# Inclusive Media Mix:

# Shaping Communication through *A Silent Voice*

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**Abstract:** *A Silent Voice* (*Koe no katachi*, dir. Yamada Naoko, 2016) is an anime film based on the critically acclaimed manga of the same name by Ôima Yoshitoki. *A Silent Voice* follows the experiences of a deaf character, Nishimiya Shôko, and her classmates, particularly as they deal with school bullying and rebuilding friendships afterwards. *A Silent Voice* not only won various awards such as Best Animated Feature Film at the Japanese Movie Critics Award, but also collaborated with actors across the public sector such as schools, local governments, and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), to enhance inclusive education in Japan. This article shifts the typical focus on media mix as a marketing strategy to consider media mix strategies as potential tools for civic and educational causes. Specifically, it explores *A Silent Voice*'s media mix in relation to improving inclusivity in Japanese education and society. To that end, this project begins with a brief elucidation of the three versions of the original manga, which serve as starting points of this inclusivity-focused media mix. The project then moves to analysis of how the anime problematizes school bullying as systemic exclusion and explores how sign language is presented as one key to forming an inclusive society. Finally, by introducing cases in which collaboration with the public sector distributes this anime's characters, induces various audience desires, and mobilizes audiences to participate in social change, I argue that *A Silent Voice* provides an example of inclusive media mix.

**Keywords**: *A Silent Voice*, Disability, Inclusivity, Media Mix, Sign Language

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## Introduction[1]

The anime film *A Silent Voice* (*Koe no katachi*, 2016) presents both the difficulties and the necessity of mutual participation in interpersonal communication. Specifically, *A Silent Voice* depicts the process of reconstructing communication after school bullying by zeroing in on two main characters, Ishida Shôya and Nishimiya Shôko, and their changing friendship. The anime follows Shôko, a girl with a hearing disability, as she transfers to Shôya's class in elementary school. Shôya and his classmates bully her, which results in her transferring away, and then classmates begin bullying Shôya for his previous behavior. After this experience Shôya, now a high school student, shuts down all communication with others and decides to commit suicide after repaying money to his mother, who paid Shôko's mother for hearing aids that Shôya broke. Before carrying out his suicide plan, though, Shôya visits Shôko to apologize for what he did in elementary school. During this meeting with Shôko, Shôya uses sign language and the two are able to really communicate for the first time, which leads Shôya to abandon his suicide plan. Instead, this communication through sign language leads him and Shôko to build a new friendship, overcome their traumatic experiences, and reconcile with old classmates.

By having a deaf girl as one of its main characters, *A Silent Voice* contributes to the much-needed representation of people with disabilities in anime, and more

generally in Japanese popular culture.[2] Shôko's school life, as represented in this work, exposes various forms of systemic exclusion in today's ableist society. As the following textual analysis will detail, this story revolves around the lack of resources and support for Shôko's everyday life, particularly in educational systems. By enforcing ableist norms in the classroom, Japanese school systems marginalize Shôko and create unfair power dynamics between classmates, which result in cruel bullying. Later reconciliations with old classmates, as experienced by characters learning sign language, are offered as one means of overcoming the exclusion that these dynamics create. In fact, when discussing in an interview why she decided to direct this anime, director Yamada Naoko has said, "This work depicts a very clumsy but important spirit of trying to know and connect with others, such as the desire to know the other person and to reach out to something that is not understood."[3] The relationship between Shôko and Shôya emphasizes the importance of communication that seeks to "connect with others" by overcoming ableism.

Like a majority of contemporary anime works, *A Silent Voice* participates in the media mix system, which has been defined as "the cross-media serialization and circulation of entertainment franchises."[4] According to Marc Steinberg, anime's survival has depended profoundly upon the strategy of media mix, such as character merchandising. Steinberg locates the beginnings of this strategy with the anime TV

series *Astro Boy* (*Tetsuwan Atomu*, 1963-6). As Steinberg explains, when author Tezuka Osamu sold the series to a Japanese TV company at a reduced price, his studio Mushi Production had to recover from that loss by earning royalties from licensed characters.[5] This synergy between characters across transmedia appearances was essential for Mushi Production to continue the low budget and tight schedule anime for TV production. In the mid-1970s Kadokawa Books, led by Kadokawa Haruki, further expanded media mix from being an anime studio's survival strategy to also becoming a media corporation's marketing strategy, covering broader transmedia fields such as literature, music, and film.[6] From these beginnings, the current discourse on media mix tends to emphasize the creation of new markets as a business strategy controlled primarily by animation studios, media corporations, and large merchandising companies.

From an audience perspective, media mix signifies a force that drives the desire to consume character-centered products, such as *Astro Boy* stickers, to build on the previous example. Steinberg's research on *Yo-kai Watch* (*Yôkai wocchi*) convincingly demonstrates that media mix can accomplish "total social mobilization" toward consumption by invoking strong desire in target audiences such as children, their parents, and their grandparents, encouraging them to collect character merchandising materials such as Yo-kai medals.[7] In this form of media mix, concludes Steinberg, "In recessionary Japan, as production decamps to other parts of Asia and the declining

birthrate puts even greater pressure on children to take up the slack in consumption, *Yo-kai Watch* appears as the perfect storm and training grounds, mobilizing children into the rhythms of consumption that govern the techno-capitalist world."[8] In other words, like the critiques of culture industry that have scrutinized how media controls people's desires in Fordist models of mass production and consumption, to think about media mix is also to criticize how media industries expand modes of consumption in post-Fordist consumer societies.[9]

Though we typically understand media mix as large corporations' marketing strategies that induce audiences' desire to consume character merchandising, I am more interested in the ways that media mix expands beyond market-oriented logics, such as when contributing to inclusive education. Given that historically anime's media mix has been a condition of financial survival for studios and intellectual properties, the goals of typical media mix do not necessarily match the goals of media mix that exists for non-capitalist purposes. Instead, to understand this second type of media mix we must take into consideration diverse agents and actors, such as the public sector. Put differently, this article seeks to contribute to our understanding of the multiplicity of media mix systems, which Alexander Zahlten has highlighted in his research on the historical condition of emergent media mixes starting in the 1920s.[10] Focusing on a more contemporary example, I examine how public institutions can also participate in this

kind of media mix. Here I investigate how such actors may distribute characters from anime and manga, induce audience desires, and mobilize audiences to participate in social change for a more inclusive society.

While criticizing systemic exclusion in ableist society and presenting the importance of communication to overcome ableism on the textual level, *A Silent Voice*'s media mix encourages audiences to participate in communication that makes a difference beyond the diegetic world of the anime. By focusing on *A Silent Voice*'s media mix and the message it conveys, I shed light on the functions of a form of media mix beyond the more visible market-driven counterpart. Taking into consideration public institutions such as schools, local government, and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) as key participants, this article explores an example of inclusive media mix, a changing force for an inclusive society in contemporary Japan. *A Silent Voice*'s media mix provides a case in which characters move across media forms to introduce sign language to fans and provide resources to children who see or experience school bullying. By delineating the development of *A Silent Voice*'s media mix, I argue that media mix can hold social and political possibility, namely, a means of creating a more inclusive society, rather than just a marketing strategy.

## 1. Origins of *A Silent Voice*'s Media Mix

In order to trace the development of the inclusive media mix of *A Silent Voice*, it is first necessary to examine the origins of the franchise, that is, manga by Ôima Yoshitoki. How did *A Silent Voice* start as a manga? What kind of agencies participated in its production? And how did the emphasis in its narrative change according to media formats, as it shifted from a short story in a monthly manga magazine to a serialized story in a weekly manga magazine? Exploring these questions gives a context with which the media mix set out.

There are three versions of the manga *A Silent Voice,* which began as boys' manga (shônen manga) where the main target audience was teenage boys. This initial version, which was a short story of just one episode, won the 80th Weekly Shônen Magazine's Newcomer Award (Shûkan shônen magajin shinjin manga shô) in 2008 and was then published in a monthly teen magazine, *Bessatsu Shônen Magazine* (*Bessatsu shônen magajin*), in February 2011.[11] The time lag between the award and actual publication was due to the "difficult" issue the manga depicts, namely, bullying an individual with a disability.[12] The publisher Kôdansha consulted with the Japanese Federation of the Deaf (JFD), the national organization for deaf individuals, and had them as a supervisor of the manga's publication.[13] This original version is composed of a long flashback to the protagonists' time in elementary school since Shôko's transfer, sandwiched by short

scenes of Shôya now as a high school student. In this version of the manga, the narrative focuses on the bullying first of Shôko and then of Shôya after a class meeting in which his classmates blame each other for bullying Shôko. This first version does not include the reconciliation process with friends that later versions of the manga and the anime contain. With Shôya's line, "For the first time today, I felt like I had a conversation with Nishimiya," the last scene of the original *A Silent Voice* emphasizes communication with Shôko as the main theme, which only becomes possible by Shôya learning sign language.

Two years after the publication of that original version, Ôima was preparing for the manga's serialization, but the editor of the magazine decided to just publish a non-serialized version for *Weekly Shônen Magazine* (*Shûkan shônen magajin*) in February 2013. Here the main story about bullying in elementary school and the reunion of Shôya and Shôko later in high school remained generally the same as the original version. However, since this revised version was originally prepared as the first episode of the serialized version, some important items that play major roles in the serialized version are more pronounced. These include Shôko's notebook, which is introduced in the opening, and Shôko's hearing aids, which Shôya violently takes from her. This revised version caused a sensation, and this issue of the magazine sold 60,000 more copies than the previous week's.[14]

The success of both the original and the revised versions of *A Silent Voice* resulted in a third version, this time serialized in *Weekly Shônen Magazine* from 2013 to 2014. This version was also published later as a seven-volume comic series. The serialized version spends more time on the reconciliation among various characters and their individual development beyond the school bullying. In fact, Ôima uses only the first four episodes (out of a total 62) to depict the protagonists' elementary school days, and then the rest is about how Shôya finds his purpose in life after reuniting and communicating with Shôko. As its focus shifts from the bullying in elementary school more to rebuilding relationships after that traumatic experience, the serialized version also introduces additional characters, such as Shôya and Shôko's family members, elementary school classmate Sahara Miyoko who is also a target of bullying, and Shôya's high school friend Nagatsuka Tomohiro. In this version, the reconciliation of characters happens through the process of filmmaking led by Nagatsuka, which serves as an opportunity of reuniting the characters and then rebuilding their relationships. By following the characters' internal conflicts in detail, this serialized version of the manga also shows the characters' growth toward an open future. This point is represented in the ending scene of a coming-of-age ceremony (seijin-shiki) in which Shôya and Shôko are about to open the door to their class reunion party, and thus to another opportunity to rebuild further relationships with other former classmates.

This brief exploration of the three versions of *A Silent Voice* – the original in 2011, the slightly expanded in 2013, and the serialized in 2013-2014 – demonstrates how the work's emphasis shifts from the traumatic experience in elementary school to the rebuilding of relationships in adolescence. It also introduces the participation of JDF, which plays an important role in connecting the media mix to sign language. The anime version of *A Silent Voice* was based on the third, serialized version of the manga but with the limited length of a feature film.

## 2. Shaping Communication against Systemic Exclusion

When audiences consume anime, they appreciate not only the characters themselves but also the settings and narratives that these characters inhabit. Accordingly, media mix systems often capitalize on settings and narratives as part of a franchise.[15] In this specific example, the representation of Shôko, the ableist norms surrounding her, and the process of overcoming traumatic past experience are all vital parts of the narrative, and inclusive media mix utilizes this narrative to create opportunities for more inclusive education. Thus, examining how *A Silent Voice* presents Shôko's life with her classmates in an ableist society helps us understand the relationship between inclusive media mix and this particular anime text.

It can be painful to watch *A Silent Voice* because of its topic of bullying in school.[16] The first 25 minutes of the anime film, which comprise about one fourth of the total runtime, take place in a suffocating circumstance in the elementary school. Here Shôko transfers to Shôya's class and tells the class that she cannot hear by writing this in her notebook. At first, her classmates are cooperative in communicating through her notebook, but gradually they start ignoring her, insulting Shôko behind her back, and bullying another classmate, Sahara, who is willing to learn sign language to communicate with Shôko better. After Shôya throws her hearing aids out of their classroom window for the first time, his violence against Shôko escalates. A montage shows violent acts such as screaming at her from behind during class, trying to trip her with a broom, and scribbling in her notebook. After breaking her hearing aids multiple times, which results in a class meeting with the school principal, their classmates start targeting Shôya in a mirror of what he had initially done to Shôko. He loses his friends, who now actively bully him, and he decides to keep to himself after overhearing his friend at the middle school entrance ceremony say "Stay away from Ishida Shôya. He is a bully." This sequence of bullying and being bullied in turn sets the hurtful tone of the characters' elementary school days as the starting point of the anime.

Watching this elementary school sequence is not just painful but also horrifying because the bullying depicted in *A Silent Voice* is based in the social system. First and

foremost, the school obviously lacks access to the resources necessary to support Shôko and her classmates, which is represented most by the learning environment in the classroom. Since the school and their teachers do not provide any support, Shôko is forced to depend on her classmates for vital things in school life, such as learning information about upcoming quizzes and group singing in music class. This unequal relationship causes a similarly unbalanced and dysfunctional power dynamic between Shôko and her classmates. Moreover, the teacher Takeuchi, whom Shôko is supposed to be able to consult with, shows no interests in organizing his class to solve conflicts and stop the bullying.[17] In fact, until the meeting with the principal, Takeuchi does not actively interfere with his own students to stop the bullying. Then even in the meeting, he only blames Shôya for his violent actions and does not take any responsibility for his atrocious classroom management. In other words, the bullying of Shôko is systemic in terms of the lack of available resources and the lack of responsibility that should be taken by authority figures such as the children's teacher.

Consequently, the traumatic experiences caused by and within the school system in this anime also work as an exclusionary force. The trauma these characters have undergone from the systemic structure prevents their relationships from being rebuilt easily. For example, in a later effort to connect Shôko with her classmates, Shôya's old friends and new friends from high school get together at a theme park. His old friend

Ueno wants to talk to Shôko alone, so she invites Shôko to ride a Ferris wheel. Starting from “I hate you,” the uncomfortable and awkward conversation between Ueno and Shôko exposes that they had no clue how to communicate with each other. While stopping Shôko from apologizing about their broken friendship in elementary school, Ueno narrates her days in the elementary school from her point of view and says, “We were doing everything we could back then, and looking back, I feel like it was inevitable how things turned out.” Ueno becomes frustrated by Shôko, who responds to Ueno’s story by saying “I hate myself,” and she criticizes Shôko for not trying to talk to her. As in Ueno’s line, this scene underlines how clueless they were in school and how the traumatic experience made Shôko hate herself. Through Ueno’s attempted justification of her childhood actions, and the two girls’ responses to each other, we can see that Ueno and Shôko both harbor self-loathing and guilt from their experience that was caused and exacerbated by the systemic structures of elementary school. Their spiral of self-loathing makes communication impossible, and the relationship becomes one of mutual exclusion.

The anime presents sign language as the key to overcoming systemic exclusion, which is in turn emphasized in its media mix. Shôya had already learned sign language to apologize to Shôko, but another unexpected character starts using sign language in the scene at the school cultural festival. In this scene, first Ueno understands that Shôko

is saying sorry in sign language, then she says, “Well, that’s just who you are” and jokingly responds “stupid (baka)” in sign language to Shôko’s apology. Shôko is surprised by Ueno’s use of sign language and fixes Ueno’s mistake that she signed “haka” instead of “baka.” Given the impossibility of communication between Ueno and Shôko in their earlier attempt at conversation on the Ferris wheel, this communication has high stakes now. At that earlier point, Ueno tried to communicate with Shôko, but her attempt did not work because Ueno did not try to understand Shôko’s way of communication, that is, why Shôko said sorry. Now, though, studying sign language has become a representative step for Ueno in trying to understand Shôko better. Although Ueno points out that Shôko saying sorry again is a repetition from their conversation in the Ferris wheel, Ueno can understand now that this is just how Shôko communicates. In other words, the repetition of communication between Shôko and Ueno underlines the necessity of mutual engagement in communication. The sign language that Ueno learns further shows that the kernel of understanding is not found in forcefully having conversations with others to convey self-opinion, but instead, through mutual participation in listening to others. This use of sign language to encourage mutual participation is the key element that *A Silent Voice*’s media mix promotes.

### 3. Inclusive Media Mix

Presenting mutual participation in conversation as a critical means of overcoming the traumatic experiences of systemic exclusion, *A Silent Voice*'s media mix with the public sector invites the anime's audience into the communication model it presents. It is worth noting here that forms of media mix intersecting with the public sector have drawn scholarly attention in anime studies recently. For example, anime series' collaboration with local communities and governments are well known as "contents tourism," or tourism induced by contents such as the narratives, settings, and locations of popular culture.[18] One of the most notable examples is *Lucky Star*'s (*Rakisuta*) collaboration with Washimiya, Saitama Prefecture, which is the location where that anime is set. In this case, the local community and copyright holders pulled together to create character goods and hold events that invited fans' participation.[19] With contents tourism, emphasis is placed on the ways that anime's media mix contributes to regional promotion by mobilizing a franchise's fans. In a similar vein, *A Silent Voice* is also used in promoting its location of Ôgaki, Gifu Prefecture.[20] Unlike many earlier examples, though, *A Silent Voice*'s media mix not only invites fans to the location, but also mobilizes them for the purposes of inclusive education such as sign language learning.

The first example of *A Silent Voice*'s inclusive media mix is a 30-minute live action educational drama (dôtoku kyôzai dorama), which was supervised by JFD in 2015 and intended for use in middle school classes to promote disability awareness. Although this educational drama was produced by film studio Toei, its distribution network is comprised primarily of schools and thus differs significantly from that of commercial films.[21] Since educational works like this are intended for non-profit purposes such as free screening at schools, libraries, and local governments, this film was distributed to the public sector at a one-time price that included copyright compensation.[22] Put differently, the educational drama entails a system focused on educational goals without pursuing more traditional objectives such as strong box office performance. Besides the different distribution system, another aspect of the drama that draws our attention as an educational text are the comments from JFD as its supervisor, which state:

> We think that the DVD of *A Silent Voice* honestly depicts the reality of school life surrounding Shôko, who is deaf. One way to bring everyone's voices to students who cannot hear and convey their own messages is through sign language. Sign language is a language that is communicated with the eyes, hands, and facial expressions. Nowadays, efforts to promote understanding of the deaf and sign language are spreading in elementary and junior high schools. We hope that everyone will learn sign language and that our society will become one in which students who cannot hear can communicate with others in a lively manner.[23]

In other words, JFD uses this media mix to promote inclusive education in middle schools, such as the promotion of sign language and an introduction to communication with students who have hearing disabilities.

In addition to the classroom distribution of a studio-produced educational drama, *A Silent Voice*'s media mix also engaged with the politics surrounding sign language activism in Japan. For example, Kanagawa Prefecture collaborated with *A Silent Voice* to promote the Kanagawa Prefecture Sign Language Regulations (Kanagawa-ken shuwa gengo jôrei, effective April 1, 2015). According to the JFD webpage, after the United Nations General Assembly drafted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on December 13, 2006 (effective May 3, 2008), The Basic Act for Persons with Disabilities was amended on July 29, 2011 in Japan. But the declaration of the right to sign language is not sufficient in itself, so JFD advocated creating an environment that would protect five rights of sign language: acquiring sign language, learning by sign language, learning sign language, using sign language, and protecting the use of sign language.[24] From here each prefecture began making Sign Language Regulations, with the first example being Tottori on October 8, 2013. Kanagawa Prefecture used the characters from *A Silent Voice* to promote the Regulations, distributed a brochure about the Regulations, and ran a free screening of the anime with a sign language workshop in which participants learned sign language used in the anime. The brochure features scenes from the serialized manga version in which Shôko and Shôya communicate by sign language and emphasizes the friendships that sign language can create with the message from the original title, "The voice can

take a shape (koe wa katachi ni dekiru)."[25] This is an example in which *A Silent Voice*'s media mix served as the introduction to the Regulations – and more generally, to sign language itself – through collaborations with the Japanese public sector on the prefectural level.

When the anime version was released in Japanese theaters in 2016, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) collaborated with *A Silent Voice* on two projects. First, MEXT distributed copies of a poster of Shôya and Shôko to elementary, middle, high, and special needs schools throughout Japan. The poster draws viewers' attention to Shôya trying to speak to Shôko using a blank speech balloon for his line, with the question "What would you say?" written next to that visual. This blank space aims to encourage students to say something to someone with disabilities who might be being bullied at their school. Second, MEXT created a website for *A Silent Voice* where visitors can find various support information and resources on school bullying and disabilities.[26] Along with the interview with director Yamada Naoko and the report of the film screening event, there are two special pages, titled "What if there is a child with a disability in school?" and "What if there is someone being bullied and needs help at school?" respectively. Each page shows a short virtual conversation with a section chief from MEXT about available resources, such as "Child SOS Hotline" and "On Special Needs Education." Using the characters and setting of *A Silent Voice*,

this website navigates students toward possible support and resources, with the objective of achieving more inclusive education systems.

These three cases present media mixes in which public sector actors such as schools, the Kanagawa Prefectural Government, and MEXT played major roles in distributing the characters of *A Silent Voice* as part of a larger message promoting inclusive education. To be sure, in the strictest sense *A Silent Voice* was actually distributed by film studio Shôchiku and exhibited in movie theaters nationwide. However, in terms of the transmedia use of characters, *A Silent Voice* diffused into the physical space of schools, Kanagawa Prefecture's policy campaign, and MEXT's advocation of inclusive education and bullying prevention. Moreover, this form of media mix has a different purpose from media mix as the survival strategy of anime production; unlike that capitalist counterpart, this media mix's goals are to discuss school bullying in the classroom, to inform the citizens of Kanagawa Prefecture about the Regulations, to introduce sign language to the audience, and to let students know the resources available when they or their peers need help.

## Conclusion

The educational features of the inclusive media mix of *A Silent Voice* hold political possibility for developing more inclusive societies. As the various cases of *A*

*Silent Voice*'s media mix demonstrate, inclusive media mix requires the synergy between not only franchising companies, but also among public sector actors ranging from schools to MEXT. As shown with Shôko's lack of access to educational and even social resources in *A Silent Voice*, ableist mainstream society has marginalized people with hearing disabilities. However, with the help of public institutions, an inclusive media mix can challenge the real-world versions of the ableist society and its norms that Shôko confronts. In other words, *A Silent Voice*'s media mix is used to create alternative networks and meet different goals. As opposed to media mix as a survival strategy in anime and manga marketing, inclusive media mix is an experiment that goes beyond the typical capitalist, market-oriented logics of the anime industry.

To make a difference in ableist society, what inclusive media mix needs most is effective mobilization of the audience. In fact, participatory reception tends to be emphasized in its media mix, as we see first and foremost in the case of the *Silent Voice*'s poster that MEXT distributed with a blank in the speech balloon. Moreover, inclusive media mix of *A Silent Voice* aims to achieve a specific end as fans' participation, namely, learning sign language, which the anime itself also attempts by inviting the audience into sign language. For example, in the climactic scene on the bridge, Shôko and Shôya communicate in sign language, but there is no explanation of what they are saying for the audience, either by voiceover or through written words.

Thus, the audience has to look for the meanings of the characters' communication, which can be an introduction to sign language. Put differently, by not explaining the communication, the anime normalizes communication through sign and encourages the audience to learn sign language through their watching experience. In fact, there are blogs in which fans passionately state that they started learning sign language because of *A Silent Voice*.[27] Furthermore, the character of Shôko appears in print media to promote sign language such as the advertisement for a sign language textbook published by JFD.[28] As such, by taking advantage of the excessive character merchandising in the media ecology of Japan, *A Silent Voice*'s media mix prepared wide entry points to sign language for the audience.

Especially when considering inclusive media mix with the public sector, we should scrutinize its power relationship with authorities and its ultimate goal. For example, in his examination of propaganda manga series *Imperial Rule Assisting Family*'s (*Yokusan ikka*) media mix as led by The Imperial Rule Assistance Association (Taisei yokusan kai) in 1940, Ôtsuka Eiji accurately points out that for this specific media mix, financial success did not matter. Instead, as a piece of propaganda, its ultimate goal was contributing to total mobilization for the second World War.[29] For studies on any media mixes where the goal is not limited to financial success, Ôtsuka's argument reminds us of the necessity of critical inquiry into what authorities such as

governments and related ministries might seek to accomplish through that collaboration. This is true for inclusive media mix as well, and we must always question the goal of collaborations with the public sector and to what particular end media mix attempts to mobilize the populace. In this sense too, then, inclusive media mix should be considered and examined as a constant process of political negotiation toward specific ends, whether or not these may be a more inclusive education and society as in the goal of *A Silent Voice*'s media mix.

**Notes**

[1] All translations from Japanese to English are mine. Japanese names appear in Japanese order, with the family name followed by the given name, except Japanese names of authors who published their works in English.

[2] On the representation of people with disabilities in Japanese popular culture, James Valentine critically examines the "disability boom" in TV drama in the 1990s. Arran Stibbe also criticizes TV dramas featuring people with disabilities as being based in the medical model and conservative gender representation. And Shinichi Saito and Reiko Ishiyama problematize underrepresentation of people with disabilities, especially elderly people with disabilities. In manga studies, Yoshiko Okuyama provides us with an introduction to significant manga works about people with disabilities. See Valentine, "Disabled Discourse: Hearing Accounts of Deafness Constructed through Japanese Television and Film," *Disability & Society* 16, no. 5 (2001): 707–27, Stibbe, "Disability, Gender and Power in Japanese Television Drama," *Japan Forum* (Oxford, England) 16, no. 1 (2004): 21–36, Shinichi and Ishiyama, "The Invisible Minority: Under-Representation of People with Disabilities in Prime-Time TV Dramas in Japan," *Disability & Society* 20, no. 4 (2005): 437–5, and Okuyama, *Reframing Disability in Manga* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2021).

[3] "Yamada Naoko Interview," (https://web.archive.org/web/20161002112955/http://www.mext.go.jp/koenokatachi/interview.htm) (accessed October 26, 2022). Yamada directed anime series from Kyoto Animation studio including TV series such as *K-on!* (*Keion!*, 2009), *K-on!!* (*Keion!!*, 2010), and *Tamako Market* (*Tamako mâketto*, 2013), and feature-films such as *Movie K-on!* (*Eiga keion!*, 2011), *Tamako Love Story* (*Tamako rabu sutôrî*, 2014) and *Liz and the Blue Bird* (*Rizu to aoi tori*, 2018). As for an analysis of her work beyond *A Silent Voice*, see, for example, Paul Ocone, "Dis/joint: Unification of Sound, Music, Narrative, and Animation in *Liz and the Blue Bird*," *Mechademia* 13, no. 2 (2021): 26–46.

[4] Marc Steinberg, *Anime's Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), viii. As for an example of media mix, Ian Condry's research introduces the collaborative creativity between an anime studio and a toy company in the case of *Mobile Suit Gundam* (*Kidô senshi gandamu*) and Gunpla. See Condry, *The Soul of Anime: Collaborative Creativity and Japan's Media Success Story* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 112-34.

[5] Steinberg, *Anime's Media Mix*, 37-85. Steinberg argues that the "dynamically immobile image" of characters from limited animation is the key to character franchising in Japan. In terms of the relationship between the stillness of limited animation and anime-specific movements from cel layers, see Thomas Lamarre, *The*

*Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

[6] In the context of Japanese film history, Alexander Zahlten analyzes the Kadokawa film, blockbuster films produced by Kadokawa, as an industrial genre. See Zahlten, *The End of Japanese Cinema: Industrial Genres, National Times, and Media Ecologies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

[7] Marc Steinberg, "Media mix mobilization: Social mobilization and *Yo-Kai Watch*," *Animation* 12, no. 3 (2017): 244-258.

[8] Steinberg, "Media mix mobilization," 255. As he states here, Steinberg's argument stands in contrast to Mizuko Ito's argument, which recognizes the use of imagination of children in participating in active, socialized consumption of *Yu-Gi-Oh!* (*Yûgiô*) and *Hamtaro* (*Tottoko hamutarô*). See Mizuko Ito, "Mobilizing the imagination in everyday play: The case of Japanese media mixes," *International handbook of children, media, and culture* (2008): 397-412. On bringing a new perspective such as the female gaze in dôjinshi and female pedestrians in urban spaces to media mix, see also Kathryn Hemmann, "Queering the Media Mix: The Female Gaze in Japanese Fancomics," *Manga Cultures and the Female Gaze* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 77-101 and Edmond Ernest Dit Alban, "Pedestrian Media Mix: The Birth of Otaku Sanctuaries in Tokyo," *Mechademia* 12, no. 2 (2020): 140-163.

[9] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (Edited by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr. Translated by E. F. N. Jephcott. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002), 94-136.

[10] Alexander Zahlten, "Before Media Mix: The Electric Ecology," in *A Companion to Japanese Cinema*, ed. David Desser (Newark: John Wiley & Sons, 2022), 474-7. As an example of multiple media mixes, Zahten introduces Michael Raine's research on popular song films during high economic growth, see Raine, "Kayô eiga to media mikkusu," *New Vistas: Japanese Studies for the Next Generation* (2014): 23-33.

[11] The official fan book, published in October 2016, is composed of the original version, the revised version, and comments and interview of the author Ôima Yoshitoki. My analysis of the original and the revised version is based on the official fan book. Ôima, *Koe no katachi kôshiki handobukku* (Tokyo: Kôdansha. 2016).

[12] "Chôkaku shôgai wa hitotsu no kosei," *Yomiuri shinbun*, January 26, 2015.

[13] On JFD, Karen Nakamura provides us with an explanation of the historical development of this political organization and its role in deaf communities in Japan. See Nakamura, *Deaf in Japan: Signing and the Politics of Identity* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2006).

[14] "Kono manga ga sugoi 2015 otoko hen: 1. *Koe no katachi*" (http://comic-sp.kodansha.co.jp/topics/koe/) (accessed October 26, 2022).

[15] On the various relationships the fans can have in consuming franchises and their narratives see, for example, Ôtsuka Eiji, "World and Variation: The Reproduction and Consumption of Narrative." *Mechademia* 5 (2010): 99–116.

[16] Agnieszka Kiejziewicz situates bullying in *A Silent Voice* within the broader context of film depicting children from Japan. See Kiejziewicz, "Bullying, death and traumatic identity: the taboo of school violence in new Japanese cinema," *Maska* 3 (39) (2018): 75-88.

[17] Teacher Takeuchi's responsibility for the bullying is more pronounced in the original, revised, and serialized versions of manga. In fact, he joins in bullying Shôko and Shôya. For example, in the original version, Takeuchi told Shôko "You're annoying" in a meeting. In the revised version, Takeuchi whispers "Who the hell sent this baggage" after Shôko presents her will to join the chorus contests. In the serialized version, when he found that Shôya took Shôko's hearing aids, he told Shôya "Well, I know how you feel." As seen in this series of comments and his irresponsibility as teacher, Takeuchi actively bullies his students.

[18] Regarding the translation of kontentsu tsûrizumu, Philip Seaton and Takayoshi Yamamura use "contents tourism" to capture "the plurality of contents (narratives, characters, locations, music, and so on) that may drive touristic behaviour." I use "contents tourism" in this article following this convention. See Seaton and Yamamura, "Japanese Popular Culture and Contents Tourism – Introduction," *Japan forum* 27, no. 1 (2015): 9.

[19] For more information about the relationship between *Lucky Star* fan activities and contents tourism in Washimiya, see Okamoto Takeshi, "Otaku tourism and the anime pilgrimage phenomenon in Japan," *Japan Forum* 27, no. 1 (2015): 12-36, and Yamamura Takayoshi, "Contents tourism and local community response: *Lucky Star* and collaborative anime-induced tourism in Washimiya," *Japan Forum* 27, no. 1 (2015): 59-81.

[20] A newspaper article reports that a local office made a location guide and a file folder with characters. "*Koe no katachi* Ôgaki kankô PR," *Yomiuri shinbun*, November 19, 2015.

[21] The educational film business of Toei started from its predecessor film studio Tôyoko Eiga which aimed at providing entertainment and education to rural villages in the late 1940s. For more information about the relationship between Toei, educational film, and animation studio Toei Doga, see Watanabe Daisuke, "Shoki tôei dôga ni okeru kyôiku eiga no ichi: Omoni kokusai ka rosen to no kakawari kara," *Engeki kenkyû: Engeki hakubutsukan kiyô* 37 (2014): 97-114. Also, for the beginning of educational film production in the history of Toei, see Tôei kabushikigaisha ed., *Tôei no kiseki* (Tokyo: Tôei, 2016), 54-5.

[22] Tôei, “Shôhin no kônyû hôhô to otoiawase,” (https://www.toei.co.jp/edu/information.html) (accessed October 26, 2022).

[23] “Dôtoku kyôzai dorama: *Koe no katachi*” flyer which is available at Toei, “*Koe no katachi*,” (https://www.toei.co.jp/edu/lineup/school/1205821_2442.html) (accessed October 26, 2022).

[24] See the JFD’s “Opinion on enacting a sign language law” which is available at the JFD’s “Project to Promote the Establishment of a Sign Language Law” website (https://www.jfd.or.jp/sgh) (accessed October 26, 2022).

[25] Kanagawa Prefectural Government. “Shuwa o motto shitte hoshii,” (https://www.pref.kanagawa.jp/documents/60180/799579.pdf) (accessed October 26, 2022).

[26] See MEXT, “Eiga *koe no katachi* x monbu kagaku shô,” (https://web.archive.org/web/20161002112910/http://www.mext.go.jp/koenokatachi/index.htm) (accessed October 26, 2022).

[27] See, for example, Kakuhôlog, “*Koe no katachi* ni kanka sarete shuwa o hajimeta yatsu wa zettai ni ore dake ja nai,” (https://04kphenix.hatenablog.com/entry/2017/11/03) (accessed October 26, 2022).

[28] See the flyer of the sign language textbook, *Chô-san to manabô*, by JFD available at http://www.jfd.or.jp/books/cp/cp-chosantomanabou.pdf (accessed November 14, 2022).

[29] Ôtsuka Eiji, “Senjika no media mikkusu: *Yokusan ikka* to tonarigumi,” in *Dôin no media mikkusu: Seisaku suru taishû no senjika sengo*, ed. Eiji Ôtsuka (Kyoto: Shibunkaku, 2017), 29-53.

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