

# Processes of Cultural and Media Consumption: The Image of 'Otaku', from Japan to the World\*

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## Abstract

From the theoretical perspective regarding communication as culture, this article focuses on the communicative dimension of cultural processes in contemporary times. Its objective is to report and discuss the widespread image of the social group referred to as *Otaku*, which is characterized by great ambivalence resulting from its Japanese origin and its subsequent insertion into mediatized imagery on a worldwide scale. In Japan, *Otaku* imagery carries the negative connotation of individuals who are fanatical about the consumption of entertainment-industry products, have little inclination for social life, and are associated with psychopathological and criminal behavior. In Asia and Brazil, the term *Otaku* has come to designate fans of Japanese pop culture but is characterized by its reference to a youth in search of informational exchanges and new modes of social interaction within urban life. It is concluded that *Otaku* imagery in the mundialized culture is altered to the extent that segments of youth in different countries – as a result of their cultural matrices – reinvent the process by which Japanese pop culture is consumed, thereby assigning alternate meanings to them.

**Keywords:** *Otaku*. Japanese pop culture. Manga. Anime.

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## Introduction

In this the beginning of the 21st century, the overriding role of Communication technology and its developments – social networks, online games, digital books etc. – has enabled the emergence of groups with distinctive sociability characteristics that appear in the media as avid consumers of pop culture and which come together as consumption communities immersed in the high-universe of the new digital technologies. In this article, the study's main question is the communicational dimension of contemporary culture focusing on a social group that has gained visibility in Japanese contemporary media since the 1980s and which has grown on a global scale with the expansion of the Japanese entertainment industry in the west, including in countries such as Brazil. This social group is known as *Otaku* (お宅).

With the aim of dealing with the processes of cultural and media consumption which constitute the image of *Otakus* in Japan and its dynamics in the midst of the globalization of Japanese pop culture, a methodological approach has been adopted for this article which includes the model of Communication studies as culture (LIMA, 2001). Starting from the field of Communication (LOPES, 2003; WEBER; BENTZ; HOHFELDT, 2002), this article interacts, in the chosen model, with the social sciences, in particular with the sociology of consumption (BAUMAN, 1999) and urban sociology (MAFFESOLI, 1997). On the methodological plain, an historical analysis was chosen which includes participative observation as currently applied in cyberculture practices (LEMOS, 2010), with the support of previously elaborated a bibliography on Japanese pop culture in general (SATO, 2007), and on Manga as a cultural and Communicational product (LUYTEN, 2000; 2005). The analysis categories include institutions (the international market of pop culture) and cultural formations (social networks on the plain of media and cultural consumption). Communication, in the adopted approach, is defined as: “a symbolic process by which reality is produced, maintained, repaired and transformed” (LIMA, 2001).

The term *Otaku*, whilst there is no precise translation, has some corresponding terms in English: *nerd*<sup>1</sup>, *geek*<sup>2</sup> and *fanboy*<sup>3</sup> are some of the denominations given to fans or admirers obsessed with some topics in this specific mode. The *Otaku* is a contemporary of these types of characteristic behaviors of the modern western world. In Japanese, the *Otaku* originally has two meanings: it can mean a respectful and formal way of referring to someone's residence ("sir/madam's home") or it may be a formal way of addressing in the second person, similar to the use of *vous* in French. In the 1980s, the use of this term as a formal address became subverted and began to be used to name a new, emerging social group in Japanese society. According to Cecília Saito (2012), this new group that was being called *okatu* resulted from a combination of the post-war economic prosperity of Japan, the intense relationship between consumption and technological media and the appeal of visual references in the Manga cartoon stories and Anime animated films.

The first use of the term *Otaku* to designate a social group is attributed to the Japanese chronicler Akio Nakamori. In 1983, the erotic magazine *Manga Burikko*, Nakamori published the article *Machi ni Otaku ga ippai* ("The city is full of *Otakus*", freely translated). The chronicler pointed out, in the June edition of that year, the appearance of a new, urban, social group (*zoku*),

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<sup>1</sup> *Nerd* is well exploited stereotype in American pop culture. In the cinema, especially, it is associated with an individual who dedicates himself to intellectual activities and does not have many friends. It's the term currently directed at fans of comic books and other pop culture products such as science fiction shows and video games and the aficionados of technology. Western TV shows, such as the American *The Big Bang Theory* and the British *The IT Crowd* currently exploit this market.

<sup>2</sup> *Geek*, mainly designates an aficionado for technology attentive to novelties and new releases of products that constitute a high tech scenario.

<sup>3</sup> *Fanboy* is a label used frequently on the internet, in a critical way, to refer to fans obsessed by an object or specific theme (a TV series, video game, movie, etc.). It designates those who unconditionally defend their idols or object of admiration and do not accept contrary opinions. The term can be currently seen related to brands of technology firms such as gamers defend their favorite consoles (Nintendo Wii, Playstation 3, Xbox360, PCs) as well as technology enthusiasts loyal particular brands (the operating system Linux, Android, Apple products).

taking its starting point as his visit to an edition of the Comiket biennial fair held in Tokyo which is aimed at the commercialization of comic books produced by amateurs.

At the fair, known for its concentration of aspiring new Manga artists as well as *Otakus*, Nakamori saw thousands of youngsters, mostly teenagers and high school students, endowed with visual characteristics that he considered to be eccentric for that time: skinny boys and overweight girls with bowl-shaped haircuts wearing cheap clothes from a well-known department store called Ito Yokado. In this urban scene, at the beginning of the 1980s, there was the practice of cosplay, where people would wear costumes and make performances in everyday places playing the roles of TV characters.

The young participants of the Comiket, according to the chronicler, were apparently just one facet of new, upcoming urban types in Japan. Next to the participants of the comic book fair, other groups appeared of obsessed youngsters such as the fans who camped outside cinema theaters to be the first to watch the animated films on the day of their release. These fans would wake up early to ensure a place in the line for the autograph sessions with their favorite singers and the kids with glasses who were assiduous frequenters of the electronics and computer stores.

For the youngsters with eccentricities in common, showing off characteristics through which they seek to distinguish themselves from the figure of “mass man” which marked the modernization of countries like Japan in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was a need for a term to define themselves. In Japan, the terms *nekkyouteki* (fanatic) and *mania* (maniac) were no longer adequate, according to Nakamori. It was then that the chronicler decided to unite them all under the term *Otaku* which would be used from then on in all his articles.

### The negative image of the **Otaku** social group in Japan

If the term *Otaku* originally has meanings related to formally addressing another person, it is interesting to note its transforma-

tion into an umbrella term that includes a social group that rips up the image of sobriety so pervasive in Japanese society which is seen as one of the most disciplined societies in the world of development of historical capitalism, especially after the Second World War.

The North American researcher Lawrence Eng (2006) lists at least three different origins, related to the original context of the usage of the term *Otaku* and with the Anime audio-visual industry as the backdrop. The first hypothesis for *Otaku* as a designation for a social group is its connection to the nuances of distancing and formality; the non-deepening of bonds between people. The *Otaku* individual, in search of rare data or material related to his object of admiration, participates in a network of contacts where each participant acts as a commercial partner willing to exchange and barter. With the aim of increasing his exchange possibilities, the network grows making it then impossible to maintain a bond of friendship with so many participants.

The second hypothesis is related to the stigma that many attach to the *Otakus*, stereotyped in Japan as unsociable types who rarely leave their homes. In this case, the meaning of *Otaku* as “your home” comes into play, characterizing the obsessed fans as those who prefer a domestic environment to more sociable spaces.

The third hypothesis on the use the word *Otaku* mentions an incident narrated by the Japanese artist Takashi Murakami, a member of the artist movement called *Superflat* whose greatest creative references are Mangas and Animes. Toshio Okada – a producer of Animes, founder of a typical *Otaku* company (the Gainax studio) and friend of Murakami – often referred to the artists Shoji Kawamori and Haruhiko Mikimoto, authors of the science fiction anime, *Super Dimensional Fortress Macross*, using the formal *Otaku* way of addressing. *Macross*, an animated series shown on Japanese TV in the 1980s, became a success and led to a number of sequels in the 1990s and 2000s.

This distant relationship, commented on by Okada, refers to the fact that Kawamori and Mikimoto, at the time they released the *Macross* series, were students at Keio university, considered to be

for the Japanese elite. Therefore, in the formal Japanese university environment, the use of the term *Otaku* to address other people would be more appropriate than the usual *anata* or *kimi* (words that also correspond to “you”). In Japanese custom, including the use of the language, there are particular manners and nuances to the way one addresses a person, be it formal, informal or offensive. The use of different manners and pronouns varies according to the person who is speaking, who is being spoken to and the context in which the conversation takes place. The nuances can be shown by the tone of voice used, by the formality of the circumstances and by the social hierarchy that exists between the actors.

The formal way of addressing others, behavior which is meant to show respect and distancing in Japanese society, ended up spreading among the fans who began referring to the creators of their favorite audio-visual series and other assiduous fans of Manga such as the *Otakus*. Nowadays, the term *Otaku*, at least in the west where this concept spread to from the 1980s onwards through consumer markets on a global scale, has become a designation of a social category related to the processes of media and culture consumption which includes the passion of a large number of fans of Manga and Anime as a psychosocial variable to be considered in relation to the formation of consumer markets.

Among the characteristics of the *Otaku* group is an obsession with collecting and classifying data and material related to the object of admiration (which varies from elements of pop culture to military items among other things), the collection and organization of information and the subversion of manufactured products (illegal reproductions of Mangas and Animes). The information collected by the *Otakus* refers to the topics that are not normally of interest to the wider population.

As André Lemos points out, the *Otakus* possess “[...] a fascination for information, but not of just any kind. They seek the strangest and most difficult to get. Their notoriety lies exactly in holding the most difficult information on a particular topic” (LEMOS, 2010, p.235). Cyberspace became fertile land not only for collection but also for storage, production, circulation and

manipulation of information by the *Otakus*. Lemos (2010, p.235) states that the group is dependent on cyberculture and those that hold the most difficult information to obtain manage to rise in the hierarchy that was historically set up by the members of the group.

The French journalist Etienne Barral (2004) interprets the appearance of the *Otaku* social group as being due to Japan's education system itself, considered to be homogenizing and massifying, prone to eliminating all kinds of transgressive behavior or individual expression. The *Otakus* characteristic of collecting data on their favorite consumer products, something that is irrelevant to other people, is related to the teaching methods used in schools and prep schools which prioritize memorization of information.

[...] The whole school system is based on the memorization of formulas, dates, data and theorems. [...] One of the consequences of this excessive memorization is that the schools produce fuller heads rather than well-prepared heads. Knowledge (with a capital K), for a Japanese student, is, above all, the ability to memorize the largest volume of dates and names rather than reasoning about events or being able to construct a sentence in a English (BARRAL, 2004, p.105).

The negative aspect of the term *Otaku* gained momentum in the Japanese media when it started to be used in relation to the occurrence of some tragic events in Japan. The first tragedy that brought the *Otaku* category into the public's attention occurred in 1987 when the photography technician, Tsutomu Miyazaki, kidnapped, killed and mutilated four girls aged between 4 and 7, in the city of Saitama (Saitama Province in the Tokyo Metropolitan Region). As well as the murders, Miyazaki also performed acts of necrophilia and cannibalism on the bodies. Arrested in 1989, when he was about to take another victim, Miyazaki had his house searched by the police and by the press who showed the Japanese public his collection of 5,763 VHS tapes with recordings of his victims, horror films, pornography, photos of the atrocities he committed and Manga collections. The discovery of the *Otaku* side of the killer provoked a highly negative reaction from the Japanese public with regards to the fans obsessed with pop culture, as Miyazaki was one of them.

However, the tragedy that is most famously linked to the *Otakus* was the terrorist attack on the Tokyo subway in 1995 which had repercussions throughout the world press. The attack, which was the second tragic case and the most famous involving the *Otakus*, killed 13 people and injured more than a thousand passengers. The mentor of the crime, Shoko Asahara, was the leader of Aum Shinrikyo, a Buddhist sect. He believed himself to be a divine entity that would save the lives of his followers in the event of a catastrophe. Categorized as an *Otaku* due to his passion for robots, Asahara attracted followers through the sect, immersed in a wave of the consumption of dark-themed Mangas in the 1980s.

According to Cecília Saito (2012), the figure of the *Otaku* has a further, much more extreme aspect to it, materialized in the form of hikikomori, another social type that is also typically nipponic. *Hikikomori* is the name given to the a person who isolates himself from society, remaining a recluse in his own room for months or years, kept by his family. This situation can be an embarrassment for parents who prefer to keep it hidden rather than be the target of unpleasant gossip in the neighborhood. According to Yuji Genda, a professor of Social Sciences at the University of Tokyo, in 2011 Japan had 1.62 million *hikikimoris*, most of whom were between the ages of 15 and 59 and predominantly male (GETTING..., 2013).

The term *hikikomori* was created by the psychiatrist Tamaki Saito to designate both a disturbance and the person that is suffering from it. This term became evident in the 1990s, with the economic recession and the appearance of millions of Japanese youths without fixed jobs, and had a direct relationship with the dysfunction that they promote within the idealized homogeneity of Japanese society.<sup>4</sup> *Hikikomoris* and *Otakus* exemplify the saying, *deru kui wa utareru* (“hammer the nail that stands out”): in a culture that prizes collectivity and allows no space for individual-

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<sup>4</sup>In the United Kingdom, there is a corresponding term – NEET (*Not currently engaged in Employment, Education or Training*) – which designates youths who do not study, work or participate in any kind of training in private or state organizations.

ism, the two social groups cited constituted those that do not fit in with the socio-economic functions of the mass population. It is therefore preferable to hide or repress them rather than interrupt the reigning feeling of harmony within an idea of a cohesive national identity.

### The positive image of the **Otakus** in a mundialized culture

In Brazil, fans of Japanese pop culture, who have strong links with the processes of the consumption of products from that country's entertainment industry, are called *Otakus*. But the term, now used around the world, does not carry the same pejorative connotation as it does in Japan. In theory, many Brazilians who use these denomination on a daily basis are unaware of the depreciative aspect that the term *Otaku* carries in Japan to this day, The Brazilian journalist Alexandre Nagado explains how the use of the term caused a curious inversion of meaning since, in Brazil, the *Otakus* are connected to fraternities, fan meetings, festivities and youthful effervescence; characteristics that diverge from the Japanese version which is more contained and less likely to lead to sociable practices.

For Brazilian cultural reasons, there is little space for classic *otaku*. The Brazilian public is formed by many *otaku* girls and young couples, which would be a contradiction in Japan. More laidback, enthusiastic and noisier than their oriental counterparts, Brazilian fans push and shove to get an autograph of their favorite dubbing actor; they jump to the sound of Anime songs as if they were at a rock concert and they promote a very Brazilian kind of fraternization which is certainly far from the solitary, isolated fanaticism present in many Japanese *otakus* (NAGADO, 2005, p.56).

Probably connected to the characteristic irreverence of *Otaku* groups in Brazil is the good-humored use of the linguistic variations of the term. There is use of the term "*otaka*", where the feminine case is added to adapt the word *Otaku* to refer to the girls who are admirers and fans of Mangas, Animes and Japanese pop music. As well as this adaptation, there is also there term

*otome*, which in Japanese means “virgin” or “damsel”, but which does not exactly denote the feminine counterpart of *Otaku*.

Despite the great geographical distance from Japan, the Brazilian *Otakus* connect socially via an intense circulation of Mangas, Animes, j-music (Japanese pop music), provided not only by Communication technology and market interaction, but also by the process that Renato Ortiz (1994) called the mundialization of culture. Simultaneously with globalization, related to economic and technological aspects, mundialization refers to cultural expression, symbols and values that go beyond their territory of origin. To Ortiz, frontiers have become blurred making it difficult to distinguish between what is familiar and what is strange, what is near and what is far. Pokemon is no longer Japanese any more than Pelé is Brazilian: both are part of a culture that is ever more international-popular, populated by globally recognized symbols.

Whilst in Japan, the *Otaku* are the protagonists in TV series (*Densha Otoko*<sup>5</sup>, *Genshiken*<sup>6</sup>, *Ore no Imouto ga Konna ni Kawaii Wake ga Nai*<sup>7</sup>), in other countries the social group begins to gain visibility through Japanese cultural events. Brazilian fans come onto the consumption circuit of Mangas and Animes through the professional activities of magazine publishers, TV channels, video distributors and events specialized in Japanese pop culture. Brazil, in fact, participates in the World Cosplay Summit held in Japan every year. Cosplay, an abbreviation of Costume Play, has spread around the world and consists of dressing up, acting and performing as characters from TV shows or comic books. The qualification rounds to choose the two contestants that would represent Brazil at this international tournament have become the most important Manga and Anime events in the country. The hard work put into cosplay by the Brazilian fans has already resulted in three world titles achieved in 2006, 2008 and 2011.

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<sup>5</sup> Translation: “The Train Man”.

<sup>6</sup> Manga by Shimoku Kio. The name of the series is an abbreviation of Gendai Shikaku Bunka Kenkyukai (Society for the Study of Modern Culture Visual).

<sup>7</sup> Story by Tsukasa Fushimi transformed into Manga and Anime. It literally means “my sister cannot be so gracious”.

In Brazil, Nippon pop culture, outstandingly communicational, keeps its influence over Japanese descendants and non-descendants alike by means of events which, in this second decade of the 2000s, are not restricted to only the most populous regions in Brazil. Events considered to be of a large scale, due to the program and duration, are also held in the metropolises of the South/South-east axis and are spreading through the Center-west (Kodama in Brasília and the Festival of Japan in Cuiabá), the North-east (Sana Fest in Fortaleza) and the North (Anime Jungle Party in Manaus), to mention just the largest conventions in terms of numbers and events that showcase information on pop culture related to Japan.

The relevance of the events away from South/South-east axis became more visible with the inclusion of international attractions such as Japanese singers who are well-known to Anime fans around the world. (Hironobu Kageyama, Yumi Matsuzawa, Eizo Sakamoto) and by holding local stages of the Brazilian Cosplay championship which define the two Brazilian representatives in the World Cosplay Summit. In the North, Northeast and Center-west regions, the events chosen to host some of the national Cosplay selection stages are: Anipólitán in Salvador, the Anime Jungle Party in Manaus, the Matsuri in São Luís and the Kodama in Brasília.

The variety and increasing number of attractions at the conventions in the other regions of the country reflect the growing number of participants at each event. One example is the Sana Fest in Fortaleza, the most recent editions of which received a total of 60 thousand people which makes it one of the largest Japanese pop culture events in Brazil along with Anime Friends in São Paulo which is attended by more than 100 thousand participants over the eight days of the event.

Volker Grassmück (*apud* LEMOS, 2010, p. 236) states that the *Otakus* are “the apotheosis of consumerism and the ideal of a capitalist workforce”, a statement that can be seen in the large supply in Japan through stores and companies specialized in meeting the demand of fans as consumers of media and cultural products. Far away from the Japanese archipelago, the Brazilian *Otaku* do not have the same facilities as their foreign peers with

respect to consumption of items related to their favorite television series. The fantasy world of events seeks to fill in some of these gaps, attracting fans, or more precisely consumer-fans, for experiences that whilst not being exactly the same as the Japanese *Otaku* experience, they at least temporarily satisfy, quite intensely, the desire for a less inhospitable and less tedious world in these times of unemployment, underemployment and where experience of time is emphatically connected to a future of uncertainties.

The Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1999) states that individuals in a consumerist society are always moving, looking for new experiences rather than accumulating material wealth in itself. The seeking of goods and services is no longer motivated by the craving to possess, to have, but by the possibility of feeling different sensations that allow for escape from the dominant mindset instituted by the most banal daily activities of the common individual. Each act of consumptions is thus seen as a kind of journey where arriving is always the least desired moment since the consumer then feels obliged to seek another product to obtain a new experience.

Global competition and the profusion of brands compels factories and companies to offer objects of desire and consumer temptations more than just products and services. Once they have won over the consumers, the objects of consumption need to be replaced by new products that also arouse desires in order for the company not to lose its niche in the market. One cycle of attractive products replaces another, aiming to constantly seduce consumers with a novelty that is always better than the previous version of a product.

For the planned seduction by the companies to become efficient, the market seeks to prepare people for their roles as consumers. In the case of groups who are fanatic about pop culture, these are not docile or patient in their wait for new products and do not waste time in their acts of consumption. But they are also unwilling to fix their desire on just one object. Consumption will no longer require learning. The satisfaction will be instantaneous and the consumer will be urged to consume as a continuous act.

In the current consumer society, what matters is to keep moving and discover new desires that previously didn't exist, with one temptation always leading to the next rather than to satisfaction.

To increase the consumption capacity, consumers must never be allowed to rest. They need to be kept awake and alert at all times, continually exposed to new temptations, in an incessant state of excitement – and also in a perpetual state of suspicion and dissatisfaction. The bait that diverts their attention needs to confirm the suspicion by promising a way out of the dissatisfaction: 'Do you think you've seen it all? You haven't seen anything yet!' (BAUMAN, 1999, p.91-92).

The state of incessant excitement takes consumers to the theme parks, fairs directed at fans, small temporary Disneylands whose attractions allow visitors to enter the world of consumer dreams. Since the 1990s, Brazilian fans have had the opportunity of participating in conventions specialized in Japanese pop culture. Events with the theme of Japanese pop culture, in different proportions, started appearing in practically all the Brazilian states and nowadays they contain a wide range of attractions: Cosplay contests and parades, karaoke, Lolita meetings (a style adopted by Japanese women and young girls the main characteristic of which is wearing clothes inspired by Rococo and Victorian fashion), games championships, sales of products (Mangas, Animes and knickknacks such as dolls, t-shirts and notebooks), j-pop concerts (Japanese pop music), talks by professional film dubbing actors, exhibitions of animated series, fanzine sales and other consumer attractions. All these activities brought together in one event practically make up a world apart, like the other side of the looking glass, very different from the daily reality which is often very tedious for the young masses.

Inside and outside the events, the *Otaku* is captured by offers of a kind of parallel dimension, a media environment planned and populated by different languages: Comic books, animated films, fashion, music and electronic games. Before an event is held, the *Otakus* are attracted by the promotional material or by information passed on by the organizers through the social networks such as

Facebook and Twitter. Activities and attractions are promoted gradually to create suspense, a kind of marketing teaser.

In a possible parallel to the categories of tourists and hobos that Bauman used to talk about the types of mobility in the modern world, the *Otakus* who participate in conventions and fan meetings bring together the characteristics of both. The tourist, an inhabitant of the First World, always has his time taken up, no longer considers distance to be a barrier to seeking new experiences and lives in a cosmopolitan world. The hobo, an inhabitant of the Second World, lives in the space and abundance of free time, being impeded from moving freely from one side to the other since he is always being watched and kept out by walls and trenches.

The *Otaku* transits between the two categories when participating in the pop culture conventions. The events constitute the journey – without leaving the spot – that the tourist can make and that the hobo makes because he needs to escape from the spaces he is stuck in. The convention, with simultaneous activities that capture the fans attention encouraging the practices of cultural consumption and the reality of daily life, marked by the obligations of work and study, emulating the characteristics of the First and Second Worlds. At the event, there is an environment planned to offer new experiences and sensations, which is what the *Otaku* wants (and what he may want but still doesn't know).

The tourists move around because they find the world within their (global) reach irresistibly attractive. The hobos move because they find the world within their (local) reach unbearably inhospitable. The tourists travel because they want to; the hobos because they have no other bearable option (BAUMAN, 1999, p.101).

If it is not possible to travel to Tokyo to visit the *Otaku* in the international famous neighborhood of Akihabara (where there are many technology and media stores) or go to the well-known Comiket (a fair for Mangas produced by amateurs, also in Tokyo), then, in some Brazilian city, a small part of the Japanese archipelago is simulated in the form of events with stalls selling

imported products, Mangas licensed for the Brazilian market, Manga workshops and other activities connected to Japanese pop culture. For a few hours or days, while the event lasts, fans are free from the demands of the Second World, being trapped by the conditions of social class, and allow themselves to be seduced by the treats of the First World which emulates a fantasy Japan and is consumed whilst remaining emphatically in the symbolic plain.

### Final considerations

The image of the *Otaku* group, though stigmatized by the practice of obsessive consumption by its members and tainted by the barbaric crimes committed by Tsutomu Miyazaki and Aum Shinrikyo in Japan, has a positive connotation to it outside Japanese territory and the signs are that this will be reproduced in Western countries. In current times, based on the worldwide perception of Japanese pop culture, this negative image of the *Otaku* group has begun to get a more positive perception even in Japan. This change of perception has occurred recently, intertwined with the country's economic stagnation, the ascension of an openly *Otaku* prime minister (Taro Aso, the premier between 2008 and 2009) and the Japanese government's attitude of support, albeit overdue, for the creation industry as a source of diplomacy and profits in the trade balance.

Consumption on a global scale of pop culture products – overwhelmingly media products – produced in Japan, constitute an historic moment which demonstrates the ambivalence of the meaning of media and cultural production when perceived in its own country and how the perception of such production is radically transformed in the eyes of foreign consumers. To a certain extent, the ways the *Otaku* group is seen in Japan and its current expansion to other countries, requires an understanding of the consumption that has already occurred worldwide in accordance with the ways the distant cultural centers deals with this foreignness that arrives in the form of media and cultural products in general.

In Japan, pop culture, despite already being massively intertwined through daily public media processes, still clashes internally when it is placed against the traditional cultures in Japan itself. This is what leads segments of the Japanese public to treat pop culture and its consumers with moral reservations based on the traditionalism which, up until the first half of the 20th century, played a role that represented the majority in terms of a national cultural mindset which needed, albeit forcibly, to reinvent itself after the Second World War.

The positive reception that Japanese pop culture has had in Asian countries, including political rivals such as China and South Korea, as well as other continents, reaching Brazil too, is an indicator of the power of attraction that Mangas, Animes and other media products have come to possess over the consumer masses, especially those within the youth segments connected to the environment of the culture industries that have made Japan a constructor of new media mindsets on a global scale.

In the case of Brazil, the ways that Brazilian youth captures the images of Japanese pop culture include the production of intense means of socialization and the formation of networks for exchanging information that is found on the plain of consumerism. The image of *Otaku*, in all its ambivalence, is reproduced through the processes of media and culture consumption already visible in Japanese society. But, at least in the case of Brazil, this image is reproduced with signs of uniqueness which suggests, rather than a centrality of an individual's social life, the search for a collective life as an urban experiment in this the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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