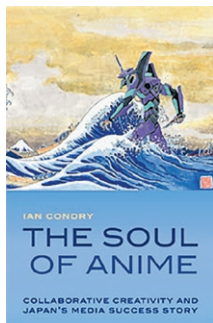


# Collaborative creativity

At the heart of Ian Condry's stimulating exploration of anime's global success is his attention to how the medium thrives through "collaborative creativity": various forms of social engagement and energy investment undertaken by individuals who operate on both the production and consumption sides of anime-related industries.

Reviewer: Matthew Fraleigh



## Reviewed publication

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WHEREAS SEVERAL of the pioneering academic treatments of anime have focused their analyses on the narrative content of specific works, the visual styles of particular directors, or the aesthetic features of the animated medium more generally, Condry is less concerned with a retrospective consideration of finished products than with the dynamic social processes by which they are created and consumed. This ethnographic approach is informed by several periods of fieldwork he carried out in Tokyo animation studios between 2004 and 2010, his interviews with numerous directors, artists, and other animation industry workers, as well as participant observations he undertook at fan conventions held in both Japan and the United States.

Condry begins with an account of the production of director Hosoda Mamoru's 2009 anime feature film, *Summer Wars*. He observes that rather than being focused on the actions of a single hero, this film is structured around the collective efforts of its various characters toward a common goal. The film's wealth of idiosyncratic characters furnishes a diverse range of viewers with multiple potential points of entry into the story: an effect only heightened by the director's decision to make the characters' design simple, thereby affording viewers the opportunity to contribute something of their own. Paralleling the inter-character cooperation depicted on screen is thus a process by which the viewers of the film are induced to participate actively as well: developing forms of connection with the work that ultimately produce a sense of "joint ownership". Moreover, Condry identifies further forms of such creative collaboration taking place on the production side as well: in the discussions among directors, designers, and animators, as well as in the creative staff's engagement with its source materials.

Turning to Hosoda's earlier film, *The Girl Who Leapt Through Time* (2006), for example, he notes how Hosoda introduced changes to the 1967 work of fiction by Tsutsui Yasutaka on which the film is based, making it more open-ended.

Condry's behind-the-scenes attention to the negotiations occurring among those involved in creating a work of anime continues in his second chapter, which focuses on the production of several animated TV series. Whereas the intricacy of anime narratives is often adduced as the major reason for their popularity, Condry's real-time observation of the deliberations taking place at these shows' regular planning sessions leads him to conclude that elaborately-conceived narrative lines may be less important in guiding a work through the development process than other factors – chiefly the creators' basic conceptions of the work's characters and their interconnections. It is not surprising that distinctive characters, rather than narrative arcs, would be the principal factor in some of the very short animated shows Condry considers, but he also offers examples of longer-format series in which

Below: *The Girl Who Leapt Through Time*.



respecting Tibetan practices, in which texts are not conserved or restored but allowed to give themselves up to the elements, and writes that "[w]e would have to be able to point to great advances in knowledge to be gained by desecrating their sacred objects through conservation treatment in order to even begin to justify that practice." (p.202) It is especially powerful that this should have been written by a specialist in paper and the book arts, and indicates the challenges posed to anthropologists, artists, scientists and cultural historians,

Below: Holy scriptures in the Pelkor Chöde monastery of Gyantse in Tibet. Image reproduced under a creative commons license, courtesy of Thriol on flickr.



both Tibetans and non-Tibetans, in determining the most suitable way to preserve the material artefacts of Tibetan book-production.

## Tibetan orthography

This is a very fine book, and I can find very little about which to complain. However, given the importance of the written text in Tibetan culture, I would have appreciated more space being devoted to the carving of xylographs and to the scribal arts. While Bacot's 1912 essay on *dbu med* script<sup>1</sup> remains one of a very few scholarly treatments of Tibetan orthography, it would have been valuable to have had a more extensive discussion here of the practise of carving, technical descriptions of the various different scripts employed, and perhaps even a brief foray into marginalia. The orthographic and design choices which we make when writing even the most trivial of texts – or even in preparing a text file on computer – make their own individual contributions to the final product, and I would welcome perhaps a follow-up paper analysing the physical construction of letters in order to better understand its role in the Tibetan book arts.

Book reviews don't generally consider the book-as-artefact, but in reviewing this particular book, it would seem apposite to remark that, as always, Brill has produced a beautiful addition to its extensive Tibetan Studies Library. The quality of paper and the photographic reproductions are exemplary, and both the heft and character of the object are conducive to contemplating what, if produced with less concern for readability and aesthetics, might have become, given the nature of its technical and scientific content, a considerably less enjoyable read, at least for those not familiar with the arcane study of the book arts.

a work's complete narrative has yet to be determined (or even glimpsed), and yet the work begins to take shape around its distinctive characters, premises, and worlds. An argument that Condry introduces and continues to develop over the remaining chapters of the book is that the anime character can fruitfully be considered a generative platform itself, conducive to migration across diverse media.

While much of Condry's analysis focuses on the production and consumption of anime in the early twenty-first century, he also endeavors to place contemporary Japan's anime industry in both historical and comparative contexts. In the third chapter, for example, he discusses the postwar development of Japanese anime, focusing especially on the work of Tezuka Osamu. Rejecting accounts of modern Japanese anime that would describe it mainly as an autonomous outgrowth of earlier domestic visual traditions, he identifies various ways in which Japanese animators saw American animated films as both sources of inspiration and targets of rivalry: the Tōei studio, for example, explicitly aspired to become the "Disney of the East". Attending to the embeddedness of the Japanese anime industry in this larger context, Condry also notes variant features of the production process that distinguish American and Japanese animated films. In the fourth chapter as well, Condry adopts a longer chronological view in recounting how Bandai was able to obtain the rights to producing Gundam plastic models in the 1970s and to unexpectedly transform a toy that had prematurely been judged a failure into one of its most popular products. Condry emphasizes the role that small networks of fans and the media that connected them played in achieving this remarkable success.

One of Condry's most interesting chapters concerns the practice of fansubbing: overseas fans' cooperative production of subtitled versions of anime works. While such activity is unmistakably prohibited by copyright law, Condry vividly demonstrates how many producers of fansubs understand themselves to be acting in the service of anime rather than counter to the interests of anime producers. He describes these fansubbers' meticulousness and attention to detail, showing how they add value, for example, through annotation of supplementary historical or cultural information. Observing that some remove their fansubs from circulation once subtitled commercial versions are available, he argues that a set of ethical principles underlies their efforts.

Throughout *The Soul of Anime*, Condry shows how the anime production process often opens up various kinds of "empty spaces" that facilitate idiosyncratic forms of creative engagement and consumption. With its equal attentiveness to the industry and to its fans, Condry's book is a timely addition that helps elucidate how the "collaborative creativity" that characterizes producers and consumers alike lies behind anime's success.

Matthew Fraleigh, Associate Professor of East Asian Literature and Culture, Brandeis University (fraleigh@brandeis.edu).

## Explorations of Tibetan book culture

In recent years, the invaluable work of Gene Smith and the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center ([www.tbrc.org](http://www.tbrc.org)) has made it possible for Tibetan texts to be reproduced digitally and reprinted endlessly on-demand. However, the TBRC's work preserves the ideas held within a text and its literary style, and not the text itself. The engaging explorations of Tibetan book culture, however, as presented in *The Archaeology of Tibetan Books*, celebrate the tactile nature of these artefacts, the physical act of holding and turning the pages, an act that leaves over time the marks of many fingers, the extensive quality control issues in selecting fibres and writing materials for different types of text, the religious and cultural vitality of texts, and the devoted commitment to aesthetics and textual accuracy of the various scribes, wood-carvers, editors and printers. The decoding of these elements is a vital aspect of a deeper understanding of Tibetan culture, and Helman-Ważny's research offers a most welcome contribution to this important work.

Simon Wickhamsmith, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey (swickhamsmith@gmail.com).

## References

- 1 Bacot, J. 1912. 'L'écriture Cursive Tibétaine', *Journal Asiatique* 10(19):5-78.