

**Japanese Voice Goes Global and Local:
Globalization and Localization of the Japanese *Seiyū* Culture
in Hong Kong**

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the popularization, perception and impact of Japanese *seiyū* (voice artists) in Hong Kong from historical, cultural and comparative perspectives. Through a systematic overview of the historical development and current conditions of *seiyū* in Japan, it discusses reasons for the rising popularity of the *seiyū* culture and the importance and influence of *seiyū* on Japanese as well as Hong Kong dubbing profession. Besides giving scholarly attention to the cultural and social importance of *seiyū*, this paper examines whether *seiyū* is a unique Japanese culture and how different patterns of acquiring and adapting foreign cultures emerge. By comparing Japanese *seiyū* with its Hong Kong counterpart, it also revisits theories and issues concerning the globalization of culture, such as cultural imperialism, glocalization and hybridity, highlighting the role of network, the power of fandom as well as the changing concepts of culture and identities.

論文摘要

本文將以歷史及文化角度探討日本聲優(配音員)文化於香港的普及和其為文化全球化討論所帶來的新啟示。本文將通過闡述日本聲優的發展史及比較日本和香港的配音行業及文化，帶出聲優文化興起的原因及其文化重要性，藉此深化讀者對此新興流行文化的認識。本文亦會討論聲優迷及網絡科技在聲優文化傳播中所扮演的重要角色，並以聲優文化為例重新檢視有關文化全球化，如文化帝國主義、文化身份認同、文化混種、文化在地化等重要議題以及日本文化傳播的新可能性。

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Introduction

A. Objectives and Significance

The Japanese term *seiyū* (voice artists) refers to the “artists who play the character’s voice in *anime* and dub foreign movies and dramas.”¹ They are well-known among *anime* lovers, but are seldom discussed in academic circles. To *seiyū* fans, names like Megumi Hayashibara, Megumi Ogata, Akira Ishida, Sōichirō Hoshi are parallel to Takuya Kimura, Noriko Sakai, Ayumi Hamasaki among Japanese TV Dramas and J-pop lovers. *Seiyū* are influential in Japanese ACG (animation-comic-game) as well as the entertainment industries in Japan.

In spite of the rising enthusiasm among *seiyū* fans in Japan and Asia, there is a lack of scholarly studies on *seiyū* as artists and professionals. There are very few academic books in Japanese and studies on this topics basically non-existent in other languages. *Seiyū* does not even earn a place in Mark Schilling’s *Encyclopedia of Japanese Pop Culture*.² Unlike studies on Japanese *manga* and *anime*, writings about *seiyū* are largely introductory and journalistic, focusing on the biographies and activities of

1. Yamaguchi Yasuo, ed., *Nihon no anime zenshi: sekai o seishita Nihon anime no kiseki* (The Complete History of Japanese Animation: The Miracle of Japanese Animation that Conquer the World) (Tokyo: Ten Books, 2004), 169.

2. Mark Schilling, *The Encyclopedia of Japanese Pop Culture* (New York: Weatherhill, 1997).

particular *seiyū*, giving advice to those who are interested in becoming a *seiyū* or outlining the historical development of the *seiyū* industry.³ The above-mentioned publications are more or less like data books which provide important basic information on which my research is largely based. There is a pioneering study conducted by the Waseda Professor Tomoyoshi Morikawa in the early 2000s. With the help from the experienced *seiyū*, Kōji Tsujitani, Morikawa launched a research project on the “History of *Seiyū*” and published two papers in *Media shi kenkyū* (Studies on Media History) in 2002 and 2003.⁴ These papers serve as good references on the development of the *seiyū* profession in Japan since the 1920s. However, Morikawa and Tsujitani largely focused on how the profession developed with interaction with other media such as radio, television, leaving the overseas influence of *seiyū* culture unexplored.

Hong Kong, Taiwan, Mainland China and the rest of Asia have

3. Examples of prominent works on *manga* and *anime* are Frederik L. Schodt, *Dreamland Japan : Writings on Modern Manga* (Berkeley, Calif: Stone Bridge Press, 1996) and Chen Zhung Wai, *Ri-Ben dong men hua di quan qiu hua he mi di wen hua* (The Globalization of Japanese Manga and Anime and the Otaku Culture) (Taipei: Tang Shun Chu Ban She, 2004). Examples of the publications on *seiyū* are Hayashihara Megumi, *Ashita ga aru sa: Sweet Time Express* (There’s Tomorrow: Sweet Time Express)(Japan: Gakken Mook, 1996); Satō Masataka ed., *Otasuke shinro seiyū hen 2006 nen* (Career Guide for Seiyū Year 2006)(Japan: Natsushokan, 2005) and Matsuda Sakimi, *Seiyū hakusho* (A White Paper of Seiyū)(Japan: Ōkura Shuppansha, 2000).

4. Tomoyoshi Morikawa and Kōji Tsujitani, “Seiyū no tanjyō to sono hatten (The Origin and Development of Voice Acting in Japan),” *Media shi kenkyū* (Media History), 13 (2002):54-73 and “Seiyū no puro no tanjyō: kaigai telebi dorama to seiyū (The Birth of Professional Voice Actors: Dubbing in Foreign TV Dramas in Japanese),” *Media shi kenkyū* (Media History),14 (2003): 115-139.

witnessed a rising interest in *seiyū* recently, a phenomenon which deserves academic investigation. This research aims to fill the gap in the fast-growing field of Japanese popular culture studies and will be the first comparative study on Japanese *seiyū* and Hong Kong voice artists. Attempts will be made to locate *seiyū* within the context of academic discussions of Japanese ACG and popular culture. Hong Kong is chosen as a study site. The main reason is that Hong Kong is the only place in Asia where a registered organization for local voice artists was set up by fans, indicating fans' enthusiasm towards local dubbing profession. However, interestingly, Hong Kong voice artists suffer from low status or criticisms on the internet through comparing their performances with Japanese *seiyū*.

My research takes the first attempt to look into the overseas influence of *seiyū* culture instead of tracing the development of the profession only. It also tries to find out why the status of Hong Kong differs greatly from that of Japanese *seiyū* through examining the structural differences and the different roles that play in pop culture, making it the first comparative study on Japanese *seiyū* and Hong Kong voice artists in Hong Kong.

Through historical, cultural and comparative analysis, my research examines issues in cultural globalization, such as cultural imperialism,

glocalization, localization, hybridization, cultural identity, hoping to provide new perspectives such as, the role of consumers and fans, the power of internet in globalizing cultural products, as well as the possibility of new consumption pattern of foreign culture and the formation of new sense of “nation” and ‘identities’.

B. Academic Issues and Literature Review

Besides giving *seiyū* due academic attention, I would like to re-examine the following academic issues which can be noted in the globalization and localization process of the *seiyū* culture in Hong Kong and other Asian countries:

- (1) What new perspectives can the popularization of *seiyū* in Asia offer to the understanding of cultural globalization?

Due to the rising cultural influence of nations like Japan, South Korea and U.K. which form great competitors to America, the focus of the cultural globalization discourse has shifted from “one-way imperialism” to “no obvious ‘direction’ to globalization at all.”⁵ Dating back to the 1950s and

5. Anthony Giddens, ‘Living in A Post-traditional Society,’ in *Reflexive Modernization*, eds. Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash (Cambridge: Polity, 1994), 96.

1960s, the “Modernization Theory” generally assumed that non-Western nations could eventually be “modernized” through absorbing and copying a Western (mostly American) style of living.⁶ In this way, local differences would be reduced into a homogenized American way of life.⁷ In the 1970s and 1980s, such Westernization or Americanization process was commonly viewed as cultural imperialism, a theory explaining that the “dominant cultures of the West and the United States are swamping minority cultures in processes of homogenization, reducing diversity” through exporting cultural goods to the rest of the world.⁸ The importation of the cultural products was not for the sake of the modernization of non-Western nations, but a strategy for the United States, to further its own economic interests and cultural domination. The spread of popular US cultural products from Disney, McDonalds and Hollywood have been regarded as strategies expanding American cultural and economic influences rather than a simple

6. Modernization Theory, a marco-theory, states that the developed nations (usually the West or America) played an important role in the social and economic modernization and development of the underdeveloped nations (the Third World). For discussions and critics on Modernization Theory, see Marion Joseph Levy, *Modernization And the Structure of Societies; A Setting for International Affairs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966); Mustafa O. Attir, Burkart Holzner, and Zdenek Suda, eds., *Directions of Change : Modernization Theory, Research, and Realities* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981).

7. Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964); Walt Whitman Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth; A Non-communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: University Press, 1960).

8. Hugh Mackay, “The Globalization of Culture?” in *A Globalizing World? : Culture, Economics, Politics*, ed. David Held (London: Routledge, 2000), 65.

flow of cultural goods determined by global demand and supply.⁹

Since the 1990s these concepts have been challenged and criticized by scholars. For instance, Tomlinson points out their insufficiency in explaining the patterns of cultural exchange, since these concepts “underestimate the cultural resilience and dynamism” of the “receiving cultures” and “their capacity to ‘indigenize’” the “cultural imports”.¹⁰ It shows that the receiving cultures are not just passive recipients, but active participants. Furthering this discourse, scholars like Nederveen Pieterse, Hannerz and Featherstone believe that the globalization of culture is more than the process of indigenization, but also a form of hybridization, which involves diversities and differences of each local culture.¹¹ The idea of “glocalization” also stresses the importance of taking the locality into consideration for a globalized product to survive in different localities, since

9. For discussion on Disney, see Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart, *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic* (New York: International General, 1975) and more recent Ye Yin-cong and Shi Peng-xiang, *Dishini bu shi le yuan* (Disney is not a wonderland) (Hong Kong: Step Forward Multimedia, 1999). For discussion on McDonald, see George Ritzer, *The Mcdonaldization of Society* (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press, 2000). For discussion on Hollywood, see Scott Robert Olson, *Hollywood Planet: Global Media and the Competitive Advantage of Narrative Transparency* (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999) and Peter Decherney, *Hollywood and the Culture Elite: How the Movies Became American* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

10. John Tomlinson, “Globalized Culture: The Triumph of the West?” in *Culture and Global Change*, ed. Tracey Skelton and Tim Allen (London: Routledge, 1999), 24. For additional critical reviews by Tomlinson on cultural imperialism, see also his *Cultural Imperialism: a Critical Introduction* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1991).

11. Jan Nederveen Pieterse, “Globalization As Hybridization”, in *Global Modernities*, eds. Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash, and Roland Robertson (London: Sage Publications, 1995), 45; Ulf Hannerz, *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places* (London: Routledge, 1996). See also Mike Featherstone, *Undoing Culture: Globalization, Postmodernism and Identity* (London: Sage Publications, 1995).

forceful imposition of homogenized culture may face resistance from strong local norms.¹²

The popularization of Japanese popular culture in Asia can be understood in the same academic framework. The attraction of Japanese popular culture, as suggested by such scholars as Honda and Iwabuchi, can be attributed to the “country-neutral quality” or *mukokuseki*, referring to something or someone lacking nationality or lacking Japaneseness of the cultural products like *manga*, *anime* and videogames.¹³ However, the Asian popularization of *seiyū*, a cultural product that is full of “Japaneseness”, poses a direct challenge to the notion of *mukokuseki*. *Seiyū* is also culture that do not need deliberated localization to facilitate consumption. Moreover, not a few Hong Kong voice artists have begun to express concerns over people’s preference for “original” Japanese voices to local dubbing.¹⁴ At the first sight, Japanese *seiyū* seems to have posed great threat to local dubbing. The popularization of Japanese *seiyū* can be easily misunderstood by social critics and the press as a form of cultural

12. Roland Robertson, “Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity” in *Global Modernities*, eds., Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash, and Roland Robertson (London : Sage Publications, 1995), 25-44.

13. For examples, Shirō Honda, “East Asia’s Middle Class Tunes into Today’s Japan,” *Japan Echo* 21(4) (1994): 75-79; Koichi Iwabuchi, “Use of Japanese Popular Culture: Media,” *Envisage: A Journal Book of Chinese Media Studies*, No.2 (2003): 99-123. In fact it is arguable that the main feature of Japanese ACG and reasons for their popularity nowadays is *mukokuseki*.

14. “Dubbing: The Voices Behind Cartoon Characters,” *Varsity*, November (Hong Kong, 2001): 34-35.

imperialism which implies that an alien culture destroys and replaces local culture.¹⁵ There are also positive impacts of popularization of Japanese *seiyū* on local dubbing profession, such as raising audiences' demand for quality dubbing and interests to pay attention to or even join the dubbing profession.

Moreover, if we take the power of fandom or audience into consideration, we may not be able to arrive at such an easy conclusion that popularization of *seiyū* in Asia is an example of cultural imperialism. Audience or fandom has long been an important topic in studies of popular culture in such disciplines as media studies and cultural studies. As discussed by Baran and Davis, the early studies on media effect, such as the bullet theory, limited effects model and the Frankfurt school, tended to focus on the effect of media on the audiences who were passive receivers and stressed the influence of the media itself as well as those who control the media.¹⁶ Jenson critically points out that early studies on fandom also regarded fans as “a result of celebrity” or “a response to the star system”,

15. Recently, even the *mukokuseki anime* and *manga* were accused to be Japanese cultural imperialism in America due to their overwhelming success. For a discussion in globalization of *anime* and *manga*, see Chen, *Ri-Ben dong men hua di quan qiu hua he mi di wen hua*.

16. Stanley J. Baran, and Dennis K. Davis, *Mass Communication Theory: Foundations, Ferment, and Future*. (Belmont: Thomson/Wadsworth, 2006).

which means that fans remain more or less powerless.¹⁷ Such notions later were challenged by the rise of audiences-focused theories that emphasized that audience is actually active and influential. For example, the Uses and Gratification theory suggests that audiences are active in selecting media channels to satisfy their social and psychological needs. Recent scholars such as Storey, Fiske and Jenkins regard audiences (fans) as active and productive consumers who produce their own meanings from the media. Storey refers to the television viewers as “nomadic audiences” who make free and flexible interpretations out of the media text.¹⁸ Fiske not only suggests that fans actively create their own meanings, they are even “producers” who produce new texts from the original.¹⁹ He finds support in Jenkins, who believes that fans are actually “textual poachers” who participate frequently in production such as fan-fiction and criticisms.²⁰ Regarding the global popularity of Japanese *manga* and *anime*, Chen also highlights the contributions fans make to spread and enrich such cultures through their enthusiastic supports and production.²¹ Reviewing the

17. Joli Jenson, “Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization”, in *The Adoring Audience: Fan culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (London: Routledge, 1992), 9-27.

18. John Storey, *Cultural Consumption and Everyday Life*. (London : Arnold, 1999), 108-123.

19. John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*. (London: Routledge, 1989), 146-151.

20. Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

21. Chen, *Ri-Ben dong men hua di quan qiu hua he mi di wen hua*.

globalization of Japanese *seiyū* culture, fans rather than the production side (the *seiyū* management agencies) indeed play an essential role by being active agents who spread the culture overseas. Through investigating Asian *seiyū* fans activities, we can reassess the consumers' power in facilitating the process of globalization as well as the development of popular culture.

- (2) What impact will Japanese *seiyū* sub-culture have on the national and cultural identities of Asian fans?

The salient success of the TV drama *Oshin* for improving Japanese images in Asia after the WWII has made Japanese government and academic circles aware of the strong social and political influence of Japanese popular culture. Scholars like Honda, believe that Japanese popular culture is a plausible means to help Japan reconstruct a positive image and wipe out the traditional image of being an “oppressive and closed society” in the heart of the young generation in Asia.²² It is because, according to Honda, Japanese popular culture, like *manga*, TV dramas and music can portray the modern and liberal façades of Japanese society, which is clearly different from the traditional pre-war Japan and military war-time Japan. It can also provide

22. Shirō Honda, “East Asia’s Middle Class Tunes in to Today’s Japan,” 78.

common topics for transnational communication among Asian youths, drawing them together in an unprecedented closeness.²³

In the second half of the twentieth century, the “hari” phenomenon (the craze for Japanese culture) prevails in Asian countries, with Taiwan as the most prominent example.²⁴ The *harizhu* (the great supporters of Japanese culture who are usually youths) not only consume Japanese cultural products actively, some also show strong identification with Japan or even yearn to become Japanese.²⁵ Paradoxically, these consumers may embrace Japanese *manga* and *anime* on one hand, while joining the demonstration against Japan’s refusal to apologize for war-time invasion on the other. A recent study by Yoshiko Nakano on Chinese youths’ views towards Japan also displays a similar paradox.²⁶ Nakano invited about a hundred Chinese youths from different regions in Mainland China who all belong to “the first Open-Door Policy Generation.”²⁷ The results of her investigation show

23. Ibid, 76-78.

24. The term “hari” originates from Taiwan’s Minnan dialect. The word “ha” (哈) originally means desire or wish and “ri”(日) refers to Japan. To understand the mentality of “harizu”, see Hari Kyōko, *Zao an! Ri-ben 1* (Good Morning! Japan 1) (Taiwan: Sharp Point Publishing, 1996), *Wo de le hari zheng* (I am infected with the Hari syndrome) (Taiwan: China Times Publishing Co., 1998), *Hari jiuming dan* (Hari Panacea) (Taiwan: China Times Publishing Co., 2000).

25. However, scholars like Iwabuchi have expressed concern that such “hari” phenomenon may lead to the revival of Japan’s post-colonial and imperialistic desires over Asia and in turn “confirm Japan’s superiority to other racially and culturally ‘similar’ Asian nations and justify the Japanese mission to civilize Asia” from Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization*, 49. See also, Iwabuchi, “Use of Japanese Popular Culture”, 114.

26. Yoshiko Nakano, “Japan in the Eyes of the Open-Door Policy Generation.” *Envisage: A Journal Book of Chinese Media Studies*, No.1 (2002): 109-127.

27. It refers to the first generation born after the adoption of the Open-Door Policy

that most young Chinese regard the consumption of Japanese pop culture and national history as two separate entities. Their love of *anime* and *manga* will neither affect their attitude towards Japanese aggression during WWII nor lessen their worries over the revival of Japanese “militarism”. However, they agree that Japanese cultural products are of good quality and Chinese should learn from them to enrich their own cultural products. The Japanese popular culture stirs no confusion in their national and cultural identities. Inspired by Yoshiko Nakano’s study, I will examine the issue of identity to see whether the passion for *seiyū* affects the national and cultural identities of Hong Kong youngsters or reflects the fluid cultural identity of Hong Kong people.

Compared to Chinese in Mainland China, the national and cultural identities Hong Kong people are more ambivalent and complicated. Hong Kong identities, as suggested by Gordon Mathews, sway between being “a part of China”---the Chinese identity and “apart from China” --- the Hong Kong identity.²⁸ Hong Kong identity is better portrayed as “Chineseness ‘plus’”. This “plus” refers to “the exposure of Hong Kong to the world”

(1978) by Mainland China. Children in this generation start to expose to Japanese cultural products, with Japanese *anime* and *manga* becoming an indispensable part of their lives.

28. Gordon Mathews, “*Heunggongyahn: On the Past, Present, and Future of Hong Kong Identity.*” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 29 (3) (1997): 3-13.

and the “affluence of Hong Kong”, which are the two characteristics that make them distinct from their Chinese counterparts in mainland China materialistically and ideologically.²⁹ The “plus” in Hong Kong culture identity also indicates a strong relation to the global market. As suggested by Tang, Hong Kong has shown a glorious record in the global trade and financial activities, standing out as an active participant in the economic globalization process.³⁰ The shortened distance and the connectedness brought by globalization make such “external links and reliance on global economy” play a more important role in maintaining the status as well as the affluence of Hong Kong when facing keener competition from global competitors.³¹ Moreover, the exposure of Hong Kong to the rest of the world is clearly facilitated by the increasingly sophisticated communication and mass media networks established under the globalization process. According to Mathews, globalization that heightens the flow of different cultures or cultural products, also gives rise to the “cultural supermarket.” It means that cultures from different corners of the world are displayed for

29. Gordon Mathews, “Cultural Identity and Consumption in Post-Colonial Hong Kong”, in *Consuming Hong Kong*, eds. Gordon Mathews and Lui Tai-lok (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2001), 287-317.

30. James T. H. Tang. “Hong Kong in Transition: Globalization versus Nationality”, in *The Challenge of Hong Kong's Reintegration with China*, ed. Ming K. Chan (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1997): 177-194.

31. *Ibid*, 193.

the consumers to choose freely. Hong Kong people are one of the most committed consumers in such a supermarket. They not only choose what goods to buy, they may even choose the identity to belong to.³² Mathews, on the other hand, believes that the handover of Hong Kong sovereignty back to China in 1997 led to a new national identity, challenging such market or globally shaped identity.³³ The large scale longitudinal research, “Hong Kong Transition Project”, shows that the identity of Hong Kong people has not changed much over the last decade, but the handover does to a certain extent affect Hong Kong cultural identity.³⁴ The resuming of power by the Chinese government seems to be accompanied by a resurgence of nationalism and a stronger sense of Chinese identity. However, Hong Kong people also display more nuanced attitude such as, “we should love China in a Hong Kong way”, that is different from the absolute unconditional loyalty to the nation that traditional nationalism asks for.³⁵ Such “conditional belongingness” shows that the market-shaped spirits of Hong Kong cultural identity still remain. With such ambivalent identity

32. Gordon Mathews, “Names and Identities in the Hong Kong Cultural Supermarket” *Dialectical Anthropology*, 21(3/4) (1996): 399-419.

33. Gordon Mathews, “*Heunggongyahn*: On the Past, Present, and Future of Hong Kong Identity.” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 29 (3) (1997): 3-13.

34. Hong Kong Transition Project (2005). “Hong Kong Constitutional Reform: What do the People Want?”, <http://www.hkbu.edu.hk/~hktp>.

35. Ren wo men ji xu xiang kang fang shi ai guo (Let’s Love our Country in a Hong Kong Way), *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, Oct. 30 2002.

that is subject to cultures available in the cultural supermarket, Hong Kong youths seem to be more susceptible to foreign culture, yet bounded by weaker nationalism.

However, my study actually echoes with Nakano's study. Although the results of my survey show a preference of the Hong Kong audiences towards Japanese dubbing, interviews show that preference seems to remain on the consumption level. If it is about the national history and glory, most the informants tend to go back to Chinese identity. Not much direct impacts on national and cultural identity are shown from informants' responses.

Instead, the popularization of Japanese *seiyū* provides a good illustration of the new meaning of culture in the globalization era, since the formation and spread of web communities dedicated to Japanese *seiyū* and dubbing has accentuated the rise of flexible identities which are acquired from the cultural supermarket or formulated through participating in the "imagined community" based on interest in particular profession.

(3) Is *seiyū* a unique Japanese culture?

Although Japanese popular culture has been well-received all over the

world, some Japanese critics point out that Japan's cultural power is incommensurate with its economic power.³⁶ It seems that Japan possesses the "propensity to 'borrow' foreign thing" and the capability of "merging them with native or other elements so that they become something new and often quite distinct from the original."³⁷

However, as suggested by the Waseda professor Koichi Iwabuchi, such appropriating and indigenizing process is actually a kind of "strategic hybridism", using hybridism as a strategy to consolidate Japan's national and cultural identities.³⁸ Some scholars see the capacity of assimilation as a distinct feature of Japan's nationality (*kokutai*). For example, Kang uses this argument to suggest Japan's cultural superiority over the West.³⁹ Japanese cultural products are said to be largely products of cultural hybridization. Then I would like to ask: "Does Japan have any unique culture of its own?" I am not an advocate of the so-called *Nihonjinron*.⁴⁰

36. For more discussions, see Masao Miyoshi, *Off Center: Power and Culture Relations Between Japan and the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991) and Koichi Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 2-3.

37. Tim Craig, "Introduction," in *Japan Pop! : Inside the World of Japanese Popular Culture*, ed. Timothy Craig (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2000), 8.

38. Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization*, 53.

39. Kang Shun-jung, *Orientalizumu no kanata he* (Towards Orientalism) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1996). However, Kawamura Minato argues that the keen indigenization practice in fact exposes the impoverishment of Japanese culture and most people mix Japan's military and economic superiority up with the cultural and racial ones, from "Taishū orientarizumu to Ajia ninshiki (Public Orientalism and Asia Understanding)," in ed. Shinō Ōe *Kindai Nihon to shokuminchi* (Contemporary Japan and Colonies), Vol. 7 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1993), 107-36.

40. This idea emphasizes the uniqueness and excellence of Japanese culture and

To discuss whether *seiyū* is a unique Japanese culture does not mean to prove that Japanese culture is superior nor does it mean that other nations do not have similar counterparts. As a matter of fact, almost every nation in the world has voice-dubbing. Moreover, it is only the Japanese *seiyū* that can gain such great popularity in and outside Japan. The development of the *seiyū* profession or *seiyū* culture is seldom influenced by and at the same time differs greatly from their foreign counterparts. In my opinion, *seiyū* is a cultural activity or phenomenon that is not imported but develops from within the country. *Seiyū* turned voice-dubbing from a “job” into a “cultural product”. *Seiyū* as a unique culture implies that in the era of globalization where different cultures mix and merge, a unique culture can thrive and stand strong. Although the world now may have become a “global village” due to the “time-space compression” of globalization, cultural homogenization is not necessarily the destined result and we can actually enjoy more choices and there is a possibility of uniqueness in hybridity.

suggests that non-Japanese cannot fully understand and appreciate Japan. See Kosaku Yoshino, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan: A Sociological Enquiry* (London: Routledge, 1992).

C. Theories and Methodologies

Globalization is a “phenomenon which clearly requires what is conventionally called interdisciplinary treatment,” and therefore Japanese popular culture can be academically examined from different disciplinary perspectives.⁴¹ This study utilizes a multi-disciplinary approach and theories from anthropology, sociology, media studies, history and cultural studies.

As scholarly writings on Japanese *seiyū* or Hong Kong voice artists are rare and almost non-existent in English, this study is based primarily on Japanese sources, such as newspapers, magazines, websites and forums. Related literature on Japanese ACG and popular culture are used as background information. For discussions on local voice artists, information is gathered from articles in newspaper, magazines, the internet as well as interviews with local voice artists.

Ethnographic methods were used to make up for the inadequacy of primary and secondary sources. A large-scale questionnaire about the popularity and influence of *seiyū* was distributed online to grasp a macro view across gender and different age groups. The questionnaire was

41. Roland Robertson, “Mapping the Global Condition: Globalization as the Central Concept,” in *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*, ed. Mike Featherstone (London: Sage, 1990), 15-30.

conducted on-line from June to September 2006. 200 questionnaires were collected from the Hong Kong general public (100 males and 100 females). Questions covered from the importance of Japanese and local dubbing and comparison of the performance of *seiyū* and local voice artists (see appendix I for the sample questionnaire).

In-depth interviews, which lasted for at least one hour in casual atmosphere, were conducted with 40 *seiyū* fans (with 12 from mainland China), 4 local voice artists, 1 dubbing director and 2 people who have dubbing experiences in Japan. *Seiyū* fans aged from 15-27, were introduced by friends or recruited from online web communities, *Lianshengpi* and *Voicewolf*, that are dedicated to *seiyū* and local voice artists. Questions for *seiyū* fans covered issues including their opinions towards the dubbing industry in Japan and Hong Kong and their consumption patterns of *seiyū* products (see appendix II for sample interview questions). Questions for local voice artists, dubbing director and people who had dubbing experiences covered their working experiences and their opinions towards the dubbing profession in Japan and Hong Kong (see appendix III for sample interview questions).

I also adopted the method of participant observation by joining two

web communities, *Lianshengpi* (Addiction to Voices) and *Shengse Langji* (VoiceWolf) since October 2005 and July 2006 respectively.⁴² These two are Chinese-language web communities with participants coming from different regions such as China, Hong Kong and some are overseas Chinese. They are chosen for their popularity among Chinese *seiyū* fans as well as participants' activeness in exchanging resources and opinions. Information on fans' opinions and activities, such as exchanging resources, releasing fans' production and posting criticism, were observed directly.

D. Structure of the Thesis

Apart from the introduction and concluding analysis, the main body of this thesis consists of three parts.

Part 1 provides background information and a historical overview of the development of *seiyū* in Japan. Chapter 1 defines *seiyū* and introduces the general conditions of *seiyū*, such as the nature of the work, operation of the industry and professional training. Chapter 2 presents the history of *seiyū*, from its humble beginning in 1940s to present *seiyū* booms in Japan. This part enhances the understanding of *seiyū* from historical and

42. *Liangshengpi*: <http://moriandmiki.huming.com/bbs/Index.asp>
Shengse Langji: <http://shine.228.xuelon.cn/index.php>

commercial perspectives, serving as a backdrop for more in-depth investigation of the culture in the forth-coming chapters.

Part 2 investigates the formation of a *seiyū* culture and its social and cultural impact in and beyond Japan. Chapter 3 deals with the reasons why *seiyū* has gained great popularity and respect in Japan, whereas chapter 4 discusses the impact of *seiyū* on Japanese and Hong Kong culture and society. This part aims at illustrating why and how *seiyū* has recently risen as an important and influential cultural phenomenon.

Part 3 examines the global popularization of Japanese *seiyū* in the Asian context, using Hong Kong as a case study. It highlights the comparison of Japanese *seiyū* in terms of reception and operation of the profession with Hong Kong voice artists. Chapter 5 discusses how Japanese *seiyū* and local voice artists gain their popularity. Chapter 6 compares the structure of the dubbing profession as well as the role of dubbing in Hong Kong and Japan. Through the comparison, I will investigate the reasons that lead to the great discrepancy in popularity and status of Japanese *seiyū* and Hong Kong voice artists.

In the concluding analysis, I attempt to answer the three questions raised earlier: “Is *seiyū* a unique Japanese culture?”; “Is the popularization of

seiyū in Asia an example of cultural imperialism?"; "Will Japanese *seiyū* sub-culture have an impact on the national and cultural identities of Asian fans?", as well as suggest some remaining issues for future studies.

It is hoped that this small research can serve as a guide for both the academic circles and general public into this once homely and negligible yet important and interesting profession. Instead of being a resistant sub-culture that shows discontentment against local dubbing or the insignificance of dubbing, *seiyū* culture is in fact inspiring and illustrative to the flow of global culture in this new globalization era.

Part I:

The Making of a *Seiyū* Culture in Japan

Chapter 1: What Is Seiyū?

1.1 Definition of Seiyū

Nihon no anime zenshi (The Complete History of Japanese Animation) defines *seiyū* as “artists who play the character’s voice in *anime* and dub the foreign movies and dramas.”¹ The definition offered by the one of the most authoritative dictionaries, *Daijisen* (The Great Spring of Words), sees *seiyū* as “actors or actresses who use only their voice to act in the radio dramas and dub the foreign movies and dramas and so on.”² It does give a quick and direct idea to the general readers about the group of people I intend to investigate. However, it does not present the whole picture of what *seiyū* actually are, since the above-mentioned definitions only capture one of the many facets of the *seiyū* profession.³ It also represents a common misconception that *seiyū* are only those who cast the voices in

1. Yamaguchi Yasuo, ed., *Nihon no anime zenshi: sekai o seishita Nihon anime no kiseki* (The Complete History of Japanese Animation: The Miracle of Japanese Animation that Conquer the World) (Tokyo: Ten Books, 2004), 169.

2. Henshū Shōgakkān Daijisen Henshūbu, *Daijisen* (The Great Spring of Words) (Tokyo: Shōgakkān, 1995).

Dictionaries tend to define *seiyū* according to their nature of work, but the evolution of definitions given in the dictionaries can also give basic ideas of how *seiyū*’s work is getting more and more diversified. Examples are the two entries offered by *Kōjien*, “radio-specified actors or actresses” (1955) and “actors or actresses who use only their voice to act without showing up; actors or actresses for radio dramas, dubbing in TV and so on” (1969) and the entry “actors or actresses who act in radio drama, do the dubbing for animation and foreign films and so on” in Tadao Umesao, ed., *Nihongo daijiten* (The Great Japanese Dictionary) (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1992).

3. According to Nakagawa’s small guide book to the *seiyū* career, *Seiyū ni naru ni wa* (To Become a Voice Artist), the jobs of *seiyū* can be divided into six categories, namely, radio drama, foreign movie and drama, animation, narration, CM and CD drama. Others will be character voices in electronic games, singing, performing in plays and musicals.

anime or dub in foreign movies, failing to recognize the wide varieties of work that they may engage in. Morikawa and Tsujitani provide a more precise definition of *seiyū* as “people who based on their own creativity, use their voices (sometimes include singing) to perform arts through various media.”⁴

Seiyū, as a profession, can be traced back to the 1920s, although the term itself was not established until the 1970s.⁵ In older days, people in this profession were generally called *ateshi* アテ師, *atereko haiyū* アテレコ俳優 or *fukikae tarento* 吹き替えタレント.⁶ Some of them would identify themselves as *haiyū* 俳優 (actors or actresses in Japanese) and even feel uncomfortable with the name *seiyū*.⁷ Nowadays, *seiyū* has become a title given out of respect and recognition, making it a profession that is parallel to *haiyū*. Outside Japan, people in the dubbing profession are referred as “voice artists” or sometimes “dubbers”. In this research, I reserve *seiyū* for Japanese voice artists only, and for its Hong Kong or Asian

4. Tomoyoshi Morikawa and Kōji Tsujitani, “Seiyū no tanjō to sono hatten (The Origin and Development of Voice Acting in Japan),” *Media shi kenkyū* (Media History), 13 (2002):55.

5. Some said that the term *seiyū* was coined by an entertainment news reporter named Tokuburō Tobayashi in the 1940s, while some believed it was coined by a producer of NHK Entertainment Division named Tatsuo Ōoka. However, it was used as an abbreviation when referring to the actors or actresses performed in the radio drama, rather than an established term for a particular profession.

6. All three terms mean “people who do the dubbing”.

7. One famous example is Chikao Ōtsuka, who expressed that “I am a actor and it is through my voice I act, so it is not nice to call me another name as “*seiyū*,”” in *Animage special roman album 26: Ganba no bouken* (Animage Special Romantic Album 26: The Adventure of Ganba)(Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten, 1979).

counterparts, I will use voice artists instead.⁸ Then you may ask why I bother to keep the term “*seiyū*” instead of rendering it into English for convenience sake? It is because naming is influenced by different perceptions of or attitudes towards the same thing. The original Japanese term *seiyū* (in Japanese Chinese characters, 声優), it can be interpreted as a shortened form of *koe no haiyū* 声の俳優, the artists who act with their voices. On the other hand, you can also interpret it as artists who achieve great mastery of expression through voices as the word *yū* 優 connotes “excellence and refinement” as well. It is not only to act but to act with skills and hearts. The character refers not only to the ability to act but to act with skill and heart. It is also this quality that helps *seiyū* to gain recognition from both their supporters and the public.

“Dubber” is a self-explanatory term that describes the nature of the profession but does not indicate its artistic aspects. A better English translation will be “voice artist”, since it captures both the artistic and professional sense of this profession better than “dubber”. However, I will use the original term *seiyū* in this research to distinguish between dubbing profession in Japan and other Asian nations.

8. The fans or supporters of *seiyū* and local voice artists also make such distinctions and tend not to call the local voice artists “*seiyū*”.

1.2 Scope of Works

It can be quite astonishing to list all possible jobs *seiyū* may take up, as it is a common misconception that *seiyū* only dub the characters' voices in animation. The diversification of jobs is a salient feature of Japanese *seiyū* and the jobs can be broadly divided into the following six categories: dubbing, radio and CD dramas, singing, radio personality, narration and CMs, and promotional functions.⁹

Firstly, dubbing for *anime*, foreign movies and TV dramas, as well as electronic games remains the fundamental work for *seiyū*. For animation and dubbed foreign works, their job is to say the lines and dialogues matching the mouth movements of the characters as shown in the pictures. However, there are also cases that the pictures are not yet available at the time of recording and *seiyū* have to read out the dialogues according to the white lines shown on screen to catch the right timing. Recordings are usually done in groups for more natural interaction between *seiyū*. Separate recordings may also be held when there are clashes of schedules.

9. Guidebooks on *seiyū*, such as Nakagawa's *Seiyū ni naru ni wa* (To Become a Voice Artist) (Tokyo: Perikansha, 1997), Naritai!! *Seiyū* (Want to Become!!! Voice Artist) edited by Dai-X SHUPPAN and *Mezase! Seiyū Artist* (Aiming at! Voice Artist) edited by SHUFU-TO-SEIKATSUSHA, emphasize the diversification of *seiyū*'s work, but they do not include promotional *seiyū* event as part of the job. However, this kind of events has played such an important part in recent popularization of *seiyū* that it is worth being included in my discussion.

Such recordings are common for dubbing electronics games, as few interactions between characters are required and voices of different characters are recorded in separate sound files.

Seiyū also perform live dubbing in puppet shows or *kigurumi* shows where people dress up as animals or *anime* characters such as *Pikachu*, *Doraemon* and *Keroro*. While someone controls the movement of the puppet and the animal or *anime* characters act or dance on stage, *seiyū* read the lines and dialogues backstage. For *kigurumi* shows involving *anime* characters, *seiyū* who have been cast in the *anime* will be invited to take up the same role in the shows.

Secondly, radio dramas were once the major entertainment from the 1930s to the 1950s. Popularity of famous radio dramas, such as, *Kimi no Na wa* (What's Your Name?) (1952) is comparable to the hit TV dramas today. The scripts of the dramas may either be specifically written or adapted from literature, *anime* and *manga*. Before the emergence of CD, radio dramas were recorded in cassette tapes for sale, yet in a limited amount. Thanks to the technological development, CDs soon replaced cassette tapes as the medium of recorded radio dramas in the 1980s. However, CD dramas nowadays are usually adapted works directly from *anime* or *manga*

that are not particularly made for broadcasting on radio. Since there are no pictures to help convey the stories, great demands are placed on the acting skills of *seiyū*. These dramas are believed to be a real stage for *seiyū*, where *seiyū*'s genuine potentials and techniques can be fully shown.

Thirdly, although quite a number of *seiyū* are contracted singers who have released records, most *seiyū* are not professional singers and may not have received specific training in singing. Nevertheless, *seiyū* who act in *anime* and games often release CDs of songs sung in the names of the characters they play. It is more demanding for the character songs than original songs since *seiyū* have to sing in the characters' voices that may be quite different from their own voices. A female *seiyū* may have to sing in a boys' voice if she is cast as a male character. For example, Ogata Megumi has released single CD for Kurama (one of the heroes) of *Yu Yu Hakusho* (1992). It is a unique practice of Japanese dubbing profession that *seiyū* sing for the two-dimensional characters. *Seiyū* have become the representative of the animated characters as they help shape the image of the characters. It is also common for *seiyū* to form a unit or group to release CDs and hold concerts. Examples of *seiyū* group are "Aice⁵" formed by Yui Horie, Masumi Asano, Akemi Kanda, Madoka Kimura and Chiaki

Takahashi and “2 Hearts” formed by Fumihiko Tachiki and Toshiyuki Morikawa.

Fourthly, not a few popular *seiyū* are invited to host radio programs about particular *anime* or games, some may even have their own radio programs. Naozumi Takahashi’s *Trouble Maker* and Yui Horie’s *Tenshi no Tamago* are such examples. Such programs serve as a valuable channel for *seiyū* fans to know more about the private dimension of their favourite *seiyū*. The programs may include trivial talk with other guests (who are usually *seiyū* as well), promotions of their own records or recent works and so on. Due to the prevalence of internet, web radio programs have increased. Internet radio stations such as, JAM STATION and Onsen, provide online broadcast of radio programs hosted by *seiyū*. Sometimes, online radio programs hosted by *seiyū* are employed as a promotional strategy for animated works. One example is the *Miyano • Yusa no Koutetsu Sangokushi ~ Radio Den ~*, a radio program hosted by Mamoru Miyano and Kōji Yusa for promoting the animated series *Koutetsu Sangokushi* (Records of the Metallic Three Kingdoms) that is scheduled for release in spring 2007.

Fifthly, narration for TV and radio programs, promotional and educational videos, TV and radio commercials is another major work of

seiyū. Unlike *anime* and games in which even fresh *seiyū* can get a role, this category is usually reserved for veteran *seiyū*. This is because narration demands good control of rhythm and intonation rather than exaggerated expression of emotion. For informational and educational TV and radio programs, lively narration is essential to enhance audiences' interests. Great techniques are also needed to leave good impressions for achieving promotional effect of the commercials.

Lastly, promotional functions take various forms, such as autography sessions or meeting-the-fans events, press conferences, interviews and stage performances. In these events, fans can have direct contact with their favourite *seiyū*, wiping out the image that “*seiyū* is a backstage job”. Because of the greater media exposure, more emphases have been put on the appearance of *seiyū*. Sometimes, *seiyū* may even dress up as the anime or game characters they cast to attend the events.

Seiyū may also participate in plays and musicals as some come from theatrical troupes. Others may be invited to be hosts of TV programs or announcers for sports events. Their voices can also be heard in the announcements broadcast on public transportation, at train stations, in department stores as well as amusement parks. One interesting example is

the *Yurikamome* train line in Toyko. Since March 2006, 16 famous *seiyū*, such as, Kenichi Suzuki, Toshiyuki Morikawa and Masumi Asano, have been employed to perform the broadcasts on train as well as the instructional announcements in train stations, ranging from the instruction of the ticket vending machines to advice in toilets.

In brief, using their voices as a profession, *seiyū* specialize in voice acting, as required in various dubbing occasions and radio or CD dramas. Due to the rising popularity of *seiyū*, accelerated by the trend of idolization, *seiyū*'s mastery of voices extends to other fields such as singing and hosting radio programs. Such diversity of work further boosts the media exposure of *seiyū*. The increasing exposure not only enhances understanding towards this profession, but also indicates the penetration of *seiyū* into everyday lives, accentuating the social and cultural significance of the profession.

1.3 Training Institutions and Agencies

Specific training institutions and management agencies for professional *seiyū* are two distinct institutional features of the *seiyū* profession in Japan. Voice actors and actresses in other Asian countries are

often contracted employees of the broadcasting companies like that in Hong Kong or members of the theatrical troupes affiliated with the broadcasting units like the case of South Korea, and there are hardly any specific training institutions established for this particular profession in Asia outside Japan.

a) Training of *Seiyū*

In Japan, there are now over a hundred of specific institutions providing professional *seiyū* training. Major institutions include *seiyū* training centers run by management agencies or theatrical troupes and specialized schools for animation and multimedia.¹⁰ Every year, there are more than two thousands new bloods trying to enter this profession, leading to keen competition among *seiyū*.

Seiyū training centers are often founded by management agencies. Famous examples are Japan Narration Training Centre (Nichinare) under ARTSVISION and Aoni Juku under Aoni Production. Some *seiyū* may come from training centers run by theatrical troupes, but the primary aim of these centers is to cultivate actors or actresses for stage performances rather than *seiyū* for voice acting. Specialized schools in animation and

10. Some universities and colleges, such as Nihon University and Toho Gakuen College of Drama and Music, offer courses for relating to narration and acting, but most graduates take up technical or managerial positions instead of becoming artists or *seiyū*.

multimedia have also established specific divisions that offer training courses for potential *seiyū*. For example, Yoyogi Animation Institute (YAG) has set up a “*Seiyū* Talent” division to provide comprehensive *seiyū* training.

The training offered by these institutes usually lasts for two to three years. Curriculum is designed with the principle that voice acting can only be achieved on top of mastery of general acting skills. Therefore, in addition to training on voice projection, intonation and narration, students will receive acting lessons and fitness training. Dancing lessons are offered to cultivate students’ artistic senses and control of pace and rhythm. To meet the new trend of idolization, singing lessons and lessons on grooming and imaging may also be included. Students can also take initiative to join open auditions to gain practical experience outside the classroom. These institutes often invite experienced *seiyū* or artists to be instructors, hoping that they can share with students useful techniques as well as valuable experiences. Some veteran *seiyū* even set up their own training schools, such as, the Katsuda *Seiyū* School by Hisashi Katsuda and the B-Box Actors School by Kazuhiko Inoue.

There are also cases in which the cast for dubbing is recruited through open auditions in which amateurs can also participate. Potential

seiyū may be spotted in such kind of auditions. It is also believed that besides formal training, self-learning by *seiyū* themselves in everyday life through reading, listening to music and observing others is also important for enhancing sensibility that will help *seiyū* to grasp and accurately express the emotion of the characters they play.¹¹

b) Management of *Seiyū*

After completing the formal training, most *seiyū* will take the audition offered by various management agencies. Famous examples are 81 Production, ARTSVISION and Aoni Production. As for the training schools affiliated with an agency, the agency will organize auditions to choose quality graduates to become contracted *seiyū*. Those who fail the audition may try other auditions until they are accepted into a particular agency. Entering a management agency is essential for starting a professional career, as it is difficult to get a job without going through an agency.¹²

Agencies serve as the bridge between the individual *seiyū* and the

11. SHUFU-TO-SEIKATSUSHA, ed, *Mezase! Seiyū Artist* (Aiming at! Voice Artist) (Tokyo: SHUFU-TO-SEIKATSUSHA, 2004), 18-25

12. Tada Makoto, *Kore ga anime bijinesu* (This is Animation Business) (Tokyo: Kōsaidō Shuppan, 2002), 219-221.

production companies. In the agencies, *seiyū* will be allocated to a particular manager who takes care of several *seiyū* at the same time. Whenever there are new jobs, the production side will recruit through the agencies. The managers will then recommend suitable *seiyū* to take part in the audition offered for that particular work. *Seiyū* have to compete with rivals from other agencies (or sometime from the same agency) to get the job. This way of work allocation applies to both junior and veteran *seiyū*, it is not unusual that a veteran compete with a junior for a specific cast. The decision of which *seiyū* is more suitable for the job are made by representatives of the production team, usually including the chief director, the sound director and the author of the work. Demo tapes or voice samples may sometimes be sent to the production team if a live audition is not held. Besides allocating jobs, the managers also need to arrange schedules and care for the images of the *seiyū* under them. Some veteran *seiyū* may set up their own agencies, such as Kenyū Horiuchi's Kenyū Office and Akira Kamiya's Seeba Shoji.¹³

Different management agencies tend to have strengths in different fields. For instance, ARTSVSION is well-known for *anime* dubbing, 81

13. Seeba Shoji's business covers not only *seiyū* management, but also the production of CD dramas, radio programs and CMs.

Production are good at NHK TV programs, and Aoni Production is known for narration. *Seiyū* in different agencies may have a better opportunity to get the job associated to particular agency, nevertheless, *seiyū* have to depend on their own skills and talents to win the competitions and become professional.

Being a *seiyū* in Japan is not as easy as one might expect. Although the demanding training and competitions may scare away newcomers from entering this profession, they actually elevate *seiyū* from a trifling job to a profession that require talent and efforts, a profession that deserves respect and recognition. Voice artists in other Asian regions may begin to gain attention from the general public, although, they still cannot be lifted up to the status that their Japanese counterparts enjoy.

Chapter 2: The Historical Development of the Seiyū

Profession in Japan

Writings on *seiyū* tend to trace the history of *seiyū* in respect to the three “*seiyū* booms” in which the profession enjoyed heightened popularity and rapid expansion.¹ Different publications may use different timing and durations for each boom, but it is generally believed that the first *seiyū* boom in Japan took place around the early 1960s, the second from the late 1970s to mid- 1980s, and the third started around the mid-1990s.

Instead of using the traditional classification with the three *seiyū* booms, I will divide the development of *seiyū* since the 1920s into the following five periods according to the most salient features in each period: the “age of radio Dramas”, “the age of dubbing”, “the age of *anime*”, “the age of idol *seiyū*” and “the age of globalization of *seiyū*”.

a) The Age of Radio Dramas (Mid-1920s ~ 1950s)

When talking about using voices to act, one will not forget the film narrator, *katsudō benshi* 活動弁士 (*katsuben* 活弁 or *benshi* 弁士 in short), in the silent films that were popular in the late nineteenth century. Their

1. Examples are Matsuda Sakimi, *Seiyū hakusho* (A White Paper of Seiyū) (Japan: Ōkura Shuppansha, 2000) and Tane Kiyoshi, “History of Voice”, *Animedia*, Vol. 4 (2005), 75 and Vol. 5(2005): 80.

narrative skills and performances were as crucial as the casts and storylines of the films. Joseph Andersons and Donald Richie remark in their authoritative work *The Japanese Film: Art and Industry*, that “the *benshi* rather than the film became the box-office attraction”.² Richie emphasizes that *benshi* not only explained the film, they actually constituted part of the films. There were even “*benshi* contests” and recordings in which *benshi* became the focus of attention, “without the accompaniment of films”.³ One may not agree that they were the primal forerunners of *seiyū*, however, it is undeniable that they paved the road to the rise of the art and profession in which “voices” play a main role. Morikawa and Tsujitani also noted that the beginning of *seiyū* can be traced back to the popularity of *katsuben* and the famous *katsuben* Kumaoka Tendō can be regarded as “the first *seiyū*.”⁴

The *seiyū* profession was believed to be born with the Tokyo Hōsō Kyoku (Radio Tokyo), the predecessor of the Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai (NHK) in 1925. In the same year, the Radio Tokyo recruited twelve radio drama trainees out of around a hundred applicants through open auditions and

2. Joseph Anderson and Donald Richie, *The Japanese Film: Art and History*, (New York: Grove Press, 1960), 25.

3. Donald Richie, *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film: A Concise History, with A Selective Guide to Videos and DVDs* (New York : Kodansha International, 2001).

4. Tomoyoshi Morikawa and Kōji Tsujitani, “Seiyū no tanjō to sono hatten (The Origin and Development of Voice Acting in Japan),” *Media shi kenkyū* (Media History), 13 (2002):56-57.

assigned them to cast in radio drama after they complete the professional training. These twelve “radio actors or actresses” are regarded as the predecessors of *seiyū*. It also marked the birth of professional *seiyū* training.

Since radio was one of the most popular forms of entertainment for the general public in the pre-war period, there was a rising demand for radio dramas as well as the voice artists. Although there were successful radio actors like Akira Nagoya, few actors or actresses took this as regular profession and most did it on a part-time basis. Since then, “being the character’s voice” remained the most fundamental part of *seiyū*’s work although their work became more and more diversified along the course of its development.

b) The Age of Dubbing (1950s ~ Mid-1970s)

In the mid-1950s, television took over radio as the chief form of entertainment in Japan. Soon after the beginning of TV broadcasting in 1953, radio broadcast declined and was further struck by the booming of the movie industry as audiences tended to opt for visual rather than audio entertainment. The images of radio actors and actresses as “a job in the

dark” or “a backstage job” were reinforced.⁵

Although the rise of the visual entertainment seemed to undermine the profession at the beginning, it actually opened up new job opportunities for voice acting. In this initial stage of the commercial TV broadcast, the dubbing for dramas and films on the TV or the foreign movies in cinema, relied heavily on the radio actors and actresses from the theatrical troupes of various broadcasting companies.⁶ Before the local TV and movie production matured, the imported dramas and films dominated the market, especially when the “Big Five” film producers (Shochiku, Toho, Daiei, Shintoho and Tōei) cut their supply of local films to the TV broadcasting companies in 1961. Dubbing for foreign imports became one great arena for the radio actors and actresses to revive their career as *ateshi* アテ師, *atereko haiyū* アテレコ俳優 or *fukikae talent* 吹き替えタレント. Along with the stories and characters of the movies, the voices behind were also able to grasp the audiences’ heart with their impressive skills. One great figure was Nachi Nozawa, whose performance in the TV Drama “0011 Napoleon Solo (The Man from U.N.C.L.E)” (1964) as the supporting character overrode the protagonist and earned him fame and fortune. The

5. Kaichou (Miyukichi Station) History of Voice Actor and Actress. *Journal of Animation University of Tokyo*, Vol 1 (2001): 3

6. The dubbing was sometimes done by comedians and *rakogoka* (comic storytellers).

exceptional popularity that an *ateshi* could gain help put the profession under spotlight and more people treated it as a regular profession rather than worked as freelancers, contributing to what was commonly known as “the first *seiyū* boom”.

Although dramas or movies were the major genre of the imported and locally produced TV programs, the influence of imported American animated series like “Superman” (1955) and “Popeye” (1959) was not negligible. They not only inspired production of local *anime*, with Osamu Tezuka’s *Astroboy* (1963) as the most prominent example, but also attracted public attention to such new form of arts. The first dubbed work on TV was actually an animation called “*Terebi bouya no bouken* (The Adventure of the Television Boy)” broadcast on 5 April 1956. All presaged the thriving growth of animation in the next decades and the rise of professional *seiyū* who gained popularity with the help of various wondrous *anime* characters.

c) The Age of *Anime* (Mid-1970s ~ 1980s)

Nowadays, most people associate *seiyū* more with “actors or actresses who perform as characters in *anime*” than artists who act in radio dramas or

dub foreign movies, which were in fact where the profession originated from. Such associations may seem to overlook the great variety of *seiyū*'s work, however, it does punctuate the affinity between *seiyū* and *anime* which rooted from the 1970s. Although the voice artists might still be called *atereko haiyū* アテレコ俳優 and *fukikae talent* 吹き替えタレント, it was since the 1970s that the term *seiyū* was established for the profession.

The skills and experiences accumulated since the first introduction of foreign animation in the 1950s eventually led to the maturity of the local *anime* production. Prominent works, to name a few, *Space Battleship Yamato* (1974), *Galaxy Express 999* (1978), *Mobile Suit Gundam* (1979), *Macross* (1982) and Hayao Miyazaki's works, triggered the "*anime boom*", in which local *anime* enjoyed unprecedented popularity. The works were so well-loved that not only the images of the characters became imprinted in *anime* lovers' hearts, but also their voices.

Individual *seiyū*, such as, Kei Tomiyama and Yōko Asagami who acted in above-mentioned works won great adoration from the fans. In 1979, Kei Tomiyama released *Kei Tomiyama Roman* (The Romance of Kei Tomiyama), the first *seiyū* album in the *seiyū* profession, while Yōko Asagami was appointed with Rihoko Yoshida as the first generation of the

“personalities” for the radio program *Animetopia*.⁷ Besides, bands and units formed by popular *seiyū* also emerged. Apart from dubbing, they would hold concerts and live performances. One famous example was “Slapstick” (1977-1986) which featured five famous male *seiyū*. Among them, Akira Kamiya, Tōru Furuya and Toshio Furukawa were well-known for casting handsome *anime* characters and in turn became tremendously popular among young females. Another *seiyū* unit “NG5”, formed by the five *seiyū* of the main characters in *Yoroiden Samurai Troopers* (1988) gained great attention in the late 1980s. With the great success of series featuring young warriors such as *Saint Seiya* (1986), up went the popularity of male *seiyū*. Writers such as Tane sometimes refer the late 1980s as a time of a “male *seiyū* boom”.⁸

This period was generally regarded as the “second *seiyū* boom”. *Seiyū* were no longer backstage heroes. Instead they started to become more expose to the spotlight and appeared more in public events like autography sessions and promotional events. For the *anime* lovers and *seiyū* fans, *seiyū* became a profession to be dreamt of, just like they dreamt

7. “Personality” is the title given to the hosts or hostesses of radio programs in Japan. *Animetopia* started broadcasting in 1980. It was dedicated to *anime* and different *seiyū* were invited as guests of the programme.

8. Kiyoshi Tane, “History of Voice”, *Animedia*, Vol. 5(2005), 80.

to be a singer or film star. In response to the soaring popularity of *seiyū*, special columns for *seiyū* were set up in *anime* magazines which were striving in their incipient development.

Seiyū-specific production (agencies) and training institutions were therefore established for those youths who held great aspirations, aiming at training quality *seiyū* for the expanding and more demanding market. For instances, ARTSVISION, one of today's most representative *seiyū* agencies was founded by Sakimi Matsuda in 1984.⁹ The idolization reached the peak in the 1990s and 2000s. "Treating *seiyū* as idols" was not merely a commercial principle suggested by Hideo Ogata, the founding editor of the magazine, *Animage*, but also a management concept adapted from the formula for producing stars in the Japanese entertainment business. Such concept underlay the establishment of *seiyū* agencies and training institutions.

d) The Age of Idol *Seiyū* (the 1990s)

To say that the 1990s was an age of "Idol *Seiyū*" does not mean that

9. Sakimi Matsuda was the manager of the Tokyo Actors and Consumers Cooperation Society (HAIKO), which was an entertainment agency founded in May 1960. Witnessing the *seiyū* boom, he decided to set up an independent agency that was specialized for *seiyū* management. Specialized training for *seiyū* was provided through the Japan Narration Training Centre (Nichinare) that was affiliated with ARTSVISION.

idol *seiyū* began to emerge in this period, but indicates that the idolization of *seiyū* became the prominent phenomenon that characterized the profession in this period. Idol *seiyū* here refer to *seiyū* who enjoy fame and public recognitions, very much like idol singers and movie stars, and who actively participate in other entertainment business such as singing and acting. The beginning of such trends can be dated back to the early 1980s. For example, Takako Ōta who was cast as the heroine in *Magical Angel Creamy Mami* (1983) is regarded as the originator of idol *seiyū*.¹⁰ Mari Ijima's song "Do you remember love?" in the animation movie *The Super Dimension Fortress Macross: Do You Remember Love?* (1984) was a hit song among *anime* lovers.¹¹ Although there were many other successful *seiyū* in the 1980s, they did not transform themselves into full-fledged singers and their records were usually soundtracks of the *anime* they played. *Seiyū* were subordinated to *anime* and had not yet achieved their own stardom in this stage.

The 1990s was the golden age of Japanese *anime* and *manga*, when Japanese ACG received unprecedented popularity at home and overseas.

10. Takako Ōta debuted as a singer in 1983. It is interesting to note that in the animated series *Creamy Mami*, the heroine was featured as a popular singer. Being a singer and *seiyū* at the same time, Ōta sang all the theme songs for the animated series.

11. The song even entered the top ten ranking in the TBS program "The Best Ten" and was performed in several TV music programs. It was even well-received overseas.

Anime remained the most significant stage for *seiyū*. The most successful *seiyū* at that time were often those who were cast in popular *anime*. The trend in *anime* had a strong impact on the course of development of the *seiyū* profession. Just as *Saint Seiya* (1986), *Yoroiden Samurai Troopers* (1988), and other ‘fighting’ *anime* gave rise to male *seiyū* in the late 1980s, the soaring popularity of *anime* featuring *bishōjo* (beautiful young girl), such as, the *Sailormoon* series (1992), *Oh My Goddess!* (1993) and *Magic Knight Rayearth* (1994), shifted the foci of attention from male *seiyū* to female *seiyū*. It was because the *bishōjo anime* put more emphasis on female characters, while the hero usually receded to a minor role, resulting in greater attention paid to the female *seiyū* who cast the heroines.

This period or the “third *seiyū* boom” also served as a watershed for the profession, since the work of *seiyū* underwent intense diversification, covering not only animation and dubbed movies, but other media like stage performances, electronic games, OVA, CD dramas and the internet.¹² Although popular *seiyū* used to host radio programs (*anime radio* アニラヂ), sing and attend public functions, it was now with a different scale as well as intention. Programs and events in the previous periods aimed

12. OVA stands for Original Video Animation. It refers to the animation that is specially released as video, VCDs or DVDs, and that it will not be shown on TV or in cinemas.

primarily at promoting the animated works, while the songs and performances were animation-based. All these were actually strategic “promotion through *seiyū*”. More radio programs in the 1990s, such as Megumi Hayashibara’s *Tokyo Boogie Night*, Mariko Kōda’s *GAME MUSEUM* (GM), focused on *seiyū*’s personal music works, daily trivia or comments on current issues rather than promotion of particular animation.¹³

In other words, *seiyū* themselves more than the works became the major attraction. Some *seiyū* became contracted singers of recording companies and produced original works. For example, all Megumi Hayashibara’s albums entered the top 10 of the Oricon Chart since 1994, and Hekiru Shina was the first *seiyū* to hold a concert in Nippon Boudokan.¹⁴ Magazines dedicated to *seiyū* such as *Seiyū Grand Prix* and *Voice Animage* were first published around 1994. All these were not simply promotion “through” *seiyū*, but promotion “for” *seiyū* as well. Besides fostering greater understanding towards the profession, it might also be seen as commercial strategies employed by the recording companies or *seiyū* agencies to increase revenue through commodifying the profession.

13. Such programs have been broadcast for more than a decade and are still very popular.

14. It is one of the most reputable halls for sports and musical performances. Only first-rate singers with strong background can possibly book Nippon Boudokan for concerts.

Since *seiyū* are now involved in a wider range of works, it seemed that dubbing or voice acting skills no longer sufficient criteria for achieving success in this profession. They had to be “multi-talented” to survive the keen competition as well as to satisfy the more demanding audiences and agencies. Beautiful faces and attractive images became one important selling point for the idol *seiyū*. Some audiences welcomed such all-roundedness, while some criticized it to be a loss of the essence of the profession. Nevertheless, this period marked the advancement of *seiyū* from a narrow profession to an eye-catching celebrity.

e) The Age of Globalization of *Seiyū* (2000~Present)

At the turn of the century, we can witness a new epoch in the development of *seiyū*. The popularity of *seiyū* has transcended the national borders to other countries, especially to the East-Asian neighboring countries, facilitated by the proliferation of the internet and the prevalence of Japanese electronics games and *anime* throughout the world.

While trends such as the diversification of work and the idolization of *seiyū* continue, the emergence of new genres in *anime* and electronic games has reshaped the “gender landscape” in the profession. It seems that female

seiyū have been more active since the 1990s, thanks to the *bishōjo anime* and games as well as recent *moe* works.¹⁵ However, male *seiyū* are stealing some limelight through the roles in BL (Boys' Love) and *otome* (乙女) *anime*, games and CD dramas which are popular among young females. BL works usually depict love stories between *bishōnen* (beautiful young boys), while the *otome* works feature romantic relationship between the heroine and large groups of male suitors. Examples of BL works are *Loveless* (*anime*, 2005) and *Angel's Feather* (game series, 2003-2005), while KOEI's *Angelique* series (since 1994) and *Harukanaru Toki no Nakade* series (since 2000) are two representative *otome* works. Besides the artwork and story plots, the *seiyū* cast is also one of the main concerns for the female audience and game players. *Seiyū* who are cast in the above-mentioned works, such as Akira Ishida, Toshiyuki Morikawa, Shinichirō Miki and Takahiro Sakurai, enjoy great support from their female fans although their successes are not limited to these genres of work. It is through such separated domains where male and female *seiyū* attracts

15. Though there are different beliefs on its origin, the term *moe* 萌 is generally believed to be originated from Japanese verb *moeru* 萌える, describing a burning passion and strong emotions towards female *anime* and *manga* characters. *Moe* is now a mainstream culture among the male *otaku*. Although the definition of *moe* may vary according to different audiences, the typical *moe* works tend to feature young innocent girls with lovely faces, recent examples in this category are *Air* (game, 2000 / *anime*, 2005) and *Ichigo 100%* (*anime*, 2005).

different audiences, resulting in a full boom of the profession.

Parallel to the local boom in Japan, the global popularization of *seiyū*, in particular, in the East-Asian region is noteworthy. It is generally believed that the formation of *lianshang zhu* (恋声族, the group of *seiyū* lovers) began to emerge among the Chinese fans in the late 1990s, and was triggered by popular *anime*, such as *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995) and *Slayers* (1995). In the beginning, the popularity was limited to *otaku*, the devoted *anime* supporters, since most imported *anime* series had been dubbed into Chinese and only a few came across the original Japanese versions cast by *seiyū*. Asian youths gain a greater exposure to *seiyū* as a result of the popularization of OVA and electronic games. In addition, following the prevalence of pirated VCDs (later DVDs) and the use of BT (or other online sharing methods), Asian *anime* fans now have access to original voices instead of the dubbed version.¹⁶ With just a click on your mouse, you will find hundreds of websites, newsgroups and BBS dedicated to *seiyū*, circulating information and resources in various languages. Fan clubs and virtual communities are also set up for particular *seiyū* or the profession in general.

16. BT stands for Bit Torrent. It is an online sharing technology with which users can share media files freely with other users through simple internet connection.

In response to the surges of Asian fans, famous *seiyū* frequently participate in ACG-related events held in major Asian cities. For example, Hiro Yūki served as special guest in the Comic Worlds (CW) HK 9 and CW Taiwan 10 in 2000, and Hikaru Midorigawa attracted swarms of fans and attention of the press by his participation in Taiwan Petit Fancy 2 in October 2005. The “Neo Romance Festa 2006 in Taiwan”, a two-day event held in February 2006, was a remarkable first attempt to hold a Japanese *seiyū* event outside Japan.¹⁷ While *seiyū* gave performances in Taiwan, two voice artists for the Taiwanese version of *Harukanaru Toki no Nakade* were invited to participate in “Neo Romance Live Winter 2005” in Yokohama in December 2005. Although it was primarily a promotional event for the electronic games and *anime*, it marked the first co-operation of *seiyū* and their counterparts in Asia and accentuated the popularity and importance of *seiyū*.

The penetration of *seiyū* into other parts of the world may not be as obvious as that in Asia, but *seiyū* are undoubtedly gaining more international attention. One notable development was that ADV Films US requested Mari Ijima, the renowned *seiyū* of Lynn Minmay in *The Super Dimension*

17. Neo Romance Festa is an annual event organized for KOEI's *otome* game series, mainly for *Angelique* and *Harukanaru Toki no Nakade*. The event has been held since 2000. Programs usually include singing, on-stage dubbings and interviews.

Fortress Macross, to take up the same role in the English-dubbed version *Macross* that was released in January 2006. This example shows that the importance and influences of *seiyū* are recognized even by people outside Asia. Since the globalization of the *seiyū* culture is still in the preliminary stage when compared to that of *manga* and *anime*, it is too early to know at this point how far *seiyū* may cast a spell across the globe in the near future. However, it is expected that there will be an increase in co-operation and interaction between Japan and other countries in this cultural field.

The history traced above does not concern solely the growth of *seiyū*. It also reflects the rise and fall of various media (from radio to internet) as well as the development of other cultural products, such as *anime* and electronic games. It seems at a glance that the maturity of *seiyū* owes much to the success of *anime*. However, through establishing its own stardom and status, *seiyū* no longer bask in the reflected glory of *anime*. Matsuda even expressed in an interview with Hotta that idol *seiyū* could build up stardom independent from the *anime* characters they played. It was also possible that characters became popular solely because of the brilliance of

the *seiyū*.¹⁸ *Seiyū* with its rising influences in popular culture, benefits the development of *anime* in return. The strong affiliation between *seiyū* and *anime* is a good illustration of how different cultural products are interdependent and interact with each other, making “media mix” or “trans-media” an inevitable trend in cultural industries. The historical account also highlights the power of the fans or *otaku* in the course of the formation and globalization of *seiyū* culture. Investigation on the popularization of *seiyū* at home and overseas will not be complete if we leave out studies on the audiences. The potency of fans to propel the popularization of *seiyū* culture will be further discussed in chapter 5.

18. Hotta Junji, *Moemoe Japan*, (Japan: Kōdansya, 2005), 262-263.

Chapter 3: Seiyū As Art And Industry

Seiyū, as suggested in Chapter 1, in a sense, is a unique Japanese culture. It is only in Japan that dubbing can rise as both a sophisticated industry as well as appreciable art. Japanese dubbing can be considered as a well-developed industry. Right from the primary training to the management after training, are all systematic and well-organized. Each year, there are new recruits joining the profession, with the management agencies responsible for job allocation. The keen competition then serves as the quality check mechanism. Under the trend of *seiyū* idolization, apart from their dubbing, *seiyū* themselves become cultural commodities promoted through different media. There are also organizations such as the Japan Actors Union, Japan Entertainment Entrepreneurs Association (JEEA) and Japan Audio Producers' Association (JAPA) that regulate the operation of the profession, including establishing a salary system and supervising contracts to protect the rights of *seiyū*.¹

Besides, voice dubbing by Japanese *seiyū* is also an appreciable art.

In a discussion about Walter Benjamin's theories of arts, McRobbie suggested

1. Morikawa Tomoyoshi and Tsujitani Kōji, "Seiyū no puro no tanjyō: kaigai telebi dorama to seiyū (The Birth of Professional Voice Actors: Dubbing in Foreign TV Dramas in Japanese)," *Media shi kenkyū* (Media History),14 (2003): 134-135.

that art should not be mystified as a solely inborn talent. What is also important are “techniques and skills, learned and practiced over the years”.² Such remarks can apply perfectly to the *seiyū* profession. A beautiful voice does not necessarily guarantee the success of a *seiyū* if one does not pay effort in formal training and everyday learning. With the solid training in practical dubbing skills as well as the artistic senses cultivated in training centers, Japanese *seiyū*’s voice artists are renowned as accurate, lively and rich in emotion. Their voices and dubbing can actually be comparable to an artwork. The establishment of a *seiyū* specific award, The *Seiyū* Award in October 2006, can be regarded as public recognition of dubbing as a form of art.³ Although there are also prizes given to *seiyū* before the founding of The *Seiyū* Award, *seiyū* prize is often given as a division of animation award, such as Japan *Anime* Award (later renamed as Anime GrandPix) organized by animation magazine *Animage* and Animation Kobe Award.

In Asian regions like Hong Kong, China and Taiwan, dubbing remains

2. Angela McRobbie, *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*. (London: Routledge, 1994), 107.

3. The voting of the award started in October 2006 and the result was released on 3 March 2007. Awards include Best Voice Actor, Best Voice Actress, Best Supporting Voice Actor, Best Supporting Voice Actress, Best New Voice Actor, Best New Voice Actress, Singing Award, Best *Personality* (radio host), Special Contribution Award, Contribution Award and Synergy Award. The first eight awards were selected based on public voting and committee assessment while the last three were selected by the organizing committee.

a minor profession that people pay little attention to and people seldom respect the voice artists who are working backstage most of the time.⁴ As an informant commented, “even though we may want to support local voice artists, we can hardly find any channels to do so.”⁵ Information on local voice artists is hardly available, the fans have to search for the information on the internet and magazines. There are only a few public functions in which fans can get in touch with the voice artists. However, the information of Japanese *seiyū* is widely available through different media and promotional functions organized by the production side in Japan. In this chapter, I investigate the internal and external factors that contribute to the rise of *seiyū* as a prominent cultural phenomenon in Japan.

3.1 Internal Factors

Internal factors refer to factors concerning the dubbing profession itself.

The two major factors that make Japanese dubbing profession well-established and respectable are the management system and the

4. Most of my informants commented that Hong Kong people and Mainland Chinese do not take dubbing seriously although the result of the questionnaires shows that about 96% of respondents believe that the quality of dubbing will affect the general quality of the works. An informant critically pointed out that, “the production side (TV broadcasting company) does not care enough about it (dubbing)” (Ms.C, 23 years old, dated 11 September 2006).

5. Interview with Mr. R, 32 years old, dated 26 July 2006.

professional training mechanism. These factors are also two unique features that cannot be found in other countries. Even in the US where many animated works are produced, the dubbing profession still remains largely backstage, and draws little attention.

a) Management System

Most Japanese *seiyū* are affiliated to particular *seiyū* management agencies and have their own managers who arrange jobs for them. It is tough for a *seiyū* to get work without going through the agencies.⁶ How much the *seiyū* can earn depends on the number of jobs he or she receives through the agency. The performance and fame of *seiyū* will also affect the reputation and profits of the agencies. Since the competition in the dubbing profession is keen, promotion of its own *seiyū* is indispensable to maintain the competitiveness of the agencies. Therefore, the management agencies will encourage their own *seiyū* to take up diversified works to attract diversified groups of audiences through different media. They may release music records individually or as a *seiyū* group, host radio programs,

6. Tada Makoto, *Kore ga anime bijinesu da* (This is the Animation Business). (Tokyo: Kōsaidō Shuppan, 2002), 220.

participate in *seiyū* events, be interviewed by the magazines or publish their own photo books. Recently, *seiyū* have started to release DVD-dramas in which they not only perform with the voices, but also do the real acting. They become the real actors or actresses. Sometimes, *seiyū* may also perform in musicals that are adapted from the *anime* they have taken part in. In this way, *seiyū* no longer means merely the “voices” of the characters, and they indeed almost achieve the status of artists or celebrities who are featured in magazines or on-stage.

Within the same agency or even under the same managers, *seiyū* sometimes have to compete with each other to be cast. In order to get more jobs, *seiyū* have to keep both their voices and dubbing quality in good condition as well as maintain a good relationship with their managers. Otherwise, they have to gain popularity or fame so that they can get direct appointment by the producers of the works without going through auditions. For example, Suzumura Kenichi was directly appointed by Fukuda Mizuo, the director of *Gundam Seed Destiny* as the hero Shin Asuka, instead of going through the audition. There was also a rumor that Suzumura’s lines in the last episode were cut due to his quarrel with Director Fukuda.

Although famous *seiyū* sometimes can enjoy better salary or get appointed by producers, no matter how experienced the *seiyū* are they may have to compete for the parts with fresh graduates of *seiyū* training schools. This is to ensure that the voices chosen will best suit the characters. One interesting example is the audition for the voice of the cartoon supervisor in a construction site. Although there are only about three lines for the character, over ten *seiyū* were invited to join the audition. Almost all of them are veteran *seiyū*, such as Nozawa Masako (Son Gokū in *Dragonball*), Furukawa Toshio (Moroboshi Ataru in *Urusei Yatsura*) and Kusao Takeshi (Sakuragi Hanamichi in *Slam Dunk*).⁷ This episode shows that the voice becomes an indispensable factor that helps shape the image and personality of the characters.

An informant from Hong Kong said that when she listened to the Japanese dubbing, she always has the feeling that “that’s the voice of the characters” or “the voice really should be like this”, but she seldom feels this way when she listens to local dubbing.⁸ Such “perfect match” of voices and characters reveals the effort *seiyū* pay to understand the characters as well as

7. A clip of the audition (a recorded version of the Japanese TV program *The Fountain of Trivia*) can be viewed at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2N_BnMQ8Wcg

8. From interview with Ms. Y, 21 years old, dated 24 July 2006.

to bring them to life. It is this kind of professionalism that helps *seiyū* earn great support from the audiences, leading to the formation of devoted *seiyū* fans. According to Hotta, the voice of *seiyū* is actually the “intersection point of the imaginary character and the reality”.⁹ To the audience, the voices are actually part of their beloved characters and therefore serve as an important channel for connecting themselves to the characters.

b) Professional Training

Specialized *seiyū* training centers or tertiary institutions provide comprehensive training. According to an informant who has studied in a Japanese *seiyū* training center, besides training in pronunciation, voice projection and acting lessons which are the basics for voice acting, there are a great variety of elective subjects to choose from, including modern dances, aerobics, choir and singing.¹⁰ Such comprehensive training equips each graduate with various skills that help them to participate in other entertainment businesses such as singing and acting in movies, plays and

9. Hotta Junji, *Moemoe Japan*, (Japan: Kōdansya, 2005), 251-252.

10. From interview with Mr. R, 32 years old, dated 26 July 2006.

musicals.¹¹ Musicals are one of the most popular forms of stage performances in Japan, involving singing and dancing. Famous manga series such as *Hunter X Hunter*, *Sailormoon* and *The Prince of Tennis* (*Tenisu no Ōj-sama*) have all been adapted into musical series. *Seiyū* who have cast in the *anime* are sometimes invited to participate in the musical though they may not take up the same role. Such wide scope of works as a result of the all-rounded training was one great attraction of *seiyū*. A few *seiyū* fans I interviewed suggested that they are often amazed by *seiyū*'s talents, appreciating that they can not only bring life to the animated characters, but also sing, dance or act well on stage.¹²

The intensive and tough training is also the fundamental factor that affects the dubbing quality. The two to three years of training can provide abundant practice in voice acting skills. The training centers may offer chances for students to do internships to accumulate practical experiences. They will also invite graduated professional *seiyū* to conduct seminar to share

11. Some *seiyū* were trained in theatrical troupes, so they have learned sound acting skills and had rich on-stage experiences before they join the dubbing profession. For the relationship between theatrical troupes and *seiyū* profession, see Tomoyoshi Morikawa and Kōji Tsujitani, "Seiyū no puro no tanjyō: kaigai telebi drama to seiyū (The Birth of Professional Voice Actors: Dubbing in Foreign TV Dramas in Japanese)," *Media shi kenkyū* (Media History), 14 (2003): 120-123.

12. For examples, interviews with Ms. M., 17 years old, dated 27 July 2006; interview with Ms. N, 17 years old, dated 11 August 2006; Ms. S, 15 years old, dated 25 July 2006.

their dubbing experiences with the students. Professional *seiyū* are invited to be guest lecturers to give instruction or comments on students' dubbing skills or served as guest judges for auditions. For example, Amusement Media Academy invited Sasaki Nozumu and Yūki Hiro to be the audition judges in August 2005. Sasaki Nozumu and Yūki Hiro are two experienced and popular *seiyū* who have been cast in famous animated series such as *YuYu Hakusho* (1992) and *Soul Hunter* (1999) respectively. It was hoped that their fame would attract and encourage more people to join the audition as well as the dubbing profession.

3.2 External Factors

The rise of *seiyū* culture can also attribute to factors such as the success of animation, electronic games and CD dramas, the positive public attitudes towards popular culture and the active participation of famous stars into dubbing profession.

a) Influence of Other Cultural Products

Although *seiyū* is now regarded as an independent cultural product, it

can hardly go on without other cultural products such as, *anime*, electronic games, foreign dramas and movies. These products are an important platform where *seiyū* can display their skills and attraction.

Among such cultural products, *anime* and *seiyū* are inseparable, since most audiences begin to notice *seiyū* through *anime* characters or *anime* songs. *Seiyū* are usually remembered as “the voice of particular *anime* characters” instead of their own names. Looking back to the history of *seiyū*, several *seiyū* booms were greatly affected by the development of *anime*. For example, the *anime* boom in the late 1970s and early 1980s kicked off the popularity of *seiyū*, and *seiyū* who have cast the characters in popular *anime* enjoyed great support from the audiences; the “male *seiyū* boom” in the late 1980s was triggered by the popularity of *anime* of young male warriors. *Anime* remains the major work of *seiyū* as the large production of *anime* keep offering abundant jobs for the growing dubbing profession. *Anime* songs, including opening and ending themes, character image songs are another platform for *seiyū* to capture more audiences through singing. The various promotional events for the *anime* also offer more chances for the audiences to get in touch with the *seiyū* they like. Ng suggests that recent works such as

Hoshi no Koe (2002) by Shinkai Makoto may be a kind of “*seiyū anime*”.¹³

It is because this kind of work involves heavy psychological portraits of the characters, which are presented through long narratives by *seiyū*. Such narratives require great skill as the *seiyū* bring out characters’ emotions and personalities. The same cases apply to electronic games as well, though the impact of electronic games is not as great as that of *anime*.

CD-drama, a new form of cultural product, gives another good stage for *seiyū* to show their professional acting skills. Although there are original drama series, most CD dramas are adapted from popular *manga*, *anime* or novels.¹⁴ Except for those adopted from famous works, *seiyū*’s performance rather than the storyline serves as the greatest attraction for most dramas, especially the BL ones. As cd dramas do not have support from pictures or graphics to tell the story or express characters’ emotion, all is up to *seiyū*’s acting skills. A *seiyū* fan from Hong Kong once commented after listening to a CD drama, “the story is such trash! The performance of the two leading

13. Ng Wai Ming, *Cong xing zhi sheng kan shin hai cheng chengong zhi dao* (Shinkai Makoto’s Success through Voice of the Star) in *Zhiri buwu* (The Room To Know Japan) (Hong Kong: Chung Hwa Book Company, 2007), 36-37.

14. Examples of original drama series are *Kichijōji Café* and *Saint Beast*, all works are made into comics, and the latter two are made into animated series too.

seiyū has lifted up the general quality greatly.”¹⁵ It is a good platform for the *seiyū* to train and perform their acting skills, and at the same time for the audiences to concentrate on appreciating *seiyū*’s acting when the visual impact from the pictures has been removed. Besides CD dramas, *Rōdoku* CDs (reading CDs) are released, with *Fushigi Kōbō Syōkōgun* (Mysterious Workshop Syndrome) as one example (fig.1).¹⁶ These kinds of CDs can be said as “*seiyū*-centered” cultural products that emerge in response to the growing demand and popularity of *seiyū*.



(C)2005 COSMICRAY, Inc.

Fig 1. CD Cover of *Fushigi Kōbō Syōkōgun* Episode 6, featuring Miki Shinichirō.

15. Comment from a daily conversation with Ms. C, 23 years old, dated 12 January 2006.

16. *Fushigi Kōbō Syōkōgun* series has released 12 volumes since June 2005. Each volume features one famous male *seiyū*, such as, Ishida Akira, Sakurai Takahiro and Miki Shinichirō. They read out the story and they have to play all the roles appeared in the works. There are mainly narratives and include only a few dialogues. Later, the series are adapted into CD Dramas, featuring the same *seiyū* in the previous reading CDs series.

b) Positive Reception of Popular Culture

Unlike most Asian regions such as Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China, Japan tends to hold a more positive attitude to popular cultural products such as *manga*, *anime* and TV games. As suggested by Chen, the strong support for Japanese ACG are based on the concept that ACG is “not the exclusive privilege for children and teenagers”.¹⁷ Japanese ACG targets all walks of life, school kids, college students, office ladies and salary men are all potential consumers. The topics may cover serious subjects such as politics and history to relaxing hobbies like chess and mahjong, with a variety of genres, such as adventure, romance, horror and comedy. Consumers from different social backgrounds will be able to find the topic they are interested in from such a great range.¹⁸ If the works target only children, the dubbing is often ignored or considered only as a change of language as children will pay much attention to the storylines or the drawing. Although Japanese ACG had been accused of causing terrible crimes, such as Miyazaki Tsutomu

17. Chen Zhung Wai, *Ri-Ben dong men hua di quan qiu hua he mi di wen hua* (The Globalization of Japanese Manga and Anime and the Otaku Culture) (Taipei: Tang Shun Chu Ban She, 2004), 19.

18. Scholar Frederik Schodt attributed such a wide range of themes in *manga* to the independent working environment of the *mangaka* (漫画家), the comic artists. The artists instead of the publisher hold the copyright and can decide where to publish their works. There are less instructions and restrictions from the publisher, so the artists enjoy more freedom to create their works with different topics. See Frederik Schodt, *Manga!Manga! The World of Japanese Comics*. (Tokyo:Kodansha, 1986).

Incident in 1988 and Kobayashi Kaoru Incident in 2004 and, the Japanese public generally holds less hostile attitudes towards ACG products when compared to regions like Hong Kong or Mainland China, where ACG products are often regarded as detrimental to children's moral standard.¹⁹ Ng points out that Japanese government indeed holds approving attitudes towards ACG products.²⁰ For example, Hashimoto Ryūtarō, the Prime Minister of Japan from January 11 1996 to July 30 1998, was once asked by a journalist what he did during leisure, and he immediately answered “reading *manga*”. Another example is Asō Tarō, the current Minister for Foreign Affairs. He is well known for his passion towards *manga* and is labeled as “Asō *manga* Tarō”. Japanese scholars, such as Iwabuchi, also believe that Japanese cultural products like *manga* or *anime* can be a good way to

19. Miyazaki Tsutomu Incident, refers to the serial murders done by Miyazaki Tsutomu, who was known as the Otaku Murder. He had mutilated and murdered four girls between 1988 to 1989. It was believed that his obsession to pornographic *anime* was one great catalyst for such cruel murders. The incident immediately triggered moral panic against *anime* and *otaku* among the general public.

Kobayashi Kaoru Incident happened in 2004, and was again related to ACG and *otaku*. It was believed that the murderer had followed the messages on “2 channel”, a websites comprising of discussion forums in various topics, of abusing and killing the heroine of the animated series *Cardcaptor Sakura*, Sakura, to carry out the murder. The incident once again stirred up criticism towards ACG.

20. Ng Wai-ming (speech delivered on 20 May, 2006, recorded by okcana) *Riben zhangfu dui manhua de taidu* (Japanese Government's Attitude towards Comics), 2 June 2005, <http://www.cuhkacs.org/~benng/Bo-Blog/read.php?105>. See also Ng Wai Ming, Riben Guanfang Ruhe Liyong manhua (How Japanese Government Make Use of Comics) in *Zhi ri bu wu* (The Room To Know Japan) (Hong Kong: Chung Hwa Book Company, 2007), 18-19.

establish a “brand” or a good image of Japan in other countries.²¹ *Anime* and *manga* are often used for educational and practical purposes. For example, some white papers issued by government often have two versions: text versions or *manga* versions. History books or books dealing with difficult concepts such as accounting principles, are often published to help readers remember and understand the trivial events or complicated ideas. Instead of seeing ACG as unhealthy and immoral, the Japanese tend to give credit to these creative industries. For example, Kyoto Seika University is the first university to offer ACG-related courses and it set up a Faculty of Comics in 2006. In April 2005, the Digital Hollywood University was founded as the first ACG-specific University.²² *Seiyū* is a popular culture that relates closely to ACG products. A more open and approval view towards ACG products also mean a greater capacity for the audiences to appreciate the works, including not only the visual graphic aspect but also dubbing.

21. Koichi Iwabuchi, “Use of Japanese Popular Culture: Media,” *Envisage: A Journal Book of Chinese Media Studies*, No.2 (2003): 99-123.

22. Riben jinren zhende you manhua daxue! (There is really a Manga University in Japan!), *Ming Pao*, 16 March 2006.

c) Impact of “Celebrity Dubbing”

“Celebrity dubbing” is a term I made up to represent the participation of famous movies stars or pop singers in the dubbing profession. It is common in the United States and Hong Kong that animation or foreign movies shown in cinemas are dubbed by famous stars. Inviting famous stars to do the dubbing for the main characters is a commercial strategy utilized by the production side to attract more audiences to the cinemas. At the same time, the star can gain more media exposure. In Japan, animated movies or dubbed foreign movies, TV animation and drama series as well as electronic games are usually dubbed by professional *seiyū*. *Seiyū* cast can sometimes serve as the main attraction of the cultural products. For example, slogans such as “*Seiyū jin sugoi!* (*Seiyū* cast is great!)” and “*Gōka Seiyū jin* (Deluxe *seiyū* cast)” are getting increasingly common in advertisements for *anime*, games and CD dramas, especially those promoting CD dramas and ACG products targeting female audiences (See fig.2).



Fig. 2. A poster advertisement for CD Drama series *Salute!* (2006), freely obtained from shop selling ACG products, the *seiyū* cast is highlighted.

In past few years, Japanese pop singers or movie stars have started participating in dubbing *anime* and games. Famous examples are SMAP, Dōmoto Kōichi, Nakamura Shidōm and Ueto Aya. Another interesting example was the TV animated series *Human Scramble* (2003) adapted from the popular comic of the same name. In each episode, a famous actor or actress would be invited as guest *seiyū*. Involved movie stars included Sorimachi Takashi, Karasawa Toshiaki and Takenouchi Yukata. Such practice is believed to be influenced by US practice of appointing famous movie stars to dub for blockbuster animated films from Disney or Warner.

A foreign writer once noted down from an advertisement commenting Japanese as “FANS OF ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING ENGLISHED”.²³ Although it may have exaggerated Japanese admiration to US culture, the underlying message about US strong cultural influence on Japan cannot be overlooked. Schodt in his book *America and the Four Japans* points out that strong American influence on Japanese can be witnessed in language, pop culture, fashion and lifestyles.²⁴ The birth and development of TV drama and animation owed much to American impact on especially production technology. Although *seiyū* now have to face competition not only from their colleagues, but also popular movie stars or singers, the threat or pressure imposed on professional *seiyū* is relatively small. It is because the local supplies of ACG products (which means jobs for *seiyū*) are abundant, and the professional training *seiyū* receive can be seen as a guarantee for dubbing quality.

In regions such as Hong Kong, stars dubbing may give an impression that non-professionals can do the dubbing especially when some audiences

23. Deborah Bohem, “The Garbled Phrase as Frozen Music,” *Spectator*, 4 January 1992): 16-18.

24. Frederik L. Schodt, *America and the Four Japans: Friend, Foe, Model, Mirror*. (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 1994), 28-35. Schodt not only stresses on American one-way impact on Japan, he instead emphasizes the bi-directional cultural influences taken place between the two countries.

regard the dubbing quality by the famous stars as not satisfactory.²⁵ While in Japan, the active participation of famous stars indicates that the dubbing profession is respectable and attractive. Through participating in the dubbing profession, the stars can further reveal their talents other than acting and extend their influences through more media exposure.

Table 1: Record of Stars Dubbing (anime / games) in Recent Years from 2004 to Present²⁶

Names of Works (Releasing Date)	Stars Participated In (Role)
One Piece: The Curse of the Sacred Sword (March, 2004)	Nakamura Shidō (Saga)
Brother Bear (March, 2004)	Higashiyama Noriyuki (Kinai)
Steamboy (July, 2004)	Suzuki Anne (James) Konishi Manami (Scarlett)
The Polar Express(November, 2004)	Karasawa Toshiaki (Driver, Santa etc 5 people)
Howl's Moving castle (November, 2004)	Kimura Takuya (Howl) Baishō Chieko (Sophie)
The Incredibles (December, 2004)	Miura Tomokazu(Mister Incredible) Kuroki Hitomi (Missus Incredible) Ayase Haruka (Violet)
Racing Stripes (March, 2005)	Tanaka Rena (Stripes)
Shark Tale (March, 2005)	Katori Shingo (Oscar) Mizuno Miki (Angie) Yamaguchi Tomomitsu (Lenny)

25. The result of my questionnaire shows that about 48% rated the performance of the stars as “average” and 24% as “not satisfactory”, and most of the Hong Kong *seiyū* fans I interviewed expressed that the quality of “stars dubbing” is unsatisfactory.

26. With reference to “Pai shang yin, haowan ye” (Addicted to dub, it’s great fun) <http://paper.udn.com/udnpaper/PIF0001/76937/web/#23>, the table is further edited and elaborated.

Chaos Legion (March, 2005)	Oshio Manabu (Sieg) Kaito Ken (Delacroix) Ryō (Siela) Ichikawa Yui (Arcia)
Drag-On Dragoon 2 (June, 2006)	Katsuuji Ryō (Nowe) Harada Yoshio (Legna) Koyuki (Manah) Aibu Saki (Eris) Shikehata Shinnosuke (Caim/Angel)
Let's go! Anpanman: The Great Adventure of Habi (July, 2005)	Tomosaka Rie (Habi)
Robots (August, 2005)	Kusanagi Tsuyoshi (Rodney) Yada Akiko (Cappy)
Paradise Kiss (October, 2005)	Yamada Yū (Hayasaka Yukari)
Rogue Galaxy (Decemeber, 2005)	Ueto Aya (Kisala) Tanaki Hiroshi (Jaster Rogue)
On a Storm Night (January, 2006)	Nakamura Shidō (Gav) Narimiya Hiroki (Mei)
Real Saviour Legend Fist of the North Star: The Legend of Raoh: Martyred Love Arc (March, 2006 ~)	Abe Hiro (Kenshirō) Shibasaki Kō (Reina) Ukaji Takashi(Raoh)
One Piece The Movie: The Giant Mechanical Soldier of Karakuri Castle (March, 2006)	Inagaki Gorō (Ratchet)
Jyu Ō Sei (April-June, 2006)	Domoto Koichi (Adult Thor)
Death Note (October, 2006~ / Animated Series) (June & November, 2006 / Movies)	Nakamura Shidō (Ryku)
Brave Story (July, 2006)	Matsu Takako (Mitani Wataru) Tokiwa Takako (Kattsu) Wentz Eiji (Mizuru)
Tales from Earthsea (July, 2006)	Okada Junichi (Prince Arren) Sugawara Bunta (Ged)
The Girl Who Leapt Through Time (July ,2006)	Naka Rīsa (Konno Makoto) Ishida Takuya (Mamiya Chiaki)
Night Head (September, 2006)	Takeda Shinji (Narrator)

GENJI ~Kamui Sōran~ (November, 2006)	Uda Erika (Shizuka Gozen)
Monster House (January 2007)	Ishihara Satomi (Jenny) Izumiya Shigeru (Nebbecracker)

The all-rounded professional training prepares *seiyū* for taking up works other than dubbing, providing them good conditions to be “idolized” as singers, actors or actresses. On the other hand, the sophisticated management system and operation of the profession urge *seiyū* to improve their skills and maintain quality dubbing so as to stay competitive in the profession. The ability and talent to perform various jobs and the stable good quality of dubbing are the two main factors that *seiyū* fans find fascinating. It also helps the profession to establish a professional, serious and conscientious image instead of leaving an impression that dubbing is an easy job that anyone can take up. Audiences adore and appreciate the profession as a kind of art that requires great artistic and practical skills that can only be acquired through tough institutional training.

Apart from the quality the profession possesses, the development of other popular cultural products also plays an important role in spreading the *seiyū* culture. These products provide different platforms for *seiyū* to

demonstrate their various talents. Based on the rather open attitudes towards cultural products like ACG by the general public, the rise of *seiyū* does not face much objection. With famous movie stars or singers participating in dubbing, people other than *anime* or electronic games lovers will also be aware of the value of the dubbing profession. As a result, the *seiyū* culture can rise from a sub-culture into a new major culture in Japan and extend its popularity and influence further to neighboring Asian countries.

Chapter 4: Cultural and Social Impact of the *Seiyū* Culture

The previous chapter looks into how the *seiyū* profession has recently become an important cultural phenomenon, whereas this chapter focuses on the impact of *seiyū* on Japanese culture and society and the receiving countries in Asia, especially in Hong Kong. Regarding its cultural impact, the rise of *seiyū* profession has inspired other cultural products (mainly ACG products) in Japan. Besides, *seiyū*'s participation in ACG production and *seiyū* training or management helps facilitate the growth of Japanese ACG industries. As for its social impact, the rise of *seiyū* culture raises public interests and attention towards the dubbing profession, and as a result leads to the further development of the profession as a whole, and generates a rising interest in Japanese language in other Asian regions.

4.1 Cultural Impact

a) Inspiration for Other Cultural Products

In Japan, *seiyū* enjoy great attention and support as shown by the emergence of specialized *seiyū* magazines, *seiyū* fan clubs and promotional events. This culture has also inspired products in other forms of popular

culture such as *manga*, *anime*, CD dramas and movies. The inspiration is achieved through providing new themes or topics for these products as well as giving rise to new cultural products. There are so far about twelve works that either use *seiyū* as the main theme or are related to the dubbing profession (Table 2).

Table 2: List of *seiyū* related ACG works from 1995 to present

Name of Work / Author	Publishing / Releasing Date	Genre
<i>Usotsuki Voice</i> (Lying Voice) Torino Aki	2006~	Comics
<i>A Kou no Pro</i> (A-class Professional) in Amatsume Ryūta Tanpensyū (Amatsume Ryūta's Short Stories Collection) / Amatsume Ryūta	2006	Comics
<i>Labu Ge CHU ~ Miracle Seiyū Hakusho</i> ~ (Love Get You! Miracle Seiyū White Paper / Kozumi Marie	2006	<i>Anime</i>
<i>NadePro!!</i> (Nadeshiko-Voice Actor Production) Vol. 1-4 / Hidō Ryōji	2005~	CD Drama Series
<i>Shōjyo Shōnen ~ Go! Go! Ichigo</i> (Young Girl Young Boy) 7/ Yabūchi Yū	2004	Comics
<i>Boku no Koe</i> (My Voice) 1~ / Nitta Yūka	2004 ~	Comics CD Drama
<i>Rec 1~</i> / Hanamizawa Kyutarō	2003 ~	Comics

	2006	<i>Anime</i> Game (PS2)
<i>Sonna Koe Dashicha Iya!</i> (Kiss of Voice) 1-7 + Special / Shinoga Iori	2003-2004	Comics
<i>C.V.</i> 1-2 / Kuragami Atsushi	1999-2000	Comics
<i>Pi-Chiku Ba-Chiku!</i> (PeaChick / ParChick!) / Chiba Jirō	1997-1998	Comics
<i>My Dream ~ On Air ga matenakute~</i> (My Dream ~ Can't Wait to Be On Air) / Nihon Create	1997	Game (PS /SS)
<i>Standby SayYou!</i> / Human	1997	Game (PS/SS)
<i>Voice Idol Maniacs ~Pool Bar Story</i> / Data East	1997	Game (SS)
<i>Welcome Back, Mr McDonald</i> / Mitani Koki	1997	Movie
<i>Yondeyaruze!</i> 1-5 (Shout Out Loud!) / Takaguchi Satosumi	1995-1999	Comics
	1996-2000	CD Drama Series Vol. 1-4

Most of these works depict the operation of the industry, the keen competition in the profession and the difficulties *seiyū* may encounter in different stages of their career. For example, *Boku no Koe* focuses on how the protagonist strives to get the main role for an *anime*, describing also the close relationship between the senior *seiyū* and the newcomers (Fig. 3&4). There are also portraits of the fair competition between the old and new *seiyū*

when the less experienced protagonist won the leading role from a senior *seiyū* who was originally appointed to play the character.



Fig. 3 A popular boys' love comics about *seiyū*



Fig 4. Scene of the hero was told by his manager that he should not promise the producer orally without notifying the management agency (pics from *Boku no Koe* Vo1, 2)

There is also description on the operation of the profession. The picture above is about the hero (a *seiyū* who is getting increasingly popular) receiving a lesson from his manager on the job arrangement.¹ It is an accurate portrait of the profession as all jobs of *seiyū* should be approved and arranged by the management agency and the *seiyū* should not accept the jobs on their own.

In the *anime Labu Ge CHU ~ Miracle Seiyū Hakusho~*, there are scenes of training practices, such as dubbing exercises with senior *seiyū* (episode 6), reading the *Uirō Uri* (外郎売), a text used to train speed reading and the accurate pronunciation (episode 7). These works allow the public, especially young people, to know more about the dubbing profession.

Although sometimes the plots may seem exaggerated for the sake of entertainment, most comic artists or *anime* producers have done research on the real situation of the profession. For example, Mizushima Tōru's husband, Machi Yūji, is an experienced professional *seiyū* and therefore can provide useful information for making the story more realistic. Mizushima has mentioned at the special corner in *Voice!! 2* that the model for the hero of the story is Midorikawa Hikaru (Fig. 5).²

1. Nitta Yūka, *Boku no Koe*, Vol 2, (Tokyo: Libre, 2006), 34-35.

2. Mizushima Tōru, *Voice!!*, Vol. 2 (Tokyo: Shinshokan, 1998), 165-166.



Fig 5. Volume 2 of *Voice!!*

The genres of comics that use *seiyū* as the main topic are diverse, from BL comics (for example, *Boku no Koe* and *Yondeyaruze!*) and girl comics such as *Sonna Koe Dashicha Iya!*. There are also works targeting adults that may include sexual contents (for example, *Pi-Chiku Ba-Chiku!*).

Seiyū games provide another channel for the game player to explore more about the profession.³ One interesting example is *Standby SayYou!*, a simulation game in which the player acts as the student of Chiba Shigeru, a famous *seiyū* and music director. Though playing the role of music director, the dubbing of the animation in the game is actually done through choosing appropriate responses in the conversation with the *seiyū*. The player not only learns to give instructions to the *seiyū*, but also knows more about the

Midorikawa Hikaru is a famous *seiyū* from Aoni Production, who has cast in several popular *anime* and electronic games, such as *Slam Dunk* (Rukawa Kaede), *New Mobile Report Gundam Wing* (Heero Yuy) and *Sengoku Mosou* (Akechi Mitsuhide).

3. “*Seiyū* games” sometimes refer to games with the *seiyū* cast as the main attraction or games that target *seiyū* fans. Here the term only refer to games with contents that are related to *seiyū* or the dubbing profession.

seiyū who cast in the game through watching the movies starring the *seiyū* in person.

The rise of *seiyū* culture provides an interesting theme for *ACG*, and facilitates the popularization of CD dramas. According to the online survey I conducted among Hong Kong people, for the question “through which channel did you get to know about *seiyū*”, about 80% consumed animation, but surprisingly, the percentage of CD dramas (3%, occupying the fourth place) comes close to that of electronic games (6%, occupying the second place) (See fig. 6) as CD Dramas are relatively new products when compared to electronic games.⁴

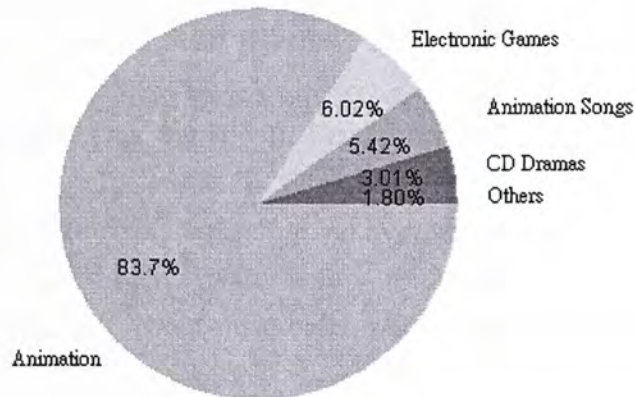


Fig 6. Result on the question “Through which channel did you get to know *seiyū*?”

4. For details of the online survey, please refer to the part of “theories and methodologies” in the Introduction.

CD drama is not so popular in Hong Kong due to the language barrier and the lack of channels to purchase the product. Therefore it is quite surprising that some people may start noticing *seiyū* through listening to CD dramas. As mentioned by some informants, the greatest attraction of CD dramas is often the *seiyū* cast, since they do not understand adequate Japanese to grasp the meaning and it is the voice of their beloved *seiyū* that supports them listening to the whole story without giving up in the middle.⁵ The *rōdoku* CDs (reading CDs) and the *seiyū*-oriented events mentioned before emerge to meet the rising demand of *seiyū* fans.

In 2005, Bandai responded to such demand by launching the Voice I-Doll collection for *Gundam Seed (Destiny)* and *Fullmetal Alchemist*, two great hit *anime* in 2005 (fig. 7&8). In September 2006, the Voice I-Doll collection of the *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, an overwhelming hit *anime* in the mid-1990s was launched. About three catch phrases were recorded for the dolls by the actual *seiyū* who were cast in the animation. Fans can enjoy their favourite *seiyū*'s voices or lines by just pressing a little button. *Seiyū*'s

5. Interview with Ms. M, 17 years old, dated 27 July, 2006.

voices are added into traditional figures to create a new type of product.



Fig. 7&8. The Voice I-doll collection of *Gundam Seed Destiny* (up) and *Fullmetal Alchemist* (below).

The ability of deriving new cultural products from an existing cultural form actually is rooted from the common “tie-up strategy” (or media-mix / trans-media) adopted by Japanese producers to keep their businesses running by creating new demands.⁶ Due to its rising importance and popularity, it is

6. Koichi Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 104. For discussion of employing such strategy to promote its products overseas by Panasonic, read also “Kaigai de

no wonder that *seiyū* has become the target of such strategy. Apart from turning *seiyū* itself into commodity through idolization, cultural products also emerge one after another. Some may say that it is a cunning business trick, but from another perspective, it also helps enrich the popular culture by providing new stimuli to both the producers and the consumers.

b) *Seiyū*'s Participation in ACG Production and *Seiyū* Training

Since *seiyū* work a lot for *anime* and electronic games, they can easily become familiar with the production process of the work (dubbing can also be regarded as a part of the production). With the artistic senses and voice acting skills cultivated in the training institutions, it is not surprising that *seiyū* instead of general actors or actresses are more likely to join in the ACG production. Furthermore, some *seiyū* have great passion for ACG products. Their love towards these products is also one of the main reasons why they decide to join the dubbing profession. One good example is Midorikawa Hikaru who is famous for his love of online-games. He reiterated in several interviews that he decided to become a *seiyū* because he loved *anime* and was

tamesaresu terebi taikoku Nippon no jitsuryoku (The Power of Japan who Try to Build an Overseas TV Empire)", *Nikkei Trendy*, March 1995: 31-42.

moved greatly by the *Gundam* series.⁷

Japanese *seiyū* are respected and adored by the fans for their devotion to the characters they play and their conscientiousness towards the profession. Their passion for the ACG products can be revealed through their lively dubbing as well as active participation in the production of *anime*, *manga* and CD Dramas. On the other hand, their conscientiousness is displayed through veteran *seiyū*'s contribution to *seiyū* training and management.

One prominent example of *seiyū*'s participation in ACG production is Koyasu Takehito. Being the voice of such popular characters as Takahashi Ryōsuke in *Initial D* and Kururu in *Keroro Gunsō*, Koyasu has a large following of supporters (especially female fans) not only in Japan, but also in China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Apart from voice dubbing, Koyasu has actively participated in the production of *manga*, *anime*, electronic games, CD drama, radio drama as well as novels.

Table 3: All Works in which Koyasu Has Participated

Name of Works (Releasing Date)	Participation in Production	Genres
<i>Darling II Backlash</i> (2004)	Producer, author	Game

7. For example the Talk Show at the Petit Fancy 2, the ACG events held in Taipei, Frontier 11; interview with Mizushima, see Mizushima Tōru, *Voice!!*, Vol. 2, 166.

<i>Weiß Side B</i> (2003~)	Producer, author	Comics
<i>Fuhai no Teiō</i> (2002)	Producer, author	Novel, radio dramas
<i>Darling</i> (2001)	Producer, author	Game
<i>Lunar Pitris 1 & 2</i> (2001)	Author	Comics
<i>Agnoia II Phrase 2 ~ Michael ~</i> (2000)	Producer	CD Dramas
<i>Agnoia II Phrase 1 ~ Lucifer~</i> (2000)		
<i>Agnoia 1</i> (2000)		
<i>Z/ETA 1-4</i> (1999 ~)	Author	Comics, CD dramas
<i>Crashers Knight and Run I&II</i> (1999-2000)	Producer, author	Radio, CD, CD Dramas
<i>Weiß Kreuz</i> (1998 ~2003)	Producer, author	Media Mix Project (TV anime, CD, CD Dramas, <i>seiyū</i> groups etc.)

Weiß Kreuz is the most famous project of Koyasu. It is an animated series about a group of young professional killers, Ken, Omi, Aya and Yōji. In the daytime, they are gentle young men running a flower shop. At night, they are fierce killers who aim at eliminating all evils in the name of justice. The interesting story and the beautiful character design have attracted a great number of female fans in and outside Japan. The most interesting point of this project is that the character design is based on the *seiyū* who are cast as the characters, Koyasu Takehito, Yūki Hiro, Seki Tomokazu and Miki

Shinichrō (See fig.6&7). The four *seiyū* have formed a group named *Weiß* and are often presented as the same images of the four main characters for promotion or performance. They have released a few records and CD dramas, and have held a number of concerts. This project is a good illustration of the media-mix strategies used under the trend of *seiyū* idolization.



Fig 9 & 10. The four main characters of the popular animated series *Weiß Kreuz*, from left to right: Ken, Aya, Omi and Yōji (up). (Below) The *seiyū* group of *Weiß*, from left to right: Koyasu Takehito (Aya), Yūki Hiro (Omi), Seki Tomokazu (Ken) and Miki Shinichrō (Yōji).

Some experienced *seiyū* may retreat from the frontline and join the production as the sound directors, a post that is put in charge of all sound matters, ranging from dubbing cast, sound effects to background music and related songs. Famous examples are Shigeru Chiba who directed the TV animation *Houshin Engi* (1999), Yoku Shioya who directed the TV animated series *Basilisk: The Kouga Ninja Scrolls* (2005) and Kazuhiko Inoue who is the dubbing director of *Law of Ueki* (2005).

Besides joining in the production of ACG products, some veteran *seiyū* continue to contribute to the profession by teaching voice dubbing or training new talent. For example, Kamiya Akira, the famous *seiyū* who cast Saeba Ryō in *City Hunter*, has taught in Nippon Engineering College and is running his own company, Saeba Shōji, taking jobs including *seiyū* management and in various sound production businesses. Shintani Ryōko and Shimizu Ai who gained great popularity were Kamiya's students at Nippon Engineering College. Another example is Inoue Kazuhiko, the voice actor for Kakashi Hatake in *Naruto*. Inoue has been the sound director for several animated series, such as *Spiral ~Suiri no Kizuna~* (2002) and dubbing director for popular *anime* such as *Tactics* (2004) and *The Law of Ueki* (2005). He

established B-Box Actors School in 2005 to train new *seiyū*. He also ran a column “*Inoue Kazuhiko no Seiyū Yarōze!* (Inoue Kazuhiko’s Let’s Become *Seiyū!*)” in *Seiyū Animedia* magazine since September 2005 as “a *seiyū* lesson” on paper, offering advice on how to become a *seiyū*.⁸

4.2 Social Impact

As the scale of the dubbing profession expands, *seiyū* are getting more media exposure, and the general public has come to understand more about this once “mysterious” profession. On top of the understanding are the public interest and recognition developed for the profession. There are more new *seiyū* being trained, leading to further growth of the profession. Such culture may also help arouse people interests in learning Japanese in other Asian regions.

a) Arousing Attention and Interest towards the Dubbing Profession

As a result of the spread of *seiyū* culture, voice dubbing as a profession has now gained more reputation and recognition in both Japan and such Asian regions as Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan. According to a survey

8. “*Inoue Kazuhiko no Seiyū Yarōze!* (Inoue Kazuhiko’s Let’s Become *Seiyū!*)” started at *Seiyū Animedia*, Vol. 7, September 2005, 56-57.

on dream careers conducted by the girl's *manga* magazine *Nakayoshi* among its readers, *seiyū* was listed along with comic artists and pop idols as a desired career.⁹ There was a recent survey conducted among Japanese primary and secondary students on what jobs they want to do in the future. *Seiyū* (along with singers and other artists) gained the fourth (5.8%) and third (3.5%) place among girls in primary and secondary schools.¹⁰ *Seiyū* have stepped out from the gloomy backstage into the spotlight on stage. Their professional and artistic skills help earn them fame and recognition in Japan.

Although some fans and Hong Kong voice artists regard Japanese *seiyū* as strong rivals to their Hong Kong counterparts, the popularization of Japanese *seiyū* does not necessarily undermine the value of Hong Kong dubbing or force the industry to vanish. Instead the popularization of Japanese *seiyū* promotes awareness of (local) voice-dubbing and a quest for quality dubbing. As commented by a Hong Kong voice actress, “the standard of the audience has risen and their demands on our profession have increased...It has become essential for us to upgrade our skills.”¹¹ Criticism

9. Data quoted in Hotta Junji, *Moemoe Japan*, (Japan: Kōdansya, 2005): 258.

10. <http://www.crn.or.jp/LIBRARY/GAKUSHU/PDF/JOB.PDF>.

11. “Dubbing: The Voices Behind Cartoon Characters,” *Varsity*, November Issue (Hong Kong, 2001): 35.

and demands from fans for high quality products impose pressure on Japanese *seiyū* to maintain or improve their performance. Such demand applies not only to Japanese *seiyū* but also Hong Kong voice artists, leading to greater attention and consciousness towards local voice dubbing. For example, some *seiyū* lovers mentioned in the interviews that they start to notice local voice artists after they become fans of certain Japanese *seiyū*.¹² An experienced local voice actor expressed to me that “I also feel that recently we enjoy more media exposure like magazine interviews, invitation to public events...the popularity of Japanese *seiyū* may have exerted some influences on this.”¹³ From the various discussions in the *seiyū* forums, comparison between Japanese *seiyū* and local voice artists often seems to give more credit to Japanese *seiyū*. However, encouragement and appreciation are also shown towards local voice artists.

Some Hong Kong informants even said that after coming across Japanese *seiyū*, they eventually developed interest in the dubbing profession. An informant, Mr. R developed such a deep interest that he flew to Japan to study in one of the renowned *seiyū* training institutions. Although his

12. For example, Interview with Ms. R, 15 years old, dated 17 July 2006.

13. Interview with Mr. W, dated 11 August 2006.

original aim was to brush up on his Japanese, he was soon attracted to the dubbing profession after some free trial lessons offered by the *seiyū* training school. It was his adoration of Japanese *seiyū* developed from watching anime in Hong Kong, along with the interest towards the profession that made him decide to enroll in Nichinare. In spite of his brilliant results in the institution, he gave up continuing in this career since as a non-Japanese there were too many obstacles to overcome, especially in such a competitive profession.¹⁴ A young informant told me that “after I come across Japanese *seiyū* and then started to pay attention to local voice artists, I feel that it is a pity that this is a profession which is always being neglected, and it seems that only a few people are willing to do this job...I would like to become a voice actress and make this profession more prosperous.”¹⁵ Although not all informants who want to become voice artists have such a mission, they also express that they have thought about becoming a voice actor/actress but soon gave up due to the concern towards one’s ability or the harsh treatment voice artist encountered in reality. All these provide good examples that the fondness towards Japanese *seiyū* among Hong Kong people

14. Interview with Mr. R, 32 years old, dated 26 July 2006.

15. Interview with Ms. R, 15 years old, dated 17 July 2006.

can arouse interest towards local dubbing industry. A veteran voice actor also said to me that some fresh voice artists may join the industry since they have a few beloved *seiyū* or local voice artists.¹⁶

b) Increasing Interest in Learning Japanese Language

The spread of *seiyū* culture into Asian regions such as Hong Kong and Mainland China, not only exports the Japanese cultural product, but also attracts more people to learn Japanese as the second or third language. Since the consumption of *seiyū* products unavoidably involves reading and listening to Japanese, it is quite surprising that the majority of the *seiyū* fans do not necessarily have proficient Japanese. Although the influence of *seiyū* may not be as large as that of *manga* and *anime*, there are *seiyū* fans who want to learn Japanese because of the *seiyū* they admire. Among the *seiyū* fans I have interviewed, 15 out of 40 said that they intend to or have already learned Japanese out of their adoration of Japanese *seiyū*. Most of them said that they want to understand what their favorite *seiyū* are talking about on the radio, CD Dramas or *seiyū* interviews and functions without the help of

16. Interview with voice actor Mr. W, dated 11 August 2006.

translation. An informant interestingly commented that, “Basically, I understand very little (Japanese), yet I love them (her favorite *seiyū*) just the same.”¹⁷ It shows that the understanding of Japanese is not a perquisite among *seiyū* fans, but it is a way for the fans to get closer to the *seiyū* they like.

For those who started learning Japanese for other reasons such as interest or love towards *anime* and *manga*, some also noticed that their motivation to continue learning Japanese had increased, and their listening skills have improved greatly through listening to or watching *seiyū*-related works. An informant told me that at first she was forced to learn Japanese by her mother and did not like it. However after she got to know and love *seiyū*, she now enjoys learning Japanese a lot.¹⁸ Another informant said that after he became attracted by *seiyū*, he started to be fond of the Japanese language, believing that it is a very pleasant language to listen to.¹⁹

Although the influence of *seiyū* culture may not be as great as other forms of Japanese ACG cultures and it remains largely a subculture in Asian

17. Interview with Ms. J, 22 years old, dated 1 August, 2006.

18. Interview with Ms. E, 22 years old, dated 31 July, 2006.

19. Interview with Mr. Y., 22 years old, dated 20 July, 2006

regions outside Japan, the cultural and social impact of such culture is significant. As suggested by Morley and Robins, facing the rising economic and cultural power of Japan in the past two decades, the West has developed a sense of “Japan Panic,” fearing that Japan is planning a “world conquest” through such softer forms of culture and economy.²⁰ However, the introduction of a new culture can bring threat as well as challenge to the traditional culture. According to Homi Bhabha, it is often the encounter of the ‘newness’ brought by the new culture that alleviates and enriches the old cultures to give birth to another new culture.²¹ This best describes the case of Japanese *seiyū*. The positive impact of the rise of *seiyū*, to a large extent, outweighs the negative. Japanese *seiyū* and dubbing profession are indispensable components of ACG products that make the products more attractive. They also help bring in new ideas into the development of new cultural products and provide inspiration for further cultural production. Japanese *seiyū* even take initiatives to participate in ACG production as sound directors or even authors and producers. The professional voice acting skills and various talents displayed by Japanese *seiyū* help the dubbing profession

20. David Morley and Kevin Robins, *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries* (London: Routledge, 1995), 147-154.

21. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), 10.

earn more credit. The passion of the *seiyū* lovers is not only directed to the *seiyū* alone, but also to the profession itself. Adding up with the contribution from veteran *seiyū* on training up new artists and *seiyū* management, the dubbing profession can therefore raise its standards and further expand its scale. The impact of *seiyū* culture is not limited to Japan. The popularization of Japanese *seiyū* in the Asian regions, brings positive challenge instead of threat to the local dubbing profession. *Seiyū* fans are not only demanding consumers urging the local dubbing to raise the dubbing quality, they are sometimes potential voice artists who may join the profession. As the Japanese *seiyū* rise in popularity, local dubbing are recently enjoying more public attention and media exposure. The love towards particular *seiyū* and consumption of Japanese *seiyū* products may also stir up audiences' interest in learning Japanese language. All these show that *seiyū* is actually an important cultural phenomenon that worth more academic investigation.

Chapter 3: The Popularization of the Japanese J-pop

3.1 J-pop Voice Artists in Hong Kong

In Hong Kong (as well as Mainland China, Japan, and other East Asian countries), the music industry has been a significant part of the cultural and economic landscape. The music industry in Hong Kong has a long history, and it has been a major source of entertainment for the local population. The music industry in Hong Kong has been influenced by various factors, including the popularity of Japanese J-pop music. J-pop music has been a major influence on the music industry in Hong Kong, and it has been a significant part of the cultural and economic landscape. The music industry in Hong Kong has been a major source of entertainment for the local population, and it has been a significant part of the cultural and economic landscape.

Part III: Comparative Study on

Japanese *Seiyū* and Hong Kong Voice Artists

Chapter 4: Japanese *Seiyū* and Hong Kong Voice Artists

The purpose of this chapter is to compare the Japanese *Seiyū* and Hong Kong voice artists. The chapter will discuss the history and development of the voice acting industry in both Japan and Hong Kong. It will also explore the similarities and differences between the two industries, and the impact of Japanese J-pop music on the Hong Kong voice acting industry. The chapter will also discuss the role of voice artists in the entertainment industry, and the challenges they face. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the findings and a discussion of the implications for the future of the voice acting industry in both Japan and Hong Kong.

Chapter 5: The Popularization of the Japanese *Seiyū* and

Local Voice Artists in Hong Kong

In Hong Kong (as well as Mainland China), Japanese *seiyū* and local voice artists were once part of a subculture shared only among devoted *anime* and game lovers (*otaku*). The general public or even *anime* lovers may not have noticed who played the characters. Recently, there has been a more attention towards both Japanese *seiyū* and local voice artists in Hong Kong. This chapter investigates the popularity of Japanese *seiyū* and local voice artists in Hong Kong (with some comparison to the situation in Mainland China), through studying the fans reception of such culture.

Data on the popularization of Japanese *seiyū* and local voice artists was collected through an online questionnaire conducted from June to September 2006 in Hong Kong. The information for the discussion on fans' consumption of *seiyū* has gathered through in-depth interviews with 40 *seiyū* fans, my own observation and participation in some internet forums dedicated to *seiyū*, such as *Ai zai Boliguan* (Love in The Glasshall), *Shengse Langji* (VoiceWolf), *Lianshengpi* (Addiction to Voices) and the interaction and

conversation with the *seiyū* fans, dating from October 2005 to present.¹

5.1 Japanese *Seiyū* Steal the Limelight in Hong Kong

a) Reasons for the Rise of *Seiyū* Culture in Hong Kong

Seiyū culture has started to grow in Hong Kong since the mid-1990s.

There are mainly two main reasons for its growth: the popularity of Japanese ACG products, and the availability of pirated discs and online-sharing technology.

Popularity of Japanese ACG Products

Being the major stages for *seiyū*, the widespread of Japanese *anime* and electronic games provides a favorable environment for the growth of such sub-culture. It is also easy to understand why *seiyū* culture was first formed among the ACG lovers. According to Chiu Wing Kai, Japanese *manga* and *anime*, such as *Kimba the White Lion* by Tezuka Osamu and *Obake no Q Tarō* by Fujiki Fujio have been imported into Hong Kong since 1960s, long before the arrival of other cultural products like pop music and fashion.² The 1990s

1. *Ai zai Boligaun* : <http://www.glasshall.net/>

Shengse Langji: <http://shine.228.xuelon.cn/index.php>

Lianshengpi: <http://moriandmiki.huming.com/bbs/Index.asp>

For details about the participant observation methodology, please refer to p. 19-20.

2. Chiu Wing Kai, *Riben manhua xuanfeng xigang ~ ji 60 zhi 80 niandai de fazhang*

marked the golden period of Japanese *anime*, successful works such as *Yuyuhakusho* (1992) and *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995) and *Pokémon* (1997) enjoyed great support audiences in Asian regions. Broadcasting company in Hong Kong therefore tended to import Japanese *anime*. Since Nintendo launched the Famicom in the 1980s, playing electronic games has been one of the popular hobbies for Hong Kong youth. Japanese ACG products not only become an indispensable part of Hong Kong people's entertainment, they are also influential to the local production.³

In recent years, it has become obvious that Japanese pop music and movies have lost their earlier glory partly due to the challenge from the Korean counterparts, Japanese ACG, however, remains strong in Hong Kong. Exchanges and collaboration of Japan and Hong Kong in production have been reduced in music and movies, while exchange and collaboration in ACG industries have become more frequent. For example, the movie *Death Note: The Last Name* which was adapted from the popular comic *Death Note*

licheng (Japanese Comics Storming Hong Kong ~the development from 60s-80s~), *Xin Wan Bao*, 5 June, 1988.

3. For discussion on the impact of Japanese ACG products on local production in Hong Kong and other Asian regions, see Ng Wai-ming, "The Impact of Japanese Comics and Animation in Asia", *Journal of Japanese Trade & Industry*, July/August (Hong Kong: 2002), 30-33 and "Ribben manhua dui xianggang manhuajie ji liuxing wenhua de yingxiang (The Impact of Japanese Comics on Hong Kong Comics and Popular Culture)", *The Twenty-first Century* 7, (Hong Kong: 2002), 105-115.

was a great hit in 2006, achieving the first-day box-office in-take of about 1.8 million HK dollars, making it the highest first-day box-office in 2006. Hong Kong was chosen as the site for the first showing of the movie. This proved that Hong Kong audiences and readers still welcomed Japanese ACG products, and Japanese manufacturers, at the same time, regard Hong Kong as one of its important overseas markets. There is also a trend for Hong Kong producers to adapt Japanese *manga* into films. Two recent examples are *Bokkō* (Battle of Mozi) and *Shamo* (Gamecock). The popularity of ACG products provides more chances for audiences to listen to the original Japanese dubbing. *Seiyū* whose voices help shape the personalities of the impressive characters from *anime* and games would also catch the attention of the audiences who are fond of such characters.

Availability of Pirated Discs and Online-sharing Technology

Before the prevalence of internet and VCDs or DVDs, Hong Kong audiences watched locally-dubbed *anime* released by TV Companies and seldom had opportunities to listen to the original Japanese versions. With the prevalence of pirated discs in VCDs or DVDs formats of Japanese anime

and electronic games audiences now have more access to the *anime* voiced by Japanese *seiyū* and the circulation of works have increased in both speed and volume.⁴ Before the popularization of VCDs and DVDs, original Japanese anime were circulated in the form of video cassette tapes (VHS). Since VHS were inconvenient for storage and the quality of the recorded contents would drop over time, it was soon replaced by compact discs. However, the prices of the authorized version are quite high. This provided a good market for the emergence of cheap pirated discs. These pirated versions are either locally made or made in Mainland China. The low prices of the discs attract even Japanese and other foreign buyers. Instead of dubbing the work, subtitles were put up and the original Japanese voices were kept in these pirated discs, providing more opportunities for the audiences to listen to the dubbing by Japanese *seiyū*.

In the past few years, pirated products have been seriously combatted by the Hong Kong Customs and Excise Department. However, due to the

4. Although piracy is illegal, it has played an important role in the popularizing Japanese popular culture in Asia. For a discussion on the impact of pirated discs, see Yuk-Ming Leung, "Japanese Holiday in Daily Life? Local (Hong Kong) Consumption of *Long Vacation*", *Envisage: A Journal Book of Chinese Media Studies*, No.1 (2002): 71-74, Ng Wai-Ming, "Reben Liuxing Wenhua zai Xiangkang de Bendihua Xianxiang Yuanyin Chutan (A Brief Investigation into the Reasons of Localized Japanese Popular Culture in Hong Kong)", in *Reben Wenhua cai Xiangkang* (Japanese Culture in Hong Kong), ed. Lee Pui-tak (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006), 176-177.

prevalence of internet and online sharing technology, such as BT and Winmx, audiences can instantly download the latest *anime* and games themselves. They now do not need to wait for the suppliers of the pirated discs and they may have the works they like for free. To facilitate easy consumption of these on-line works, web-communities have started organizing their own subtitling teams. These subtitling teams are surprisingly efficient that the “fans-subbed” video can be put up the next day after its broadcast in Japan. There are also websites such as Youtube where people can upload and download videos for convenient on-line sharing and watching. *Time* also noted the great impact of Youtube by choosing this new on-line sharing channel as the cover story of the issue on 1 January 2007. “Power To The People” is an insight provided by the widespread of Youtube.⁵ It also makes each one of us who sit in front of the computer the “person of the Year”, highlighting the rising power and initiatives held in audiences’ hands.⁶ With internet and these file sharing technologies, *seiyū* fans can exchange resources with other fans, find out more information about the *seiyū* they like and interact with fans from different regions. It is a good illustration of how

5. Jeremy Caplan, Kathleen Kingsbury, Susan Jakes, Jeffrey Ressler, Grant Rosenberg and Byran Walsh, “POWER TO THE PEOPLE”, *Time*, 1 January 2007: 24-38.

6. Richard Stengel, “Now It’s Your Turn”, *Time*, 1 January 2007:6.

“people shape the technology to fit their own needs.”⁷

b) Chinese fans Activities and Consumption of Japanese *Seiyū* Products

Seiyū supporters value not only the creative stories and beautiful artworks, which Japanese ACG are renowned for, but also the *seiyū* who bring life to their favorite characters, giving rise to *lianshang zhu* (恋声族, the group of *seiyū* lovers). Though the scale of such group is still small when compared to that in Japan, the enthusiasm of these *seiyū* lovers is as keen as that of their Japanese counterparts. For example, in the web communities, there are sometimes more than ten pieces of *seiyū* products, (such as CD dramas, or fan-subbed *seiyū* events) uploaded each day for free sharing, and many supporters spend time and effort to translate the CD drama or *seiyū*'s personal diaries and interviews into Chinese.⁸ On the day of a *seiyū*'s birthday, his or her fans (both Japanese and Chinese) will put up more dubbing works which features that particular *seiyū* for sharing on the web. Some may make special presents, such as e-books (booklet in electronic format), videos or sound clips that they combine from several different clips.

7. Manuel Castells, *The Rise of The Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 393.

8. *Ai zai Boligaun*: <http://www.glasshall.net/home.htm>

Fans' response towards the car accident of Kamiya Hiroshi provides good illustration of fans' love for *seiyū*. Kamiya has been cast in popular works, such as *Honey and Clover* (Takemoto Yūta) and *Samurai Warriors 2* (Azai Nagamasa), and is well-received especially among female audiences. A fan of Kamiya called for others to send blessing messages to a Japanese website that organized such message to be sent directly to Kamiya.⁹ Despite knowing only a little of Japanese, most fans tried to write their messages in Japanese, hoping that Kamiya would recover from the coma soon. Webmasters of the web community *Lianshengpi* have set up a memorial website to mourn for Suzuoki Hirotaka, who died of lung cancer on 6 August 2006.¹⁰ The most famous characters Suzuki has cast were Shiryu from *Saint Seiya* and Hyūga Kojirō from *Captain Tsubasa*. The website not only provides information on Suzuoki's works and contribution, it also offers a channel for fans to express their respect towards Suzuoki and grief towards his death. There have been over three hundred messages posted since the launch of the website on 10 August 2006. Although most forums and web

9. Notice to Call for Blessing Messages posted by a fan on *Liangshengpi*:
<http://moriandmiki.huming.com/bbs/Show.asp?id=14942&BoardID=25&TB=1>
Specific Website For the Blessing Message Project:
<http://www.rx.sakura.ne.jp/~forget/kikaku1.html>

10. Shrine for Suzuki Hirotaka san: <http://www.jiniantang.cn/tomb.asp?moid=218>

communities were founded by *seiyū*'s fans from Mainland China, Hong Kong *seiyū* fans also play a part and actively join in various discussions and resources sharing.

From the in-depth interviews I conducted with *seiyū* fans from Hong Kong and Mainland China, I found different consumption patterns among fans in these two regions.¹¹ When asked “how do you show support to your beloved *seiyū*”, Hong Kong fans would usually buy magazines, CDs or other *seiyū* related products. In past few years, there have been more *seiyū* products such as *seiyū* magazines, CD albums or DVD available at shops selling Japanese products in Mongkok, reflecting the rising demands for *seiyū* products. Only a few Hong Kong fans would participate in fan production, such as fan-dubbing or fan fiction.



Fig 1. *Say You Wait for Me*, Vol.1, a local *doujinshi* about Japanese *seiyū*.

11. The interviewees are either recruited from the web communities dedicated to Japanese *seiyū* and dubbing or introduced by friends and *seiyū* fans interviewed. For details of the interviews, please refer to P.17-18.

Say You Wait for Me (1997) was one such exception (fig.1). It was a Hong Kong *doujinshi* dedicated to Japanese *seiyū*. It includes an introduction to popular Japanese *seiyū* and animated works, as well as a few interviews with local voice artists of ATV.

A more recent example is *Sakura*, a *doujinshi* that was sold in Comics World 23 (fig. 12).¹² It is a fan publication for Sakurai Takahiro. The book is a short comic comedy about a young man trying hard to rescue his family business (an entertainment agency) by scouting new potential idols. All characters in the comics are *anime* characters that are played by Sakurai, including Shibuya Yūri in *Kyo Kara Maoh!*, Haruka in *Tactics* and Yamazaki Susumu in *Peacemaker Kurogane*. Though small in scale, this kind of production is actually the product of fans' enthusiasm towards comic production, combining with their adoration towards their beloved *seiyū*.

12. Comic World is held twice a year in Hong Kong. It is the largest market for Hong Kong ACG lovers to publish their self-financed works related to ACG.



Fig 12. *Sakura*, a local *doujinshi* dedicated to Japanese *seiyū* Sakurai Takahiro

Fans from Mainland China engage more devotedly in online file sharing, because *seiyū* magazines and other products are hardly available. They are also involve more in fans production, such as fan fiction, fan dubbing and fan-subbing. Some web communities will organize group production of fan drama, in which fans have to imitate original *seiyū*'s voices. One example is the fans group Wangwang Qingyuan BL Tongren Guangbuo Zu (Love of the Prince of Tennis Fans Drama Group).¹³ The voices of characters in the radio drama are cast by voluntary *seiyū* fans. Original screenplays for the radio dramas are written by fans as well.

13. Notice put up in the web community *Wangwang Qingyuan* on the establishment of the fans drama group: <http://www.wwqybbs.com/cat520/archiver/?tid-4375.html>

5.2 Hong Kong Voice Artists Move out from the Backstage

Compared to Japanese *seiyū*, local voice artists seem to have a relatively low-profile (usually remaining backstage) and are less popular in Hong Kong. However, they also have their own devoted supporters, and such groups of supporters actually emerge before the *seiyū* culture arrived in Hong Kong. Although the degree of devotion displayed may not be as great as the *seiyū* fans, the fans of local voice artists show supports in their own way, as an informant commented, “the voice artists do their best silently, so we support them silently.”¹⁴ Another informant, Ms. I, said she write a letter to the voice actor she likes about once a month.¹⁵

Some fans of Hong Kong voice artists took a more active stance. In 1997, a group of Hong Kong voice artists supporters set up the Fan Club for Hong Kong Dubbing Artists, Voice, Characters and Art Studio (HKVCAS). It is the only registered legal fan organization for local voice artists in Hong Kong. It aims to promote understanding towards local voice artists and the dubbing profession, provide an arena for fans to exchange opinions and offer

14. Interview with Mr. K, 20 year old, dated 11 August 2006.

15. Interview with Ms. I, 27 years old, dated 7 August 2006.

opportunities for members to get in touch with the voice artists.¹⁶ The club organizes various activities, such as member meetings, dramas appreciation, camping, and voice artists' talk shows. The most well-known activity is the voice artists' talk show held in Comic World 16, 17 and 20, a popular ACG event that are held in various regions such as, Hong Kong, Taiwan, the US and so on. Through such activities, the distance between fans and voice artists is greatly reduced. The organizers of the Club also help promote understanding of the local dubbing profession by writing articles for some ACG related magazines, such as *A-Club* (publication stopped in May 2001) and *Ani-Wave*. Its contribution towards promoting local dubbing has aroused the interest of the media and voice artists themselves. The Club was interviewed by *Ming Pao* and *Sing Pao Newspaper* in October 1997 and Cable TV in January 2003. The voice artists were willing to join the activities organized by the Club. For example, Tsang Sau Ching with her four-year-old daughter became the guests of the seventh anniversary party of the Club in August 2004. Kwok Chi Kuen also joined the Christmas buffet the club members in December 1999.

16. Fan Club of Hong Kong Dubbing Artists, Voice, Characters and Art Studio, <http://www.hkvcas.org/hkdub/hkdub.htm>.

The internet also serves as a good platform for fan communication. There are a number of newsgroups that are set up for fans to exchange ideas and information on Hong Kong dubbing. Newsgroups such as, the Dubbing Valley, and the HKVCAS Valley are for general discussion on local dubbing.¹⁷ There are also newsgroups dedicated to particular voice artists. For example, popular voice artists, such as Leung Siu Ha, Chan Yan and Kwong Shu Pui also have a specific newsgroup. Sometimes, the voice artists will also participate in the discussion in these newsgroups, responding to questions or chatting with their supporters. One informant said “I like local voice artists more because I feel closer to them...It does not mean that Japanese *seiyū* are not friendly, but local voice artists are not so out of reach...”¹⁸ Being close to the supporters is one of the great attractions of local voice artists that Japanese *seiyū* lack.

Apart from communicating with other fans and voice artists, fans can freely make use of homepages, blogs, BBS and newsgroups to publish their comments and criticisms about local dubbing. Such comments and

17. Dubbing Valley: <news://news.animehk.com/ahk.dub>
HKVCAS Valley:
http://globe.visualmedia.com.hk/vm.php?search_txt=&group=dub.hkvcas
18. Interview with Mr. P, 24 years old, dated 5 August 2006.

criticisms sometimes serve as a good reference for the voice artists to further improve their skills. Another kind of fan production is *doujinshi* (publication by fans). In 2003, a group of local voice artist fans published a *doujinshi* titled *The Voice Project* (fig.13). This *doujinshi* includes original comics, criticisms of voice artists' performance, personal data and interviews of local voice artists. There is an interesting short story on a popular local voice artist, Leung Wai Tak, who was asked to dress as the cartoon character he dubbed to attend the Comic World.



Fig. 13 *The Voice Project*, the first HK *doujinshi* about local voice artists

Fans' responses to the death of Lo So Kuen (voice actress of Nobita in *Doraemon*) in July 2006 provide the best illustration of the enthusiasm of

local voice artists fans. Once the shocking news was released, there were flows of messages posted on different forums, BBS and blogs by not only voice artists' fans but also by *anime* lovers. Most people expressed their deep sadness of losing a brilliant voice actress as well as an "old friend" who has accompanied them for over ten years. The following comments were common on all internet platforms:

"We will remember her voice forever!"

"It seems that we have lost part of our childhood!"¹⁹

A fan even went to the funeral of Lo So Kuen to mourn for this professional voice actress and posted his experience and feelings about the funeral to a newsgroup.²⁰ Some fans criticized the indifferent attitude of TVB towards the death of Lo. Such responses not only showed respect for a professional voice artist by the audiences, but also display the "limited attention" of the TV company for which the voice artists' work.

19. "Nobita Lost His Voice; Fans Lost their Childhood; Voice Actress Lo So Kuen Died; Fans Make Mourning Banner", *Hong Kong Economics Times*, 26 July 2006.

20. Report on Lo's funeral posted on HKVCAS Valley:

http://globe.visualmedia.com.hk/vm.php?search_txt=&group=dub.hkvcas

5.3 The Comparison of the Reception of Japanese *Seiyū* with That of

Local Voice Artists in Hong Kong

Japanese *seiyū* and Hong Kong voice artists have their own dedicated supporters. Although Japanese *seiyū* and local voice artists can be seen as rivals, their fans do not hold hostile feelings against each other. There are even fans who support both *seiyū* and local voice artists. However, as audiences now have more channels to listen to original Japanese dubbing, comparisons of the performance of Japanese *seiyū* and local voice artists (especially the performance in animation) are often made in the online discussions between fans. Although extreme comments such as “I just can’t stand the Chinese dubbing (for animation)”, “listening to Chinese dubbing makes me sick” were sometimes made by audiences from Mainland China, most fans took a milder attitude.²¹ They believe that local dubbing also has its own merits, but cannot match the good quality of Japanese dubbing. The result of the questionnaire I conducted revealed that about 52% of the general public believe there is a great difference between Japanese *seiyū* and Hong Kong voice artists’ dubbing quality. However, interviews with *seiyū* fans

21. For discussion on the performance of Chinese voice artists and Japanese *seiyū* in *anime*, visit threads of posts in *Shengselangji*: <http://shine.228.xuelon.cn/read.php?tid=23228> and <http://shine.228.xuelon.cn/read.php?tid=18089&fpage=13>.

reveal a slightly different picture. Most of the *seiyū* fans I interviewed on one hand expressed their passion to the *seiyū* they like. On the other hand, they showed appreciation of local voice artists as well. An informant who is a fan of Miki Shinichirō even said that “for some works, like *Yuyuhakusho*, I think that the local (Hong Kong) dubbing are much better than the Japanese ”.²² Some fans noted that the quality of local dubbing fluctuates greatly depending on which dubbing companies or TV broadcast companies are responsible for the dubbing. They think that the skills of the local artists who are employed by TVB are just as good, and what they lack is often the rich emotional expression since they do not have much time to study and got involved in the characters.

Another difference is the professional training. My questionnaire showed that about 56% of the respondents regard professional training as the largest difference between Japanese *seiyū* and Hong Kong voice artists. Most fans I interviewed may not know about the professional training available for dubbing professionals in Japan and Hong Kong, but generally expressed that there is a little training offered in Hong Kong, while there are

22. Interview with Ms. C, 23 years old, dated 18 July 2006.

specific schools for voice acting in Japan. Some fans also related such lack of institutional professional training to lower dubbing quality.²³

The most noticeable difference between Japanese *seiyū* and Hong Kong voice artists as revealed by both my questionnaire (about 57% of respondents) and the interviews with *seiyū* fans and local voice artists is the social status and recognition. Most informants including local voice artists themselves think that except for fans or animation lovers, the general public and even the TV and production companies do not pay much attention to dubbing.²⁴ As a local voice actress said, “In Japanese, *yū* means artist and *seiyū* are artists who perform with their voices. In Hong Kong, *dubber* only refers to those who read the lines and narration.” The title can already reflect the perception towards the whole profession.²⁵ “I think we can call them (Japanese *seiyū*) ‘stars’,” an informant casually remarked.²⁶ Japanese *seiyū* are no longer merely dubbers, or technicians who read out the lines or narration in other languages mechanically. Rather, they have become all-rounded idols (*talent*) who participate in various entertainment businesses.

23. For example, interview with Ms. Y, 21 years old, dated 24 July 2006.

24. Interview with voice actress, Ms. P, dated 10 September 2006.

25. Interview with voice actress, Ms. S, dated 11 September 2006.

26. Interview with Ms. S, 15 years old, dated 25 July 2006.

Hong Kong voice artists are respected by their fans or some audiences, but the job concentrates on dubbing. Two informants pointed out that even the local voice artists themselves have held such perceptions.²⁷ Such difference can be attributed to the limited scope of works of local voice artists. “How can we respect them (Hong Kong voice artists) when we don’t even know them?” an informant bitterly asked.²⁸ Limited scope of works means less media exposure as well as fewer channels for audiences to listen to their performances. This becomes a large obstacle for local voice artists to catch up with their Japanese counterparts.

Facilitated by the development of internet technology and the popularity of Japanese ACG, *seiyū* culture took root in Hong Kong in the 1990s. The formation of web communities brought forth by the prevalence of the internet plays an important role in spread of *seiyū* culture. According to Howard Rheingold, such communities are “the social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal

27. Interview with Ms. I, 27 years old, dated 7 August 2006 and Mr. Y, 22 years old, dated 20 July 2006.

28. Interview with Ms. C, 23 years old, dated 18 July 2006.

relationships in cyberspace.”²⁹ The web community is not just a public sphere for expressing ideas and getting information. Rather, emotional commitment and dedication are also invested. *Seiyū* fans not only take the initiative to consume *seiyū* products through the communities. They also form a powerful group to maintain and promote the *seiyū* cultures because of their devotion and passion towards such cultures. Through sharing resources online and actively engaging in fan production, such as writing fans’ criticism and fan fiction, producing fans-dubbed animation or CD dramas, as well as publishing *doujinshi*, more people now turn their attention to this rising culture or prefer Japanese dubbing.³⁰ When Japanese *seiyū* gain more fans, Hong Kong voice artists continue to receive support from their faithful fans. Fans set up fan clubs as well as newsgroups to show their support and to interact with the voice artists they respect. In recent years, Hong Kong voice artists have enjoyed more media exposure through attending more public functions. Fans’ responses towards the accidents or deaths of popular Japanese *seiyū* and local voice actresses illustrate fans’ enthusiasm.

29. Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1993), 5.

30. Result of the questionnaire shows that about 78% of respondents will generally choose Japanese dubbing rather than local one. Voice actress Ms P. also mentioned in the interview dated 10 September 2006 that she found that Hong Kong people tend to prefer Japanese dubbing.

Although Japanese *seiyū* and Hong Kong voice artists have their own supporters, local voice artists are different from *seiyū* in social status, scope of work, professional training and dubbing quality. The greatest divergence lies in the social status voice artists enjoyed. It is greatly related to other perceptual differences in scope of works, and quality of training and dubbing. As fans generally believe that Hong Kong voice artists receive less professional training than Japanese *seiyū*, they are likely to relate this to lower dubbing quality. Moreover, there are a few channels to know more about local voice artists because of the limited scope of work, audiences will seldom regard this as a profession that deserves much respect. The next chapter will further investigate the phenomenon of the divergent popularity and status of Japanese *seiyū* and Hong Kong voice artists through a comparative approach.

Chapter 6: Comparison of the Dubbing Profession between

Japan and Hong Kong

The interplay of the locality and the globalism is often highlighted in the study of globalization. From the modernization and Americanization (homogenization) perspective to cultural imperialism, the receiving culture is believed to be under great threat under the overwhelming power of the foreign culture. The power of “local” and recipient cultures are emphasized and celebrated under the concept of “glocalization” and “hybridity”. Jameson also points out that whether the imported culture can bring harm or good to the local culture depends not solely on the power of the imported culture, but also the needs of the locality and how the locality takes in such foreign impact.¹

Looking into the rise of *seiyū* culture in Hong Kong, it may seem that *seiyū* has won over the local voice artists. Along with the growing popularization of Japanese *seiyū* and attention towards local voice artists in Hong Kong, there are inevitably increasing comparisons made by the

1. Fredric Jameson, “Globalization as Philosophical Issue” in *The Cultures of Globalization*, eds F. Jameson and M. Miyoshi (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1998), 69-73.

audiences on their performance and the profession as a whole.² The most obvious differences between the profession in Japan and Hong Kong lies in the status and recognition, as most of my informants noted. Although some audiences appreciate both Japanese and local dubbing, the majority of respondents have given more credit to Japanese *seiyū* and some may even criticize local dubbing. The results of the questionnaires show that among those who have listened to both Japanese and local dubbing, about 96.8% of people rank the quality of Japanese *seiyū* as very good (66.8 %) and good (about 30%), without any votes to the “not satisfactory” and “poor” categories, while only about 7.1% of people rank the Hong Kong counterparts as very good and 37% as good (Fig.14&15).

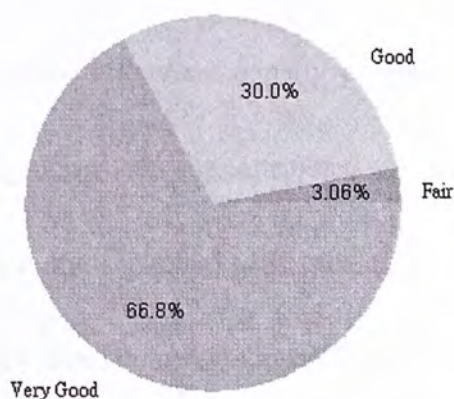


Fig.14 Results on the question “what do you think about the quality of Japanese Dubbing?”

2. Similar phenomenon also occurs in other Asian regions, such as Mainland China and Taiwan, but my research focuses on the situation in Hong Kong.

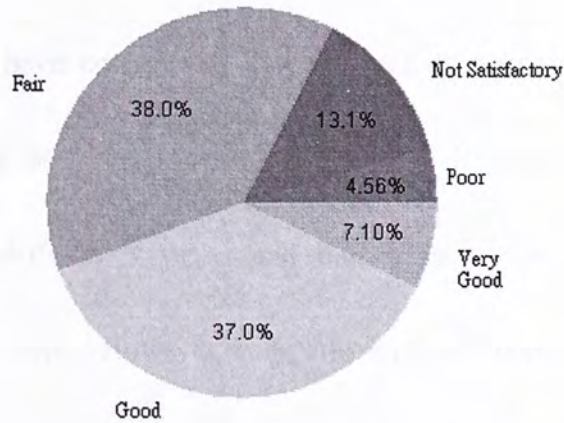


Fig 15. Results on the question “what do you think about the quality of Local Dubbing?”

Comments like “local dubbing is just like reading, without emotions”, “local dubbing does not work” can be found at some web communities set up for fans of Japanese *seiyū* and local voice artists.³ Informants who support both *seiyū* and local voice artists also reveal that on the average the Japanese dubbing is better than local dubbing, although they believe that Japanese *seiyū* and local voice artists are equally professional. Such divergence in status and recognition can be attributed to the fundamental structural differences such as the scale and affiliation of the profession, as well as the role dubbing plays in the cultural industry in Hong Kong and Japan.

3. See for example, *Lianshengpi*: <http://moriandmiki.huming.com/bbs/Index.asp> and *Shengselangji*, <http://shine.228.xuelon.cn/index.php>.

6.1 Structural Differences in Dubbing Profession

Not a few have commented that although Japanese *seiyū* and local voice artists both perform professional dubbing, it seems that they are working in two different systems and thus it is unfair to make direct comparison of the two. However, comparison of the dubbing profession in Japan and Hong Kong does shed light on why Hong Kong voice artists are not as popular as their Japanese counterparts.

a) Scale of the Profession

According to the *Voice Actor Directory 2006* and *Voice Actress Director 2006*, the supplementary booklet issued by the long-standing *seiyū* magazine *Seiyū Grand Prix*, there are 496 professional female *seiyū* and 452 professional male *seiyū*. When compared to 2005, the number has increased by around 20%. There have been new members entering the profession every year as students graduate from various training institutions, leading to keen competition and high turnover that help maintain quality dubbing.

An experienced Hong Kong voice actor who has worked as a professional voice actor for more than 30 years in Hong Kong revealed in an

interview that, the number of people now working in the dubbing industry (including those who work for television broadcast companies and small dubbing companies, full-time, part time or free-lance) is actually no more than 200. It is because the employing companies can absorb no more new voice artists due to budget constraints and the enormous cost of training new “employees”.⁴ As a result, it is easy for the audience to get an impression that “there are always those same voices being heard over and over again...it’s quite boring”.⁵ The profession tends to remain a static field in which new stimulation and competition from new talent are limited, resulting in a slower progress in the profession’s development.

b) Scope of Works

Chapter two introduced the diversified works of Japanese *seiyū*, including dubbing, radio, CD dramas, singing, radio *personality* (host), narration, CMs and promotional functions. Voice artists in Hong Kong usually focus on dubbing for animation or foreign TV dramas, and narration for TV programs. Dubbing for movies or animation that are shown in

4. Interview with voice actor Mr. W, dated 11 August 2006.

5. Interview with Mr. E, 25 years old, dated 4 September 2006 and interview with Ms. M, 19 years old, dated 11 September 2006.

cinema are often done by famous singers or movie stars, except for long-standing works like *Doraemon* since the audiences have become accustomed to the characters' voices. Dubbing for electronic games are limited as local game production is not rich. They seldom perform works other than dubbing, but they are sometimes invited to appear on radio programs, at large-scale ACG events like Comics World and activities organized by various ACG-related associations of different universities. Only a few participate in theater plays and radio dramas. Although the media exposure of local voice artists can by no means compare to that of Japanese *seiyū*, it is obvious that local voice artists are now gaining more attention than before. For example, the local ACG magazine *Ani-Wave*, starting from volume 113 (15/7/2006), has published interviews with local voice artists alternately with the latest news about Japanese *seiyū*. The death of Ms. Lo So Kuen, the voice actress who played Nobita (*Da xiong*) in the *Doraemon* series also aroused great media concern. Now.com, a paid TV service offered by internet-provider Netvigator, has recently launched a TV advertisement with cartoons that resemble *Captain Tsubasa* and has invited the local voice actress, Yuen Shuk Chen, who played Captain Tsubasa, to dub

in the advertisement.

c) Affiliation of Voice Artists

The Japanese dubbing profession is well-known for its unique management system. Each professional *seiyū* usually belongs to an agency, which acts as the middleman between the *seiyū* and the production side. Due to the keen competition in this profession, the agencies are willing to promote their own *seiyū* and control the dubbing quality in order to maintain their competitiveness in the profession. Launching promotional events designed for *seiyū*, and commodifying *seiyū* as idols are inevitable commercial strategies.

In Hong Kong, voice artists are usually employed by television broadcasting companies or small animation or dubbing companies.⁶ The primary aim of these companies is to produce as many as dubbed works as possible. Quality may sometimes be sacrificed to meet the tight schedule. Some local voice artists have expressed in their interviews that they seldom

6. The dubbing team of Asia Television Limited (ATV) was dismissed in 2001, and Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB) has around 60 people in its dubbing team. The remaining two-third would work in small animation production companies or sound recording and dubbing companies, as well as working as free-lance voice artists who do not belong to a particular company. Cable TV usually employs voice artists from dubbing companies or free-lancers.

have time to study the scripts or to understand more about the characters.⁷

Moreover, the companies will not have the intention to promote their “employees”.

d) Professional Training

As we have seen in chapter 1, generally, a Japanese *seiyū* has to undergo three to four years *seiyū* training to obtain the qualification to become a professional *seiyū*. They are trained in specialized training centers or special dubbing and narration division in the university. The training is comprehensive, including not only voice projecting, knowledge about the profession, (voice) acting, but also dancing and singing lessons that help cultivate aesthetic senses.

However, the Hong Kong dubbing profession lacks regular professional training courses, let alone any specialized institutions for professional voice acting training. Dubbing classes are usually offered when the TV broadcasting company wants to recruit new talent, or as an interest class for youngsters. The professional training class usually last for only four to six

7. For example, interview with voice actor Mr. W, dated 11 August 2006.

months. The classes provide training in acting and dubbing, but the practice may not be adequate. Therefore, the voice artists have to improve their skills through observing and imitating a more experienced voice artist, practising and accumulating dubbing experiences.

The wide coverage of Japanese *seiyū* training has equipped *seiyū* with enough skills to take up different jobs like singing, acting in musicals or movies, while local voice artists can only concentrate on voice acting. This poses great limitations on the platforms they can perform so as to gain more popularity.

e) Operation of the Profession

In Japan, casting is mainly done through auditions. Interested agencies may send suitable *seiyū* to compete for the cast. Although there are cases in which the cast are appointed by the production side, the audition usually allows both veteran and new *seiyū* to compete on an equal basis. In this way, the production side can make sure that the voices selected best suit the characters. The sound director will supervise all sound related elements including dubbing, sound effects and music used in the programs. They will

give feedback and advice to *seiyū* on how to read the lines and express their emotions. *Seiyū* may sometimes make spontaneous changes to their lines without prior notice to the director or other *seiyū*, demanding a quick response and cooperation from their partners.

A Hong Kong voice actor once expressed at an open talk dated 13 October 2007 that auditions were usually held for large-scale productions such as Disney movies in Hong Kong. For animation shown in cinemas or TV commercials, the dubbing cast, most of the time, was chosen by the production side of the work. For foreign TV dramas or imported cartoons and animation series, the cast was decided by the dubbing director.

The dubbing director is familiar with the special characteristics of each voice artists. Once there are jobs, the dubbing director is then responsible for selecting the most suitable voice artist to make up the cast. Unlike the sound director in Japan, the dubbing director concentrates largely on supervising the dubbing process or selecting cast members. They also need to have a thorough understanding of the work and give advice and feedback to *seiyū* on how to present the characters.

The following table summarizes differences in the dubbing profession

in Japan and Hong Kong:

Table 4: Summary of the Similarities and Differences between the Dubbing Profession in Japan and Hong Kong

	Japanese <i>Seiyū</i>	Hong Kong Voice Artists
Scale of the Profession	~ large (more than a thousand) ~ new talent constantly flow in	~ small (around 200 for the whole industry) ~ new talent cannot flow in easily
Scope of Works	~ diversification of work, including dubbing, singing stage performance	~ concentrate on dubbing (esp. for TV animated series and foreign TV dramas)
Affiliation of Voice Artists	~ independent <i>seiyū</i> management agency → more promotion	~ mainly television broadcast companies → no promotion
Professional Training	~ specialized training centers ~ three to four years comprehensive training	~ dubbing class (by television broadcast company) ~ four to six months dubbing and acting training
Operation of the Profession	~ casting through audition	~ cast decided by dubbing director

Such differences reveal that the Japanese dubbing profession can allow more competition that motivates *seiyū* to improve their dubbing quality to maintain competitiveness. The strict and professional training equip the

new *seiyū* with sufficient skills to perform quality dubbing. The comprehensiveness of the training also makes the diversification of work possible for Japanese *seiyū*. Engaging in various work and the active promotion launched by the management agencies provide audiences with more chances to get in touch with *seiyū*'s work and develop interest in or admiration of them.

In contrast, Hong Kong voice artists can hardly get publicized as there are no promotional events and their work is limited to dubbing TV dramas and animated series. In the interviews with Hong Kong informants, when they are asked if they should support local dubbing, most informants would not hesitate to say yes, but they would say that they did not have enough channels to know more about the local voice artists even though they want to.⁸ Some Hong Kong informants also said that the professional training of local voice artists are inadequate and the voice acting skills of some local voice artists, especially those employed by small dubbing companies, are not always satisfactory.⁹ All these lead to an impression that Japanese *seiyū* are more professional and all-rounded, and that Japanese dubbing generally has a

8. For example, interview with Mr. R, 32 years old, dated 26 July 2006.

9. For example, interview with Ms. A, 18 years old, dated 25 July 2006.

better quality.

6.2 The Role of Voice Dubbing in Popular Culture

The dubbing profession and voice artists in Hong Kong and Japan play different roles in the popular culture of the two regions. If Japanese *seiyū* are the representatives of the original characters, then Hong Kong voice artists can be seen as translators bridging the original products and the local audiences. The dubbing profession is undoubtedly important to other popular forms of culture such as animation and electronic games. Just imagine watching a silent animation. Then it is easy to understand that without the dubbing profession, the related fields will definitely lose much of its attraction.

Original Production vs. Reproduction

As shown by the results of the questionnaire, about 78% of people prefer listening to the Japanese dubbing, and for those who do not quite understand Japanese or can only grasp some simple words, about 51 % will still prefer Japanese dubbing even without the aid of Chinese subtitles.

Besides thinking that the performance of Japanese *seiyū* is better, most people believe that the Japanese dubbing is more “original”.

Walter Benjamin suggests that an original artwork possesses an “aura”, a kind of uniqueness and authenticity that is created once the original work is produced. He argues that the emergence of technological reproduction led to the decay of “aura”, since people are now satisfied with the reproductions and have a strong desire to “get closer” to the original through possessing the reproduction.¹⁰ For example, audiences may prefer music records, movies or photographs that can be repetitively produced and consumed at their own convenience.

However, the popularization of *seiyū* culture actually displays the audiences’ desire to directly “get closer” to originality and authenticity. When some of the *seiyū* fans I interviewed talked about the attractions of Japanese *seiyū* or why they prefer Japanese over the local dubbing, they would say “local dubbing cannot give one the feeling that ‘that’s the voice of the character,” or “the local dubbing cannot fit into the characters.” Some would say “Japanese *seiyū* help create the characters” or “Because it is

10. Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility Third Version”, M. Bullock and M. Jennings, eds., *Selected Writings Vol.4* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1996), 251-283.

Japanese work, Chinese dubbing is ... awkward...Japanese dubbing is more natural and original.”¹¹ The audiences generally regard Japanese dubbing and Japanese *seiyū* as part of the original production or one of the elements that constitute the “aura” of a particular animation or electronic game.¹² Local dubbed works are then regarded as secondary and inferior to the Japanese original.

The most salient example of “Japanese as the original” was the “*Fullmetal Alchemist Incident*”. Fans of the animation show a vigorous response towards the TVB usual practice of rendering the animation theme song into Chinese. Even before the Chinese theme song sung by Eason Chan was broadcast, the company received complaints that the Chinese version severely damaged the original essence. Some fans even proposed a demonstration against such practices.

A few informants from Hong Kong and Mainland China regard Japanese and local dubbing as two different original productions, each with its own “aura”. One said, “Japanese and local dubbing are two different

11. Interview with Ms. Y., 21 years old, dated 24 July 2006; interview with Mr. R., 32 years old, dated 26 July 2006; interview with Ms. J, 16 years old, dated 30 August 2006.

12. Although Walter Benjamin applied the concept of “aura” to traditional artworks, I believe it can also be applied to the original production of popular cultural products.

things that cannot be compared...they have different attractions.”¹³ For animated series such as *Doraemon*, that were part of the childhood of many Hong Kong people, the local dubbing is, in the general public’s hearts, actually “the original”. When they turned back to listen to the Japanese dubbing, they may regard that as odd and may not be able to get used to the Japanese version. When the VCDs or DVDs of these popular works are released, the “original TVB cast” is often highlighted on the cover to attract consumers. In this case, the perception of “originality” is based on “what they first heard and got used to”, rather than the origin of the production. Such fluid concepts of “originality” and authenticity” displayed by the fans resonate with Ien Ang’s discussion on Cantonese kung fu movies that what is “local” or “authentic” is a relative rather than a fixed concept and is “subject to change and modification as a result of the domestication of imported cultural goods”.¹⁴

Independent vs. Subordinated

Investigating the development of the *seiyū* culture in Japan (see chapter

13. Interview with Mr. K., 20 years old, dated 11 August 2006.

14. Ien Ang, *Living Room Wars: Rethinking Media Audience for a Postmodern World* (London: Routledge, 1996), 155.

1), shows that the dubbing profession has evolved from a subordinated part of other forms of popular cultural products such as *anime* and electronic games, to an independent field in which *seiyū* can achieve their own stardom. Japanese *seiyū* are no longer merely remembered as the voices for the animated characters (such as the voice of Pikachu or the voice of Doraemon). Rather, they are remembered for their own voices. Fans would say this is Park Romi's voice, and that's Suzumura Kenichi's voice. Some Hong Kong informants mentioned that the *seiyū* cast of the works is actually the most important factor when they choose to consume a cartoon, game or drama. Some would try their best to collect and consume all works featuring their favorite *seiyū*. As an informant complained that she had watched quite a lot of "rubbish" or animation she did not like because her beloved *seiyū* was cast in the works.¹⁵

The idolization of *seiyū*, as a commercial strategy and the result of the rising popularity of *seiyū*, shows that *seiyū* have now risen as a new cultural product in Japan. The emergence of *seiyū*-oriented magazines and events, personal concerts and *seiyū* groups all prove that *seiyū* do not necessarily

15. For example, interview with Ms. Y, 21 years old, 24 July 2006.

depend on *anime* or games for survival.¹⁶ Instead, *seiyū* can bring in new ideas to other forms of popular culture. For example, *seiyū* may actively participate in the production of ACG and CD dramas, and comics and animation can draw inspiration from the dubbing profession (see chapter 4). The appearance and image of *seiyū* are becoming increasingly important and emphasized since they are now presented as “idols” who shine under limelight, and they have to meet the demand for greater media exposure (fig 16 & 17). Such commodification and idolization of *seiyū* is a good illustration of “the becoming economic of the cultural” (commercialization of cultural products) which is one of the salient features of post-modernity as suggested by Jameson.¹⁷ One must not misunderstand this as simply turning the cultures into profit-making commodities for economic benefits. Instead, it stresses the importance and value of popular culture as well as the need to have a well-organized cultural policy to help promote and protect such culture.

16. The first Chinese *seiyū*-oriented magazine *Voice Shengyou* was published in June 2006 in Mainland China.

17. Fredric Jameson, “Globalization as Philosophical Issue” in *The Cultures of Globalization*, eds F. Jameson and M. Miyoshi (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1998), 60.

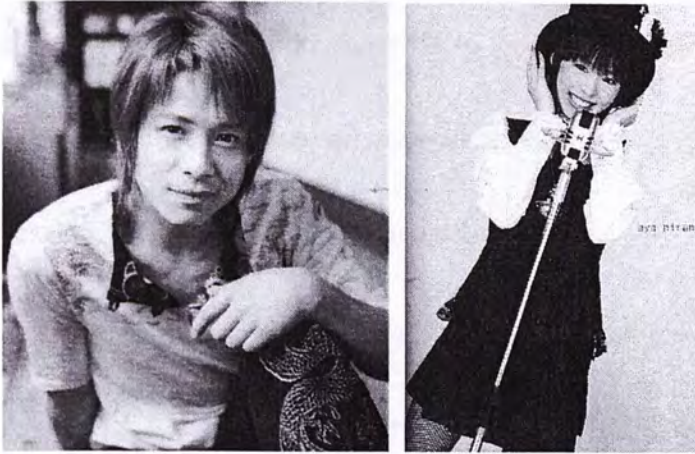


Photo: hm³ Magazine

Fig 16 & 17. Takahashi Naozumi (left) and Hirano Aya (right), two popular *seiyū*, posing for different *seiyū* magazines. One may easily regard them as general Japanese pop idols instead of *seiyū* that work backstage.

Obviously, such realization of the importance of major popular cultural products such as (ACG or film) is not as strong in Hong Kong as in Japan, let alone the significance of the backstage dubbing profession. The voice artists in Hong Kong still remain the voices behind the characters. Most of them are remembered by the characters they have played. It is because there are seldom voice artists lists are seldom shown at the end of the animation or the narrated program (except for foreign TV dramas or some particular animated movies and VCD or DVD series). Audiences therefore used to pay little attention to local voice artists. Audiences also do not have easy access to voice artists' information. Some Hong Kong informants who like Hong Kong dubbing expressed comments such as “even though we want to support

local dubbing, we have no channels to do so”, and “to know the names is already difficult, how can we support them if we do not even know their names?”¹⁸ Although in recent years Hong Kong voice artists have enjoyed more media exposure and appeared more in public functions related to ACG, they are not presented as “stars” like *seiyū* and their appearance is not emphasized (fig 18).



Photo: Apply Daily

Fig 18. Ching Man Yi (left), the voice actress for Dae Jang Geum, a popular Korean TV dramas about the first female royal physician of the Joseon Dynasty of Korea, and Lam Bo Chuen (right) the voice actor for Doraemon, dress casually for a radio interview by Radio Television Hong Kong.

Local dubbing seems to be merely a part of the daily production of the television broadcast company. As a local voice actor confessed, “local dubbing is just part of the assembly line...we just have to dub the lines so that the program can be shown on time...sometime it is such a rush that we may

18. Interview with Ms. K, 16 years old, dated 14 August 2006.

not have time to think about how to present the characters better...the demand of the company may not be very high, especially when there is too much work...”¹⁹ It does not mean that local voice artists pay less attention to their work or their dubbing performances are less satisfactory than Japanese *seiyū*. However, this clearly shows the role of local voice artists as translators or middlemen who use their skills to bridge language barriers. Such translation is less valued by Hong Kong people even though it helps make the products more understandable for local audiences. Although for the time being, local dubbing is subordinated to the operation of the television broadcast companies or small dubbing companies, and less respect and attention are paid towards both the dubbing profession and the voice artists, the importance of local dubbing in spreading Japanese animation is undeniable.

The reasons for the divergences of the status and popularity between Japanese *seiyū* and Hong Kong voice artists are rooted in the structural differences of the two dubbing professions. Since the scope of works

19. Interview with voice actor Mr. W, dated 11 August 2006.

directly affects the amount of media exposure, the chances for raising the popularity and the affiliation of works will affect the amount of support received for promoting the profession as well as the voice artists. The professional training plays an important role in determining the quality of dubbing. The competition from the new talent as well as the colleagues helps voice artists to remain competitive. These factors have helped the Japanese dubbing profession develop as a major culture, but such factors are less favorable to the local scene.

Hong Kong voice artists remain subordinated to the works they play and have difficulties achieving independent stardom. They also have to perform under the shadow of the original dubbing. The current situation of local voice artists is like that of Japanese *seiyū* in the 1950s. The veteran *seiyū* Kamiya Akira recounted that when he was young, being a *seiyū* was to be despised and people would avoid calling themselves *seiyū*.²⁰ Japanese *seiyū* also endured a hard time suffering from low status and harsh conditions. In the early 1960s, there was a wide debate over “whether *seiyū* are artists or

20. Takada Shiro and Chiba Setsuko, *Seiyū ni naru niwa* (To Become *Seiyū*) (Tokyo: Perikansha, 1983), 12.

not” in the media (newspaper and magazine).²¹ *Seiyū* dubbing at that time like in Hong Kong today, was also be considered as secondary since the dubbed works were mainly imported animations, TV dramas or movies.

According to Morikawa and Tsujitani, the decline of imported foreign TV dramas and the rise of local animation served as the turning point for the dubbing profession.²² Casting local characters can establish a more direct relationship between the *seiyū* and the character since the voice is part of the character and there is a more natural match between the voices and the pictures. Some fans and voice artists I interviewed also believe that in order to have a more prosperous dubbing profession, more mature supporting local ACG production is crucial.²³ If local voice artists can have more chances to dub local characters, the influence and popularity of local voice artists can surely increase. The development of Japanese dubbing may serve as a good reference for the future development of local dubbing profession.

By comparing the profession in the two regions, I do not intend to

21. For details of the debate, see Morikawa Tomoyoshi and Tsujitani Kōji, “*Seiyū no puro no tanjyō: kaigai telebi dorama to seiyū* (The Birth of Professional Voice Actors: Dubbing in Foreign TV Dramas in Japanese),” *Media shi kenkyū* (Studies on Media History), 14 (2003): 130-131.

22. *Ibid.*, 131-136.

23. For example, Mr. R., 32 years old, dated 26 July 2006 and interview with voice actor Mr W, dated 11 August 2006.

accentuate the strength of Japan and look down on Hong Kong's dubbing profession. The global (or the imported) and the local are not two "distinct, separate and opposing realities" that deserve to be put on the either end of the cultural spectrum.²⁴ As John Storey puts it, "globalization can both help confirm and help undo local cultures", what is the impact of the imported or global culture depends much on the local response.²⁵ Whether the rise of Japanese *seiyū* culture in Hong Kong is a positive challenge or threat lies not in differences between the two dubbing profession, but in how the audience as well as the production side react to such differences.

24. Ien Ang, *Living Room Wars*, 153.

25. John Storey, *Inventing Popular Culture: From Folklore to Globalization* (Malden: Blackwell Pub, 2003), 112-114.

Concluding Analysis

As a new cultural phenomenon, existing globalization theories such as modernization theory, cultural imperialism, hybridity and glocalization can fully explain the rise and growth of *seiyū* culture. Regardless of its sub-cultural status, *seiyū* is a significant topic rather than a minor subculture that deserves academic attention, since it offers a good illustration of the dynamic of the cultural production and consumption, as well as the constantly changing concepts of “culture” and “identity” in the era of globalization. Further explanations on this can be achieved by looking back to the three questions raised in the very beginning.

- (1) What new perspectives can the popularization of *seiyū* in Asia offer to the understanding of cultural globalization?

Figuring out what are the new perspectives offered to understanding can be done through two lenses: the local reception and impact of *seiyū* culture on the dubbing profession in Hong Kong, and the agency of spreading such culture.

“Localization” and Impact of *Seiyū* Culture

According to Mackay, cultural imperialism is “perhaps the longest-standing and best developed approach to explaining cultural globalization”.¹ Due to the enormous impact of Japanese cultural products on other Asian regions, the spread of Japanese cultural products is likely to be described as involving cultural imperialism. For example, Japanese *manga* and *anime* are under attack from some scholars or journalists as depriving the local industries in receiving countries such as Taiwan and the United States.² One defense for such cultural invasion, as suggested by scholars like Iwabuchi and Honda, was the “country-neutral quality” or *mukokuseki* (something or someone lacking nationality, referring to the non-Japaneseness) that these cultural products believed to possess.³ They argue that these products are trying to repress the Japaneseness that may hinder understanding

1. Hugh Mackay, “The Globalization of Culture?”, in *A Globalizing World? : Culture, Economics, Politics*, ed. David Held (London: Routledge in association with the Open University, 2004), 48.

2. For example, see Jia-Shin Hyu, *Manbu tukuang shijie: jiedu riben manhua de wenhua yihan* (Strolling in Manga World: A Cultural Discourse in Japanese comics), Master Thesis of Graduate Institute of Mass Communication of Fu Jen Catholic University, 2001; Annalee Newitz, *Anime Otaku: Japanese Animation Fans Outside Japan*, <http://bad.eserver.org/issues/1994/13/newitz.html>.

3. For example, see Shirō Honda, “East Asia’s Middle Class Tunes into Today’s Japan,” *Japan Echo* 21(4) (1994): 75-79; Koichi Iwabuchi, “Use of Japanese Popular Culture: Media,” *Envisage: A Journal Book of Chinese Media Studies*, No.2 (2003): 99-123 and ‘To Globalize, Regionalize or Localize Us, That is The Question’, in *The New Communications Landscape : Demystifying Media Globalization*, eds G. Wang, J. Servaes, and A. Goonasekera (London: Routledge, 2000), 145-146.

of audiences who have different cultural backgrounds or remind the audiences of past Japanese invasion and violence. In this way, the products can be accepted more easily by audiences all over the world. The trend of “deterritorialization” (or delocalization / displacement) facilitated by the easy flows and exchange of cultures, also suggests that there is “a loss of the ‘natural’ relation of culture to geographical and social territories”.⁴ Both concepts show that the regional colors of cultural products are greatly weakened under the globalization process.

However, *seiyū* as a cultural product is far from *mukokuseki* and indeed has a strong Japanese presence. It is full of Japaneseness, involving the Japanese language as well as unique Japanese practices in voice-dubbing industry. Such Japaneseness is not regarded as a hindrance but as an attraction for the *seiyū* consumers. For example, the heavy involvement of Japanese language in consuming *seiyū* products, the idolization of *seiyū*, the engagement in singing and the stage performance in *seiyū*-specific functions are seldom found in the same profession in other regions. The Japaneseness embedded in *seiyū* products, as expressed by some *seiyū* fans, is in fact a

4. Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies For Entering And Leaving Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 229.

major attraction rather than hindrance in their consumption. It is quite a different phenomenon from adopting other Japanese cultural products such as comics, food and TV dramas, since it is difficult for these products to achieve great popularity without a certain degree of deliberate localization.⁵ Such adoration towards Japaneseness reflects a quest for authenticity or originality, which is quite unusual in the “global melangé” where similarities and diversities, homogenization and heterogenization co-exist.⁶ It is also a great contrast to what David Hubka suggested in his discussion on the globalization of children’s animated television. He wrote that “appropriate language dubbing was a central consideration in the global distribution of television programs...consumer expectations for the local vernacular extended beyond the need for appropriate language, to include the need for locally appropriate dialect and accent.”⁷ Now, the tide turns. It seems that “origin” becomes more salient and important than hybridity, though the sense of “authenticity”

5. Wai-Ming Ng, “Reben Liuxing Wenhua zai Xiangkang de Bendihua Xianxiang Yuanyin Chutan (A Brief Investigation into the Reasons of Localized Japanese Popular Culture in Hong Kong)”, in *Reben Wenhua zai Xiangkang* (Japanese Culture in Hong Kong), ed. Lee Pui-tak (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006), 176.

6. Jan Nederveen Pieterse, “Globalization as Hybridization”, in *Global Modernities*, eds. Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash, and Roland Robertson (London: Sage Publications, 1995).

7. David Hubka, “Globalization of Cultural Production: The Transformation of Children’s Animated Television, 1980 to 1995”, in *Global Culture: Media, Arts, Policy, and Globalization*, eds. Diana Crane, Nobuko Kawashima and Kenichi Kawasaki (New York: Routledge, 2002), 246.

or “origin” is ambivalent rather than absolute as suggested in chapter 6.

Such interesting phenomenon is more likely to be found in a mature market for adopting foreign cultures. Hong Kong is one such market where Japanese (and Western) cultural products can freely circulate through legal as well as illegal channels. The result of the questionnaire and comments from the interviewees, as shown in chapter 5 and 6, may show that fondness for Japanese dubbing seems to exceed that for local dubbing. However, the popularity of Japanese *seiyū* still does not deserve the claim of cultural imperialism when its impact on local dubbing is taken into consideration. As stated in chapter 4, the impact of the popularization of *seiyū* on the local dubbing profession is positive because it arouses attention towards the profession as well as raising interest in joining the profession. The local voice artists I interviewed also suggest that the rise of Japanese *seiyū* in fact benefits the local dubbing industry through drawing attention and creating a demand from audiences. It also poses benign competition that leads to improvement in local dubbing.

A Globalization from Below

Nederveen Pieterse points out that “globalization is not merely driven by major corporations, international institutions, and governments but also by social forces, including consumers and social movements.”⁸ Brecher, Costello and Smith also stress the importance of “globalization from below”, believing that the power from “grassroots solidarity” is the most plausible way to counter the averse effects brought by the “globalization from above” which is usually initiated and directed by transnational corporations or governments.⁹ Although the power from the “grassroot” is much highlighted in economic and political aspects of globalization, it is also true for globalization of popular culture that is closely connected to the everyday life of people. Chapter 5 shows that in promoting Japanese *seiyū* in and outside Japan, the consumers (especially the *seiyū* fans) are actually the main agents. Regarding the popularization of *seiyū* in Asian regions, it is more accurate to say that it is the fans instead of the production side who have taken the initiative to promote such culture.¹⁰ The consumers of *seiyū* (the

8. Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange* (Lanham, US: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 10.

9. Jeremy Brecher, Tim Costello and Brendan Smith, *Globalization From Below: The Power of Solidarity* (Cambridge, US: South End Press, 2000), ix.

10. There are similar situations for other cultural products like TV dramas, *anime* and

seiyū lovers) are not passive recipients who are, as the Frankfurt School scholars like Horkhemier and Adorno may argue, being “deceived” by the cultural industry that produces standardized products in the guise of free choices.¹¹ The characterization of fans as pathological “mad existence” or passive victims of the celebrity system suggested by early studies on fandom or depicted by media, are far from appropriate as well.¹² Instead, cultural consumption entails production, a process in which the consumers employ their “symbolic creativity” to create meanings out of the specific product.¹³ With different resources and experiences, each consumer may come up with different interpretations of the original meanings and messages the products aim to convey.¹⁴ Fans or devoted supporters of various forms of popular culture, according to Fiske, are “active, enthusiastic, partisan, and participatory” and they are not only cultural consumers but also “cultural

manga. For discussions on the passivity of Japanese production side in exporting the products, see Koichi Iwabuchi, ‘To Globalize, Regionalize or Localize Us, That is The Question’, in *The New Communications Landscape : Demystifying Media Globalization*, eds G. Wang, J. Servaes, and A. Goonasekera (London: Routledge, 2000), 147-148.

11. Max Horkhemier, and Theodor Adorno, ‘The Culture Industry as Mass Deception’, in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, eds J. Rivkin and M. Ryan (Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 1037-1041.

12. The term “mad existence” was suggested by Richard Schickel in *Intimate Strangers: The Culture of Celebrity* (New York: Doubleday, 1985).

13. Paul Willis, Simon Jones, Joyce Canaan and Geoff Hurd, *Common Culture: Symbolic Work at Play in the Everyday Cultures of the Young* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1990), 17-26.

14. John Storey, *Cultural Consumption and Everyday Life* (London: Arnold, 1999), 108-123.

producers”.¹⁵ Michel de Certeau and Henry Jenkins also refer to fans as “textual poachers” who form an alternative community, in which they actively interpret different media for their own cultural consumption and production with heavy “intellectual and emotional involvement”.¹⁶ *Lianshengzhu* (community of *seiyū* fans) can also be understood as active consumers and producers. In chapter 5 we can see how they take the initiative to consume *seiyū* products through watching *anime* and playing electronic games that feature their favourite *seiyū*, buying CDs, CD-dramas and magazines dedicated to *seiyū*, searching for and sharing these products on the internet or through web communities or on-line sharing technology, such as BT, Winmx and Youtube. In addition, fans act as producers through acting as voice artists themselves and produce fans-dubbed *anime* or CD Dramas. Other types of production include writing criticism on *seiyū* performances and fan-fiction in which the consumers (the fans) become part of the production as a judge of dubbing quality and authors of the derived cultural products.¹⁷ Such production involving fans, on one hand helps

15. John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 1989), 146-151.

16. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, tran. S. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) and Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* (New York : Routledge, 1992).

17. For discussion on how the original texts are reproduced through fan-fiction and

spread this sub-culture further through sharing their own collection and production. On the other hand, it gives another life to the original products to be reborn in another form. Recent increases in promotion for *seiyū* by their agencies and greater media exposure may suggest a more active stance of the production side. However, the production side is not as active in promoting *seiyū* overseas. The visits of *seiyū* to Asian regions are usually initiated by the receiving countries rather than Japanese *seiyū* agencies. Therefore, it may be more accurate to describe the popularization of *seiyū* culture as a globalization process powered by audiences or fans than a careful calculation of the Japanese production side to inculcate Japanese ideas or uproot the local cultures. This actually violates the premises of “glocalization” and cultural imperialism in which national and international corporations used to pull the strings.¹⁸

Question 2: What impact will Japanese *seiyū* sub-culture have on the national and cultural identities of Asian fans?

gain new lives through such reproduction, see Henry Jenkins, “*Star Trek* Return, Reread, Rewritten: Fan Writing as Textual Poaching”. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 5(2) (1988): 85-107. Example of fanfictions of *seiyū*, see Shengyou Wenxi (Collection of Writings on *Seiyū*), <http://cq.netsh.com/eden/bbs/757584/>.

18. Roland Robertson, “Globalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity”, in *Global Modernities*, ed. M. Featherstone et al. (London: Sage, 1995).

In the last section of Chapter 5, the results of my survey show a clear preference of the Hong Kong audiences towards Japanese dubbing. In addition, as shown in Chapter 6, the Japanese dubbing profession seems to be preferred over the Hong Kong dubbing profession in winning the attention of audiences. However, their preference seems to remain on the consumption level, though some of the informants stated that they grew fond of Japan because of their love of *seiyū*. Very few of them are (or ready for) identifying themselves with the Japanese culture by expressing that they longed to become a Japanese. However, the popularization of Japanese *seiyū* provides a good illustration of the fluidity of the meaning of culture and identity in the globalization era.

Changing Concept of “Culture” and “Identity”

Under the rapid process of globalization, the meaning of culture has, almost inevitably, changed. Besides living with a “way of life” that characterizes a nation, a people, we are at the same time influenced by “the information and identities available from the cultural supermarket”.¹⁹ Along

19. Gordon Mathews, *Global Culture / Individual Identity: Searching for Home in the Cultural Supermarket*. (London: Routledge, 2000), 1.

with the given national culture with which one was born, globalization gives rise to the idea of choosing cultures that one wants to adhere to. When “globalization has radically pulled culture apart from place”, particular cultures are no longer confined to their place of origins.²⁰ Such deterritorialization of culture may seem to undermine the power of nation as the basis of cultural as well as identity formation.²¹ As John Storey suggests that culture (especially popular culture) is actually the “root” and “routes” of our identities.²² Culture is clearly where we locate ourselves and what our identities originate from. Just as culture is ever-changing, so are identities. As we freely pick the culture we like for consumption from the cultural supermarket, we are at the same time choosing our identities. Nation, the “imagined community”, under which people are united under a fixed identity, may well be replaced by interests, tastes or professions. A sense of “pop cosmopolitanism” as Jenkins put it or “semiotic solidarity” as Matt Hills suggested, is developing under the rapid growth media convergence aided by

20. Jonathan Xavier Inda and Renato Rosaldo, “Introduction: A World in Motion”, in *The Anthropology of Globalization*, eds. Jonathan Xavier Inda and Renato Rosaldo (Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 11.

21. Ulf Hannerz, *Transnational Connections*. (London: Routledge, 1996), 81-90.

22. John Storey, *Inventing Popular Culture: From Folklore to Globalization* (Malden: Blackwell Pub., 2003), 78-91.

the evolution of telecommunication technology.²³ The formation of *lianshang zhu* in Asian regions can be a good illustration of such new possibilities. The word *zhu*, which means group or tribe literally, indicates a sense of “we-ness” and belongingness based not on nationality (since the members are clearly from different regions or countries), but on the passion and interests towards particular *seiyū* or Japanese dubbing as a whole.²⁴ Although nationalities are often blurred in the web communities, regional variations still exists as people from different regions have their own ways to consume the same *seiyū* product. For example, *seiyū* fans from Mainland China would produce fan dubbing or radio drama, while fans from Hong Kong seldom do so. The fans of the same Japanese *seiyū* may also hold different feelings towards the local voice artists or have different views of the historical and political issues between Japan, Mainland China and Hong Kong.

23. Henry Jenkins, “Pop Cosmopolitanism: Mapping Cultural Flows in an Age of Media Convergence”, in *Globalization: Culture and Education for a New Millennium*, eds. Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco and Desirée Baolian Qin-Hilliard, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Matt Hills, *Transcultural Otaku: Japanese Representations of Fandom and Representations of Japan in Anime / Manga Fan Cultures*. <http://web.mit.edu/cms/Events/mit2/Abstracts/MattHillspaper.pdf>, 2002.

24. The term “we-ness” suggests a sense of community that distinguishes “we” from “other”. See Derek Foster, “Community and Identity in the Electronic Village” in *Internet Culture*, ed. David Porter (London: Routledge, 1997), 23-38.

Question 3: Is *seiyū* a unique Japanese culture?

Bases on the discussion of the rise of *seiyū* culture in the past few chapters and sections above, it is appropriate to conclude that *seiyū* is a unique Japanese culture. The investigation of the operation of the profession in chapter 1 and comparison with its Hong Kong counterpart in chapter 6 shows that, the Japanese *seiyū* profession has its own distinct features that are seldom found in other regions, such as the specific training institutions, *seiyū* management agencies, idolization of *seiyū* and *seiyū*'s active participation in ACG production or *seiyū* training.

Besides the uniqueness in its operation, the popularization of *seiyū* also differs from other Japanese cultural products, such as music, *manga* and *anime*. It is a culture that is directly consumed with much deliberate localization by the consumers. For the fans, the heavy Japaneseness embedded in *seiyū* products strengthens rather than weakens the consumption pleasure. Moreover, it is a culture in which the audiences play the role as the main agency to distribute and promote the culture. The production side (the *seiyū* agencies) seems to be passive when compared to the active fans in promoting the *seiyū* products overseas. With the aid of internet, the

formation of web communities and its important role in facilitating the spread of *seiyū* culture, demonstrate a new possibility of forming a “nation” or “society” that is not based on ethnicity, races or religions.

I would like to reiterate that claiming that *seiyū* as a unique Japanese culture, is not to boost the cultural power of Japan or limit the possibility of developing a unique culture to Japan alone. Through the studies on *seiyū*, what I hope to reveal is the possibility of forming a specific local culture that can transcend national borders as well as the infinite new possibilities and creations brought forth by encounters of different cultures.

Issues to Be Addressed in Further Studies on *Seiyū*

Due to the limited scale and resources, this research only unveils the tip of the iceberg of such growing *seiyū* culture, leaving still a large part undiscovered.

Taking Hong Kong as the main research site, though helps develop a more focused and in-depth investigation in the formation of *seiyū* culture outside Japan, this research sacrifices the possible interesting findings through comparing the different consumption patterns in other Asian regions,

such as Mainland China and Taiwan. In spite of the same Chinese background, Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan take different approaches to Japanese popular culture, as a result of various factors such as the relationship to Japan, degree of openness to foreign culture or experiences of international cultural exchange. Fans of *seiyū* or voice artists from these regions, therefore, tend to develop different consumption patterns (reflected in different activities). Comparison of such behavioural and attitudinal divergences towards *seiyū* culture may help reveal a more general picture of how these three regions deal with the flood of foreign cultures in the era of globalization. Comparison can also be made on the different reception and consumption pattern of *seiyū* in Japan and voice artists in Hong Kong, in order to reveal more fundamental feature about the cultural identities of the Chinese and Japanese fans.

Although this research points out the inseparable relationship of the dubbing profession and other cultural products, especially *anime* and electronic games in which *seiyū* usually perform, separate investigations into the relations of *seiyū* and these products may provide useful information. These studies may further reveal the importance of the *seiyū* culture among

the studies on Japanese popular culture. It can also explore different interesting phenomena concerning *seiyū* or dubbing in these cultural products, such as the use of *genjina* (nicknames) in games of different genres and the participation of *seiyū* in production of ACG products.

Regarding the globalization of *seiyū* culture, fans can be regarded as the main agents in spreading such culture. However, as the idolization of *seiyū* goes on, the role of management agencies may change accordingly, probably taking a more active stance in promoting the *seiyū* culture. The idolization of *seiyū* on one hand brings *seiyū* fame and profits, and on the other, draws criticisms from fans that it is now visual presentation instead of voices that matter, resulting in the decline in dubbing quality. Will such new approaches adopted by the management agencies lead to another *seiyū* boom, or will such trend of idolization cool down the enthusiasm of devoted fans? These interesting questions may be further explored in studies on *seiyū* culture.

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Appendix I

聲優文化問卷調查

你好！本人乃中文大學日本研究系碩士一年生，現正進行一項關於日本聲優及本地配音員的研究。本問卷資料只作研究用途，內容保密，問卷將於研究完成後銷毀，感謝您抽空作答！

(請別選適當空格)

關於日本聲優

- 1) 你知道什麼是聲優嗎?
 知道(往第 2 題) 不知道 (跳至第 8 題)

- 2) 你認為聲優工作包括：(可選多項)
 動畫 電子遊戲 外語電影/劇集 廣播劇/CD 廣播劇
 唱歌 劇集及廣告旁白 話劇/舞台劇 其他(請註明：
_____)

- 3) 你比較注意/喜歡男聲優還是女聲優？
 男聲優 女聲優 兩者差不多

- 4) 你是從什麼途徑認識到聲優的？(只選一項)
 動畫 電子遊戲 動畫歌曲 廣播劇/CD 廣播劇
 其他(請註明：_____)

- 5) 什麼因素會影響你選擇一套日本原聲動畫？(請排列次序：1 為最重要，如此類推)
___故事內容 ___畫風 / CG ___作者/監督 ___配樂 ___聲優陣容
___其他(請註明：_____)

- 6) 什麼因素會影響你選擇一套日本原聲電子遊戲？(請排列次序：1 為最重要，如此類推)
___人物設定 ___故事背景 ___遊戲系統 ___製作商 ___配樂
___聲優陣容 ___其他(請註明：_____)

- 7) 你認為日本聲優配音質素如何？
 很好 不錯 一般 不太理想 差劣

Appendix I

關於本地配音員

8) 你有聽過由本地配音員配音的作品嗎？

有 沒有 (跳至第 22 題)

9) 你比較注意/喜歡男配音員還是女配音員？

男配音員 女配音員 兩者差不多

10) 你認為配音員工作包括：(可選多項)

動畫 電子遊戲 外語電影/劇集 廣播劇/CD 廣播劇

唱歌 劇集及廣告旁白 話劇/舞台劇 其他(請註明：

_____)

11) 你多從什麼途徑接觸本地配音員？(只選一項)

動畫卡通 電視劇(如日劇/韓劇) 電視節目的旁白

其他(請註明：_____)

12) 什麼因素會影響你選擇一套配音/本地動畫？(請排列次序：1 為最重要，如此類推)

___故事內容 ___畫風/CG ___作者/監督 ___配樂 ___配音員陣容

___其他(請註明：_____)

13) 什麼因素會影響你選擇一套配音/本地遊戲？(請排列次序：1 為最重要，如此類推)

___人物設定 ___故事背景 ___遊戲系統 ___製作商 ___配樂

___配音員陣容 ___其他(請註明：_____)

14) 你認為本地配音員配音質素如何？

很好 不錯 一般 不太理想 差劣

日本及本地配音員比較

15) 你認為配音的好壞會影響作品(如動畫/遊戲)的整體質素嗎？

會 不會

16) 一般來說，你會選擇日本配音還是本地配音？

日本配音(往第 17 題)

本地配音 (跳至第 20 題)

17) 你能聽懂日語嗎？

Appendix I

- 是 (跳至第 21 題)
否 (往第 18 題) 能聽懂簡單詞彙或句子(往第 18 題)

18) 聽日語配音可能導致理解困難，沒有字幕的話，仍會選擇日語配音嗎？

- 會(往第 19 題) 不會 (跳至 21 題)

19) 為什麼仍然選擇日語配音？(可選多項)

- 日本聲優表現比本地配音員好
 日語配音比較原汁原味
 認為單靠畫面仍能理解作品內容
 沒有特別原因
 其他(請註明：__-
_____)

20) 為什麼會選擇本地配音？(可選多項)

- 本地配音員表現比日本聲優好
 本地配音比較親切
 聽不懂/不想聽日語
 沒有特別原因
 其他(請註明：__-
_____)

21) 你認為日本聲優及本地配音員的差別？(可選多項)

- 地位/待遇 工作範疇 專業訓練 配音質素
 其他(請註明：_____)

其他

22) 你有接觸過由明星配音的電影或動畫嗎？

- 有 沒有

23) 你認為明星配音的質素如何？

- 很好 不錯 一般 不太理想 差劣

個人資料

性別：男 女

年齡： 13- 20 21-30 31- 40

地區：香港 中國大陸 台灣 其他(請註明：_____)

Appendix II

訪問用問題

對象: 戀聲族

- 1) 喜歡/留意聲優有多久了?
- 2) 有喜歡的聲優嗎? 較喜歡男聲優還是女聲優?
- 3) 從什麼途徑開始接觸聲優?
- 4) 為什麼喜歡日本聲優?
- 5) 你怎樣表達對聲優的支持? (設網頁 / 購買相關產品 e.g. cd / cd drama / 自製廣播劇?)
- 6) 聲優是否選擇作品時最重要的因素?
- 7) 留意/喜歡本地配音員嗎? 為什麼?
- 8) 你認為聲優和本地配音員有什麼區別?
- 9) 你認為日本配音比本地的優秀嗎?
- 10) 你認為為何本地配音員沒能像聲優般受歡迎/受尊重?
- 11) 你認為作為香港人應該要支持本地配音嗎?
- 12) 喜歡聲優後有改變你對日本的想法嗎? (更喜歡日本 / 想成為日本人 etc.)
- 13) 有想過成為配音員嗎?
- 14) 原來懂日語嗎? 會為了喜歡的聲優學日語嗎?
- 15) 你怎麼看明星配音及聲優偶像化的現象?

Appendix III

訪問用問題

對象: 配音員

- 1) 爲什麼會成爲配音員?
- 2) 自己配音會受日本聲優影響嗎?有喜歡的日本聲優嗎?
- 3) 有曾經被稱呼爲聲優嗎? 對這個稱呼有什麼感受?
- 4) 你認爲本地配音員和聲優有什麼區別?
- 5) 你認爲香港人重視配音嗎? 是否喜歡日本配音多於本地配音?
- 6) 有覺得近年港人對配音越來越重視嗎? 你認爲和日本聲優在香港受歡迎有關係嗎?
- 7) 你認爲聲優越來越受歡迎, 會感到被威脅/有壓力嗎? 會增加觀眾對配音質素的要求嗎?
- 8) 你認爲香港對配音員的訓練足夠嗎?
- 9) 本地配音製作有參考日本的模式嗎?
- 10) 你對明星配音/聲優偶像化有何看法?



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