



José Andrés SANTIAGO IGLESIAS

Universidade de Vigo, Vigo (Spain)

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***Dragon Ball* Popularity in Spain Compared to Current Delocalized Models of Consumption**

How *Dragon Ball* developed from a regionally-based complex system into a nationwide social phenomenon

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Abstract

The development of anime and manga in Spain in the late 70s and 80s and their boom in the early 90s mimics its progression in the two prominent European markets, Italy and France. Most of the mainstream anime series broadcasted in Spain were originally imported from Italian media conglomerate Fininvest as well as French licensing companies.

*In February of 1990, *Dragon Ball*, a TV adaptation of the manga created by the renowned cartoonist Toriyama Akira, premiered in Spain. However, *Dragon Ball* was not an immediate phenomenon. The 'when,' 'where' and 'how' differ from any other broadly popular anime/manga series in Spain or any other major European market, due to the specificity of the Spanish «Autonomous Communities» cultural, political and administrative division. *Dragon Ball* first premiered in Spain via several regional broadcasters — TVG, TV3 and ETB (Galicia, Catalonia and Basque Country) — with only a few weeks in between, dubbed not in Castilian Spanish but in the respective co-official languages (Galician, Catalanian, Basque), growing into an independent social phenomenon within these regions before it spread nationwide years later.*

*Thanks to *Dragon Ball*, anime as a cultural platform in Spain influenced many people by expanding fandom boundaries to a broader social spectrum, turning anime and manga into mainstream mediums and – while both publishers and merchandising companies failed to anticipate such a significant social impact – setting the foundations of the Spanish manga/anime industry. It is clear that no other anime series has ever triggered such a cultural phenomenon, in terms of general success, social dissemination and broadcast mechanics. Therefore, in this article I will try to examine *Dragon Ball* in Spain as a complex model, and analyse its unique model of intermedia growth*

Keywords: *Dragon Ball*, Manganime, Broadcast, Mainstream, Consumer, Complex, Dendritic, Intermedia-growth, Regional-based, Dubbing, Fandom.

In February of 1990, *Dragon Ball*,¹ a TV adaptation of the manga created by the renowned cartoonist Toriyama Akira,² premiered in Spain via several regional broadcasters staggered over a few weeks. It was an exceptional success and became an unparalleled generational phenomenon. *Dragon Ball* had a thrilling rhythm through the combination of an engaging plot, breathtaking fight scenes and a unique sense of humor previously unseen in western animation, and it fascinated fans of all ages. Now globally famous, *Dragon Ball* has been deemed by many scholars and researchers as the most influential work in the Spanish manga and anime industry, a ‘Trojan Horse’ that heralded the arrival and popularization of Japanese comics and animated series domestically.

In this article, I will address the major role of *Dragon Ball* in the initial boom and further development of the manga and anime market in Spain. I will also expand on the particularities of this case study within Spain and the European context, in comparison to contemporary trends in manga and anime consumption in recent years. Furthermore, in order to address this broad social phenomenon without limiting the discussion to only fan culture, I will structure this article in three major sections, as follows:

First, I will present a brief introduction to how anime arrived in Spain as well as the pertinence of this case study. I will also summarize some basic ideas from the referred bibliographical fonts. Then I will address how *Dragon Ball* arrived to and spread within Spain, focusing on the specific circumstances of how it entailed a different progression of

¹ On February 26th, 1986, *Dragon Ball* first premiered in Japan.

² Throughout this article, Japanese names are given in the domestic order: family names preceding given names.

intermedia³ development within Spain compared to other European countries. Finally, I will present an analysis of the growth model and its evolution from a holistic perspective to a complex system. I will also highlight *Dragon Ball's* transformation of the manga and anime market in Spain as well as its social impact despite the absence of prior market strategy or advertising.

The First Stages of Anime in Spain

The development of anime and manga in Spain in the late 70s and 80s and their boom in the early 90s actually mimics its progression in the two prominent European markets, Italy and France. Most of the mainstream anime series broadcasted in Spain were originally imported from Italian media conglomerate Fininvest⁴ (Italy 1978) as well as French licensing companies. Italy played a most important role as the prime market for anime in the late 70s and 80s (Pellitteri 2010), and France as the largest European manga market despite its own strong national comic industry. The flows of manga and anime consumption within Europe have been quite similar, thus what occurred in Spain in the late 70s, 80s and the early 90s during the first anime boom is a reflection of what happened in neighbouring Mediterranean countries, though on a lesser scale.

Liberalization of the television frequencies in Italy in the late 70s gave birth to an assortment of new channels. One of the most important

³ In the following article «intermedia» is used as in Pellitteri (2010).

⁴ Fininvest was founded in Milan (Italy) in 1978 by the Italian magnate Silvio Berlusconi. Since 1996 all media activities have operated under the newly-created mass-media company Mediaset. Mediaset is the largest private broadcaster in Italy, owning several channels in Italy and Spain, as well as digital and TV broadcasting networks and a film production company, among other things.

agents in this process was Fininvest, which aired three new channels. Anime was a prominent part of their new commercial strategy, as it provided an easier and cheaper way to fill the schedule—buying a bundle of Japanese animated series rather than producing their own—with specifically aimed children’s content (Puig 2014). Between 1978 and 1983 more than 183 anime series were broadcast on several Italian channels (Moliné 2002: 68).⁵ When the same liberalization process took place in France in 1986⁶, Fininvest followed a similar strategy with the new channel *La Cinq*,⁷ and it did the same two years later in Germany with national broadcaster *Tele5*. In Spain, when the private national channels and the public regional channels began to broadcast in the early 90s, an identical process took place. *Telecinco* filled the kids broadcasting schedule with more than eighty anime series⁸—many of which had previously been released in Italy and France—along with major scripts changes, edited and mutilated footage, radically regionalized adaptations, and changes in localizations and names of characters, as seen previously in the neighbouring countries. Yet despite

⁵ Moliné refers to the source: Eureka 11-12, November-December 1983, p. 5.

⁶ Although we are intentionally underlining the leading role played by Fininvest in the anime dissemination within Europe, the core idea is how the liberalisation of tv frequencies was a turning point that led to the massive anime broadcasting in the late eighties and early nineties. Within this context, *Club Dorothée* – owned by French Private Channel TF1 – must be highlighted as the first and foremost broadcaster of anime in France. *Club Dorothée* was a tv program intended for young people, produced by AB Productions, airing from September 2nd 1987 to August 30th 1997. *Dragon Ball* first aired in France within this daily show.

⁷ In 1986 *La Cinq*, a subsidiary channel belonging to the France 5 corporation, first aired. 40% of France 5 was owned by Silvio Berlusconi’s Fininvest media conglomerate, while the remaining 60% belonged to different French Businessmen led by Jérôme Seydoux. *La Cinq* is considered the first privately owned free terrestrial television network in France (*La Cinq* ceased its broadcasting activity in 1992). In 1988 Fininvest launched *Tele 5* in Germany (closed in 1992). In 1990, the Spanish free terrestrial television network *Telecinco* was established.

⁸ Starting in 1991 and in the following years: *Captain Tsubasa*, *Saint Seiya*, *Ranma 1/2*, *City Hunter*, *Kimagure Orange Road*, etc. At first the private broadcasters didn’t cover the whole Spanish territory, but rather the big cities and regions with higher population density, followed a progressive deployment, covering the whole Spanish territory within several months and even years in between.

these severe alterations to the already modest animation of many of these series, anime fascinated an entire generation of Spanish children and young people. Compared to American and European animation, anime as a medium reached a far more extensive social substratum, changing people's preferences while also multiplying possibilities (Kelts 2006: 198).

I will not engage in further discussion of the origins of manga and anime in Spain, as it does not lie within the scope of this article. Nevertheless, in order to completely understand the unique case of *Dragon Ball* in Spain, it may be necessary to further contextualize it within the aforementioned scenario. In such case, the bibliography included at the end of this article should provide sufficient background on manga and anime in Europe. Many of the sources quoted in the article are originally written in Castilian Spanish, as it refers to a nation-specific phenomenon. However, Marco Pellitteri's book *The Dragon and the Dazzle* (2010) provides a detailed analysis in English on anime from a broader European perspective.

The Dragon and the Dazzle Phases in Spain

While the popularization of manga and anime in Spain took place over the late 70s, 80s, and early 90s and was very similar (on a smaller scale) to the Italian and French markets, the *Dragon Ball* case has some particularities that I believe are worthy of examination for non-Spanish scholars. However, I will first address some concepts referred to by Marco Pellitteri in his book *The Dragon and the Dazzle*, as I build some of my statements upon his ideas.

In his book, Pellitteri describes two phases—termed “dragon” and “dazzle”—with regard to how anime actively targets western viewers. Each phase corresponds to a different dynamic, the first (dragon) being more neutral, characterized by western-friendly products and adopting a rather passive attitude towards the viewer and the market. The second phase (dazzle) is predicated on western viewers being familiarized with manga and anime visual language. It emphasizes a hybrid product reminiscent of a Japanized West, with strong connotations of the Japanese everyday *imaginarium* and a more active discourse.

We cannot extend these two phases, which are based on the Italian and French situations, to the Spanish case without taking into account the distinct time-frame of each stage. Accordingly, though the Spanish model is similar to most European countries as described by Pellitteri, the timing of events differs greatly, and hence the final map was not so homogeneous. Ultimately, different timing led to circumstances specific to each nation, i.e. the *Dragon Ball* phenomenon in Spain.

We might consider a phase-lag of approximately 5 to 10 years between the Italian and French manga and anime boom in the 80s and the one that took place in Spain in the early 90s as a result of the liberalization of TV frequencies. The “dragon” and “dazzle” phases described by Pellitteri also took place in Spain but with different timing. Therefore, some series that might be considered representative of this phase never gathered momentum in Spain, and vice-versa. In his book,

Pellitteri refers to *UFO Robot Grendizer*⁹ as representative of the first phase and *Pokemon* as a benchmark of the second stage. Notwithstanding, we might not speak about *Grendizer* or even *Mazinger*¹⁰ in Spain, but rather about *Dragon Ball* (Dragon phase). And while *Pokemon*¹¹ is indeed a global success, we address *Crayon Shin Chan*¹² – as we shall see later – as the real game-changer of the Spanish market (Dazzle phase).

Up to this point we could discuss whether *Mazinger Z* rather than *Dragon Ball* should be considered as the benchmark of the early anime boom¹³ in Spain (the Dragon phase). *Mazinger Z* is indeed a remarkable milestone within the Spanish manga and anime scenario. Its overall popularity almost rivals that of *Dragon Ball*, and we can easily trace the similarities/dissimilarities of both anime in Spain. However, several crucial factors that led me to appoint *Dragon Ball* and not *Mazinger Z* as

⁹ Known in Italy and France as ‘Goldrake’ or ‘Goldorak’, *UFO Robot Grendizer* is an anime produced by Toei Animation based on the homonymous manga by Ōta Gosaku and part of the *Mazinger* franchise originally created by Nagai Gō. *UFO Robot Grendizer* was broadcasted in Japan from 1975 to 1977. Its unprecedented success in Italy is largely analysed in Pellitteri’s book.

¹⁰ *Mazinger Z* (Toei Animation, 1972-1974) is the anime adaptation of Nagai Gō’s famous manga (first published in *Weekly Shōnen Jump*, 1972-1974). *Mazinger Z* aired in the Spanish State Broadcaster TVE on March 4th, 1978, with the title *Mazinger el Robot de las Estrellas* (Lit. Mazinger, the Robot from the Stars).

¹¹ *Pokemon* first aired in Spain in 1999 in the paid-TV Satellite channel *Fox Kids*. It was broadcasted in Telecinco on December 20, 1999.

¹² Based on the eponymous manga (1990-2010) by Usui Yoshito (1958-2009), *Crayon Shin Chan* (1992 ~ ongoing) first aired in Spain in April 2000, on Canal Super3, a children-aimed Catalanian TV network, dubbed in Catalanian. Lead by its great success, *Crayon Shin Chan* also aired a few months later in Galicia (dubbed in Galician language), Valencian Country (dubbed in Valencian) and Basque Country (dubbed in Basque).

¹³ Despite the first attempts to successfully distribute and commercialize Japanese animation in the late 60s and early 70s, it was not until *Heidi*’s (*Arupusu no Shōjo Haiji*, 1974) arrival that anime started to gain the attention of viewers as a standalone medium in Spain. *Heidi* first aired on May 2nd, 1975 on the national public TV channel TVE (Televisión Española). Produced by Zuiyo Enterprises, directed by Takahata Isao, and appointing Miyazaki Hayao as artistic director of the show, it was the first of several series produced under the common label Meisaku (lit. meaning ‘Theater masterpieces’). Comprising of 52 episodes, it was a major success among children and adults alike. *Heidi*’s popularity led to the arrival of other Meisaku Collection productions under the direction of Nippon Animation.

the Trojan Horse of the Dragon phase in Spain. After *Grendizer* first aired in Italy in 1978, it was immediately followed by the liberalization of TV frequencies leading to the anime boom previously addressed. However, after *Mazinger's* broadcasting on the Spanish state channel TVE in 1978, the *anime* industry in Spain remained quite stagnant¹⁴, until the very same liberalization of TV frequencies took place in Spain almost a decade later. Instead, several co-productions emerged in the late early 80s, many of them between Spanish producers and Japanese studios, the latter being responsible for technical development. The Spanish media company BRB International which had played a key role in the arrival and rise of anime in Spain – by commercialising *Mazinger Z* in the first place – began to produce its own animated series, most of them in partnership with Nippon Animation¹⁵ alongside other Asian animation studios¹⁶. *Mazinger Z* was really popular indeed, and it is broadly remembered among several generations of Spanish viewers, but beyond its own significance it did not change the manga and anime industry in Spain as *Dragon Ball* did – the very reason why we can talk about a *Dragon Ball* phenomenon to begin with.

The *Dragon Ball* Phenomenon: The First Distinguishing Feature

From here on I will focus on the *Dragon Ball* phenomenon in Spain. *Dragon Ball* is one of the most successful manga and anime series ever created, and its cultural and commercial impact applies at a broad scale

¹⁴ Some minor exceptions might be *Candy, Candy* (Toei 1976), based on the *shōjo* of the same title by Mizuki Kyoko and Igarashi Yumiko and first broadcasted in TVE in 1984; or *Comando G* (“Battle of the Planets” – *Gatchaman Ninjatai Kagaku*, 1972) in TVE in 1980.

¹⁵ *Ruy, Pequeño Cid* (*Ritoru Eru Shido no bōken*, 1980), *D'Artacán y los tres mosqueperros* (Wanwan Sanjushi, 1981) and *La vuelta al mundo de Willy Fog* (Anime Hachijūnichikan Sekai Isshū, 1983).

¹⁶ *David el Gnomo* (*The World of David the Gnome*) – produced in 1985 in partnership with a Taiwanese studio – being the most remarkable example.

throughout Europe and worldwide. However, the strength of its social impact specific to Spain remains unrivaled. I believe that the specificity of the Spanish case rests on three important factors: atomized expansion, which started on only three regional TV channels and took several years to spread to the rest of Spain; its social success, by aiming not only at anime fans but also at a broader viewer spectrum thanks to an extremely domesticated product; and a clever sales strategy for manga. Three truly specific features ultimately fold into a nearly unique model of intermedia growth.

FORTA was established in April of 1989. FORTA¹⁷ is the Federation of Public Radio and TV channels from different regions in Spain.¹⁸ In the late 80s many of these regional broadcasters were still underdeveloped and had little resources compared to the state-owned broadcaster TVE and other private channels that began operating in 1990, such as Antena 3 and Telecinco. Many of these regional broadcasters produced their own shows (newscasts, documentaries, etc.), but the majority of soap operas, sitcoms, animation series and children's programs were foreign and shared between TV channels affiliated with FORTA.

In 1989, a small licensing company named Marius Bistagne located in Catalonia sold a 26-episode pack of *Dragon Ball* to the Catalanian

¹⁷ FORTA (Federación de Organismos de Radio y Televisión Autonómicos [Federation of Radio and Television Autonomous Broadcasters]), was founded on April 5th, 1989. It is an association of twelve radio and TV broadcasters from different autonomous regions in Spain.

¹⁸ Many of these channels were already operating years before FORTA was established. The Basque ETB channel first broadcasted in 1982, the Catalanian channel TV3 launched in 1983 and the Galician TVG in 1984, among others.

channel TV3¹⁹. Marius Bistagne was also a film production company, but most of their revenue came from third-party licenses for TV broadcasting. Marius Bistagne not only licensed other productions, but also produced its own content. Yet for children-oriented content, buying the rights from international producers was cheaper than producing. The company provided many of the animation series first broadcasted by TV3 when it began airing them in 1983. Mario Bistagne, the owner of the licensing company, regularly attended the MIPTV (Marché International des Programmes de Télévision) in Cannes in order to negotiate new licensed products from worldwide producers and then sell their rights to Spanish broadcasters. Toei Animation was a major producer with dozens of series involved, and Bistagne became their regular customer: “Marius Bistagne licensed the Toei original series to TV3, while in charge of dubbing those very same series in its own studio, making twice the profit” (Puig 2012).

TV3 shared the first 26-episode pack of *Dragon Ball* with other FORTA partners, leading to *Dragon Ball*'s premier with several regional broadcasters in February of 1990²⁰. Only a few weeks apart, the series achieved unprecedented success within the few regions where it was

¹⁹ TV3 had previously broadcasted *Dr. Slump*, an anime adapting the namesake manga by Toriyama Akira. *Dr. Slump* was quite successful in Catalonia (Estrada 2016, p.31), but in Galicia and the Basque Country it was broadcasted by the FORTA partners (TVG and ETB), dubbed in Galician and Basque, only after the *Dragon Ball* success. Toriyama's *Dr. Slump* became more successful after *Dragon Ball* first aired, thanks to the obvious resemblance in character design (Estrada 2016) – which kids instantaneously identified as *Dragon Ball*'s style – and the cameo played in the *Dragon Ball* early chapters by *Dr. Slump* leading characters.

²⁰ There are no official records of the air date of *Dragon Ball* in Spain. However, according to TV broadcasting pages from some newspapers in 1989 and 1990, *Dragon Ball* was first broadcasted in Galicia (TVG) on Feb. 8, 1990, entitled “As Bolas Mágicas” [The Magic Balls] and dubbed in Galician language; in the Basque Country (ETB) on Feb. 21, 1990, entitled “Dragoi Bola” [*Dragon Ball*] in Basque language; and in Catalonia (TV3) on Feb. 15, 1990, known as “Bola de Drac” [*Dragon Ball*] and dubbed in Catalan language.

being broadcasted and became a true generational benchmark. The broadcasters assumed that those 26 episodes were a closed season. It was not until the last episode was aired that they realized that the series was incomplete, when they received thousands of phone complaints from fans of all ages. The documentary film *Songokumanía*²¹ by Oriol Estrada explores the phenomenon of *Dragon Ball* by collecting interviews with some of the leading agents involved back in the early 90s. The former broadcasting manager at TV3, Oleguer Sarsanedas, states:

Phone-calls from nine, ten, eleven and twelve years old kids completely outraged, complaining about the finale. «You cannot stop the show now because we are in the middle of a fight and it couldn't have ended yet! It is impossible that the series ended like this!» They were right, of course. We immediately checked what had happened and found out that the first season of *Dragon Ball* (back then was the only season available) had 153 episodes. So we sought no matter how – by land, sea and air – the remaining episodes of the series.²²

However, because Marius Bistagne was no longer licensing these products, TV3 purchased the remaining chapters of the series—chapters 27 to 153—from the French AB Group media conglomerate, the rights-holder of *Dragon Ball's* anime for all of Europe, and immediately broadcasted from July of 1990. This rushed and hasty negotiation is one of the reasons behind some of the dubbing changes following chapter 26. Initially, Spanish broadcasters worked with the

²¹ *Songokumanía* (2012) is a documentary film by Oriol Estrada on the *Dragon Ball* phenomenon in Spain. It includes interviews with Oleguer Sarsanedas (TV3 Broadcasting Manager in the 90s), Pere Olivé (Artistic Director at Planeta de Agostini Comics at the time), Cels Piñol (a fanzine artist), Àlex Samaranch and Ana María Meca (Estudio Fénix), Antonio Martín (CEO Planeta de Agostini Comics from 1982 to 2001), Joan Navarro (Glenat Spain and EDT CEO), among others.

²² Oleguer Sarsanedas, Broadcasting Manager TV3 (1990), in: Oriol Estrada. *Songokumania. El big-bang del manga* (2012). Documentary video.

French footage—already cut, adapted and dubbed in French; but from chapter 105 the Japanese raw footage was accessible, so *Dragon Ball* could be translated into the different regional languages directly, improving the overall quality²³.

As this chronological account shows, it may seem that *Dragon Ball* was an immediate success as with any other mainstream anime series broadcasted in Spain in the late 80s and early 90s, without larger social impact. However, this was not the case. *Dragon Ball* was not an immediate phenomenon. The ‘when,’ ‘where’ and ‘how’ differ from any other broadly popular anime/manga series in Spain or any other major European market, due to the specificity of the Spanish «Autonomous Communities’» cultural, political and administrative division. Non-Spanish scholars should bear in mind that there are 17 Autonomous Communities currently in Spain – as defined in the Spanish constitution of 1978; an autonomous community is a first-level political and administrative region, providing limited autonomy to the nationalities and regions that comprise the Spanish nation²⁴. Castilian Spanish is the official language of the entire country, but six regions have co-official languages as well: Catalan/Valencian in Catalonia, the Balearic Islands

²³ The inconsistency of the Castilian Spanish dubbing continued throughout the entire series when Antena 3 finally televised it in 1997 for a global Spanish audience.

²⁴ The provided definition of «Autonomous Communities» in the text as well as the following explanation is the official definition according to the current legal framework (and it does not comprise the opinion of the author or reflect the national feelings of some regions). According to the same official definition, within the current Spanish constitutional frame, each region has a degree of self-government with their own regional parliaments and political institutions, which legislate at some extent on an executive and administrative level according to the national law. However, since sovereignty resides in the nation as a whole and not in the autonomous communities, Spain is not a federation but a unitary state with some decentralized components.

and the Valencian Community; Basque in the Basque Country; and Galician in Galicia.

Toei's *Dragon Ball* appeared first premiered in Spain in regional televisions—Galicia, Catalonia and Basque Country—with only a few days in between, dubbed not in Castilian Spanish but in the respective co-official languages, growing into an independent social phenomenon within these regions before it spread nationwide years later in 1992, when other channels from Madrid and Andalusia began broadcasting the series. A few years later it was finally aired nationwide on a privately owned television network.²⁵

This is the first distinguishing feature of the *Dragon Ball* phenomenon in Spain and other European countries: rather than developing on a larger, national scale, *Dragon Ball* began with atomized broadcasting in Spain ²⁶ , thereby comprising networks of fans within a non-interdependent, region-based structure.

The *Dragon Ball* Phenomenon: Domestication

The second distinguishing feature is linguistic, regional and cultural specificity. Using local tropes and deeply codified expressions, *Dragon Ball* was accessible and appealed to a large variety of social groups. Furthermore, since it was only broadcasted in these regions, it contributed to the awareness and acquisition of the regional languages

²⁵ Madrid (Telemadrid) and Andalusia (Canal Sur) in 1992; and in Spain (Antena 3) in 1997.

²⁶ While the largest European countries (by volume of inhabitants and importance of television market) have few local/regional TV channels – or have TV channels of a lesser impact – the major role played by regional broadcasters in the development of the Spanish TV industry sets a quantitative difference that is hard to ignore.

within those territories and in neighbouring regions²⁷ that had access to the regional television signal due to their proximity.

Like many others mainstream series, *Dragon Ball* was in the media spotlight, and it was highly praised by language professors and regional academics for its contribution to the use and promotion of Galician, Catalan and Basque languages, especially among children and young adults. On the other hand, it received harsh criticism from some politicians, parental associations and conservative groups²⁸. Many complaints were directed at the violence depicted and the use of subtle erotic jokes (despite their obvious comical nature). In spite of these complaints, regional broadcasters refused to drop Toriyama's anime based on two compelling reasons: the overwhelming support from general audiences and the undeniable commercial boost behind *Dragon Ball*. In this regard, Enrique de Arce, the broadcasting manager of TVG (Galician regional television), stated in an interview in 1993 with the Spanish newspaper *El País*²⁹, "*Dragon Ball* has come repeatedly to the first rank of audience, reaching a 40% share. This data disqualifies any objection." Furthermore, Arce repeatedly suggested that *Dragon Ball* did not glorify or encourage violence.

The *Dragon Ball* Phenomenon: A Groundbreaking Publishing Strategy

²⁷ In some bordering regions, such as the Valencian Community and Aragon, close to Catalonia; or Asturias or the provinces of Leon and Zamora, close to the Galician border.

²⁸ I will not further engage with the violence/sex polemic regarding *Dragon Ball* as it is not exclusive by any means to this series. On the contrary, it is a shared debate with many other anime series broadcasted in Spain in public networks. *Mazinger Z* was harshly criticised in the 70s due to the violence depicted, and *Crayon Shin Chan* suffered the same criticism in the late 90s due to the comic outbursts of the characters. The same criticism arose towards many other anime series broadcasted in the early 90s: *Saint Seiya*, *Dash' Kappei*, *City Hunter*, *Ranma 1/2*, etc.

²⁹ Enrique de Arce, Broadcasting Manager of TVG in *El País*, (23/08/1993); in: Puig (2012d).

After dozens of faxes and phone calls followed by hard negotiations with Shueisha, the Japanese publisher and rights-holder, the publishing company Planeta de Agostini began selling copies of the *Dragon Ball* manga in Spain³⁰ in 1992,³¹ both in Castilian and Catalan languages (separate editions). Aware of the huge market potential of the *Dragon Ball* manga, they had first contacted the French magazine *Dorothée*, then the AB Group in France and finally Shueisha via the Tuttle-Mori Agency, a Japanese international literary and media agency specializing in the licensing of intellectual property rights. With this, Planeta de Agostini became a true pioneer of negotiations between Spanish and Japanese publishers.

“The edition was expensive. Unlike the usual American comics, they had to flip pages to match the western reading direction from left to right, adapt onomatopoeia, translate from Japanese, pay royalties and so” (Puig 2012c). In spite of these difficulties, the Spanish publisher actually managed to sign a very advantageous deal: Planeta de Agostini simultaneously issued the initial chapters of the manga (labeled as the ‘white series’³² due to the color of the cover) and the chapters corresponding to the arc and events taking part in the *Dragon Ball Z* anime series (starting from volume 28 in Japan and labeled as the ‘red

³⁰ First published in Spain by Planeta de Agostini in 1992, both in Spanish and Catalan. It was republished in different formats until 2001. Between 2006 and 2007, Planeta de Agostini published the *Dragon Ball - Ultimate Edition* (34 volumes, 21.5 x 15 cm, 232 pages each).

³¹ In 2012, during the celebration of the XVIII Saló del manga de Barcelona (Barcelona Manga Fair), the organization Ficomic succeeded in achieving the Guinness world record for *Dragon Ball* cosplay, gathering 307 people dressed as their favorite characters from Toriyama’s original series. This record was organized as a tribute for 20th anniversary of the *Dragon Ball* manga in Spain, as it was first published by Planeta de Agostini in 1992.

³² “Serie Blanca” in Spanish; lit. ‘white series.’

series'³³). This was a clever commercial strategy, allowing fans not only to revisit the stories they already knew and loved, but also to keep pace with new chapters that were aired weekly on TV. This double manga distribution is the third distinguishing feature of the *Dragon Ball* phenomenon in Spain.

Planeta de Agostini launched an initial print-run of 100,000 copies in Catalan and 50,000 copies³⁴ in Castilian Spanish (Puig 2012c). The difference in print-runs is significant, as the market in Catalan was twice the size of the overall Spanish readership, which supports my previous statements regarding the role language played in the domestication of this product. Puig calls attention to this fact and highlights TV3's leading role, being "deeply integrated within the Catalonian society in comparison to other regional broadcasters." In my opinion, this attribution is partially misleading. It is undeniable that the leading regional catalyst of the *Dragon Ball* phenomenon in Spain is the Catalonian apparatus. The body of viewers—the Catalonian population being greater in number than both Basque Country and Galicia combined—together with the fact that most comic publishers are located in Catalonia, the proximity to the French comic market (the largest in Europe), and the huge success and large-scale advertising of *Dragon Ball* by TV3 are some of the reasons behind the tremendous impact of Toriyama's anime and manga in this region. However, as I have addressed in this article, one of the most important reasons behind

³³ "Serie Roja" in Spanish; lit. 'red series.'

³⁴ *Dragon Ball's* print-run figures are also quite meaningful for understanding the importance of this series within the manga industry in Spain. *Dragon Ball* was selling an average of 60,000 copies while other major titles sold around 15,000 copies (Roig 2000). However, most manga being published in Spain at that time hardly sold more than 3,000 or 4,000 copies annually.

the great success of *Dragon Ball* in Spain lies within the regionalization and extensive domestication of the product, especially in relation to the use of regional co-official languages in dubbing. While Catalan readers enjoyed *Dragon Ball* edited in Catalan language, neither Basque nor Galician children had access to Basque nor Galician language editions. The fact that none of these readers identified with the Castilian Spanish translation (i.e: expressions, character names and locations) was enough to deter them from reading the printed series. By the time the *Dragon Ball* manga was published in 1992, only Catalan, Basque and Galician readers were deeply familiarized and engaged with the series, given that in Madrid and Andalusia the series had just been aired. Therefore, I believe that another relevant factor for the differences in print-run between the Catalan and Castilian Spanish editions lies within this simple truth: while Catalan readers enjoyed *Dragon Ball* edited in Catalan language, neither Basque nor Galician children had access to Basque nor Galician language editions.

The Spontaneous Synergic Model

The second distinguishing feature is linguistic, regional and cultural specificity. When Marco Pellitteri addresses the five levels of intermedia growth in *The Dragon and the Dazzle* (2010), he defines the spontaneous synergic model as follows:

The spontaneous synergic model [...] originates from a technology that is powerful and popular, the television series. At first, it is little supported by merchandise industries and editorial channels, especially due to the inability of the right-holders to see the commercial potential of the product; moreover, this merchandise turns out to be a mishmash of cheap material, which nevertheless sells out because of the innovative force of the base product.

Pellitteri identifies this model in reference to *UFO Robot Grendizer*, broadcasted in Italy between 1978 and 1980, which achieved unparalleled success. Pellitteri adds: “the explosion of goods has been free and disorganized: based on a sudden, or rather unexpected, popularity of heroes and narratives” (2010). Like *UFO Robot Grendizer* in Italy, *Dragon Ball* replicated a similar market phenomenon and model of intermedia growth in Spain.

However, what Marco Pellitteri terms ‘spontaneous synergic model’ is what I have come to identify as a ‘complex model’ as it is usually defined: a system composed of interrelated parts that exhibit properties and behaviors as a group larger than the simple sum of the individual parts—a model that depicts new properties that cannot be explained by single elements. With this stance, I am adopting an idea of complexity closer to mathematical or media technologies discourse rather than a philosophical or purely epistemological approach. Complexity in regards to products, techniques, and strategies is interconnected, interdependent and diverse. Complexity as a model is adaptable and changes in a fluid manner, is flexible, and ultimately evolves and interacts with its environment. The “spontaneous synergic model” is far from a reductionist model, but the very idea of *synergic* refers to a holistic behavior, while the nuances of the word ‘spontaneous’ conveys complex, axiomatic thinking. Therefore, the ultimate distinguishing feature of the *Dragon Ball* phenomenon in Spain is its nearly unique model of intermedia growth: a complex model that covers and even exceeds the sum of all the previous three features but cannot be understood without them. Examining *Dragon Ball* in Spain as a complex

model, it is clear that no other anime series has ever triggered such a cultural phenomenon, in terms of general success, social dissemination and broadcast mechanics³⁵. Because of *Dragon Ball*, anime as a cultural platform in Spain influenced many people by expanding fandom boundaries to a broader social spectrum, turning anime and manga into mainstream mediums and setting the foundations of the Spanish manga/anime industry.

Milestones such as Ōtomo Katsuhiro's *AKIRA* (both the manga and the film) legitimized manga and anime as mediums among critics and hardcore comic readers, but it was *Dragon Ball* that enabled the shift from niche to mainstream. Catalanian essayist Sebastià Roig refers to *Dragon Ball* as "the dawn of a new era" (Roig 2000, p. 219), as it permanently changed how people thought about manga and anime. The arrival of Toriyama's bestseller reinforced the publishing industry and sparked the marketing of many new Japanese works. The following years were defined by the swift dissemination of manga and the progressive growth of new publishing groups. "*Dragon Ball and Ōtomo opened the gates for the great Japanese landing. Two years later...it became Pearl Harbor*" (Roig 2000, p. 224).

³⁵ Specially when compared to other anime series bring broadcasted in Spain in the early 90s, e.g. *Saint Seiya*. *Saint Seiya* was among the most successful anime series being broadcasted at the time. It first aired in 1991 on TVE, but it was prematurely cancelled and re-broadcasted again on Tele 5 in 1993, once the anime boom in Spain was already in motion. However, *Saint Seiya* manga was first published in Spain in 1993 by Planeta DeAgostini – the same publisher behind *Dragon Ball* – but it was a huge sales failure and therefore was cancelled prior to its conclusion. The whole series were published almost 15 years later by Glenat/EDT only after the *kanzenban* Japanese especial edition was published in Japan between 2005-2006. On top of that, while we could argue that *Saint Seiya* was indeed a very famous and important anime in Spain. The intermedia growth model has nothing to do with *Dragon Ball*: the series aired followed by Panini's sticker albums and Bandai's vintage figurines. It was a whole different commercial strategy, far from the spontaneous success depicted by *Dragon Ball*.

The *Dragon Ball* Phenomenon: Merchandising and Photocopies

We have previously addressed Pellitteri's definition of 'spontaneous synergic model' in regards to the *Goldorak* phenomenon in Italy. Pellitteri's 'spontaneous synergic model' highlights the lack of specific merchandising as a defining feature. When applied to the of the *Dragon Ball* phenomenon in Spain it reveals another peculiar and distinguishing aspect of Toriyama's *manganime* when compared to other *anime* series: the flood of alternative, non-official merchandise such as figurines, toys and other collectibles included in chips and biscuits packaging, posters in the inner pages of magazines, candy with stickers included in the packaging, and so on. As the influential comic critic and essayist Alfons Moline states in his seminal book *El Gran Libro de los Manga* (2002, p. 70),

at the beginning, the lack of official merchandising prompted fans to create their own. A traffic of photocopies from the original Japanese *Dragon Ball* manga circulated among kids and teenagers, but also adults. The "Dragon Ball mania" will be remembered as the perfect example of how a mass popular myth can rise from public favor, without any advertising campaigns.

There were no official merchandise, comic books or posters for *Dragon Ball* in Spain when it premiered in 1990. Within the following weeks and months, TV journals and weekly magazines sold thousands of copies because of the inclusion of color pictures and centerfolds of *Dragon Ball*, overwhelming the market while stunned Spanish comic

publishers attempted to understand the phenomenon all of them had failed to anticipate (Roig 2000).

Back then we were publishing a magazine called «Crazy Comics» and we edited a volume focused on Japanese comics. When opened, there was this picture [of Son Gokū, *Dragon Ball*'s main hero]. A few days after we shipped this magazine, moms with kids began to come to our office, ringing the bell and asking if we could sell them this volume. Always this one. When we finally asked why this one, they told us it was because of that single picture. All because of that single picture!³⁶

Navarro's anecdote reveals much about the real dimension of the photocopies' merchandising in the months following *Dragon Ball*'s debut in Catalonia, Galicia and Basque Country. In the early 90s, fans were selling black and white photocopies of *Dragon Ball* illustrations and even pictures they drew themselves. They exchanged or sold them as collectibles in schools, copy shops, newsstands or public markets, gathering thousands of people on the weekends who were drawn by these unofficial goods. Most of these copies were of poor quality as a result of being photocopied from a previous photocopy and so on.

The original sources of those photocopies were quite diverse. A large amount of illustrations were photocopies of single pages from the original manga being published in Japan (Bernabé 2009). Due to proximity, the large French market was an entry point for many of those images. *Club Dorothée* magazine included several centerfolds and prints. This magazine was published by the media conglomerate AB Group, producer of the children's program *Club Dorothée* and rights-holder of

³⁶ Joan Navarro, CEO EDT Publishing House, in: Oriol Estrada. *Songokumania. El big-bang del manga* (2012). Documentary video.

Dragon Ball in France (Puig 2012). One year after *Dragon Ball* first aired, Panini³⁷ launched the first collection of *Dragon Ball* trading cards. The first print-run consisted of 100,000 albums and 14 million trading cards and was sold out in less than a month. A few months later more than 400,000 albums and nearly 70 million trading cards had been sold.³⁸

Besides exceptional sales figures, the most noticeable achievement by *Dragon Ball* was the spectacular public response. *Dragon Ball* was not a “flash in the pan” or simply another anime for only anime fans. The animated series was appealing not just to children and teenagers but also university students (Estrada 2016, p. 95), housewives, middle-aged men and women, and senior citizens³⁹. The overall impact of *Dragon Ball* exceeded by far the fandom realm, reverberating over a broader social spectrum. In 1992 Alfons Moliné foresaw the future possibilities of *Dragon Ball* within manga and anime reception in Spain from both a scholarly and casual reader perspective: “A few decades from now, when future sociologists analyze how Spanish society was back in the nineties, there is no doubt they will look at this phenomenon: Songoku-mania” (1992).

Conclusions

³⁷ Panini S.p.A. is an international publishing house focused mostly on comics, books, magazines and trading cards. It was founded in Modena (Italy) in 1961 and named after the Panini brothers. The Spanish branch, Panini España S.A. began its activity in the mid-70s by selling trading cards.

³⁸ The Spanish population in 1991 was less than 39 million. Source: INE (Instituto Nacional de Estadística). URL: <http://www.ine.es/censo2001/historia.htm>.

³⁹ As previously highlighted, according to Enrique de Arce (Broadcasting Manager of TVG, 1993) *Dragon Ball* reached a 40% share in its timeslot in Galicia, with similar view-ship in other regions. This figure clearly suggests that the target audience was not limited to children.

Up to this point I have discussed the defining particularities of the *Dragon Ball* phenomenon in Spain. It is not my intent to deny the special nature of *Dragon Ball* as a case study since it is largely considered one of the most (if not *the* most) globally successful manga and anime series to date. This notwithstanding, I would like to place special emphasis on how different this success has manifested within the Spanish society when compared to other national markets. Regarding this, we should acknowledge the following specific conditions in addition to the features I have mentioned previously: it was an unanticipated success, preceded by neither advertising campaigns nor prior fame when it premiered; it was spread by word-of-mouth, without a pre-existing network. As opposed to *Dragon Ball's* growth pattern worldwide, it emerged in limited regions in Spain, dubbed in co-official languages and aired on different dates, sometimes with years in between. It successfully targeted not only anime fans and hardcore viewers – as we may understand them today – but also aimed at the general public. It was a remarkable success among people of all ages and socio-economic backgrounds despite possible lack of any previous interest in anime or manga (Estrada 2016), and initially both publishers and merchandising companies failed to anticipate such a significant social impact.

We have previously addressed *Dragon Ball* as the cornerstone of the 'Dragon phase' in Spain, as compared to the *Grendizer* case in Italy. As for the 'Dazzle phase', I highlighted the importance of *Crayon Shin-Chan* within the regional broadcasters in the early years of the 21st Century. *Crayon Shin-Chan* aired in April 2000 – dubbed in Catalan – on the Catalonian channel Canal Super3, largely aimed at children and younger

audiences. Its rapid success was immediately followed by other regional broadcasters – partners within the FORTA association –, with just a few months in between in a similar fashion as what had happened ten years before with *Dragon Ball*. Dubbed in the official languages in Galicia, the Valencian Community and Basque Country, it took almost a whole year before it was broadcasted in Castilian Spanish in the Andalusian regional TV network (Canal Sur). In 2005, the private national network Antena 3 bought the broadcasting rights for all of Spain. The in-depth domestication of *Crayon Shin-Chan* made it appealing for a larger audience, amused by this slice-of-life *anime*, successfully combining references to Japanese everyday culture and the deeply codified expressions from their closest cultural environment. *Crayon Shin-Chan* partially mimicked *Dragon Ball*'s model of intermedia growth achieving a huge success.

However, nowadays the anime scenario in Spain has changed, from TV broadcasting to Blu-ray retail and *simulcast*. When compared to the current market consumption and broadcast mechanics, we can immediately highlight differences with the *Dragon Ball* scene in the 90s, both in terms of 'viewer' and 'channel'. The main distinction between the two scenarios is the divergence between the mainstream public (understood as non-regular anime viewers) and the hardcore users (understood as fans accustomed to watching anime). Nowadays, most fans and hardcore consumers are familiar with the formal language and conventions typical of anime and manga. Furthermore, recent *fansub* and *scanlator* trends show that we are moving closer and closer to a foreignization of both mediums, as viewers increasingly demand

products true to the original language, including Japanese honorifics, everyday expressions and cultural references that would be incomprehensible to an uninitiated audience. Mainstream viewers' attitude toward these series is generally passive, meaning that these users access anime and manga through traditional TV networks. In contrast, hardcore users are proactive and seek a broader variety of works via multiple sources. On top of that, disruptive Internet technologies provide dedicated viewers with a myriad of alternative channels. Therefore, the possibility of replicating something similar to the *Dragon Ball* phenomenon in the present Spanish manga and anime scene should be deemed as a complex (if not impossible) task.

The thorough domestication of *Dragon Ball* enabled its success among mainstream viewers and anime fans alike, by adapting language, expressions and contents such as jokes and world-setting references. Nowadays, if TV networks were to broadcast anime for a primary audience of anime fans, they would most likely avoid using domestication strategies. Yet by doing so they risk alienating mainstream viewers who are unaware of relevant codes and conventions. *Dragon Ball* played an instrumental role in the birth of the anime and manga market in Spain, but ultimately the market has changed into a different landscape with diversified needs.

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