely practiced.

There has been, in the past, a perception that American audiences would need to have anime adjusted for them. This generally entailed the reversing of pages so that the manga would read from left to right. In some cases, this resulted in the change of names to more western names. However, as Drazen discusses, American audiences are not put off by the “Japaneseness” of manga and anime (Drazen 136). In fact, fans tend to want manga and anime in authentic form, without reversed pages or terrible English-dubbed voice acting. The tendency for fans to become interested in and fixate on Japanese culture lends evidence to this: fans of anime and manga are, I believe, attracted to the Japanese flavor of their interests.

One common example that I noticed in *Naruto* is known as foreignization. In “scanlation,” the act of scanning and translating manga online, translators have to decide what words will be easily understood and which phrases they must translate. A phrase applied to manga by James Rampant, foreignization occurs when words or phrases that would have no English equivalent are left unaltered in the text (aside from phonetic translation) and are either explained in a footnote or, if the word is common enough, left alone as it is understood that fans will know what it means (Rampant 228). The act of foreignization is a common practice in scanlations and, by proxy, the western manga community. Words that have been accessed this way are taken in by fans into general lexicon – they become loanwords. In this way, a reader learns these loanwords informally through translators.

For instance, if having a conversation with one of my friends who has never been to Japan, but reads manga constantly, he would probably understand a lot of the cultural references that I make when discussing my time abroad. Some things he would know, from general manga reading, would include honorifics (san, sama, kun, indicating status), the term *jutsu* (technique) from ninja manga, and that *ramen* is a delicious noodle dish. Because of footnotes that occasionally pop up, fans can also access knowledge of more nuanced cues, such as onomonopoeia. One example of this would be when Chougi, one of Naruto’s teammates, transforms into a large ball to roll over enemies. In this scene, the sound of Chougi rolling is “Grrrrr” (see fig. 18). While onomonopoeia is a convention of manga, it is also present in Japanese; I distinctly



Figure 17. A “scanlated” image in which “kun” is included. Kishimoto, *Naruto*.

remember a three-year old student who rolled around on the floor making the same noise. Some aspects of Japanese don't always translate, but the amount of knowledge that is transferred through foreignization can be fairly impressive.

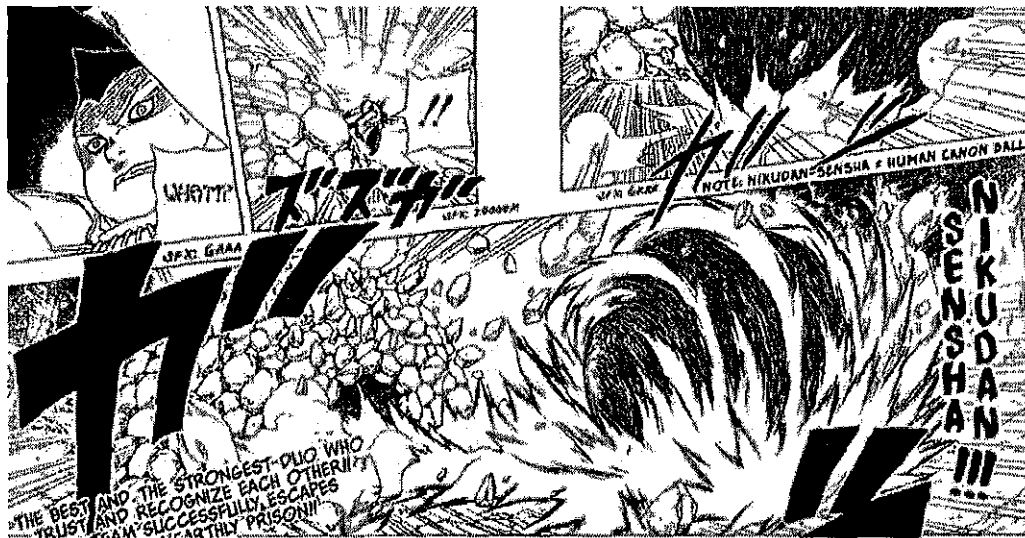


Figure 18. Chouji escapes a trap using his rolling technique. Note the “SFX” notes underneath each panel. Kishimoto, *Naruto*.

The reason to include such a concept is this – foreignization is one way that western fans learn and discover very real aspects about Japan. Onomopoeia may not be particularly useful, but it is one of many concrete facets of Japanese culture that are passed on through the mediums of anime and manga. By experiencing linguistic cues that haven't been changed for foreign consumers, the manga or anime fan can learn language and cultural information in context. *Naruto* scans, like so many manga scans available online, include information that fans learn in context.

Chapter Two: The Fans of Naruto

Upon reflection, I think that my initial interest in fan Orientalism was prompted by external and internal perceptions of anime and manga fans. There is a waning, but still very present, negative stigma within mainstream US culture that surrounds anime and manga fandom. It is often assumed that western fans of anime Orientalize Japanese culture, though this assumption is not, perhaps, voiced in those same words.

I recently saw a skit on Disney's sketch comedy show *So Random!* in which two teenage anime fans go through everyday life while displaying manga-like hyperbole. What would be a normal high-school gym class is turned into a showcase of ridiculous costumes, outrageous posturing, and strangely enunciated lines that are meant to mimic shows like *Naruto* and *Dragon Ball Z*. While funny (and I didn't hesitate to chuckle), this lampooning of fans highlights the stereotype that manga and anime fans translate their textual interest into reality. I, for one, have never encountered a fan who experiences this kind of schizophrenic existence. Of course, costuming and posturing observed during cosplay events and conventions may fuel this stereotype, but such events exist as sacred space for fans and cannot be conflated with "real world" life.

To examine fans' knowledge and perception of Japan requires access to expression of ideas between fans. The best place to observe modern fan communities is online – specifically fan forums. Typically, fans participate in a fan forum to connect with other fans and to discuss various points of interest concerning the object of fandom. Such a space exists online and is virtually accessible to anyone; this provides for a diverse sampling of fans.

People from all different walks of life post to the forum, creating new threads (as in thread of discussion) and bouncing around ideas about their favorite manga, anime, or other fandom in a digital discussion.

One of the main forums I observed was *NarutoForums.com*, a fan forum that maintains a lively fan presence and contains daily posts in almost every section. This particular site is popular because it feeds from one of the main *Naruto* fan sites, contained within *Anifreak.com*. This site is one of the more active fan sites, uploading new chapters of the manga, and new episodes of the anime, every week. Most of my observation was completed using *NarutoForums*, as it was the most active forum available that dealt primarily with *Naruto* fandom.

I also observed other sites such as *Naruto-fans.com* and *OneManga.com*, as they also feature consistent activity in most threads. By following these forums on a fairly regular basis, I observed fan interactions and discussions that will help to put online fandom of shows like *Naruto* into perspective. Of course, discussion often diverges into areas outside of *Naruto* as well. There are many threads and forums within the main site that are dedicated to outside interests. However, some of these are related to *Naruto* in interesting ways. During my research, I searched the forums for threads that seemed to offer insight into fan perceptions of Japanese culture. I also made sure to check forums that concern the series itself in order to establish, if there was one, a link between consumption of *Naruto* and Orientalism. Threads that I found especially relevant were generally found on *Narutoforums*, in the “Konoha Ryokan” sub-forum. This particular area focuses on discussion of Japanese culture and contains multiple threads on different facets of the topic including music, travel, food, and more.

I have included posts from these online fan forums in their original format in order to preserve authenticity. This means that there are several grammatical and spelling errors that may be distracting. However, what is important here isn't the stylistic issues of the posts themselves, but rather the opinions that they express.

I first wanted to focus on the appeal of *Naruto*. What draws fans to the series? If I could identify that Japanese elements were part of the allure of such a series, I thought that Orientalism could play a part in fandom. While lurking on Onemanga.com one day, I came upon a very simple thread topic: "Why we love this manga?" The following section contains posts exclusively from this thread. Some posts were, as expected, short bursts of enthusiasm that related to *Naruto* as a "New Dragon ball Z," as a replacement to other shows that they enjoyed. Most of the parallels made between *Naruto* and other shows involved incredible fight scenes and interesting powers. Some fans on this thread responded by analyzing their enjoyment of the show on a deeper level, listing reason after reason for their fandom. One user says:

I like the simplicity of the manga. Most manga are shaded to perfection and look extremely detailed but its really distracting imo. Not that it looks bad, I think it just takes away from the story telling...I like the simple, black and white coloring design of the *Naruto* Manga. Simple, clean, effective. There is very little "gray" and when its used, its used lightly and only to show depth or skin variations. I like the general art style. The characters look more universal than one race or regionalism, than some other manga characters. (Argon "Re: Why we love this manga?")

Not only is the visual style's simplicity praised, but the reasoning is related to storytelling. Secondly, the characters are discussed as being diverse. This user appreciates that, rather than

represent any one ethnicity, the characters are of a universal aspect: rather than being Japanese or Caucasian, they are simply human. As discussed earlier, character design in *Naruto* does not lend itself to Orientalism. Characters are one of the more prominent attractive qualities for any manga or anime. *Naruto* itself features a plethora of characters who all get a small share of the limelight at some point or another in the story.

Another user says:

While it's true that anyone other than the main cast isn't focused on too much, (with the manga named *Naruto*, it's no shocker why), that doesn't bother me too much, for the most part... That being said, it IS nice to see the other characters shine from time to time. The Chunin Exam arc and the Team 10 arc being prime examples. *Naruto* has a boatload of interesting characters. (Hadz-x "Re: Why we love this manga?")

It is clear that the variety of characters clearly keeps readers interested. For some fans, this may be effective because it gives them several characters from which to find a favorite. Many sophisticated fans, myself included, tire of the typical "everyman" protagonist and seek out secondary and even tertiary characters as favorites. For many reasons – appearance, fighting style, and even back-story – fans find the various characters of *Naruto* fascinating. That said, I believe much of the show's popularity (as some of the later posts show) is related to *Naruto* as an everyman character; fans often find his philosophy, his *nindo* (ninja way), appealing. The *nindo* itself is not particularly Japanese in essence – it is simply *Naruto*'s refusal to give up. As a theme that arises in works from around the world, this is hardly an aspect that could be considered Orientalist.

Several posts simply state that a single character's presence made *Naruto* important or attractive to them. In response to the thread topic, Madara0wnsu says: "because theres

uchihai in it,” a reference to the Uchiha clan, a family that is integral to the storyline of *Naruto*. As I will discuss further, identification with and support of a character is important to fandom, especially that of anime series.

As with Argon’s quote above, some fans are very concerned with the plot and storytelling aspects of the series. Hadz-x explains that he or she enjoys, “Story Arcs. There's a lot I like about them, actually. Mostly, the length. The thing about Naruto's story arcs, that I like, is that they usually manage to pack everything in without rushing or dragging” (“Re: Why we love this manga?”). What I would add to this is that the story is constantly building on pre-established plot, so that a twist that comes around chapter 400 may have to do with an important scene that occurred in chapter 50. This is never really a practice of reneging or re-editing the previous story; instead, it is clear that the storyline has been meticulously planned with regards to major events. What results, then, is a greater continuity than that of other serial titles.

Thus far, it is clear that what fans appreciate about *Naruto* has little to do with Japan or an exoticized Orient and more with traits that make *any* story appealing. A few users do comment on the cultural flavor of the series, however. This is obviously very important to Orientalism studies because it identifies some perceptions that fans may have concerning Japan. Some are clearly based on opinions that have not been researched at all:

This series has an interesting historical heritage of the ninjas and how their skills are able to help ninjas in overcoming obstacles and the like though the animation and drawings are exaggerating a lot. But it does bring out the fundamental essence of the life of a ninja, clans, social, lifestyle, customs and cultures, etc. (ProGoddess “Re: Why we love this manga?”)

I wouldn't say that this is necessarily Orientalism – the poster here isn't identifying modern Japan as a place where ninja currently roam. The “fundamental essence of the life of a ninja” including “customs and cultures” is observed as fantastic and fictional, rather than real. The poster acknowledges that “the animation and drawings are exaggerating,” and in a sense hyperbolizing something that once existed.

Another post hits on the idea of stereotypes and hints at Kishimoto's subversion of the ninja trope as I described earlier:

I think that the fact that it has ninjas that don't follow the stereotypes us modern people have established for them makes Naruto a good story.

Ironically, that's the reason a lot of people think Naruto is retarded.

(Lone Wolf Stark “Re: Why we love this manga?”)

Naruto, as I have already established, is an especially loud character. Essentially, this poster appreciates that the series pursues a storyline and character development that avoids stereotyping and, with it, the Orientalist image of the silent ninja.

Another poster comments that inclusion of mythology within the manga caused him to research Shinto terminology, ultimately leading to real cultural knowledge of Japan. Note that this poster doesn't conflate the culture of *Naruto* with Japan, but rather acknowledges that there is a relationship between the two.

There are several things about Naruto that intrigue me.

First off, the culture within the Narutoverse and its relationship with the Japanese culture, or Shinto. I found myself digging through wiki pages trying to figure out Susanoo and all the workings of Japanese myths. I actually loved this quest though. (Doritocheese “Re: Why we love this manga?”)

It would appear that the Japanese and Shinto influences in *Naruto* do draw western consumers in. That said, this is hardly a negative thing. Many fans, like Doritocheese, are driven to research information about more concrete facets of Japanese culture – in this case, Japanese mythology. Fans certainly can be attracted to the Japanese flavor of a text, but this doesn't mean that they Orientalize it. From what I have seen, much of what fans enjoy about the *Naruto* series are the universal aspects – relationships between characters, personality traits, and other story elements that appeal to them personally. Friendship, rivalry, romance and love, duty, and warfare are all themes that people of any country can relate to. Fans especially show us this through their posts concerning characters.

After sorting through several threads concerning favorite characters, I noticed that the fans of the *Naruto* series that I observed do not seem to Orientalize when considering characters that they enjoy. Fans connect to personality traits of the characters more than anything. When talking about appearance, most fans cite “design” as part of a character's appeal. Rather than exoticise characters as Japanese, the posts I observed recognized them as fictional elements in a non-Japanese world. What I take all of this to mean is that Orientalism, especially in gauging the “Japaneseness” of a character, has little to do with the appeal that that character may hold for fans. Rather, there are three common trends that determine the appeal of certain characters to fans: the fans either relate the character's personality to their own, admire the character as “cool” or strong, or are drawn to the more in-depth analysis of a character as he/she is written:

My favorite character in the Naruto series is Deidara.

I like his ability and his art very much, also he looks cool with his long hair. I feel connected to him somehow because I also like art and adore explosions: suave. (Sabakuno Gaara “Re: Favorite Naruto Character and Why?”)

Deidara, a character who considers his ninjutsu an art form, is a popular villain from the manga. This post directly reflects two of the qualities I noticed the most: first that the character is “cool,” and second, a connection to the personality of the character and his abilities. The user feels connected because of both the art factor and the explosions that Deidara utilizes. This connection, rather than identifying an Oriental other against which to define the self, is one of similarity.

Another poster says:

Mines itachi because he his the smartest ninja in my opinion in the whole story and he had potential to be probaly even the stronger than madara but he had no interest in dominating power. (DmCverry94 “Re: Favorite Naruto Character and Why?”)

Itachi, one of the most popular characters, is hailed as a genius within the world of *Naruto*. This user in particular is drawn to the personality of the character – that he “had potential” to be stronger than the ultimate villain of the series and refused this “dominating power.” What is left unsaid, but is clearly of interest here, is that Itachi refuses this power in favor of saving his younger brother, Sasuke, and making *him* more powerful. The selfless nature of the character appeals to fans on an emotional level, his martyrdom serving as a theme appeals to universal, rather than Orientalist tastes.

Another user reflects:

Oh really I would have to choose rock lee

Haha why rock lee because he's doing the impossible and the things people told him he couldn't do with out ninjutsu or genjutsu

He became a powerful Ninja without having to master ninjustu or genjutsu

That's is why I like him. (Onek "Re: Favorite Naruto Character and Why?")

In this case, the user is attracted to the underdog status and tenacity of Rock Lee. A character who lives by a very specific *nindo*, similar to Naruto, Rock Lee never gives up and indeed does "the impossible" no matter what he is told. This type of personality is one of the more frequent reasons people seem to enjoy the series. As such a personality is not exclusively a Japanese "type," it would seem that this is not an Orientalist model.

Another user compares his two favorite characters:

I could never choose between Itachi and Sasuke.

I love Itachi because he's one of the most powerful and most intelligent ninjas in the series yet he is not arrogant at all. He has that deep, seductive voice and I love those profound speeches he's always giving. He's calm, rational, and despite being so amazing he is never boastful.

Even though he is very different from Itachi, I love Sasuke just as much as his brother. I love that stoicism, that indifference-the way he just doesn't give a damn. Once Sasuke has a goal in mind, he will do absolutely anything to achieve it. He doesn't care who it is-he will take down anyone standing in his way. He's experienced horrible things, has had one of the worst childhoods in

the series (if not the absolute worst besides his brother), but he never gave up and cried about it-he kept working harder. (The enigmaNINJA “Re: Favorite Naruto Character and Why?”)

Again, positive personality traits are the main focus of this post. The poster cites Itachi’s intelligence and humility, as well as a “deep seductive voice” that contributes to the overall “coolness” of the character. In Sasuke, the poster notes the mental strength of the character and his goal-oriented personality. Again, tenacity is a trait that this poster appreciates and there is no mention of Oriental exotic traits.

The next poster, Ecclaed, provides a list. Ecclaed begins, “Ultimately, a character becomes unforgettable because of the feeling they invoke. I’ve started to develop a real liking to Kishimoto for his way of developing characters.” This post clearly favors character development and storyline. The list includes “Kakashi: Super cool.” The “cool factor” is a big part of admiration for characters. Gaara, a former villain, is listed as having “successfully transcended” the “loneliness, pain, and the subsequent turmoil of hatred amplified by his tailed beast.” Again, personality is key here – the poster clearly admires that Gaara has been able to move past these problems. Among others, the poster mentions Naruto because, “He’s pure. Through all of his hardship he still maintains the strength of will to change himself and others. It leaves me with a warm feeling every time he successfully undergoes each trial in his special way. He makes me laugh.” Ecclaed does not save all admiration for heroes only, however. Hidan, an unredeemed villain, is listed because “He reminds me of the darker aspects of society... I just find him complex at unexplored levels” (“Re: Favorite Naruto Character and Why?”). Overall, this poster seems to admire aspects of

characters that lend themselves to a good story and nowhere is any Orientalist stereotyping mentioned.

In all, most of these posts have to do with personality and with universal traits that make these characters appealing. A character being cool is often in reference to personality rather than appearance, it seems. Note that there is no mention of Japanese qualities and, throughout, no use of Orientalist discourse. This tells me that the appeal of *Naruto* lies not in its Japanese roots, but in the universality of its story. Unflinching heroes, complex villains, and the cool factor are not exclusive to Japanese stories – these are traits that entertainment and literature from any country possess.

The next post echoes what so many others have said – the title character, Naruto, is a favorite because “I’m a sucker for the ‘Loser to Hero’ character type, I admire his determination, love his jutsu, and enjoy his character quirks” (TenshiOni, “Re: Favorite Naruto Character and Why?”). Naruto’s tenacity is constantly mentioned as a reason for his appeal; not his Japanese qualities, not any remnants of Bushido ideology in his *nindo*, but simply his tenacity and underdog status.

One fan, writing about his favorite character, says:

Well... It's amazing how much I relate to her and look up to her...I was basically just like her actually. Socially awkward, mumbles a lot, gave up way too easily, and had little to no self esteem. Heck, some of those I'm still working on! However, if it wasnt for this character showing how much you can change... I probably would've went down a dark path like she almost did.
(Jake Protagonist “Re: Favorite Naruto Character and Why?”)

I find this post particularly moving because it demonstrates the emotional connection that many fans have with characters that they appreciate and the power of pop culture in general. In this case, the poster credits the character with changing his/her life for the better. Several other posts mention this kind of personality link – rather than admire the character, they feel an uncanny kinship with him or her.

Another post makes a similar comparison:

Although, I'd say I have a particular interest for Sai because when I see him, I see myself. I haven't been great at socializing and I was mostly a loner until I've discovered friends. When I have any kind of task, I do it properly and I do not complain. I am also quiet and reserved. Just like Sai. I also like his art and I myself do a lot of art. The only thing that doesn't make us alike is our appearance. (Allstorm "Re: Favorite Naruto Character and Why?")

Again, this poster sees himself in the character. This association, I would say, is a strong indicator that fandom for *Naruto* is not prone to Orientalism. If Orientalism were present in this particular fan's perspective, the otherness of such a character would be at the forefront rather than the familiar.

One other post also hits on the universality of these characters and the appeal they hold:

Uchiha Itachi, i think have tons of potential to become as strong as madara, amazing at genjutsu and ninjutsu, and i like how he was drawn. Dark, and very mysterious..my favorite one indeed. (Susanoo "Re: Favorite Naruto Character and Why?")

“Dark, and very mysterious” could be used to describe characters from an infinite pool in both manga and western comics, television shows, and movies. Aesthetics also play a part – the poster likes how Itachi is drawn. There is no mention of Japanese style or themes – only the personality, aesthetics, and story function of the character.

I find it encouraging that none of the posts I examined mention anything about the characters in relation to Japan. It seems to me that most fans of the *Naruto* series do not find characters appealing because of any Orientalist form, but rather because of universal traits that they relate to. It is not the strange and foreign – the exotic – that fans are attracted to when it comes to characters, but rather the familiar.

Conversely, it is interesting to note that this user has adopted Susanoo, the name of a Japanese deity, as a screen name. While the exotic nature of the name certainly seems to appeal to fans, it may not be that the user has chosen the name specifically as a reference to the myth. This name also applies to a specific *ninjutsu* that a particular character employs. Thus, the intrinsic meaning of the name is lost and becomes a signifier of the show rather than of its original mythological meaning. Rather than exoticizing the East, I think this is an appropriation that would occur within any fandom. As I will later discuss, this appropriation of vocabulary is part of a set of tactics that build personal meaning rather than to Orientalize.

As I stated at the beginning of this section, I believe that many attitudes toward anime and manga fandom are simply a matter of perception. Noted theorist Pierre Bourdieu, in his 1979 book *Distinction*, discusses how tastes that seem natural are often shaped and reinforced by cultural institutions. Applying this theory to fan culture, Henry Jenkins explains, “Taste becomes one of the important means by which social distinctions are maintained and class identities are forged. Those who ‘naturally’ possess appropriate tastes

'deserve' a privileged position within the institutional hierarchy...while the tastes of others are seen as 'uncouth' and 'underdeveloped'" (16). I would say that this applies to mainstream America, where "uncouth" has perhaps been translated into "weird" and "underdeveloped" has now become "immature." Indeed, television drama and other live-action entertainments are often understood as normal when compared to cartoons and comics. Such a reaction is to be expected, as anime and manga fandom revolves around texts that seem to reference childhood and, thus, a reversion to that stage. Jenkins himself addresses this issue saying, "would these same practices...be read as extreme if they were applied to Shakespeare instead of Star Trek, Italian opera instead of Japanese animation, or Balzac instead of Beauty and the Beast?" (53).

Indeed, negative perception of fans is definitely a matter of taste. Jenkins notes that "The stereotypical conception of the fan, while not without a limited factual basis, amounts to a projection of anxieties about the violation of dominant cultural hierarchies" (17). At the top of such hierarchies lie hobbies and pastimes that are acceptable and valued as popular capital: sports, network television shows, and the like. Anime and manga represent artistic and cultural ideas that are, while still accessible to western consumers, ultimately formed outside of *popular* western culture. As Jenkins puts it, "Fans construct their cultural and social identity through borrowing and inflecting mass culture images, articulating concerns which often go unvoiced within the dominant media" (23). Compounded with this is the sense that these are *foreign* texts, that they are not a western product and thus represent a strangeness or foreign quality in the person who enjoys them. Something must be wrong with the fan, according to these anxieties.

While Bourdieu's hierarchy posits the popular (and, thus, "common") against cultured bourgeoisie, Jenkins' (and my) approach is geared more toward American popular culture, where the minority culture (anime/manga fandom) is seen as, if not "underdeveloped," simply weird. This hierarchy does not only explain the casual perception of western "Otaku" as Orientalist, but also gestures towards biases within anime and manga fandom itself. After all, many fans seem to consider popular anime, such as *Naruto* or *Bleach*, to be "popular" and thus below notice while others such as *Cowboy Bebop* and *Evangelion* remain acceptable to "proper" fan taste. Interest in the more accessible, plebian titles smacks of the "uncouth" and attracts the assumption that such a fan must not understand much about his or her choice of obsession.

Let me explain how this is important to Orientalism. First, I believe that anime fan culture is *perceived* to be Orientalist by non-fans, especially in the internet community. Whether or not they are labeled as "Orientalist," the bottom line is that anime fandom is often seen as following Japanese cartoons and comics to a hyperbolic level and as worshipping Japan as a perfect nation – a fantasy land. This perception is a result of the norming in western culture of "appropriate," and therefore, hierarchical, tastes. Anime and manga fandom is still very much considered a "nerd" community. Granted, this is a title that most members of such communities are comfortable with. However, in western society, anime and manga fandom still exists as an abject group, perceived as a younger (cartoons are acceptable for younger viewers, according to our culture) and less mature crowd. Western anime and manga fandom is, as it were, still resting on the lower end of the cultural totem pole.

Second, I believe that there is an internal response to the perception of anime and manga fans as vapid Orientalists that actually perpetuates this perception *within* the community. Like a sort of fandom antibody, those who seem to police the aesthetics honored in the fan community are not only exercising their cultural clout, but also reacting against the stereotyping that accompanies such fandom. The “weaboo” (pronounced *wee-ah-boo*), a label that I believe represents self-conscious Orientalist anxieties present in fan and general internet culture, is all too often used in online discussion of anime and manga.

Weaboo: The Specter of Orientalism

Urban Dictionary (my only “authoritative” option as the *Oxford English Dictionary* does not cover internet slang) defines a Weaboo as “A negative term directed to anyone overly obsessed with Japanese culture to the point where they become annoying. Used frequently on the image boards of 4chan” (“Weaboo”). The main frustration with such people is that they are “uneducated about their obsession of choice” and “are often noobs [newbies] who are overly zealous, trying to impress others with their *otaku* knowledge” (“Weaboo,” emphasis mine). Weaboos are often also accused of attempting to become Japanese themselves, the stereotype being that such a person is usually caucasian.

One important aspect in all of this is the accusation that Weaboos consider themselves “otaku” and wish to become Japanese. The knowledgeable fan knows that the word “otaku” has a negative connotation and also applies to a proliferation of obsessions aside from just anime. Weaboos may attempt to appropriate different aspects of perceived Japanese culture in constructing their own “otaku” identity.

Weaboos are differentiated by both their lack of knowledge, or subcultural capital, and their behavior. One distinction made by the creator of this Urban Dictionary page is that

“they [proper anime enthusiasts] neither boast about their knowledge nor call themselves otaku.” The weaboo, then, is a construction resulting from the failure of fans to follow certain decorum or protocol in online fandom. The examples of Weaboo behavior found in Urban Dictionary resemble interactions that could be found on any anime fan site on the web, though perhaps in a satirical form:

Weaboo: Liek OMG, did anyone see the Inuyasha Movie 3 on teh the Cartoons Network last night! LOLZ Sesshomaru is SO HOTT!!!

Weaboo 2:I hope the Naruto fillers end soon LOL

Humble anime fan: STFU weaboos (Sir DJ Twizzler).

These posts function as examples of how individual perceptions of anime, fandom, and how fans “should behave” affect identity and the labeling of others. Anime featured on Cartoon Network, while popular, is often seen as “mainstream.” Both *Naruto* and *Inuyasha* have been marketed by major networks in the United States, each meeting with explosive popularity among viewers. With this distinction, more “cultured” (and thus, self-perceived “true”) anime fans may judge those who are fans of these series as less cultured and, thus, false anime fans: weaboos.

Of course, the term is widely used by internet users who are not overly interested in anime or manga as a weapon against what they may see as an annoying cultural trend. However, I am primarily concerned with the function of the term within fandom. At its core, the concept of the Weaboo functions in fandom in two ways: first, as a measure against Orientalism and second, as a marginalizing label used by more “cultured” fans to enforce their individual fan ideals. The problem is that it furthers the perception of the anime fan, cultured or not, as Orientalist.

Something else to consider is that behavior may change. Fans who are introduced to anime through network television are just as valid as those who claim to possess ultimate knowledge of Japanese culture, or who at least boast a refined anime palate as opposed to a perceived plebian series. After all, doesn't trying to know everything about a subject result from a desire to somehow be involved in that subject? As fans read, watch, and consume more concerning Japanese culture, it may be that their knowledge and behavior will change. I myself started on *Naruto* (it was unlicensed in the United States at the time) and have certainly expressed opinions such as "I hope the *Naruto* filler ends soon."

However, after living in Japan and experiencing the culture, I consider myself to have a balanced perspective and a working knowledge of Japanese language. In fact, as I have stated earlier, interest in shows like *Naruto* sparked my interest in Japan in the first place. As a result, I don't feel any sense of hierarchy when it comes to anime and manga series. People are going to enjoy what they enjoy. The hope is that fans think critically about the shows that they watch or the comics they read and understand that such works are fiction even in the country of origin.

In all, it seems that the approach one takes to his or her understanding of Japan may be the difference between being an Orientalist or enthusiast – a weaboo or simply a fan. Understanding that anime and manga are not the definitive authority on Japanese culture, that the relationship between anime as a product and Japan as producer may be more complex than a simple mirror image, is required to maintain balance in fandom.

Indeed, from my observations it seems that this more balanced approach is prevalent in anime/manga fan communities. In a thread titled "Why are we so enamored with Japanese culture?" on *Narutofan.com*, the discussion did not center on aspects of Japanese culture that

fans appreciated so much as it did on how blind admiration toward all things Japanese is a grievous mistake. To this effect, the comments on this thread went completely against my expectations.

Some responses on this thread were very concise: ES explains, “ I enjoy some fictions produced by the country but I certainly don't adhere to the delusion that it's perfect and shit” (“Re: Why are we so enamored with Japanese culture?”). This poster very deliberately rejects the Orientalist notion of Japan as “perfect.” Some posts were a bit longer:

Only a dumb weeaboo would believe japan is a anime land. No such thing,The japanese do have some pretty bad history towards Asia/other things. My korean friend hates japan because of the comforting woman thing. Their sexual relationships has gone too far especially with incest and under aged children. Yes japan has some fucked up History,but i beautify it because I like the food and hope to learn to cook sushi,sashimi,etc,Some places/trees in japan are beautiful looking(Sakura trees,mount Fuji,i'd like to see them,I'd like to vist not for anime and manga(i have a laptop for that don't i?) i want to learn the customs,play instruments,learn japanese,Play Pachinko games,see how their technology is different from ours. etc.

...Do not visit just too go to cons,or buy manga,go for the culture. Using wapanese will make you look like a retard,learn the language and study kanji,romaji,katakana,etc. (Nechku Chan “Re: Why are we so enamored with Japanese culture?”)

The opinion here is complex and has clearly been formed after exchanges with fans who display ignorant behavior. An “anime land” is clearly a utopian space, the ideal fairytale

“Japan” that some fans may perceive. The truth, of course, is that no country is perfect. The user brings up history with Korea as well as the issues of incest and pedophilia (most likely in reference to the rather lax child pornography laws that the country held until the early 2000s) as negatives that dispel the illusion of Japan as a perfect “anime land.” One problem with this post is the stereotyping of Japan as a place of rampant sexual perversion (“their sexual relationships has [sic] gone too far”). As incest and pedophilia are problems that affect numerous nations, it is quite a generalization to single Japan out entirely.

The other point I notice here is that Nechku Chan clearly states he does not have to visit the country for anime or manga: “I have a laptop for that, don’t I?” This seems to indicate that Japan itself may produce intellectual material like anime and manga, but that its consumption does not require any connection with the country itself. It is interesting to notice that the relationship here is defined by difference. The poster wants to see how “their technology is different from ours.”

If anything, this user is very much against exoticising Japan. He encourages people to “learn the language” and to visit Japan for the culture and geography rather than “just to go to cons.” Proper fandom, in this context, is a matter of attitude: visiting Japan simply for manga and anime is a very Weaboo, and therefore Orientalist, thing to do. Rather, the traits that are respected by this user (and many others) are investment in Japanese as a language (rather than throwing together a couple of words in English sentences, typically identified as “wapanese”) and an approach toward experiencing the culture as it is rather than as seen on T.V.

Some responses to the initial post were extremely pessimistic:

People are ignorant. Simple as that. Most westerners are dumb, lazy, and pathetic and with all those ingredients in mind they don't take the time to learn about their own culture. And because laziness is the way of fools they latch onto Japanese culture because they're dumb enough to believe that you can gauge Japanese culture through cartoons, comic books, and video games. Of course these media will only portray the Japanese in the best light, thus leaving dumbasses ignorant of the 500+ years of the Japanese fucking over other people in the Asiatic nations as well as their own people. (Zero Phoenix "Re: Why are we so enamored with Japanese culture?")

This post also attempts to dispel the fantasy anime-land image of Japan. Not only does this poster assert that fans cannot learn everything about Japanese culture from anime, manga, and video games, he (or she) also furthers blind fanaticism as a two-fold problem: it represents laziness on the part of western fans and a calculated effort by Japanese media to "portray Japan in the best light." The post itself may be fairly aggressive and pessimistic, but it indicates soft power as a factor in propagating ignorance of historical fact. The poster (who seems to be a westerner) attacks the ignorance that is associated with fans who blindly idolize Japan as a nation. It is important to notice that while this user mentions the Japanese "fucking over other people in the Asiatic nations," the accusation mentions Japanese people as victims ("as well as their own people"). In this way, the user humanizes Japanese people while arguing against the idea of a perfect Japan.

The original poster is taken aback by the responses he or she has received, but also agrees with them.

I guess they're those who are better informed about the drawbacks and shortcomings of Japanese culture.

I just found it weird westerners would easily buy into their subcultures and ways of marketing. But you guys pretty much asserted that they're handful of those who are completely oblivious and ignorant of the imperfections and flaws of the cultural and social issues and Japan that affect the daily lifestyle and living situation of Japanese and foreigners alike. And I think despite some who acknowledge this and enjoy and take in what Japan has to offer through their subcultures and outlets, they continue to believe in this lie.

I guess ascetically Japan is beautiful (i.e. their arts and crafts, antiques of old, old historical infrastructure, etc.) But it's all a complete delusion/ facade to shift the focus off the bad things as well. (Astro "Re: Why are we so enamored with Japanese culture?")

Astro asserts that the beauty of Japan (its soft power) is a "delusion/façade" to shift focus off of negative images of Japan. This correlates with the earlier posts that confront the fantasy image of Japan as a distraction from historical and political truths. This poster directly addresses the marketing of subcultures (which would include anime and manga) and the false image of Japan that they may convey. While I don't think that Astro is saying that the aesthetics of Japan are a facade, I think he is saying that to ignore the negative aspects of a society would be to participate in a complete delusion.

One user spells out the idea of Orientalism as it is displayed in anime and manga fan culture:

Why are we enamored by the Japanese culture? For those who are, it is just something different. Something that offers them more than what is given to them traditionally...It's filled with fantasy thoughts of a distant land that even when they go to Japan, they fail to see beyond the curtain they already built for themselves. This cannot be taken seriously at all. (Jeff "Re: Why are we so enamored with Japanese culture?")

The most important aspect of this post is the idea that preconceptions of Japan as fantasy act as a self-fulfilling prophecy, coloring the experience so that it reinforces the preconceptions that an Orientalist western fan may possess. As the process is perpetuated by first-hand experiences as well, a fan may very well visit Japan and decide that it is exactly what he or she expected, depending on how fully the myth of Japan as a fantasy land is ingrained in his or her belief system.

Of course, as some users point out, there is a balance to manga and anime fandom: Wolfarus claims that "Being a fan of / into the anime/manga/gaming culture does not necessarily equate being 'completely enamored' with Japanese culture as a whole" ("Re: Why are we so enamored with Japanese culture?"). I tend to agree and, predictably, so did other users. To jump back to earlier comments, many seem to appreciate anime and manga as removed from Japanese culture ("I have a laptop for that, don't I?"). In such cases, an interest in manga or anime may not translate into an interest in Japan, meaning that fans of this type may not even equate manga with the country of origin at all.

It becomes clear, as I browse these forums, that fans do not seem to be caught in any Orientalist trap. None of the posters ever really approaches the original question posed to them: "Why are we so enamored with Japanese culture?" Instead, they deconstruct the perceived "weaboo" mentality that they infer in the thread title. These fans seem to be highly aware of the fallacy that results from equating the fictional elements of anime and manga with any "real" portrait of Japan.

One aspect of this particular thread that I did find disturbing was that while users were eager to dispel Orientalism in favor of a realistic approach to Japan on a historical and political basis, some posts leaned toward negative stereotyping. In the above posts there was definitely a feeling that removed manga and anime, which posters enjoyed, from Japan as a place and culture. The negative quality of some of these posts still seems to be redirected from frustration with Orientalist fans, attacking the ideas that such fans represent. As a result, while deploring the blind positive exoticism of some fans, these posters instead essentialize Japanese culture in a way that posits it under an assumed superior Western outlook. In this case, then, there was some limited Orientalizing from fans.

One anonymous user mirrors the stereotype that the Japanese are all repressed claiming, "I'm not [enamored with Japanese culture]. Actual Japanese culture is depressing, they are so repressed!" ("Why are we so enamored with Japanese Culture?"). The assumption that Japanese people, as a culture, are repressed is generalizing to a very large degree. Japanese attitudes toward individualism and sex, especially, are complex and nuanced. This post plays into what I consider a false dichotomy between the West and Japan. That is, the user refuses a positive Orientalism while engaging in negative, evoking a stereotype of repression that springs from an ideal that is culturally biased. This bias, as

Harumi Befu mentions in the article “Concepts of Japan: Japanese Culture and the Japanese,” assumes Americans “to be individualistic, while the Japanese are said to be groupist – where Japanese groupism is definitely given a lower value status than US individualism” (25).

Claiming that all Japanese people are repressed, this particular post is intended as a negative response to “weaboo” behavior but reveals an Orientalist belief system.

The end of this thread is, regrettably, disappointing. The conversation continues on to sex, with a joke about the birthrate and how one anonymous user will gladly “go over and help increase” it (“Why are we so enamored with Japanese Culture?”). Unfortunately, this final comment also reflects the very Orientalist sentiments that I had begun to believe were not present in this particular community. Under the assumption that he is an “unrepressed” westerner, this user plays into the Orientalist assumption of the Asian female as sexually available and exotic. By assuming the problematic role of virile, conquering western male, this user betrays an attitude that most posters in this thread do not seem to have.

One of the more turbulent discussions I observed, this thread displayed instances of Orientalism that were unexpected. I had assumed that within anime and manga fandom, exoticism would be employed more frequently. In reading these comments, however, it became clear that by pushing against the stereotype of the starstruck fan, some fans end up Orientalizing through negative stereotyping.

Language Study

One very encouraging facet of fandom that I discovered on Narutoforums was Japanese language study. Many anime fans are interested in learning Japanese. In this way, they can further connect to their interests and to each other. I find this compelling because it is a way into discovering authentic aspects of Japanese culture. By studying language, fans

participate in an activity that increases their cultural capital within the fan community while also teaching them more about Japan as it exists in more or less concrete terms. Such forums are a great way to learn language, an online collaborative variant on pop-culture as educational tool. A tactic used by publications like the now-defunct *Mangajin*, using pop culture as material and motivation is a great way for fans to learn Japanese language.

The “Japanese Discussion Thread” on *Narutoforums.com* provides a collaborative area for students to discuss their study of Japanese. Posters will ask for help and often correct each other on the finer points of the language. Some of these issues are more technical, such as figuring out how to actually type out Japanese characters. RemChu asks, “Um, How are you all typing in romanji and or kanji?” and claims to be a “newb” or new to the language (Japanese Discussion Thread). This kind of dialogic participation is incredibly helpful for some users. By asking other posters who are clearly writing Japanese characters, the fan is able to learn Japanese as well.

Then there are posts that deal with specific grammatical points:

その文章は全然大丈夫だよ！

You're imagining it wrong though. The sentence you wrote is "The thread revived". It doesn't specify anything about who did it or even if it revived by itself. If you used が 復活されました it would be "has been revived", implying the action of an unspecified third party. (TrgaryenX “Japanese Discussion Thread”)

This particular user responds to another’s post, praising him or her for a good try. By responding in Japanese, he or she is able to provide more substance for fellow learners to digest while gently correcting and teaching the correct grammar.

A smaller number of posts involve learning Kanji:

こんばんは～このThread久しぶり～

I'm a bit confused, what's that?

EDIT: Nevermind, found it. (Jeff "Japanese Discussion Thread")

The subject of the post, in romanized spelling pronounced as "Konbanwa, kono thread hisashiburi" translates to "good evening, haven't seen this thread in a while." The specific Kanji, 久, is what the poster is inquiring about. This post demonstrates a fan who is clearly taking the initiative to learn Japanese.

By participating in this thread, it is possible for fans like this to experience language, one of the more concrete aspects of Japanese culture. The collaborative learning here is in no way complete – a fan forum could never replace formal language education (or immersion, for that matter). However, it does provide a space for learning and also serves as a motivational tool. After all, by correcting and helping to teach others, fans can show off how knowledgeable they are. In this way I think that rather than encouraging Orientalist practices, fan communities like *Narutoforums.com* are actually fostering a more balanced approach to viewing Japanese culture. Other threads of interest include a travel thread, where posters talk about their own experiences in Japan, and a music thread, where fans post music videos and discuss Japanese artists that they have come to enjoy through watching different anime.

Anime fans in particular are exposed to Japanese music during the opening and closing credits of any anime, including *Naruto*. This serves as a gateway into interest for various Japanese artists in a variety of styles. I myself found many favorite artists while watching *Naruto*. While the samplings provided are generally dubbed "ani-songs" by Japanese listeners, these provide the foundation of interest for western fans who are not

familiar with Japanese music. One poster on the “Japanese Music General Thread” at *Narutoforums.com* lists several artists that he has since become familiar with. In answer to a previous question as to his familiarity with non-anime related songs, he replies:

Vaguely. But not really. ☹️ Except for the few bands I've listened to whose style intrigued me enough to search for more of their songs. The Pillows, L'arc en Ciel, Ikimono Gakari, Nujabes To list a few... These songs were the gateway songs for me. I just wanted to post some that people could relate to.

(Nimander “Japanese Music General Thread”)

I would comment that the act of searching for more songs from artists he enjoys means that Nimander *has* moved beyond anime-related music. In this way, a fan becomes more connected to Japan as it exists outside of the realm of anime and manga. By incorporating this music into daily life, listening to it as one would any other music, the fan does not Orientalize but instead transculturalizes – making a homegrown Japanese cultural product a part of his or her lifestyle.

Conclusion

One thought to consider, finally, is that manga and anime fan culture in the West is, if not creating a hybrid of east and west, at least diversifying the cultural experiences of fans on a local level. As Pelliteri writes concerning anime that becomes part of a generation’s experience, “anime that receive this... treatment morph from local product into authentically transnational ones” (213). I remember seeing *Naruto* on network TV for the first time, seeing kids wearing *Naruto* T-shirts at the mall. Certainly, the series has become a transnational product. Pelliteri also proposes the word transculturalization “to point to dynamics of inclusion of themes, concepts, and Japanese imagination values in the fringes of

Italian/European fans of Japanese comics and animation” (214). I think this translates well to American fandom as well. I would clarify that “Japanese imagination values,” in my mind the aesthetics of manga and anime, are the most specialized of this list. I am reminded of *Naruto*-influenced fan art, fan fictions, *doujinshi* (fan-made comics). All of these display this inclusion, not just in entertainment activities, but in creative ones. American manga is now available: stylistically Japanese, but wholly western in its production.

Perhaps what we are seeing in fans who do seem to emulate manga is *transculturalization*: a selection on the part of fans of things that they appreciate about Japanese culture that have been concentrated in manga. Pelliteri cites Cuban ethnologist Fernando Ortiz in explaining *transculturalization*, “the dynamic of assimilation, through a process of selection and inventive reprocessing, of a dominant culture by a subordinate or marginal group” (qtd. 214). Looking beyond the colonial implications of Ortiz’s theory, Pelliteri posits that appropriation of Japanese cultural concepts by fans of anime and manga changes the very culture of the fans themselves..

This idea meshes well with Michel DeCerteau’s concept of “Textual Poaching.” As DeCerteau explains, “The reader takes neither the position of the author nor an author’s position. He invents in the text something different from what they intended. He detaches them from their (lost or accessory) origin. He combines their fragments and creates something unknown” (169). Henry Jenkins applies this to fans of television shows, like *Star Trek*, who use these texts to assemble identities and products, taking information from their beloved text and bringing their own meaning to the text. One clear example within *Naruto* fandom would be the appropriation of vocabulary for use as screen names (Susanoo, for instance). This could also include the writing of original stories, sometimes involving the re-

writing of a text's plot to suit individual taste (Jenkins 52). In discussing *Naruto*, fans create "something unknown" in that they re-write the plot through the ranking (by power and/or popularity) and *shipping* (supporting a romantic relationship between two uninvolved characters) of characters. Fans fragment and re-work many aspects of manga and anime, including language and cultural codes. By removing and using specific facets, fans aren't Orientalizing: the ideas and images that they find appealing do not represent Japan, but rather a new hybrid identity.

By appropriating aspects of Japanese culture and assimilating them into part of one's identity, the fan is able to implement these concepts without making any particular claim towards Japanese culture. Rather than saying "Japan is like this," fans instead seem to be saying "I am like this" or "I am interacting with cultural products, but I am not losing my sense of perspective concerning them." Another way to see it is this: already working from a place of marginality, the anime/manga fan does not acquire power over the East or Japan, but builds power within his or her fan community.

Cultural capital and the specialized fan version Napier coins "sub-cultural capital" are also bound within this idea of transcultural poaching. In fact, the pursuit of sub-cultural capital is exactly what keeps Orientalism in check. The more someone in a fan community knows, the more power he or she possesses. Within the world of *Naruto* fandom, especially, I noticed that cultural capital revolves around knowledge of the narrative world in general, keeping current with the series so far, and familiarity with characters and their powers. Some other possible capital could involve art styles (for comparison with other manga), familiarity with Japanese culture, and, of course, Japanese language.

What this means is that the basic hierarchy of the *Naruto* fan culture actually limits the function of Orientalism within their ranks. Orientalism, which is essentially a proliferation of ignorance, will not thrive in a culture that promotes knowledge.

Obviously, manga as a draw for Japan isn't exactly Orientalist. Manga and anime are real aspects of Japanese culture, but they are not wholly representative of that culture. It is problematic to fault fans who enjoy this aspect of Japanese culture with being Orientalist, as this simply assumes that fans cannot separate the two. The representation of Japanese culture in manga and anime doesn't serve to Orientalize Japan itself because the mediums involved don't create a hierarchy or dichotomy between the East and the West.

While this discussion could be neverending, I believe that instances of Orientalism toward Japan come down to the individual attitudes of fans. If the fan approaches a text like *Naruto* with a balanced attitude and a willingness to study more than just the manga itself, Orientalism will not be prevalent in a community. Approaches toward fandom should also be balanced. Rather than accuse Japanophiles and anime/manga enthusiasts of Orientalism or "weabooism," people must understand that many fans approach cultural knowledge with a very critical eye. Furthermore, as fandom can lead to deeper cultural understanding, fans who do not yet possess such a critical eye should not have their pleasure policed.

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