Article

Global Media Streams: Netflix and the Changing Ecosystem of Anime Production

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Abstract

Streaming services have become a primary intermediary between international content producers and global audiences, and their palpable influence as gatekeepers, tastemakers, and disruptors of media industries abroad have significant ramifications for the way television is produced and distributed. Using the case study of how Netflix is influencing the Japanese anime industry, this research outlines the contradictory ways that the streaming service engages with international media and how local creators are grappling with the specter of globalism that Netflix represents in their own work. Utilizing textual analysis, discursive analysis, and interviews with industry insiders, this article identifies some of the shifts that are occurring in the anime industry due to the advent of Netflix on the level of production and text.

Keywords

globalization, media industries, platform studies, anime, Netflix, new media

As competition within the "streaming wars" have amplified, there has been a growing anxiety for survival from established services, such as Netflix, resulting in a turn toward original content production to make up for networks withdrawing their own content and incentivizing subscribers to stay. A significant feature of Netflix's original content production and distribution is its global reach; however, how these endeavors impact local industries abroad has been relatively understudied in scholarly analyses of the portal. Netflix's global presence has already had rippling effects in international

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media policy, content regulation, infrastructure, production, and viewing practices. Drawing from established debates around cultural imperialism, this has raised concerns from globalization scholars regarding how we can understand the influence of these largely American-based services on an international scale. The term "platform imperialism" was coined by Dal Yong Jin, who noted that platforms, as digital intermediaries, continue to exacerbate the asymmetrical relationships, data flows, and economic interdependence between nation-states and transnational corporations. This extends beyond "forms of technological disparities, but also the forms of intellectual property, symbolic hegemony, and user commodity [which] concentrate capital into the hands of a few US-based platform owners, resulting in the expansion of the global divide" (Jin 2015, 12). While the verbiage of Netflix as SVOD platform or portal seems to be used, at times, interchangeably, there are certain parallels that can be drawn between Jin's platform imperialism and Netflix as a portal for televisual content in terms of concerns regarding practices that reinforce power asymmetries. The opacity of the service's data mining practices, the centrality of IP ownership in the continued survival of streaming services, governmental intervention in promoting the success of transnational services gesture toward potentially exploitative arrangements that bolster the performance of American-based services.

While it is certainly true that platformization has disrupted many aspects of our social, economic, and cultural lives, scholars have already complicated the notion that the lopsided flow of information and content necessarily connotes Western domination. When speaking about the hegemonic positionality of American-based services and enterprises, it is important to define exactly what constitutes "domination" in what feature of global development and how such domination manifests in relation to the platform. For example, regarding the flow of media commodities across national boundaries, these engagements continue to necessitate cultural translators, forms of hybridity and strategic modification on the part of these platforms and local creators alike in order to effectively engage with different cultural communities abroad (Donoghue 2017). While this does not disprove the potential dominance of Western institutions in the global production and flow of media, it does reveal that such ideological, symbolic, and economic hegemony may not be such a straightforward endeavor and requires more detailed case studies to grasp the complex negotiations made between entities that facilitate the production and distribution of cultural commodities. This gestures toward the continued relevance of Straubhaar's (2007) concept of asymmetrical interdependence, which captures the diversity of relational possibilities "in which countries find themselves unequal but possessing variable degrees of power and initiative in politics, economics, technological capability and culture."

In this article, I examine the myriad ways in which Netflix has been disrupting the anime production industry, the issues that have risen with the advent of this new global streaming service within the processes that have sustained the circulation of anime texts previously, and how the cultivation of orientalist framing devices signal the contradictory and ambivalent strategies employed by Netflix when engaging with Japanese anime. In doing this, I analyze whether Jin's concept of platform imperialism can be

aptly applied to the service's current relationship to the Japanese anime industry, particularly from a symbolic and industrial perspective, beginning with a textual and genre-level analysis of Netflix's North American catalog. I argue that two ways in which we can see symbolic violence being inflicted upon the national Other is from the orientalizing discourses that are leveraged by the Netflix owned and produced documentary, *Enter the Anime*, which are in turn bolstered through the overemphasis of certain genres of anime within Netflix's catalog. In focusing on the para-industrial phenomena which consist of "the ubiquitous industrial, cultural and corporate fields that surround, buffer and complicate any access to what we traditionally regard as our primary objects of media research" (Caldwell 2014, 721), one can grapple with the diverse ways in which media texts are rooted in background contexts that are crucial to understanding the nature of an asymmetrical industrial relationship. Caldwell's (2008) concept of industrial reflexivity recognizes the ways that industrial self-analysis reveals the constructed nature of how creative laborers and audiences alike understand and negotiate their positionality within the structures of the entertainment business through ritual and narrative. In analyzing personal interviews with industry laborers, trade papers, paratexts, and the constitution of content catalogs, one can better understand the reasonings behind the contradictory narratives that Netflix constructs in order to appear both attractive and benevolent to a cosmopolitan industry and audience.

On the one hand, the intermediating potential of lopsided genre representations within catalogs and the circulation of paratexts that indulge in Orientalist discourses position Netflix as a dominant entity that has the potential to significantly shape global perceptions of Japan's media output through the exclusion and highlighting of certain textual features. However, once we transition to looking at Netflix's industrial influences on the Japanese anime industry, it becomes clear that local industrial players leverage Netflix's influence in order to experiment and advance their own technical capacities, as well as address the shifting demographics of the global anime viewership, resulting in a more complex image of the push and pull of influence between local creators and Netflix. Given these two oppositional relational images, I argue that while certainly Netflix and the Japanese anime industry remain in asymmetrically interdependent relationships that retain uneven advantages across the global industry, neither side can be easily characterized as being dominant or dominated by the other when considering the multidirectional vectors that constitute the service's model of engagement with anime.

Reinforcing Imagined Originations: Orientalism, Symbolic Annihilation, and Enter the Anime

Symbolic annihilation was a concept that was first proposed by Gerbner and Gross (1976) to define how the exclusion from the world of televisual representation was a means of violence against marginalized communities by erasing these communities from the "socially constructed "reality" [which] gives a coherent picture of what exists, what is important, what is related to what, and what is right" (p. 176). While Gerbner

used this phrase in order to analyze the impoverished representation of women on television in the 70s, other scholars have picked up this concept in order to analyze the partial or full erasure of marginalized communities, including racial minorities, global cultures, LGBTQ groups, and more. Within the framework of digital streaming services, such forms of symbolic exclusion may stem from the representational capacity of the service's catalog as well as through algorithmic curation. Across scholarly inquiry regarding the representation of global media forms within streaming catalogs, there has been the critique that despite the presence of international media, Hollywood content tends to dominate in relation to the numbers in Netflix's catalog (Affonso Penner and Straubhaar 2020; Albornoz and García Leiva 2022; Cunningham and Scarlata 2020). Japanese anime has not suffered from a dearth of titles in Netflix's North American catalog, with 148 television shows and sixty-nine films in total as of March 2022.[1] However, within this impressive library, the medium of anime is represented unevenly, primarily privileging action and science fiction productions with eighty-six series and forty-two films falling into these two categories. While this is not surprising given the history of formal anime distribution within the United States often skewing to prioritize these genres, it becomes increasingly concerning when we couple the limitations of the catalog with Netflix's collaboratively produced documentary, *Enter the Anime*, regarding the medium in question. The documentary contextualizes anime as a phenomenon whose success is predicated on its cultural and national origins.

While many scholars have emphasized the tenuous relationship between Japan as an imagined cultural center and the media products that they produce, one of the framings that is leveraged by Netflix in order to enhance the appeal of its anime catalog is through emphasizing and reinforcing this relationship. Ian Condry has argued that to try to frame the development of anime as a result inherently predicated on "Japanese culture" or more broadly, "the overarching nation or ethnic assertions of cultural resonance," often disservices the multidirectional social practices and forms of value creation that happens across national and cultural borders, all of which contribute to anime's global success (Condry 2013, 18). Anne Allison also expresses her skepticism regarding the "Japan" that supposedly effaces their pop cultural exports, noting that "whether the attraction is coded as global culture or as culturally Japanese, it involves not only a perceived difference from American pop but also a constructed world premised on the very notion of difference itself" (Allison 2006, 2). Similarly, Casey Brienza echoes this sentiment by noting that a wider global viewership of Japan's pop cultural exports does not necessarily lead to "Western sympathies toward Japan as a nation or reorient global cultural hierarchies" (Brienza 2016, 2). What all of these scholars are ultimately emphasizing is the tenuous relationship between the nation and the cultural products that purport some kind of imaginary origination.

Despite these observations, Netflix is persistently seen taking advantage of orientalized perceptions of "Japaneseness" that supposedly justifies the global popularity of anime. Such framings can be seen in *Enter the Anime*, directed by Alex Burunova. This documentary provides a convenient lens through which one can see the iteration of "Japaneseness" that is being promoted by the service and their motivations for reinforcing a sense of imaginary origination to anime. The majority of the documentary

promotes Netflix's own original anime content and acts as a guiding paratext that is predicated on a vision of anime's global legibility being foundationally dependent on certain pre-existing Orientalist assumptions. *Enter the Anime* begins with Burunova narrating and posing the question, "what is anime?" within the first few minutes of the documentary, Burunova contends that one must simply ride the Japanese subway to understand the "stoic surface of Japanese culture. . .quiet, polite, restrained." The documentary then poses the question of how such a suppressed culture could create something like the "dark, twisted crazy world of anime," promising to introduce the viewers to the "deranged minds" behind the works. Already within the first minute of the documentary, the rhetoric that is employed utilizes multiple layers of orientalism in order to draw upon the perceived frenetic and ever-shifting nature of Japanese culture. Orientalism, as it relates to perceptions of Japan, has seen many iterations, from frameworks of exotic traditions, to brutal and inscrutable warrior cultures, to "weird" pop culture phenomena, to techno-orientalism. Each iteration proves to be a way of allowing the outside voyeur to readily identify the subjected Other through pre-constituted essentialisms and partially-understood cultural spectacles, and further, provides the means to "comprehend the actuality of this representation" through repetitive exposure (Ramakrishnan 1999, 135).

If, as noted previously, anime is not inherently connected to "Japaneseness," or, if so, only dubiously, then the reinforcement of the connection is presented in the way that the majority of the documentary is shot in Japan despite the medium's transnational and global production processes. Further, many of the establishing shots of Japanese culture default to the various forms of Orientalism listed above, all of which are not associated with the process of creating anime, but nevertheless impose a sense of imagined cultural origination through the authoritative gaze of the documentarian. Abundant cutscenes of Harajuku fashion subcultures, themed restaurants, robots, Shinto shrines, flashing neon lights, and manga-dominated bookstores connote both traditionalist and "wacky" orientalism and serve as convenient props for introducing the "deranged" minds of anime creators who have collaborated with Netflix.

Burunova defines the term "deranged" by framing Japanese anime creators as simultaneously violent and eccentric, as well as inherently exploitable due to the nature of their productions. Among the Japanese creators who are interviewed, the viewer is introduced to several of the anime industry greats, including Kenji Kamiyama, Shinji Aramaki, Seiji Kishi, and more. An extensive list of works that have been labeled as Netflix Originals make appearances within the documentary; however, what is critical to note is the manner in which these works are framed. As noted previously, Netflix's North American anime catalog is quite extensive, but it represents the medium unevenly, heavily privileging the action and science fiction genre over all others (D'Anastasio 2020). Regarding their original net animation (ONA), which are anime that are distributed digitally, the imbalance is even more stark. Among Netflix's thirty-five ONA, twenty-five productions fell into the genres of action, science fiction, or both. This lopsided representation of the medium provides a means of delimiting the interpretation of anime and the bodies and cultures that create it through processes of exclusion. With a skewed emphasis on genres that specialize in grittier and often

violent work, the natural outcome of the documentary, which focuses on Netflix Originals, is the fetishization of the minds behind these productions. This framing allows for Japanese bodies, popular esthetics, and iconography to stand in as props for the kinds of desired imagery that the platform would like to project on to the medium and culture: one of unhinged violence and passion that cannot be found in standard animated content outside of Japan. Through strategic exclusion, the service foregoes moments of cultural proximity, which are quickly filtered out in order to orient the viewer toward content that is more defined by spectacle and irrevocable otherness.

The most potent example that belies these motivations is ironically, when Burunova talks about *Aggretsuko. Aggretsuko* is not an action and science fiction work, but a slice-of-life Netflix ONA that explores the exploitative and sexist conditions of a professional environment from the perspective of a female protagonist. Despite the culturally proximate nature of the text itself, the framing device that the documentary uses to introduce *Aggretsuko* is primarily cemented in the gimmick of the show, the fact that the protagonist bursts into heavy metal karaoke in times of heavy duress. In one particularly insightful moment in the documentary, Rarecho, the director, marvels at the fact that a global audience has found some of the culturally specific humor revolving around Japanese sexism to be appealing and relatable. He goes on to provide further commentary on his reflection of the global #MeToo feminist movement in relation to the series and his sentiments regarding perhaps the lack of development for women's rights around the world. Such introspection is sandwiched between interludes of bombastic heavy metal and the protagonist in fits of rage. In editing the documentary in this manner, Burunova foregoes moments of humanization and global connection, both on the level of the text of *Aggretsuko* and the director's words, in order to emphasize how *Aggretsuko* is "loud, aggressive, and gritty." In reality, the contents of the show and the industry interviews with the creators reflect a far different story, neither of which are particularly loud, aggressive, nor gritty, but more reflective of social conditions, the broader global context in which the anime has been received, and what that may ultimately say about the audiences that receive it so positively. This emphasis toward the supposed unpredictable and frenetic nature of the character, Aggretsuko, then becomes projected onto Japanese culture writ large, when Burunova states immediately following the interview with Rarecho, that she was "getting caught in Japan's contradictions," not without failing to provide imagery of a demure kimono-clad woman. Despite the professional and often mundane nature of the interviews themselves, the documentary sandwiches the creators quite literally between violent and flashy cutscenes of the anime production, seeking to project the fantasy narratives onto the bodies of the creators. The product itself begins to replace the actual bodies and voices of the people behind the scenes, further merging the fantasy of Japan with the much more ordinary Japan that the creators present.

Because documentaries are often poised to bestow the viewer with insider expert information within exclusive environments, it is all the more imperative that self-reflexivity is employed in order to carefully mediate the dialectical relationship between self and other. The failure of employing such self-reflexivity often leads to a careless collapse into ethnocentrism, cultural tropes, stereotypes, and reifications of

imperialistic relations. Due to the fact that casual viewers of anime often engage with what is made easily available, *Enter the Anime*'s prime position within Netflix's catalog next to the anime productions that are being distributed increases the chance for this documentary to be consumed by individuals who may not be invested in engaging more deeply with anime's cultural background. Algorithmic curation may further enhance the visibility of this production. Combined with Netflix's extensive global reach, these features support Jin's observation that the digital economy "serves as indices of American dominance in their ability to engage in both capital accumulation and spreading symbolic ideologies" (p. 7). Such symbolic ideologies can be seen in the hegemonic interpretations that *Enter the Anime* draws upon, conveniently sensationalizing when it seeks to bring in international viewers who are already fluent in the racially charged rhetoric, tropes, and stereotypes that aim to make Japanese culture legible. Given that *Enter the Anime* is the only anime documentary that is currently being distributed on Netflix in the North American catalog, we can once again see how exclusionary logic amplifies voices that seek to capitalize on these narrow orientalist perspectives and enhance the dominance of American-oriented symbolic ideologies.

It would be tempting to look at Netflix's paratexts and North American catalog and conclude that the exploitative relationship between the local anime industry and the global streaming service is one of monodirectional domination. However, while it is clear that Netflix's intermediation can certainly exacerbate the circulation of damaging symbolic ideologies that seek to enhance the economic performance for the global streaming service, in other ways, anime creators have taken advantage of the affordances of Netflix's global reach in order to address some of their own concerns regarding local industry trends. Japan's current economic model of anime production and distribution has been in a state of flux due to changing demographics and unsustainable industry practices. In further analyzing the effects of Netflix's investment into the anime industry and the promise of global distribution for ailing creators abroad, it has come to light that Netflix's presence has had some profound disruptions on how anime is traditionally produced, and in thinking through the implications of such disruptions, one can begin to understand the collaboration between global creators and Netflix in a more favorable light beyond totalizing exploitation.

Shifting Production Models

In order to understand the changes that Netflix has wrought within the industry through their investment, it is first necessary to outline the way in which anime is traditionally created. A significant characteristic that distinguishes the Japanese mode of anime production is what Steinberg (2012) calls the "anime media mix" system. Anime media mix is a transmedial approach to narrative creation, where a decentralized network of television shows, films, dramas, light novels, *manga*, toys, tourism, and other commodities are used to envelop consumers into an expanding web of content. Steinberg theorizes that while normal media mix marketing is used to ensure the eventual purchase of a prioritized good, anime media mix truly is decentered, as all acts of consumption can be perceived as support for the fragmented, yet holistic narrative

world system of the franchise. This idea can be observed in the production committee structure of anime creation.

When an anime work, usually inspired by an original *manga* or light novel, is created, a production committee for that work is formed. The constitution of production committees vary widely depending on the individual work; however, those who are willing to be a part of the production committee have something to gain from the creation of that anime (Funimation 2020; Kojima 2018; Paradigm Shift 2022). For example, a production committee can consist of the publishers of the original *manga*, as the creation of an anime may boost sales for the original work. Music companies could promote their own artists through the openings and endings of the anime (Funimation 2020; Sevakis 2012). Film distribution companies may be on the committee in order to gain revenue from the theatrical release to the public, and likewise, television stations may join in order to gain exclusive distribution rights to broadcast the work on their particular channels. These are but a few examples of some players that can be on a production committee. Each player within the committee provides some funds in order for the anime to be created. Because the production committee consists of many players, the risk, in case an anime fails to become a market hit, can be distributed among each player, so that a failed production wouldn't immediately put any one company out of business (Dooley and Hikari 2021; Kikka 2017). Likewise, if the production becomes a big success, the benefits are also distributed. However, in the majority of cases, the risk and reward are not evenly distributed among each player.

Given this structure, the anime studio itself and the artists who animate and produce the work, is only one player among many. The production committee provides funding to the anime studio, and it is up to the studio to either try to complete the production in-house or reach out to other studios to aid in certain parts of the production process. While the distribution of risk is a big benefit for the production committees and allows for more anime to be released per broadcast season, there are also inherent weaknesses to the system. The budget that is normally provided by production committees is often too meager to adequately cover the price of producing the work, leaving the studios with sometimes severe deficits (Blair 2017; Dooley and Hikari 2021; Nishi 2020; Suguwara 2020). Though the revenue that has been generated by the anime market has exponentially risen over the past decade, animation studios largely saw very little of this money (Schley 2017). Instead, these funds are used to create more shows, as evidenced by the fact that the number of hours animated, both for film and television anime, have risen exponentially since the year 2000 (ASPPH 2018). Due to the fundamental lack of funds, animators are usually paid very poorly for their labor, with beginning animator salaries starting at around 200 to 500 yen per image (Nishi 2020, 101). Long hours and paltry pay are rampant within the industry, often leading to a high exodus rate of animators within their first few years. This leads to a persistent lack of human resources that results in an inability to foster future generations of talent, which ultimately produces more stress on the part of the animator and the system.

Beyond the issues that are spurred by low funding provided by the production committee, given the number of players that are in the committee, it is necessary for anime

studios to negotiate across the board, due to the mandatory consensus from the committee that must be reached before the work can be released. This can lead to several limitations regarding modes of expression. For example, if a production has to be broadcast on television, there is a limit to how violent, grotesque, or sexual a work can be due to both Japanese censorship laws as well as concerns over marketability (Blair 2017). While having to appease and negotiate with many disparate players ensures that a production will be of a certain level of quality, the persistent negotiations leave studios with more work rather than less, and the process is often less streamlined.

Finally, in the past decade, a significant source of revenue for the anime industry was through DVD and Blu-ray sales (Kojima 2018; Sudo 2017). However, as physical media has become less profitable, the industry needed to find new and innovative sources of revenue, which means expanding their markets beyond the local consumer base that they have depended on for so long (JVA 2019). With an ailing market and a need for anime to go global through more legitimate channels, the industry was primed for the advent of global distribution companies like Netflix to contribute new ways of producing anime, which would forego the need for physical media and allow Netflix to retain exclusive distribution rights in order to gain an edge in the streaming wars.

Netflix's Model of Production

A significant characteristic of Netflix's model of anime production and distribution is that the streaming platform aids in funding a significant portion or all of the production through licensing or commissioning, in exchange for exclusive distribution (Nishida 2020). This has a profound impact on multiple aspects of standard anime production practices. For one, Netflix's Chief Anime Producer, Taiki Sakurai, has expressed that because Netflix anime can be created with a small team consisting of a director, screenwriter, and Netflix representative at the head, they can more effectively discuss their ideas and streamline the decision-making process, unlike the traditional production committee methods, where the script may be checked by over a dozen individuals and creators must be concerned over whether ancillary merchandise will sell (Yamazaki 2020; Sudo 2020). Because Netflix has thus far been most committed to distribution, the focus can be redirected to the production itself. Further, while exact figures are never provided, interviews with anime creators who have collaborated with Netflix have noted that the budget that is provided is much more ample than what can be expected from a standard production committee budget (Ito 2020; Nishio 2018; Watanabe 2019; Yamazaki 2020; Sudo 2020). Moreover, while production schedules vary depending on the project, due to Netflix's departure from the cultural standards of distribution, animators are no longer beholden to the broadcast season, where anime must begin airing at the beginning of Spring, Summer, Autumn, or Winter, and end with that respective season. This gives animators more options regarding their scheduling, which was the case for the Netflix ONA, B: The Beginning, in which Director Ishikawa noted how flexible and extravagant the three-year development period was, compared to standard production schedules (Ishijima 2018). While production schedules for broadcast television anime can go into the broadcasting period, Netflix's

expectation that the entire series be uploaded at once requires animators to shift their schedules for a completed project by the time of the streaming service's drop date.

The departure from traditional broadcast seasons have rippling effects on the formal anime text itself. Originally, the length of the narrative for broadcast anime must generally fit within the span of around 12 to 13 episodes. Regardless of the pacing of the original source material, anime narratives must fit within these temporal limitations. However, collaborating with Netflix removes these stylistic restrictions for studios, as broadcasting schedules no longer dictate the length of a work. For example, the Netflix productions of *Dragon's Dogma* and *Eden*, which consists of seven and four episodes respectively, present detractions from expected norms exemplifying further flexibility to the anime form. In addition, the mode of delivery has changed as well. While normally, anime is broadcast on a one episode per week basis, in order to extend the duration of influence and hype that a traditional anime series can generate throughout its broadcasting, Netflix opts for uploading full seasons at a time, aligning closely to their preferred binge-model of consumption. Because of this, instead of building an extended temporal hype, each episodic narrative requires a hook into the next episode to keep the viewer engaged throughout the season, a strategy that is not so commonly used depending on the anime's genre.

Beyond the episodic structure, Netflix's mode of operation also allows for more narratives that engage in explicit expressions of violence and sex to be shown flexibly around the world. Streaming acts as a workaround for the restrictions normally enforced on broadcast television anime. While anime is no stranger to explicit expressions of violence and sex, explicit works are often relegated to late-night time slots in order to reduce the chances of children being involuntarily exposed to such content. Because Netflix operates under the assumption that shows are chosen directly by their subscribers, instead of having viewers be exposed involuntarily to content, this has allowed for the expression of more intense or "realistic" scenarios (Ikuta 2018; Kojima 2018; Sugimoto 2018). Works like Devilman Crybaby are often cited as evidence of this shift toward more explicit work, as the show's graphically violent and sexual nature have caught the attention of industry professionals who may be looking to expand their repertoire of animated works (Mizukawa 2017; Yoshikawa 2020). Perhaps more importantly, it allows viewers to access such works more conveniently beyond the limitations of late-night scheduling. In this way, one can shift the framing of Netflix's lopsided representation of the anime medium within their catalog toward a more favorable light. While Netflix clearly prefers these darker and edgier works, creators have opted to use Netflix as an experimental space for work that may not be as easily accepted in other broadcasting alternatives, revealing how creators can use Netflix's intermediating presence to their own advantage.

In return for the generous funding, flexible schedules, and more liberatory modes of expression, Netflix normally asks for exclusive distribution rights for a set period of time. For film anime, there are two ways in which it is brought to Netflix. First, for licensed work, following six months after the public theatrical release in Japan, Netflix gains exclusive distribution rights allowing for windowing (Kojima 2018). In other agreements, Netflix may gain exclusive distribution rights while the film is in public

theaters for simultaneous viewing as was the case for the film *Blame* (Noh 2020a). For television anime, Netflix may purchase the exclusive distribution rights for a set number of years following the airing of the work for broadcast television in Japan, while their ONA are normally aired exclusively on the platform before possibly being aired on Japanese broadcast at a later date. Exclusive distribution proves to be challenging for the anime media mix model, as there are less avenues for one to experience the work, therefore, perhaps less incentives for ancillary businesses to produce merchandise.

It must be noted that despite the increase in funding, industry insiders, including Terumi Nishi, Minami Masahiko, Seiji Mizushima, Mitsuhisa Ishikawa, and the Chief of Anime Production of Netflix Japan, Taiki Sakurai, have commented that the affordances provided by Netflix will not likely help the dire labor situation that the anime industry employees currently find themselves in (Ikuta 2018; Ito 2020; Lehecka 2020). This is due, in part, to the fact that in return for the high budget, there is a requirement for a higher quality of work than would normally be produced for average television anime, which requires more labor from the animators. The "quality" that is referred to here comes in the form of technical advancement of the craft. In a personal interview with Director Masahito Kobayashi of Studio Dwarf, the creators of *Rilakkuma and Kaoru*, a stop-motion animated series, he noted that it was required that the studio follow the policy set by Netflix for shooting in 4K HDR, which was the "highest possible image quality at the moment" (Noh 2020b). Such technical developments within the anime industry, as influenced by the funding of global distribution platforms, is also seen in works like Director Akira Saitou's *Sol Levante*, which was created in collaboration with Production I.G. *Sol Levante* made history being titled as the very first hand-drawn 4K HDR anime, allowing for artists to illustrate with even more detail allowing the company to "push the boundaries and limitations of Japanese anime" (Robinson 2020). Further, the information regarding the production process of this work was made publicly available for other studios who may be interested in educating themselves regarding making similar kinds of work. In a personal interview with Polygon Pictures producer Jack Liang, he commented that the advent of platforms like Netflix really sped up the development and acceptance of these technical standards within Japan, acting as a "wake up call" for the anime industry of the growing standards in quality for animation around the world (Noh 2020c). Such comments gesture toward the way that technological development, in conjunction with the increased centralization of global platforms, like Netflix, are shaking up local industry norms, with these production studios being perpetually subject to- and negotiating with asymmetrical power relations. Netflix's presence in the anime industry has led to the increased pace of technical development, but this has also provided educational opportunities that creators can take to other projects beyond their collaborations with Netflix. While these developments do not come without the additional effort on behalf of those doing this creative labor, we may also see Japan continue to be at the forefront of cutting-edge animation techniques with the help of global services. Such relationships defy easy designations between being exploited or empowered, but is rather, a negotiated approach that seeks to cement the future success of both sides.

Moreover, the anime industry is using Netflix to address one of the most significant challenges to their continued economic development, which is the necessity to serve an increasingly globalized audience in earnest. Despite being touted as a media globalization success story, until recently, the anime industry considered their domestic market to be their priority, and the desires and consumption practices of the global audience to be largely peripheral. As Ryotaro Mihara points out, the total revenue earned overseas has been growing slightly, but has, holistically, remained rather stagnant. As Mihara notes, while the overseas revenue for Japanese anime never reached 40 percent of the total market, the Japanese video game industry was seeing "46-90% of its revenue from oversea markets over the same period" (Mihara 2020, 103–104). However, as of 2019, overseas revenue for anime extended to 1.0092 trillion yen, making up 46 percent of the total revenue earned for the anime industry (Baseel 2019). Because of the growing price of creating quality anime that is guaranteed to perform, the shrinking national consumer base, and the rapidly declining sales of physical media, the industry was primed for the advent of Netflix and the platform's promise of monetary plenty and global distribution. Through global distribution, the industry can attract a far wider consumer base and make up for stagnant national sales. Suddenly, the industry could no longer ignore the necessity of playing to the global public and Netflix proved to be a convenient vehicle to woo these fans through legitimized channels.

This turn to the global signals several changes within the industry. In particular, to collaborate with Netflix often means having to collaborate within industry professionals from different national industries. While as noted previously, works like the *Enter the Anime* documentary seek to cement Japan's originary position within the anime industry, in practice, Netflix does not intend to only work with Japanese creators to make anime or "anime-inspired" content. In an interview with Taiki Sakurai, regarding the challenges of producing *Eden*, he notes the rarity of a singular anime work that consists of a globally oriented team which includes American, Taiwanese, Australian, and Japanese talent. Because the individuals who worked on this team came from different cultural contexts, the particularity of the imaginations of each creator proved to be challenging at points, as are differences in work styles and workflows (Watanabe 2019). However, Sakurai goes on to hypothesize that despite perceptions of cultural origination as it relates to Japan, anime itself doesn't particularly have a national orientation as a genre or medium, as the work is not inherently Japanese or American. Instead, he notes that there is a kind of anime style, and that because of this style, viewers can project themselves onto the characters regardless of cultural or national background. Such affordances of the medium are critical for the anime industry's future survival and is seen as its great potential. What is important to note here is that Sakurai's observations go directly against some of the presumptions that are presented in Netflix's *Enter the Anime* documentary, proving that an inherent connection between anime work and Japan need not necessarily exist, gesturing toward the contradictory approaches utilized by Netflix to make anime appealing to subscribers. Indeed, Netflix's slew of anime-inspired work, many of which come from marginalized creators of color around the world, reveals a willingness to bend presumptions around "authenticity" and anime in order to give the wider global

creator network an opportunity for global distribution. Once again, these trends challenge the overwhelming economic and ideological dominance that platform imperialism purports, and instead, reveals a more complex truth in which interdependency continues to be negotiated across national and cultural boundaries for global visibility and economic development.

Reflecting upon the disruptions that have followed Netflix's entrance into the Japanese anime industry and the growth of Internet streaming television on a global scale, it becomes clear that the narrative that is presented between platform and industry is not one of easy subjugation or empowerment. Netflix's extensive, yet uneven library reflects a limited understanding of the complexity of the anime medium, yet provides international viewers with a legitimate platform for accessing content with a catalog that is far richer than any broadcast options that have been made available on American broadcast television thus far. The platform opens the door for certain forms of expressive liberties and aids in helping to address certain drawbacks in Japan's industrial practices, yet simultaneously privileges certain genres of content over others, and openly distributes a paratext that indulges in orientalist discourses in the presentation of anime culture and Japan more broadly. We see "internationalism," yet perhaps only in so far as it aids the further spread of global capital and the capturing of international producers and audiences alike. Yet through this capturing, creators are using these affordances to advance their own objectives and developments within local industries.

The diversity and cosmopolitanism that Netflix purports to serve fits rather neatly into Marwan Kraidy's concept of "corporate transculturalism," which he defines as "a discourse in which fluid identities and porous cultural borders are depicted as growth engines in the service of cosmopolitan capitalism. . .a profit-driven strategy that actively and systematically seeks to capitalize on cultural fusion and fluid identities" (Kraidy 2006, 90). This particular strain of corporate transculturalism can be seen in the way anime creators now seem to cater more to "global" audiences. For example, despite Director Ishikawa's insistence that Japanese creators not be bogged down by the idea of their work being distributed to 190 countries, it's difficult to imagine that such considerations are not part and parcel of the creation process (Hirano 2018). Netflix's *Eden* was scrubbed of any Christian elements in order to ensure that the show would "not be unappealing to a global audience" (Watanabe 2019). Similarly, Hiroyasu Aoki (director of *Hero Mask*) said that while Netflix was lenient in letting them create what they wanted, the Japanese studios themselves have become conscious of the global audience, and in turn, wanted to make something that may be palatable for their conception of that audience (Cho-Animedia 2019). In other words, these studios want to produce work that harmonizes with Netflix's particular brand of internationalism. While this may delimit work that may be considered too "culturally specific," we can also see the ways in which production teams are now incentivized to collaborate across national and cultural borders, spurred by the promise of generous funding from global streaming services. This arrangement comes with its own affordances regarding how knowledge is spread beyond "central" industries into what has been traditionally conceived of as the "periphery."

Given the labor and funding issues that have plagued the Japanese anime industry for decades, it is apparent that there was a need for some form of intervention. The chances of local streaming services from Japan becoming a mainstream phenomenon to the same extent of platforms like Netflix is highly unlikely given the industry's limited success in setting up anime streaming platforms within the United States. As it becomes increasingly clear, who is able to distribute to the broadest "where" becomes key in the process of global capital accumulation, and in turn, speaks to who is able to fund and produce what within the local stage. In a 2020 report by GEM Standard, Netflix's Japanese market share grew from 8.4 percent in 2018 to 13.8 percent in 2019, making it currently the biggest market player for video on demand services. Its leaps in success continue to gesture toward the significance of capitalist hegemony within local markets, understandably rekindling concerns once again over cultural imperialism, and more specifically, platform imperialism. However, when teasing apart the often ambivalent and contradictory layers of Netflix's approach to engaging with the anime media industry and their global fandom, what becomes clear is that the realities on the ground reveal a much more complex truth.

As critical as we must be of the political and economic dimensions of Netflix's gatekeeping potential, it is also undeniable that the service's presence within the anime industry has opened up formal and legitimate spaces where productions can find a broad audience around the world. Further, as insiders have implied, the presence of Netflix has hastened the development of the medium into further uncharted territory, whether that is through making it possible to take on the risk of creating with more multinational production teams, introducing more technologically advanced methods of creating animation, or offering alternative modes of funding. In turn, creators take up these opportunities to further advance their own industrial objectives. While these developments do not inoculate the effects of symbolic hegemony that Netflix may reinforce, this study reveals that the juxtaposition between different lenses of understanding Netflix's effect on and collaboration with the anime industry yields an image less characterized by the monodirectional dominance that is implied in the concept of platform imperialism and more of a multilateral, albeit asymmetrical exchange of influence.

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Note

1. The results of this study are predicated on the data that was available during this time period. Drawing conclusions from a constantly evolving content catalog continues to challenge scholars within the field of SVOD research.

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