

**Pop Culture in Asia:  
Adaptation, Convergence, and Challenges  
Academic Conference**

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**In conjunction with the  
Singapore Toys, Games and Comics Convention**

**Paper Abstracts**

**Panel 1: Makers and Players: Experiencing Comics, Games and Faith in  
Malaysia and the Philippines**

**Paper 1: Discourse of Accommodation: Philippine Video Game  
Community Discourse and its Accommodation of Anime, Manga and  
Cosplay**

Presenter: Manuel Enverga III

Consumption of global popular culture media, such as comic books, video games and anime has led to the formation of subculture groups built on common consumption patterns, with different consumption-based subculture groups producing and articulating their own discourses. These discourses reflect the symbols, meanings and ideas inherent in the group. By emphasizing ideas that are significant to the group and marginalizing what are not, these discourses represent the imaginary of the consumption-based group. This paper examines the Philippine video gaming community's imaginary, and argues that its dominant discourse is one that not only emphasizes video games, but accommodates other popular culture forms such as anime, manga, comic books and even cosplay, which are traditionally considered separate from video games.

The paper selected three prominent Philippine video game publications to represent the discourse. These publications are *Game!*, which is published monthly and is the most widely distributed video gaming print magazine in the country, and has a readership of over 150,000. Also examined was *Playground*, which, recently shifted from being a print publication to an online one, with its website being updated everyday. The third publication is *GameOPS*, the oldest online video game publication in the Philippines, which is updated at least once every two days.

An examination of the images in the three publications is indicative of the Philippine video game imaginary's accommodation of other media forms. For example, the cover art of *Game!* and *Playground*, in its print form, makes use of the art style used in anime and manga. A similar pattern is seen in the images that are shown in the different publications. The text content of the

three publications, which include sections devoted specifically to anime, manga, and even cosplay further suggests that traditionally separate media genres are accommodated in the Philippine gaming imaginary.

The pattern in Philippine video game publications may be contrasted with similar publications, such as *Electronic Gaming Monthly (EGM)*, an American magazine that is being re-published as a magazine again after two years as an exclusively online publication. EGM, unlike the Philippine publications, does not have a section devoted solely to anime or manga. Nor does it make use of images based on anime, unless it is focusing on a video game based on an anime. This phenomenon suggests that localized cultural appropriations of global media are not necessarily homogeneous. Although video games are consumed throughout the world, the discourses and practices produced from them are heterogeneous.

## **Paper 2: Approaching Comics and Religion in Peace**

Presenter: Zurairi Abd Rahman

Religion has become part and parcel of comics, with numerous comic characters declaring their faiths in-story or explained by their creators – be it Judaism, the many denominations of Christianity, or even non-believing ones.

Islam however continues to be rarely-represented; those who are not comic fans will have trouble trying to identify a Muslim character. There are also groups of Muslims who distance themselves from the art form and look down on it as a foreign invasive culture. Add to that the controversial Muhammad cartoon case in Holland and the death threats that emanate from it – one has an explosive conflict of religion versus art.

This paper discusses these topics by looking at the relationship between Islam and the comic industry throughout the years, and comic's many misconceptions among Muslim community. These include an exclusive look at a comic-related Zionist conspiracy theory cooked up by paranoid Muslim-dominant Malaysian media. Browsing through comics published between the 1980s up until now, the paper charts the evolution of Islamic representation in comics. It starts from the stereotypical images of desert guerrilla soldiers and ends with the much-hyped entrance of the significantly Islamic comic *The 99*, spearheaded by Dr Naif al-Mutawa and his Teshkeel Media Group.

From these analyses hatched an interesting result: we see a dilemma of culture war in Islam, a constant fight between comics' perceived foreign image, and the need to spread Islamic values and teachings. It also suggests a number of reasons why there is so little representation and discussion on Islam in comics.

Overall, this paper serves as a unique look into the relationship between Islam and the comic industry, perceived through the eyes of a comic enthusiast from a Muslim background. It will be a valuable addition to the on-going observation of religion in art.

## **Special Presentation: Niu Bizi; a 1930 China Pop Culture Icon**

Presenter: Carolyn Wong

Carolyn Wong is the granddaughter of Huang Yao, one of the core members of the 1930s Shanghai cartoon movement (along with Feng Zikai, Zhang Leping, Ding Cong, Huang Miaozi etc.) and the creator of Niubizi. Until 10 years ago, she grew up knowing her grandfather as a Chinese artist and did not know of her grandfather's life in China as a cartoonist. This is mainly because he had lost most of his works during the war. This set the family off on an amazing journey of rediscovering his works and finding out Huang Yao's life as a Cartoonist, Scholar and Artist.

In his cartoon period, Huang Yao created Niubizi to counter the West's misconception that China was the sick man of Asia. Niubizi was also the voice of the common man and the cartoon strip was an instant success in 1934. Huang Yao had to leave Shanghai in 1937 because of the invasion of Shanghai as the Japanese were after him. By then, he had completed over 8 cartoon books and was published in hundreds of newspapers and magazines. During the war he produced over 15 books and 4 woodblock prints. Ironically, his cartoons were forged by the Japanese in Beiping. During the war period, Huang Yao documented the spirit of the Chinese people during the war and worked on anti war materials and exhibitions.

After leaving China, he traveled to Vietnam, Hong Kong, Thailand, Singapore and then to Malaysia. He died in 1987. His works are in the collection of the National Palace Museum in Taipei, the British Museum, the Singapore Art Museum and several museums in China.

Carolyn Wong will take you through her family's discovery of her grandfather.

## **Panel 2: Toys and Games in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan**

### **Paper 1: The Images of Hong Kong Vanishing and Vanished Cityscapes in Japanese Video Games.**

Presenter: Benjamin Ng Wai Ming

Commonly regarded as the “evil den of the East” by the Japanese, Hong Kong has inspired Orientalist imagination and exoticism in Japanese popular culture, mass media and writings. many Japanese are obsessed with vanished or vanishing cityscape of Hong Kong. Kowloon Walled City (now the Kowloon Walled City Park), Kai Tak Airport, Chungking Mansions, Tung Choi Street (Ladies' Street), Temple Street (Men's Street), Bird Market, Wanchai Market, shophouses in Shanghai Street, Aberdeen Typhoon Shelter, and cooked food stalls in the Central are the places of their special interest.

Based on the nostalgic feelings of old Hong Kong, the Japanese reconstruct old Hong Kong cityscape in popular imagination and virtual reality. The images of the cityscape of Hong Kong in Japanese video games are quite

stereotyped. First, they tend to be associated with old buildings, traditional customs, and grass-root culture. Second, they put emphasis on the exotic and grass-root aspects of Hong Kong, such as old buildings, gangsters, neon signs, wet markets and temples. Third, the characters are Orientalist, as can be seen from their professions (gangsters, fortune tellers, martial arts teachers, etc) and appearance (kung fu clothing, qipao, etc).

## **Paper 2: New playthings for new children? Toy production in republican China**

Presenter: Valentina Boretti

Beginning in the early 1900s, a discourse emerged in China whereby toys became tools for nation- and citizen-building: carefully chosen playthings could allegedly contribute to create new children/prospective citizens, who would then rescue the nation. This entailed a rejection of many “traditional” toys, regarded as coarse and meaningless, and a call for the production of “modern” objects (blocks, animals, balls) – many of which, incidentally, were “traditional” since they had been around for centuries. The “new”, “scientifically”-produced toy was to act as a tangible incarnation of China’s progress: mobile and mechanised playthings were meant to construct forward-striding citizens.

In order to examine the material outcomes of discourse, this paper will look at the Chinese toy market between the 1910s and the 1940s, examining the diverse kinds of goods available to customers. We will see how craftsmen updated their creations; imported playthings boomed; the state and educators also intervened in production; and native industrial production was triggered by entrepreneurs’ aspiration to appropriate a lucrative market.

Capitalising on the newly-found relevance of toys, entrepreneurs stepped in to provide the “modern” objects that theorists had branded as a necessity for children. Exploiting pleas for national consumption and improvement of production, they recast the plaything as a scientifically conceived *local* object, thus attempting (not very successfully) to supersede old-style toy-makers and replace foreign goods.

Toys became sites for negotiations and appropriations: while entrepreneurs poached discourse and used it to their own ends, craftsmen employed foreign models to update their creations; and “experts” objected about the quality of most products. Toy manufacture could mean almost anything - from survival to national pride and industrial modernity, but its main and *understated* goal was to make profits. Its practical outcome, however, consisted of a much wider choice for customers.

But how new was the “new” toy? The “new” toy was a cohabitation of old and new, or rather a revamped edition of the “traditional” plaything, with new labels attached. In fact, toy typologies did not change much: some new objects did appear (trains, submarines, planes), but most items were age-old playthings recycled and re-branded as “modern” and “educational”.

### **Paper 3: Virtual Agencies: Gender, Religion, and Character Toys in Taiwan**

Presenter: Teri Silvio

Around 2003, miniature, cute plaster figurines of local Taoist deities began to appear in Taiwan's tourist night markets, where they were sold primarily to foreign tourists. In December 2007, the Family Mart convenience store chain released their own "Hao Shen Gongzai," given as prizes in exchange for proof of purchase stickers. This series started a craze for deity figurines (shenming gongzai) among Taiwanese people, especially office workers in their 20s and 30s. Temples throughout Taiwan began to produce their own cute figurines in an effort to attract the younger generation to traditional worship centers.

This paper is based on three years of ethnographic fieldwork with commissioners, designers, and collectors of deity toys. Here I focus on questions of the relationships between toys and divinity, cuteness and agency. I have found that Taiwanese tend to relate to these toys along a continuum between treating the toys as essentially small icons and treating them as pure souvenirs with no religious power. The two poles of this continuum tend to be gendered, with women far more likely to see the toys as materializations of the deity's personality and power, and men more likely to see them as collectable objects with no religious significance. This pattern reflects a long-standing gender division in both religious practice and belief in Taiwan. It also extends to gendered patterns in how young Taiwanese interact with toys of manga, anime, and game characters.

I argue that some of the general differences in how men and women tend to relate to character toys can be related to different conceptions of both social and divine agency. While men tend to hold more socially sanctioned power, they also tend to ascribe agency to external forces and systems, while women, more marginalized from the systems that legitimize power, tend to take a more constructionist view of agency.

### **Panel 3**

#### **Changing Society, Shifting Values: An Insight into New Definitions of Gender, Intimacy and Symbolic Meanings in the World of Manga and Anime**

**Paper 1:** From Enjo-kô sai to LovePlus: Anime and Virtual Lovers Redefining Models of Intimacy in Contemporary Japan.

Presenter: Mary Reisel

The rise of the practice of *enjo-kô sai* – usually translated as compensated dating in English – caused a major stir in Japan when it first appeared in the media. The phenomenon of schoolgirls selling dates and sex to older men became a major issue of public and academic attention, and the discussion around it was intense. However, none of the debates analyzed the double

messages behind the media, which both condemned and encouraged it at the same time. Even though the official position criticized *enjo-kô sai* and labeled it a form of prostitution, new stories in popular anime and manga often read by teenagers presented *enjo-kô sai* as an ordinary behavior, thus encouraging and spreading the practice among girls who believed it was an accepted behavior among Tokyo girls.

While real dates are offered to older men, Nintendo's recent popular game, *Love Plus*, is offering virtual dates to young men, who are actually expected to have intimate relations with their virtual girlfriend. As new players join the game, the industry around it is constantly growing: vacations for the real/virtual lovers, accessories to buy, and recently even marriages that are officially accepted in some parts of Japan. In a country with a declining birth rate and reluctant to marry, these innovative intimate partnerships and relations create a new reality which required new social tools to deal with.

Based on a long Anthropological fieldwork conducted in Japan in the last decade, this presentation will offer a range of different attitudes towards the changing concepts of intimacy in Japan, from ideas suggesting intimacy is decreasing and turning into a capitalistic product on sale, up to the notion that intimacy is evolving and adapting itself to the new world of virtual life.

## **Paper 2 :** Changes of Gender Roles and Social Values as Seen Through Manga and Anime

Presenter: Ken-ichiro Yoshihama

Two interesting reversals of gender roles can be seen recently in the reading/watching habits of manga/anime among young Japanese. The first one is in the numbers. A rapid growth of girls and young women is constantly penetrating the world of manga and Otaku culture, which for long was considered to be mainly masculine for a long time. The second reversal is in the content of manga and anime they like. Traditional love stories where boys and girls fall in love with each other are decreasing fast. While young girls read more and more manga about men and male love, young men and teenage boys watch more and more styles of anime which were originally designed and oriented to young girls.

Girls' fascination with male manga can be seen to result and develop from the popular *Yaoi* realm, which is well known and established by now and serves as a fertile ground for new explorations. Boys' growing interest in anime that has no male figure in its center reflects a major change: they no longer need, or want, a male role model to identify with. This phenomenon, accompanied by the decline of the major narratives, is a meaningful transformation of tastes that reflects changing gender perception and new social values.

The presentation is based on a long fieldwork and research centered on issues of contemporary gender identity and sexuality as they are seen in the changing concepts of manga and anime. It will try to answer key questions such as: What does it mean to watch anime without a male hero? What does it mean to be *Fujoshi* and called *Fujoshi*? Why does male love and manga satisfy *Fujoshi*?

### **Paper 3: Cultural Semiotic Analysis of Abstract Symbols in Manga**

Presenter: Yuko Nakamura

Although Japanese manga wins popularity and fans all over the world, abstract symbols, such as “fire” which represents severe anger in Japan, is often interpreted differently in other cultures. Occasionally, these local interpretations can have a major impact on the understanding of the characters, and even the reading of the story and its meaning.

This presentation will attempt to explain a few major abstract symbols that are often used and repeated in manga, such as flowers, wind, skies and darkness. Those are categorized and divided into units according to their shapes and meaning. Based on an extensive survey conducted among foreign students in Japan, I will show the extent of confusion and misunderstanding regarding the meaning of those abstract symbols for foreign readers in different cultures and in different languages. Finally, the conclusion will show for comparison the way these abstract symbols are actually used and understood in everyday life in Japan, not only in manga but also in products developed through the world of manga, such as T-shirts, soft drinks and much more.

### **Panel 4**

#### **Theorizing Games and Comics Through Japan**

##### **Paper 1: Database versus Narrative: Two theories on Contemporary Production/Consumption of Toys, Games and Comics from Japan**

Presenter: Kam Thiam Huat

This paper critically analyzes the theories of popular cultural consumption by two Japanese cultural critics, Azuma Hiroki and Ôtsuka Eiji. Azuma Hiroki, whose popular work has been recently translated into English as *Otaku: Database Animals*, is an influential figure in the current field of social and cultural analysis. Through translations and references, his argument that postmodern consumption is driven by database consumption – consumption based on elements that stimulate excitement – has been slowly gaining ground in recent studies on Japan, especially the media-mix strategies of cultural production and active amateur participation in Japan. Much less publicized is Ôtsuka Eiji’s concept of narrative consumption, which posits that consumption is used to construct shared narratives, and has been known mainly through Azuma’s citations. Although Azuma argues that database consumption is the historical replacement of narrative consumption, this paper will argue, with parallel drawn from seminal studies on television and movie fandom, that Ôtsuka’s concept of narrative consumption is still valid in the comprehension of contemporary consumption and production. In the process, the paper will also demonstrate that the concepts of database consumption and narrative consumption have greater relevance beyond the theorizing of Japan in the understanding of the everyday production and consumption of toys, games, and comics in advanced capitalist societies.

## **Paper 2: In Search for Southeast Asia: A Case Study of Card and Board Games in Japan**

Presenter: Karl Ian Uy Cheng Chua

Studies concerning games focus on digital or online games and often ignore the effects of analog games towards their consumers. Often, studies regarding analog games, such as board and card games, simply trace the history of these games. However, what is ignored by most scholars is the fact that children usually consume analog games in their formative years before they are able to consume digital ones. In Japan, despite her shrinking population, the toy and gaming industry is still an impressive market worth almost 500 billion yen with board and card games occupying a market share of 16% or 831 million yen. Furthermore, an annual international toy show is held in Tokyo to create a venue to launch and promote new innovations in the industry which attracts close to 150,000 visitors.

Taking from the same page of studies on digital gaming, this study will make the assumption that analog games also have an effect upon its consumers. This study will adapt a theory used in Children's Literature studies which states that adult writers (game creators) are attempting to pass on their values (stereotypes) to the children reading their work (playing the game), thus replicating the values of present society to the future one. The strength of the games' influence can be argued by the fact that these are packaged as educational games.

Japan has a long history of representing stereotypes of Southeast Asia. Once identified as part of the geographically vague region of Nanyō (South Seas) during the Shōwa period, Japan used the controversial Sambo-stereotype (black natives) in portraying the inhabitants. However, at the same time, she had maintained her diplomatic ties with the country of Thailand. 80 years later, this study see whether the same phenomena still exists by presenting how the games described, illustrated and represented the various Southeast Asian countries via the elements in the games. The author chose a sample of 5 card games (karuta) and 3 board games to conduct this study. The samples were chosen based on their "educational concept" of teaching their players about the world. Sekai no Kokki Karuta 1 and 2, and Sekai no Kuni Karuta both attempt to teach players about the flags of the countries of the world. Sekai Isshū Karuta, on the other hand, presents illustrations of children from various countries. Karuta Sekai Isan shows the various World Heritage sites, while Sekai no Ijin Karuta talks about the World's Greatest People. Sekai Shūyū Gemu, Sekai Isshū Gemu and Ainori Bōdogemu simulate players going to various countries around the world.

## **Paper 3: More than just Boys: A History of the Changing Images of Gender in Weekly Shonen Jump**

Presenter: Kristine Michelle L. Santos

Every week, over 2 million copies of Shōnen Jump roll out of the publishing houses of Shueisha. Boys and even men of older age casually pick their copies off the shelf and catch up on the recent adventure of their heroes. And just as casually, girls pick up their own copies of this same magazine -- a magazine that has the intent of entertaining only the dreams of young boys, Weekly Shōnen Jump.

Shōnen Jump hosts a lot of popular comics in Japan. It serves primarily as an anthology of various comics, entertaining boys with weekly chapters of their favorite comic heroes. Some of the titles that came out in Shōnen Jump were Barefoot Gen, Saint Seiya, Dragon Ball Z, Slam Dunk, One Piece, Naruto, Prince of Tennis and Bleach. Some of these titles are now internationally read and watched by children and just like the Japanese, its primary audience are boys.

The question now is why and how were these girls drawn towards this magazine for boys? There are magazines targeted specifically for women yet these girls pick up this magazine and even chose it as their favorite magazine in a 2006 Oricon survey. More so, how do they draw "homosexual" abstractions of these stories published in Jump enough to create a new subculture wherein they are all called fujoshi - rotten girls?

This paper examines the history of the changing gender of Jump, from its straightforward boyish beginnings to the ambiguous nature of its sexuality in its current issue. This explores the changes the magazine had taken in order to respond to the changing views of society with regards to gender, allowing the magazine to be accessible not only to boys but also to the fantasies of women as well. With the magazine still strong throughout the years and with the proliferation of the bastardized fantasy comics of these fujoshi called dōjinshi, Jump's once rigid concept of being a boy is slowly starting to change and has grown to be as fluid as the postmodern world's understanding of gender.

## **Panel 5: Transformations and Other Readings of Japanese Anime and Manga**

### **Paper 1: That's Way Gay: Negotiating Textual Gaps & Homoerotic Interpretation in Akira Amano's *Katekyo Hitman Reborn!***

Presenter: Pamela Punzalan

Most of the studies regarding *parody* dōjinshi – that is, comics created by non-professional artists, and based off of original manga or anime titles – tackle the revisionist tendencies of the texts towards traditional gender structures and notions of masculinity. However, it is important to remember that prior to any socio-political agenda that the authors may have, dōjinshi are, first and foremost works *for* fans and *by* fans, meant to entertain and pay homage to the original series before forwarding any message regarding the socio-cultural milieu that they arise from. Dōjinshi, then, can be studied in light of reader-oriented criticism, treated as the product of a reader's active and participatory engagement with the original text.

Of course, reader-oriented criticism assumes that the text, through both the presence and absence of certain parts of narrative information, controls the range of possible meanings that a reader can eschew from its pages. In light of studying the homoerotic slants of the majority of *parody* *dōjinshi* today and how more homoerotic *parody* *dōjinshi* are produced for some titles than for others, we can then work with the assumption that some texts may lend themselves more easily towards a homoerotic interpretation than others. This paper uses *Katekyo Hitman Reborn!* – a popular *shōnen* manga series by Akira Amano – as an example.

## **Paper 2: Queering the Canon: Yaoi Doujinshi and Homonormative Fan Narratives**

Presenter: Lakshmi Menon

A fan is never merely a consumer of a text. As Henry Jenkins says, we live in an era of “convergence culture”, and fans are as much producers of a text as they are consumers. Fan produced narratives, in particular works of fan fiction, are defined by their relationship with the texts they are based on, being both related to the subject’s fictional canonical universe and simultaneously existing outside the canon of that universe. *Doujinshi* are a Japanese phenomenon similar to fan fiction in the West: fan produced amateur comic books based on popular manga, anime or game series and distributed outside the publication industry for the consumption of other fans of the same series.

This paper will examine a sub-genre of *doujinshi* that is referred to as *yaoi*, which can most easily be defined by its similarity to Western slash fanfiction. They are stories that contemplate on the possibility of homosexual love between characters in the canon they are based on. *Yaoi doujinshi* are explicit in their depiction of male homoeroticism between characters of anime and manga series without a canonical basis for their relationship. The canon of anime/manga series such as *The Prince of Tennis* or the *Final Fantasy* games, for instance, is therefore ‘queered’ by the artists, its concreteness questioned as a change of perspective, or perhaps perception, changes the text from its alleged heteronormative stand to being one that is open to multiple interpretations. Also noteworthy is that most of the artists creating and distributing *yaoi doujinshi*, male homoerotic texts with explicit graphical description of sexuality, are women, as are the consumers of these *doujinshi*. This paper will therefore also examine the politics of how female fans are creating and consuming texts that are often *homonormative* to the point of having little room for women characters in the narrative. Finally, the paper seeks to show how *yaoi doujinshi* as fan narratives base themselves on canon and at the same time subvert it through their queer reinterpretation.

## **Paper 3: From Manga To Hi-Tech Toy: The Doraemon Character and Japanese Cultural Production**

Presenter: Spitsyna Ksenia (and Maria Nesterova)

Doraemon is a catlike robot character that appeared in manga in 1969. Doraemon won the sympathy of many fans of different ages through its *kawaii* appearance and lovely personality. Doraemon became a well-known

character in Japan through the manga, a weekly TV anime series, and annual animated movies. Doraemon is a “brand name” and a “franchise character” that has since been realized in many formats including among others video games, toys, and stationary products.

The Bandai Co used the Doraemon character for a new hi-tech toy called My Doraemon. The company has advertised it as the “21 Century Communication Robot”. The toy has voice recognition features. The character demonstrates the multiple layers of cultural production in Japan.

## **Panel 6: Samuari, X-Men, Batman, and Animation**

### **Paper 1: Anime and Video Games as Reflection of the Samurai Soul**

Presenter: James L. Aevermann

The progress of accepting previous subculture media such as video games, comics, and anime into mainstream media has taken leaps and bounds over the past two decades. One of the aspects of such integration can be traced to the idea that forms of entertainment, whether it be books, comics, toys, video games, or movies, is a reflection of the culture that produces it. Paying particular attention to the historicity of the Japanese samurai, one can see the moral values found in historical, as well as fictional accounts of these warriors translated into more modern media through anime, video games, and comics. The purpose of this paper is to shed light on this phenomenon of crossing platforms to reach a wider audience by tracing the importance and impact the samurai code of ethics has had on not only the Japanese culture, but the culture of the rest of the world as well. By looking at how the sense of duty, honor, and loyalty as reflected in samurai bushido has crossed over from books such as Kyokutei Bakin’s *Nansou Satomi Hakkenden* and Miyamoto Mushashi’s *Book of Five Rings* into comics and anime such as *Ruroni Kenshin* and *Bleach*, and further into the realm of video games like the *Final Fantasy* series, we can see how the concerns of the Japanese to find an identity in today’s fast-paced, modernized world are also our own concerns. This paper examines the relevance of these works and how different media can bring the concerns to a wider possible audience.

### **Paper 2: “Alas, poor Magneto! I knew him, well.”: Intertextuality, Occidentalism, and the Japanese opening montages for *X-Men: The Animated Series*.**

Presenter: Wilson Koh

The popular American superhero cartoon *X-Men: The Animated Series* (Marvel 1992) was front-ended by two completely new theme songs and animated openings when it aired on Japanese television during 1994. The original’s distinctive six-bar musical theme was replaced with Japanese hard rock set to curious and frenzied video displays of Japanese-animated superheroics. In one shot, for example, the metal-controlling Magneto summons aliens through a magic portal. This despite no such analogous scene occurring in any of *X-Men*’s 70-plus episodes.

Why did Marvel commission these new opening sequences for the Japanese market? Especially since each Japan-aired episode proper was virtually identical (with the exception of a Japanese dub) to its American counterpart? Artwork, musical assets, and plot arcs were all carried over across versions. I compare the semiotics of the Japanese opening sequences with those of popular *anime* of the period, and additionally factor in prevailing Japanese notions about American animation. I thus argue that these new opening sequences are ritual spaces which operate upon the double logic of recuperation and Occidentalism. They are attempts by producers to align *X-Men* with the larger intertextual network of Japanese *anime*, yet appealingly exoticise it so as to positively differentiate it from other texts in this dense network.

### **Paper 3: There are more secrets to Bruce Wayne than just being Batman: Reading Chris Nolan's The Dark Knight**

Presenter: Rijula Das

Superheroes are the biggest clichés of our times, yet it never fails to fascinate as contemporary Hollywood grosses would attest. Superman lands on planet earth with his brilliant red and blue dress code and starts the good work, leaving in his wake a pantheon of good boys, vigilantes, modern day Christ like figures in masks and cloaks that spawn through the ages. From being an alien come to save earth from another planet, the superhero becomes a much more relatable figure of the shy high-school boy hopelessly in love with his friend, and then he moves on to being the black clad, brooding figure of the millionaire-with-a-cause. When the spandex finally begins to itch, it is time to look back and reassess—was the mission worth the trouble? This paper will attempt to discuss the continuing tropes in the superhero genre—the necessary double life and the mask, the alienation, the eternal dance between Good and Evil, the ethos of being the ‘Chosen One’, the inability to attain domestic felicity with a woman, the Duty vs. Pleasure dichotomy—in other words, the travails and rewards of being the ‘American Adam’. The text under analysis is Christopher Nolan’s film “The Dark Knight” and the paper borrows certain important ideas from R.W.B. Lewis and Leslie Fiedler to inquire into the dark recesses of an apparently straightforward children’s pictorial narrative about the fundamental values of Good and Evil. The figure of the superhero has evolved and become darker, revisionist and self-questioning. The confusion that lurks at its heart is this: when the spandex finally begins to itch, is it time to take it off altogether or just get a new suit?

### **Paper 4: From A Mousedeer To Alien Creatures: Animated Feature Filmmaking In Malaysia**

Presenter: Hassan Abd Muthalib

The first feature animation film in the ASEAN region was made in Thailand in the 1970s. It took about another 20 years before Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia and Singapore joined the fray. In Malaysia, five features have been produced and a number of others are now in various stages of production. All the films' stories refer to the country's rich trove of legends and folk tales that

Are already in the public memory - all except for the most recent which became an unprecedented box-office hit. This film had an original storyline and characters that are now a part of the country's popular culture.

This paper will first of all provide a brief introduction the animated features in the countries of ASEAN & the choice of their narratives. It will then give an overview of the history and development of animation in Malaysia & then focus on the narratives of feature films to explore the sources and adaptations and their relevance to the audience and issues of the present day.

## **Panel 7: Manga, Comics, The Internet, Games and Identity: Japan, India and Southeast Asia**

### **Paper 1: *History of Shôjo Manga Style: a Woman's Voice since the 1970s*** Presenter: Fusami Ogi

Manga are not just for Japanese. The form is adopted by non-Japanese artists and *manga* are read by non-Japanese readers. Regarding such popularity, *shôjo manga* is particularly interesting because non-Japanese images have contributed to what we regard as *shôjo manga*. Gaining more attention both within Japan and outside Japan, *shôjo manga* style has maintained a consistent appearance since the 1970s.

In Japan, the dominant style of *shôjo manga* was determined in the 1970s. Characters with round, large eyes and long legs, which make the characters look non-Japanese, have become typical of *shôjo manga*. Such non-Japanese looks in *shôjo manga* have continuously and reluctantly raised one popular question among Japanese readers: why do *shôjo manga* characters have non-Japanese looks?

Now, in a global sense, readers outside Japan have begun to pose the same question. At the same time, the query seems to have a less negative sense, perhaps because the style had already become universal with the boom called COOL JAPAN. Here, we should note an interesting displacement in the relation between the concept of non-Japanese and the term "*shôjo*." In the history of *shôjo manga*, the convention of being non-Japanese has been accepted for *shôjo*, but now has finally gained a subject position? My presentation will consider the history of non-Japanese depictions as an ideological form which reflects the *shôjo*'s (literally, Japanese girls') desires and thoughts in the 1970s, posing a question concerning what has enabled the 'national' media to become transcultural as well.

### **Paper 2: The role of visual culture in accessing the self through history: Examining the Indian graphic novel in the Internet age** Presenter: Tarika Prabhakar

The terms I have used, 'self' and 'history' are in themselves almost mythologized. Enormous amount of work has gone into understanding both — sometimes individually and sometimes in the context of each other.

The growth of the graphic novel whether in the form of its predecessor i.e the comics or in its present form, can be traced alongside the growth of the middle class in India. The aspirations and exposure of this middle class gets reflected in the way the graphic novels are conceptualized.

This formulating and accessing of the Indian 'self' occurs in the graphic novels through the prism of history. The Indian cultural tendency of expression is primarily history-oriented.

This is apparent in the visualization of the popular comics and the graphic novels, which is a fairly recent phenomenon in world literature and even more nascent in India. The characters are usually drawn from the staple of the Indian mythological story palette – heroes like Rama, Karna, Eklavya (mostly from the epics Mahabharata and Ramayana), folk heroes, political leaders like Ambedkar and Gandhi among others. There is no noticeable experimentation with the style, content or the moral which is prerequisite for such a powerful genre in the Indian context.

This paper examines the outlines of how a visual medium like the graphic novel works in a society like India. How both these discourses spew out 'commonsensical' notions and how both ascertain or subvert each other's ideologies and worldviews. The paper looks at the growth of the cult of the graphic novel in India and sees how the graphic novel represents the dynamics of the culture market of India.

The precedent of the Indian Graphic novel can be seen in the advent of Amar Chitra Katha .The series was started by the cartoonist Anant Pai with the intention of re-introducing Indian 'culture' to the younger, more tech savvy generation increasingly attracted towards western ideologies in the form of images and stories. This reactive propulsion became the driving force for the Indian comic art.

The contemporary graphic novels like Sarnath Bannerjee's Corridor and Orijit Sen's River of Songs deal with much the same issues while the scope of ideas being dealt with has undergone a tremendous change.

This paper also takes examples like campfire comics to delve upon the changes that have crept into visual culture. Whereas campfire comics heroes like Karna, Arjuna (who belong to the Indian epic past) have come to resemble more and more the western super heroes, Sarnath Bannerjee's protagonists assume the role of the lost intellectual common person who is 'post-literate' a term he uses for himself and for his readers. Such a terminology also highlights the radical transformation that the genre has undergone.

### **Paper 3: *Why So Serious? Play-play Only Lah! An Ethnographic Reflection on How Games (Serious and Otherwise) Are (and Aren't) Useful Tools for Social Empowerment in Contemporary Southeast Asia***

Presenter: Tan Shao Han

“Serious” games have attracted significant interest and support from powerful organizations of late; the discourse that these games are well-suited to solve extant (and potential) “serious” problems has gained currency in recent times. Games such as *World without Oil* and *UrgentEvoke* were funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and World Bank respectively to raise public awareness of resource shortages. Closer to home, in March this year, Singapore’s MDA organized a conference to discuss serious games and their industrial applications for training the local workforce.

Is this the time, then, for gamers to rejoice? After all, our hobbies have received recognition from important people - they are not just “games” anymore, now they are serious stuff, big business, useful for the “real world”!

While I share some optimism and enthusiasm for the technological capacities and noble ideals of “serious games”, I also believe, both as a scholar of games, and as a player and designer of games, in the value of appraising these recent developments with a more cautious, critical eye.

In this paper, I share some ethnographic observations and reflections of *Hoot the Hoonta*, a Live Action Role-playing Game (LARP) I made and played in Singapore to raise awareness and funds for the victims of Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar in 2008. I designed this game at an early stage of the crisis, when bureaucratic restrictions and official blockades by the junta government of Myanmar prevented supplies and rescue teams from entering the country and reaching people in the worse-hit areas.

I look at the ways in which this game succeeded in generating some cultural and economic resources for the cyclone victims – and I also look at the ways in which this game largely did not succeed in making any permanent, structural changes to improve their lives. I argue that while this game had not created long-lasting improvements in the Cyclone victims’ lives, this does not necessarily reflect a failure of ‘serious games’ as a genre. I discuss how games can provide liminal spaces for their players, where they can gain new experiences and knowledge to reflect upon – if they so choose.

In this sense, games, as artifacts of human design, have value as inspirational, communicative, and learning tools; they are akin to other liminal genres, such as performances, rituals, and literature in this aspect. However, games – like books, dramas, and music – can only influence people’s thoughts and feelings, not motivate their actions and behaviour. They provide opportunities for reflexivity, but do not propel agency; they are cultural artifacts, not cultural actors.

I conclude by speculating on possibilities for games as arenas for independent cultural production in Southeast Asia, a region where authoritarian regimes employ harsh censorship laws in their attempts to control what people can say, do, perform, or remember. It may not yet be possible for everyone to write novels or direct plays amidst today's social realities – yet, perhaps, creating and playing games may be less daunting tasks. After all, they're supposed to be fun. Seriously.