

Forming the Digital Bonds of Civility as Cultural movement and New Social Movement in Japan:

Collaborative Creative Consumption, Distribution and Production of Japanese Subcultures in East Asia with/without the globalizing concept of Intellectual Property?

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Aim

The paper examines the creative consumption among otaku, a group of Japanese hobbyists who love to consume Japanese subcultures of *manga*, *anime*, music or even novels in forms of active borrowing and recreation of the original “copyrighted” original works (widely discussed within Japan in terms of *nijisôsaku*, literally “secondary or derivative creation”) as well as the exchange, sharing and redistribution of them. The research argues that the proliferation of Japanese subcultures and the popularization of them in some East Asian societies may be due to an alternative and loose conception of property right, which is not based on the ideas of possessive individualism as authors’ right and legal ownership of cultural goods, but relies on some common cultural-cognitive understandings of legitimate ways to consume, share and distribute of them among hobbyists.

Methods

The paper draws on data from interviews (including oral history) with hobbyists, authors, editors, shopkeepers and distributors, copyright holders and managers in Japan in summer 2013 and 2014.

Results

The paper argues why the consumption, distribution and production of Japanese subcultures should be understood as a collaborative cultural movement to craft new conceptions of cultural property and practices (if not only a reinvention of pre-modern ways of conceptualizing shared cultural production), which are distinctively different from the current globalizing (if not only Western and modern) concept of intellectual property. The paper tries also to delineate how the current cultural movement *nijisôsaku* in Japan, originated from the amateur *manga* event of Komiket in the late 1970s, can also be understood as a kind of new social movement to renegotiate with the institutionalized cultural industry, which was deteriorating in the 2000s but tried to regain its popularity by incorporating new ideas from hobbyists.

Conclusion

Finally, the paper argues that whether the forming of these digital bonds of civility will be a potential hope for a transnational public sphere in East Asia — but instead of Habermas’ kind of liberal deliberative public among property-owned bourgeois class, a “postmodern public,” defined by Richard Rorty, loosely bounded by digital bonds in which private desires were commonly defined and collectively enjoyed by means of “data-base consumption,” defined by Azuma Hiroki.