Introduction

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This book is a compilation of nine essays written by my graduate students at the University of the Philippines from 2011 to 2012. These articles typify term papers submitted for the different courses I offered in three consecutive semesters: first and second semesters of academic year (AY) 2011–2012 and the first semester of AY 2012–2013. The courses I taught during the period included "Arts of Asia," "Special Problems in Northeast Asia: Northeast Asian Popular Culture," and "Seminar on Society and Culture of Japan." As I usually require students writing a term paper to cite three to five sources from the reading materials I used in each course, readers of this book may notice that some references have been repeatedly cited or referred to in different essays.

I believe imitation is essential to learning as manifested in the history of the East and the West. For one thing, the Japanese word *"manabu"* (学ぶ), which means "to learn," originated from the word *"manebu"* (真似ぶ), which means "to imitate" (Niimura [1955] 1997). Training in traditional performing arts, for instance, requires "perfect" imitation of one's master (Yoneno-Reyes 2001), just as sixteenth-century Italian painters of *Manierismo* acquired skills and techniques by imitating the works of Michelangelo, the great master of the Renaissance (Wakakuwa 1994). In graduate studies in social sciences and humanities, initial training of students, I believe, includes reading works of great writers, paraphrasing them, and quoting them verbatim as exercises in comprehension and proper citation. Although what Edward Said calls "system for citing works and authors" (1978, 23) has turned out to be problematic, we are still bound by academic principles. Ironically, it is through reading that we can nurture critical mind and the skill of argument. At the same time, data-gathering skill must be acquired through actual experiences—by trial and error. Traces of such training process may be observed in each essay in this book in one way or another. If readers find some gaps in the essays in this book, it is because the authors were still in the middle of such training, at least at the time of writing the initial drafts. In some essays in this book, theoretical ideas by great thinkers that are mentioned may not necessarily be developed fully or integrated into the data and argument. Or the empirical data may not seem sufficient in quantity or in quality. The scope of the researches, particularly with regard to data gathering, oftentimes had to be limited as most of these researches were conducted primarily as mere exercises for a term paper. The authors had extremely limited time for research since most

of them were working full-time while attending graduate classes. For this reason, I salute each of them for their perseverance and efforts.

Despite such limitations and some crudities, I am confident that these essays must be published for the following reasons.

First, in the Philippines, the impact of popular culture of East Asia (referring to the area corresponding to the lands and seas of China, Korea, and Japan at large through historical times up to the present), which partly became observable since around the 1980s, has escalated since the 2000s. This goes as well with the world trend. This phenomenon is worth monitoring as it may be one of the forces that have led to the decentralization of the popular culture industry, which has been dominated substantially by the United States (as epitomized by Hollywood films, Disney products, American music, etc.) since the twentieth century. The empirical knowledge and perspectives of the young Filipino scholars in this volume have a great potential of contributing to the discourse on diversification of popular culture in the twenty-first century in the midst of globalization.

Second, the increasing visibility of East Asian popular culture in the Philippines since the 2000s implies historical turn in Filipinos' consumption of foreign popular culture. As for TV dramas, Marian F. Gongora reminds us that Filipinos had embraced mainly American and Latin American TV dramas until the 1990s (chapter 7). But the great success in the country in 2003 of *Meteor Garden*, a Taiwanese drama based on a Japanese manga, and the massive entry of Korean dramas in the following years almost wiped out American and Spanish dramas from Philippine TV (pp. 106–7). It is important to point out that obviously the authors of this book belong to the generation who experienced the "F4 craze," the height of the popularity of the four handsome male characters of *Meteor Garden,* in their high school years. They must have witnessed, consciously or unconsciously, the historical turn in popular culture consumption in the Philippines. Thus, I was able to draw from them fresh and valuable insights into popular culture in contemporary Philippines.

Third, the global rise of East Asian popular culture coincided with the rapid development and spread of information technology (IT), which drastically changed people's mode of communication and socialization. It is observed that the mode of consumption of popular culture has been greatly influenced by advances in IT. We belong to a fortunate generation who has been able to witness the ongoing shift of the primary mode of circulation of popular culture from the print and electronic mass media of the twentieth century to the Internet of the

twenty-first century. The mass media in the twentieth century were generally characterized by one-way beaming and structured by the principle of "mass production/mass consumption" such as newspaper, magazine, movie, radio, television, CD/DVD, and so on. Today, circulation is done through files that can be uploaded, downloaded, edited, or shared by anyone. Fans form their own fan communities on the Internet by connecting with one another online, both globally and locally, with sentiment of intimacy, by "reading" and "writing" "spoken language" on the screen or by "chatting" through letters. The Philippines, a country considered "still developing," is never left behind in this technology. In fact, the Philippines placed eighth in the world in terms of highest number of online social network users (Pertierra 2010, 4). Facilitated by their command of the English language, Filipinos actively participate in the fandom of East Asian popular culture. I suggest that the relatively weak foundation of print and electronic media infrastructure has left more space to be filled. Into this gap, IT penetrated by skipping the stage of maturity of print and electronic media. Internet cafés have been mushrooming in big and small towns in the Philippines while the country has remained the "text capital" of the world with the salient popularity of short message services (SMS or "text" as fondly called in the Philippines) through cellular phones (Hirata, n.d.; Pertierra 2008). Gongora's data imply a generational shift: Filipino college students (as of 2011) tended to watch Korean dramas on the Internet first (p. 116), and television is no longer the only medium through which dramas can be seen. Relevantly, even the Japanese comic book manga is consumed by many young Filipinos today, including two of the authors in this book (Francesca Aguiluz and Rogerick F. Fernandez), through internet sites that also provide English translations.

Fourth, young Filipino scholars today are in a privileged position to research about East Asian popular culture as they are digital literate, if not digital native. Their digital literacy allows them to conduct fairly reliable research by "participant observation" in the world of fandom executed largely in the virtual community today. The empirical knowledge displayed in the essays in this book demonstrates that very well. Older generation of scholars, including myself, must admit their limitations on this matter.

The essays in this book collectively address two major themes: gender and fandom.

In my observation since 1999, gender is one of the concerns that has taken the interest of Filipino graduate students in Asian Studies. In consuming and appreciating products of East Asian popular culture, they tend to interpret and

problematize works (e.g., songs, dramas, films, manga, or games) in terms of gender. This is well manifested in this book. Six out of nine articles in the book deal with gender. The six essays are grouped into two: three on the male gender and three on female. Of the former, two are about male homosexuality as represented in manga (Rogerick F. Fernandez in chapter 4) and films (Mario Rico Micu Florendo in chapter 5) while one is about effeminated masculinity of Japanese male idols (Herlyn Gail Alegre in chapter 1). Of the latter, topics range from emotional distance in watching TV dramas (Gongora in chapter 7), *shōjo* (少女 girl) and violence in manga (Aguiluz in chapter 2) to *ryōsai kenbo* (良妻賢母 "good wife, wise mother") ideology (Giselle Jimenez in chapter 3). Today, social science theorists agree that feminist discourses since the 1960s have contributed greatly to the development of post-structuralist theories and discourses, for their capacity to bring in perspectives from "the other" (McGee and Warms 1996, 391). Meanwhile, feminist discourse made its own development today so as to accommodate issues of not only women but also men and, furthermore, those of homosexuals, transgenders, and their variations. In my opinion, it is gay and transgender studies that have provided cutting-edge perspectives advancing social theories today, as these studies fundamentally ask the problematique of "category" or, in other words, names, labels, and language (e.g., McLelland 2000; Valentine 2007). Unraveling a category can lead to a piercing critique of the foundations that make up contemporary society. Advancing such studies could even potentially invite collapse of existing and widespread values and myths in any aspects of society, if and when successfully done. In such a context, it is imperative that Filipino graduate students of Asian Studies aptly pay attention to gender issues. I am most proud to present their works to the public through this book.

At the same time, obviously, the authors themselves are active participants in the fandom, thus fandom itself became the subject of the study (Alegre in chapter 1, Myrtle Anne T. Zabala in chapter 6, Gongora in chapter 7, Dorcas Juliette Ramos in chapter 8, and John Rex de Guzman in chapter 9). The various activities of fans illustrated in these essays from "stalking" (Alegre) to pilgrimage (Zabala), language study (Gongora), and cosplay (Ramos) inform us the coexistence of conventional and new modes of fandom in the Philippines (as well as elsewhere). This is well summarized by the word "worship" that De Guzman scrutinizes in his essay. As Patrick D. Flores (2000) has insightfully analyzed, Filipino fandom carries unique features with religious and psychological nuances epitomized by the mixture of indigenous and Roman Catholic values and

practices. Thus it is reasonable that the authors in this book properly introduce such religious concepts as "worship" and "pilgrimage" in the discussion of fandom in the Philippine context. The strength of this book lies in the extent of the empirical knowledge it produces. While Alegre presents an ethnography of a concert of a male Japanese pop group in Taiwan, and Zabala meticulously utilizes the available documents in establishing the correlation between fandom and tourism. The last three chapters (chapters 7–9)–namely, those by Gongora, Ramos, and De Guzman, respectively–present results of original surveys on Filipino fandom. Obviously, sociocultural conditions pertaining to globalization and geocultural proximity to the East Asian region enable young Filipinos to research on these topics. Some young Filipinos today actively consume imported popular culture from neighboring Asian countries. As Ramos implies in her essay by referring to Pierre Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital, I bet that proactive consumption could be an opportunity for Filipinos to domesticate what was originally foreign. We are now reminded of excellent studies on Spanish colonial period (e.g., Ileto 1979; Rafael 1988; Irving 2010) that have illustrated that domestication of imported cultural elements has been an initial step toward "self-expression, subversion and protest" (Irving 2010, 195).

Lastly, the Internet connects fandom and gender. As much as fandom has been formed through the Internet today, studies inform us that the Internet has contributed to the development of gender awareness of many individuals today (Pertierra 2010). That was at the same time, I confess, one of the challenges the authors and I had to face in carrying out this project. The authors' digital literacy even challenges conventional research methods. As many authors conducted "fieldwork," interviews, and surveys in virtual communities to a large extent, the credibility of the data obtained unconventionally had to be examined carefully, particularly when deviating from the teachings of standard methodology textbooks. Similarly, some crucial information, such as ratings or sales figures and even "related literature," had to be sought online; including "official" documents from "official" fan forums, groups, or pages in social network sites due largely to the absence or inaccessibility of such materials in print. It looks as if the world were shifting and floating that even information production, if not knowledge production, is getting more and more dependent on virtual productions. If so, studies of popular culture, particularly that of emerging Asia and particularly by young scholars, could potentially advance social sciences and humanities through adjustment of methodology to cater to the social conditions of the twenty-first century.

Once again, we are fortunate to have been able to witness the historical turning point of human civilization from print to digital and the concomitant probable advancement in social theories and methodologies. Despite the flux of term papers, theses, and dissertations on Asian popular culture at the University of the Philippines, we have so far very few publications on the topic. I do not think it is too ambitious to hope that this book becomes a landmark.

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