



From Passion to Commercialization: Formation and Growth of Space Battleship Yamato Fandom as a Case Study

De la pasión a la comercialización: Formación y crecimiento del fandom de Space Battleship Yamato como caso de estudio

Yoshioka, Shiro

Newcastle University (NCL)

shiro.yoshioka@ncl.ac.uk



How to cite:

Yoshioka, S. (2026). From Passion to Commercialization: Formation and Growth of Space Battleship Yamato Fandom as a Case Study. *RAE-IC, Revista de la Asociación Española de Investigación de la Comunicación*, 13(26), raeic132601. <https://doi.org/10.24137/raeic.13.26.1>

Abstract:

This is a case study on Space Battleship Yamato (Uchū senkan Yamato) focusing on roles played by fans, producer and mainstream media in establishing its popularity as well as anime as a new genre. The aim of this article is to provide an example of establishment of a genre and roles played by fans, producers and mainstream media in the process of its formation and recognition. The paper examines the process of formation of the fandom to argue that fans played central role, both actively and also as a target of business, in formation of the fandom as well as a genre called *anime*, which, unlike commonly considered in and outside academia, is only a small part of animation

produced in Japan. By examining fan activities, relationship between fans and producers, commercialization of fans and fandoms and discourse on *Yamato* and its fans in mainstream media, the case study reveals that formation of a genre and its fandom, and more importantly, its growth and survival take place at intersection of the text, fan activity and their passion, the producers, commercialism, and critical discourse in media.

Keywords: fandom, anime, *Space Battleship Yamato*, *Animage*, commercialization, merchandise, fanzine, fan club, Yoshinobu Nishizaki, Hideo Ogatan

Resumen:

Este artículo presenta un estudio de caso sobre Space Battleship Yamato (Uchū senkan Yamato) centrado en los roles desempeñados por los fans, el productor y los principales medios de comunicación en el establecimiento de su popularidad, así como del anime como un nuevo género. El objetivo es proporcionar un ejemplo de la consolidación de un género y de los papeles que jugaron los fans, los productores y los principales medios de comunicación en el proceso de su formación y reconocimiento. El documento examina el proceso de formación del fandom para argumentar que los fans desempeñaron un papel central, tanto de manera activa como siendo un objetivo comercial, en la formación del fandom, así como del género llamado anime; el cual, a diferencia de lo que se considera comúnmente dentro y fuera del ámbito académico, es solo una pequeña parte de la animación producida en Japón. Al examinar las actividades de los fans, la relación entre estos y los productores, la comercialización de los fans y los fandoms, y el discurso sobre Yamato y sus seguidores en los principales medios de comunicación, el estudio de caso revela que la formación de un género y su fandom y, lo que es más importante, su crecimiento y supervivencia, tienen lugar en la intersección del texto, la actividad de los fans y su pasión, los productores, la comercialización y el discurso crítico en los medios.

Palabras clave: fandom, anime, *Space Battleship Yamato*, *Animage*, comercialización, merchandise, fanzine, fan club, Yoshinobu Nishizaki, Hideo Ogata

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. THE MAIN POINTS

This is a case study on *Space Battleship Yamato* (*Uchū senkan Yamato*) focusing on roles played by fans, producer and mainstream media in establishing its popularity as well as anime as a new genre. The aim of this article is to provide an example of establishment of a genre and roles played by fans, producers and mainstream media in the process of formation and recognition of the genre.

What is commonly called anime in English refers to commercial animation mostly for TV, targeting teenagers and above, and produced within an intricate network of cross-media adaptations, but it is a genre that occupies only a small part of Japanese animation actually produced, as Jonathan Clement's extensive chronicle of Japanese animation clearly shows.(Clements, 2023) When I say that anime is a genre, I do so in the sense Rayna Denison does, namely, it is a discursive construction rather than a group of specific texts that share certain characteristics.(Denison, 2015, pp. 20–22) The point of the case study below is to show that *Yamato* was a pivotal point in construction of anime as a genre separate from the rest of Japanese animation, and fans, both actively and passively, played significant role in the process together with producer of the show and mainstream media. It also demonstrates that change in the nature of fans and fandom, namely their commercialization, was crucial for establishment and further growth of the genre and fandom.

1.2. ABOUT THE FRANCHISE

Space Battleship Yamato (*Uchū senkan Yamato*, hereafter *Yamato*) was broadcast in Japan between October 1974 and March 1975. As the title suggests, at the centre of action is a space battleship called Yamato. Wartime Japanese battleship of the same name sank shortly before Japan's defeat in the Second World War on its way to the final, kamikaze mission. In the anime the ship is resurrected as a space battleship to carry out a mission to save the earth from attack by aliens, who are clearly modelled on Nazi Germany. Viewing rate of the show remained low and it was cut short. However, popularity of the show caught up after the end of the original broadcast, and an abridged

version was released as a feature in 1977, to be followed by a sequel a year later. The focus of the case study is up to this point, detailing roles played by fans. After that, the franchise survives to this day with more sequels and remakes including a live-action feature alongside cross-media adaptations such as manga and videogame.

1.3. WHY *YAMATO*?

In English scholarship, *Yamato* is often discussed in the context of nationalism in postwar Japan or Japan's war memory.(Ashbaugh, 2010; Takekawa, 2013; K. Yoshida, 2015) However, its historical significance in establishing a new genre that is now called anime tends to be overlooked. For that matter, history of Japanese animation and its fandom is under-researched with the focus often limited to so-called otaku culture after the turn of the century, and so is production and consumption of anime as commercial activities, especially the history of the industry.(Azuma, 2009; Galbraith, 2019; Itō et al., 2012; Kam et al., 2017) Examining popularity of *Yamato* allows us to reflect on these issues and gain a historical perspective on anime and its fandom from different angles instead of content of anime as text or sociological/cultural studies approach to fan practice. The case study will also remind us that anime, which now is touted as spearhead of Japanese cultural export, was a minor subculture, and its legitimacy was slowly built up as it gained more visibility in mainstream media, not necessarily positively, especially up until the 1990s.

2. FORMATION AND GROWTH OF FANDOM

Yamato was a gamechanger in the history of postwar Japanese animation because its target audience was not children but teenagers and above. Before *Yamato*, animation, both for cinema and TV, was predominantly for children, and called cartoon films or cartoon on TV. A fan states that although he was already fascinated by TV animation before *Yamato*, he still had negative view on TV animation or cartoon on TV as he valued live-action sci-fi film and TV shows more highly. (Nakatani & Kushino, 1982, p. 32) However, *Yamato*, as another fan recalls, was a "totally new experience. "(Arai, 2010, p. 30) It had intricate and detailed setting, elaborate and persuasive depiction of operation of war machine and battle, dark and tragic atmosphere, and realistic visual aesthetics.

(Nakatani & Kushino, 1982, p. 47) Hideaki Anno, who later started to create anime himself, reminisces that he “had never seen any cartoon on TV that is for adults” before *Yamato*. Unlike other cartoon on TV, the show exclusively featured adult and young men as main characters, and he “was not embarrassed to recommend it to my mates.” (Anno, 2025, pp. 7–8) For female fans, good-looking young male characters including the enemy alien (they look exactly the same as earthlings except for their blue skin color) were also attractive. (Nakatani & Kushino, 1982, p. 47)

As the recollection of the first fan indicates, animation fans already existed before *Yamato*. The early fans were often those interested in producing animation for themselves, but starting in the early 1970s, that is shortly before debut of *Yamato*, young female fans attracted to characters and their voice actors appeared. (Hirose, 1977, pp. 30, 32) Fans of general popular culture such as live-action sci-fi or Western TV drama also liked animation. (Nakatani & Kushino, 1982, pp. 46–47; Ōtsuka, 2016, pp. 168–169). The recollections above suggest that *Yamato* could be particularly attractive to these fans. Yet, as they emphasise, *Yamato* was nothing like conventional TV animation in that it squarely dealt with hardcore sci-fi setting or characters and was specifically appealing to older audiences.

Still, the viewing rate of the show struggled as its inauguration coincided with the climatic arc of another extremely popular TV animation, *Heidi the Girl of Alpes* by Isao Takahata and Hayao Miyazaki (this was the time before VCR, which is very significant for our discussion, as detailed below). (Makimura & Yamada, 2015, p. 113) *Yamato* was cut short from 39 episodes to 26. The fans were disappointed and angered by the decision. Their anger and passion for the show was such that some of them strived to found fan clubs so that they could express their feelings and keep record of the show by producing fanzines. (Makimura & Yamada, 2015, p. 115; Nakatani & Kushino, 1982, p. 42) These fanzines featured interviews with voice actors, glossaries and commentaries based on production materials they obtained by frequenting the production studio, and even copy of production materials such as story boards or screenplay. (Nakatani & Kushino, 1982, pp. 52–53) In this period, the relationship between fans and creators was very close, although not in the same way as on social media today. It was not unusual for fans

to frequent studios to observe the production process and gain access to the latest information and production materials.

These fan clubs played pivotal role in the fandom because at this point, if the fans want to learn about the show beyond what they can see on the screen or keep record of the show, the only way to do so was to take the matter in their own hands because there was no commercial media that do the job for them or social media where they can have direct access to the creators' words. Even watching the show again was not possible unless it was repeated because home VCR was first released in Japan only in 1975, the very year the show ended.(Japan Institute of Invention and Innovation, n.d.) As such, information and materials on TV programmes as well as the show itself were ephemerals that would simply disappear once the broadcast ended unless the fans themselves collect and make record of them. As such, the fanzines served as media as well as archive for fandom. The clubs also worked as hubs for fans who were otherwise isolated from each other, often on their own, because despite growing popularity of animation among older audiences, there still was a strong view in Japan that TV animation was for children, to the degree that a teenager watching such a programme can be called a weirdo.(Nakatani & Kushino, 1982, p. 46) More specifically on *Yamato*, fans often struggled to find like-minded person because as soon as they mention the word "Yamato," young people often responded scornfully saying "oh, it's one of those cartoons" and older ones thought they were talking about the wartime Japanese naval battleship.(Nakatani, 1982, pp. 91–92) Once the show, in reaction to petition by fans, was repeated and its popularity started to surge, the number of clubs and their member skyrocketed, reaching more than forty and 50,000 respectively in two years.(Makimura & Yamada, 2015, p. 113; "'Senkan Yamato' Ni Yangu Kanetsu (Youngsters Crazyed by "Battleship Yamato")', 1977)

3.MOBILIZATION AND COMMERCIALIZATION OF FANS

Growing popularity of *Yamato* led to commercialization of fandom as well as animation for older audience. This started with the first film of *Yamato*, which in essence was edited and abridged version of the TV series. Originally it was planned as an attempt to sell the series in the US as a tele-feature or a stand-alone TV drama shown in a slot for

film. Fans learned the news through the fan clubs and requested Yoshinobu Nishizaki, the producer of the series that it be released in Japan. (Makimura & Yamada, 2015, p. 116; Nakatani, 1982, pp. 90, 92)

Once the film was set to release, Nishizaki started to involve fans in its promotion. The first step he took was to post an advertisement in a newspaper announcing establishment of an office for fans and fan clubs of *Yamato*. The advertisement asked them to get in touch to report on their current activities, adding that those who did respond would receive production materials such as *seru* or transparent celluloid sheet used in the final phase of production. The advertisement was sent from one club to another, reaching all corners of the country. (Makimura & Yamada, 2015, p. 126) Nishizaki also approached members of prominent fan clubs in person. He even called their home, asking for appointments at his office. At the meeting, he met representatives of major fan clubs one by one, telling them about his plan for promotion of the film and asking for candid opinions. (Makimura & Yamada, 2015, p. 127) Other fans also visited his office *en masse*, and Nishizaki treated them to tea and cake at tearoom in a nearby hotel. (Makimura & Yamada, 2015, p. 128) After the promotional campaign started in earnest, fans were mobilized to promote the film. They received two posters and asked to place one of them somewhere that attracts attention. They could keep the other poster to themselves. They were also asked to write to magazines for young people and radio stations requesting a feature article on the film or play the theme song of the TV series. To maximise the effectiveness, they were given instructions on which magazines and programmes they should aim at. In exchange, they, besides the posters, received production materials including *seru* after the film was released. (Makimura & Yamada, 2015, pp. 128–129; Nakatani, 1982, p. 100) Fans cooperated, both for the materials and their passion and love of the show, and also because they did not want *Yamato* to be “shamed” for commercial failure. (Nakatani, 1982, pp. 96-101) The film turned out to be a phenomenal success, breaking record for revenue and number of audiences at six cinemas where it was initially released. (Makimura & Yamada, 2015, p. 132) The promotional campaign for the *Yamato* film is an example of highly successful cooperation between producer and fans in gaining recognition of a niche product/genre and achieving significant commercial success. In essence, Nishizaki

made use of fans' love and passion for the show and desire to propagate it for commercial purposes. Success of the campaign can be a product of the circumstances where fans had no choice but to rely on themselves to gather extra materials and information on the show due to absence of media for them. Originally fans obtained them from the studio for free and shared them through the clubs, but with the campaign, the fans were integrated into a commercial mechanism where they are allowed access to exclusive information and materials in exchange for their labour. However, we need to note that the fans cooperated because they – at least those who met Nishizaki in person – believed that he was not simply trying to make money out of *Yamato* but he was genuinely passionate about it just like the fans. (Nakatani, 1982, pp. 95–96) As such, the relationship between them was not one-sided but more of comradeship.

Involvement in promotional campaign, however, was only a part of major and rapid commercialization of fans' activity as well as anime as a genre. Unlike conventional TV animation for children, the main target audience of *Yamato* were older, and they afforded merchandise far more expensive than dishes, stationaries or sweets, which were common. (Sadakane, 2021, p. 460) Many merchandises targeting them such as record, scale model, and even watch were produced, especially after success of the film. The watch came with price tag of 15,000 yen, that is roughly 100 dollars now. (Sadakane, 2021, p. 460) Even more expensive item was produced by Office Academy, the company produced the series and headed by Nishizaki: a set of three books with a range of production materials and even a list of merchandises and fan clubs of the series. It cost twice as much as the watch, and minors required their parents' permission to order. (Makimura & Yamada, 2015, p. 133) With *Yamato*, buying and collecting these merchandises besides watching the show on TV became an essential part of fan activities, and this included paying to access different versions such as film, manga or novel. From the perspective of promotion of film, this means that in addition to motivating fans to cooperate with the campaign as seen above, merchandise can be used as an incentive to bring fans to cinema by selling advance tickets with merchandise or giving one to them at cinema, which was exactly what happened with *Yamato*. 30,000 advance tickets with posters were sold in a month, and fans started to queue at cinemas

as early as two days before opening because *seru* were given to audiences while the stock lasted, and record with the film's soundtrack was given to early bird audiences. (Makimura & Yamada, 2015, pp. 129, 131) Fans often saw the film repeatedly, even immediately after seeing once to get more *seru*. (Makimura & Yamada, 2015, p. 131) Now the film or anime itself is no longer a piece of work to be appreciated but a part of a collection of merchandise including posters and *seru*.

Even more significantly, popularity of merchandise also meant that they came to have commercial value, and fans' activities were more firmly formed as commercial ones. As the fandom grew and so did popularity of merchandise, especially *seru*, which used to be thrown away once they were used in the final stage of production or given to fans who visited production studio for free. After success of the first *Yamato* film, they came to have commercial value and started to be sold at pop-up shops in department stores as well as among fans. While the shops usually sold them for 200-to-500-yen, rare *seru* fetched 5,000 to 15,000 yen when sold among fans. Popularity of merchandise and materials also led to opening of specialist shops selling production materials such as *seru*, storyboards and screenplay. ('Seruga Atsume Ijō Na Būmu (Craze over Collection of Celluloid Sheets)', 1978) As seen above, these used to be collected and shared by fans who visited the studio through fan clubs and fanzines, but now they were sold as business, rendering fan activity into commercial one.

It is also important that there now was a market in the fandom where fans assess value of materials. This is not possible without shared knowledge and understanding of the genre, a common background to agree on what is regarded as rare or valuable, which, in turn, requires media that provides information on the genre. At around the time of the *Yamato* TV series, animation was a niche hobby that is often associated with live-action sci-fi film and TV drama, and *Out*, the first magazine that carried a feature article on *Yamato* in 1977, was not dedicated to animation but subculture in general, especially sci-fi. Apart from the 60-page feature article on the anime, the 177-page issue had no article on animation. ('Mokuji (Table of Contents)', 1977) In 1975, when the TV series ended, *Fantoché*, a magazine specializing in animation was published, but its focus was not contemporary Japanese TV animation series but animation in general. The inaugural

issue had articles on topics ranging from a report on Annecy Animation Festival in France to puppet animation but only one page (out of 44) was dedicated to contemporary Japanese TV animation. The hand-written article simply introduced a few new TV series starting in the season, and the page was mostly filled with hand-drawn illustrations of characters. ('TV ANIMATION', 1975, p. 20) However, popularity of *Yamato* led to inauguration of *Animage*, the first magazine specializing in contemporary Japanese TV animation. The appearance and content of the magazine was completely different from the other two. It had far more color pages with still images from TV animation and films and focused on the latest and recent Japanese TV animation rather than animation in general or live-action sci-fi. Voice actors, who hardly attracted any attention in the other magazines, were strongly featured. These differences were due to editorial policy of the magazine that targets teenagers and sells itself as a fashionable magazine with an informal atmosphere. (Ogata, 2004, p. 60) The policy, in turn, derived from Hideo Ogata, its chief editor's experience and observation. Ogata, originally was the chief editor of a magazine for children, knew about *Yamato* because Nishizaki visited him when the TV series started, asking Ogata to carry an article on it. While the article never appeared, Ogata later learned that the series was gaining extreme popularity among teenagers rather than schoolchildren, and they were petitioning for production of a film version. As the magazine he was editing was struggling to expand readership beyond children, he created a special issue on *Yamato*. It was released ten days after the film, selling 100,000 copies in ten days, followed by as many in the next ten days, and eventually a total of more than 400,000 in a year. (Ogata, 2004, pp. 40–47) The success persuaded Ogata that there was a significant market for contemporary animation and so is for magazines on it, and to start a new magazine. (Ogata, 2004, pp. 50, 55) By approaching teenage fans, the editorial board members realized that they were interested in characters, especially the heroes and heroines, treating them like stars. (Ōtsuka, 2016, pp. 139–143) As mentioned earlier, this type of fans already existed before *Yamato*, but unlike sci-fi fans who were also into animation, they had no media targeting them, and *Fantoché* focused very squarely on animation per se rather than characters in contemporary Japanese TV animation series and overall tone of the articles tended to be scholarly without any color images. Ogata realized that it was this type of fan that

was fueling popularity of *Yamato* and created a magazine specifically for them. The magazine turned out to be an immediate success with the first issue featuring *Yamato* selling 95.6 percent of 70,000 copies. (Ogata, 2004, pp. 59, 65) Together with popularity of merchandise, the launch and success of *Animage* indicates that anime fandom is no longer a field relying on self-help and personal connections, namely fans visiting studio to make connections with the creators and information as well as materials being disseminated through fan clubs and fanzines. Instead, fans buy and consume information and materials that are professionally prepared and processed. Existence of media for fans is crucial also because it gives shape to fandom. This can happen in different ways. One is, as Ian Clements asserts, by giving anime and its fandom “a sense of itself as a culture, a body of work with its own media discourse and its own developing sense of history.” (Clements, 2023, p. 225) Despite its editorial policy, early *Animage* had a pedagogic aspect. While the focus was mainly on contemporary Japanese TV animation, the magazine also carried articles on classical Japanese and occasionally non-Japanese animated features as well as animation technique in general, which were common in *Fantoché* but not as accessibly written as in *Animage*. The juxtaposition of “fashionable” and pedagogical aspects in *Animage* can be a reflection of different views on anime fans who were the main target readers. Conservative fans often had negative view on them due to their love of characters and apparent lack of understanding and interest in animation per se and criticized them for fad-following. (Yoshioka, 2026) In the editorial board of *Animage* were different opinions on the direction of the magazine as to whether it should be popular and accessible or more specialist and even pedantic. (Ōtsuka, 2016, pp. 260–262) The pedagogic articles in early *Animage* represents the latter and also can be an attempt to enlighten novice fans condemned for fad-following by providing them with broader knowledge of animation beyond what they love. It also was a suggestion on what the readers should know if they claim themselves to be anime fans. At the same time, once such a discourse is internalized by fans, they can share a common understanding of the genre by agreeing on what constitutes significant classical works or important creators. The same can be said about contemporary TV series. As Sarath Thornton argues, in subcultural fandom, knowledge on the latest development in the field, or what is “in,” constitutes “subcultural capital”

that gives the owner privilege over others who do not have such knowledge. The capital can be also reified as fashionable items or appearance. (Thornton, 1995, p. 11) Media on subculture plays pivotal role in disseminating such knowledge, which, in turn, can be used to maintain distinction of the fandom as well as policing its border to draw a line between fans and non-fans, as Nathan Hant's study on Sci-fi magazine shows. (Hant, 2003) The market for *seru* can exist and thrive based on shared understanding that some works have more value than others and possessing rare items on them leads to greater subcultural capital, and that applies to other materials and also commercial merchandise. That, in turn, enables anime to be firmly nested on an intricate commercial mechanism that expands beyond the TV show itself.

The magazine also helped fans to forge a sense of community. The readers' letters section of the magazine served as an arena where fans discuss the issue of fad-following amongst themselves as well as a place to look for like-minded friends by posting calls for pen pals or seek possibilities of obtaining materials and later recording of shows through classified ads. Fan clubs themselves could also post calls for members. ('Retā Rūmu', 1978)

In short, the magazine was presenting an idea on what anime is and what constitutes its fan. It also gave voice and shape to fans, especially new ones who loved characters. Here, anime is no longer synonymous with animation in general but specifically means the type of animation like *Yamato*, namely TV series for teenagers or older audiences, a distinction that survived to this day.

4. YAMATO AND MAINSTREAM MEDIA

Popularity of *Yamato* among young adults rather than children, its content and merchandise also influenced mainstream media's approach to TV animation. Before *Yamato*, articles on TV animation in mainstream media were rare, and often on any new trend as a part of overview of new TV shows in each season or debate over negative influence on children. ('Kawaru Terebi Manga (Changing Cartton on TV)', 1971; 'Terebi Anime No Ikiru Michi (The Way to Live for TV Anime)', 1975; Saitō, 1970) The assumption behind these articles was that TV animation is for children. However, starting with *Yamato*, the focus began to shift to popularity or even craze over anime and its

merchandise and its possible reasons. Besides reporting the popularity, these articles saw anime as a possible clue to understand young adults' culture and in turn contemporary Japanese society. This was particularly the case after the second *Yamato* film released in August 1978, by when popularity of anime and its merchandise was gaining attention. The ending of the film in which the protagonist, after death of his fiancée, asks the rest of the crew to leave the ship and conducts a kamikaze attack and reaction of teenage audiences to the scene was a popular topic of mainstream media coverage for different reasons. The image of kamikaze as well as the overall tone and setting of the franchise that is clearly associated with wartime Japan was met with concern over glorification of wartime Japan or excessive nationalism. In a review in *Yomiuri Shimbun* newspaper, the reviewer noted that the way the film praises "cosmic love" and self-sacrifice for such a cause claiming eternity of life beyond existence of physical body reminded him of a wartime slogan that, in his view, had exactly the same mindset behind it, and as a former militarist boy, he felt as if he had stepped back in time to the days of the Great East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere. ('Seimitsu Na Sakuga, Miseba Mo Tasai (Elaborate Animation with an Extensive Range of Highlights)', 1978) Reviews in film magazines also heavily condemned that the film was filled with death and destruction, and expressed fear for showing such a film that praises war to young children (we should note that the reviewers seem to believe that animation is for children, and as such, the film is also seen by them, which, as we already know, is not the case). (Seya, 1978, p. 97) In a letter to a newspaper, a 39-year old woman wrote that while she enjoyed the adventure, dream, the sense of justice and good-looking characters in the film and was touched by the ending, it also reminded her of kamikaze attack during the war and made her wonder what feeling of the young people who conducted the attack during the war was like. (M. Yoshida, 1978, p. 218) Mitsuru Yoshida, a survivor of the final voyage of the wartime battleship *Yamato*, also mentioned the prospect that popularity or even craze over the film could be a representation of excessive nationalism among young people before dismissing depiction of war in the film as "mere a sci-fi farce" rather than "ugly and harrowing 'war' that humans tirelessly repeated in their history." (M. Yoshida, 1978, p. 218) The focus in mainstream media, however, was not just on the political aspect, which, as Jacqueline Berndt points out, was

largely missing among anime fans. (Berndt, 2018, p. 3) Instead, articles often attempted to look for explanation of the extreme popularity, noting feverish behaviour of fans who sobbed and cried at the climatic scenes towards the end and even tried to throw a bunch of flowers at the screen just like in concerts of pop stars. (Shiraishi, 1978) While the association with war and concern over nationalism was mentioned, that was not the main point of these articles. They either associate it with contemporary social situation surrounding young people such as the “exam war” or fierce competition for a place at top universities (Shiraishi, 1978), educational system in which children were continuously assessed for their excellence only in certain areas such as studies or sports (Takayama, 1978, p. 100), or change in the way young people communicate as they started to have their own room. (Takayama, 1978, pp. 100–101) This type of discourse that sees popularity of anime and its fans as representation of contemporary social situations became a recurring theme in mainstream media, repeated in coverage of *Mobile Suit Gundam* (1979-82) (‘Haruyasumi Anime Kessen (Decisive Battle of Anime for the Spring School Holidays)’, 1981; Nishizawa, 1982), *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995-6) (‘Nazo No Monogatari Ninki No Nazo (Mysterious Popularity of a Mysterious Story)’, 1997; Ōtsuki, 1996), and *Princess Mononoke* (1997) (Shiraki, 2015). In short, the shift of audience from children to teenagers and above and also change in the content as appropriate for them changed the way animation is treated in mainstream media. At the same time, visibility of fans and popularity of a given franchise, even if it is partially staged in the case of *Yamato*, is crucial for these coverages because without that, discourse on animation in mainstream media may well have continued to be marginal stories on TV programmes or films for children. As seen above, the type of fans who propelled the boom of *Yamato* – those interested in characters – existed before *Yamato*, but they did not have enough mass to make them visible to the wider society and attract media attention. *Yamato* was a tipping point where that changed.

5. CONCLUSION

This short case study on *Space Battleship Yamato* demonstrated that fans played important role both as active agents and targets of business in formation of anime as a genre; They coalesced to make their voice heard by the TV station, gather, archive and

exchange information and materials on *Yamato*, forming a new fandom. They also cooperated with producers to promote the franchise they love or provide information for a new magazine. In addition, they influenced view of animation in Japan. Their visibility together with the content of the anime that was significantly different from what was commonly expected about TV animation in Japan changed how mainstream media deal with animation. Their passion, on the other hand, was used, if not abused, for commercial profits. Yet, that was both indication of and catalyst for further growth of anime as a new genre separate from other types of animation. Fans and media for them discursively constructed the genre while commercialization of the genre, which was supported by the increase of fans as well as shift of target audience from children to older young people, established it as a commercially viable field of business.

What we can see from the case study is that formation of a genre and its fandom, and more importantly, its growth and survival take place at intersection of the text, fans' activity and passion, the producers, commercialism, and critical discourse in media. This applies not only to *Yamato* specifically but development up to the early 1980 including Hayao Miyazaki's *Nausiaä of the Valley of the Wind*, explosive growth of interest in anime in the mid-1990s triggered by *Egangelion* and *Mononoke*, and so-called otaku culture in the 2000s. However, all of these as well as history of anime fandom are yet to be systematically explored in academic vein, especially in the West. Although almost fifty-years old, the story of *Yamato* – not what happens in the anime but outside the screen – still deserves attention.

6. FUNDING

This paper is not supported by any external funding.

7. CONTRIBUTION

	Author 1
Conceptualization	X
Data curation	X
Formal analysis	X
Investigation	X
Methodology	X

Supervision	X
Validation	X
Visualization	X
Writing - Draft	X
Writing – Review & editing	X

8. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declare that there is no conflict of interest.

9. USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The autor declare that no artificial intelligence was used in the preparation of this article.

10. REFERENCES

Anno, H. (2025, July). “Yamato ga nakattara ima no nihon no amimēshon wa nai to omoun desu” (Had there not been for Yamato, I don’t think Japanese animation as it is now wouldn’t exist). *Neppū*, 6–22.

Arai, H. (2010). *Uchūsenkan Yamato to 70 nendai nippon (Space Battleship Yamato and Japan in the 1970s)*. Shakai hyōron sha.

Ashbaugh, W. (2010). Contesting Traumatic War Narratives: Space Battleship Yamato And Mobile Suit Gundam. In D. Stahl & M. Williams (Eds), *Imag(in)ing the war in Japan: Representing and responding to trauma in postwar literature and film* (pp. 327–353). Brill.

Azuma, H. (2009). *Otaku Japan’s database animals*. University of Minnesota Press.

Berndt, J. (2018). Anime in Academia: Representative Object, Media Form, and Japanese Studies. *Arts*, 7(56), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts7040056>

Clements, J. (2023). *Anime a History*. Bloombury.

Denison, R. (2015). *Anime: A Critical Introduction*. Bloombury.

Galbraith, P. (2019). *Otaku and the Struggle for Imagination in Japan*. Duke University Press.

Hant, N. (2003). The Importance of Trivia: Ownership, Exclusion and Authority in Science Fiction Fandom. In M. Jancovich, A. L. Reboll, J. Stringer, & A. Wills (Eds), *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste* (pp. 185–201). Manchester University Press.

Haruyasumi anime kessen (Decisive Battle of Anime for the Spring School Holidays). (1981, March 14). *Yomiuri Shimbun*, (Morning), 23.

Hirose, K. (1977, December). Fushigi na anime (Strange anime). *Gekkan Manga Shōnen Rinji Zōkan TV Anime No Sekai (Monthly Manga Boy Special Extra Issue: The World of TV Anime)*, 28–42.

Itō, M., Okabe, D., & Tsuji, I. (Eds). (2012). *Fandom unbound: Otaku culture in a connected world*. Yale University Press.

Japan Institute of Invention and Innovation. (n.d.). *Sengo nihon no inobēshon 100 sen ante seichōki kateiyō bideo (kasetto) (100 innovations in postwar Japan in the steady growth period: Home VCR)*. Retrieved 30 March 2026, from https://koueki.jiii.or.jp/innovation100/innovation_detail.php?eid=00056&age=stable-growth&page=keii

Kam, T. H., Kamm, B.-O., & Galbraith, P. (Eds). (2017). *Debating otaku in contemporary Japan: Historical perspectives and new horizons*. Bloomsbury.

Kawaru terebi manga (Changing Cartoon on TV). (1971, October 21). *Mainichi Shimbun*, (Evening), 7.

Makimura, Y., & Yamada, T. (2015). *Uchū senkan Yamato o tsukutta otoko Nishizaki Yoshinobu no kyōki (The Man who Created Space Battleship Yamato: Nishizaki Yoshinobu, a Madman)*. Kōdansha.

Mokuji (Table of Contents). (1977, June). *OUT*, 1(2), Unpaginated.

Nakatani, T. (1982). Yamato fībā, yomigaeru Uchū senkan Yamato (The Yamato Fever: Space Battleship Yamato Returns). In N. Ikeda (Ed.), *Anime daisuki! : Yamato kara Gandamu e (We Love Anime! : From Yamato to Gundam)* (pp. 87–120). Tokuma shoten.

Nakatani, T., & Kushino, A. (1982). Uchū senkan Yamato hasshin su! (Space Battleship Yamato Lifts Off!). In N. Ikeda (Ed.), *Anime daisuki! : Yamato kara Gandamu e (We Love Anime! : From Yamato to Gundam)* (pp. 23–56). Tokuma shoten.

Nazo no monogatari ninki no nazo (Mysterious Popularity of a Mysterious Story). (1997, August 16). *Asahi Shimbun*, (Morning), 18.

Nishizawa, M. (1982, April 11). Ima, naze anime ka (Why so much fuss about anime now?). *Yomiuri Shimbun*, (Morning), 9.

Ogata, H. (2004). *Ano hata o ute: Animēju keppūroku (Shoot that Flag!: A Record on my Bloody Battle at Animage)*. Ōkura Shuppan.

Ōtsuka, E. (2016). *2kai no jūnin to sono jidai: Tenkanki no sabukaruchā shishi (The residents of the second floor and the time they lived in: A personal account of history of subculture at its turning point)*. Sekiaisha.

Ōtsuki, T. (1996, November 29). Kotoba ni sarenu “riaru”: ‘Shinseiki evangerion’ no shinshō fūkei (‘Reality’ Turned into Words: Mental Landscape of Neon Genesis Evangelion). *Mainichi Shimbun*, (Evening), 8.

Retā rūmu. (1978, October). *Animage*, 105–109.

Sadakane, H. (2021). *Sabukaruchā o shōhi suru: 20seiki nihon ni okeru manga anime no rekishishakaigaku (Consuming Subculture: A Historical Sociology on Anime and Manga in the 20th Century Japan)*. Tamagawa daigaku shuppanbu.

Saitō, J. (1970, September 24). Terebi manga no yukue (Where Cartoon on TV Heading to). *Mainichi Shimbun*, (Evening), 5.

Seimitsu na sakuga, miseba mo tasai (Elaborate animation with an extensive range of highlights). (1978, August 7). *Yomiuri Shimbun*, (Evening), 7.

‘Senkan Yamato’ ni yangu kanetsu (Youngsters crazed by ‘battleship Yamato’). (1977, July 18). *Yomiuri Shimbun*, (Evening), 4.

Seruga atsume ijō na būmu (Craze over collection of celluloid sheets). (1978, July 23). *Mainichi Shimbun*, 13.

Seya, H. (1978, October 27). Uchū senkan Yamato ni naita kodomo tachi (The Children who Cried Watching Space Battleship Yamato). *Asahi Jānaru*, 96–100.

Shiraishi, H. (1978, September 5). Naze ukeru Uchū senkan Yamato (Why is Space Battleship Yamato popular?). *Mainichi Shimbun*, (Morning), 5.

Shiraki, M. (2015). Kyokō no jidai ni michisuji shimesu (Showing a Path in an Age of Fictions). In Studio Ghibli (Ed.), *Jiburi no kyōkasho 10: Mononokehime (Textbook on Ghibli 10: Princess Mononoke)* (pp. 176–179).

Takayama, H. (1978, October 27). 10 dai bunka to shite no <Yamato genshō> o saguru (Exploring the ‘Yamato phenomenon’ as a teenage culture). *Asahi Jānaru*, 100–102.

Takekawa, S. (2013). Fusing nationalisms in postwar Japan: The battleship Yamato and popular culture. *Electronic Journal of Contemporary Japanese Studie*, 12(3).

<https://www.japanesestudies.org.uk/ejcs/vol12/iss3/takekawa.html>

Terebi anime no ikiru michi (The Way to Live for TV Anime). (1975, April 28). *Asahi Shimbun*, (Morning), 5.

Thornton, S. (1995). *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*. Polity.

TV ANIMATION. (1975). *Faotoche*, 1.

Yoshida, K. (2015). (In)visible women: Gendering of popular war memories through the narrative of the battleship Yamato for six decades in postwar Japan. In M. Kim (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Memory and Reconciliation in East Asia* (pp. 95–108). Routledge.

Yoshida, M. (1978, November). Uchū senkan Yamato no sedai (The Space Battleship Yamato generation). *Bungei Shunjū*, 214–219.

Yoshioka, S. (2026). Miyazaki Anime” vs. “Miyazaki manga eiga:” Discourse on Miyazaki Hayao and His Works in Anime Magazines, 1978–82. *Mechademia Second Arc*, 18(2).