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Fandom

Historicized Fandom and the Conversation between East and West Perspectives

Abstract: Digital fandom is traditionally connected to the concept of “participatory culture” (Jenkins 1992) and framed as a novelty developed thanks to the so-called “Internet turn”. We cannot deny the fact that fandom has changed with digitalization, but the focus on “digital fandoms” has often led to an overestimation of the novelty of modern fan communities. In this chapter, we study fandom using a historical and comparative approach demonstrating that, if we historicize fandom, we can easily see how digital fan practices can often be dated back to a pre-digital era. We will try to understand why scholarship has been focusing on the “Internet turn,” neglecting other shifts, by looking at the key issue of fan productivity as one of the most popularized traits of digital fandom. By inserting fandom in a broader transnational context and analyzing different case studies, from the East and West, we will also show that different kinds of fandom definitions and fan traits might become visible if we focus on nonwhite fans’ historical participation.

Keywords: digital Fandom, fan productivity, participatory culture, media fandom, transnational fandom

In this chapter, we interrogate the concept of fandom in a historical dimension. This dimension is often neglected in fan scholarship or reduced to a single historical change: the advent of the Internet. Instead, fandom must be historicized since digital fan practices can often be dated back to a pre-digital era. We will try to understand why fan scholarship has been focusing on the “Internet turn,” neglecting other shifts. In order to do that we look at the key issue of fan productivity as one of the most popularized fan traits. As we think about the concept of fandom and the productive interaction of fans with the media before and after the digital age, we need to take into account different sources and perspectives. One of the problems with fandom histories is that they tend to be whitewashed histories of fandoms (Pande 2018) as the discipline has been dominated by white scholars (De Kosnik and Carrington 2019).

Therefore, we will try to re-historicise the widely accepted definition of fandom so as to both “name” its western origin, in other words its whiteness, and

to register the presence of different concurring definitions. In a second step, we will show how the traditional concept of fandom changes if observed by a non-white, in our case Asian, perspective. In the third paragraph, we point to the complexity of the material contributions of fans to fandom spaces, when observed in a historical way, and we take into account both a Western and an Eastern perspective in response to the push to decolonise fan studies in the digital age in terms of bibliographies and frameworks (Wanzo 2015). The analysis of different case studies, from the East and West, will detail how specific fan definitions and practices were used before the digital age while showing that different kinds of fan traits might become visible if we look at nonwhite fans' historical participation. Additionally, as already demonstrated (Morimoto 2019), exploring transcultural/transnational fandoms where the source text is non-Western and in languages other than English can help destabilise the anglophone focus of our field.

1 Defining Fandom

The definition of “fandom” has been historically disputed among Western researchers who approached the field with competing agendas. Especially in the context of the first studies focusing on cinema, music, comics and TV, fandom is alternatively described based on the intensity of the relationship it has with its cult object (Jensen 1992; Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998; Le Guern 2002), as an interpretative and sometimes productive community (Bacon-Smith 1992; Jenkins 1992; Baym 2000; Hills 2002; Booth 2010) and as a cultural identity built through a specific type of attachment to a media text (Tulloch and Jenkins 1995; Askwith 2007). Fandom as a concept is also related to the meanings that in different times and contexts have been attributed to the word “fan”. According to the first wave of fan scholars, the term “fan” is short for “fanatic,” from the Modern Latin “*fanaticus*” and originally referred to religious membership “of or belonging to the temple, a temple servant, a devotee” (Jenkins 1992, 40). As noted by Le Guern (2002) the interpretation of the word “fan” as short for “fanatic” led to a connection between fandom and religion, as the usage of “fanatic” generally referred to an unwavering, uncritical belief in (usually religious) dogmas. In turn, the negative connotation of “fanatism” reflected negatively back on the people labelled with the term “fan” (Fiske 1992). If we look at the representation of fans in the media, the recurring image is that of irrational, unsocial, obsessive and in some cases even dangerous individuals (Bennet and Booth 2016).

But, if we look at the realm of sports fandom, we find a concurring definition since the word “fan” is traced back to the nineteenth-century writings of Pierce Egan (1823) who used the term “fancy” to refer to the fans of a specific hobby or sport, especially of boxing. This sports connection is also credited by William Hazlitt who wrote in the *New Monthly Magazine* of February 1822 of a man “whose costume bespoke him one of the fancy, and who had risen from a three months’ sickbed” to go to see a prize fight (Dickinson 1989). According to William Henry Nugent (1929), baseball borrowed the term “fancy” and shortened it to “fans” and “fan” to refer to enthusiastic followers of this sport and it was later popularized in US baseball circles in the 1880s.

In any case, there is such detailed documentation of negative characterizations of fans in popular culture that early Western fan studies set out to debunk many of the negative stereotypes that had been associated with fan activities (Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007).

One of the first scholars to challenge the common presentation of fans as solitary and obsessive individuals or part of a massified culture was the sociologist Joli Jensen (1992), whose work acknowledged fandom as a respectable and traceable social phenomenon occurring in all those situations in which someone shows a deep interest in something. But it is by focusing on the more creative and productive sides of fandom that early fan scholars such as Fiske (1992) and Bacon-Smith (1992) challenge the negative connotation of fandom while also connecting fan practices with the concept of “participatory culture” introduced by Henry Jenkins (1992) to explain the culture and logic of fan communities. During the first wave of fan studies, fandom was also connected to the concept of resistant consumption (De Certeau 1984) to indicate how fans would usually appropriate the media text through a series of tactics openly in contrast with the intentions of the original authors and that fan spaces were inherently subversive, considering that fans work “against the grain” of hegemonic popular cultural texts (Coppa 2008). Therefore, the concept of fan productivity became one of the distinguishing traits of fan practices.

This association was reinforced by the transition of fan communities online (Benecchi 2018) and with studies focusing on digital fandom (Askwith 2007; Caldwell 2008) that attribute a central role to fans within the contemporary media universe, highlighting how some sectors of the cultural industry have developed production policies explicitly aimed at incorporating and taming the most typical fan practices. In the digital era, the productions of fan communities are reframed as resources for the mainstream media and culture, both from a creative and a commercial point of view (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013; Benecchi 2018). The Internet is seen as the leading factor of this reframing and is connected to an overarching “sense of community” and “positive participatory

practices” that many fan scholars still find attractive. This attraction could be one of the reasons the “Internet turn” is widely used by recent fan scholarship.

2 Fandom from a Chinese Perspective: From Fans to *Fensi* and Beyond

If we look at the definition and history of fandom from a non-Western/non-white perspective, in an attempt to decolonize the history of fandom, we open up different perspectives both on the origins and the evolution of the phenomenon.

Descriptions of the development of fandom in China take a very different route from those in the West, starting from the word used to describe fans and fan communities. The western word “fan”, in its “fanatics” acceptation, can be directly translated in Chinese as *mi* “迷”. But, in contrast to the western history of fandom, this literary translation is never utilized, as it is, to label a person as a fan intended as someone who is an enthusiast or a devotee or even a fanatic of something. When it comes to the Chinese language, the word *mi* “迷” cannot stand by itself. We need to specify the object of fandom for the word to make sense: therefore, we cannot use *mi* “迷” to describe a person, but we can talk about “*dianying mi* 电影迷” to describe fans of films (Zheng 2016). It is only recently, and in connection to the migration of fandom online, that a new word emerged and became more common: “*fensi* (粉丝)”, a phonetical translation of the word “fans”. Interestingly enough, Chinese fans seem nowadays unwilling to be labelled as “*fensi*” a word that in time “turned from a neuter into a derogatory noun linked to specific acts, such as quarrels, irrational insults toward others, or forcing other *fensi* to choose a camp” (Yin and Xie 2018). Another problematic aspect of this word in connection to Chinese fandoms is that its endogenous origin appears to be a reflection of the foreign sources influencing the new generation of Chinese fans. Indeed, if we look at the origins of modern Chinese fan culture, we can see that it developed as a cultural re-appropriation of foreign media products and within the context of transnational fluxes observed in the realm of popular music (Zhang and Negus 2020), but also in anime (Mōri 2011), manga and TV dramas (Fung 2009; Chen 2018). It must be noted although this foreign, and especially Japanese, heritage is often neglected by Chinese fans, especially when retracing the origins of Chinese fandom: in their reconstructions and oral histories, Chinese fans build a lineage that connects Chinese fandoms and canonical high art literature (Zheng 2013).

While we have precise dates and origin stories, even if contrasting versions, when it comes to the Western and Anglophone history of fandom, if we look at

the history of China, it is difficult to get an accurate answer about the origins of fandom. We might get a glimpse of early fan culture from the legendary stories dating back to the Western Jin Dynasty (AC 265–316) more than 1700 years ago – with stories similar to the fanatical behaviour of fans depicted in some historical books of that period (Li 2017, 36). In contemporary China, as a product of the development of modern industry and market economy, popular culture is essentially a civic culture (Zou 1998, 55–60). Therefore, after the reform and opening up (since 1979), the era of mass culture in Chinese society was gradually established (Hu 2020, 112). At the same time, the rapid development of the electronic media, represented by television and radio, has not only laid the technical foundation for the mass production and widespread dissemination of cultural products; but also the characteristics of the electronic media, with visual images as the main symbols of communication, have lowered the threshold of cultural reception so that the content of their dissemination can reach a wider range of people (*ibid.*). The development of fans in China in the modern sense could be said to have witnessed the migration and integration of East Asian popular culture. Chinese scholars (e.g., Yang 2009; Xu 2012; Hu 2020) have roughly divided the development of fan culture into three stages. The first stage was in the 1980–90s, when the films, TV dramas and pop music of Hong Kong and Taiwan, which had developed and emerged in mainland China, were imported in large numbers. Singers and actors from Hong Kong, represented by the “Four Kings” (Andy Lau, Jacky Cheung, Leon Lai, Aaron Kwok), became very popular in mainland China, and their fandom first began to emerge at that time. Since then, “star-chasers” (追星族), before “fans”, were widely recognized and became known to the public (Hu 2020, 113).

The second phase began with the TV show *Super Girl* in 2005. The 2005 season of the televised singing contest *Super Girl* (超级女声), organized by Hunan Satellite TV, swept the whole nation with amazing popularity and success. Fans from all walks of life and age groups not only provided enthusiastic support to their favourite contestants but also formed their own unique fan cultures. The *Super Girl* television show in 2005 inadvertently created a new profit model for the mainland pop music industry: the idol economy, which applies the rituals of valorisation, including fan magazines, awards ceremonies, television or radio programs about idols’ personalities, to achieve the profitability of record companies (Guilbault 2002, 192). Focusing on the *Super Girl* champion Li Yuchun in 2005, for example, Ling Yang (2009) argues that the rise of *Super Girl* fans represents a more active, autonomous and participatory cultural consumption model in China. This model of cultural consumption, with pleasurable identification and fantasy at its core, is based on Internet fan communities and characterized by the use of new media and fan production, while breaking the traditional production/

consumption dichotomy and changing the power relationship between producers and consumers in the media-entertainment industry (Yang 2009, 104–112). As a phonetic translation of “fans,” “fensi” not only began to become known to the public, gradually turning “star-chasers” into a historical word, but also with fans gradually becoming a group that could not be ignored.

During the third stage, starting from 2014, a large number of Chinese K-Pop stars, typically represented by Luhan, Lay Zhang, and Kris Wu, who returned to China to develop their careers (Jin 2018, 66), started to emerge and the Internet-based fan communities began to form. The fan economy has become an important part of the mass culture industry. With the rise of Internet entertainment shows, many idol shows were born, which attracted large numbers of fans and created huge economic revenues. Fans are active in almost all areas of the creative industries as an emerging community but we can see how cinema, TV and music media texts are dominant in the histories of fandom both in the western and eastern contexts, even though we will show how fan practices are also historically connected to non-media texts.

Particularly through the lenses of history and ethnography, Chinese fan cultures are revealed to be very different from their Western counterparts. Recent studies (Yin and Fung 2017; Zhang 2016; Zheng 2016) have shown a pivotal difference between Western fandoms, conceptualized as groups of fans with similar interests, consumption or production practices around the same fan objects and Chinese fandoms where the individual (in some cases even elitist) and affective experience is the most important aspect, especially if we look at pre-Internet fandoms. In the past, Chinese fans divided themselves by “pits,” or fan objects: to enter a pit meant building an affective bond with a fan object (Yin and Xie 2018). As argued by Zheng (2016), even when we move from traditional to online fan cultures, the intimate relationship between the fan object and the fan remains a defining trait of fan cultures in China, also influencing the collective aspects of the fan community. This is not to say that fan communities are not relevant or that fandom is only an individual phenomenon in China but the way we look at the existing fan communities, mostly developing after the migration of fandoms within the online space, must be adapted to the local context. Recently, a new expression – “fan circles” – entered the realm of fandom in China and is now used by fans instead of the Western label “fandom.” “Fan circle” implies the fact that a fan is connecting not only with an object but also with other fans. More importantly, Chinese fans in such fan circles have formed subcommunities with hierarchical power structures. Even though popularized in the digital age, the Chinese concept of “fan pits” and “fan circle” is not a digital invention: fans have always been organized in circles, as in communities, both in the East and the West. But, in contrast to the typically imagined active

fan we can retrace within classical Western fandom literature, Chinese fan circles are not “a subversive community in the periphery that simply rebels against the centre but are a constantly negotiating subculture that adopts various evaluation system and hierarchies from the mainstream culture and the educational institution” (Zheng 2016, 3). As Yang and Xu (2016) have suggested, under the censorship regime in mainland China, fans have mostly taken up what James Scott (1985, 241) has called “the weapons of the weak,” that is, “cautious resistance and calculated conformity.” Other studies underline that Chinese fans are extremely conscious of how their online activities are monitored and tracked to produce metrics within the context of the music industry (Negus 2019; Prey 2016). These “tech-savvy” fans auto-labelled themselves as data fans (*shù jù fēn*, 数据粉), meaning that they “recognize their importance as data and use this to benefit the musicians or idols they are following, and to enhance their sense of achievement and agency” (Zhang and Negus 2020, 3).

This is further proof that fandom, whether in a pre-Internet or digital context, cannot be easily generalized and quantified: fan cultures are deeply rooted in their social and cultural environment, and must therefore be observed as simultaneously decentred but interconnected, globalized but localized, mainstream but subculture.

3 Debunking the Novelty of Digital Fan Productivity West to East

Fandom is not a modern or Internet-based phenomenon. Early fan practices, at least the ones that we can document, are not even connected to twentieth-century media. One of the oldest and best documented Western fandoms is that composed by railway enthusiasts (Gray 1986). Many different labels, from “railfan” and “railway enthusiast,” to “trainspotter” or “anorak,” were used to describe people who were fans of rail transport. We have also seen that in Asia, accounts of “fanatical behaviour” can be seen in some historical books even dating back to the Western Jin Dynasty, AC 265–316 – legend has it that Pan An (潘安), the most famous beautiful man of the time, was warmly greeted every time he went out by his fanatical female followers, who expressed their love by throwing fruit into Pan An’s carriage, so much fruit that it spilt out of the car (Li 2017, 36). Literature was a native realm for early fan practices in the West as well. Courtney A. Bates (2011) recently studied a corpus of fan letters addressed to Willa Cather (1873–1947), which are now held by the University of Nebraska–Lincoln’s Special Collections. During the First World War, there were even those who advised soldiers to read Jane Austen’s books and

share stories and interpretations of the characters. This specific fan practice was documented by the writer Rudyard Kipling in his *The Janeites*, which tells of the bonds created between Jane Austin fans with very different roles and uses at the front (Kipling 1926). In 1901, it was under the pressure from the fans of the detective Sherlock Holmes that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle resumed the adventures of Sherlock Holmes with *The Hound of Baskerville*, after “killing” his most famous character in the literary adventure *The Final Problem* in 1893. In correspondence to Holmes “resurrection,” fans organized well-documented tribute campaigns to greet the return of their favorite detective and explicitly pointed out that Sherlock Holmes “is alive and well” as a 1901 sticker distribution and posted campaign shouts (Benecchi 2018).

The pre-Internet or even pre-electronic media origin of many fan practices is also demonstrated by insider histories of particular fandoms (Moskowitz 1974; Lellenberg 1990; Heinemann 2000) and some historical accounts of early fan practices retraced by fandom studies scholars (Nieminski and Lellenberg 1989; Hayward 1997). “Fan productivity” is an example of how, when talking about fandom’s distinctive traits, we must adopt a perspective that both historicizes and decolonizes the concept. The case of *Boys’ Love* (referred to as BL) fandom in Taiwan shows how fan productivity can activate transcultural fandoms and be connected both to digital and pre-digital contexts. Fan productivity connected to BL manga in fact shows the persistence of fan practices connected both to the physical sphere and to analogue spaces even in a digital era.

BL originated in the 1970s as a genre of Japanese *manga* which featured “love, sex and romance between boys and young men,” and later transformed into different forms of cultural texts (Martin 2012, 365). As the popularity of the BL genre increased, a *fujoshi* (rotten girls) community arose along with it: young and heterosexual women who proactively consume, circulate, reproduce and associate with the BL culture as can be seen in a wide range of cultural products, including *manga*, animation, video games, light novels, and cosplay (Galbraith 2011). Since the 1980s, along with the popularity of Japanese *manga* and anime, Japanese BL culture has become popular among young people in East Asia, including Taiwan. Similar to the ways that BL culture developed in Japan, in Taiwan, BL female readers discussed and shared their reading experiences and comments with friends or in online forums, blogs, comic markets, and tea parties that they planned themselves. Therefore, in recent years, a *funü* community (its counterpart in Japan is *fujoshi*) has also emerged in Taiwan.

In 1949, martial law was declared in Taiwan to suppress political dissidence (Huang 2005, 2). The people’s freedom of speech and publication were strictly limited by the government to the significant detriment of comic publishing. This censorship lasted for a long time, and consequently, the quality of domestic

comics decreased, and the number of local cartoonists shrank (Chou 2007, 79). Albeit being illegal, publishers smuggling comics from Japan was frequent. 1976 marks the beginning of the “piracy period” (Su 2010, 104) in Taiwan, thereafter, publishers pirated Japanese *manga* by photocopying them to enter the comic market in Taiwan to fill the gaps (Li 2002, 192; Ye 2010, 7). Many major Taiwanese *manga* publishers were founded during the piracy period by selling cheaply copied Japanese works. It was during this “piracy period” (1976 to early 1990s) that Japanese BL culture was brought into the country, as were a huge number of Japanese *dōjinshi*.

BL *dōjinshi* (fan-made magazines in Japan) refers to parodic and amateur works by fans of BL that serve to reproduce the original BL artefacts (Galbraith 2011, 212). At that time, the Japanese *manga Saint Seiya* was the most popular among *manga* readers. Because *Saint Seiya* was still serialized in Japan, it took the Japanese publishers three to four months to publish one paperback. Each new paperback was published almost immediately in a pirated edition in Taiwan. However, Taiwanese publishers wanted to publish *Saint Seiya* more frequently to meet the needs of the market so they divided the original paperback into thinner ones. Then, publishers added to each of the paperbacks about 50 pages of additional content, which mostly originated from fans’ *dōjinshi*. More and more Japanese *dōjinshi* of *Saint Seiya* were circulated among students in Taiwanese high schools, and the vast majority of these were of the BL theme (Miyako 2016, 80). Responding to the popularity of BL *dōjinshi*, the comic publishers pushed a lot of BL *dōjinshi* into the market and after 1988, BL *manga* and novels became very popular among young Taiwanese girls who created BL *tongrenzhi* (Chinese translation of *dōjinshi*) by themselves and set up BL focused activities.

The importation of BL into Taiwan not only stimulated the creativity of Taiwanese authors but also inspired many BL fans to reproduce the Japanese BL culture in Taiwan by organizing BL activities, such as *tongrenzhi* markets. Together, the imported Japanese BL *dōjinshi* and the amateur Taiwanese BL *tongrenzhi* constituted the main products of Taiwanese BL *tongrenzhi* markets (Zhang 2013, 100). At the same time, many semi-underground publishers also started to publish Japanese BL *dōjinshi*. Taiwanese *funü*, inspired by Japanese *dōjinshi*, were discovering a new way to express their passion for a certain work. A *tongrenzhi* always contains a snippet of the original work, usually a few pages, and uses the same story background and characters as the source material so readers would easily accept and share them. As printing costs gradually dropped in the 1980s, it became even more convenient for Taiwanese *funü* to create their *Tongren* works (ibid.).

The early Taiwanese *tongren* groups were formed in much the same way as their Japanese counterparts, thus mostly in schools. In the 1990s, many *tongren* communities, which created and circulated BL products, were still set up in high schools and universities (Miyako 2016, 86), while online *tongren* communities and BBS were still in their infancy. However, fan desires to communicate with other *funü* inspired them to seek creative solutions. By 1992, the Taiwanese *funü* community had developed a special “message book” system (Miyako 2016, 84), which helped members make friends and share their experiences. These message books were placed where *funü* gathered, such as comic bookstores and the print shops – wherever female high school students gathered to exchange their *tongren* works (Su 2010, 113).

By the mid-1990s, as the BBS Forums became widely known, Taiwanese *Tongrenzhi* creators began to make extensive use of forums to discuss BL topics, post BL novels and pictures, or advertise BL *tongrenzhi*. The Internet was helpful for Taiwanese *funü* to establish a platform for real-time communication and circulation, which in turn has promoted the popularity of Taiwanese BL culture. The practice of *funü* in Taiwan indicates a cultural link between BL culture and LGBT support, which becomes an important characteristic of Taiwan’s BL culture: in the 1990s, Taiwanese culture changed drastically when martial law and state control of mass media were abolished. As Miyako (2016) mentioned, the student movement had a strong influence since it awoke an awareness of democracy and freedom. Inspired by this, Taiwanese students began to fight for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights. Overall, from an Asian perspective, the attitudes of BL fans towards masculinity and homosexuality can be seen as a subculture that provides a space of resistance and advocacy in opposition to the mainstream culture, independently of whether or not the space is digital.

Despite all that, much scholarship has neglected the historical dimension of fandom or has emphasized the importance of a single historical change: the advent of the Internet. Certainly, we cannot deny the fact that fandom has changed with digitalisation so much so that fan culture has emerged from an underground and community-based activity to become a vibrant social platform operating on the Internet (Yin and Xie 2018). This is particularly true and well documented when we look at fandom in countries such as China, where the acceleration of the process of globalisation and the emergence of the Internet has led to a transformation of fan cultures (Iwabuchi 2010; Ito, Okabe and Tsuji 2012; Fung 2013). In this new context, “patterns shifted from individual fan practices in relatively private lives to the collective fan practices across the social life of fans” (Yin and Xie 2018, 3326). Nevertheless, the focus on “digital fandoms” has often led to an overestimation of the novelty of modern fan

communities as demonstrated in the very first published collection of historical studies of fan communities and activities (Reagin and Rubenstein 2011). According to recent historical studies, compared to the pre-Internet age, the reading and (re)writing practices of online fan communities, especially, do not present a significant break in taste, content or form.

Consequently, without denying the transformation of fandom in specific social contexts over time, we must be careful not to flatten the history of fan cultures as the sole by-product of changes in media technologies. Fan culture is never an independent entity but is deeply rooted in the contemporary social and cultural environment, responding to social issues and cultural debates (Chin and Morimoto 2013; Benecchi 2015; Pande 2018).

As fandom migrated online at the turn of the 2000s, new forms of expression appeared, with fans simultaneously collaborating with new platforms, such as social networking sites (Hills 2013; Yin and Xie 2018). Nevertheless, even digitized forms of fan productions can be traced back to pre-Internet examples of the same fan practice: an example of this is that of *vidding*, a grassroots form of audiovisual production, which combines clips from a TV series or movie with the music of various genres (Coppa 2008). When YouTube was founded in 2005, fans celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of this practice in a dedicated convention called *Vividcon*, demonstrating that *vidding* is a form of amateur audiovisual production that precedes the digital age with the first fan video of this genre dating back to 1975, when the web and social media platforms did not yet exist, made by Kandy Fong, one of the founders of the United Federation of Phoenix, the longest-running *Star Trek* fan club: it is a slideshow of restored images presented with background music at a fan convention but still represents a first model of amateur audiovisual appropriation and production (Fong 2014).

As demonstrated by the case of BL fandom, we may also find a similar phenomenon in East Asia, where fan productivity has existed among Asian fans long before the Internet was born. One of the informants (Miyako 2016), interviewed during four months of fieldwork in Taiwan in 2016, recounted how, as a comic fan in Taiwan, she was able to conduct the cultural production of fans in the 1980s. Miyako was born in 1974 and grew up in Taipei. During her childhood, pirated Japanese comics were very popular among Taiwanese teenagers. In the meantime, the first generation of local cartoonists like You Sulan (游素兰) were also receiving more and more attention. When Miyako was in middle school, she was a fan of You Sulan and learned to paint in You's manga style. At that time, manga magazines were popular in Taiwan and manga fans had opportunities to publish short manga or post their illustrations. Special columns were even provided by the magazines for manga fans to post a brief self-introduction and mailing address, in the hope of finding pen pals. In this way, Miyako made

friends with other manga fangirls. At first, they wrote letters to each other to share their opinions about certain manga but this discussion sparked their strong desire to write new stories based on the original manga. Therefore, they began to draw their own manga inspired by the original material and to send them to other fans. These manga were the origin of *tongrenzhi* in Taiwan, which means fan-made magazines.

Conclusion

This chapter observed fandom as a sociohistorical practice, highlighting the longitudinal transformations of fan practices from a pre-digital to a digital environment, and also taking into account different cultural and social contexts in order to decolonize fandom history. We showed how fandom has evolved and shifted in specific contexts but also how much modern fan practices resemble traditional ones. This certainly does not deny the fact that fandom has changed with digitalization so much so that fan culture has emerged from an underground and community-based activity to become a vibrant social platform operating on the Internet. This is particularly true and well documented when we look at fandom in Asia, as we demonstrated through our analysis. Nevertheless, this focus on “digital fandoms” has often led to an overestimation of the novelty of modern fan communities. Through the analysis of case studies from the East and the West, we argued that in the evolution of fandom the significance of digital media has not resided in forming new fan practices. Rather, digital media have played a role in changing the forms and scope of some traditional fan practices, making them more visible, and sometimes more acceptable, to a larger audience. In doing so, digital media also stretched some of the limits of fandom and made visible some of its hidden and often discarded tensions. In the case of Asian fandom, the deep affective relationship between fan and fan object has been built relatively consistently, while the means, but not the practices, of fan participation have been changed by digitization. Asian fans showed the same transformative productivity before and after the digital age, as is clearly demonstrated by the case of the *dōjinshi/tongrenzhi* markets in Taiwan.

By focusing on the traditional concept of fan productivity, we also demonstrated that while fandom has become more visible, this does not mean that fandom has become more productive in the digital age. Indeed, when studying concrete cases, one immediately realizes that only a small part of fandom is productive, as already demonstrated by the study of online communities by Ben McConnell and Jackie Huba (2006) and the study of social media communities

by Paul Schneider (2011), both based on producing a Nielsen pyramid (1997), in turn addressing the issue of active participation by drawing on the Pareto law. Recent studies of fan communities have also confirmed the issue of applying the idea of active participation in connection to digital fan communities and the so-called Internet turn (Benecchi 2018). And yet the aspect of “productivity,” which in early fan studies was just one of the traits defining fans and not a discriminating feature, has been reinforced and put forward as the main characteristic of fandom in the digital age. The term “fandom” has itself been mainstreamed, thus becoming a powerful metaphor for the over present and often overvalued “online participatory culture.” This inevitably led to a misunderstanding of the complicated cultural and social contexts the word “fandom” connects to and the granularity of fan communities that are constantly shifting not only in accordance with changes in the media but also due to cultural and social changes.

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