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Editorial
Marco PELLITTERI (Shanghai International Studies University, China) & Herb L. FONDEVILLA (Aoyama Gakuin University, Japan)

Welcome to this particularly rich volume of Mutual Images.
This Editorial is composed jointly by Marco Pellitteri, Mutual Images journal’s Editor-in-chief, and our esteemed colleague Herb L. Fondevilla, who operates from Aoyama Gakuin University in Tôkyô, Japan.

Herb and Marco’s research paths have crossed figuratively as well as literally on several occasions during the years in which she (for more than ten years now) and he (for more than five) have been living in Japan. Herb was working at the University of Tsukuba until the beginning of 2017—when she obtained her current position in Tôkyô—and Marco was conducting research as a research fellow at Kôbe University from 2013 to 2018. Our many shared academic interests have naturally generated several opportunities to meet at different events, such as when we first met in January 2015 at a well-organised international symposium on the aesthetics and cultural studies of manga and anime at Ateneo de Manila University, in the Philippines, and at subsequent venues held at various Japanese universities.

It is therefore with pleasure that we co-write this Editorial, which is a special collaborative occasion for us both. In May 2017, Herb had invited Marco to collaborate on the scientific and logistic organisation of a two-day symposium, but due to prior engagements he was unable to be directly involved at that point. So instead, Marco suggested Mutual Images Research Association (MIRA) as the perfect partnership opportunity: as a young association, MIRA is full of human energy and enthusiasm, and above all animated by the association’s will to expand its network of academic relations and range of initiatives. MIRA editorial board member Matteo Fabbretti helped Herb with the event logistics and paperwork, and later contributed as a keynote speaker for the symposium.

In other words, every symposium is a collaborative effort, none more so than Japan Pop Goes Global: Japanese Pop Culture on Aesthetics and Creativity, which finally took place at Aoyama Gakuin University on 25 November 2017. Observation and conversa-
tions between Herb and MIRA’s members led to the notion that Japanese popular culture has entered our collective subconscious via the mass media, leading to its continued impact on visual culture construed and extended by artists who have come of age in an era defined by the rapid economic growth of post-World War II Japan and its popular culture. *Japan Pop Goes Global* was neither the first nor the last of the intellectual initiatives focussing on the international and transnational spread of Japan’s pop-cultural expressions, but it nevertheless tried to highlight, through specific and—dare we say—useful frameworks, the impact of Japan in many creative fields that surround us every day in the fields of fashion, media entertainment, tourism, art, graphic narratives, and storytelling at large. The impact of Japanese pop culture on creativity is still just beginning to make itself known in many national contexts, both in Asia and in the West(s), from Europe to the Americas.

Further discussion led to the development of the three main themes/sections into which the symposium was organised: Adapting and Transforming Folktales in the Contemporary Period, Cultural Industries Across Borders, and Creating and Re-Creating Meaning. Our aim was to reflect on Japanese pop culture’s growing influence on contemporary visual arts, charting its progress as it makes its way across geopolitical barriers and arrives at the crossroads of culture, memory, and technology of the present day. How then does Japanese pop culture reiterate and reinvent itself through the lens of a different time, background, and society? Furthermore, this volume of *Mutual Images* considers how “Japaneseness” translates itself through the lens of media consumers who were born and raised in other cultures. The articles in this volume all revolve around the transmutations of Japanese pop culture and its products as they move through time and across generations of audiences. They also challenge the notion of *mukokuseki*, according to which Japanese products typically lack distinguishing features, and that this cultural vagueness is what has allegedly made them appealing towards global audiences. On the contrary, the perceived and acknowledged Japaneseness of these products, in most cases—markedly in the case of manga, anime, and related forms of entertainment—actually enhances the experience of their consumers by serving as a gateway towards less stereotypical interpretations of Japanese culture.

The possibilities of further discussion on the influence of Japanese popular culture on creativity are very broad and potentially limitless. From the advent of Japanese anime and the introduction of multimedia products in the early 1970s to Europe, North America, and
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several parts of East and Southeast Asia, it has grown exponentially and today Millennials regard it as part of their everyday lives. Currently, the more obvious influences can be found in Hollywood’s big budget movies such as Pacific Rim by Guillermo del Toro and Isle of Dogs by Wes Anderson. As more audiences around the world become captivated by the many facets of Japanese popular culture, its influences on visual culture at large will steadily increase and may perhaps lead to a new kind of global aesthetics.

The first section of this issue, then, is devoted to Japan Pop Goes Global, a workshop whose main goal was that of looking at the impact of Japanese creative industries such as manga, anime, and gaming on tourism in Japan. The section hosts two papers variously related to Japan Pop Goes Global. Two more papers from this workshop will be published in the next issue, due to a variety of little delays which, summed, led us to the decision of splitting the publication of the workshop’s contributions in two consecutive issues of the journal.

The first article is by Erika Sumilang-Engracia: it delves into how characters from Japanese folk tales are woven into the famous Pokémon franchise. In spite of heavy allusions to traditional Japanese culture, these characters not only enhance audience’s enjoyment of the video game, but also serve as a conduit into which Japanese culture is transmitted, re-imagined, and revisited.

The second article addresses a key question in today’s Japan: can the allure of Japanese popular culture really make a difference in increasing the number of tourists in the country, and can it impact the way Japan is viewed by potential visitors? Natalie Close investigates the ‘Cool Japan’ campaign as it takes on the gargantuan task of increasing foreign tourism in the country despite its lack of focus on which aspects of Japanese culture to promote.

For further information on the original deployment of the symposium Japan Pop Goes Global, please refer to:

- https://www.mutualimages.org/japan-pop-goes-global
- https://www.aoyama.ac.jp/info/event/2017/02412/

Enjoy Mutual Images, Vol. 5.
Marco PELLITTERI, Main Editor
Herb L. FONDEVILLA, Guest Editor