Cultural Appropriation: Erasure of Cultural Odour, Homolingualization, and Queer Erasure
within English Adaptations of Japanese Anime

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Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2020

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Acknowledgments

Introduction

the first month of Pokemon Go is the only time this world knew peace

@cake_hoarder (Twitter, September 2019)

The above tweet illuminates the nostalgia and fondness that is often evoked by the

memory of summer 2016, a summer that was characterized by the release of Pokemon Go, a

smartphone app based on the anime series, *Pokemon.* The twitter user likens this period to

"world peace", a comparison that is rooted within the design of the game that motivated social

interaction among its users. One of the ways that Pokemon Go promoted communal gameplay

was through the inclusion of PokeStops, a digitized meeting hub that allows for players to collect

Poke Balls. These digital hubs mirrored the ones featured within *Pokemon,* and similarly to the

characters within the anime, players would often encounter other players while visiting Poke

Stops. This allowed for players to interact with one another, leading many to exchange tips on

where to find rare and hard to catch Pokemon and even forming teams to widen their scope. The

fusion of nostalgia for the times of trading Pokemon cards in schoolyards, the collective goal of

players, and the warm weather created a rose tint around the summer, one that almost felt like

"world peace".

The reality of the summer is much darker, as upon the game's release for digital

download in July 2016, it was linked to an accident only mere hours after its debut. The accident

was blamed on the distraction caused by the new game, as a university student in Japan took a

tumble down a flight of stairs and later required medical attention for the wound on his head

(Ho). The accidents would only continue to escalate, even resulting in a few deaths as the summer came to a close, mostly involving distracted drivers or distracted pedestrians (McCormick). These tragedies and accidents are unfortunately unsurprising, as this was not the first time that the Pokemon franchise had a drastic effect upon consumers. In 1997, the 38th episode of the original television series featured a rapidly pulsing animation effect that caused 685 incidents of 'photoparoxysmal' response in viewers, mostly children (Clements 177). Another 12 000 reported that they felt nauseous after viewing the episode. This incident did not slow down plans for an adaptation for Western audiences, but instead ensured that the series had "global brand recognition" and is often considered the "central 'event' of anime's overseas popularity" (177).

There have been previous discussions surrounding the popularity of the Pokemon franchise, which has consecutively claimed the top spot for highest grossing global franchise since 2018, crushing American produced competition like Star Wars and Marvel (Hutchins). David Buckingham and Julian Sefton-Green attribute this success to the various aspects of the Pokemon phenomenon that "offer[s] different kinds of appeal—and different levels of complexity—for different age groups" (382). This model allows for someone to enjoy Pokemon at the age of 5, as they cuddle their Pikachu plushies, and at age 25, as they digitally track down Pikachu in power line fields on their smartphones. It is a franchise that grows with children instead of being grown out of. Further exploration has demonstrated that the phenomenon offers audience engagement within structured limitations, a blend that mirrors traditional modes of play. Gilles Brougère's interviews with French schoolchildren on their engagement with Pokemon cards supports this theory, as their use of the cards followed both "common techniques

of children's play", but also featured them "customiz[ing] rules and story worlds to meet their

own contexts" (qtd. in Mittel 210). Taking this further, other accounts detailing Pokemon's

cultural capital emphasize that it differs from other children's media that are constructed around

a perception of the child consumer as being passive and disempowered. Instead, through its

multi-textual format and its "reliance on play (in both video game and card forms), collection,

and knowledge acquisition, the show actually demands action and engagement from its young

viewers" (210). Pokemon, therefore, is better understood as a "cultural practice" as it is

something that you do, not just something to be consumed (Buckingham and Sefton-Green 379).

There have been discussions if Pokemon can be considered a "craze", and the accidents

pertaining to the release of Pokemon Go support those claims. The classification of the franchise

as a craze is also related to the profit it generates, something that the entertainment industry

began to take notice of in the late 1990s. Pokemon represented the potential embedded within

anime series, signalling that it was time for Japanese content to break into the international

market, as the potential for revenue from both domestic and foreign audiences was transforming

into reality. On one hand, this was a win for Japanese media exports as Japanese anime has been

found to monopolize the animation market (Han 45) and has resulted in cultural exports tripling

in value to 12.5 billion between the years 1993-2003 (45), which is a far cry from the post-World

War II era - when Japan "imported more mass media content than it exported" (Ito 1990) - until

the 1970s. Furthermore, it also demonstrated that there was an audience appetite and potential for

"global acceptance of anime and related products shows that an un- Disney popular culture can

indeed spread worldwide" (Han 45). However, on the other hand, there are differences within

Western consumption of Japanese anime which subsequently influences the production of

English adaptations. These differences are often categorized through Marco Pelliteri's social algorithm that states that there are two modes of viewership that audience's operate under, the first being the "Dragon",[1] which is regarded as "the consumption of anime in celebration of its differences" (qtd. in Clements 179), and the "Dazzle",[2] a consumption of anime that is centred around what has "become the established norm, such as children who grew up with *Pokemon*" (qtd in. 179). This dichotomous classification may not be able to accurately reflect the entirety of anime's Western audiences but it exposes that there are different ways of consuming anime, distinct peaks of interest, and varying levels of respect and appreciation for Japanese culture among fans. Pelliteri takes this discussion further through his explanation that these two categories represent a chronological transformation within the relationship of Japanese content and the Western market. The Dragon phase ranged from 1975 and 1995 and is considered by Pellieri to be a period when the West sought out Japanese anime, allowing for the aforementioned celebration of differences. The Dazzle phase, which represents the current climate of anime, exemplifies the importance of Western audiences. It is a period in which anime is not being sought out, but rather actively produced for the West. The Dazzle phase also coincides with the largest revenue that Japanese anime has generated within its history. This demonstrates that there is a higher peak of interest for anime that excludes explicit cultural nods.

The privileging of American audiences is detrimental to the anime industry as a whole and exposes the larger issues that influence this persistent concession to American cultural standards. In this paper I will seek to demonstrate the various changes that occur when Japanese

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[1] Refers to the title of Pelliteri's master thesis, The Dragon and the Dazzle: Mass Trans-culture and Multimediality from East to West'.

[2] Refer to the above note.

anime series are adapted into English for Western audiences that are rooted within the erasure of the "cultural odour" of Japan. Through the exploration of the erasure of cultural odour, which is defined by Kōichi Iwabuchi as the, "cultural features of a country of origin and images or ideas of its national, in most cases stereotyped, way of life are associated positively with a particular product in the consumption process" (qtd in. Fennel et al. 441), within the linguistics of English adaptations of Japanese anime, I will demonstrate the relation this bares to cultural appropriation. In order to illuminate this further, I will also examine the erasure of queer relationships within the English adaptations of the two popular Japanese anime series, *Sailor Moon* and *Cardcaptor Sakura*, an erasure that is rooted in an attempt to align with Western standards surrounding childhood.

The Relationship between Cultural Appropriation and the Erasure of Cultural Odour within English Adaptations of Anime

Cultural appropriation has been defined as "the taking—from a culture that is not one's own - of intellectual property, cultural expressions or artifacts, history and ways of knowledge" (Ziff and Rao 1). Cultural appropriation is not a new issue, but rather one that has recently become better understood and has reached mainstream conversation as more and more celebrities and films are called out and "cancelled", a term that is used by young activists as a way of cutting off a person, company, organization, etc from any future revenue by boycotting them. It represents the audience becoming active agents and being advocates for accountability, as it becomes more and more clear that cultural appropriation is not marketable to younger millennials and generation z. Previous generations condoned this behaviour, and some celebrities

even used it as a marketing tool, one example being American singer Gwen Stefani's inclusion of

"Harajuku Girls", four highly sexualized Japanese backup dancers in her videos and promotional

events for her 2004 solo debut album, *Love.Angel.Music.Baby*, as she designed the whole era of

her album around the appropriation of Japanese culture. When American singer Katy Perry tried

to follow this model in 2013 when she performed at the Video Music Awards dressed as a geisha,

the internet was quick to cancel her and she was forced to issue an apology in which she said she

would try to educate herself ("7 Celebrities Accused of Cultural Appropriation"). It represents a

selective mode of imitation that allows for dominant cultures to adopt "trendy" or aesthetically

pleasing elements of a minority culture. The dominant culture is able to "cherrypick" through

other cultures, while still main maintaining the privilege awarded through their membership of

the dominant culture.

While there is more conversation and understanding surrounding cultural appropriation, it

can still be difficult to define what qualifies as appropriation. This difficulty arises out of the

numerous possibilities that are suggested by the term "culture" and the complexity within

cultural transmission. Culture transmission can be viewed as an "appropriative practice" in

which the "dominant group may be criticized and challenged when they borrow the cultural

forms associated with subordinator groups" (Ziff and Rao 7). Western companies adapting

Japanese anime into English is a form of cultural transmission and it is also, unfortunately, a

form of cultural appropriation. One of ways in which Japanese anime is appropriated by the West

is through the erasure of Japan's "cultural odour". American shows are often embedded with

both subtle and obvious cultural nods, like the main hangout spot of the characters on the popular

television show Friends being named "Central Perk", which anchors the show to New York City.

There are even shows that are so "American" it almost feels comedic, like the popular reality show Duck Dynasty that centred around a rags to riches "redneck" family. The show was a mosaic of perceived notions of American culture, as it featured a white family who likes to hunt and successfully obtained their fortune through the fabled "American Dream," which has dominated the modern era of America by selling the idea that everyone has the potential to be successful. Japanese anime often lacks this cultural odour to varying degrees, with it often being treated as "raw material that [is] needed to be honed into something suitable for the American market, typically without the approval or interference of the original owners (Clements 181).

The erasure of cultural odour occurs at a multitude of levels within the process of adapting Japanese anime into English. The dichotomous realm of translation is one of the first areas of discussion, as adaptations either follow the "sub" or "dub" template. "Subs" are understood as films that rely on subtitles to translate the meaning, while "dubs", use English voice actors to mimic the mouth movements of the original actors. Commercial companies usually prefer the method of dubbing over subbing since it has been found that dubs are more popular (Hodges 193) due to their less visible modes of translation. These less visible modes of translation can be understood through their attempts at presenting the material as belonging to the country consuming the dubbed material. (194). Sakai Naoki describes this dynamic of communication as homolingual address and its companion, heterolingual address, as the realm of visible translation (qtd in Hodges 194). Both communication classifications are responsible for creating different senses of community; the homolingual illustrates a commonality that is often rooted in ethnic or nationalist understanding (194), while the heterolingual "acknowledges serious differences between people and thus addresses a fractured audience" (194). One of the

issues with dubbing foreign work into English is that it attempts to mask the original work as though it functions as homolingual (194), a clunky process that usually corrupts the original meaning.

This corruption embedded within the process of adapting Japanese anime into English is the reason why many fans of anime prefer subbing over dubbing, as dubbed anime is usually riddled with mistranslations and alterations, usually caused by the attempt to reduce the Japanese cultural odour and make the work homolingual to a Western audience. Mistranslations are usually synonymous with both subbing and dubbing, as translations are "commonly positioned as second-order modes—occurring after, or in opposition to, the primary process of production" (Dwyer and Uricaru 208). This renders translations extremely vulnerable to misuse, which results in a loss in authenticity and originality (208), stemming from the derailment of the original intention within the original delivery of dialogue in order to make it translatable to English. Mistranslations within subbing and dubbing are both a disservice to the original work, as the translations are usually "empty, vapid, drained of the emotion upon which the original Japanese is predicated" (Ryan 49), and while the words may be the most effective way of translating Japanese into English, the feeling of the original is still at best diluted and at worst it is wholly absent. However, the degree of devastation each inflicts differs. Mistranslations within subtitles are usually not as deferential to the original material as the ones within dubs. While it does parallel the homolingual model of communication as the manufacturers of subtitles often have to choose between prioritizing "strict fidelity to the source text or comprehensibility and accessibility to the intended reader/audience" (qtd in. Martin 22), the use of subtitles ensures that the original voice actors remain intact and anchor the work to its origins, while dubbing "erases

the original, Japanese sounds" (Hodges 193). This erasure of the Japanese language further perpetuates the cultural odourlessness that is embedded within English dubs of Japanese anime, as it disables the heterolingual elements that would cement work that originates from Japan that is not explicitly embellished with visual cultural nods that are not understood globally as Japanese.

The main difference between mistranslations within subbing and dubbing can be understood through the motivations behind each, a difference that is best illustrated by the practice of "fansubbing". Fansubbing occurs when fans, typically Western, create their own subtitles for anime texts that have either not been officially translated for the English market, or to replace the official subtitles that are "lacking in cultural/linguistic information deemed significant by fans. (Hills 82). These fans are not interested in trying to conflate Japanese culture into a Westernized context, but rather seek to better understand the meaning of the original source material. The differences in focus of mainstream translation in comparison to fansubbing demonstrates each realm's motivations, as mainstream translation aims for "mass-market appeal in the target culture by minimizing cultural difference and using as many localizing idioms as possible" (84), while fansubbing prioritizes "preserv[ing] a sense of Japanese culture and language use, often including notes and explanations of material that may be difficult to translate" (84). These differences relate to the social classification of audience attraction to Japanese anime that was earlier illustrated through the concept of "Dragon", which is regarded as "the consumption of anime in celebration of its differences" (qtd in. Clements 179), and "Dazzle" a consumption of anime that is centred around what has "become the established norm" (179). Fansubbers belong to the Dragon domain of anime consumption, as they attempt to

understand the cultural differences within Japan and America, while often fans of dubs fall into the Dazzle side of the dichotomy, as they have often been found to have "no particular interest in its country of origin, or even in the many references to Japanese customs and history which pervade anime and manga" (Levi 3). However, the responses of anime fans in North America has been found to be self-contradictory. They will often claim to have no particular interest in the Japanese elements of anime, but when implored to explain their attraction to the anime they often "list the ways in which anime and manga are different from (and superior to) North American cartoons and comics" (3,4), which is usually a mosaic of praise of the unique drawing styles that are derived from traditional Japanese styles, the blend of comedic elements and tragic scenarios which has long been included within traditional Japanese theatre and literature, and the willingness to deal with difficult subjects like moral ambiguity, loss and death (4). These are all notions of Japanese culture that are neutralized through English dubs that attempt to present Japanese anime as being homogenized and universal because it lacks explicit visual cultural representation. This subsequently influences fans of the dub to never attempt to further their knowledge of Japanese culture in order to recognize and understand all the cultural notions woven within.

The relationship between the erasure of cultural odour and cultural appropriation can be best understood through an Orientalist framework, which is defined by Edward Said as "corporate instituting with the Orient—-dealing with it by making statements about it, views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having power over it" (qtd in. Valk 384). Said's model of Orientalism offers an understanding of how cultural odour erasure and cultural appropriation can

operate in a multitude of ways which may not always be obvious. Anime dubs often serve as Western audience's first introduction to Japanese culture, but it is an introduction that has been rendered culturally odourless in order to "hone it into something suitable for the American market" (Clements 181). This relates to Said's explanation of Orientalism representing the West describing and teaching Oriental culture. Through the erasure of cultural odour within English adaptations of Japanese anime, the West is showcasing Japanese culture in whichever way they choose. Taking this further, this demonstrates that the motivation behind adapting anime into English is rooted in exploitation. English adaptations preserve the elements of the plot that they believe will generate success and toss away the rest in an attempt to homogenize the material for a Western audience. This results in the homogenization and neutralization of less obvious cues of Japanese culture through the elimination of explicit representations of Japanese culture.

An example that illuminates this nicely occurs within the English adaptation of *Star Blazers* (1979), which featured a major change when converted from its original source material, the Japaneae anime, *Space Battleship Yamato* (1974). In the original version, the spaceship was named *Yamato*, a name that originates from the World War II battleship of the same name that sank on April 7th 1945 with few survivors. The anime series featured a scene in which the ship is salvaged from the ocean floor, a scene that has been described as a "powerful rewriting of history" (Levi 6). The English version opted to change the name of the ship to *Argo*, as a reference to the ancient Greek heroes, Argonauts. The name change can also be understood as a way of distancing the English adaptation from the historical influences embedded within the original. The historical account of the sinking within Japanese culture is one that is recounted

with pride, as the ship was sent on a one-way mission to the Japanese island of Okinawa to

protect the island against American forces. The salvaging of the ship from the dried up ocean

floors is an example of less explicit forms of cultural odour being erased in favour of appealing

to Western audiences. From a Western perspective, the sinking of the ship is representative of the

strength of the United States during World War II, and it is the one that Western audiences are

dually familiar and comfortable with. However, it completely mutilates the intended meaning of

the creators and erases the Japanese perspective of both the sinking of *Yamoto* and World War II

overall. Once again, through the erasure of cultural odour within English adaptations of Japanese

anime, the West is showcasing Japanese culture in whichever way they choose while also erasing

their understanding of history.

There is also the issue of erasure of cultural odour within English adaptations of Japanese

the production stages of Japanese anime that occurs at the production stages. While studying US

viewers perceptions of anime characters, Lu found that for anime created after the mid-1960s,

her university-aged subjects viewed the characters as Causcasion (qtd. in Cooper-Chen 48). This

also demonstrated that there was a shift that occurred within this time period that influenced

anime artist to begin constructing non-Japanese faces, one that Grisgby connected to contact with

the West (qtd in Fennel et al. 442). This is further demonstrated in the type of anime that

dominates the North American markets that usually deals with the "fantastic" because science

fiction and fantasy have been found to "render the cultural odour less evident" (Levi 16). Despite

the best efforts of anime creators, the audience will render anime culturally odourless through

first "selecting the types of anime and manga to import, and then by interpreting anything

unusual as fantastic" (16). The homogenized production of anime for the West that erases notions

of Japanese culture and neutralizes any remainders has transformed the audience into active agents of cultural odour erasure.

The Westernization of *Sailor Moon*: Anglicization of Names & Queer Erasure

The English adaptation of the widely popular Japanese anime, *Sailor Moon* (1992-1997), is often regarded as one of the most controversial and harmful English adaptations in anime history. Sailor Moon, which was adapted from the print manga series of the same name (1991-1997), featured a lineup of young teenage girls each named after a planet, except for the eponymous heroine of the story, who transformed into magical soldiers tasked with saving the earth from the forces of evil. The plot line was reflective of the cultural demand for female characters that promoted a discourse emphasizing both female friendships and female protagonists. It proved to be a huge success within Japan and became a fixture of Japanese culture as it continues to be regarded as one of the best-selling Shōjo mangas, a category of mangas that are targeted towards young female audiences, of all time. The popularity of the series within Japan led to a race for various American animation companies to secure the English rights to the show. The magnitude of interest and competition between the companies evident from the bidding war was not surprising. *Sailor Moon*'s initial success among young adolescent girls within Japan was connected to the show's representation of the importance of female friendships and protagonists that were dually strong and feminine. American companies knew this formula would similarly attract American adolescent girls as it parallels the narrative structure that could already be found within American live television series like Buffy the

Vampire Slayer (1997- 2003) and Sabrina the Teenage Witch (1996-2003). The transparent and vulnerable narrative style of both shows paralleled Shōjo mangas, as they all shared a focus on the inner world of female protagonist as they explore the "….emotional maturity, relationships, and familial back- stories as these heroines go about their daily lives" (Ramasubramanian and Kornfield 192). All three shows offered audiences a blend of fantasy and reality, as fans could relate to the issues of school, heartbreak and trying to fit in, while being entertained by the mythical elements that are immersed throughout.

  All these factors indicated that the series was primed for success within North America and eventually the intense bidding war was won by the American company DIC Entertainment Corporation, who enlisted the services of the Canadian Optimum Productions to dub the anime. The anime first premiered in the USA and Canada in 1995, but the original run of the series would prove to be unsuccessful and was cancelled after two seasons. The low ratings would initially appear to indicate that the predictions about the supposed success of *Sailor Moo*n had been incorrect and perhaps the similarities between Shōjo narratives and American television series was not enough to bridge the gap between cultures. However, the initial cancellation of *Sailor Moon* and the low views likely resulted from the time slots that the USA had placed the series, which did not allow it realistically to be shown to its target demographic, rather than on lack of potential interest. This proved to be correct, as the cancellation sparked the fury of fans who petitioned for the series to be saved, demonstrating that there was room for fan growth within the series. Their wish was later granted as re-runs of the series began to air on Cartoon Network; this ignited the ratings and allowed for the rest of the series, except for the fifth and final season, to be dubbed and later released.

While the series was primed for success within America due to the previously explored similarities between the narrative structure and those of other popular American TV shows, the series was riddled with issues that stemmed from the attempts to Westernize it and minimize the cultural odour of Japan. First, there was the name alterations. Some of the characters were allowed to maintain their original names, usually with some changes in spelling, if they did not destabilize the attempts at homolingual communication. For example, Sailor Mars's human alter ego, Rei became Raye, and Sailor Mercury's name change consisted of a simple switch from Ami to Amy. The main heroine, Tsukino Usagim who moonlights as Sailor Moon, was not as lucky as the aforementioned examples, as her name was entirely scrapped and transformed into Serena. The transformation of names is a consistent alteration inflicted, as it operates as a form of homolingualization in an attempt to make the series more appealing for a Western audience. It is a common practice that has occurred persistently since early attempts to bring Japanese anime to the West. Anime series like *Gigantor* (1963), *Speed Racer* (1967), *Battle of the Planets* (1972), all enjoyed reasonable success during their crossover to English audiences, but only appeared in "dubbed forms and names were changed to disguise or at least reduce the Japanese 'odour.'" (Levi 6).

While name changes may seem initially harmless, they are indicative of the larger issue of the erasure of Japanese cultural odour and the Anglicization of Japanese names. Names are often embedded with cultural significance and shape a person's identity. A name can be representative of "various social categories such as age, race, ethnicity, intellectual competence, and various other attributes" (Ruzicka 4). It becomes clear that names operate as social indicators and markers, which can either foster positive or negative reflections. Laham, Koval and Alter

found that names that are "difficult to pronounce" have been ranked less favourably in comparison to easy-to-pronounce names (qtd. in Ruzicka 5). This demonstrates the negative perceptions that a dominant group formulates when they are "presented with a name from a minority group that is difficult for them to pronounce" (5). Asian Americans often choose to "anglicize" their names and adopt an "English name" as a way of avoiding the dominant group's mispronunciations of their names. Anglicizing one's name has been described as a "loss of a person's identity with his/her ethnic group" (6). Using this understanding of the anglicization of names and how it operates as a destabilization in one's connection to one's ethnic group, the name changes within *Sailor Moon* function as a way of furthering the erasure of the cultural odour of Japanese anime so it can better appeal to Western audiences.

While name changes represent the privileging of Western audiences and support the refusal of fans to engage with Japanese culture, there is further damage that is inflicted upon English adaptations of anime that is much more devastating. The reason why the English dub of *Sailor Moon* is so controversial does not reside within the name changes or the homolingualizing found within all dubs, but rather in the subject matter that DIC Entertainment, the American company who produced the dub, chose to omit. The original version of *Sailor Moon* characterized queer relationships as acceptable and normal from a very early point within the series. The first queer relationship explicitly shown with the series was between the two evil henchmen, Kunzite and Zoisite. When the series was adapted for Western audiences, Zoisite was transformed into a woman. Wockner attributed this conversion to broadcaster's fears that viewers would "intuit a 'gay' relationship between the characters" (qtd. in Hoskin 4). Zoisite, who was presented as non-binary within the original series, was the easier of the two characters to alter in

order to destabilize any homosexuality within the series. This would not be the first alteration related to the erasure of queer characters within the series, as it would soon be inflicted upon characters who were more central to the plot. The third season featured the introduction of two new Sailor Scouts, Sailor Uranus and Sailor Neptune, who served as the mystical alter egos of Amara and Michelle. In the original, the two are explicitly depicted as being in a romantic relationship. This presented an issue for the American broadcasting company in charge of distributing the series, as they could not edit out the characters or swap one of their genders in an attempt to transform the relationship into a heterosexual one. Instead, they opted to represent Amara and Michelle as "cousins", resulting in a very confusing and awkward final product. While the dub had erased the romantic dialogue between the two, the animation betrayed the attempted transformation through the remaining affectionate gestures. When the producers of the English dub were questioned over their decision to censor the queer relationship, they stated that the reasoning was related to ensuring that the series was a "product that is suitable for children" (qtd. in Hoskin 3).

The erasure of queer relationships in order to be "suitable for children" raises the discussion of why queer relationship are not appropriate for children and why the spectrum of appropriate media for children has to be understood through a Western perspective. The positive representation of queer relationships within *Sailor Moon* is reflective of the cultural attitudes surrounding same sex relationships within Japan, a country that has a long history of being accepting of sexual minorities, presenting "no major difficulties in being gay in Japan" (Shoushi 2008). This acceptance can be demonstrated through Japanese anime's long history of including queer characters, with the first queer character making an appearance in *The Rose of Versailles*

(1979). American animated television shows have been slower to include queer characters, with the first openly gay character not being featured until 1997 in the popular animated series, *The Simpsons*. While the episode, "Homer's Phobia" was acclaimed for its critique of the "the most common misconception about homosexuality: namely that gayness is somehow contagious" (Henry 2003). its exploration of a queer character was not as rigorous and inclusive as Japanese anime. It also was created for an adult audience, which also indicates that while American audiences could have a positive reaction towards queer characters, there is still an instilled belief that children should not be exposed to relationships that are not heterosexual.

This reasoning only further demonstrates that the transformation of the relationships within *Sailor Moon* was rooted in the pursuit of ensuring that the series would be appropriate for Western children audiences through the maintenance of "heteronormativity and normative-bodies by erasing queer desire and identities" (Hoskin 4). Once again, the privileging of Western audiences further perpetuates the erasure of the cultural odour of Japan through the erasure of cultural and social norms in order to homogenize anime into the Western cultural attitudes surrounding queer couples and children's proximity to these relationships.

Westernization of *Cardcaptor Sakura*: Cultural Differences and Queer Characters

*Sailor Moo*n was not the only English anime dub to be guilty of erasing queer relationships in order to homogenize into Western cultural attitudes surrounding queer couples and children's proximity to these relationships. *Cardcaptor Sakura* (1998-2000), was a Japanese anime series targeted towards children that featured a young girl, Sakura, who after accidentally

releasing a set of magical cards, "Clow Cards", that are infused with magical powers must track

them down in order to save the world from destruction. The series featured a budding romance

between Sakura's older brother, Touya, and his best friend Yukito, as they fall in love with one

another over the course of the series. The creator of the series stated that she wanted to

"normalize queer identities in people of a young age that wouldn't talk down to its target

audience" and wanted to create something that "minorities would feel comfortable

with" (Collins). This pursuit of acceptance and understanding of queer relationships is reflective

of the cultural attitudes surrounding same sex relationships within Japan. However, when the

series was adapted for English, the romantic nature of their relationship was instead

characterized as an extremely close friendship. This was not the only alteration that the English

adaptation inflicted upon the series. Sakura's best friend, Tomoyo, was portrayed as entirely

infatuated with Sakura in the original series and would accompany her on all her missions. In the

English adaptation, Tomoyo's crush is omitted and the relationship is transformed into one of

platonic devotion.

The previous exploration of *Sailor Moon* invites comparisons between Japanese anime's

extensive inclusion of queer characters versus America's limited archive of queer characters.

While the first queer character within anime was introduced in 1979, it was not until nearly

twenty years later that American animated television would debut an openly queer character.

While there has been substantial improvement within America's inclusion of queer characters,

the reception of those characters exposes that there are still cultural differences that remain. In

2019, the popular PBS children's animated television show, *Arthur* (1996-present), revealed that

long standing character, Mr. Ratburn, was queer through his marriage to another man. The

episode, "Mr. Ratburn and the Special Someone", itself was a positive representation of

acceptance towards same-sex relationships, however, the reaction that followed would expose

deep-rooted oppositions. One Million Moms, a division of the American Family Association,

expressed their discontent on their website: "Discussion of such controversial topics and lifestyle

choices should be left up to parents". They continued with their tirade, "PBS Kids should not

introduce this to young children. Just because an issue may be legal or because some are

choosing a lifestyle doesn't make it morally correct. PBS Kids should stick to entertaining and

providing family-friendly programming, instead of pushing an agenda." The reactions

demonstrate that there is still vocal opposition towards children having access to depictions of

queer characters and homosexual relationships.

The discussion of the difference of children's proximity to queer characters and

homosexual relationships within Japanese anime and American animation is a further

demonstrations of the cultural differences between the two countries. *Sailor Moon* and

Cardcaptor Sakura are both meant to be targeted towards children within Japan and America, an

element that appeals to American companies tasked with dubbing as "American animation tends

to be reserved for children's shows, many genres of anime lack an obvious market niche, limiting

the kinds of material that get translated" (Hodges 189). When animation does include more

mature themes or ones that have been deemed unsuitable for children, it is distinctly categorized

as "adult", demonstrating the dichotomy that exists within American animation. This dichotomy

is not as strict within Japanese anime, and while there are anime series that are explicitly for

adults (189), the criteria for the exclusion of children from the target audience differs from

America as "childhood and sexuality are not artificially separated from each other" (Helms 141).

Japanese anime is willing to acknowledge that children are aware and conscious of their sexuality from a young age as they develop crushes on one another and the inclusion of queer characters supports children in understanding their sexuality and protects them from feeling ashamed. *Cardcaptor Sakura* supports this encouragement for children to feel comfortable with their queer identities through the characters of Sakura and Tomoyo, who are both 10 years old at the beginning of the series. Tomoyo developing a crush on her best friend, Sakura, with no negative repercussions positively demonstrates that this is an acceptable from of sexuality and attraction.

When Japanese anime is dubbed and the character's' sexualities have been unequivocally changed it indicates that "western broadcast stations are shying away from the topic of homosexuality in a children's program, whereas Japanese do not" (Helms, 141-142). The depiction of homosexuality as an adult theme within American animation articulates the belief that love narratives between various genders is inappropriate for younger audiences and that these relations are to be understood through a "pornographic and deviant framework" (Hoskin 8). Portraying these relationships as deviant and something that has to be edited out in order to be deemed acceptable for child consumption is the exact opposite of the intentions of the creator. It also illuminates a larger issue that relates to the same ideologies surrounding the anglicizing of character names. The erasure of queer sexualities is linked to "historical and symbolic methods of disciplining bodies that are deemed not to fit within the dichotomous bounds of heteronormativity" (3), a dichotomous bound that is formulated on American cultural conceptions of sexualities. This leaves queer characters to be "abjected from the Western world and expelled from the cultural imaginary" (Hoskin 8), and further erases the cultural odour of

Japan which supports positive inclusion of queer characters within anime. The erasure of queer characters also destabilizes the shõjo genre, as shõjo also presents the "creative escapism in adolescent same-sex fantasy" as a way of resisting "patriarchy and compulsory heterosexuality" (Saito 149: M. Suzuki 582-83). This can also be understood as an example of the erasure of cultural odour and cultural appropriation. The English adaptations have selected the elements from the shõjo genre that can be homogenized for a Western audience, such as female friendships and strong female protagonists, but have erased the ones that cannot, such as queer characters. Ultimately, the erasure of queer characters represents a disregard for Japanese culture, which has a long history of having no significant opposition towards same-sex relationships, and for the creators of the anime series that include these characters.

Conclusion

1998: stop playing Pokemon and go outside

2016: stop playing Pokemon and come inside

@jonnysun (Twitter, July 2016)

The above tweet characterizes Pokemon's continued success and popularity as it has established itself as the one franchise that seems unlikely to die out. The success of Pokemon changed the game for Japanese anime, as it brought it to global recognition. The amplified attention towards Japanese anime has generated a generous profit, but the extensive revenue cannot pay the cost of what has been lost through increased Western consumption of anime. The cultural transmission between Japan and the West is one that is characterized as an "appropriative

practice" as the cultural odour has been erased from the anime in order to homogenize the content. This functions in a multitude of levels, which is why it can be so difficult for audiences to recognize any notions of Japanese culture with anime.

My previous exploration into the relationship between fans of dubbed anime and Japanese culture revealed that through a mixture of ignorance and the erasure of cultural odour, the fans have unconsciously neutralized notions of Japanese culture that are not explicitly visual. This represents that there are two modes of erasure that occurs within English adaptations of Japan. There is the initial erasure that is performed through the Western companies that adapt anime series for Western audiences. This initial erasure attempts to homogenize the content, which can operate through homolingualizing the dialogue and the anglicization of names within *Sailor Moon.* It can also occur through the attempts to homogenize the content through the erasure of any cultural differences, an example being the erasure of queer characters in *Sailor Moon* and *Cardcaptor Sakura* in order to comply with Western perception on children's proximity to same-sex relationships. Then there is the second erasure that transpires through the fan's consumption of this material. They will characterize their attraction to anime as being related to the ways in which, "anime and manga are different from (and superior to) North American cartoons and comics" (Levi 3, 4), but deny that this attraction is related to Japanese culture. Their denial stems from the notions of Japanese culture that are neutralized through English dubs that attempt to present Japanese anime as being homogenized and universal because it lacks explicit visual cultural representation.

This is a consumption of anime that is mutilated and does not represent a respect for Japanese culture. It is a cultural transmission in which in order for Japanese anime to find

success outside of Japan, it has to be transformed into something that Western audiences feel

comfortable engaging with. The period of privileging Western audiences needs to conclude and

hopefully ignite a return to the "Dragon" era of concussion of anime, a consumption that

celebrates the differences within Japanese culture and anime (qtd. in Clements 179). This would

allow for Western audiences to engage with anime and be introduced to a culture different from

their own. The positive representation of queer characters within children's media in Japan and

Japan's acceptance of queer identities could assist in closing the gap between Western children's

proximity to same-sex relationships. If we can overcome our differences to collectively chase

virtual Pokemon around for a whole summer, then we can learn to appreciate the differences that

other cultures have to offer. Now, that would be world peace.

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