

## Expression of Love on Yaoi Content in Tokyo and Surabaya Comic Events

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Globalization of anime and manga has introduced and popularized the Yaoi genre to the global audience. This paper looks at the fan activities and appropriation of Yaoi content in Tokyo and Surabaya comic events. It analyzes the way fans in each country form their own interpretation of fan practices to express their love in the Yaoi genre. According to Koichi Iwabuchi (2002: 40), despite global distribution of one culture to different cultures around the world, this does not indicate the creation of global hegemony, but instead the “creation of a new style”. The attraction to the Yaoi genre as an aesthetic and the purpose of comic events in Tokyo and Surabaya are similar. Comic events in both countries are organized to be a space for self-expression, and the Yaoi genre is a male-male homoerotic content based on Japanese anime, manga and games narratives. Due to the fan practices in Japan comic events and the way anime and manga was introduced to Indonesian consumers, fans in Tokyo and Surabaya use the space in comic events with different purpose and methods.

In comparison, comic events with Yaoi content in Tokyo are more frequent than Surabaya, or even Indonesia as a whole. In Tokyo alone, Comic Market, the biggest comic event in the world, conduct its event twice a year, attracting half million attendants in every event. Then there are medium size comic events by Akaboo that take place up to 10 times a year. Finally, an event organizer company, Studio You organized up to 30 smaller events or more within a year in Tokyo. The comic event by Studio You could provide the space for 600 circles (group of artists or an artist) in different convention halls around Tokyo. In the case of size, comic event in Surabaya known as Anime Culture convention, attracts much less than Tokyo comic event, and only conduct its event once a year. However, Surabaya comic event provide flexibility for fans to express themselves. Within each event, the spaces for artists, exhibitors and cosplays are divided with equal consideration and spaces. Each event also provides additional smaller events, such as inviting special guests from Japan or other countries, and conducting workshops. Unlike Japan, in which comic events are dominated by doujinshi production and consumption, comic events in Indonesia is within its developing stage, allowing the organizers and participants to experiment and built their own interpretation of “popularity” and “trend” within the comic culture.

Therefore, this research does not focus on the significance of comics or fan activities in each country, but how significant they are to the fans. What motivates them to participate in the events, both as attenders and amateur artists? Many researchers had discussed the significance of comic events in Japan, especially the growth of the Yaoi genre in Comiket (Lam, 2010; Galbraith, 2011; Tamagawa 2012; Welker, 2015). However, not many have thoughtfully discussed the purpose of the events for the fans themselves. Existing research had confirmed that the comic events in Japan provide the space for the fans of the Yaoi genre to create

doujinshi or cosplay as a way of self-expression. However, what personal sacrifice or struggle does fans need to give that conveys their dedication and passion to their fan activities? What benefits them by participating in these activities? Furthermore, there is no existing research that discussed the comic events in Indonesia, especially those with Yaoi content. So what is the purpose of comic events in Indonesia? How and why are the fan activities differ from those in Japan? These questions will be answered through ethnographical studies on fan activities in Tokyo and Surabaya comic events.

### **Comic Events in Tokyo**

Many researchers had discussed the role of comic market in Japan. According to Hiroaki Tamagawa (2012) and James Welker (2015: 54), comic market provide the space for self-expression that is not restricted by the commercial publishing world, and Fan-Yi Lam (2010: 233) expresses how the space led to “the development of doujinshi in Japan today”. In one of Patrick Galbraith (2011) paper on Fujoshi activities, Fujoshi uses the spaces in comic events as spaces for them to exchange doujinshi and communication. These researches not only show how doujinshi is the popular medium of self-expression in the comic market, but also how doujinshi become a structured and competitive market within the fan community. With the history of almost four decades, Comic Market and other comic events allow fans the space and time to structure and appropriate the Yaoi content in doujinshi. How do they do that? Who creates the rules? What struggle do they face to follow their own structure and rules? What motivates them to do this? To analyze these questions, this paper will use a comic event called “Good Comic City 23” organized by Akaboo as a case study. Using ethnographical approach to understand both the attenders and circles point of view on their journey before, during and after the event, their perspectives will discussed the motivation of their participation in the convention.

The event called “Good Comic City 23” was conducted in Tokyo Big Sight. For many Fujoshi, this is one of the expected comic events to go to as it hosts the space for 30 different fandoms and 11,059 circles. Before the events, circles need to have many things to consider before they could sell their doujinshi in the events. These circles were aware, days and even weeks or months before event, that not only will they compete with thousands other circles, but also the pricing demand of the attendees in the event. Doujinshi should cost between ¥400 to ¥600 for books that consist of 12 to 36 pages. If the doujinshi is more than 60 pages, then the circles are allowed to sell their doujinshi for ¥1000 or more. With this consideration, circles need to plan their narratives and the number of pages that would appeal to the attenders’ interest.

Most of the doujinshi circles are working women or housewives, they either have full time job or full time duty as housewives, and it takes them a month or more to create one single issue of doujinshi. Before the creation of doujinshi, circles also need to attract their own followers, giving them better estimation on how popular they are as a circle in the community and the demand they will have when selling their doujinshi. To do so they need to create Pixiv account, where they should post sketches or illustration to promote their artistic skill to the

community. Pixiv also become an online space in which circles post their doujinshi cover page and few samples pages to attract attendees to purchase their work. Some circles also create their own Twitter, so followers could follow them in a personal level as circles posts their opinion about certain anime or manga titles, as well as the type of characters and pairings they like. All of these considerations need additional time outside of their daily activities and their time to draw their doujinshi. Understanding the amount of Pixiv and Twitter followers, as well as interest in their artworks and doujinshi by Pixiv users, circles could estimate the amount of doujinshi copies they should print.

The decision of how many copies should one doujinshi be printed is significant for many doujinshi artists due to the cost. Making too little will be too expensive. If the doujinshi has 24 pages, the circle needs to sell each for ¥500, but the printing for the minimum amount, which is 30 copies, can be around ¥17,000 to ¥25,000. Even if the circles sell every single piece of their doujinshi, the amount they collect will not cover the cost of the printing. Most circles, would usually print 50-100 copies and hope that what they could sell cover the printing cost. Then there is the consideration of free merchandises for attenders who buy their new doujinshi. Not all circles would do this, but those who want to encourage attenders to purchase their doujinshi, they will provide free merchandises alongside their new doujinshi. The merchandises can range from postcards, keychain, pins, tote bag and even tea sets. Additionally, alongside the printing cost, circles need to pay for their table's rent, ranging from ¥2,500 for small comic events, ¥4,000 for the medium events and ¥7,000 for Comic Market. For the case on Comic Market, ¥7,000 is a lottery payment, paying the rent for the table does not guarantee the availability of the tables for the circles.

The day of the comic event has finally arrived. "Good Comic City 23" began their event at 10:30 am in the morning. Circles are allowed to enter at two and half hours earlier, but if they come later than 10 am, they need to wait in line alongside other attenders. Many attenders, mostly women, have waited in line hours before the start of the event. At around 9.45am, attenders have to wait for another 45 minutes under the increasing heavy rain. Many of these attenders arrive early in order to line up for their favorite popular circles. The new doujinshi of popular circles could sold out in under half an hour, and the line it takes to buy the doujinshi can last for 20 minutes. After buying the doujinshi of their favorite circles, they are surrounded by thousands of other circles, encouraging them to browse and purchase more doujinshi. Many attenders were willing to buy more doujinshi of their favorite couple or characters from new circles to show their support and appreciation. This is why many attenders would prepare big tote bags to carry all the doujinshi they purchased. One attender is sorting out her doujinshi, and base on the height of the doujinshi stack that she places on the floor next to her, she may have bought around 40 doujinshi or more. In that estimation, she could spend around ¥20,000 for her purchase of the day.

Throughout the event, the attendees were not the only one purchasing the doujinshi. Circles who have someone to sell their things or finished with their sales, began browsing around the area. Not only are they browsing, but they also approach other circles that they form friendship with, and buy their doujinshi to support their works and maintain their relationship. At around

two hours before the end of the event, many attendees are standing at the corner of the event halls, texting their friends for the “After” they will attend together, circles are also in the same position as some of them start to pack. “After” is what the attendees and circles of Japan comic events called the activity where a group of fans would get together and “celebrate” their favorite characters or pairings. Throughout the “After”, fans would congratulate each other good work, either for contributing to the pairing as a circle or an attendee that purchased many doujinshi, from both popular and unpopular circles. It is during this time that they could talk freely and without social restriction about their favorite character pairings. Furthermore, “After” filled with circles would communicate about their upcoming doujinshi and discussed the possible kink or topic that can be popular for their future doujinshi narratives.

Through these experiences, it can be concluded that all participants, both circles and attendees spend a generous amount of money for the event. What motivates many circles to risk time and financial investment with low possibility of profit? Also, what encourage attendees to attend the event, knowing that they have to wait in line, under the mercy of either hot or cold temperature, and in either sunny or rainy weather condition, and spend thousands of yen to purchase doujinshi made by amateur artists? Many circles would claim that the money is not important, that earning a profit is not the point of their participation. Even with no or little financial profit, many circles will keep on creating and attending the events. The same applies to the attenders, as they will visit as many events that support their favorite pairing, and buy the doujinshi of circles under those pairings. All of these actions and willingness to sacrifice their money and time are motivated by their love towards particular characters or pairings. For many circles, creating the doujinshi is how they show their affection and passion towards their favorite characters and pairings, and their profit is the community approval through online and verbal praises of their artworks and contributions. As for the attendees, collecting doujinshi that represent their favorite pairings allow them to contribute their own support and love towards the pairings and the fan community.

According to Rio Otomo (2015), Fujoshi is not an individual identity, but a community identity. Many of the event activities, selling and buying doujinshi, as well as gathering together as a group of Fujoshi in “After” are community activities. Reading manga, watching anime and playing games led to strong emotional connection between the human and fictional characters through their narratives. Most Yaoi doujinshi are based on manga, anime or games narratives that have no Yaoi content, but the narratives and relationship between two or more male characters led to the fantasy of romantic relationship by many Fujoshi. Comic events allow the space for many Fujoshi not only to create, buy and communicate their interest, but also to show their “love” to their favorite pairings. Many circles and attendees do show excitement and pride when their favorite pairings has the most circles representing them in the comic event. The feeling of love is self-sacrificial and unselfish, which is why financial and time investment is expected from participants for the sake of supporting their favorite pairings in every comic events. The existence of the community appropriated such feelings and activities, giving each other comfort and encouragement to continue their activities as active doujinshi circles and attendees.

## **Comic Event in Surabaya**

The interest on Yaoi content in Indonesia originates from the popularity of anime and manga in Indonesia. In early 1990s, Japanese manga was first translated and distributed throughout Indonesia's local bookstores, especially within the Java island region (Ahmad, Hibino, Koyama, 2011). Currently, there are no existing academic research that discussed the significance or purpose of anime and manga events in Indonesia, this include the discussion on Yaoi content in those events. However, some researchers have acknowledged the growing popularity of Yaoi content among comic consumers in Indonesia (Abraham, 2010; Dewi, 2012; Lent, 2015: 148). Due to strict censorship in Indonesia, a law that forbid any sexual or erotic representation or imageries, most consumers of Yaoi content in Indonesia gain access to Yaoi manga and doujinshi through the internet. There are very few places in Indonesia that could sell books with Yaoi content, and those that do only provide manga in Japanese and English translation only. Anime and manga events that allow participants to express their interest in Yaoi content is also very few. Therefore, an event such as Anime Culture convention in Surabaya attracts the attendance of many Yaoi fans throughout Indonesia.

Anime Culture convention in Surabaya is an annual event that not only provide the space for artists and cosplayers to express their interest in Yaoi content, but also invite Yaoi manga artists from Japan and overseas cosplayers that specialize in the Yaoi genre. Many Yaoi fans around Indonesia are willing to attend this event to gain access to both official and fan-made Yaoi merchandises and performances. That is why, by using Anime Culture convention as a case study for the Yaoi fans activities in the event, this paper will discuss how the activities reflect the way Yaoi content is viewed in Indonesia. What struggle do the artists or cosplayers face before and during the events? What are the purposes and motivations fans have in participating in this event? These questions will be discussed through ethnographical observation of the event activities.

Through the use of Facebook, the organizers of Anime Culture convention highlights their private event, a special question and answer session with Ayano Yamane; a manga artist from Japan, who is recognized by many Yaoi fans around the world due to the global distribution of her works in the Internet. Despite the public promotion in the internet and on the public banner of the convention, the event is private and fans are encourage to book the ticket for the private event earlier so they could reserve the seating space on the day and time of their selection. The price for attendance can range from Rp250,000 (US\$25) to Rp1,000,000 (US\$100). The least expensive ticket only allows attendance, while the expensive tickets gave additional merchandises and Ayano Yamano signatures to the attenders. The room of the event is small and isolated from the general attenders and the public, allowing the feeling of privacy and closeness between the small event attenders and the manga artist. Questions asked were mostly related to the artist's experience as doujinshi and manga creator, showing how this event is meant to inspire those interested to pursue professional career as comic artists or casual artists. Ayano Yamane private event was not the only indication that attenders are interested to learn something related to artistic creation. Within the three days convention, there are manga, doll

clothing and live drawing workshops. Each day, fans could choose to join the workshops, private events, or walk among fellow fans, browsing through artist alley and exhibitors booth, as well as taking picture of and with cosplayers.

The second highlight of the convention was the cosplay performances. There are two type of cosplayer attenders in Indonesian comic event, one type are regular attenders that wear cosplay to attract cosplay photographers or to please the other attenders with their costume. In the Anime Culture convention, some cosplayers who cosplay as male characters from anime and manga enacted intimate and skin-ship poses with one another to excite their viewers. Another type of cosplayers are those who participate in cosplay competition. Within Indonesian comic events, cosplay competition is usually the main event, where cosplayers not only show off their cosplay outfit to the audience, but also perform the characters they are displaying. Anime Culture convention was no exception, as many cosplayers participate in the competition, and due to the theme of the event, provide the audience some actions that hinted intimacy between two male characters. The jury of the competition were carefully selected and also well known by the fan community. Two of the juries, Hana and Baozi are cosplayers from China that specializes in Yaoi theme cosplays, and there are also special events within the convention where fans could take pictures with them and buy their cosplay compilation photo books.

Many fans with artistic skills participate in the artist alley. Due to Indonesian anti-pornography law, the organizers are very cautious with the display of sexual imageries. They allowed artists to sell erotic and sexual theme drawings, including Yaoi content, but they are to be placed under the table. Yaoi drawings of two men hugging, holding hands or standing next each other were acceptable since they did not portray explicit intimacy. In public, such as promotional videos and banners, Anime Culture convention portrayed itself as one of the many anime and manga events in Indonesia. As for the fans that came for Hana and Baozi, as well as Ayano Yamane events, they understand that the comic event also allows the space for Yaoi content. However, not all attenders who attend the event understand what those representatives signify. Therefore, artists could only show non-explicit imageries from their booth, and should give warning to the attenders who purchase their works when they contain explicit materials.

While Indonesian is not an Islamic country, the majority of their population is Muslim, who view explicit content, including Yaoi, as a form of sin. Based on passing comments given by some artist in the convention, they admit that printing their works, especially if they make doujinshi, is very challenging. While there are printing companies in Indonesia that are willing to provide service for the production of Yaoi content, most will not, and artists have to look for other printing companies outside Indonesia to print their works, and the cost of printing as well as shipping will cost more than local printing. The theme of the convention is very general, and that is anything under the anime, manga and games genre. That lack of specification allows flexibility for the artists but also unpredictability. They could not predict what kind of characters or pairings the attenders would like them to draw, and the only thing they could rely on was their artistic skills. Which was why many attenders purchase merchandises and doujinshi not only based on their favorite characters or pairings, but also because of aesthetics of the fan works.

Overall, fans who participate, may they be artists, cosplayers and general attenders, not only invest their time and money, but also the willingness to negotiate their moral perspective. During the time when artists are in the process of making their fan works and for cosplayers to think of their outfit and performances, they understand that they will spend money for activities that do not guarantee financial profit. The same applies to attenders that pay for the private event with Ayano Yamane, as the cost of the tickets are very expensive for Indonesian standard. Then there are attenders that travel from other provinces or cities in Indonesia to attend the only comic event in their country that allows Yaoi content. In the process of their time and financial investment, they also need to negotiate their moral perspective. Most attenders of the comic events are educated since they were young by their family and society that sexual imageries and homosexuality are sins. By attending the convention for the purpose of Yaoi consumption and expression, they know that they are not following the moral teaching of their family and society. Therefore, for many fans, enjoying the Yaoi content can be a moral conflict.

Anime Culture convention may provide the space for fans to express their love in they Yaoi content through contributing and purchasing Yaoi theme art, performances and education, but it also provides the security and privacy for fans self-expression. Camille Bacon-Smith (1992) has described convention as a space that protect the fans from social judgment. Anime Culture convention was placed in a location where attenders and participants' activities are not visible to the public. Placed on the seventh floor of a department store, there are also black glass barrier covering the activities from the public sight. The location for Ayano Yamano event is also isolated from other general attenders. Fans are willing to give time, financial and moral obligation because they love drawing, performing, buying and surrounded by Yaoi content. By being in a space where fellow fans not only share the same interest but also their moral conflict, they could find comfort through the way fan practices appropriated their love towards the Yaoi genre.

## **Conclusion**

While the concept of Yaoi and its aesthetic have roots in Japanese popular culture, the interest in male-male homoerotic content and the gathering known as comic event exist in different regions and cultures of the world. However, as both concepts travels from one culture to another, interpretation of Yaoi content and fan activities transform to fit the cultures. The comic events with Yaoi content shares similarity in Tokyo and Surabaya. Fans in both locations found interest in Yaoi content through the influence of Japanese anime, manga and games narrative and characters. They invest their time and money to express their love of Yaoi content through creation of art and crafts, as well as the purchase of those creations. The purpose of comic events in both locations is to provide the space for fans to express their love to the Yaoi genre. These attributes may also appear in many other comic events around the world. The globalization of popular culture and the accessibility of the Internet allow the spread and adaptation of similar fan practices from one culture to another.

The Yaoi content in Surabaya may be influenced from Japanese content, but unlike comic events in Tokyo, in which doujinshi creation and consumption is the main fan activity, fan activities in Surabaya are flexible and one activity does not dominate the other. In its developing stage, Indonesian fans are willing to try many form of fan activities to express their love to the Yaoi genre, especially with the limitation of space, frequency and moral expectations. However, limitation inspires creativity, and fans use such creativity to negotiate their limitation and pursue their love on Yaoi content through the creation of new fan practices. By using the fan activities in Tokyo and Surabaya comic events as case studies, they showed the way each location appropriate their own interpretation of Yaoi themed comic events despite similar aesthetic value and purpose.

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