The dissemination and localization of anime in China:

Case study on the Chinese mobile video game Onmyoji

Wuqian Qian

The Department of Asian, Middle Eastern and Turkish Studies
Master Program in Asian Studies, 120 hp
Autumn term 2016
Supervisor: Jaqueline Berndt
English title: Professor
Abstract

In the 2017 Chinese Gaming Industry Report, a new type of video games called 二次元 game is noted as a growing force in the game industry. *Onmyoji* is one of those games produced by NetEase and highly popular with over 200 million registered players in China alone. 二次元 games are characterized by Japanese-language dubbing and anime style in character design. However, *Onmyoji* uses also Japanese folklore, which raises two questions: one is why NetEase chose to make such a 二次元 game, the other why a Chinese game using Japanese folklore is so popular among Chinese players. The attractiveness of an exotic culture may help to explain the latter, but it does not work for the first. Thus, this thesis implements a media studies perspective in order to substantiate its hypothesis that it is the dissemination of anime in China that has made *Onmyoji* possible and successful.

Unlike critics who regard anime as an imported product from Japan which is different from domestic Chinese animation and impairs its development, this study pays attention to the interrelation between media platforms and viewer (or user) demographics, and it explores the positive influence of Japanese anime on the Chinese creative industry, implying the feasibility of anime or 二次元 products to be created in other countries than Japan. By focusing on media, this study aims to contribute to an awareness of media culture in Area Studies, in this case, Japanese Studies, Chinese Studies, and/or East Asian Studies.

Keywords: Onmyoji, 二次元, ACG (Anime Comic Games), Chinese anime, fan works, industry
Convention

This thesis uses Chicago Author-Date Style for quotation and bibliography. The romanization of Japanese words follows the revised Hepburn system with the exception of indicating macrons. The Romanization of Chinese words follows Pinyin. The Chinese word 二次元 is used throughout the thesis and was Romanized only in the introduction part for that the Chinese characters were directly borrowed from the Japanese word 二次元 (nijigen), but it differs from the original concept of nijigen. Chinese and Japanese names are given in the East-Asian name order, that is, surname preceding first name without separation by comma except in the bibliography.
Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.................................................................................................................................................1

CHAPTER 1 ANIME IN CHINA.................................................................................................................................7

1.1 HOW ANIME SPREAD IN CHINA.......................................................................................................................7
   1.1.1 Anime on TV ..................................................................................................................................................7
   1.1.2 Anime in magazines ....................................................................................................................................10
   1.1.3 Anime on DVD/VCD ..................................................................................................................................11
   1.1.4 Anime on the Internet ..................................................................................................................................12
       1.1.4.1 Free shared resources for download ..................................................................................................13
       1.1.4.2 Online video sites ............................................................................................................................14
       1.1.4.3 Newsletters of social media accounts ..............................................................................................15
   1.1.5 Cinema as a new platform for anime ........................................................................................................16

1.2 ANIME FANDOM IN CHINA ...............................................................................................................................18
   1.2.1 The composition of anime fans ................................................................................................................18
   1.2.2 Active forms and platforms .....................................................................................................................18
   1.2.3 Fan works ...................................................................................................................................................19

1.3 THE EMERGENCE OF CHINESE ANIME ........................................................................................................19
   1.3.1 Formats and styles of Chinese anime .......................................................................................................19
   1.3.2 Production and release of Chinese anime ...............................................................................................22
   1.3.3 The amount and genres of Chinese anime ...............................................................................................22
   1.3.4 The industrialization of Chinese anime ..................................................................................................22

CHAPTER 2: THE RECEPTION OF ANIME IN CHINA............................................................................................24

2.1 NEGATIVE OPINIONS ......................................................................................................................................24
   2.1.1 “Anime as cultural invasion” ....................................................................................................................24
   2.1.2 “Anime as a medium of sex and violence” ...............................................................................................27
   2.1.3 “Anime as an impediment of the Chinese animation industry” ..............................................................28

2.2 POSITIVE OPINIONS .......................................................................................................................................30
   2.2.1 “Anime as a community of kindred spirits” ............................................................................................30
2.2.2 “Anime as an educational tool for teenagers” ................................................................. 31
2.2.3 “Anime as a worthwhile field for investment” ................................................................. 32

CHAPTER 3: CASE STUDY OF ONMYOJI ................................................................. 35

3.1 THE GAMEPLAY OF ONMYOJI .............................................................................. 35
3.2 THE PLAYERS OF ONMYOJI ................................................................................. 36
3.3 THE FEATURES OF ONMYOJI ................................................................................ 36
  3.3.1 Visual and vocal characteristics ............................................................................ 36
  3.3.2 Functional characteristics ..................................................................................... 38
3.4 THE PROMOTION OF ONMYOJI ........................................................................... 38
  3.4.1 The interaction between game and players ............................................................. 38
  3.4.2 Media mix of Onmyoji .......................................................................................... 39
3.5 THE POPULARITY OF ONMYOJI ......................................................................... 40
  3.5.1 Reasons for its popularity ..................................................................................... 41
    3.5.1.1 Delicate design in visual, vocal, and narrative regards ..................................... 41
    3.5.1.2 Targeting anime fans in China ......................................................................... 42
    3.5.1.3 “Authentic Japanese culture” ............................................................................ 44
3.6 THE REVISIONS OF ONMYOJI ........................................................................... 45

CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................. 47

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT ............................................................................................. 49

BIBLIOGRAPHY ........................................................................................................ 50

APPENDIX 1 ............................................................................................................. 56

APPENDIX 2 ............................................................................................................. 57
Introduction

Before introducing this thesis, some crucial terms shall be explained.

*Anime* is initially known as a form of entertaining fiction rendered in cel-based limited animation. In Japan, anime is distributed in different formats including TV series, movies for theatrical release, OVA (original video animation), web, TV commercials and games. The word anime is a Japanese abbreviation of the English loanword *animation*, which emerged in the 1970s, but can mean all forms of animated film. Outside Japan, anime refers specifically to animation from Japan or the related style often characterized by colorful graphics, vibrant characters, and fantasy themes.

In Chinese, there is more than one equivalent to the Japanese term. The historically first term was transliterated from the English word cartoon, *katong* (卡通), a type of illustration, possibly animated, typically in a non-realistic or semirealistic style. The specific meaning has evolved over time, but today it usually refers to either an image or series of images intended for satire and humor, or to video that relies on a sequence of images.

The second Chinese term is *dongman* (动漫), a portmanteau of *dong* (animation, moving images) and *man* (manga/manhua, still images, comics). This word first appeared in the name of the Chinese Animation & Comic Publishers Association in Taiwan in 1998. In the same year, a magazine named *Anime Comic Time* started publication in Mainland China.

---

1 As distinct from “full animation” it restricts the number of cels used per second of film to less than eight and creates an impression of movement by editing, sound and other means. See Steinberg 2012, 15-16.
2 中華動漫出版同業協進會 (1998-), formed by a group of comics and animation companies, peripheral goods manufacturers, and distributors of Taiwan Publishing House, is the most influential public association group in Taiwan comics industry.
3 *动漫时代* (November 1998-) was the first magazine that introduced anime in Mainland China and China’s highest-selling anime magazine. It ceased publication in July 2006 due to fierce peer competition and investors’ withdrawal, which is called ACT July Incident in the Chinese anime and comics industry.
The third term is ACG, an acronym of “Anime, Comic, and Games”, used in some Chinese-language subcultures. It refers in particular to Japanese anime, manga and video games, with the latter initially referring to *galgames*[^4], but recently to all games in anime or manga style. The term first appeared with the *ACG Review Board* at National Sun Yat-sen University’s BBS in 1995, created by a Taiwanese fan of anime and comics. Afterwards, with the promotion of Shahulu Alliance[^5], the acronym stabilized and became popular in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.

*Erciyuan* (二次元) is another recently important term. As different from *dongman* and ACG, it is derived from the Japanese word *nijigen* (二次元).[^6] It basically means two-dimensional and is used as a synonym for the mainstream style of Japanese anime, but it is also applied to comics, games, and other works displayed on paper or screen. If garage kits and figures are based on 2D characters, they belong to 二次元. When *nijigen* was imported to China, people conjoined the 2D pictorial space with the “world” in Japanese anime and games. *Two Dimensions Mania* (二次元狂热, 2008-) was the first media information magazine in China that used the term.

The above terms co-exist in contemporary Chinese. Dongman and ACG are only used in China while 二次元 is used both in Japan and China. The scope of each term is different as well. Dongman is generally used to refer to anime and manga, while ACG and 二次元 also include video games. To some degree, 二次元 equals ACG insofar as they both refer to anime, comics, and video games, but 二次元 can also signify virtual worlds that only exist in ACG works.

All these terms are related to *Onmyoji*, a smartphone-based video game produced by

[^4]: Bishojo game
[^5]: 傻呼嚕同盟, is a Taiwanese anime and comic review group, founded on October 16, 1997 to promote ACG culture; the main members included initiator Jo-Jo, Alplus, tp, ZERO, etc. The name was a transliteration of Shuffle Alliance in *Mobile Fighter G Gundam*.
[^6]: Below, the Sinojapanese characters are used instead of romanization to avoid cultural fixation as either Japanese or Chinese.
the Chinese internet company Netease. With over 200 million players in registration, this game has spread in China, Japan, Korea, Thailand, Vietnam, and Western countries since June 20, 2016 when it was first released. It is categorized as a 二次元 game in the 2017 Chinese Gaming Industry Report, and Netease planned to release it first in Japan only. Japan and 二次元 are two words that remind people of anime and manga. Indeed, Onmyoji has anime characteristics such as Japanese voice acting and anime-style character design, and the main story in the game references onmyoji and yokai as part of Japanese folklore. It is understandable that Netease initially considered Japan as the first market. But with the advocacy of many Chinese players in the beta version, Netease changed its mind and decided to release Onmyoji first in Mainland China. And this change proved right for Onmyoji ranked No.1 in the list of Bestselling Applications of China within one month and stayed No.1 for ten days. Though the number of active players has decreased, the number of daily players still reached 1.49 million by September 2017. This phenomenon raises two questions: one is why Netease chose to make such a 二次元 game; the other is why Onmyoji became so popular in China. To answer these two questions, it is vital to consider the influence of anime on the Chinese ACG industry. It is precisely this influence that has made Onmyoji possible and successful, as this thesis will try to demonstrate.

Concerning the spread of anime in China, both positive and negative influences have been discussed among Chinese scholars. For instance, Wang (2013) argued that 二次元 culture will weaken the recognition of national culture, threaten domestic animation, and appropriate cultural resources. Gao (2013), too, considered that the continuous dissemination of Japanese ACG culture will reduce the space for domestic anime, comics, and games to survive. Besides, Yang (2014) and Guo (2016) were worried that violent, sexual, and anti-mainstream representations in anime are not good for teenagers. When referring to the positive influence of Japanese anime, scholars have only focused

---

7 Wang used Dragon Ball, Chuka Ichiban! and other anime related to Chinese culture to exemplify that Japanese anime is appropriating cultural resources from China. Wang felt regretful about Chinese culture explouted in Japanese anime (2013, 33).
on audiences. For example, Liang (2015) noted that audiences can relax by watching anime, that the affirmation of life in anime is useful for the mental development, and that sports anime can improve the awareness of teenagers to grow in a healthy way. Yang (2014) explained that Japanese anime can attract teenagers to study Japanese culture.

It is hard to find research that considers Japanese anime’s positive role in the development of the Chinese animation industry, although it is easy to find similarities between current popular Chinese animation such as *outcast* and *Rakshasa Street*, and Japanese anime as well as 二次元 video games produced by Chinese companies. While Liang (2015) mentioned that Japanese anime offers a chance for the Chinese animation industry, suggesting that Chinese animators can reference the artistic style of Japanese anime, he failed to explain why such reference would be useful.

Some scholars have noticed the cooperation of the Chinese animation industry with Japan and that Chinese animations are not only made for children any more but also for teenagers and adults. To distinguish animation for teenagers and adults from traditional animation for children, this thesis uses the term “Chinese anime”. Regarding the cooperation with Japan, some scholars (Li, 2011; Wang and Takahashi, 2015) only referenced animation produced before 2012 such as *Origin: Spirits of the Past*¹, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*², and *The Tibetan Dog*³ though current Chinese animation cooperates more with Japan. Referring to Chinese anime, Zhai (2017) pointed out that Chinese 二次元 culture resulted from the lack of official dissemination and the help of subtitle groups, and Chinese anime fans as well as their fan works are derived from 二次元 culture, which also contributes to the localization of 二次元 culture in China. Guo (2017) conducted a case study on *One Hundred Thousand Bad* 

---

¹ 銀色の髪のアギト (銀色の髪のアギト) is an animation film released in Japan in 2004 which failed to pass the censorship of China.
² 三国演义 (最強武将伝 三国演義) is a serial TV animation produced in 2008 which was broadcast in both China and Japan.
³ 藏獒多吉 (チベット犬物語) is an animation film produced in 2011 which was broadcast on Chinese TV and Japanese pay TV.
Jokes. He focused on the production of anime and the interaction among different media formats, exploring the current situation of network animation and the effects of the ACG mode only. However, as a media product, anime relates to both consumption and production. Separating the two sides does not help to understand the current situation of Chinese ACG culture/industry.

In a word, previous studies on the influence of anime in China paid little attention to the positive role of Japanese anime in the Chinese animation industry. Studies on current Chinese animation fail to combine consumption and production in a precise way, considering only a few Chinese anime or ACG works which play an important role in the Chinese ACG industry. To fill those gaps, the author chose a Chinese video game as a case study to investigate the current situation of the ACG industry in China and to find positive impacts of Japanese anime on the Chinese ACG industry. Thus it is necessary to give an introduction to anime’s dissemination and localization as well as its reception among both anime fans and non-anime fans. The first two chapters introduce the dissemination, localization, and reception of anime, depicting the background and context for the emergence of Onmyoji. The third chapter focuses on Onmyoji itself, exploring the reasons for its popularity by investigating its promotion, referencing articles published in mainstream media, and interviewing players. 13 players were randomly selected, and all the interviews were conducted through online conversation, using Wechat, Tencent QQ, and the communication function in the game. They were asked three questions: 1. Why do you play this game? 2. How do you explain its popularity from your point of view? 3. Are you an anime fan or not? Because the mother tongue of author and interviewed players is Chinese, all the interviews were conducted in English. The author anonymized the names of interviewed players out of privacy concerns.

---

11 十万个冷笑话 is being serialized on YouYaoQi, an online comic website. It has been adapted into an animation series and animated film since 2012.
12 Tencent QQ is an instant messaging software service developed by the Chinese company Tencent.
By analyzing a 二次元 video game produced by a Chinese company, this study questions the difference between Japanese anime culture and Chinese anime culture, acknowledging anime as a format that can be used in other countries apart from Japan. But this does not mean that localized anime culture is the same as anime culture in Japan because ways of dissemination, cultural policies, and consumer demographics are different. Those differences will not be covered in this study, but they become visible as points of departure for further studies. In addition, this study only involves anime, comics, and video game without mentioning other rising forms of 二次元 media in China such as radio drama and sound comics. But their ties to the development of Chinese voice actors justify starting from anime and video games. Furthermore, it should be noted that this study covers only mainland China.
Chapter 1 Anime in China

Japanese anime entered the People’s Republic of China (henceforth China) in 1980 with the import of 『铁臂阿童木』 (Astroboy). Some Chinese scholars (Chen and Teng 2006; Wang 2013) have divided the spread of anime in China into three periods: the official mass-media dissemination period, the pirates’ domination period, and the amateurs’ dissemination period. But their article focuses on TV, pirated DVD/VCDs and amateur subtitle groups, ignoring other mediums such as magazines and cinema as well as other fan groups. To fill this gap, this thesis will provide a more comprehensive introduction to the history and current situation of anime’s spread in China based on various media platforms. Then the fandom of anime in China as well as Chinese productions influenced by Japanese anime will be discussed.

1.1 How anime spread in China

The spread of anime in China has been a complicated process that involves the government, businessmen, and fans. This section will introduce anime’s spread in China while focusing on different mediums and providing some historical background.

1.1.1 Anime on TV

Television was the first media platform that introduced Japanese anime to Chinese audiences. Since Astroboy in 1980, many foreign animation series have entered China and become shared memories for many Chinese people born in the 1980s and 1990s. Though anime broadcasts on TV were welcomed by young audiences, the import of Japanese anime did not always go smoothly. This part will first introduce the official policies and then specify the broadcast of both anime itself and informational programs.

---

13 Monochrome version imported and broadcast by CCTV in December 1980.
14 The authors are from the School of Journalism and Communication, Jinan University.
15 Fan-cultural groups engaged in subtitling. See Ma and Fang 2016.
In 2000, SARFT\textsuperscript{16} launched a policy that any imported animation should be examined and approved, and each TV station should limit the proportion of foreign animation. In 2004, SARFT issued a document called *Some Opinions on Developing Film and TV Animation Industry in China*, suggesting that the share of domestic cartoons broadcast on TV should be no less than 60%. In 2005, SARFT advocated that domestic cartoons should air during prime time (17:00–21:00) in *Specific Measures for Promoting the Development of Animation Creation in China*. From September 1, 2006, all TV channels at all levels were obliged to not broadcast foreign animations or respective informational programs between 5pm and 8pm. Co-produced animations could be broadcast in this period upon special approval by SARFT. Channels targeted at minors had to broadcast domestic animations or self-produced children’s programs and refrain completely from domestic or foreign films and TV dramas.

Due to the policy\textsuperscript{17} mentioned above, most Japanese anime were available on TV from 1980 to 2005, with a few exceptions such as *Doraemon* and *Chibi Maruko Chan* that are considered suitable for children and still being broadcast on TV now. Apart from some anime made for children, most imported anime were for teenagers,\textsuperscript{18} and *shonen* and comedy were the two main genres, such as the popular series *Lulu, the Flower Angel*, *Saint Seiya*, and *Slam Dunk*.

*Lulu, the Flower Angel* was the first anime not imported by CCTV. *Saint Seiya* was first broadcast on SYTV\textsuperscript{19} and got popular very quickly, which made other local TV stations compete to import this anime as well. Publishers soon released a series of manga books with the same name and sold more than 6 million copies from 1990 to 1991 (Chen and Teng 2006, 78). *Slam Dunk*, imported from Taiwan and dubbed by

\textsuperscript{16} The State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television of the People’s Republic of China, in March 2013 merged with the General Administration of Press and Publication (GAPP) into the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT).

\textsuperscript{17} More details see Han and Chen 2015.

\textsuperscript{18} At that time, most Chinese people considered animation as a product for children, hence most grown-ups would not choose to watch anime.

\textsuperscript{19} SYTV (Shenyang Television 沈阳电视台) was launched in 1979.
Taiwanese voice actors, gained even more popularity than Saint Seiya. Almost every student knew the names of Sakuragi Hanamichi and Rukawa Kaede, its two main characters. The huge success of Slam Dunk is also cited as an influence on the increased popularity of basketball among Chinese youth during the 1990s. The character Rukawa Kaede was especially well-received among female students (China Daily 2016).

Unlike Saint Seiya and Slam Dunk, Neon Genesis Evangelion (abbr. EVA; Jp. 新世紀エヴァンゲリオン 1995) was not a successful import. Many scenes and lines that were considered unsuitable for children were cut in the process of dubbing, and even the opening song was changed, which caused anger among audiences who had watched EVA on pirated VCD with the original contents before its broadcast on Chinese TV. Chinese fans of EVA fiercely criticized the distortion, and the official import of EVA became a failure (Chen and Teng 2006, 79).

In 1994, CCTV started the program Cartoon City with its own cartoon hosts. Cartoon Express as the first section introduced information on foreign animations. In its opening part, there was a short video clip that used fragments from Japanese anime. Apart from CCTV, some regional TV stations also launched animation programs such as KAKU, Aniworld TV, and Toonmax. These three animation programs all had sections that introduced and discussed Japanese anime. Anime Cool Zone of KAKU and Bangyang Dongxi of Aniworld TV were two sections that provided anime news and commentary. Anime Information of Toonmax also introduced Japanese voice
actors, merchandise, and anime songs, for example, in their section *Love IN on weekends*.\(^{31}\)

Because of the official policy, those programs have been revised, and the anime sections are no longer available, but they did provide fresh and attractive information for audiences then.

### 1.1.2 Anime in magazines

Magazines belong to the publication industry which was under the administration of GAPP (General Administration of Press and Publication). GAPP merged with SARFT into SAPPRFT (State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television) on March 14, 2013, seven years after SARFT had banned foreign anime from TV. The longer time in between provided anime and manga magazines with a chance to flourish. Various magazines were launched, and people could buy them at news stands along the streets or at the corner of college campuses.

![](image1.png)

**Figure 1. Anime related magazines in China**

Most of these magazines were monthlies (see Fig. 1) and introduced anime or published manga series, offering also posters and DVDs or CDs as gifts. Some included fan works

\(^{31}\) 周末爱上 IN
and introductions of voice actors like *Comic Front* and *Anime Spot*. Others like *Two Dimensions Mania, Animation & Comics Fans* and *Animation Comic Moe* had their own features. For example, *Two Dimensions Mania* focused on both information and the analysis of anime. *Animation & Comics Fans* had a column named *Animation & Comics Fans Travelling in Japan* which organized trips for anime and manga fans. *Animation Comic Moe* was known for its erotic pictures of anime characters.

Though most of the anime and manga magazines were welcomed by fans, copyright issues and elements that were regarded “unsuitable for minors” finally drew the attention of the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China, the Ministry of Education, SAPPRFT and other governmental agencies in September 2013. Xinhua News Agency and CCTV News Channel reported on “anime and manga magazines with filthy contents” in succession. Afterwards, some magazines were forced to stop publication permanently such as *Animation & Comics Fans* and *Anime New Type* or for several months like *Animation Comic Moe*.

### 1.1.3 Anime in DVD/VCD

As mentioned by some scholars (Chen and Teng 2006; Sudo 2008), piracy was a serious issue in China, especially in the 1990s and 2000s. Though genuine DVDs were sold,
they were too expensive for students, and they could not fulfill the demands of anime fans neither with respect to quantity nor diversity of genres. Thus, some businessmen saw the chance to make profits from pirated DVDs.

As mentioned above, the official import of EVA in 2001 became a failure because fans had watched the unrevised pirated version. Pirated DVDs/VCDs peaked at that time. Not only anime but also manga and video games were illegally pressed into compact discs. Due to the lack of effective copyright regulation and the relatedly weak awareness, many pirated DVDs/VCDs entered the market to be purchased at a cheap price. At first, most pirated anime were copied from the version released in Taiwan and Hongkong. To make more profits, pirates started to employ people who were in command of Japanese to translate new anime rather than wait for the translated version from Hongkong and Taiwan, which saved time on the one hand and fulfilled the growing demand on the other hand. Most translators were employed temporarily for a low reward, which affected the quality of translation. Though anime fans were not satisfied with the translation, they had to endure it since the demand for new anime exceeded the supply (Chen and Teng 2006, 79).

Because of the piracy, people in China got in touch with genres of anime and manga, including BL, that escaped the censorship by the government. But with the development of the Internet, online resources have gradually replaced DVD.

1.1.4 Anime on the Internet

With the development of the Internet in China, it has become more convenient for anime audiences to obtain anime resources and information. These are circulated mainly in three ways: shared resources for download, streaming media, and newsletters of social

---

41 One pirated DVD only cost 45 CNY (Sudo 2008, 44).
42 Abbreviation of Boys Love, a term mainly used in Japanese for fictions of male same-sex relationships.
media accounts.

1.1.4.1 Free shared resources for download

Before streaming media became popular, most anime were translated by subtitle groups and then uploaded onto P2P resource sharing platforms and forums, where anime fans communicated with each other. Some anime and manga forums have their own subtitle groups, such as POPGO and dmhy. The subbing usually has several steps, acquiring first-hand resources, translating, proofreading, special effects, embedding, pressing, and uploading; hence members in a subtitle group take different responsibility. Once the anime resources are uploaded, people can download them by different download softwares such as Thunder and utorrent. And because these subtitle groups are anime fans who have the enthusiasm to share anime with others and have strict standards when recruiting new members, the quality of the translation is much better than that of the pirated DVDs/VCDs. As they do not aim to make profit, people prefer shared resources over pirated DVDs/VCDs. Besides, since there are no restrictions of users’ age, profession and location to be considered, it takes less time for forum-based subtitle groups to accomplish one episode of an anime.

Shared resources make it easier for anime fans to watch anime in higher quality, but the copyright issue is as much a problem as with pirated DVDs/VCDs. In order to to avoid legal liability the following sentences are always embedded in the shared resources by subtitle groups: “This subtitled version is for learning and communication only, and commercial use is strictly prohibited. Please delete it within 24 hours and purchase the original.” (Ma and Fang 2016, 62).47

---

43 漫游, founded on December 9, 2001.
44 动漫花园, also founded in 2001.
45 迅雷 (xunlei) is one of the most widely used download softwares developed by Thunder Network Technology Co., Ltd., Shenzhen.
46 Utorrent, with over 150 million users the most widely used BitTorrent client outside China, is a proprietary adware BitTorrent client owned and developed by BitTorrent, Inc.; globally only behind Xunlei.
47 马春花&方亭, 2016.
1.1.4.2 Online video sites

In the Internet Age, not only anime, but also dramas and films can become free shared resources. Together with the streaming media technology these resources facilitate the construction of online video sites. Those online video sites can be divided into two types. One is a site providing various video resources including anime. The other is a site where anime plays the most important role.

Most online video sites belong to the first type which provides films, dramas, variety shows and animation, and the video resources will be updated as soon as the site gets new shared resources. Some sites do not have a function for uploads and sharing. They implement special video players that enable audiences to download videos when watching, while some sites where different people can upload resources and share videos to other platforms do not allow audiences to download.

Sites belonging to the second type are Acfun and Bilibili. Subtitle groups can upload their translated works onto these sites. Acfun was created in June 2007 by anime fan Xilin as a personal website to share serial anime. In March 2008, Xilin imitated niconico, a site for video sharing in Japan, employing a similar flash player that enables comments overlaid on videos\(^\text{48}\). Inspired by Acfun, Xu Yi created Bilibili in June 2009. At first, these two sites did not provide a download function; people could only upload and watch online, but with the wide use of smartphones and Wifi, Acfun as well as Bilibili came to publish mobile applications with a download function so that users can download videos via Wifi and watch videos anytime and anywhere offline without paying for data traffic. At present, Acfun and Bilibili are the two biggest online video sites for ACG fans. Besides, bullet comments are no longer a privilege of ACG fans.

\(^{48}\) More information about bullet comments, see Zhang 2016.
active on Acfun and Bilibili; other online video sites such as Tudou,\textsuperscript{49} Youku\textsuperscript{50} and iQiyi\textsuperscript{51} have also implemented such function for more people to insert bullet comments on videos.

Even though most videos shared on these sites have copyright problems, the big sites mentioned above have purchased the copyrights of both old and new anime from Japan since 2011 when iQiyi started to obtain Japanese anime such as \textit{One Piece}; hence anime audiences in China can watch most original new anime almost at the same time as audiences in Japan. However, since the anime resources on these sites are for online watching, the contents of big sites are subject to censoring or revising, and some genres with sexual representation are not available on these sites. But people can still get access to the original unrevised anime resources by downloading from the forums and resource sharing platforms mentioned above.

\subsection*{1.1.4.3 Newsletters of social media accounts}

In addition to free resources for download and online video sites, anime fans can get information about anime by following official or private social-media accounts that introduce anime. Weibo\textsuperscript{52} and Wechat\textsuperscript{53} are the two biggest social media in China. When searching for \textit{dongman}, there are many related results. People who are interested in anime can go through the historical newsletters or articles published by those accounts to choose the accounts that match their interest. Those social accounts provide anime fans with various kinds of information such as recommendation of interesting anime, offline ACG events, clips of newly released anime, etc. Some social accounts,

\textsuperscript{49} Tudou is a video-sharing website headquartered in Shanghai. It started on April 15, 2005, but was acquired by Youku in March 2012. The new company is named Youku Tudou Inc.

\textsuperscript{50} Youku is a video hosting service based in Beijing, formally launched in December 2006 and by now one of China’s top video and streaming service platforms.

\textsuperscript{51} iQiyi, formerly Qiyi, is an online video platform based in Beijing, launched on April 22, 2010.

\textsuperscript{52} Sina Weibo is a Chinese microblogging website. Launched by Sina Corporation on August 14, 2009, it is one of the most popular social media sites in China.

\textsuperscript{53} WeChat (微信) is a Chinese multi-purpose messaging, social media and mobile payment app developed by Tencent. It was first released in 2011, and by 2018 it is one of the world’s largest standalone mobile apps with over 1 billion monthly active users.
especially those on Wechat, periodically publish articles including reviews and recommendations. Followers can comment beneath the newsletter or send private messages to discuss with the owner of the account. Some official accounts encourage followers to submit their anime reviews, and the best will be included in the next newsletter. Of course, followers can also open their own account to share their thoughts.

The emergence of social media provided a new way of communication to anime fans; they can acquire timely information, share their interests and opinions with other people who are not anime fans, expand the influence of anime or ACG culture. And the detailed anime reviews or recommendations are useful for anime fans who lack sufficient time to browse everything provided online. Because of anime fans’ online activities, many non-viewers get in touch with anime culture. As a result, even people who are no fans tend to know and use terms like 萝莉 (Lolita) and 萌 (moe/adorable) (Gao 2013, 38).

1.1.5 Cinema as a new platform for anime

Although cinema is a traditional mass-media, the frequent release of anime film in cinemas started to boom in recent years. From 1980 when China began to import Japanese anime, to 2006, only six animated films were released in China including three works directed by Miyazaki Hayao. After 2007, the serial anime films of Doraemon and Detective Conan gradually became hits in Chinese cinemas. Since 2016, Chinese cinemas have imported serial anime films like BORUTO -NARUTO THE MOVIE-, Legend of Sanctuary, and Chibi Maruko-chan: A Boy from Italy as well as original

---

54 Animated film in anime style.
55 Feature-length films based on TV anime series.
56 火影忍者剧场版：博人传 is a 2015 Japanese animated film and the directorial debut of Yamashita Hiroyuki. It is based on Kishimoto Masashi’s manga and anime Naruto and released in China on February 18, 2016.
57 圣斗士星矢：圣域传说 is a 2014 Japanese CG animated fantasy martial arts action film produced by Toei Animation, directed by Sato Keiichi and written by Suzuki Tomohiro. It is based on the manga Saint Seiya by Kurumada Masami. It is the sixth film based on the series. It was released in China on February 26, 2016.
58 樱桃小丸子：来自意大利的少年 is a 2015 Japanese animated family comedy film directed by Takagi Jun, produced by Nippon Animation and based on the manga series Chibi Maruko-chan by Sakura Momoko. It was released in China on
anime films such as *Your Name,*69 *The Shape of Voice,*60 and *Fireworks, Should We See It from the Side or the Bottom?*61 The number of imported anime films reached about 20 in two years, which is a sharp increase compared to the period from the 1980s to the 2000s. Apart from anime films, live-action films adapted from anime works such as *Parasyte*62 and *Gin Tama*63 have also been imported.

The increasing number of imported anime films shows that cinema tends to be a new platform for anime, and indicates the growing influence of anime fans or anime consumers. And since most Chinese animation films only target children, the import of Japanese anime films fulfills the needs of teenagers and grown-ups.

To summarize, the dissemination of anime in China was started and later restrained by the government, but the regulation is only effective on TV. Anime was initially broadcast on official channels and then shared by means of pirated DVDs/VCDs, before it became popular online and entered cinemas. The copyright issue of anime has been gradually resolved due to effective government action and a large amount of purchase by big online video sites. In the dissemination of anime in China, Internet plays an important role. The online video site as well as its bullet comments function has changed the way people watch and discuss anime. Also, the dissemination of anime won’t continue without the help of anime fans, especially subtitle groups.

September 23, 2016.

61 *打ち上げ花火、下から見るか?横から見るか?* is a 2017 Japanese animated romantic drama film produced by Shaft and released by Toho. It is based on the 1993 Japanese live-action TV drama and film of the same name directed by Takeuchi Nobuyuki. This anime film was directed by Iwai Shunji and released in China on December 1, 2017.
62 *寄生獣（寄生獣）,* is a science fiction horror manga series written and illustrated by Iwaaki Hitoshi, and published in Kodansha Afternoon magazine from 1988 to 1995. It has been adapted into live-action movies in 2014 and 2015 as well as TV animation in Oct, 2014. The edited version of live-action films was released in China on September 2, 2016.
63 *銀魂,* its live-action film was released in China on September 1, 2017.
1.2 Anime fandom in China

As mentioned above, fans are the main disseminator of anime in China. Thus, studying the fandom of anime can help grasp the current situation.

1.2.1 The composition of anime fans

According to Xu (2016), most Chinese animations are for children, and when children grow older, they will turn to foreign productions such as Japanese anime and American animation. Thus, anime fans are mainly teenagers and grown-ups. Based on a research on Chinese 二次元 users, 17-26 year olds constitute the core. After the age of 24, an inclination to “de-group” begins due to changes in work and family life. Besides, most二次元 users live in big cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou.

1.2.2 Active forms and platforms

Because many anime fans are students, anime clubs on campus have become the basis for them to conduct various activities such as cosplay, creation and exhibition of fan works. Besides, some fans learn Japanese due to their interest in anime, and then they join subtitle groups to help translate anime from Japanese to Chinese, along with anime fans who are good at finding first-hand resources or editing.

Apart from campus and subtitle groups, Internet is the main platform for anime fans. They browse the articles and attend the discussions on relevant online forums. The emergence of bullet comments on online video sites provided them with a creative way to express themselves and communicate with others. Offline, ACG conventions are fan work conventions with Shanghai, Jiangsu, and Guangdong as the main venues. Chinese anime has become the new force in domestic ACG exhibitions, and domestic anime-related companies tend to show up.

---

64 For characteristics of 二次元 users, see Wang 2018.
65 For more analysis on Internet as a platform for anime fans, see Chen 2016.
66 According to a research in 2016, 71% of the ACG exhibitions are fan work conventions with Shanghai, Jiangsu, and Guangdong as the main venues. Chinese anime has become the new force in domestic ACG exhibitions, and domestic anime-related companies tend to show up.
attractive to anime fans. Some big ACG conventions such as CCG EXPO invite famous voice actors, cosplayers, or artists. Anime fans can cosplay, ask for signatures of their favorite voice actors, cosplayers, or artists, and buy anime goods there.

1.2.3 Fan works

In addition to cosplay, some anime fans create dojin manga or dojin novels which are usually published and shared on social media. They can also submit their works to platforms such as pixiv. Some anime fans who are good at editing clips of anime make MAD or AMV, which are usually uploaded onto Acfun and Bilibili. Recently, some anime fans have started to make doujin anime.

1.3 The emergence of Chinese anime

With the dissemination of anime and the growing group of anime fans, so-called 国漫 (guoman, Chinese anime) has entered the market. Compared to traditional Chinese animation which only targets children, “Chinese anime” is usually adapted from Internet novels or Internet comics and appeals to teenagers and adults.

1.3.1 Formats and styles of Chinese anime

At present, Chinese anime is categorized into two formats. One is 3D anime represented

---

67 China International Comics and Games Expo (here referred to as CCG EXPO) started in 2011, is a big convention of comics and games co-sponsored by the Ministry of Culture of the PRC and the Shanghai Municipal People’s Government, co-organized by the Shanghai Municipal Administration of Culture, Radio, Film and TV, the China Animation Comic Game (ACG) Group, the National Comics and Game Industry Revival Base, Shanghai Radio and TV Station and Shanghai Media Group (SMG).

68 同人漫画, comics created by fans.

69 Pixiv is a Japanese online community for artists to exhibit their illustrations and get feedback via a rating system and user comments. It was first launched as a beta test on September 10, 2007. As of September 2016, the site has over 20 million members.

70 Music Anime Doga is a Japanese term for fan-made anime music video (AMV), a video consisting of anime clips arranged to a song.

71 An anime fan in China made a dojin anime of Lovelive.
by works such as *The Legend of Qin*\textsuperscript{72} and *Shalen*\textsuperscript{73}; the other is 2D referring to anime style. The visual style of Chinese 2D anime is completely different from traditional Chinese animation.

Figure 2. Traditional character design (upper tier) vs. character design in Chinese anime (lower tier)

Figure 3. Traditional background design (upper tier) vs. background design in Chinese anime (lower tier)

\textsuperscript{72} 秦时明月, also *Qin’s Moon*, is a Chinese CG-animated TV series by Robin Shen (Shen Leping), first broadcast around the Chinese New Year in 2007. The story is based on the novel of the same name by Taiwanese writer and entrepreneur Sayling Wen (Wen Shiren). It is China’s first 3D wuxia animation, produced by Sparkly Key Animation Studio in Hangzhou, Zhejiang. The title literally means “The bright moon of the Qin Era”, quoted from a famous Chinese poem.

\textsuperscript{73} 侠岚 is a Chinese 3D martial arts anime produced by Beijing Sensen Digital Technology Co., Ltd. Seasons 1–4 were broadcast on the CCTV Children’s Channel from January 29, 2012, every Monday to Friday at 19:00, and synchronized with the Internet platform iQiyi. Seasons 5 and 6 were available on major video sites at 12:00 every Friday. Season 7 is running now.
As shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3, traditional Chinese animation emphasizes animal-like characters (Ouellette 2016), and human characters always have black hair. Human characters look child-like, and little attention is paid to details such as costumes. Some background designs reference Chinese ink-and-wash painting, and some children’s drawings. Most backgrounds look flat, lacking intricate light and shadow. In contrast, Chinese anime focuses on human characters. Characters are portrayed with colorful hair, vibrant eyes, relatively realistic body proportions, and pretty costumes. Buildings and natural sceneries are drawn in a semi-realistic style and look like photos. Figure 4 and Figure 5 show a comparison of Japanese anime and Chinese anime in character design and background design. The consistent style indicates the influence of Japanese anime on Chinese anime.
1.3.2 Production and release of Chinese anime

Chinese 3D anime is produced by domestic companies, but the case of 2D anime is different. Some Chinese 2D anime are produced in cooperation with Japanese companies and have the chance to get broadcast in Japan. For example, *Congqian Youzuo Lingjianshan*[^74] is co-produced by Tencent and Studio Deen and was simulcast in Chinese and Japanese. The series aired on AT-X, Tokyo MX, KBS Kyoto, Sun TV, and TV Aichi from January 8, 2016. Some other 2D anime are produced by Chinese companies but have a version dubbed by Japanese voice actors. *Fox Spirit Matchmaker*[^75] is one example. It was produced by Haoliners Animation League and broadcast on Bilibili, iQiyi and other major video sites in China. The Japanese version is broadcast on niconico, and the first season aired on TOKYO MX from July 1, 2017 to December 16, 2017. Other 2D anime such as *Wojia Dashixiong Naozi Youkeng*[^76] produced by Chinese companies only have a Chinese version, and are only available online through major video sites.

1.3.3 The amount and genres of Chinese anime

Though more and more Chinese anime are entering the market, due to the lagged development of Chinese anime, their amount is less than that of Japanese anime in China. Using Bilibili as an example, Japanese anime covers more than one hundred pages while Chinese anime less than twenty. Notwithstanding that the development of Chinese anime started late, the genres of Chinese anime are more diverse than those of traditional animation, involving fantasy, spirits, comedy, etc.

1.3.4 The industrialization of Chinese anime

The Japanese anime industry chain includes three steps in general but with flexibility:

[^74]: 从前有座灵剑山 (霊剣山 星屑たちの宴, Spirit Blade Mountain: Feast of the Stardust), 2016
[^75]: 妖狐小红娘 (縁結びの妖狐ちゃん)
[^76]: 我家大师兄脑子有坑 (My Senior Fellow Apprentice Has a Brain Pit) was produced by Magilm Pictures and broadcast on Bilibili.
1. The creation, publication, and serialization of manga or light novels; 2. the production and broadcast of anime adapted from manga or light novel; 3. the development and marketing of relevant goods; and recently as a fourth step the management and development of Intelligence Property (IP) related to the anime contents (Li 2016, 37). Compared to Japanese anime, Chinese anime has not formed such a mature industry chain yet, but the development of valuable IP has started. For instance, *The King’s Avatar* was a popular net novel serialized from February 28, 2011 to April 30, 2014 on qidian. Then it was adapted into comics and anime available online. The anime acquired high popularity, and it will be adapted further into a TV drama. Also, it has been adapted into a mobile video game produced by FLMobile in April 2017, and the merchandise such as rings and poker cards are selling well.

---

77 Bao (2017) and Zhao (2016) gave some advice for the industrialization of 2D Chinese commercial animation.
78 全职高手 was produced by G.CMAY Animation & Film and is broadcast on Tencent Video.
79 起点中文网 is an original online literature website. It was established in May 2003 by a fantasy literature association. It is famous for collecting original network novels by independent web writers.
80 Co-produced by Tencent Penguin Pictures, Linmon Pictures, and Phoenix Media, the drama will be released in 2018.
81 FLMobile is a global mobile game publisher and operator.
Chapter 2: The reception of anime in China

The popularity of anime in China has drawn the attention from scholars, officials, and journalists. Anime are discussed both online and offline. People with a different social role, people who watch anime and people who do not, people preferring different genres of anime have different opinions about anime. This chapter analyzes how anime has been accepted in China by referencing different opinions from different groups of people. As will become clear, there are structural commonalities across all differences. The most important one relates to national culture, i.e. the “Japaneseness” of anime, its “imitation” and a desired originality of Chinese “anime/animation”.

2.1 Negative opinions

Anime, as an imported product from Japan, has come across some resistance in the process of its dissemination in China. It is seen by some as a cultural invasion and a threat to Chinese domestic animation and is criticized for its erotic and violent representations.

2.1.1 “Anime as cultural invasion”

As mentioned in chapter 1, China’s copyright issues were very serious in the 1990s and 2000s. According to Chen (2017, 56-57), the pirating activities reflected the popularity of Japanese anime and manga, which brought about the anxiety of a “cultural invasion” by Japanese culture.

The government began to regulate the diffusion of anime and manga. In 1995, the state launched the “5515 project” under the Propaganda Department and GAPP. The project aimed to establish five comics publishers to release 15 comic book series and launch five new comic magazines within three years. The main function of “5155” was to

82 The official magazines were targeted to parents and teenagers to inform them on how to avoid the negative effects of Japanese manga (Chen 2017, 57).
promote the domestic *xinmanhua* which was mentioned by the magazine *King of Cartoons*, affiliated with Shanghai Animation Film Studio, in its preface:

> In recent years, the film screens and book stalls of our country are filled with Japanese and American cartoon films and comics. All sectors of society demand the change of this situation and the development of the *xinmanhua* and animation of our own Chinese nation.

(Editor Board, 1996, Vol. 7, p. 1)

Apart from editors, some magazine readers also showed their concern about Japanese anime and manga. One reader even regarded Japanese manga as “spiritual opium” and advocated for a Self-strengthening Movement. Another reader criticized the “imitation of Japanese manga” in China (Chen 2017, 58). An artist also expressed his sadness that Chinese traditional culture tends to be discarded and replaced by foreign culture (Chen 2017, 58).

With the development of the Internet, the 5515 Project collapsed in 2006 (Chen 2017, 61), but the opinion of cultural invasion still exists. When googling the Chinese keywords 日本动漫 (Japanese anime and manga) and 文化侵略 (cultural invasion), many results give an exact description of Japanese anime and manga as “cultural invasion”. For instance, on a Chinese Q&A website called Zhihu, a user who just got in touch with Japanese anime and manga, asked in 2014: Should we be vigilant towards Japanese anime as cultural invasion? This user felt guilty when watching Japanese anime though he/she enjoyed it. Till now, 568 users have answered this question, and most agreed that it is a kind of cultural invasion, but the important thing is to study

---

83 新漫画 is a concept raised in 1990s China. Compared to 漫画 manhua as caricature, which was the mainstream format in Chinese comics, 新漫画 is close to Japanese manga and targets different readers.

84 Quoted in Chen 2017, 57.

85 精神鸦片

86 Self-Strengthening Movement 洋务运动. This reader used a historical event to imply that Chinese manhua should compete with Japanese manga. See Chen 2017, 57.
Japan and then surpass Japan, which is reminiscent of the Self-strengthening Movement mentioned above.

Another Google result considering Japanese anime as cultural invasion is an article written by a person called I’m crazy for anime on the webpage of Daily Headlines with the Chinese title “日本的文化入侵——动漫” (Cultural Invasion: Anime and Manga). I’m crazy for anime first claimed his/her identity as an anime fan as his/her nickname indicates, but then he/she argued as below:

Japanese anime is produced in Japan; hence it propagates Japanese culture which is very different from our culture. Japan exports anime, increasing its revenue on the one hand, and on the other hand it advocates national culture to gain recognition from foreigners. This kind of national culture is most harmful to Chinese teenagers who have not formed mature values yet. They will lose Chinese traditional virtues if they watch anime too often.

This person also mentioned Japan’s aggression against China, and that Japanese anime never tells about the crimes committed in China. It is remarkable that an anime fan is so nationalistic and crazy about anime at the same time.

Of course, people who do not regard Japanese anime as cultural invasion criticized such opinion. For example, in jianshu, an online creation community in China, Mr. Savage wrote an article named “A little discussion on the absurdity of the cultural invasion discourse”. According to her/him, the opinion of cultural invasion is based on a conspiracy theory that a state intentionally exports cultural products to achieve its hidden goal of overturning another state, and people with such opinions mainly oppose
Japanese anime, Korean drama, and Hollywood film\textsuperscript{91}. It seems that Japanese anime is treated as a cultural product which could be used as a tool in politics. However, as demonstrated in chapter 1, anime has evolved from cultural products imported from Japan into a transcultural style that China can also produce.

2.1.2 “Anime as a medium of sex and violence”

Many Chinese who are not familiar with anime insist that Japanese anime is full of erotic scenes which are unhealthy for minors.

According to Lin (2016, 70), most 二次元 fans in China are teenagers and students, and their hobbies cannot be understood by the older generations who hold the right to speak. The consideration of sexual and violent elements in Japanese ACG products as harmful to minors becomes an excuse for teachers as well as parents to interfere with youths’ tastes and hobbies. Since anime is considered a product for minors in China, foreign animations with sexual or violent representations usually fail to pass the censorship (Wang and Takahashi 2016, 3). Even though Chinese big online video sites have started to purchase Japanese anime since 2011, many anime, even those with high popularity in China, are banned by the SAPPRFT because of so-called sexual and violent descriptions.\textsuperscript{92}

Some scholars also cater to the official attitude, criticizing Japanese anime for its erotic and violent contents. For instance, Liu (2012) exemplified the negative influence of Japanese anime concerning sexual and violent description as follows:

In the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, in order to occupy a bigger market, Japanese anime tries to find the breakthrough to seize the market. Ordinary themes could not fulfill the void and numb minds of audiences anymore. As a result, many anime authors and

\textsuperscript{91} Translated from Chinese by author.
\textsuperscript{92} For anime banned in 2015 see Appendix 1.
producers tend to add more bloody, violent, horror, erotic, and twisted scenes to stimulate the senses of the audience. [...] Feminine physical characteristics are exaggerated and nude scenes are frequently shown, for example in *Bleach* and *One Piece* [...] Japanese hold an open attitude towards sex and anime with normal relationship stories could not satisfy the mental demands, thus, some themes like homosexuality, bisexuality, sibling love, and adultery attract a lot of attention, and form a unique expression of pornography in Japan. [...] These anime misguide the morality of youths and are bad for the physical and mental growth of youths. (Liu 2012, 8)

Such concerns are understandable, but those people exaggerate the erotic and violent descriptions in some anime such as *Bleach* and *One Piece* which are categorized as *shonen*, i.e. as suitable for minors, in Japan. Besides, they neglect the demands of adults.

### 2.1.3 “Anime as an impediment of the Chinese animation industry”

Anime as an imported product has been seen as a threat to the Chinese animation industry. Gao (2013, 37) said that the continuous spread of ACG culture based on Japanese works will lead to the crack-down of Chinese animation, comics and games. He claimed that domestic ACG fans have lost confidence in Chinese animation and games, and the external reason is that Japanese anime and games are much better in quality than Chinese ones. Specifically speaking, Li (2016, 128) claimed as follows:

> Due to the popularity of Japanese anime, Chinese youths have formed a respective aesthetic taste. But the style of domestic animations is very different from that of Japanese anime and is divorced from the aesthetic taste of Chinese youths, which constrains the development of domestic animation.

Chinese anime, however, is different. Compared to traditional Chinese animation which only targeted children, more genres have come into the market, and the visual as well
as the vocal part has improved a lot. Chinese anime such as *The Legend of Qin, Die Now*\(^93\), and *School Shock*\(^94\) have gained popularity. However, many of these anime, especially 2D anime, are criticized for their Japanese style and lack of “Chinese characteristics”. For example, *Kuiba*\(^95\) was a successful anime series produced in China. It won several awards in 2011,\(^96\) 2012,\(^97\) and 2013,\(^98\) but its visual style raised some complaints. One viewer wrote on Douban that “Kuiba is a fake Chinese animation and as such not beneficial for the healthy development of Chinese animation. Supporting it is like supporting fake-brand mobiles.”\(^99\) Some other Douban users also criticized Kuiba that it copied *Naruto* or that the character design is Japanese.

As Li (2016, 45) explained, the younger generation working in the Chinese animation industry consists mainly of anime fans. Thus, domestic animators may leave traces of Japanese anime when making original animation consciously or unconsciously, which results in the higher requirement for good and creative ideas in Chinese original animation. If addressed inappropriately, it will be hard for the animation to take off the label of copy and fake.

Anime as an imported product from Japan introduced a new kind of animation to Chinese audiences, which functions as knowledge that can be shared and learned. The multiple genres of Japanese anime have helped enlarge the Chinese animation market which previously only targeted children, hence it is a good chance for Chinese

\(^{93}\) 端脑, produced by Haoliners Animation League based on a comic created by 壁水羽 (bishuiyu) and released on November 28, 2014.
\(^{94}\) 雏蜂 was produced by Haoliners Animation League based on a comic created by Sun Heng. It was released on July 23, 2015 via Internet and entered Japan on August 15, 2015. It is the first original Chinese anime exported to Japan, but it ended with only 6 of 20 planned episodes.
\(^{95}\) 魁拔 was produced by Vasoon Animation and released on July 8, 2011. The film was followed by *Kuiba 2* in 2013 and *Kuiba 3* in 2014, with a fourth film scheduled for release in 2017. But the producer Wu Hanqing passed away on May 11, 2017, which influenced its release.
\(^{97}\) 2012 Beijing Films, TV, and Animation Industry Annual Awards Ceremony: Excellent Producer of the Year.
\(^{98}\) The 9th Huading Awards: Best Animation Film.
\(^{99}\) Douban.com, launched on March 6, 2005, is a Chinese social networking service website allowing registered users to record information and create content related to film, books, music, recent events, and activities in Chinese cities.
animators to produce anime for a larger group of people. Besides, cooperation between the two countries makes it possible for Chinese animators to learn techniques and commercial management of anime. Regarding character design, since most anime fans in China have become accustomed to mainstream Japanese anime style, it is easier to attract anime fans by referencing Japanese anime style. However, when some anime fans or anime audiences who care about the production country hear about Chinese anime, they look forward to watching something different from Japanese anime. These people are more open-minded to multiple styles of Chinese animation, which also offers a space for Chinese animators to make experimental animations.

2.2 Positive opinions

Although some people criticize anime, the popularity of anime in China has not decreased. Many people hold positive opinions towards anime.

2.2.1 “Anime as a community of kindred spirits”

Compared to traditional media such as TV, magazines, and newspaper, the Internet makes it easier for anime fans to share fan works and communicate with more people who have the same hobby. Under these circumstances, some people think that anime fans can obtain a feeling of belonging from anime.

For example, He (2017) analyzed the behavior of anime fans, in order to explain the reasons for their activities such as cosplay, creation of dojin works, online and offline communication. He stated that with the development of the Internet, anime can enable anime fans to not only experience a happiness which is hardly found in reality, but also make them feel respected. Anime fans want to get rid of loneliness through anime, and the anime community is beneficial for them in that regard (He 2017, 141). Moreover, when they communicate with each other, they can build an ideal ego, contributing to self-actualization and gaining the recognition from peers. The group with the same
ideals helps anime fans acquire a feeling of belonging (He 2017, 141).

Also, Li (2015) considered that under the environment of new media, otaku\(^\text{100}\) feel a sense of belonging in the Internet world. She argued that otaku have a rich creativity and bring people infinite entertainment and joy in the 二次元 world. In the 二次元 world, the spirit of subculture represented by otaku reverses and taunts the official mainstream culture. Otaku are no longer self-abased or timid, rather they confidently and firmly express themselves in the 二次元 world. They are not humble anymore, rather they enjoy making parodies. They have transformed their discontent and the anger accumulated in reality into a motivation of creation, creating excellent works in their professional fields, which also makes them celebrities in reality (Li 2015, 69). In other words, to people who love Anime/Manga/Game but lacks communication skills and confidence in reality, 二次元 world offers them a chance to communicate via Internet and motivate creativity, which on the one hand help them regain confidence and pride and on the other hand bring other people a lot of happiness through their creation.

### 2.2.2 “Anime as an educational tool for teenagers”

Apart from the benefits for otaku, anime is also regarded as a good thing for teenagers under certain circumstances. For example, Yang (2014) mentions five positive influences of Japanese anime on Chinese teenagers. First, Japanese anime can relieve the mental stress of teenagers and help them improve the emotional quotient; second, Japanese anime such as Captain Tsubasa and Slam Dunk can help teenagers develop a strong will to not fear failures; third, anime such as Naruto are beneficial for teenagers to develop team spirit; fourth, Japanese anime can improve the thinking ability of teenagers and provide informative knowledge on such skills as playing basketball and

\(^{100}\) In China, ‘宅 (otaku)’ (geeks, nerds) is generally considered as fanatics addicted to ACG, i.e. characters and events in the virtual world. Allegedly, they do not care about what happens in reality and are perceived as mentally ill persons who have a communication disorder and lack communication skills (Li 2015, 68).
Go; last but not least, Japanese anime attracts teenagers to study Japanese language and culture.

It is true that many Japanese anime advocate positive values. In the shonen genre the hero is usually accompanied by a group of partners that work together to fight evil. Even without an antagonist as in Bakuman,\(^\text{101}\) heroes will cooperate and chase after their dreams regardless of the difficulties in front of them. In addition, to people who want to learn Japanese, anime has proved useful in two aspects (Zhang 2015, 119). On the one hand, learners can improve their communication skills by imitating and practicing the conversations in anime, and the Japanese dubbing along with the vivid characters is stimulating; on the other hand, the multiple themes and genres of anime provide learners with rich Japanese vocabulary, and the stories set in daily life help them learn about Japanese culture as well.

### 2.2.3 “Anime as a worthwhile field for investment”

The new 二次元 economy is mentioned frequently in media reports. China Culture Daily\(^\text{102}\) suggested that video games and derived products are the two main ways to make profits from 二次元 which is a Blue Ocean Market\(^\text{103}\) due to the lack of large enterprises who produce derived products. It is claimed that derived 二次元 products have a high rate of gross profit and a high re-purchase rate, due to fans as loyal clients with high consuming capacity. Securities Times\(^\text{104}\) also confirmed that this group of people only care about what to purchase instead of the price.

Indeed, the high consuming capacity of 二次元 fans has attracted many investments.

---

\(^\text{101}\) Bakuman is a TV anime series adapted from the manga Bakuman written by Ohba Tsugumi and illustrated by Obata Takeshi, serialized in Weekly Shōnen Jump 2008–2012. The anime was produced by J.C.Staff and began airing on NHK-E on October 2, 2010.

\(^\text{102}\) 中国文化报, founded in 1986, is an authoritative newspaper in the charge of Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China, focusing on culture and arts.

\(^\text{103}\) Blue Ocean Market refers to a market that is under development and lacks competitors.

\(^\text{104}\) 证券时报, founded in 1993, is a daily newspaper in the charge of People’s Daily, focusing on finance, economics, and securities.
For instance, one article in *China Strategic Emerging Industry* with the title “The Germination of 二次元 Economy Attracts Capitals into Anime and Manga Industry” mentioned that Tencent has announced in its first Anime and Comics Industry Cooperation Conference that it aims to change 二次元 from a subculture which serves a certain group of people into a popular culture. Thus, Tencent invested 300 million CNY to create anime, comics and derived products in the format of video games, TV drama, films, and novels. In addition to Tencent and other media companies, there are investment companies such as Sinovation Ventures and ZhenFund. Meanwhile, foundations which focus on the anime industry have emerged in China, for example, the Zaoniao Fund invested Taikong Works and Hangzhou TThunDer Animation Co., Ltd.

Overall, the increasing investment in the anime and comics industry is based on the huge number of 二次元 users, with 70 million core users and 200 million pan-users in estimation (iResearch 2016). Considering that most 二次元 users prefer Japanese anime (according to the 二次元 user research by 36Kr), investing in Japanese style anime and the derived products is more likely to generate profits than traditional animation.

The reception of anime is controversial in China. Different people see anime from different perspectives, but the commercially most influential group are anime fans.

---

105 中国战略新兴产业 was founded in September 2013 by *China Economic Herald* in the charge of National Development and Reform Commission.

106 腾讯动漫行业合作大会 is an announcement conference held by Tencent, oriented to the whole anime and comics industry. It has been held annually since 2015.

107 创新工场, founded by Kai-Fu Lee on September 7, 2009, is an Angel Investment company aiming to help young start-ups.

108 真格基金 is a Beijing-based seed fund founded by New Oriental co-founders Bob Xu and Victor Wang. ZhenFund was established in 2011 in collaboration with Sequoia Capital China, with the aim of promoting innovation among youth in China.

109 早鸟基金, founded in November, 2013, focuses on the investment in cultural brands.

110 华映星球 is a professional film company that specializes in original animation and film CG effects.

111 杭州天雷动漫有限公司, founded in 2010, is a cultural and creative enterprise.

112 See more analysis on anime culture in China in Gao 2017.
Though fans do not regulate the anime market, they influence it, which again affects the concept of anime as well as the official attitude towards anime. Anime is no longer an imported product that can be seen as cultural invasion; it has become a localized style, last but not least because it is a business that is worthy of investment\textsuperscript{113}.

\textsuperscript{113} More information about the investment in 二次元, see Luan 2015.
Chapter 3: Case study of Onmyoji

According to The 2017 China Gaming Industry Report, the revenue of 二次元 games increased by 45% compared to 2016, reaching 15.98 billion CNY. The stable performance of Onmyoji, Collapse3 and other such products released in 2016 as well as the fast-growing Moon released in 2017 are improving the performance of 二次元 products in the game market, an increasingly important part of the mobile game market. The popularity of those games reflects the current 二次元 culture in China, which calls for studies. Onmyoji, as one of the most popular 二次元 products, contains many characteristics of anime, and its marketing strategies are closely linked to the fandom of anime in China, which makes Onmyoji a good case for studying the anime culture or 二次元 culture in China. Meanwhile, the (national)-cultural, i.e. Japanese, elements in Onmyoji and its revisions in visual design also make it a good case to see how subculture, i.e. anime, is blended with (national) culture, i.e. Japaneseness, and how a product is influenced by policy.

3.1 The gameplay of Onmyoji

It is a turn-based fantasy strategy game produced by Netease with PVP or PVE battles, where you can strengthen your beloved shikigami to build your dream tactical team and defeat various demons to become the ultimate onmyoji. Four onmyoji (Abe Seimei, Kagura, Yaobikuni, and Minamoto Hiromasa) can summon hundreds of spirits called shikigami, each with their own unique skills, skins, and side stories. Players can create an onmyo house to recruit a fixed group of members or join an onmyo house. The main storyline has it that during the Heian period (784–1192), the evil Seime called Black Seimei is continuously sending his shikigami to make chaos

---

114 Player versus player is a type of multiplayer interactive conflict within a game between two or more live participants.
115 Player versus environment is a term used in online games to refer to fighting computer-controlled enemies.
116 Spirits that can be summoned by charms?
117 Players play as onmyoji, who can summon spirits to fight against the enemy.
in the world which raises the attention of Seimei who lost parts of his memories. Seimei is collecting his lost memories by fighting against those evil shikigami who obey the order of Black Seimei with the help of his own shikigami and partners. The whole story is divided into different chapters, and each chapter is composed of battles and animated narratives. All the characters including the spirits can be found in Japanese folklore such as *Konjaku Monogatari*¹¹⁸ and *Otogi-zoshi*¹¹⁹.

### 3.2 The players of Onmyoji

According to JIGUANG,¹²⁰ about half of the players are between 20 and 24 years old. 52.8% of the players are interested in anime and manga. 53.4% of the players prefer Bilibili.¹²¹

### 3.3 The features of Onmyoji

As a video game that works with Japanese stories, *Onmyoji* is full of anime characteristics, and the functional design caters to the watching habits of anime fans. This part is going to separately introduce the visual, vocal, and functional characteristics of *Onmyoji* to explore the features of anime in this game.

#### 3.3.1 Visual and vocal characteristics

The game combines 2D and 3D visuality. Most backgrounds are 2D while characters as well as important tools such as sushi for charging energy and architectures are between 2D and 3D. The character design exhibits a typical anime style, while the

---

¹¹⁸ *Konjaku Monogatarishu* (今昔物語集), also known as *Konjaku Monogatari* (今昔物語), is a Japanese collection of over one thousand tales written during the late Heian period.

¹¹⁹ *Otogi-zoshi* (御伽草子) refers to a group of about 350 Japanese prose narratives written primarily in the Muromachi period (1392–1573).

¹²⁰ 极光 (JIGUANG) is China’s leading platform of mobile big data and cloud service provider for mobile application.

¹²¹ The data was collected in September 2017.
costumes reference traditional clothes both from Japan and China (see Figure 6). Some characters such as Nura Rikuo, Hozuki and the Medicine Seller directly use the character design from the respective anime, something which is called linked activity. Besides, Japanese hiragana and katakana syllabaries, cherry blossoms, Mount Fuji and shrine architecture are used in the background, which creates a Japanese atmosphere. Moreover, all the characters are animated in the battle and it implements animated narratives between two battles of the main storyline.

Figure 6. Character design of Onmyoji

All the characters are dubbed by Japanese voice actors including Fukuyama Jun, Sawashiro Miyuki and other famous performers. Characters directly borrowed from anime are dubbed by the same voice actors as in the anime. The soundtrack is by the Japanese composer Umebayashi Shigeru who also wrote the soundtrack for the series of Onmyoji movies. There are no subtitles when an onmyoji summons shikigami and launches assistant skills to fight against the enemy or when a shikigami launches his/her skills upon battle declaration. Each shikigami has his/her own story that is told by the respective voice actor.

---

122 奴良リクオ is the protagonist of the manga as well as the TV anime *Nura: Rise of the Yokai Chan* (ぬらりひょんの孫).
123 鬼灯 is the protagonist of the manga as well as the TV anime *Hozuki’s Coolheadedness* (鬼灯の冷徹).
124 薬売り is the protagonist of the TV anime *Mononoke* (モノノ怪).
125 Downloaded from official site.
3.3.2 Functional characteristics

In addition to the basic operation for a video game, *Onmyoji* implements a function called barrage or bullet comments which is usually used on online video sites. As explained in chapter 1, when people watch online videos, especially anime, they can input their comments and thoughts on the video players, and some scenes will be covered by comments if they are interesting enough. Also, live audiences can communicate through bullet comments. Some audiences do not comment but they will browse the bullets to see if there is a funny comment. This kind of function is applied to *Onmyoji*. When the animated narratives appear between two battles in the main storyline and when players attend the party held at their onmyo house to improve the level of their shikigami, players can comment and communicate with each other by inserting bullets, which caters to players who have gotten used to making barrage or watching barrage.

In conclusion, the visual anime style, the voice actors who are active in Japanese anime, and the function of bullet comments which was first used on platforms sharing online anime resources make *Onmyoji* a 二次元 video game.

3.4 The promotion of *Onmyoji*

The promotion of *Onmyoji* mainly focuses on two ways. One is the interaction between game and players; the other is media mix.

3.4.1 The interaction between game and players

On the official site of *Onmyoji* and its game application, there is a column called *tongren* (dojin) community where comics/illustrations created by fans, cosplay by players, dojin videos, and dojin novels are posted. Besides, *Onmyoji* encourages players to take part in the creation of fan works by holding various activities such as skin design
competition, illustration competition, and dojin novel competition. Players can attend such activities by submitting their own fan works, voting for their preference and reading or discussing the related topics on social media, and they can get special rewards for their participation. In addition to fan works, Onmyoji also facilitates some other activities to increase the interaction chances for players. For example, in the linked activity mentioned above, players can guess which anime character will be linked with Onmyoji according to the hints provided. As soon as they hit it, they can get energy, coins or summon charms as rewards. Onmyoji also holds offline activities such as experiencing hot-springs or attending ACG conventions, that create chances for players to communicate face by face and strengthen the interactive relation between game and players.

Instead of taking action to attract more players, Onmyoji focuses on the interaction between game and existent players by encouraging fan works and increasing the chances for players to interact with the game. The more fun players get from the interaction, the more willing they are to introduce the game to others.

3.4.2 Media mix of Onmyoji

According to Steinberg (2012, 142), within popular discourse the “anime media mix” refers to two intersecting phenomena: the translation or deployment of a single work, character, or narrative world across numerous mediums or platforms (also known as repurposing) and the synergetic use of multiple media works to sell other such works within the same franchise or group126. Although Onmyoji is not an anime but a video game, such mode of media mix applies.

Since it was released in 2016, Onmyoji has cooperated with many other companies. For example, on March 16, 2017, L’Oreal Paris decided to produce a limited gift box,  

---

126 More about media mix, see Kopylova 2016.
imprinting one shikigami from Onmyoji called Koi no Sei on its package. On December 28, 2017, the China Merchants Bank coopted Onmyoji, releasing a credit card with illustrations of four main characters on the right side of the card. Moreover, on its announcement conference of Honor V9 in February 2017, Huawei announced that Onmyoji is the visual effect ambassador of Honor V9. And another shikigami, Yuki Ona was assigned brand ambassador of P&G to support the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang. Apart from the cooperation with other companies, Onmyoji has also been transformed into other media works such as manga, anime and musical play. Besides, merchandise such as T-shirts and garage kits is sold online, and players can buy it through official channels.

Compared to the interaction between game and players, the media mix of Onmyoji not only focuses on existent players, but also enlarges its influence by cooperating with other companies in different fields, which makes it possible to attract more and new players.

3.5 The popularity of Onmyoji

According to CNG, the emergence of Onmyoji has stimulated the fast increase of revenue in China’s game market and has become the most succesful game in China. Revenues of Onmyoji games in the second half of 2016 increased by

---

128 China Merchants Bank (CMB) is a Chinese bank headquartered in Futian District, Shenzhen, Guangdong, China. Founded in 1987, it is the first share-holding commercial bank wholly owned by a corporate legal entity in China.
129 Honor V9 is a smartphone model produced by Huawei.
131 The manga is serialized on Tencent Anime and Comics.
132 NetEase released a serial ultra-short anime based on Onmyoji in April 2018 on its official application. The anime is co-produced by Shanghai Thundray cultural communication Co., LTD and a Japanese company called Blade.
133 The musical play is directed and starred by a Japanese director and Japanese stage actors. It was performed in Tokyo from March 9 to March 18, 2018, and then in China in Shenzhen (March 30 – April 1), Shanghai (April 7 – April 15) and Beijing (April 20 – April 22).
134 CNG (中新游戏研究), also called 伽马数据, is the exclusive content producer of Chinese game industry reports.
117.6% and *Onmyoji* accounted for 60% of the increase. *Onmyoji* became the top one in the list of global iOS revenue only two months after its release in September 2016. With more than 210 million players in registration, it was one of the ten bestselling mobile video games in 336 days from September 2, 2016 to December 31, 2017 based on Chinese iOS.

### 3.5.1 Reasons for its popularity

The high popularity of *Onmyoji* has raised attention and discussion from media such as *China Daily* and *Jiemian*. They explained the popularity of *Onmyoji* from their point of view without referencing the opinion of game players who directly experience the game, or game commentators who are professionals in evaluating a game. In this part, besides the opinions from media reports, the author also adds opinions of ordinary game players and professional game commentators to explain the high popularity of *Onmyoji*.

#### 3.5.1.1 Delicate design in visual, vocal, and narrative regards

A game commentator called CaffreyMo argued that the beautiful visuals of the game, the luxurious voice actor lineup, the top-quality soundtrack, and the animated narratives are the first step to attract players.\(^{135}\) Indeed, among 13 interviewees including both anime fans and players who are not anime fans, 9 interviewees mentioned the visual and vocal parts of *Onmyoji* and 3 interviewees praised the narrative.

“I think that it is a successful attempt to use Japanese voice actors. Since the story is about Japanese yokai, using Japanese voice actors and Japanese composers make the story more native.” (not anime fan)

“I chose Onmyoji because of its narratives and top-class voice actors.” (anime fan)

“[...] After all visual is the basic element for any video game. No matter how the other

---

\(^{135}\) CaffreyMo, 2016
elements are, the most important element is visual. A game could not attract players without delicate visual and delicate visual is the first step for the success of a video game. [...] The style of soundtrack corresponds the overall Japanese style and some background music implements the style and instruments of Noh\textsuperscript{136}. [...] It is rare to see a video game with narratives. The story of Onmyoji is divided into different chapters and lost memory is always an effective material for a story.” (anime fan)

“As a Chinese mobile game, it is creative to use Japanese voice actors and composer, which also matches the narrative of the game. [...] Visual style, soundtrack as well as game play is creative enough, and the flowing narratives indulge players.” (not anime fan)

In a word, the outstanding design in visual, vocal and narrative regards are important factors that attract players. And the implementation of Japanese voice actors and composer is generally welcomed whether the player is an anime fan or not.

3.5.1.2 Targeting anime fans in China

Otaku Otaku Otaku girl\textsuperscript{137} commented that the deep cultivation of 二次元 culture has greatly expanded the user base. The aesthetic style with the development of the plots is like an anime miniature. Moreover, NetEase employed voice actors who have dubbed Japanese anime, that fans used to watch. Anime fans can relive the familiar voices in the game, which enables Onmyoji to attract 二次元 users without efforts. Besides, superwave\textsuperscript{138} argued that anime or games that relate Japanese ghosts and spirits have many audiences in both China and Japan. Anime such as Natsume’s Book of Friends,\textsuperscript{139}

\textsuperscript{136} Noh (能) is a major form of classical Japanese musical drama that has been performed since the 14th century.

\textsuperscript{137} 宅宅宅女, 2017

\textsuperscript{138} Superwave, 2017

\textsuperscript{139} Natsume’s Book of Friends (夏目友人帳) is a Japanese manga series by Midorikawa Yuki. It has been adapted as a series of drama CDs, as well as a TV anime series produced by Brain’s Base (seasons 1-4) and Shuka (seasons 5-6), which was broadcast on TV Tokyo for 6 seasons in 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2016 and 2017.
Mushishi, Shounen Onmyoji and Nura: Rise of the Yokai Chan belong to this so-called yokai genre and are quite popular among anime audiences, which makes Japanese yokai a treasure worth developing for game. Among the interviewees, some admitted that the popularity of Onmyoji is related to anime elements.

“The anime element is one of the reasons why I chose to play Onmyoji, and I have to admit the influence of Japanese anime industry on Chinese children. [...] Onmyoji and Japanese anime have some commonalities, hence the target clients overlap to some degree.” (anime fan)

“Onmyoji absorbs the advantages of Japanese anime such as voice actors, making the game more attractive.” (anime fan)

“Maybe I would have quit this game if it was dubbed in Mandarin because the game is anime style, and I have gotten used to Japanese dubbing in anime.” (anime fan)

“Onmyoji succeeds in motivating a large number of anime fans by inviting famous Japanese voice actors to dub the game characters.” (anime fan, staff in a manga company)

Apart from the anime elements, the way of promotion is also regarded as one aspect that attracts anime fans. For instance, a product manager called dousheng considered that the official support for fan works helped create a community, using the game as the medium, and the combination of PGC (Professionally-generated Content) and UGC (User-generated Content) produced by platform and players stimulated a new

---

140 Mushishi (蟲師) is a manga series written and illustrated by Urushibara Yuki. It was serialized in Afternoon Seasons Zōkan from 1999 to 2002, and in Monthly Afternoon from December 2002 to August 2008. It has been adapted into a TV anime series by Artland which aired on Fuji TV between October 2005 and June 2006.

141 Shounen Onmyoji (少年陰陽師) is a Japanese light novel authored by Yūki Mitsuru and illustrated by Asagi Sakura. There is also a series of drama CDs, a PlayStation 2 game, and a manga adaptation and a musical.

142 豆笙, 2016
interest by game players. Similarly, Ta say, one column of Baidu\textsuperscript{143} argued that the proficient use of 二次元 buzzwords in official copywriting gets the recognition of 二次元 fans, and frequent attendance on various ACG conventions accurately targets the offline gathering place of 二次元 fans.

In general, as an 二次元 video game, Onmyoji has successfully caught the hearts of many anime fans in China by employing anime style in visual regards, famous Japanese voice actors who are active in anime, and a familiar way of promotion to anime fans.

3.5.1.3 “Authentic Japanese culture”

Since Onmyoji adopts stories related to the Heian Period (794-1192) and Japanese folklore, some media linked the popularity of Onmyoji to Japanese culture. For example, China Daily explained that although the game was developed by a Chinese team, both the historical background and the style underscore the production team’s understanding of Japanese culture, which is the important factor for its success in both China and Japan.\textsuperscript{144} In addition to media reports, some interviewees also considered that cultural factors are related to Onmyoji’s popularity.

“Most game players are youngsters and nowadays Chinese young people are deeply influenced by Japanese and Korean culture. [...] Onmyoji could let young people know more about Japanese culture.” (not anime fan)

“Chinese traditional culture and Japanese traditional culture are the same in essentials while differing in minor points, which makes it easier for Chinese players to accept this game.” (anime fan)

\textsuperscript{143} Baidu, Inc. (百度), incorporated on January 18, 2000, is a Chinese multinational technology company specializing in Internet-related services and products, and artificial intelligence, headquartered at the Baidu Campus in Beijing’s Haidian District. It is one of the largest AI and internet companies in the world.

\textsuperscript{144} Translated from Chinese.
“The commonalities of Chinese and Japanese traditional culture may be one of the reasons why most players quickly accept the game.” (not anime fan)

However, some interviewees did not agree that cultural elements are important to Onmyoji’s popularity.

“Many game players do not care about the cultural background.” (anime fan)

“It has nothing to do with cultural background. [...] Do not be restricted by culture. [...] Either Japanese culture or Chinese culture is only a tag for a game and what the market welcomes are good products, good games and good brands.” (anime fan)

Overall, an attractive cultural background is not necessary to every player, and some players only care whether the game is interesting enough.

3.6 The revisions of Onmyoji

It is understandable that a video game is revised for a better user experience. But in the case of Onmyoji, some historical revisions were made not for better user experience; rather they were the results of governmental regulation.

In the official Announcement of Revision and Updating on December 1, 2016, there appeared one revision: according to related rules, the logo on the loading interface would be changed from traditional characters to simplified characters. On December 8, 2016, it was announced that skill effects and shikigami’s full-body drawings as well as dialogues and copywriting with bloody effects would be modified due to related rules. Moreover, on December 14, 2016, three parts were modified based on related rules including the adjustment of illustrations and modes of two female shikigami,\textsuperscript{145} the

\textsuperscript{145} See the comparison of the former and the revised in Appendix 2.
simplification of all traditional script in the game, the modification of bloody effects.

Such revisions are reminiscent of some opinions mentioned in chapter 2: anime as cultural invasion, and anime as a medium of sex and violence.

According to Cheetah Data,\textsuperscript{146} \textit{Onmyoji} was planned to be first released in Japan.\textsuperscript{147} Thus, the script was initially designed as Japanese \textit{kanji} some of which are the same as traditional characters in Chinese. Though it was not mentioned clearly in the Announcement why traditional characters had to be changed into simplified ones, considering that the use of traditional characters is no longer the habit of most people in Mainland China, the modification may have been symbolically linked to the cultures of Hongkong, Taiwan and Japan where traditional characters are still used, which weakens the role of simplified Chinese as official character. The revisions of the two female shikigami and bloody effects reflected the worries about a negative influence of sexual and violent descriptions on teenagers.

As a game using Japanese stories as material, \textit{Onmyoji} failed to escape the worries related to cultural influence. As a 二次元 game, \textit{Onmyoji} reacted to doubts on sexual and violent descriptions which are usually considered as bad aspects of anime and made adjustments. Though it is delicately made and has earned a lot of popularity, it may have not gone so smoothly if \textit{Onmyoji} had refused to make revisions following the governmental regulations.

\textsuperscript{146} Cheetah Data is a global mobile big data analysis platform.

\textsuperscript{147} Many domestic players petitioned the project team to first release \textit{Onmyoji} in China through the function of bullet comments in the beta version. As a response, the project team set up a platform for reservation on the official site, promising that if the number of reservations reaches 200,000, \textit{Onmyoji} would be first released in China. The number of reservations exceeded 200,000 in one day, which made the first release in China possible.
Conclusion

Anime was introduced to China first through official channels. As different from traditional Chinese animation which only targets children, anime has attracted teenagers and young adults. Regardless that the government has restrained Japanese anime on TV, the development of the Internet has contributed to the dissemination of anime as well as other ACG products such as manga/comics and “galgames”, which contribute to the further development of ACG fandom in China. ACG/二次元 fandom has created a big market for anime, comics and games. Many big companies tend to invest in the animation industry, which produces also anime-style Chinese animations, that is, Chinese anime.

The game *Onmyoji* was produced under such circumstances. There is no doubt that *Onmyoji* is a successful video game. Although it employs Japanese-cultural elements, its success cannot be simply explained by its “cultural charm”. The visual and vocal characteristics make *Onmyoji* a 二次元 game comparable to other video games of the same category of 二次元 game such as *Arena of Valor*. The function of bullet comments, the way how it interacts with players as well as the use of the anime media mix further show that *Onmyoji* mainly targets 二次元 users or anime fans who are also the contributor to its success. In other words, the emergence and popularity of *Onmyoji* results from the large number of anime fans or 二次元 users in China. It reflects the current 二次元 culture in China and proves that anime is no longer an imported product but has evolved into a format that can be used by other countries too. Its promotion combining ACG fans with anime media mix also provides a creative mode for the industrialization of Chinese anime. However, as a video game implementing anime elements and Japanese stories, *Onmyoji* faced the governmental regulation, which also reflects the contradiction between media works and official ideology in the ACG field.

148 王者荣耀 is a multiplayer online battle arena produced by Tencent Games. It was released on November 26, 2015 in Mainland China.
Overall, this study sheds light on the Chinese ACG industry, demonstrating the potential of Japanese anime through the case study of *Onmyoji*. It introduces that the continuous dissemination of Japanese anime has created a large group of anime fans in China, who are the main consumers of ACG products and contributors to the form of the Chinese ACG market and the localization of 二次元 culture. How 二次元 culture is localized and what the differences between Japanese 二次元 culture and Chinese 二次元 culture are, also deserves to be studied but goes beyond the scope of this master thesis.
Acknowledgement

First of all, I am very grateful to Dr. Jaqueline Berndt, Professor at the Department of Asian, Middle Eastern and Turkish Studies of Stockholm University. Her patience and support helped me both academically and mentally, which has given me the confidence to accomplish my thesis. Her professional guidance is so impressive that I have learnt a lot during the process.

I also wish to express my thanks to Dr. Ewa Machotka, Associate Professor at the Department of Asian, Middle Eastern and Turkish Studies of Stockholm University, who gave me useful advice on my writing sample.

Last but not least, I want to thank all the game players of Onmyoji interviewed for their cooperation and support.
Bibliography


Han, Ruo-bing, and Chen, Jianping 韓 若冰, and 陳 建平. 2015. “中国における


Li, Yan 李 琰. 2011. “日中間におけるアニメーションビジネスの一考察.” MA thes., 慶應義塾大学 Keio University, Graduate School of Media Design.


Lai-kwan, Pang. 2012. Creativity and its Discontents: China’s Creative Industries and


Zhao, Wei-juan 赵 伟娟. 2016. “日本アニメ産業発展の中国への示唆 一 アニ
メブランドのマーケティング伝播を中心に。” MA thes., Northeast Normal University, Department of Japanese Language and Literature.

https://baike.baidu.com/tashuo/browse/content?id=4cc6a4b85e0e06ce09f96030


http://language.chinadaily.com.cn/2016-11/03/content_27262610.htm

http://cctv.cntv.cn/special/view/blsecbw/index.shtml

CaffreyMo. 2016. “《阴阳师》成功原因分析—做最好的自己，用诚意打动用户.”
Published December 8, 2016 on Tencent GAD.
http://gad.qq.com/article/detail/24379

https://tieba.baidu.com/p/3267438724

http://www.chanpin100.com/article/101772

https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/-kA_vlDDkQNacVK4-RKQ5w
https://www.douban.com/doulist/44033623/

https://kknews.cc/comic/zyezyj.html

https://www.bilibili.com/video/av422256?from=search&seid=2196978162712408586

https://www.jiguang.cn/reports/143


https://www.bilibili.com/video/av6253622?from=search&seid=369304106125847396

https://www.jianshu.com/p/20ce64d7ef38


Ouellette, Sophie. 2016. “What is the difference between Chinese and Japanese animation?” Created June 6, Prezi. 

http://www.jiemian.com/article/1449488.html


https://www.bilibili.com/video/av13667360?from=search&seid=2164084044745086


[Yang, Zhou] 杨洲. 2016. “独家数据解析阴阳师：费时费钱的游戏如何成为现象级？” Published December 9, on Cheetah Data.

http://data.cmcm.com/report/detail/150


https://www.zhihu.com/question/23960299


https://www.douban.com/note/602075557/?from=tag


https://www.bilibili.com/video/av1427862?from=search&seid=148669630729631020

97
# Appendix 1.

Banned Japanese anime in China in 2015 (retrieved from Wang and Takahashi 2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>動画作品</th>
<th>年代時代</th>
<th>件名</th>
<th>内容</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>残響のアホル</td>
<td>BLOOD-C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>破壊戦士チアウェイダー</td>
<td>Ergo Proxy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ガンスインザヴァンパイアパン</td>
<td>寄生獸</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>スカルマン</td>
<td>Another</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>インフェルノコップ</td>
<td>アフロサムライ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>東京伝説トーキョーグール</td>
<td>ソードアート・オンライン</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>東京ESP</td>
<td>東京レイヴンズ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>デビルメイクライ</td>
<td>Mnemonic<del>ムネモシュネの娘たち</del></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>新妹魔王の契約者</td>
<td>崩壊の巨人</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>コープスパーティ</td>
<td>ストライク・ザ・ブラッド</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>デスノート</td>
<td>デッドマン・リンダーライト</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>デート・ア・ライブ</td>
<td>サイコパス<del>PSYCHO-PASS</del></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>デビルマンレディ</td>
<td>School Days</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>エルフを狩るものたち</td>
<td>エルフレンリート</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ハイスクールD×D</td>
<td>百花缭乱<del>SAMURAI GIRLS</del></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>だから彼は、H ができない</td>
<td>GIRLS ブラボー</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>かのこん</td>
<td>はぐれ勇者の勇者英学</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>桜通信</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>黒執事3</td>
<td>クレイモア</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2. Revisions on the bust of two female shikigami