ANIME CULTURE IN ROMANIA - ENVIRONMENT TO PROMOTE MANGA COMICS

Adrian Nicolae Cazacu
PhD Student, Bucharest University of Economic Studies

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to hightlight the appearance and development of a new romanian market for products of an emerging culture, called anime.To acomplish this I studied the cultural and economical aspects of the anime culture, its presence in the western world and in Romania, and then hightlighted the appearance of a new product, belonging to the anime culture, on the romanian market, the manga comics.

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Keywords: culture, subculture, democracy, anime, manga.

INTRODUCTION

We can distinguish four functions of the social communication, namely: the function of creation the rules, social function of the individual, social control function and the innovative function.

The innovation function allows the progressive transformation of the group rules, development of rules and points of view, the acceptance of the new ideas, often in minority, thus stimulating the creativity. The first three features are observable, direct and explicit. On the contrary, the innovative function is implicit and hidden; it is visible after long periods. Even if the mechanisms of this function are not fully known, communication researchers try to explore all its implications in different social contexts.

1. THE CONCEPT OF CULTURE

Mass culture has emerged to meet the needs of the mass societies, with large agglomerations, concentrated in cities or industrial centers, with a new way of life, where time is rigorously segmented in "working time" and "leisure" – which was to be filled with products, services and entertainment activities.

From another perspective, mass culture is a new kind of culture, so different to the old folk culture (specific to the agrarian societies), and to the specialized "high", "scientist" culture.

In the Romanian thinking, Blaga imposed the distinction between minor and major cultural culture. Popular culture and the specialized one were together accepted, along the history, as two separate levels of culture, not completely isolated, but influencing each other.

Mass culture should not be confused with the current phenomena belonging to the popular traditional culture. Edgar Morin defined the mass culture as a set of myths, symbols, language, imagery and rules concerning the real and imaginary contents that are transmitted through the contemporary media system. It takes a certain type of production, organized by rules of industrial, series production, also a chain of circuits for social broadcast, through which this culture reach a vast and heterogeneous audience. It conveys a wave of chaotic informations

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with transitional mosaic structure. This mass culture is diversified and fragmented according to the specific social and professional groups, ensuring the symbolic process of social interaction.

Mass culture is not a culture produced by the masses, but for the masses. It is produced by specialists or specialized institutions in this regard. When economic, science and technology have created new means of communication, they took over and broadcast works and modern culture or popular posts, transforming them to meet the needs and the expectations of the average consumer.

Mass culture is a new type of culture-dependent media system, added to the traditional folk culture and the specialized culture, interspersed in the space appeared between these two cultural levels set, covering this range populated by "masses", masses of whose the cultural needs could not be satisfied neither the old popular culture nor the specialized modern culture. To the specialized "high" culture, which is produced by the culture of modern intellectual elites, the masses had only limited access, due to the readiness level implied by its specific deciphering codes. Gradually, mass culture tends to replace the two previous cultures, to absorb the works and messages.

The recipient of mass culture is no longer the "specialized" public of the works belonging to the specialized modern culture, but a heterogeneous public. For cultural needs and expectations of this public are to be created (produced) other works, messages that are attractive and materially affordable, but also accessible, to be sold and bring profit to the producers.

Mass culture is thus subject to the economic logic of supply and demand, gaining profit.

Creator-receiver relationship is replaced by the production-consumption relationship. As a consumer, the public relate to the mass culture like some goods or merchandise, and assess their usefulness depending on the needs and aspirations.

In conclusion, unlike the creations of the specialized culture, where the value criteria was predominant, in the mass culture is predominantly the commercial basis. Products crops should be sold, and their industrial production is to be profitable. Sometimes, the producers of this new type of culture have "translated" the specialized culture works in the mass culture codes and registers, in order to be reached by the consumers of media messages.

2. THE ANIME CULTURE: ALTERNATIVE CULTURE OR SUBCULTURE?[1]

Yinger[2] reduces the uses of the subculture term to three classes: preculture, subculture and counterculture, the latter being distinguished by its deeply conflicted nature. The term of subculture is used by Yinger, to punctuate the scheme of smaller groups than a company. The accents fall on language, religious, axiomatic differences, set against the dominant social. Both ethnic enclaves and groups of friends, cliques, clans, also can be considered subcultures.

A subculture has its own independent, determined set of values, which can be different, more or less, from the usual rules. Am appropiate example of this meaning are the national minorities which are defined by individuality and retains this individuality regardless of their social, national, political and cultural environment in which they are located.

Another example is the anime culture. This culture arose shortly after the Japanese animation has become a style and an identity. Anime, for Japanese is animation, but for the rest

[1] Senida POENARIU, "Counterculture between democracy and totalitarianism", *Journal of romanian literary studies*, 6, pp. 1168

[2] Milton YINGER, "Contraculture and Subculture", *American Sociological Review*, 5(25), pg. 625-635.

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of the world is the animation produced in Japan. This animation has its own group of fans of all ages as there are anime for children, teenagers and adults. The anime consumers acquire cultural identity through the activities they carry, besides the purchase of the specific products, namely: anime related issues(online or verbally), attending conventions, where the majority of them dress up like their favorite character (Cosplay), and performing anime-inspired art works. Such events take place in Romania, since 2007.

In a broader approach to understand the economic and social impact of this crop in the West and in Romania, it is worth studying the origin, development and defining features of "anime culture."

After the end of WWII and the surrender of Japanese forces began a period of occupation of Japan by the Allied powers, actually: the occupation has been exercised by the US, since such an influx of Western culture, mostly American.

Furthermore, Japan would be in bombed, this time not by bombs but by the media. Products such as west movies and animations came into Japan in a fast pace. As a result, Japanese animators who achieved only black and white film, were threat by the American animation products, entirely colored (Beck, 2004).

Besides this problem, Japanese animators faced censorship imposed by the US authorities on banning all references to the military conflict (MacWilliams, 2008).

These developments led the Japanese animators to make animated films with interesting stories, which are, most often in the "science fiction" and "fantasy".

American occupation of Japan ended in 1952. It is published post mortem when the basic work of the Father (the god of anime in Japan) of anime Osamu Tezuka, "Astro Boy", then adapted for television (1963). In his drawings, we find the beginning of the defining features of anime style, namely "anime eyes".



Drawing of the anime's eye style
Source: Alex Harris

Anime characters' eyes are not only the drawing of big eyes. In their construction, there are two positions corresponding to two Japanese Hiragana alphabet letters ***i*** and ***tsu*** reversed, which in turn correspond to two positions of the eye: ***i*** for the forward and ***tsu*** for the lateral direction.

Drawing mouth is again a feature, by very small size, and her drawing of a single continue line. The color of the hair of these characters is varied, most og the times unnatural.

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Besides the artistic characteristic features of the animated characters, another feature that gives him unique, is the wealth of themes and motifs addressed and, as I mentioned, the diversity of the age groups, which it is addressed.

Thereafter, America continued to produce animations Disney and Warner Brothers, while in Japan is born a new time animation, which soon will become what today we know as the "culture of anime", which will arrive to compete and to influence the American animation. In Japanese animation, there is a part of the cultural Japanese identity, because its creators, but, because of the the cultural ventures in which appeared the diversity of themes and motifs addressed, many of them borrowed from literature, we can say that the new identity "anime" tends to be a true universal identity that can be easily appropriated by individuals belonging to Western culture, and more.

Since the '70s, Japanese animation began to gain popularity in America. According to the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), "Japanese animation took place in the animation world for nearly two decades and over 60% of worldwide broadcast, cartoons are made in Japan" (JETRO, May 2005). According to the same source, in 2005, exports of livestock amounted to an estimated 4,35 billion dollars worldwide. How did the Japanese animation to reach such a performance? The reasons are mainly:

- TV stations in America preferred to buy and to double the Japanese animated productions instead make new ones, as the production costs have been covered by Japanese animation studios.
- The American animated addressed only very young audience, unlike the anime that can address both children and adolescents or adults, the genre gained popularity among more mature audience.
- Anime productions aimed specifically at children were also traditional American animation competition

Even is different from Western animation, anime does not remove the American audience. Animation techniques, the interesting stories and characters deeply characterized are the elements that give the anime an attractive note. Anime and animation produced in America have common roots, which is why much of the anime looks familiar to general public with traditional animation and the new specific elements appear to be exotic and trendy (trending) (JETRO, 2005).

The familiar elements, combined with the exotic create for mainstream consumer a unique visual cocktail. Anime is more than a popular culture, it is an art form intended for the masses, distributed by means of mechanical and digital technics, and designed to attract a wide audience and is intended for mainstream consumers, not only for connoisseurs (MacWilliams, 2008).

As a result, its appearance in West, has made and maintained a steady audience, which evolved from a number of followers and fans of animation (the '70s), at the level of mainstream culture in the 80' even if in the beginning, anime were located through editing and dubbing.

Anime multiculturalism has enjoyed Western audience, which, over time, assimilated and imitated them.

Currently, the term anime defines not only the Japanese animation but a real form of culture created around this animations, which have evolved diverse cultural events such as: Cosplay Donjinshi and that can make a separate study.

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In the above view, the anime could be considered a subculture that can coexist with the other cultures, also in Romania.

However, it is not the only perspective we can understand the culture of anime. Adrian Marino[3] describes the opposition of the two concepts: the totalitarian culture and the alternative culture.

To exist, the alternative culture, it needs the democratic society model, based on pluralist human rights, diametrically opposed to the totalitarian society. It does not expose its program through in direct opposition, as if the counterculture does, but "coexist" - "the expression of a critical conscience in latent or declared form, always parallel, never suppressed".

The difference between the alternative culture and the counterculture is not only the freedom of speech but also different causalities and different governing rules. The counterculture incurred through oppositional interaction with the mainstream values.

The alternative culture can exist only under a democratic regime that allows and encourages the nature of competition between independent cultural forms.

From this perspective we can understand the anime culture also as an alternative culture, which is the second version and that for which we subscribe.

3. PRESENCE OF THE ANIME CULTURE ON THE ROMANIAN MARKET

In Romania, officially, the anime culture entered from years 89', but interest in it has existed from the previous period, the first contact of Romanians anime achieved by watching foreign channels, namely: TELE7ABC, and by several animated films which were screened on big screen. After years 89', the TVR1 station has showed, subtitled or dubbed in Romanian, many anime movies, such as: PHEONIX 2772-SPACE FIREBIRD, WINDARIA and serials like: SABER RIDER, MACRON ONE CANDY CANDY, SANDY BELL, SAILOR MOON, RUNONI KENSHIN, POKEMON, DRAGON BALL Z, etc.

The TVR 1 station exemple was followed, to some extent, by other stations. The ANIMAX channel, also broadcasted until 2014, many anime series, subtitled in Romanian.

4. PRODUCTS DERIVATED FROM THE ANIME CULTURE. MANGA COMICS

CASE STUDY

Manga sites are artistic creations in the form of comics, made in the same artistic style of anime that either are made by companies producing the cartoons, either by the independent artists. These artistic creations are sources of inspiration for the animated series or are parodies after them.

Originally sold only in Japan, they went with the spread of anime culture, on the American markets, France, Germany and other European countries, including Romania.

Thus, since 2005, a new market was born in our country, currently as an online store, even called Manga Shop, offering comic books in Japanese style (manga) and American style (comic).

The *www.mangashop.ro* site is one of the activities that have been initiated at the time by a number of people involved in the anime / manga community that has been formed around

[3] Adrian MARINO, *Politica şi cultura. Pentru o nouă cultura română*, Editura Polirom, Iaşi, 1996, pg.256

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the online forums. The original site was designed as a hobby and focused on the commercialization of several popular Japanese comics, but, in time, the demand has increased. Thus, since 2007, Manga Shop was organized as a business and, gradually, the offer has diversified: they started from the manga of all genres and for all tastes, added comics, albums with original artwork, magazines, tutorials drawing and books related to the culture, the history of Japan and Japanese.

Since years 2008, there were added to the offer, also related comic and movie figures, shirts and accessories. Shortly afterwards, they were removed from the site to come back with a better and more varied offer, immediately after the crisis of 2012. This product category has currently reached about half of the active offer.

MangaShop's customers are young people, between 14 and 28 years, from the urban areas. Their preferences are related with: Japanese music, drawing, electronic games and cosplay site[4].

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