An Introduction to Japanese Subcultures

Handout English Version

Week 1
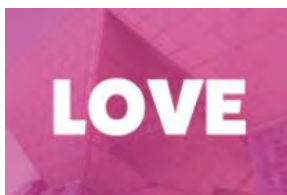**Love**

Week 2
Battle

Week 3
Technology

Week 4
Fan culture

WEEK 1: LOVE

Activity 1: Introduction

In this course, we will explore girls comics, boys comics, the vocaloid phenomenom, cosplay, and J-pop idols, focusing on the four themes of Love, Battle, Technology and Fan culture.

1.1   WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF JAPANESE SUBCULTURE VIDEO (03:10)

1.2   WHAT IS SUBCULTURE? ARTICLE

1.3   ACADEMIC BACKGROUND OF JAPANESE SUBCULTURES VIDEO (03:09)

1.4   YOUTH SUBCULTURES IN JAPAN ARTICLE

1.5   WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE SUBCULTURE IN JAPAN ? DISCUSSION

Activity 2: Immaturity and Relationships with Others

Immaturity is one of the key terms that describes Japan after modernization (post WWII). How is immaturity manifested in Japanese subculture?

1.6   INFANTILITY AND FRAGILITY VIDEO (01:05)

1.7   JAPANESE IMMATURITY ARTICLE

1.8   IMMATURITY IN YOUR CULTURE DISCUSSION

Activity 3: Love Relationships in Japanese Culture

What is "Shojo"? What is "Otometic" ? Let's find out more about those uniqe aspects of Japanese subcultures through Japanese shojo comics from 1970s and 80s.

1.9   OTOMETIC MANGA VIDEO (01:32)

1.10   ABJECTION OF MATURITY ARTICLE

1.11   ETERNAL GIRLHOOD ARTICLE

1.12   LOVE RELATIONSHIPS DISCUSSION

Activity 4: Kawaii Relationships

What is Kawaii to you? Let us try to redefine Kawaii by reading articles and through discussion.

1.13   WHAT IS "KAWAII"? VIDEO (01:37)

1.14   KAWAII THINGS AND YOU DISCUSSION

1.15   KAWAII AND UNCANNY ARTICLE

1.16   KAWAII OBJECTS ARTICLE

1.17   WHAT IS KAWAII IN YOUR CULTURE? DISCUSSION

Activity 5: Love and Sexuality

Discussions about Fujoshi, Yaoi and BL.

1.18   LOVE AND SEXUALITY IN MANGA VIDEO (01:56)

1.19   YAOI AND ITS CULTURAL BACKGROUND ARTICLE

1.20   YAOI MANGA: A FORM OF EXPRESSION OF FEMALE DESIRE ARTICLE

1.21   YAOI MANGA: THE MEANING OF LOVE FOR YAOI READERS ARTICLE

1.22   YAOI AND BL DISCUSSION

Activity 6: Summary of Week 1

Overview of Week 1 and a discussion about the role of love Japanese subcultures

1.23   LOVE IN SUBCULTURE DISCUSSION

1.24   GLOSSARY ARTICLE

1.25   ETERNAL GIRLHOOD ARTICLE

Week1: LOVE
Introduction

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Step 1.1 (Video)
Welcome to the World of Japanese Subculture

Japanese subculture is now a global phenomenon, but we would like to put it into Japanese historical context, which will shed a new light on the significance of the youth culture of Japanese audience. Its significance is surely appealing to audience with other cultural backgrounds.

Think about your own youth culture. Is it similar to that of Japanese youth culture? Or do they have different significance? Why do you like (or are you interested in) Japanese subculture? What is the fascinating point?

A four week journey

In this course, we will focus on the cultural phenomena beginning around the 1970s. This is around the time in which visual culture such as animation and manga began to be exported out of Japan. We'd like to relocate Japanese Subculture in the context of Japanese historical and social situations from that time to the present. We will explore girls comics, boys comics, the vocaloid, cosplay, and J-pop idols. However, we will avoid a typical historical survey of Japanese subculture. Instead, we will pick up four topics which underlie contemporary youth culture in Japan: Love in Week 1, Battle in Week 2, Technology in Week 3 and Fan culture in Week 4. Each week, learners will read reading materials including excerpts of graphic contents, answer to quizzes and also discuss some points with other fellow learners. In some activities, the list of further readings are provided for your future interests. Through our four week journey, let's find out a new perspective on the young people of Japan, explore how they can be seen to elaborate the world of "immaturity" and "vulnerability" as well as to develop a basic knowledge of key Japanese subcultures, learning the recognizable traits of each.

Organizing team

This course will be led by Professor Hisayo Ogushi with three other specialists.Professor Isamu Takahashi, Professor Susumu Niijima and Professor Toshiyuki Ohwada from Keio university.

From the left: Hisayo Ogushi, Isamu Takahashi, Susumu Niijima and Toshiyuki Ohwada.

Haruka Ikebe, Daiki Uchida, Motoki Yasui and Professor Keiko Okawa will assist you during the course!

Follow the team to read their responses to learners throughout the course.

Important notes

- You can find a PDF version of all the steps of the week in the "DOWNLOADS" section of the first step of the each week.
- Video subtitles are provided in both English and Japanese. To select your preferred language, please hover over the speech bubble icon in the video player, and choose from the options provided.
- Some words and names that may be unfamiliar to learners are listed in the glossary located in Step 1.24.
- All book titles and Japanese keywords will be *italicized*.
- Sometimes *ō* and *ū* will appear with a straight bar above the letters (i.e., macron or diacritical mark) . This represents long vowels, for example, *ō* for "oo" or "oh."
- When you complete each step, select the Mark as complete button before selecting the forwarded arrow to move on.
- If you are new to FutureLearn, take a look at the Using Futurelearnsection for information on how to get the best out of the course.

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Video Script

0:06

Hello, everyone. I am Hisayo Ogushi, the lead educator of the online course about Japanese Subculture. In this course, we'll discuss and reconsider the themes of Vulnerability and Immaturity that are prevalent within and throughout Japanese subculture. I am a professor in the English Department at Keio University, and my main research field is 19th-century American Literature. Now you might wonder why I am your guide in and around the world of Japanese subculture. You may also be wondering about the relationship, if any, between American literature and Japanese subculture. Well, let me briefly tell you about my own background.

0:51

My first encounter with America was not with American movies, nor with children's books, but with Japanese comics-- especially, various works of Japanese shojo manga (manga targeting young women) or anime set in North America. In a way, manga served as a gateway to my current position in Japan as a scholar of foreign literature. My generation, those who grew up with manga and anime, has witnessed the transformation of Japanese subculture from simple childish entertainment to the "soft power" that represents contemporary Japanese culture. The substance of Japanese subculture is now known as "cool Japan." Due to the development of the Internet and other visual media, Japanese manga and anime, as well as popular music, gained wide-reaching global notoriety.

1:52

Words such as "otaku" or "kawaii," even without translation, have already been established as keywords to explain Japanese culture. have already been established as keywords to explain Japanese culture. This course is not, however, just a catalogue-like survey of Japanese subculture. The three educators and myself will investigate Japanese subculture in the context of youth culture from 1970s, which positively embraces "immaturity" and "vulnerability."

2:22

In each week of this four-week long course we will cover the four genres: "Love," "Battle," "Technology," and "Fan culture." There will also be a different and unique theme each week of the course. We hope that you will see Japanese subculture through the perspectives of the four genres and weekly themes. Professor Isamu Takahashi will be with you in Week 2. Professor Susumu Niijima in Week 3. And the fourth week will be guided by Professor Toshiyuki Ohwada. Each week is interrelated. When the course ends, we believe you will get a larger picture about Japanese subculture.

Step 1.2 (Article)
What is subculture?

This course discusses "Japanese Subculture" but before we begin, let's have an overview of "subculture" by reviewing some descriptions by scholars.

Definition of subculture

According to Oxford English Dictionary (the OED), subculture, means *"an identifiable subgroup within a society or group of people, especially one characterized by beliefs or interests at variance with those of the larger group"*. The term first appears in English language documents in 1914. Originally "subculture" indicated a particular group of people and their culture. For example, the OED shows an example of "subculture" as follows:

"This subculture, nicknamed hip hop , is about . . . status and competition, particularly among males" (Time, 21. May, 1983).

As Terry Eagleton discusses in *The Idea of Culture,*(1) the concept of "culture" has an aspect counter to "Culture" with capital C, which is supposed to hold universal and transcendental values for everyone (Eagleton 40). Subculture is, if we follow Eagleton's argument, "a culture," leading us to "identity and solidarity" not to authenticity or authorities.

In 1947, Milton M. Gordon defines subculture in his famous essay *"The Concept of Sub-Culture and Its Application"*(2) as follows:

A concept used here to refer to a sub-division of a national culture, composed of a combination of factorable social situations such as class status, ethnic background, regional and rural or urban residence, and religious affiliation, but *forming in their combination a functioning unity which has an integrated impact on the participating individual*.

Gordon later explains that each subcultural group has ethnic, class, and regional differences, but each group established their own "world within a world." Subculture, in this sense, could be defined as "culture" within "Culture," which may be related to counter culture.

Subculture in Japan

How does this theory apply to Subculture in Japan after WWII? Akio Miyazawa, arguing in his *Nippon Sengo Sabu Karucha Shi*(4) [A History of Subculture in Japan after WWII] (2014) [fig.1], in which he deals with his personal memories from 1960s through 1990s, points out that at the beginning Japanese subculture was greatly influenced by American West Coast counter culture (chapter 1). According to Miyazawa, the word "subculture" first appeared in Japanese documents when an article by Kenji Kanesaka, a visual artist and critic, was published in *Bijutsu Techo*[Art Notebook] magazine [fig.2] in February Issue of 1968.
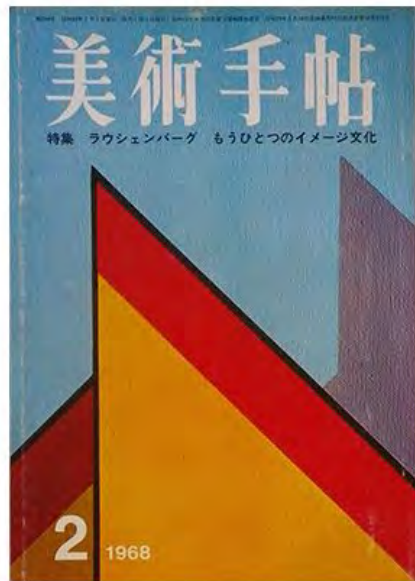
(Right) Fig.1 *Nippon Sengo Sabu Karucha Shi* **[A History of Subculture in Japan after WWII], Akio Miyazawa, Tokyo: NHK Shuppan, 2014. (Left) Fig 2** *Bijutsu Techo***, Bijutsu Shuppan-sha, Magazine, Feb 1968**

His article, "*Wakudeki heno Izanai: Kyampu to Hippi Bunka*(3) [An Invitation to Indulgence: Camp and Hippie Subculture]," Kanesaka points out that people are witnessing a big transition of industrial art from straight lines to winding and curvy lines which could be compared to Art Nouveau at the turn of the century. Seeing the traditional rules of art and the traditional sense being free, licentious color combinations are now flourishing in, the so called, Hippie Culture, Kanesaka mentions this cultural phenomenon is "bad taste," and "this could be called subculture, which is yet to be culture" (3),p.87. It is interesting that Kanasaka seems to believe that subculture is not yet culture, as if subculture were, in other words, an immature condition that has yet to become culture, even though subculture has the power to break through the traditional sense of value.

Sabukaru and Subculture

Roughly since 1990s, "subculture" has been often abbreviated as "sabukaru" when we talk about Japanese subcultures. One of the first documents which include "sabukaru" is, as far as we researched, Eiji Otsuka's *Sengo Minshushugi no Rihabiritaishion*(5) [Rehabilitation of Democratization after WWII] (2001). In Otsuka's context, sabukaru connotes a sort of junk-ness and ephemerality. Subcultures in the Japanese context may not indicate cultures in ethnic or regional subgroups as Gordon points out. Japanese subcultures may rather indicate marginality, immaturity, ephemerality, or vulnerability. Subcultures in a contemporary sense generally refer to popular culture including animation, manga, video games and popular music. And yet, we need to recognize that "subculture" holds imbricated meanings.

Now, how do you define "subculture"?

To share your ideas and see posts from other learners, select the **comments** link below. You can also 'like' and reply to comments from your peers.

Step 1.3 (Video)

Academic background of Japanese Subcultures

Academic background of Japanese Subcultures

In the video, you will find a lot of mangas behind Prof. Ogushi. This is a special place called "Manga Kissa" (a café with manga library) where you can have coffee/tea while reading as many mangas as you like, and stay as long as you like (for a reasonable fee).

In this video, you will see one of those cafés in Ikebukuro, Tokyo. This café called 801 Café, however, is not an ordinary Manga Kissa – almost all the manga found here belong to the boys' love and yaoi genres. You will learn more about those genres later in this activity. This café is for women only, so that female fans of BL and yaoi manga are able to read such comics comfortably.

Enjoy her talk, her outfit and this place with a wonderful collection of comics !

Your thoughts?

How do you think the world sees Japan in 2016? Why does Japanese subculture attract global attention? Why are YOU interested in Japanese subculture? What is the attraction for you?

Scholars introduced in the video

If you are interested in more about the academic background, please search for further readings by the following scholars introduced in the video;

- [Larry McCaffery](#)
- Sinda Gregory
- [Anne Allison](#)
- [Sharon Kinsella](#)
- Thom Lamar
- [Susan Napier](#)

Click Here to see the List of Reading materials mentioned in the video

Video subtitles are provided in both English and Japanese

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Video Script

0:06

Youth Culture and Subculture in contemporary Japan have been actively studied and considered since the end of WWII. In this course, we will focus on these cultural phenomena in and around the 1970s. This is around the time in which visual culture such as Animation and Manga began to be exported out of Japan. On April 30, 2001 Time Magazine launched a Special Issue entitled "How the World Sees Japan." The cover humorously and ironically describes stereotypical images of Japan and its people. A samurai who is talking on a mobile phone, a maiko-like woman holding an expensive designer handbag, a child with a portable video game. Beyond them, in the background, one can see Fujiyama in the skyline.

1:02

Sakura trees, the Temple of the Golden Pavilion coexist with Aibo-like robo-pets and other technological advancements in Japanese culture. In the field of literature, a new stream of Japanese literature and underground culture, so called "slipstream literature", flourished in the 1990s. This genre attracted attention from critics such as Larry McCafferey and Sinda Gregory, who coined the term "Avant-Pop" in 1995. McCaffrey also edited The Review of Contemporary Fiction in the summer of 2002 with the special topic of "New Japanese Fiction." The literary works included in this journal were those by postmodern writers, most of whom shared a sense of paraliterature.

1:51

Japanese studies in the UK and US from 1990s gradually cover contemporary subcultural phenomena of Japan, Manga, Anime, Gothic fashion, J-Pop Music and Girls' Kawaii Culture. Scholars such as Anne Allison, Sharon Kinsella, Thom Lamar and Susan Napier, to name a few, argue on Japanese subculture in an academic context, and their studies inspire more lively discussion about Japan as well. Mechademia, an annual journal from the University of Minnesota Press, which exclusively focuses on Asian popular culture, published its first issue in 2006. This journal offers an intellectual space for scholars and critics to show their academic achievements. Why does Japanese culture attract global attention? Why are YOU interested in Japanese subculture? What is the attraction?

2:52

In the next step, you will read an excerpt from William M. Tsusui's article that explains Otaku, hard-core subculture fans and their relationship with youth culture in Japan.

Step 1.4 (Article)
Youth Subcultures in Japan

What is otaku? What kind of people do you think otakus are?

In this step, let's take a look at what William M. Tsutsui discusses in his article *"Nerd Nation: Otaku and Youth Subculture in Contemporary Japan"* in *Education about Asia* 13.3 (2008) to understand how the academics view and analyze Otaku, hard core subculture fans and their relationship with youth culture in Japan.

Youth Cultures and Otaku

Some of you might have some ideas that Japanese subculture is popular only among those who are, so called, "nerds," or "otaku." Now, what is "otaku" identity? What is "otaku-ness"? William M. Tsutsui discusses as follows:

A wide variety of youth subcultures have appeared in Japan since World War II, many of them shocking polite sensibilities and subverting mainstream society with behaviors considered hedonistic, self-centered, and deviant. Among the subcultures that attract the most attention, both among the public and in academic circles, is the otaku, the notoriously obsessive fans of manga, anime, video games, and other forms of Japanese popular culture. Generally styled as "nerds" or "geeks," otaku are pictured in Japan's collective imagination as socially maladjusted young men, physically unattractive (usually gawky or overweight), and unnaturally fixated on some narrow corner of mass culture. Otsuka are commentator, "socially inept loners. . . fanatically knowledgeable in one abstruse field, be it Godzilla movies or the history of sumo wrestling"; they are "chronically shy," "sickly pale," and "socially inept, but often brilliant technological shut-ins."(1) An otaku, the journalist Tsuzuki Kyoichi concluded, is "someone who doesn't look good, who has no girlfriend, who is collecting silly things, and . . . who is into something useless."(2) In the more evenhanded words of the Oxford English Dictionary, which added a definition of otaku in March 2008,

Originally in Japan: a person extremely knowledgeable about the minute details of a particular hobby (esp. a solitary or minority hobby); . . . one who is skilled in the use of computer technology and is considered by some to be poor in interacting with others."(3)

Since their emergence in the 1970s and 1980s, otaku have become a major social phenomenon, engendering fear, disapproval, and misunderstanding, as well as widespread fascination. The rise of an otaku identity in Japan has inspired books, films, and art movements that both celebrate and demonize fervent fan subcultures. Around the world, admirers of Japanese pop culture (above all, anime and manga) proudly embrace the label otaku and emulate the practices of Japan's intense fanatics. Meanwhile, the prominence of otaku culture has spurred handwringing among the Japanese public, contributing to longstanding concerns over the degeneracy and self-absorption of Japan's youth. Understanding the world of the otaku can provide insights into the impact of affluence, technology, and the media on young Japanese, the globalization of Japan's vibrant youth culture, and the diverse social challenges confronting millennial Japan.

New Directions of Otaku

As a youth culture, Japanese subculture has a significant subversive power against social systems, especially that of education. You will see one of the roots of Japanese subculture in the next section in Tsutsui's essay.

Many psychologists and cultural critics have argued that the roots of otaku behavior lay within Japan's highly structured, even oppressive, educational and social systems. They have suggested that the information fetishism of otaku stems from the rigid routines of Japanese schooling, which emphasize rote learning and the memorization of vast quantities of fragmented facts. The social awkwardness and reclusive tendencies of otaku, meanwhile, were widely understood to be reactions against the pressure for conformity, emphasis on the group, and elaborate standards of decorum that characterize Japanese society. And while some commentators have insisted that otaku are, in fact, remarkably sociable (especially with fellow enthusiasts), other scholars have argued compellingly that otaku tend to form impersonal networks rather than convivial communities. . . .

Since Japan's otaku subculture began to attract public attention in the 1980s, it has evolved in a variety of new directions. While many early otaku were particularly fixated on science fiction (whether the Godzilla movies or television series like *Ultraman*), the imaginative and visually rich realms of *manga* and *anime* soon became the most widespread obsession. By the start of the new millennium, otaku interests became more overtly sexualized. There was a proliferation of *garu-ge* ("girl games," dating simulation software) and female fantasy characters introduced in anime, manga, or as collectible plastic models. . . . As many analysts have suggested, the long-term transition in otaku tastes, from sci-fi and animation to pursuits viewed by the larger society as perverted, pornographic and often pedophilic, was driven by the mainstreaming of manga and anime in the 1990s. As the Japanese public came to accept forms like anime, otaku felt compelled to move on to more outrageous and offensive obsessions in order to maintain their distance from polite society and their resistance to its niceties. As one scholar has observed, "Today's subculture chooses videogame wars over street-riot opposition, deviance over activism. . . . erotic fantasy over sexual freedom, and hollow identity over existential angst." (4)

Your thoughts?

As you read above, Japanese subculture arises from a highly competitive background. Please think about the youth culture in your own county. Are there any social influences? If so, how? Share your thoughts in the comments area with other learners. Feel free to read and respond to other people's comments.

SEE ALSO
EDUCATION ABOUT ASIA

A Journal published by Association about Asian Studies since 1995, a practical teaching resource for secondary school, college, and university instructors, as well as an invaluable source of information for students, scholars, libraries, and anyone with an interest in Asia (quoted from AAS web page).

https://www.futurelearn.com/links/l/71o3clbo4kebkyefe3idx7z33fgynx0

Step 1.5 (Discussion)
What is your favorite subculture in Japan ?

Have you ever read/seen Japanese Manga or Animation? Have you ever played any Japanese video games?

How was your first experience of experiencing or interacting with Japanese subculture? What in Japanese subculture attracts you the most? Are there any stories or narratives that you do not like or understand? Please share your thoughts in the discussion area below.

You may like to read and comment on contributions made by other learners. You can also **'like'** comments if you agree with what's been said or if you have found something particularly interesting.

Week1: Activity 2
Immaturity and Relationships with Others

Immaturity is one of the key terms that describes Japan after modernization (post WWII). How is immaturity manifested in Japanese subculture?

1.6   INFANTILITY AND FRAGILITY VIDEO (01:05)

1.7   JAPANESE IMMATURITY ARTICLE

1.8   IMMATURITY IN YOUR CULTURE DISCUSSION

Step 1.6 (Video)
Infantility and fragility

Do you see immaturity and infantility in Japanese subcultures?   Prof. Ogushi will give you some questions related to immaturity.

In this activity, we will discuss "immaturity" and "infantility" in Japanese subculture before we get into the topic of **"Love"** and romantic relationship. Let's read some materials in the next step in order to get the historical context of "immaturity" and "relationality" in contemporary Japan.

Video Script
0:06

After WWII, Douglass MacArthur, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, once said of Japanese people that "Measured by the standards of modern civilization, they would be like a boy of twelve as compared with our development of 45 years." Immaturity is one of the key terms that describes Japan after modernization. As Masahiko Abe argues in The Strategy of Infantility (2015), youth, infantility, immaturity, and fragility are eventually related to contemporary otaku culture. If so, then how can immature people build up relationships with others? Is it possible that we can mingle with others without growing up? What do protagonists in subculture narratives want in their relationships with others?

Step 1.7 (Article)
Japanese immaturity

Immaturity is one of the keywords for understanding Japanese subculture in this course, and in this activity we will learn why immaturity matters in Japanese society.

"Immaturity" by Keith Vincent

Now let us read the excerpt from an article entitled "The Geneology of Japanese Immaturity"(1) by Keith Vincent, one of the most prominent scholars of Japanese literature.

People seem to agree that there is something "immature" or "infantile" about Japan. This is true, it would seem, from perspectives both inside Japan and outside it. As I am sure you all know, the Japanese government has decided to embrace the image of Japanese immaturity—making Hello Kitty Japan's minister of tourism in 2008, and promoting "cuteness" as one of Japan's most lucrative cultural exports. The image of Japan as a perpetual adolescent has long been prevalent in the political realm, although now that the Japan Democratic Party has taken control of the government and asserted some autonomy vis a vis the U.S., journalists are asking if Japan is "finally going to grow up and go its own way." (2) […]

It is perhaps for this reason that students interested in Japan seem so different from students who want to study, say, French or Chinese. When I interview students or read applications for study abroad programs to Japan, for example, students will of course talk about specific things about Japan that they like (the food, the fashion, popular culture, etc.) but they almost always also talk about their 'love' for Japan as such. Often they mention how this love for "Japan" has been with them ever since their childhood. Of course it is important to love what you study–in fact it is necessary to be passionate about any foreign language in order to truly master it. But still, there is something obsessive and otaku-like about the way these kids "love Japan." Japan to them is not just another country. It is another world that seems to promise something that nowhere else has.[…] The strange intensity of this love may have to do with the fact that they associate Japanese culture with their childhoods. . . .

Of course I consider it part of my job to disabuse them of these fantasies and to get them to think about Japan and Japanese culture in more critical, not to say "grownup," ways. My focus is on modern literature so I have them read lots of Soseki and Karatani Kojin, and this usually helps a little. The ultimate goal is to get them to stop thinking about "Japan" per se and start thinking about the people who live there and the books they have written and how these might both relate to their own lives and stimulate them intellectually. I suppose in a way you could say that I am trying to get them to "outgrow" the Japan of their childhood. But at the same time I want them to hold on to their memories of an "infantile" Japan and think about where this image might have come from historically. So rather than just "outgrowing" their fascination with Japan I hope they will use the image of an infantile Japan to think through how our understandings of childhood and "growing up" have themselves taken on powerful ideological meanings in the modern world. I would even say that one of the best reasons there is to study Japanese literature is the opportunity it provides for us to re-examine our assumptions about what constitutes maturity and childishness.

Why is this? Because the notions of maturation and development that underlie Japanese modernity have for so long been not only naive goals but also critical questions on the Japanese intellectual and cultural landscape. Saitô Tamaki has argued, for example that the process of *henshin* ("transformation") that is so ubiquitous in manga and anime is a metaphor for accelerated maturation—and reflects the child's desire to grow up.(3) It may also allude to a larger social preoccupation with the process of growth and development that can be traced back to the Meiji period. Japan's experience of accelerated modernization from the Meiji period onwards was, after all, a sort of collective *henshin*. In some respects the sheer speed of this transformation proved traumatic, but it also contributed to a heightened critical awareness of the ideologies attached to notions such as progress, maturation, and "civilization." […] [I]t remains true that no student of modern Japanese history and literature can ignore the ideological, rhetorical, psychological and other ramifications of the felt imperative to "grow up," to "modernize," to become a "first-class country" (ittô koku) in Meiji or, more recently, a "normal nation."

Japanese Immaturity

In this article, Vincent, focusing on cultural castration by the United States after WWII as well as the issue of dependence on materialism in Japan, criticizes the ideological labelling of Japanese as "immature."

If we accept the premise of "Japanese immaturity," there may be some truth to both of these explanations of what has caused it. The trauma of defeat in war and the suffocating influence of an overweening mother might very well stunt one's growth. But I would like to suggest that rather than asking whether the "the Japanese" are or are not "immature," we ask instead what kind of ideological work gets done when we claim that they are. For one thing, panicking about "growing up" and "separating from the mother" invariably privileges a phallic, and usually heteronormative masculine subject. . . . And whatever one might say about this question on the level of the individual psyche or family dynamics, to apply this sort of psychoanalytic reasoning to an entire culture is deeply problematic. In fact, I would argue that rehearsing the narrative of "Japanese immaturity" has the effect of consolidating the Japanese nation around a collective trauma and thereby repressing our awareness that *different people experience history differently*. If there is hope for a nation to truly "mature" it lies in the affirmation and cultivation of this diversity and the recognition of more than just a single narrative of the postwar. This means recognizing that the nation–or any given generation–does not move forward in a single lockstep and that "maturity" can take many forms.

It also means addressing what has been called the "modernizationist" understanding of culture– the idea that there is some universal timeline of progress, with the "infantile" or "primitive" on one end and the "mature" or "civilized" at the other. In the modernizationist way of thinking, particular cultures or individuals are imagined as existing at some point on this timeline and thus being either "behind" or "ahead" or perhaps coeval with others. It is surprisingly hard to avoid this way of thinking even today, when some people would say that we ought to have moved beyond such a linear, modern way of thinking.

"Immaturity" by Masahiko Abe

Masahiko Abe, a Japanese critic-scholar of English and Japanese literature, considers "immaturity" as a strategy to make a new realm, in which languages are free from speaker/listener (i.e. teacher/student, ruler/ruled, strong/weak) relationships. In general, society needs static states through language in order to rule the world. What happens if, however, the immature/weak/ruled have a voice? Abe discusses the place for immaturity/childishness in our society, and its subversive power.

Abe argues that the concept of infantility, immaturity or minority was focused on in the age of modernization. Before modernization, authorities controlled information and communication in order to keep orders in favor of those who had power. However, Abe discusses, print and media technology developed during modernization, which enabled ordinary people to have access to and spread information that was not officially authorized. Narratives by the unauthorized—in other words, by the immature—may be shady, promiscuous and chaotic, but they may have subversive power against authorities. Abe's argument on the infantility of narratives might shed a new light on Japanese sub-consciousness which you may be able to see in Japanese subcultures.

Step 1.8 (Discussion)
Immaturity in your culture

In this activity, we discussed characteristics relating to "immaturity" in Japanese subculture. Now please share your thoughts about "immaturity" by answering some of the following questions:

Can you think of any protagonist(s) who resist growing up? Do you sympathize with them?

"Bildungsroman" is one of the western literature genres. They are coming-of-age stories or stories of growing-up, such as J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* or Philip Roth's *Goodbye, Columbus*. Do you find any differences between young protagonists in Japanese subculture and those in Western "Bildungsroman"?

Do you believe that there is any value in remaining immature? Please explain why (or why not).

You may like to read and comment on contributions made by other learners. You can also **'like'** comments if you agree with what's been said or if you have found something particularly interesting.

Week1: Activity 3
Love Relationships in Japanese Culture

Immaturity is one of the key terms that describes Japan after modernization (post WWII). How is immaturity manifested in Japanese subculture?

1.9   OTOMETIC MANGA VIDEO (01:32)

1.10   ABJECTION OF MATURITY ARTICLE

1.11   ETERNAL GIRLHOOD ARTICLE

1.12   LOVE RELATIONSHIPS DISCUSSION

Step 1.9 (Video)
Otometic Manga

Do you know *Otometic manga* in Japanese subculture? Please watch Prof. Ogushi talk about the focus of this activity.

In this activity, we will discuss Japanese *shōjo* (or *shojo* = "girl" in Japanese) comics during the 1970s and 80s, featuring nothing but relationship issues: romantic relationships, friendships, and family relationships

Video Script
0:06

In most Manga works, younger protagonists often struggle with relationships, especially, romantic relationships. It is mostly because they need some form of acknowledgement from others. One of the features of Japanese shojo comics during the 1970s and 80s

0:25

is, nothing but relationship issues: romantic relationships, friendships, familial relationships. Through complicatedly entangled relationships,

0:37

the protagonists struggle to find an answer to the question: "who am I?" Their desire for acknowledgment from others ? they need others for their self-acknowledgement.

0:49

Interestingly, most of the time, protagonists eventually stay the way they are: the point is not growing up, but accepting who they really are. In those shojo mangas called "Otometic manga" popularized in 1970s, you will see girls' desire to be accepted as they are in order to discover who they are. You will read an excerpt of an essay by Frenchy Lunning. In the essay, Lunning argues that, in the works of later generations, a shojo's immaturity turns into their strength.

Step 1.10 (Article)
Abjection of Maturity

Cover of Mecademia 6 (magazine)

Please read the following excerpt from *"Under the Ruffles: Shōjo and Morphology of Power"* by Frency Lunning in Mechademia 6.3-19 (University of Minnesota Press).

About *Shōjo*

"Shōjo" (少女) can be translated as "a young girl," but "girl" does not convey the nuance which "shōjo" embodies. Eiji Otsuka, a Japanese cultural critic and writer, once defined shōjo as a period of female's life between a child and a sexually matured woman. Before modernization, female life was divided into two periods: childhood and woman who could participate in the labor force and reproduce children. By modernization, however, the female educational system was introduced. In this system, school girls appeared who were children, but not sexually matured enough to be a woman. Otsuka argues that, being kept away from productivity in a social system, shōjo are afraid of being mature. (Shōjo Minzoku Gaku)(5). Therefore, shōjo is a period of female adolescence when most go through the issues related to identity, body, immaturity, and relationships. Now, Frency Lunning discusses characteristics of shōjo.

The shōjo may be the most complex and profound possible feminine subjects. As we approach her through her most obvious manifestation, she reveals her abject state through the visual morphology of her representations. Those representations extend to various forms of fan behavior and to the narratives created within the shōjo culture. Her morphology is extracted from the body *of* manga and anime, and from the bodies represented *in* manga and anime. These bodies are in no way stabilized and in no way actual. To the extent that gender becomes a fictive notion in favor of a magical state of shape-shifting, they swivel and switch dangerously, as if announcing the absence of an original gender state. For the creators of manga and anime, the shōjo body offers a substrate upon which is inscribed the tension between a desire to do away with gender and the inability to express gender conflict without gender. As a representation of the abject, the shōjo character becomes a thing of phantasm: she has the ability to evoke something beyond the reach of cultural imaginings, beyond the utopic and dystopic potentials of desire. She wears her cultural abjection on the surface. As the most vulnerable and undervalued of feminine subjects, she is easily lured, easily convinced of the illusion of romance, easily transformed into other genders and beings that appear inconsequential to mainstream cultural meanings and agendas. Representing lived states of women, she utterly fictionalizes the inner/outer dichotomy in a manner that typifies the boundary issues of the abject subject. Ultimately, however, both come down to the same thing: the shōjo body is a work of art that attempts to profess the narrative of abjection by providing a fantasy of endless diversion, a fantasy of that which repulses us, by way of that which we desire.

Shōjo and Abjection

As mentioned, girls are afraid of growing up. Their bodies, however, are gradually becoming sexually matured. Then, what should shōjo do?

Abjection is evidenced in the fear of seepage between the inner psychic states and the outer body. For shōjo bodies, the menstrual blood of the mature female body represents this seepage. As the "threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside," menstrual blood represents within the heterosexual matrix the cultural onset of the heavy responsibilities of sexual maturity and maternity for females, which results in the threat of being "ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable."(1) That inner states is signified on the shōjo through a figuration that is understood to reside within the body and is "signified through its inscription *on* the body."(2) It is this signification through the various objects of abjection, chosen from within the very particular constellation of shōjo objects, that provides a structure for the identity of the self, contained or enclosed within the body. Identity is, in a sense, a label that is inscribed on the body: the container of the self.

For the shōjo, the response to the abjection of maturity and the consequent desire for agency and power are both configured through a masquerade of innocence and purity: the infantilized signs of *kawaii* or cute in shōjo heroines. Yet, even as heroines imply power and agency, little girls are notoriously considered the weakest human subjects. This seeming contradiction is answered in Anne McClintock's explanation of sadomaschochism [sic] as "a historical subculture that draws its symbolic logic from the changing social contradictions." McClintock also quotes G. W. Levi Kamel: "The desire for submission represents a peculiar transposition of the desire for recognition."(3)

An idealized form has been set aside for her, one that was valorized in the Victorian period, one that evokes a particular "scene," of innocence, purity, sweetness, and a femininity whose power is derived not from her ability to reproduce, but form her power as an image of a potentially "pure and innocent" sexuality. As McClintock comments, "power through being the spectacle of another's gaze is an ambiguous power. It allows one to internalize the gaze of the voyeur and participate in the vicarious enjoyment of their power."(4) This is the key to the revolutionary and paradoxical power of shōjo.

As the pivotal defense against the threatening sexuality of a mature woman, the shōjo persona effects a "stealing up" of the body surfaces against the confrontation with the materiality of the Real, to secure the subject with an armor constructed from the safe costumes and totems of childhood.

Your thoughts?

In this article you learned about the multi-layered characteristics of shōjo: they are innocent, weak, immature, while desiring agency and power. Do you think the "pure and innocent" sexuality mentioned in the article above has any real/realistic meaning or significance to you? Can you think of any examples in poetry, novels, and movies? Share your thoughts. (Please be careful not to identify any specific people in your comments.)

Step 1.11 (Article)
Eternal Girlhood

There are several categories in girls comics (shōjo manga). Please read the following article to understand one of them, "Otometic" manga (Reference-1).

In *Dissecting Subculture Myths* (Reference-3) (Sabukaruchaa Shinwa Kaitai) (1993) by Shinji Miyadai, Hideki Ishihara and Meiko Ōtsuka, girls' manga are divided into several categories: "popular fiction girls' manga," in which heroines have experiences readers dream about but are unlikely to actually have, allowing them to experience these things by proxy; "autobiographical/quasi-literary girls' manga", which interprets reality and is typified by otometic (or "assertively girlish") manga; and "pure Western-European literary girls' manga", by creators such as Moto Hagio.

The year 1973 saw the appearance of the otometic style, a revolutionary development in the history of girls' manga. This model incorporated , and marked the beginning of "relational" girls' manga. It was represented by the group of creators that included A-ko Mutsu, Yumiko Tabuchi, Hideko Tachikake, and (early in her career) Mariko Iwadate, and it can be broadly divided into two types, which we will refer to as "hyper-positive" stories and "complex" stories. In the former, it's said that "'The World' is kind," and that's why city mailboxes are red and telephone poles are tall, etc. In the latter, "I'm clumsy and unattractive, but he says he likes me 'just the way I am.'" In both, the issue is, not experiencing improbable situations by proxy, but how to interpret a real-life and the world that surrounds her. It presents a "relational" model which can accommodate "me".

For example, let's take a look at Mariko Iwadate's *Fairy Tale for Two* (Futari no Douwa) (1976)(1). The protagonist is Shinobu, an extremely shy girl with a weak constitution. Her mother has died, and she lives with her father, who's a bit of a worrier. Shinobu Hoshikawa is slow and klutzy, no matter what she does, but she's honest and kind. The story begins in junior high when she reunites with Takashi Sugawara, a boy she idolized in elementary school. Shinobu is too embarrassed to tell anyone about her feelings, and when a misunderstanding occurs between her and Takashi, she isn't even able to clear it up. After that, Takashi transfers to another school, and the two of them are separated. However, Shinobu continues to think only of Takashi. In the end, the pair is finally united as high school students, several years after they first met in elementary school. For her part, Shinobu thought, "I was content just to watch him," but in the end, it's revealed that they both liked each other all along. In this story, it's possible to detect the message, "I loved you the whole time," or in other words, "I like you just the way you are." [Fig.1]

Osamu Hashimoto discusses the model otometic manga creator, A-ko Mutsu. Hashimoto contends that girls feel they need affirmation that someone likes them just the way they are from another person (in this case, a boy), and that, in order to get them to say this, they create flaws – such as being shy, or short, or having lots of freckles – for themselves (*Hanasaku Otome no Kinpira Gobo* (Reference-2). In short, continuing to dream of having someone say "I like you best that way," after creating a self that's full of flaws, is the essence of otometic manga. Considered in combination with Miyadai's interpretation, one could say that otometic manga flourished in the early 1970s because it provided a model by which, through being aware of reality in a particular way, girls who are living in that reality become able to navigate it more easily.

In that case, what does this "awareness of reality" recognize? Awareness of reality through the heroines of girls' manga is simply the recognition that one is living in the midst of relationships with other people. That is precisely why there are no heroines like Oscar in *The Rose of Versailles*(Berusaiyu no Bara) (1972-73)(2), characters who are idolized for embodying proxy experiences. Instead, as in the previously discussed Fairy Tale for Two – or as in the case of Momoko, the heroine of *Chime*(Chaimu) (1980, also by Mariko Iwadate)(3), who has a complex regarding her older twin sister [fig.2], they see girls who are harboring some kind of complex but must still maintain their relationships with others, and find role models among them that make them think, "This is me!" In other words, the girl readers run simulations of situations they'll have to live through in their own lives by reading manga.

For girls who are living in the midst of a web of relationships with others, who are these "others"? With whom do they want relationships, and who do they want to acknowledge them? This is, naturally, the person they like best, and in girls' manga – in which love is generally heterosexual – it is the boy for whom they have unrequited feelings. These romantic manga, which were generally set in schools, were known as "school dramas," and they constituted a major trend from the 1970s to the 1980s. In these stories, heroines who were the same age as the readers developed unrequited feelings for boys, as the readers did, and in the end, their earnest feelings were rewarded. It isn't hard to imagine that such stories resonated with many readers. For example, Chizuru Takahashi's *Quivery Coffee Jelly* (Pururun Coohii Zerii) (1977)(4), which ran in the magazine Nakayoshi, is the story of Ryoko, who hasn't liked coffee jelly since losing her boyfriend to a friend because the taste reminds her of lost love. Ryoko, who has a complex about her beautiful friend, is drawn to Shu, who works at a café. However, she assumes that he, too, likes her friend, and falsely imagines that she's lost another love. When it becomes clear that Ryoko is the one Shu really likes, she becomes able to eat coffee jelly again [Fig.3].

Note that Yukari Ichijo's *Designer* (Dezainaa) (1974)(5) was among the girls' manga of that era, and that sweeping romantic stories – some of which, like Jun Makimura's *The White Flower of Eryx* (Eryukusu no Shiroi Hana)(6), dealt with incestuous relationships – also existed. In the first place, there were some who felt a sense of wrongness about girls' manga whose framework was "love for love's sake." Although this wasn't a trend that was present in all girls' manga, at the very least, works belonging to a certain category of such manga reflected girls' desires and fantasies. Conversely, it seems safe to say that girls who read this sort of manga thought that they needed affirmation from boys and grew as a result, creating a cycle.

This type of "affirmation received from others" also means noticing the existence of people besides oneself. It is linked to accepting an increase in the space others occupy in one's world, and it's possible to see girls' growth here. For example, let's take a look at the Sakumi Yoshino work, *The Crowd in the Moonlight* (Gekka no Ichigun) (1982-1983)(7). Marika, the heroine, is completely reliant on her little brother Jiu, who is both sociable and good in school. The rest of her family is quite capable, and she is the only one who can't keep up. Possibly due to her intense insecurity regarding this fact, Marika doesn't know how to deal with others. However, one day, she meets one of Jiu's friends, a young man named Kemikawa who is intelligent and handsome, but brusque. She subsequently catches glimpses of an unknown world and all sorts of human relationships which she's never encountered before, and gradually, she changes. As is plainly shown in the scene in which Marika talks with her strict father, who formerly made her uncomfortable[Fig.4], she confesses that she "really understands that other people have their own lives and personalities." It's worth noting that the change in Marika's awareness – the shift from "I'm the only one who's like this…" to "I'm not the only one who's like this, am I?" – was brought about by the young man Kemikawa. Knowing oneself is, at the same time, linked to knowing others, and by extension, to being conscious of the reality of the world to which one belongs, and of the world beyond that.

Mariko Iwadate's *You Are the Moon of Third Street* (Kimi wa Sanchoume no Tsuki) (1985)(8) features a similar setup. As in The Crowd in the Moonlight, Rutsu Onda is dependent on her capable younger brother, Akira. When her brother gets a girlfriend, Rutsu is pushed to become self-reliant, but then, as if to fill her brother's place, Hino, a boy who has had feelings for her for a while, appears [Fig.5]. At this point, the boy's cry of "If you die, Onda, I won't know what to do" makes her aware of the existence of others.

Of course, not all girls' manga stories end happily. For example, take a look at works from the early '80s by A-ko Mutsu, known as the originator of otometic manga. *The Days of Rose and Rose* (Bara to Bara no Hibi)(9), published in 1985, begins when two sisters, Asae and Riri, fall in love at the same time. As a matter of fact, they've fallen in love with the same boy, but they don't know it. Christmas is coming, and Asae and Riri both resolve to give a present to the boy they like and confess their feelings to him. However, the boy already has a girlfriend. At this point, it isn't possible to get words of outside affirmation (in other words, the phrase "I love you just the way you are") from the boy. However, a more positive self-affirmation is demonstrated: That of becoming aware of oneself through the existence of others. "This isn't a sad thing. Maybe it was necessary." "Yes. It's as though we've gotten one step closer to someone who's waiting for us, somewhere." Whether the love is unrequited or reciprocated, these words affirm growth achieved through romantic experience. Or again, in Fumiko Tanikawa's *Hana Ichi Monme* (Hana Ichimonme) (1989)(10), the protagonist Sakurako is in love with her biological older brother, Kou. Naturally, incestuous feelings go unrewarded, but she says to herself "I really can't manage it right now, but… I'm sure… Someday, I want to be able to think, 'I'm glad I'm your little sister, Kou,' from the bottom of my heart," and finds positive meaning in the very act of loving someone. In another Tanikawa work, *Feeling like Full Moon* (Kimochi Mangetsu)(11), the heroine, Michiru, realizes that her feelings for the older student she liked were only an infatuation. At the end of the story, she thinks, "Someday, I'll fall in love with someone. Those feelings will grow and become a full moon that never wanes." This thought can be interpreted to mean a shift toward love as a step that's necessary for personal growth, instead of love itself, or rather, that she sees it as a necessary element for growth. Accordingly, she's telling the readers that, even if they're disappointed in love, it isn't anything to worry about.

One other common romantic pattern in girls' manga is "falling for an odd boy." This can be said to be self-affirmation that comes from understanding what's good about that particular person when other people don't, based on the idea that "I see something in the person that no on else does." This isn't about appearances being deceiving. "The only person who understands me" has transitioned to "the person only I can understand," and "liking him just the way he is" is the flip side of "being liked just the way I am." In *Let Me Call You My Hero* (Yobasete MY Hiiroo) (1984)(12) by Yū Asagiri, currently active as a boys' love novelist, Mayu is a girl who's both beautiful and intelligent and attends a highly academic school. She's true to her feelings, not for her upperclassman Ono – who is handsome, attends the same high school and gets excellent grades – but for Ippei, her drab childhood friend. However, here, it's Ippei who worries that he may not be a good match for Mayu. Still, at the school festival, Mayu yells "I like you the way you are, Ippei!" from the stage. She has the courage to actively publicize the fact that she likes a boy like him [fig.6].

As discussed above, girls' manga as a model for relationships exists, and its most important aspect is affirmation of self received from others. Of course, ultimately having your feelings for the person you love reciprocated is a happy ending that belongs only to the realm of manga, and readers are aware that these stories couldn't happen in real life. Even so, the hope that "It just might happen tomorrow" has a hint of reality to it. Since the girl readers' happy endings are constantly delayed this way, girls' manga must be mass-produced. In other words, the interval while the happy ending is being postponed is, for otometic girls, happiness.

Step 1.12 (Discussion)
Love relationships

As you have just seen in Steps 1.10 and 1.11, girls in otometic manga need acknowledgement from others. In most cases they acquired it through love relationships. Do you think friendship is not enough for them? Do you sympathize with them?

You may like to read and comment on contributions made by other learners. You can also **'like'** comments if you agree with what's been said or if you have found something particularly interesting.

Week1: Activity 4
Kawaii Relationships

What is Kawaii to you? Let us try to redefine Kawaii by reading articles and through discussion.

1.13   WHAT IS "KAWAII"? VIDEO (01:37)

1.14   KAWAII THINGS AND YOU DISCUSSION

1.15   KAWAII AND UNCANNY ARTICLE

1.16   KAWAII OBJECTS ARTICLE

1.17   WHAT IS KAWAII IN YOUR CULTURE? DISCUSSION

Step 1.13 (Video)
What is "Kawaii"?

Have you ever heard of "Kawaii"? What does it mean in your definition? In this activity, we will try to re-define "Kawaii" through readings and discussion. First, watch Prof. Ogushi explain a brief history of "Kawaii" in Japanese subculture.

Books introduced in the video

- "Cuties in Japan" by Dr. Sharon Kinsella, who teaches Japanese culture and society at the University of Manchester
- "Hentai Shojo Moji (the peculiar handwriting style of Japanese young girls)" by Kazuma Yamane, Japanese scholar
- "Cute Studies" in East Asian Journal of Popular Culture

Video Script
0:06
The term "Kawaii" is often used for describing Japanese subculture. It is, however, not easy to define for it conveys multi-layered meanings. We will see the way "Kawaii" represents a certain type of relationality. Kawaii, or Cuteness, is a term that is tightly associated with Japanese girls' culture and this ephemeral cultural phenomenon arising around the 1960s now attracts worldwide academic attention. Kazuma YAMANE's research on the peculiar handwriting style of Japanese young girls in mid-1980s suggests that an unconscious inclination to immaturity prevailed in girls' culture and that kawaii is a key term to describe girls' preference.

0:58

Dr.Sharon Kinsella, who teaches Japanese culture and society at the University of Manchester, published one of the earliest articles on kawaii in English, entitled "Cuties in Japan" published in 1995. These early academic contributions on Kawaii eventually led to the launch of a journal, The East Asian Journal of Popular Culture, with the first special issue focusing on "Cute Studies." Now, let us research the cultural significance of "Kawaii" in Japan.

Step 1.14 (Discussion)
Kawaii things and you

Let's explore and share your own "Kawaii" around you.

1) Find "kawaii" things (tangible, or intangible) around you.

2) Observe it carefully and describe why you think is "kawaii".

3) If possible, do some research about the "kawaii" thing. Where did you find it? Who created it?

4) If you can, take a photo of your own "kawaii" thing(s). [optional]

5) Share your story (and photo) on a collaborative visual board called Padlet.

Padlet allows you to share texts, images, audio, video, and some other types of files (such as pdf) by simply pasting it on an online shared board.

Write your contents in the Padlet board here

Password : keio_university

All you need is to click the "+" button located at the lower corner of the page and choose/type what you like to share with other learners. If you managed to take a photo of your drawing, attach the photo along with your story! This guide may be helpful if you are not familiar with the type of tool. You can also look up Padlet tutorials too.

6) Browse what other learners have found.

What do you notice? Share any thoughts in the Comments section below.

You may like to read and comment on contributions made by other learners. You can also **'like'** comments if you agree with what's been said or if you have found something particularly interesting.

Step 1.15 (Article)
Kawaii and Uncanny

Kawaii does not only mean "cute" but may also refer to that which is "uncanny". Please read the following article about Japanese Kawaii culture.

Origin of the Word "Kawaii"

Etymologically, Kawaii is derived from *Kawa Hayushi* (face blushed). The expression, first appearing around the 11th century, which originally means "to be embarrassed, or to be ashamed." *Kawa Hayushi*phonologically changed into *Kawayui*, which means "to be ashamed, to feel awkward" in th 12th century, and consequently acquired the meaning such as "to feel bad about something/somebody," and became associated with "pitiable qualities." The other derivation of *Kawa Hayushi*is "*Kawaisou*" (pitiable, poor, miserable). Kawaii as lovable, pretty, or cute appeared as late as 16th century. Thus, it can be said that Kawaii evokes our tender feelings based on pity.

Inuhiko Yomota, a well-known cultural critic, is also interested in Kawaii, and published an introductory book on Kawaii(4) in 2006. Yomota skillfully summarizes Kawaii as follows: Kawaii is something/somebody small, innocent, weak, immature, incomplete, ephemeral; something/somebody you want to protect. He also adds kawaii is something/somebody that stops time, deferring growth or maturity.

Kawaii is, thus, something or somebody with which or with whom you want to have a relationship. It might easily inspire the banal dichotomy such as protector/protected, ruler/ruled, controller/controlled; but Kawaii also has power over you. Since Kawaii is incomplete and immature, therefore, Kawaii is something you cannot completely understand or grasp, which ultimately opens up to the door to uncanniness. We will come back to this point later.

Now let us think about Hello Kitty. She is born and raised in a London suburb with her wonderful family, a nuclear family with her father, mother and her twin sister, Mimmy, who spends most of the time out of the spotlights. Hello Kitty lives in a lovely house with a Persian cat, charmy, as her own pet. She's small (her height is, according to her official profile, around five-apples tall), and she is probably innocent and immature. If we follow those Kawaii criteria that Yomota offers in his study, Hello Kitty is the embodiment of Kawaii.

Kawaii and *amae*

Now look at the Hello Kitty family. And you will probably see something weird about this family. The adults—father, mother, grandfather and grandmother— they all fully smile as you can see their eyes closed, which is a cultural symbol of a smiling. Kitty (as well as her sister Mimmy), to the contrast, have a blank face without a mouth. Sanrio is the company behind Hello Kitty. Sanrio's official explanation on Kitty's deadpan expression, in fact, acutely divulges the secret of Kawaii. Kitty's mouthless face is, according to Sanrio, for sharing the feeling of the person she is with. When you are happy, Hello Kitty is also happy. Likewise, when you are sad, Hello Kitty understands your feeling. If Hello Kitty mirrors your feelings, then Kitty is not the object to be dominated, but rather you can identify with her.
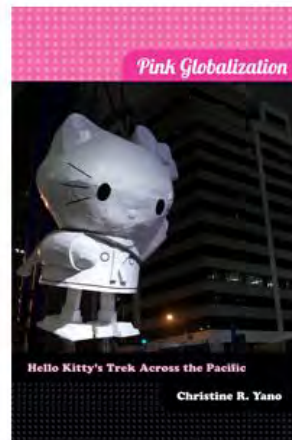
Fig. 1. *Pink Globalization: Hello Kitty's Trek across the Pacific*, by Christie Yano, Duke UP, 2013. - Cover page

Christie Yano acutely points this out in *Pink Globalization: Hello Kitty's Trek across the Pacific*[fig.1] (3) published last year (2015): "Hello Kitty and other kawaii objects act as prompts for an empathetic response of caregiving. . . . However, in Japan there is an additional twist: Some consumers do not only want to adopt the cute commodity; . . . . they want to become it" (3, p.56) Yano, following the discussion by Kinsella(2), states that becomingness into a Kawaii object is a crucial point to understand cuteness in the Japanese context. Anne Alison aptly argues that this identification with kawaii object reflects **amae**-based relationship in Japanese culture.
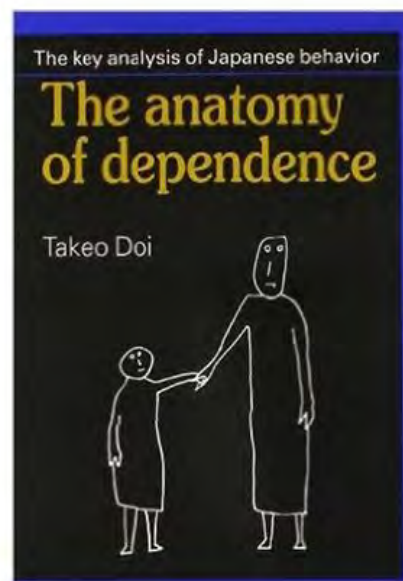

Fig. 2. *The Anatomy of Dependence* by Takeo Doi, 1971. Kodansha International, 1973 - Cover page

Amae has been one of the most frequently considered characteristics of relationality in Japanese culture since the prominent psychiatrist Takeo Doi published *Anatomy of Dependence* [fig.2] (1) in 1971.

Amae, whose literal meaning is "sweetening," is, according to Doi, an attitude of indulgent dependence which is indispensable in order to build up a mutual relationship in Japanese culture. Doi asserts that "**Amae,** in other words, is used to indicate the seeking after the mother that comes when the infant's mind has developed to a certain degree and it has realized that its mother exists independently of itself. In other words, until it starts to **amaeru** the infant's mental life is an extension, as it were, of its life in the womb, and the mother and child are still unseparated. However, as its mind develops it gradually realizes that itself and its mother are independent existences, and comes to feel the mother as something indispensable to itself; it is the craving for close contact thus developed that constitutes, one might say, **amae.**" Doi indeed admits that this phenomenon is not limited to Japanese culture, but he, focusing on the untranslatability of "**amae,**" argues its efficacy to understand "the ways of thinking of the Japanese."

Kawaii and Girls Culture

Let us here remember that *The Anatomy of Dependence* (1) was published just three years earlier than the "birth" of Hello Kitty, a blank faced cute creature, which mirrors your feelings. Explaining the historical context of Kawaii and girls culture in the 1960s and 1970s, Shinji Miyadai, a Japanese sociologist, analyzes, without mentioning Takeo Doi's argument, that a proliferation of youth cultures recreate the traditional mother-child stories which frequently appeared on Manga magazines, into the so called "high school drama." Miyadai states that the self-fashioning of girls in the 60s and 70s is accompanied with separation from their elder family members, including mothers, and discovery of a new relationality with others. Youth culture brought about new standards which girls would follow instead of traditional examples such as Purity, Honesty, and Beauty. And, that is an inclination to Kawaii culture for building up a new **amae** relationality with others. It is highly possible that Hello Kitty, who was born in 1974, became an object to accept "the craving for close contact" of girls, who need **"amae"** dependent relationality with others.

Your Thoughts?

As you see, Kawaii means something you want to protect, but simultaneously it could mean something you want to depend on. Do you have a similar concept in you own culture?

Step 1.16 (Article)
Kawaii Objects

Kawaii-ness has been slightly changing in recent years. Let's take a look at Kawaii-ness in some shōjo manga, then think about Kawaii-ness in the 21st Century.

Chibi-neko of *The Star of Cottonland*

A few years after Kitty's debut, Yumiko Oshima, a shōjo manga writer famous for her philosophical stories with girlie illustrations, started a serialized comic called *Wata no Kuni Hoshi*, or *The Star of Cottonland*(1978-87)(1). Its protagonist and narrator is an abandoned two-month-old kitten, saved by the Suwano family. The kitten, named Chibi-neko, perceives herself to be semi-human, and represents herself as a small girl with cat ears. Chibi-neko somehow believes that she will grow up to be a human being.

Fig. 1. *The Star of Cottonland* (綿の国星 - Wata no Kuni Hoshi), vol.1, coverpage, by Yumiko Oshima, 1978-1987 on "LaLa", Hakusensha

Chibi-neko, a beautiful white cat—like Hello Kitty—appears in a white dress with a white frill apron. She has blue eyes and fluffy curled hair. She is innocent, ignorant, and needs the protection provided by the Suwano family [fig.1].

Concurrently, her innocence provides her with opportunities to spread happiness and sympathize with others, while learning about the workings of the world. Chibi-neko, however, is an eternal child, because she is never going to be an adult or, in other words, a human being. In this sense, Chibi-neko reflects the emotional aspects of girls having some anxiety about their own identity. However, according to her, she never derives an answer because "When I try to think of one thing, my mind strays away from it. It is because the outside scenery changes day by day." Chibi-neko does not recognize the stream of time, for she is in the eternal present. This is the transitory characteristic of Kawaii, and girls who are destined to grow up long for this immaturity.

Shōjo manga writers born in 1949

Yumiko Oshima is one of the manga creators categorized as *24-nen-gumi*, or "Year 24 group." Year 24 group refers to Shōjo manga writers born in the 24th year of Showa period, 1949, and whose achievements as shōjo manga writers established the basic format and grammar of this genre. One of the characteristics of their revolutionary poetics in shōjo manga is that the protagonists' monologue or inner confession about their anxiety (it is similar to the stream of consciousness of modernist novels). According to Eiji Okuda, the root of their anxiety may be traced back to the female liberation from the role of "mother" during the democratization of Japan after World War II. Women were freed from the traditional and oppressive roles imposed on them, and yet the new direction for females was still to be determined. Chibi-neko in *The Star of Cottonland*, an embodiment of Kawaii-ness, clearly differentiates the sphere of children and youth from that of adults. Hello Kitty, a deadpan Kawaii cat who receives all the affection from girls, offers a relationship based on *amae*, allowing girls to have time and space to be themselves when surrounded by them.

Kawaii-ness in Cats

Cats possess an elegant independence and adamant disobedience, and yet they keep relationships with people through occasional expressions of a wheedling attitude, thus attracting cat lovers. If independence and dependence coexist, without contradiction, they are probably a perfect representation of Kawaii-ness for girls during the 1970s crystallizing the cultural imagery of cats.

Kowaii vs Kawaii

Cats are probably the most fascinating Kawaii creature because of their kaleidoscopic characteristics. The 1990s witnessed a curious phenomenon, which was the birth of Kowaii cats. "Kowai" means "scary" in Japanese. Kowaii is a newly coined term to express fear or dread in Kawaii objects. You will understand the nuance of Kowaii when you see this illustration by *Nekojiru*(2), which appeared in 1990 [fig.2]. The protagonists of this story are cat siblings, Nyako and Nyatta. Their father is an unemployed alcoholic, and the mother manages to feed the family. Interestingly, Japan enjoyed the bubble economy when this manga first appeared in a legendary underground manga magazine, *Garo*.

Nekojiru Udon evokes a nostalgic feeling, reminiscent of the time when Japan was still a poor country. The past represented in this manga is reflected in the present with an impalpable uncanny atmosphere, which is described in the cruelty of supposedly innocent and cute kittens. Nyako and Nyatta are, in one sense, victims of child abuse, but they are not helpless kids. They show their cruelty and violence toward their pet dog, small insects, or elderly cats.

Muteness of Kawaii objects

When *Yasashisa* (kindness in Japanesee) disappeared, Kawaii revealed its uncanny aspects that nobody could control. Emily Raine introduces Sianne Ngai's discussion on "cuteness," stating that "cuteness suggests infancy and a certain helplessness" which prompts "sadistic desires for mastery" (203). Here I would like to ask whose desire this is, and who wants to control or to be controlled. Similar to Hello Kitty and other beloved stuffed animals, Kawaii things do not talk, and we love them all the more because of that. The muteness and silence of Kawaii objects enable us to identify ourselves with them, as Christie Yano suggests.

However, we are always apprehensive of the fact that we never know what these mute objects really think, since they do not speak. Nyako and Nyatta are certainly helpless infants, but they do not hesitate to be brutal and cruel to others. We project ourselves onto Kawaii objects, but they may not be so easily controlled. They will stimulate our sadistic desires, but perhaps they are the ones to possess such desires. The fact that Kowaii cats Nyako and Nyatta actually talk, albeit awkwardly, debunks the uncanny in Kawaii objects, through the disguise of a cat—a creature that we are never able to understand in spite of our intimacy. They will not let us have a mutual relationship based on *Amae*, but instead, they reflect the ugliness and cruelty in ourselves.

Cute Cruelty in *Tamala 2010*

In the 21st Century, another cute cat reveals cute cruelty. *Tamala 2010: A Punkcat in Space*[fig.3](3) produced by a group of artists called Tree of Life (t.o.l) was released in 2002.
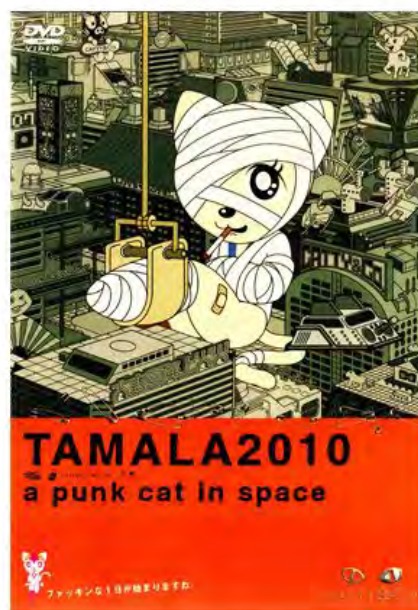

Fig. 3. *Tamala 2010: A Punk cat in Scape*, Kinetique inc.,2002 DVD is available at Amazon

Let's take a look at the trailer (on YouTube) for the animation. Set in future Tokyo, Tamala, a motherless kitten, departs from earth to search for her mother cat who is allegedly living on the Planet Orion. However, before reaching the final destination, her spaceship makes an emergency landing on Planet Q, where she meets a handsome cat named Michelangelo. Emily Raine states that Tamala is a caricature of Hello Kitty, but it seems to me that she is a descendant of Nyako and Nyatta, who never disguise their cruelty. The public security of Planet Q has deteriorated because of political instability, but Tamala is afraid of nothing. She blatantly shows herself off in a club, dancing fiercely, which eventually attracts Kentauros, a brutal dog cosplaying as a police officer. She is assaulted by the dog, and her headless body is found by Michelangelo, who flees immediately. However, after a while, Tamala comes back to life, and appears in various commercials for every commodity supplied by a huge conglomerate, Catty & Co.

Kawaii-ness in the 21st Century

This animation reveals that our desire for cute objects is closely related to capitalist, materialistic society. Tamala is indeed an innocent kitten, but she never offers *Yasashisa* (gentleness) to the audience. She is a selfish cat who cares about nothing but her own desire. Nevertheless, she becomes a desired object by showing herself in every commercial of the huge company, Catty & Co. Concurrently, she is the one who captivates us in the commodity society. Thus cruelty in Kawaii-ness ultimately governs us, erasing the "heterogenous ties of a community based on ideals of spontaneous cooperation, mutual affection, . . ." as Emily Raine suggests (198). Tamala, in her monosyllabic talk, repeats the following phrase: "Wait a little longer." The seducing attitude of the cat is extremely controlling. *TAMALA 2010*, by disclosing cruelty, baldness, perversity, and eroticism in Kawaii objects, forces us to redefine Kawaii-ness in the 21st Century.

Your Thoughts?

How would you define "amae" relationship in your cultural context? Do you find similar dependent relationships in your own society or in your own experiences? How do you feel about "kawaii" when you see that someone is depending on somebody?

SEE ALSO
TRAILER VIDEO OF "TAMALA 2010: A PUNKCAT IN SPACE", TREE OF LIFE (T.O.L), 2002
Tamala 2010 is introduce in this step. The trailer video will give you more clear image of Tamala.

https://www.futurelearn.com/links/l/s7ty00di7826l67xxgqavofb5diuirv

Step 1.17 (Discussion)
What is Kawaii in your culture?

Have you found any new aspects of "kawaii"? Are you attracted to those? Why/Why not? Also, how do you translate Kawaii in your own language? Do you think it is translatable to your culture?

You may like to read and comment on contributions made by other learners. You can also **'like'** comments if you agree with what's been said or if you have found something particularly interesting.

Week1: Activity 5
Love and Sexuality

Discussions about Fujoshi, Yaoi and BL.

1.18   LOVE AND SEXUALITY IN MANGA VIDEO (01:56)

1.19   YAOI AND ITS CULTURAL BACKGROUND ARTICLE

1.20   YAOI MANGA: A FORM OF EXPRESSION OF FEMALE DESIRE ARTICLE

1.21   YAOI MANGA: THE MEANING OF LOVE FOR YAOI READERS ARTICLE

1.22   YAOI AND BL DISCUSSION

Step 1.18 (Video)
Love and Sexuality in Manga

In this activity, we will look into Sexuality in Manga. What is it about? Prof. Ogushi will provide examples and background.

Keywords introduced in this video

- Fujoshi : literal meaning is 'rotten girls'
- BL : Boy's Love

Additional Readings

Here are two famous examples Prof. Ogushi picked up in the video. They are very popular in Japan and translated to other languages. If you know those manga and like them, please share the summary and what fascinated you with other learners !

- *"The Heart of Thomas"* by Moto Hagio, Shogakkan, 1974
- 萩尾望都『トーマの心臓』(Tōma no Shinzō) 小学館 1974
- *"The Poem of Wind and Trees"* by Keiko Takemiya, Shogakkan, 1976
- 竹宮恵子『風と木の詩』(Kaze to Ki no Uta) 小学館 1976

Video Script
0:06

Most of you, who are interested in taking this course, are already familiar with Otaku? what kind of people they are, what kind of proclivities they have, or what kind of cultural interests they have. You may have also heard of "fujoshi", literally translated as "a rotten girl," referring to female fans of

subculture, especially, those who fantasize and envision male homoerotic relationships in manga, anime and other subcultural works. Fujoshi call themselves as such, sometimes, in a self-abusive way. In Japan, we often witness homoerotic relationships between male characters in commercial girls' comics such as "The Heart of Thomas" by Moto Hagio or "The Poem of Wind and Trees" by Keiko Takemiya.

1:00

There are also tons of independent magazines dealing with manga or stories with homoerotic relationships written mainly by female writers. Now some of you might remember a similar genre in Western fandom called "slash fiction" in which fans create alternative fiction recreating characters of commercial works with homoerotic tendencies. Now you may wonder why do female fujoshi need and want that kind of fantasy? Is there any explicable theory behind this fantasy? Well, it is difficult to give a general answer to this question. In this activity we will partially explore the world of fujoshi, and hopefully you will understand the social situation of women in Japan as well.

Step 1.19 (Article)
Yaoi and its cultural background

What is Yaoi? What kind of social background created this culture?

Please read the following article excerpted from my own article; *"Only Women Know: Possibilities of Male Homosexual Preferences and Sexuality as Seen by Women,"* which appeared in *Sanshokuki* (1)(May 2011).

Sexuality

The viewpoint of sexuality eventually made it clear that feminism, which had gender as its central issue—a topic often discussed in dualistic terms—was built on the assumption of heterosexuality. Furthermore, while feminism had not addressed differences in ethnicity or class, the concept of sexuality was introduced as a result of a demand for another axis of thought. In this way, it became possible for us to question again the "difference" that we overlooked, even though it existed within us (or that we deliberately ignored it), from the angle of gender. Homosexual people, who had different sexual inclinations, were marginalized by "compulsory heterosexuality" (Adrienne Rich) and "heteronormativity" (Michael Warner), and even within literature, homosexual relationships were overlooked or marginalized. However, through gay and lesbian critique examining sisterhood and gay sensibilities within works of literature, the issue of sexuality gradually came to the forefront.

However, from the late '80s to the '90s, a form of discussion emerged that harshly criticized the fact that homosexuality and the heterosexuality it marginalized were again falling into the trap of dualism. Are heterosexuality and homosexuality simply binary opposites? If the nucleus of humanity is a fluid grouping-together of possible pieces of the self, then is it also possible to think of a person's sexuality not as a fixed concept, but rather as an accumulation of fragments that can change shape? Is homosexuality even a uniform concept, or do differences exist within homosexuality? Teresa de Lauretis's essay "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities: an Introduction," published in *Differences* (1991, vol. 3 no.2), objected to the dualistic view of homosexuality as the margin of heterosexuality, and attempted to treat it as something unique with a unique societal and cultural shape. At this point, de Lauretis advocated the use of the term "queer theory" to reconsider and reconstruct the framework of our sexuality, instead of using the term "gay and lesbian studies". De Lauretis emphasizes consciousness of internal differences, and through consciousness of male sexuality and female homosexuality, gender differences, and particularly differences in ethnicity and class, studies of sexuality that included these aspects came to be known as queer studies.

Theory of Sexuality

The starkest theorization of the fluidity of sexuality comes from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Between Men* (1985). Sedgwick examines internal homosocial desires and homophobic relationships through a close analysis of texts from Shakespeare to 19th century Victorian novels. She finds that homosocial desires, mediated by women, appear in the bonds seen between heterosexual men in a variety of works, and indicates the possibility that these could be structured as "continuums" of homosexuality (though these continuums are broken off by homophobia). One noteworthy detail here is that heterosexuality and homosexuality are not positioned as opposite states of human desire, but that at times, their boundaries overlap.

It is likely that when this theory, which truly read into the "bonds" between men who behave in a heterosexual manner was introduced to Japan, many people thought of a certain deeply-rooted, yet hidden, literary phenomenon that exists largely within female literature. This literary phenomenon is none other than the "yaoi" genre of fiction—an embodiment of male homosexual preferences created by women, and a genre that is supported by those tastes.

Male homosexual preferences created by women

Male homosexual preferences created by women, as the term suggests, appear in works of fiction (novels and manga) about male homosexuality by women, for women. Currently, one might say that rather than being the secret pleasure of a very niche group of enthusiasts, this theme has become a phenomenon. The origin of this age in which female authors express love between men for the enjoyment of female readers can be traced to the 1960s, with the publication of Mari Mori's novels *A Lover's Forest* and *The Bed of Dead Leaves*. Later, in the 1970s, the manga authors Moto Hagio and Keiko Takemiya, members of the Year 24 Group within shōjo manga, released the shōnen-ai works *The Heart of Thomas*[Toma no Shinzo] and *The Poem of Wind and Trees* [Kaze to ki no uta] respectively. In 1978, *Comic JUN* (later *JUNE*), a magazine specializing in shōnen-ai and male homosexual works, began publication.

YAOI

Another literary movement that began in the 1970s worth noting is the first Comic Market held in 1975, also known as "Comike." Originally billed as a dōjinshi fair, one might say that Comike was a space that made forms of expression differing from those found in commercial magazines possible. The genre known as "yaoi" blossomed within Comike culture. The name "yaoi" is an acronym of the phrase "**YA**ma nashi, **O**chi nashi, **I**mi nashi" ("no climax, no punch line, no meaning"), and the genre consists of derivative works originating from parodies of existing anime and manga works. Generally, if the existing work is meant for consumption, heterosexuality is taken as a given, and either no particular reference is made to the sexuality of male characters within the work, or they are presented as heterosexual. However, not only do the female readers who read something homosexual into the homosocial "bonds" between those male characters overcome the separation of homosociality and homosexuality discussed by Sedgwick with ease, but they also put physical sexual relationships between men clearly in the foreground. For example, the first yaoi work that I discovered was one that portrayed love between the boys who appeared in the shōnen manga *Captain Tsubasa*, which was a hugely popular series in the magazine *Shōnen Jump* in the 1980s. This depiction by women fantasizing about homosexual love within the powerful friendship (bonds) between males included some extreme sexual imagery. This queer reading of a work, that nimbly evades "traditional definitions" of sexuality, resonates with Sedgwick's theory.

Of course, this may be only a facet of popular culture, and one cannot simply say that this phenomenon only exists in Japan (for example, see Joanna Russ's *Pornography by Women, For Women, With Love* (1985) and Mari Kotani's *Techno Gynesis [Joseijō muishiki]* (Keiso Shobo, 1994) regarding the existence of the slash fiction genre in the United States). Furthermore, there are real homosexual men who criticize the portrayal of male homosexual relationships in yaoi. However, the question here is: why do women like male homosexuality, or what are women trying to gain by drawing it (or reading it)?

There are several interpretations as to why women (not all women, of course, but some) are interested in the homosexuality of men, rather than their own gender. In *Phantasma of Yaoi* [Yaoi Genron] (Natsume Shobo, 1999), Shihomi Sakakibara suggests that women have an active need for a subject to stand in for themselves, and that they are seeking an escape from womanhood itself. On the other hand, in *On Yaoi Novels* [Yaoi Shosetsuron] (Senshu University Press, 2005), Yoko Nagakubo states that by depicting homosexual relationships that mimic heterosexual relationships, yaoi attempts to depict relationships with what is called the "heterosexual code" reduced to its absolute minimum.

YAOI and BL

In Midori Mizuma's *Shonen-ai as Metaphor* [In'yu to shite no shōnen-ai] (Sogensha), released in 2005, a different opinion to the two above is presented, where she delves into the question of the family, which reproduces not only aspects of sexuality but its norms as well. Mizuma theorizes that in order to escape from the body that personifies the existence of the "mother" and her control, women need "shōnen-ai: an eros (a general principle) that has eliminated the female body." Her theory offers the view that this is linked to the question of why representations of violence and incest are common in the genres known as yaoi and boy's love.

By temporarily putting away one's body, one can break out of the restrictions and fetters placed by societal norms of sexuality, and within the family, escape from the controlling power reproduced mainly by the "mother." One may consider that what women fantasize about in male homosexual relationships that do not require women is not a world in which women are suppressed, but rather a place where those women can reconstruct themselves by actively nullifying themselves.

One interesting point here is the origin of the "yaoi" acronym often used with regard to the derivative works: "no climax, no punch line, no meaning." To put it another way, yaoi is deliberately removed from context, background, and all that both entail, and takes the stance of removing itself from the temporal and spatial consequences of narrative construction and backstories required of storytelling in general. In this way, it offers a point of view that differs from the values of what is held to be the majority. If, as referenced by Judith Halberstam, quoting Samuel Delany in the book *In a Queer Time and Place* (New York University Press, 2005), queer existence uses time and space in a form that challenges the normative ideals of development and maturity, and growth and responsibility, perhaps we may be able to identify the reason why the "no climax, no punch line, no meaning" of yaoi depicts existence in the "here and now," completely separated from both past and future.

Step 1.20 (Article)
Yaoi Manga: A Form of Expression of Female Desire

Here is the English translation of excerpts from *"Adults Don't Understand"*(1) ("Otona wa wakatte kurenai" in Japanese) by Nobita Nobi (Nihon Hyoronsha, 2003).

Nobi started her creative career as a yaoi manga writer. The top image of this step is one of her Yaoi works from a commercial publisher, which depicts two characters, Kurama and Hiei, from Yoshihiro Togashi's Yuyu Hakusho [Ghost Files]. Nobi creates love relationship between Kurama and Hiei, which has not been clarified in the original story. Nobi envisions intimacy between the two as you see in the book cover above, recreating their friendship into love.

In the following article, Nobi analyzes why she was so attracted to yaoi that she could not help creating the derivative works with frequent explicit sexual descriptions.

I have liked manga ever since I was a child, and eventually, I started drawing my own. If I recall correctly, the first manga I drew was of a sex scene between two boys. This was not a copy of *Kaze to ki no uta* [The Poem of Wind an Trees], nor was it completely original. I pulled in male characters from an anime that I liked at the time. The manga consisted only of a sex scene in a rape-like situation that was devoid of love; it was completely pornographic, with the illustration of sex itself as the only goal.

I can still clearly recall what motivated me to draw that: I had a desire. First, I loved those male anime characters. Second, because I loved them, I wanted to get my hands on them in a concrete way—in other words, I wanted to engage with them sexually. And the reason why I chose this method of doing so was not so that I could put myself in the manga or have a female character stand in for me, but so that I could have the help of a male character to force the act.

Why did I choose yaoi? Is yaoi what I desired—could I see my desires fulfilled by yaoi? I asked myself these questions ever since I became aware of my desire. To me, it was like asking myself what I am. I have collected the results of this soul-searching on the topic of yaoi below, using myself as a sample.

YAOI and Dōjinshi

Nobi explains her desire for the manga/anime characters she likes, and she wanted to build up a relationship with them; but she did not create or imagine a female character on whom she is supposed to project herself. Instead, she had a fantasy that the male character she loved had a homosexual relationship with another male character. But why does Nobi need such a twist? For Nobi, creating yaoi works relates to her own identity.

The word "yaoi" originates from an acronym of the phrase "yama nashi, ochi nashi, imi nashi" ("no climax, no punch line, no meaning"). At first, this phrase was not exclusively applied to *dōjinshi* [self-published magazine], but rather any kind of manga seen as tawdry and bereft of a story—in other words, the stories had no climax, no punch line (or denouement), and no meaning. They were just illustrations of the parts the artists wanted to draw; often single scenes, such as the introduction by itself, or just a specific situation. Later, some *dōjinshi* groups started to refer to their output depicting sexual situations between males as "yaoi," in a teasing, self-deprecating manner. This name became the standard in the *dōjinshi* world, and the meaning of the word changed to refer to works that included sexual encounters between male characters or scenes of that kind.

Meanwhile, *shōjo manga* depicting love between males also continued to develop, as demonstrated by Keiko Takemiya's Kaze to ki no uta [The Poem of Wind an Trees]. There are many such manga and novels in circulation, to the extent that they can now make up their own section in bookshops. In fact, these works have already become established as a genre separate from *shōjo manga*: "boys' love." This is an English-language reading of the existing genre name "shōnen-ai," and is used to differentiate the genres. Many works in the boy's love genre have a lighter, everyday nature and tend to be more upbeat, while shōnen-ai traditionally has a strong aesthetic inclination. Original boys' love *dōjinshi*are also widespread, but strictly speaking, those are not yaoi even if they are based on love between males. This is because they are original. It is true that the first works to be called yaoi were originals as well, and at the time, the term "yaoi" did not differentiate between original works and parodies. However, as boys' love became more common, and that the fact that it depicted love between males had become obvious, people stopped referring to boys' love content as yaoi, particularly in the case of original boys' love *dōjinshi*. In short, yaoi currently refers specifically to parody *dōjinshi*.

What is the importance of YAOI to females?

Along with the article you read in 1.19, now you roughly grasp what yaoi is as a genre. You might think it is just a crazy female fantasy of male homosexual relationships in manga/anime works, destroying the original setting of those works. Yaoi, however, offers complex issues of female sexuality as well as their undermined positions in society.

Of course, not all females who like *dōjinshi* also like yaoi. Some are not interested in yaoi, and some even find it unpleasant. There is no doubt that just like male otaku, female otaku simply like anime, manga, and the characters appearing within. However, that fact alone does not categorize them. Perhaps this ambiguity is related to the difficulty of understanding yaoi. If it were exclusively the case that female otaku simply like manga and anime characters in exactly the same way as male otaku, then they would probably draw manga depicting love between male and female characters in the same way as male otaku, rather than manga depicting love between male characters. However, this does not bear out in reality. While many of the parodies do not feature sexual imagery, and some are about relationships between male and female characters (called "normal" to differentiate them from yaoi), half if not more of the parodies aimed at females are yaoi. True, the circles that produce these parodies have a wide variety of inclinations, and one can hardly check every book exhibited at Comiket, so there is no way to get a precise picture of the proportion of yaoi within all circles and all *dōjinshi*, but still, this is the very real sense that I had when I personally attended the event as part of a circle.

Nobi discusses that there is a difference between male and female otaku. In female yaoi dojinshi, why is sexual imagery frequently needed? What does the sexual imagery signify? You will read the rest of the excerpt of the article in the next step.

Step 1.21 (Article)
Yaoi Manga: The Meaning of Love for Yaoi Readers

Here is the English translation of excerpts from *"Adults Don't Understand"*(1) ("Otona wa wakatte kurenai" in Japanese) by Nobita Nobi (Nihon Hyoronsha, 2003). Nobi starts her creative carreer as a yaoi manga writer. We suppose that you have already read the earlier part of this article in the previous step. If not, please go back to the previous step.

To start with, I would like to point out that even if you were to sum up these works as yaoi *dōjinshi*, only a small number contain nothing but sex scenes between males, and outside of the sexual imagery, many yaoi *dōjinshi* are shōjo-manga-styled love stories. Works that actually do contain a climax, a denouement, and meaning are broadly called "yaoi" if they contain sexual imagery, though sometimes they are also given labels such as "yaoi ari" ("contains yaoi"). There are also cases where pieces about love between males are included under the "yaoi" label even if they do not include clear instances of sexual imagery. In other words, although the yaoi movement emerged from unambiguous depictions of sex, the key detail for yaoi was love between males, and because of that inclusion of the element of relationships, yaoi does not exclusively attach itself to sexual imagery.

Why Poeple Read Yaoi?

Yaoi is known as a genre which includes explicit sexual description. However, as Nobi mentions above, the significant point is love, not sexual relationship. Then, why do so many people want to read yaoi?

So then, what kinds of people consume and produce yaoi? There is a common, malicious misconception that they are uncool, unattractive virgins who are unpopular with men. Comiket runs for three days, using all available space at the Tokyo International Exhibition Center, and still numerous circles are rejected. If you took half of those circles to be female-oriented—or yaoi—circles, they would still make up an enormous number. Furthermore, if you include the visitors who come only as consumers rather than as members of a circle, the total number becomes incalculable. On top of that, if you were to include the numbers of people who do not attend exhibitions and sales, and instead buy via mail order or bookstores, the total becomes even more overwhelming. […]

Yaoi is active wherever *dōjinshi* based on the shared fantasy of "two characters being in love" is created and consumed by this diverse population of people. And I am one of them.

Females Read Works without Female Characters

Mostly in Japanese context, Yaoi genre is supported and consumed by female audience. You have probably heard of fujoshi (a rotten girl) , meaning those female fans of yaoi. But why do those female readers avidly read yaoi works without female characters?

It is a given that females do not exist within yaoi relationships. When they do appear, they are usually depicted as being an obstruction to the relationship from the male couple's point of view. Otherwise, they are depicted as being understanding and positive toward the love shared by the couple. In yaoi fantasies, females are not the subjects of love. Given that both the artists and the readers are female, why is that? Why must the characters be male? Here are some of the common replies from those who like and enjoy yaoi.

First is the reply that they would rather have the male characters they like to be obtained by a male, than by another female. This is accurate to an extent. Although females who enjoy yaoi may like homosexuality, they are not necessarily homosexual themselves. The sexual preferences of females who enjoy yaoi are ultimately ordinary. If a male character that a female yaoi enthusiast likes enters a relationship with a female other than them, then that immediately means that their love for that character has been rejected. However, by pairing male characters together, the rejection is postponed. The other male character does not represent an opponent to her, or to other females. Romance before its fulfillment is a competition to win the love of a male, but if the male is gay, then that means that at least there was never any competition with other females, and the female in question can drop out from the competition. In this way, they can at least avoid complete rejection.

However, no matter how much one loves anime and manga characters (or celebrities, even), it is not possible to experience romance with a fictional (or equally distant) person, so the act of postponing rejection in this way is still somehow logically backwards. […]

There are women who are fond of gay men in the real world for similar reasons, and I personally find that view disrespectful. Some gay men are also uncomfortable with this view. However, both sides are mixing fantasy and reality. Yaoi is ultimately a fantasy made up of illusions created by females, and gay relationships in real life are completely different. […] That is why women who enjoy yaoi absolutely should not force their fantasies on real-life gay relationships, nor is it necessary for gay men to harm their fantasies. Real-life gay men are not a part of these fantasies. And though this is obvious, neither can these women be a part of real-life gay relationships. […]

"Why is it that woman who are not involved can enjoy love or sexual acts that take place between males?" Just by adding this "who are not involved" to the first question, you can probably see how ineffective that answer about "seeing the strength of their love" is, if not extremely frivolous and thoughtless. Considering that these women, including myself, actually have a strong and sincere passion for yaoi, it is a disproportionately flimsy answer. It feels like an excuse to me. To put it in an extreme way, using the strength of love as a reason suggests a rationalization or a kind of evasion. […]

What's behind reading Yaoi?

As you see, Nobi deliberatively analyzes the reason why female readers want and need to read yaoi, and she does not give us an easy answer. It is because to think about why one like to read yaoi is equivalent to think who the one is and what kind of relationship the one wants to have or wants to avoid. Something yaoi readers might want to avoid is, according to Nobi, one's one body, as you will read in the next section. The important question is, why do women try to avoid their bodies.

What is actually important here is considering the question of why these females do not want to be embraced in their own bodies. They have complexes, large or small, regarding sexual acts with their real bodies. They might have a powerful dislike of sex itself, and they might suffer from an extremely subtle depression. Sometimes, they are equally negative toward the fact that they have sexual desires of their own. This is exactly why they feel a sense of safety and comfort in sexual acts where a male body takes the place of their own bodies. What this suggests is not a kind of negligence or avoidance that simply seeks comfort from a safe place, but a more urgent feeling pushed out by some internal pressure.

However, this does not mean that all women who enjoy yaoi are incapable of sex. As mentioned previously, I would add that there are also many women who clearly distinguish reality for what it is. However, when pursuing something "even better" within fantasies separated from reality, they choose yaoi.

It is often said that female readers of yaoi want to see an "equal relationship" between the two characters. In reality, women can hardly achieve such a relationship. Moreover, some women feel uncomfortable with their bodies, because they are often objectified in society. Yaoi offers them a type of fantasy without those obstacles, in which readers are able to enjoy the love relationship between the two characters safely.

Step 1.22 (Discussion)
Yaoi and BL

Now you understand Yaoi and BL as popular genres of subculture, particularly by girls. Please share your views.

Considering the significance of youth culture, representations of sexuality could be a powerfully subversive strategy against authorities. Do you think the Yaoi and BL genres can play an important role as a strategy against social oppression? If so, how?

You may like to read and comment on contributions made by other learners. You can also **'like'** comments if you agree with what's been said or if you have found something particularly interesting.

Week1: Activity 6
Summary of Week 1

Overview of Week 1 and a discussion about the role of love Japanese subcultures

1.23   LOVE IN SUBCULTURE DISCUSSION

1.24   GLOSSARY ARTICLE

1.25   ETERNAL GIRLHOOD ARTICLE

Step 1.23 (Discussion)
Love in subculture

As you saw in this week, love means relationality.

Heroines in shōjo manga need acknowledgements from others. They want to be accepted as they are, knowing they are immature. In other words, readers are expected to appreciate their immaturity and vulnerability as a key to accomplishment in relationships. Girls are, on the other hand, completely disappear from relationships in the works of Yaoi genre partly because female writers/readers cannot embrace their bodies. Instead, writers/readers of Yaoi envision ideal relationship between the two (male) persons, without taking a risk to show female sexual desires. In other occasions, immaturity sometimes turns out as innocent cruelty as you saw in *Neko Jiru Udon*.

This week shows that immaturity holds multi-layered meanings. Sometime it shows innocence, and sometime it means resistance. Do you think immaturity is accepted in your own culture, too? Are you attracted to immaturity? Why/Why not?

Next week, Professor Isamu Takahashi, an avid reader of Japanese comics, will introduce you to the concept of "Battle" in Japanese subculture. You will enjoy the discussion about the culture behind those battles by examining various types of well-known protagonists of boys' manga.

You may like to read and comment on contributions made by other learners. You can also **'like'** comments if you agree with what's been said or if you have found something particularly interesting.

Step 1.24 (Article)
Glossary

Please see the PDF of Glossary linked to Step 1.24.

Step 1.25 (Article)
Week 1 Additional Notes and References

Step 1.2 References

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2. Gordon, Milton M. *The Concept of Sub-Culture and Its Application*, The Subcultures Reader. Ed. Ken Gelder. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2005. pp.46-49. (Jenks, Chris. *Subculture: The Fragmentation of the Social*. London: Sage, 2005).
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4. Miyazawa Akio. *Nippon Sengo Sabu Karucha Shi* [A History of Subculture in Japan after WWII] . Tokyo: NHK Shuppan, 2014.
5. Otsuka, Eiji. Sengo, *Minshushugi no Rihabiritaishion* [Rehabilitation of Democratization after WWII]. Tokyo: Kadokawa, 2001.

Step 1.3 Reading Materials Metioned in the Video

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2. slipstream literature, The Subcultures Reader. Ed. Ken Gelder. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2005. 46-49.
3. Special topic "New Japanese Fiction" in The Review of Contemporary Fiction in summer 2002
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Step 1.4 Notes

1. [The Incredibly Strange Mutant Creatures Who Rule the Universe of Alienated Japanese Zombie Computer Nerds (otaku to You)](#) An article published in Wired 1.01 (March-April 2003) by Mark Shelling, referred in this step in "Youth Cultures and Otaku" section.
2. [I'm Alone, but Not Lonely: Japanese otaku-Kids Colonize the Realm of Information and Media](#) "someone who doesn't look good, who has no girlfriend, who is collecting silly things, and . . . who is into something useless." is quoted by Volker Grassmuck in "'I'm Alone, but Not Lonely': Japanese otaku-Kids Colonize the Realm of Information and Media" (1990)
3. [Oxford Dictionary Online](#) "Otaku" definition referred from this step, Accessed July 3, 2008.
4. [Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture](#) Alexandra Munro, "Introducing Little Boy" in Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture, ed. Murakami Takashi (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 256, is referred from this step.

Step 1.7 References

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2. Masaru Tamamoto, *Will Japan Ever Grow Up?*, Far Eastern Economic Review, July 10, 2009.
3. Tamaki Saito, *Sentô bishôjo*, chapter 5 , Ohta Publishing 2000 斎藤環『戦闘美少女の精神分析』、太田出版 2000

Step 1.10 References

1. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* by Julia Kristeva (Author), Leon S. Roudiez (Translator), New York: Colombia University Press, 1982 Available at Amazon
2. Ibid., 1.
3. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*by Anne Mcclintock, p155 Available at Amazon
4. Ibid., 157.
5. 大塚英志『少女民俗学』（光文社、1989年） *Shojo Minzoku Gaku*[Antholopology of Japanese Girls], Eiji Otsuka (Kobunsha, 1989)., p.18-20

Step 1.11 References

1. 大串尚代「オトメチック・ルネッサンス―少女マンガのヒロインたちのその後」『幸福の逆説』巽孝之他編（慶應義塾出版会、2005年）より抜粋。Excerpted from Hisayo Ogushi's "Otometic Renaissance: Heroines after the Prince Came." The Paradox of Happiness (Koufuku no Gyakusetsu) Ed. Takayuki Tatsumi, et al. (Keio University Press, 2005), (Original in Japanese)
2. 橋本治『花咲く乙女たちのきんぴらごぼう』前編　(河出書房新社、1984年) *Hanasaku Otometachi no Kimpira Gobo* [Kimpira Gobo of Flowering Girls] Vol.1 by Osamu Hashimoto. (Kawadeshobo Shinsha, 1984), pp.105-106
3. 宮台真司、石原英樹、大塚明子『サブカルチャー神話解体』（PARCO出版、1993年） *Dissecting Subculture Myths* [Sabukaruchaa Shinwa Kaitai] by Shinji Miyadai, Hideki Ishihara and Meiko Ōtsuka, Miyadai (Parco Publishing, 1993)

Step 1.11 References - Shōjo Manga

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2. 池田理代子『ベルサイユの薔薇』集英社 1972-73 *The Rose of Versailles* (Berusaiyu no Bara), Riyoko Ikeda, Shueisha,1972-73
3. 岩館真理子『チャイ夢』集英社 1980 *Chime* (Chaimu), Mariko Iwadate, Shueisha, Shueisha,1980
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8. 岩館真理子『君は三丁目の月』集英社 1985 *You Are the Moon of Third Street* (Kimi wa Sanchoume no Tsuki), Mariko Iwadate, Shueisha, 1985
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11. 谷川史子『きもち満月』集英社 1991 *Feeling like Full Moon* (Kimochi Mangetsu) Fumiko Tanikawa, Shueisha, 1991
12. あさぎり夕『呼ばせてMYヒーロー』講談社 1984 *Let Me Call You My Hero* (Yobasete MY Hiiroo) ,Yu Asagiri, Kodansha, 1984

Step 1.13 Books introduced in the video

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2. "Hentai Shojo Moji (the peculiar handwriting style of Japanese young girls)" by Kazuma Yamane, Japanese scholar
3. "Cute Studies" in East Asian Journal of Popular Culture

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3. Christie Yano, *Pink Globalization: Hello Kitty's Trek across the Pacific*. Duke UP, 2013.
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Step 1.16 References

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Step 1.18 Additional Readings

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2. *"The Poem of Wind and Trees"* by Keiko Takemiya, Shogakkan, 1976 竹宮恵子『風と木の詩』(Kaze to Ki no Uta) 小学館 1976 What is Yaoi? What kind of social background created this culture?

Step 1.19 References

1. *Only Women Know: Possibilities of Male Homosexual Preferences and Sexuality as Seen by Women*, Hisayo Ogushi, in "Sanshokuki" (May, 2011), Keio University Press 大串尚代『女だけが知っている――女性にみる男性同性愛嗜好とセクシュアリティを考える』、三色旗, 慶應義塾大学出版会, 2011年5月

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