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Japanese Subculture in the 1990s: *Otaku* and the Amateur *Manga* Movement

Abstract: The majority of amateur *manga* artists are women in their teens and twenties and most of what they draw is homoerotic based on parodies of leading commercial *manga* series for men. From 1988, the amateur *manga* movement expanded so rapidly that by 1992 amateur *manga* conventions in Tokyo were being attended by over a quarter of a million young people. This paper traces the origins and genres of amateur *manga* and asks why its fans and producers became the source of nationwide controversy and social discourse about *otaku* in the first half of the 1990s.

A limitless secret world of smoldering underground clubs where baby girls in bikinis wield Uzi submachine guns and Russian Eskimos D.J. in Elizabethan court dress. Grey catacombs of deserted rain-swept streets where beautiful women in impeccable Nazi uniforms sport unexpected erections. Nameless back streets scattered with the limpid green lights of opium-soaked noodle shacks where Oxford dons chop up giant squid for hungry pairs of lusty French school boys. Such is the stuff that amateur *manga* is made of.

Within the fluid expanse of the amateur *manga* movement have crystallized fascinating and rare expressions of the more spontaneous and untempered fantasies of a broad section of contemporary Japanese youth. It is the largest subculture in contemporary Japan—as invisible as it is immense. In 1992 the movement peaked in size as over a quarter of a million young people gathered at amateur *manga* conventions in Tokyo. The majority of activists in amateur *manga* subculture are working-class girls, and what turns them on more than anything else is violent homosexual romance between male hermaphrodites. What turns the lads on is baby girls with laser guns. Their tastes, however, are not fashionable. Whatever happens to girls' *manga* in Paris—where little girls' *manga* series such as *Candy Candy* and *Sailor Moon* recently became the toast of Montmartre—amateur *manga* and

its masses of girl artists are not artsy fartsy in Tokyo. The amateur *manga* movement is remarkable in that it has been organized almost entirely by and for teenagers and 20-somethings. Amateur *manga* is not sent to publishers to be edited and distributed. It is, instead, printed at the expense of the young artists themselves and distributed within *manga* clubs, at *manga* conventions, and through small ads placed in specialist information magazines serving the amateur *manga* world. Through the 1980s it grew to gigantic proportions without apparently attracting the notice of academia, the mass media, the police, the PTA, or government agencies such as the Youth Policy Unit (Seishōnen Taisaku Honbu)—which were established precisely to monitor the recurring tendency of youth to take fantastical departures from the ideals of Japanese culture.

In 1989, however, amateur *manga* subculture and amateur *manga* artists and fans were suddenly discovered, as if through infrared binoculars, and dragged from their teeming obscurity to face television cameras and journalists, police interrogation and public horror. Amateur *manga* artists became powerfully characterized as antisocial *manga otaku* or “*manga nerds*” in a sudden panic about the dangers of amateur *manga*, which spread through the mass media. Amateur *manga* artists, referred to as *manga otaku*, were rapidly made into symbols of Japanese youth in general and took center stage in the domestic social debate about the state of Japanese society that continued through the early 1990s.

The Debate about Youth in Japan

During the 1960s large sections of Japanese youth, both university students and lower-class migrant workers in urban areas, began to rebel against existing political, social, and cultural arrangements. Youth expressed their aspirations through radical political movements and a broad range of new popular cultural activities, in particular, the *manga* medium which expanded enormously in the latter half of this decade. The political and cultural activities of this generation contributed to the enterprise of large culture industries in the 1970s, which made a market of the new intellectual interests and aesthetic tastes of postwar Japanese youth.¹ Although the political point of youth radicalism became completely obscure by the early 1970s, younger generations, youth culture, and young women became the focus of nervous discourse about the apparent decay of a traditional Japanese society.

Youth have come to constitute a controversial and often entirely symbolic category in postwar Japan. (White) youth cultures in the United Kingdom and the United States have, increasingly, been humorously indulged and wishfully interpreted as contemporary expressions of the irrepressible

1. Marilyn Ivy, “Formations of Mass Culture,” in Andrew Gordon, ed., *Postwar Japan as History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

creative genius and spirit of individualism that made Britain a great industrial nation and America a great democracy.² But individualism (*kojinshugi*) has, as we know, been rejected as a formal political ideal in Japan. Institutional democracy notwithstanding, individualism has continued to be widely perceived as a kind of a social problem or modern disease throughout the postwar period.³ Youth culture (*wakamono bunka*), which has flourished in Japan since the 1960s, has been identified as the magic cooking pot of postwar Japanese individualism and viewed in a particularly sour light by many leading intellectuals. Youth culture, symbolizing the threat of individualism, has provoked approximately the same degree of condescension and loathing among sections of the Japanese intelligentsia as far-left political parties and factions, symbolizing the threat of communism, have provoked in the United States and the United Kingdom.

Individualism generally and youth culture in particular have been interpreted, first and foremost, as a form of willful immaturity or childishness.⁴ In 1971 Doi Takeo made his influential critique of contemporary Japanese society in the work *Amae no kōzō*.⁵ Doi, an eminent psychoanalyst, argued, among other things,⁶ that postwar generations of Japanese youth expressed a desire to be indulged like children. In both the university campus riots of 1968–70 and individualistic hippie culture, Doi saw the childish petulance of a dysfunctional generation, spoiled by the absence of a strong political father figure in Japan's new postwar democracy. Postwar youth were, at the same time, suffering from the overindulgence of their own modern parents. Doi finally concluded that a whole range of democratic advances, including the political challenge to racial, gender, and national inequality, were a form of childishness: "In practice, the tendency to shelve all distinctions—of adult and child, male and female, cultured and uncultured, East and West—in favor of a universal form of childish *amae* [dependent behavior] can only be called a regression for mankind."⁷

In 1977 Okonogi Keigo, also a psychoanalyst by profession, published another influential Japanese critique of modern society on the age of the "moratorium people." Okonogi linked the childishness of Doi's youth to the widespread rejection of civil society and of social obligations to fulfill certain designated adult roles in society. Okonogi observed that "Present-

2. For example, Julie Burchill, *Sex and Sensibility* (London: Grafton, 1992).

3. See Brian Moeran, "Keywords and the Japanese 'Spirit,'" in Brian Moeran, ed., *Language and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993).

4. See Sharon Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan," in Lisa Skov and Brian Moeran, eds., *Women, Media and Consumption in Japan* (London: Curzon Press, 1995).

5. Doi Takeo, *Amae no kōzō* (Tokyo: Kobundo, 1971); *The Anatomy of Dependence* (London: Kodansha Europe Ltd., 1973).

6. See an analysis of the cultural nationalism in Doi's work in Peter Dale, "Omnia Vincit Amae," in *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness* (London: Routledge, 1986).

7. Doi, *Amae no kōzō*, p. 165.

day society embraces an increasing number of people who have no sense of belonging to any party or organization but instead are oriented toward non-affiliation, escape from controlled society, and youth culture. I have called them the 'moratorium people.'"⁸

Criticism of the immaturity and escapism of contemporary youth has been closely bound with criticism of the contemporary *manga* medium. The principal reason for the enormous expansion of *manga* from a minor children's medium to a major mass medium during the 1960s was precisely that university students began to read children's *manga* instead of the classics. By spending hours with their noses buried in children's *manga* books, obtuse students demonstrated their hatred of the university system, of adults, and of society as a whole. Reading children's *manga* came to be considered somewhat risqué and underground. Since this period the qualities of introspection, immaturity, escapism, and resistance to entering Japanese society have been strongly equated with youth, youth culture, and *manga*.

During the following decade, the mass media and culture industries were criticized for encouraging the expansion of youth culture and its individualistic values across society. In 1981 youth were briefly referred to as the "crystal people," passionless cultural connoisseurs somewhat akin to the characters of Bret Easton Ellis's classic novel, *American Psycho*.⁹ The crystal people were named after the title of the best-selling novel, *Nan to naku kurisutaru* by Tanaka Yasuo, which zoomed in on the sophisticated but empty and neurotic lives of fashionable students.¹⁰

In 1985 a new term was coined in the media to describe, once again, a generation of youth born into relative affluence, with no experience of the poverty and hardships of the early postwar period. Young people became known as the *shinjinrui*—a term that implied that young people's behavior was so entirely different from that of previous generations that they could in effect be described as a "new breed" of human. Despite the widespread use of the concept in media and academic analysis over the following decade, the new breed remains a semimythological generation.¹¹ In 1987 they were estimated to be in their "20s and early 30s"¹²; five years later, in 1992, they were believed to be the "under 30s"¹³; and in 1993 they were believed

8. Okonogi Keigo, "The Age of the Moratorium People," *Japan Echo*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (1978). See also "Moratoriumu ningen no jidai," *Chūō kōron*, October 1977, and *Moratoriumu ningen no jidai* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1981).

9. New York: Vintage Books, 1991.

10. Tanaka Yasuo, *Nan to naku kurisutaru* (Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1981). For commentary, see Wakabayashi Shin, "Understanding the 'Crystal' People," *Japan Echo*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (1981).

11. See Alessandro Gomasca, "Youth, Crisis and Display: The Rhetoric of *Shinjinrui* in Contemporary Japan," *Versus, Quaderni di Studi Semiotica*, Vol. 10 (1998).

12. Bradley Martin, "The Shinjinrui Blues," *Newsweek*, June 8, 1987, p. 32.

13. Laurel Anderson and Marsha Wadkins, "The New Breed in Japan: Consumer Culture," *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (1992), p. 146.

to be in their late teens and early 20s.¹⁴ Economist Sashida Akio estimated in 1986 that by 1996 the new breed would consist of precisely 52 per cent of the population and 49 per cent of the work force.¹⁵ While the *shinjinrui* were favored by the media and a minority of social commentators such as Hayashi Chikio, who felt they would “be far less constricted in their thoughts and feelings than earlier generations,”¹⁶ they were more frequently described by social scientists as the irresponsible, passive consumers of leisure and cultural goods. Nakano Osamu, a leading expert in the field of youth, described the new breed in the following terms, which appear to directly credit them with causing the major characteristics—and problems—of a late industrial economy: “Because of the new breed’s preoccupation with pleasure and comfort, it chooses pleasure over pain, recreation over work, consumption over production, appreciation over creation.”¹⁷

Different sections of the media and in particular the visual media were suspected of exerting a pernicious influence over youth, causing them to get lost in a realm of aesthetic, intuitive, irrational, and ultimately immature thought. Magazines devoted to help-wanted listings were accused of more directly encouraging young people to evade full-time company careers.¹⁸ Social scientists suggested that the spread of youth culture and individualism through the media had produced a generation characterized by increasingly particularistic and narrow interests. Not only were youth resistant to entering society as mature adults, to becoming *shakaijin* (social citizens), but, it was observed, they had begun to lose all consciousness of affairs beyond their private hobbies.¹⁹ At the same time, youth were criticized for their disturbing passivity and unwillingness to venture from their soft and comfortable private lives—variably referred to as “cabins,” “capsules,” and “cocoon.”²⁰ Japanese mass society, it seemed, was being transformed into “micromasses” by hordes of passive and introverted youth:

What will become of Japan . . . if society continues to fragment into these self-satisfied, complacent micromasses? The[y] live in tiny cabins on a huge ship. They do not care if the sea is rough or calm, nor do they care what

14. Merry White, *The Material Child* (New York: The Free Press, 1993), p. 123.

15. *Japan Times Weekly*, April 5, 1986. These particular figures sound more like the percentage of women in the Japanese population, reflecting, perhaps, the close association of *shinjinrui* with independent young women in the media.

16. Hayashi Chikio, “Atarashii Nihonjin wa donna ningen?” *Next*, August 1985, p. 101.

17. Nakano Osamu, “A Sociological Analysis of the ‘New Breed,’” *Japan Echo*, Vol. 15, special issue (1988), p. 15.

18. Ijiri Kazuo, “The Breakdown of the Japanese Work Ethic,” *Japan Echo*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (1990).

19. Fujioka Wakao, “The Rise of the Micromasses,” *Japan Echo*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (1986).

20. See Kurihara Akira, *Yasashisa no yukue: gendai shonen ron* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1981); Rokuro Hidaka, “On Youth,” *The Price of Affluence* (New York: Kodansha International, 1984); and Nakano Osamu, *Narcissus no genzai* (Tokyo: Jijitsushinsha, 1984).

direction the ship is taking. Their only desire is for life to remain pleasant in their cabins.²¹

In the characterization of amateur *manga* artists as *otaku* and the ensuing social debate about the behavior and psychology of Japanese youth involved with *manga*, key themes of previous debates about youth resurfaced in new forms. *Otaku* were portrayed as a section of youth embodying the logical extremes of individualistic, particularistic, and infantile social behavior.²² In their often macabre descriptions of *otaku* lifestyle and subculture, social scientists conveyed, perhaps, their deeper anxieties about the general characteristics of Japanese society in the 1990s.

Mini Communications and Amateur Manga Printing

At the beginning of the 1970s, cheap and portable offset printing and photocopying equipment rapidly became available to the public.²³ Amateur *manga* and literature of any kind could now be reproduced and distributed cheaply and easily, creating the possibility of mass participation in unregistered and unpublished forms of cultural production. During the early 1970s the new possibilities opened up by this technology also meant that it was relatively easy for individuals to set up small publishing and printing companies. Many former radical students who had ruined their chances of joining a good company through their political activities, or who were turning their energies to youth culture for other reasons, set up one-person publishing companies producing small, erotic, or specialist culture magazines, many of which also contained sections of more unusual *manga*. Others established small offset printing companies that gradually began to specialize in printing small runs of amateur *manga* to professional standards for individual customers.

Using the services of the new mini printing companies, individuals in all walks of life could now print and reproduce their own work without approaching publishing companies. This twilight sphere of cultural production, existing beneath the superstructure of mass communications (*masukomi*), became known as mini communications (*minikomi*). With regard to its amateur, uncentralized, and open structure, the printed *minikomi* medium can be usefully compared to the computer Internet during the 1990s. One of the most extensive forms of mini communications in Japan was to become printed amateur *manga*.

21. Fujioka, "Rise of the Micromasses," p. 38.

22. Sengoku Tamotsu, president of the government-funded Japan Youth Research Center (Seishōnen Kenkyūjo), gives uncredited explanations of the *otaku* phenomenon in Japanese, in the documentary film *Otaku*, directed by Jean-Jacques Bienex (1993), at 41 minutes.

23. Yonezawa Yoshihiro, "Komikku māketto," in *Otaku no hon* (Tokyo: Takarajimasha, 1989), p. 77.

Contemporary printed amateur *manga* are known as *dōjinshi*, a term previously used to refer to pamphlets or magazines distributed within specific associations or societies. Alongside the growth of the commercial *manga* industry, and following the development of cheap offset printing and photocopying facilities, the number of *manga* artists and fans printing and distributing editions of their own amateur *manga dōjinshi* began to increase, first slowly in the 1970s, and then rapidly during the 1980s.

Large publishing companies ceased to systematically produce radical and stylistically innovative *manga* series around 1972 because these no longer matched sufficiently closely the changed interests of their mass audiences.²⁴ New *manga* artists and fans interested in developing new forms of expression in *manga* were forced to turn to amateur production as an alternative outlet for unpublishable material. After this point of technological and commercial transition, the amateur *manga* medium rapidly developed an internal momentum, partially independent of developments in commercial *manga* publishing.

In 1975 a group of young *manga* critics—Aniwa Jun, Harada Teruo, and Yonezawa Yoshihiro—founded a new institution to encourage the development of unpublished amateur *manga*. The institution was Comic Market, a public convention held several times a year where amateur *manga* could be sought and sold. Yonezawa Yoshihiro, president of Comic Market, explained how it was established as a response to the official, commercial *manga* industry:

All the independent comics and meeting places of the 1960s were disappearing by 1973 to 1974, and then *COM* magazine folded. It was a regression, from being able to publish all kinds of stuff in mainstream magazines to only being able to publish unusual stuff in *dōjinshi* underground magazines. What else can you do but start again from the underground?²⁵

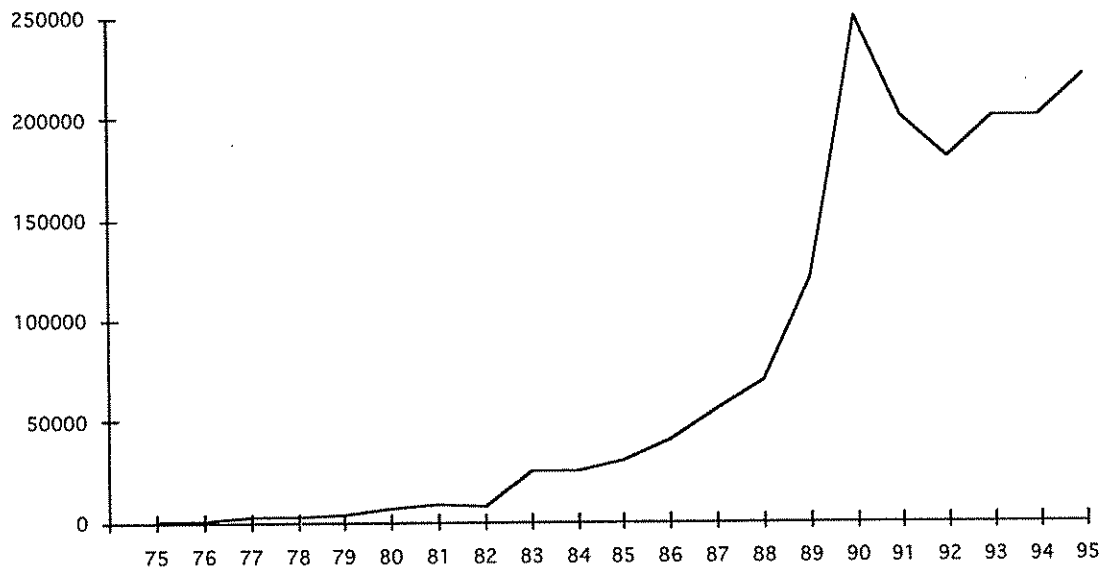
The first Comic Market, held in December 1975, was attended by 32 amateur *manga* circles and 600 individuals.²⁶ These figures grew slowly between 1975 and 1986, and then rapidly between 1986 and 1992. In its first ten years, Comic Market was held three days a year; attendance grew so large that it was rescheduled to two weekend conventions held in the Tokyo Harumi Trade Center in August and December. Attendance figures for Comic Market (see Figure 1) provide a useful illustration of the proportions

24. Sharon Kinsella, "Change in the Status, Form and Content of Adult *Manga*, 1986–1995," *Japan Forum*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (March 1996), pp. 103–12; and *Adult Manga: Culture and Power in Japanese Society* (London: Curzon Press, 1998).

25. Interview with Yonezawa Yoshihiro, president and founder of Comic Market, July 1994, in Tokyo.

26. "Komikku māketto 46 sankā mōshikomusho setto" (Tokyo: Komiketto Junbikai, December 1993), p. 15.

Figure 1. Attendance at December Comic Market, 1975-95



Source: "Komikku māketto 46 sankā mōshikomusho setto" (Tokyo: Komiketto Junbikai, December 1993), pp. 14-15.

and growth of the amateur *manga* medium, which is otherwise a remarkably invisible subculture in Japanese society.

Comic Market became the central organization of the amateur *manga* medium, the existence of which encouraged the formation of new amateur *manga* circles in high schools, in colleges, and among amateur *manga* artists with similar interests across the country. Since 1993, 16,000 separate *manga* circles, distributing one or more amateur works produced by their members, have participated in each Comic Market convention. Up to 30,000 *manga* circles have applied to attend each convention throughout the 1990s, but no more than 16,000 stalls can be accommodated in the Harumi Trade Center.²⁷ A portion of this excess demand is absorbed by the organized staggering of conventions over two days and also by a recently established rival convention, known as Super Comic City, held in the Harumi Trade Center each April. The amount of amateur *manga* produced and distributed has increased greatly since around 1988 and in the mid-1990s totaled anywhere from 25,000 separate works each year upward²⁸; the number of amateur *manga* circles across the country was estimated between 30,000 and 50,000 during the early 1990s.²⁹

27. Interview with Yonezawa Yoshihiro, July 1994, in Tokyo.

28. I have calculated this figure of 25,000 on the basis of two Comic Market conventions per annum, each attended by 16,000 circles, of which 74.1 per cent, or 11,856 circles, produce *manga* (rather than music, costumes, or CD-ROMs). Each of those 11,856 circles distributes at least one new work twice a year. Thus at Comic Market alone approximately 23,712 amateur works are distributed each year.

29. *Imidasu 1993* (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 1992), p. 1094.

Amateur Manga Business

Comic Market is ostensibly a voluntary, nonprofit organization, but a range of other commercial enterprises have begun to grow on the margins of the amateur *manga* pool. In 1986 specialist amateur *manga* printer Akabubu Tsūshin launched the Wings amateur *manga* conventions, and in 1991 Tokyo Ryūkō Center set up Super Comic City conventions. Both companies hold small to medium-sized conventions in towns across the country every few weeks. It is possible for amateur *manga* artists and fans to visit a convention to find contacts and friends or to search out new amateur *manga* every other weekend, though in fact many smaller conventions are limited to specific genres of amateur *manga* of interest to just one particular group of amateur *manga* artists.

Timetables of convention dates and locations are advertised in several monthly magazines devoted to the amateur *manga* world. In the second half of the 1970s low-circulation magazines such as *June* (San Shuppan), *Peke* (Minori Shobō), *Again*, *Tanbi*, and *Manga kissatengai* were established.³⁰ The first of these magazines, entitled *Manpa* (*Manga wave*) was launched in 1976 and its scions continue to occupy the organizational center of the amateur *manga* medium. In 1982 *Manpa* magazine split into *Puff*, which specializes in amateur girls' *manga*, and *Comic Box*, which covers all amateur *manga* from a distinctive leftist political position. These magazines also carry ads for small *dōjinshi* publishers, *dōjinshi* books and anthologies, meeting places for amateur artists, and small specialist *manga* book shops that may also sell some *dōjinshi*. *Comic Box* magazine also publishes *manga* criticism, interviews with *manga* artists, and otherwise unrecorded indexes of all published *manga* matter.

An increasing number of small companies have also begun to publish amateur *manga* itself. Fusion Productions, which makes *Comic Box* magazine, also publishes *Comic Box Jr.*, a 300-page monthly magazine in which collections of already printed and distributed amateur *manga* organized by specific genre or subgenre are published, and collected anthologies of *dōjinshi*, which so far include a now infamous, erotic, three-volume series entitled *Bishōjo shōkōgun* (The Lolita syndrome) published in 1985. In addition to small publishers, the growth of the amateur *manga* medium has provided custom for a large number of small printing shops such as P-Mate Insatsu and Hikari Insatsu; many of these shops specialize solely in the production of *dōjinshi*.

Other commercial enterprises linked to the amateur *manga* medium are large *manga* shops that cater to the specialist requirements of amateur *manga* artists and fans. In 1984 a chain of *manga* shops named Manga no

30. Interview with Yonezawa Yoshihiro, July 1994, in Tokyo.

Mori (*Manga forest*) sprang up in the Shibuya, Shinjuku, Takadanobaba, Kichijoji, and Higashi Ikebukuro subcenters of Tokyo. In 1992 Mandarake, a multistory amateur and secondhand *manga* superstore, opened in another center of Tokyo, Shibuya; its staff wear costumes fashioned after those of better-known *manga* characters.

Amateur Manga Artists

In the second half of the 1970s when Comic Market was still a relatively small cultural gathering, a high proportion of *dōjinshi* artists graduated from amateur to professional status. Ishii Hisaichi, Saimon Fumi, Sabe Anoma, Kono Moji, Takahashi Hakkai, and Takahashi Rumiko all printed *dōjinshi* and distributed them at Comic Market, subsequent to becoming famous, professional artists.³¹ As the size of the amateur medium grew in the 1980s, this flow of artists into commercial production decreased sharply.

It is evident from Figure 1 that the amateur *manga* movement reached its peak in 1990–92, when a staggering quarter of a million amateur artists and fans attended each Comic Market. Amateur *manga* conventions are the largest mass public gatherings in contemporary Japan. It is not only in this regard that *manga* conventions bear a sociological significance similar in some senses to that of football in Europe. Most of these contemporary artists and fans are aged between their mid-teens and late 20s. Although no statistics have been recorded, Yonezawa Yoshihiro has also observed that young Japanese from low-income backgrounds, who were typically raised in large suburban housing complexes and attended lower-ranking colleges or have no higher education, are in the majority at Comic Market. The significance of this observation is not straightforward. Despite the academic and media attention given to higher education and the emergence of a universal middle class in contemporary Japan, the majority of young Japanese *do not* go on to higher education, and of those who do, a large proportion attend low-ranking colleges. At the same time, the majority of Japanese people now live in suburban housing complexes and apartment blocks. While this could be taken to suggest that the sociological composition of Comic Market is therefore “standard” and “representative,” the significance of this observation is, perhaps, that this is one of the very few cultural and social forums in Japan (or any other industrialized country) not dominated by privileged and highly educated sections of society.

This observation is particularly interesting in light of the high levels of interest in self-education and the accumulation of cultural information that can be observed within the amateur *manga* world. By applying Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of the “cultural economy” to Anglo-American fanzine subcul-

31. Yonezawa, “Komikku māketto,” p. 78.

tures, John Fiske has developed the theory that these subcultures can operate as “shadow cultural economies,” providing individuals who feel lacking in official cultural capital—namely, education—and the social status with which it is rewarded with an alternative social world in which they have access to a different kind of cultural capital and social prestige.³² It is possible that the intense emphasis in Japan since the 1960s on educational achievement and acquiring a sophisticated cultural taste has also stimulated the involvement of young people excluded from these officially recognized modes of achievement with amateur *manga* subculture.

Nevertheless, a fraction of the rapid growth of the amateur *manga* medium at the end of the 1980s was accounted for by the arrival of teenage artists from privileged backgrounds at amateur *manga* conventions. These new participants, some of them the students of elite universities, are attributed to parents who were active in the counter culture and political movements of the late 1960s and who passed on both their social background and some of their positive attitude toward *manga* to their children.

The huge proliferation of *dōjinshi* production in the wake of the mini communications boom, which allowed many ordinary Japanese youth to begin producing amateur *manga*, meant that by the 1980s virtually all amateur *manga* was being made, not by highly skilled professional artists seeking alternative outlets for their personal work, but by young artists who had no relationship with the *manga* publishing industry at all. Of the tens of thousands of *dōjinshi* writers active in the medium during the 1980s, only a handful went on to become professional artists. The originally tight relationship between amateur and professional *manga* production became looser. In an attempt to direct some of these amateur artists toward commercial production, the Comic Market Preparation Committee began publishing an annual journal designed to promote amateur *manga* artists. In this journal, *Komiketto origin*, published every summer, 15 to 20 amateur artists of the best-selling *dōjinshi* of the previous year are reviewed and introduced to the public.³³

Early in the development of Comic Market it became evident that printed amateur *manga* provided an unexpected new gateway into the *manga* medium for Japanese women. Though Disney animation and the cute children's *manga* characters created by Tezuka Osamu had long been popular with young women, very few of them became *manga* artists before 1970. Commercial *manga* was dominated by boys' and adult magazines, and these publishing categories continue to represent the mainstream of the medium and the publishing industry today. In 1993, adult *manga* for men

32. John Fiske, “The Cultural Economy of Fandom,” in Lisa A. Lewis, ed., *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 30.

33. Interview with Yonezawa Yoshihiro, July 1994, in Tokyo.

represented 38.5 per cent, boys' *manga* represented 39 per cent, while girls' *manga* represented only 8.8 per cent of all published *manga*.³⁴ The number of women making *dōjinshi* increased quickly after the establishment of Comic Market, so that the first result of the sudden increase in the general accessibility of the *manga* medium was a new amateur *manga* movement engendered by women. In the mid-1970s a group of female artists producing "small quantities of extremely high-quality *manga*" emerged³⁵ and became known as the "1949 Group" (*nijūyon-nen gumi*), after the year in which a number of them were born.³⁶ These artists, including Hagio Moto, Oshima Yumiko, Yamagisha Ryoko, and Takemiya Keiko, joined other earlier *dōjinshi* artists who had become professional *manga* artists when they filtered into commercial girl's *manga* magazines.³⁷

Until 1989, approximately 80 per cent of *dōjinshi* artists attending Comic Market were female and only 20 per cent were male. Since 1990, however, male participation in Comic Market has increased to 35 per cent. The girls' *manga* genre continues to dominate amateur production but, and this is a point of great interest, it has now been adopted by male *dōjinshi* artists. The increase in male attendance at Comic Market after 1988 was another factor contributing to the rapid proliferation of the amateur medium at this time. New genres of girls' *manga* written by and for boys sprouted from the fertile bed of the amateur *manga* medium. Some universities began to boast not only *manga* clubs but also girls' *manga* clubs for men. This *manga* and those men became the unlucky focus of the *otaku* panic.

Genre Evolution within Amateur Manga

The realistic, adult-oriented *gekiga* style, which arose out of anti-establishment *manga* subculture in the late 1950s and had a strong influence on the genres utilized within commercial boys' and adult *manga*, has not been a big influence on contemporary amateur *manga*. Amateur *manga* production has been far more influenced by girls' *manga*, which in turn has far greater stylistic continuity with the less politically controversial tradition of the child-oriented, cute, sometimes fantastical, *manga* style pioneered by Tezuka Osamu. Not only do amateur and commercial *manga* diverge in their stylistic origins but the social networks of amateur and professional artists have become so different that they represent two virtually separate cultural media. From the amateur *manga* subculture have emerged new genres that are distinctly recognizable as amateur in origin.

34. *Shuppan nenpō* 1994, p. 188.

35. Interview with Saitani Ryō, chief editor of *Comic Box* and amateur *manga* expert, April 1994, in Tokyo.

36. Midori Matsui, "Little Girls Were Little Boys," in Anna Yeatman, ed., *Feminism and the Politics of Difference* (St. Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1993).

37. Interview with Saitani Ryō, April 1994, in Tokyo.

In the early 1980s, *dōjinshi* artists began to produce not only new, original works, but a new genre, parody *manga*, based on revised versions of published commercial *manga* stories and characters. The first commercial *manga* series to attract a whole wave of amateur parodies in the first half of the 1980s was *Uchūsenkan Yamato* (Spaceship Yamato).³⁸ As the amateur *manga* medium expanded, the proportion of *dōjinshi* artists producing parody instead of original works increased too. By 1989, 45.9 per cent of material sold at Comic Market was parody *manga*, while only 12.1 per cent was original *manga*.³⁹

Most parody *manga* has been based on leading boys' *manga* stories serialized in commercial magazines. Stories in the top-selling magazine *Jump*, such as "Dragon Ball," "Yūyūhakusho," "Slam Dunk," and "Captain Tsu-basa," have been particularly frequent sources of parody. Parody based on animation rather than *manga* series, and referred to as *aniparo* (an abbreviation of animation-parody), became more popular from the mid-1980s onward. In the same period *kosupurei* (an abbreviation of costume-play), where *manga* fans dress up in the costumes of well-known *manga* characters and perform a form of live parody at amateur *manga* conventions, also became widespread.

Dōjinshi artists categorized their style of *manga*, which is dominant in both parody and original work, as *yaoi*. This word is an anagram, composed of the first syllable of three phrases, *yama nashi*, *ochi nashi*, *imi nashi*. These phrases mean "no build-up, no foreclosure, and no meaning," and they are frequently cited to describe the almost total absence of narrative structure typical of amateur *manga* since the mid-1980s.⁴⁰ In *yaoi manga* the symbolic appearance of characters, and emotions attached to characters' situations, has become far more important than the traditional plot. The narrative or story line, which in many ways is the only remaining link between *manga* and works generally understood as high literature, has been very much abandoned to commercial *manga* publishers, for whom it continues to be of varied but generally substantial importance. *Yaoi* is also characterized by its main subject matter, that is, homoerotic and homosexual romance between lead male characters. Typical homosexual characters are pubescent European public school-boys, or muscular young men with long hair and feminine faces whose partners are essentially beautiful women with male genitals. (See Figure 2.) Girls' *manga* featuring gay love is sometimes identified as *jūne mono* (after the girls' *manga* magazine *June*), while love stories about beautiful young men are also known as *bishōnen-ai*. Although the characters of these stories are biologically male, in essence they are ideal

38. Yonezawa, "Komikku māketto," p. 79.

39. "Komikku māketto 15 nenshi," in *Comic Box*, November 1989.

40. The meaning of *yaoi*, common knowledge among *manga* fans, is defined on paper in *Imidasu 1993* (Tokyo: Shōgakukan), p. 1094.

Figure 2. Homoerotica for Young Women



Gay lovers on the frontispiece of a popular *dōjinshi*, *Nairu o sakanobotte* (1989). By kind permission of the artist, Yahagi Takako.

types, combining favored masculine qualities with favored feminine qualities.⁴¹ Readers are likely to directly identify with “gay male” lead characters—and often the slightly more effeminate male of a couple. In the context of the obvious range of restrictions on behavior and development that women experience in contemporary society, young female fans feel more able to imagine and depict idealized strong and free characters if they are male.⁴²

41. Sagawa Toshihiko, chief editor of the girls’ *manga* magazine *June*, confirms this interpretation in an interview with Frederick Schodt. See Frederick Schodt, *Dreamland Japan* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 1996), pp. 122–23.

42. This is not an approach unique to Japanese girls’ *manga*: fanzine subculture in the United States and Britain also features a strong vein of male homosexual romance for women. Fans use material featuring homosexual love affairs as devices for staging the type of independent and free characters in which they are most interested. Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* (London: Routledge, 1992).

Interpreting the Themes of Amateur Manga

Comic Market President Yonezawa Yoshihiro sees the expansion of parody in *manga* as an attempt to struggle with and subvert dominant culture on the part of a generation of youth for whom mass culture, which has surrounded them from early childhood, has become their dominant reality. In this context Yonezawa interprets parody *manga* as a highly critical genre that attempts to remodel and take control of "cultural reality." *Manga* critic Kure Tomofusa, on the other hand, believes that the highly personal (*jiheiteki*) themes of parody *manga* represent not a critical sensibility so much as a return to the previous safe themes of Japanese literature:

In 1980 people once again began to forget about dramatic social themes and *manga* began to move toward petty, repetitive, personal affairs, rather like the I-novels [*shishōsetsu*] of the pre-1960 period. In the 1980s new kinds of love-comedies, often within parody, began in and dominated the amateur printed *manga* world.⁴³

Yonezawa, representing the more open-minded approach of many independent media-based specialists, attempts to perceive a progressive political spirit, which is equivalent with that born by his own generation of the late 1960s, in the cultural activities of amateur *manga* subculture. Kure, however, insists on a critical appraisal of the themes of amateur *manga* and finds them seriously wanting in tangible social and political content. This view is shared by many editors and artists involved with the commercial *manga* medium. The implication of this criticism of parody *manga* is that the definition of "originality" applied to *manga* is something linked to the degree to which it embraces current social and political events. "News," in *manga*, has more than a merely linguistic association with "originality." Amateur *manga*, whether parody or original work, is widely judged to be low-quality culture because it lacks direct references to social and political life.

In a survey that I distributed at random to 40 amateur *manga* artists at Comic Market in August 1994, the respondents were divided in their opinions about parody *manga*.⁴⁴ Of the 29 respondents who returned the survey, 19 said they preferred parody to original *manga*. Of those 19, 10 respondents gave "more interesting" as their reason for either producing or buying parody *manga*. Another 9 of the 19 respondents who claimed to prefer parody to original *manga* felt either that it was "easier to understand" or they were "not capable of making original *manga*." The remaining 10 respondents claimed not to like parody *manga* at all because it was "not

43. Interview with Kure Tomofusa, June 1994, in Tokyo.

44. This was a single-sheet, self-completion, postal-reply, questionnaire survey presented in the informal, cute style popular among amateur *manga* artists.

interesting.”⁴⁵ Thus, approximately one third of respondents, who were all Comic Market participants, did not like parody *manga* at all, another third said they liked parody *manga* because it was more interesting, and a final third said they liked parody *manga* because it was easier to write and to understand than original *manga*. These judgments, made by convention participants, confirm that producing and appreciating parody *manga* is, among other things, an easier task for many amateur artists than producing original characters and stories. Creating new *manga* scenarios and characters that work is a far more challenging intellectual task than making new versions of already developed *manga* stories borrowed from popular boys' *manga* magazines. The presence of the amateur *manga* medium, which has allowed a great number of ordinary, proportionately less talented individuals access to producing *manga*, may have had the effect of lowering the standards of amateur *manga* and encouraging the expansion of the parody genre. Despite this dependence of amateur *manga* on commercial *manga* for its scenes and characters, it is clear that parody *manga* has nevertheless developed as a qualitatively separate master-genre in its own right, in which the traditional and commercial understanding of originality has come to have less meaning.

Parody *manga* often contains an element of satirical humor that makes light fun of the seriousness of the masculine heroes in commercial boys' and adult *manga* series. While on the one hand, parody positively celebrates these favorite *manga* characters, on the other hand it also pierces their authority and aloofness by inserting scatological humor or embarrassing jokes about their sexual desires. The overall effect of this type of naughtiness in parody *manga* is to make the parodied characters more fallible, allowing readers to feel more intimate toward them. This aspect of the amateur *manga* sense of parody is similar to aspects of the Anglo-American sensibility of camp. Both of these cultural modes are based on the subversion of meanings carried in original, and frequently iconic, cultural items. Moreover, in the case of both parody and camp, this playful subversion is focused particularly on cultural items that contain strongly identified gender types.⁴⁶

45. The questions included on this single-sheet, self-completion, questionnaire survey cited here were:

2a) Do you prefer parody or original *dōjinshi*? (Answer: parody/original/both/other)

2b) Why is that your favorite?

46. Susan Sontag has suggested that “Allied to the Camp taste for the androgynous is something that seems quite different but isn't: a relish for the exaggeration of sexual characteristics and personality mannerisms. For obvious reasons, the best examples that can be cited are movie stars. The corny flamboyant femaleness of Jayne Mansfield, Gina Lollobrigida, Jane Russell, Virginia Mayo; the exaggerated he-manness of Steve Reeves, Victor Mature.” There is a modest parallel here between the American camp appropriation of movie sex symbols and the Japanese parody appropriation of well-known male characters from boys' *manga* series. From “Notes on Camp” (1964), republished in *A Susan Sontag Reader* (London: Penguin Books, 1983), pp. 108–9.

Through parody *manga*, a large vanguard of young women have developed a cultural form that expresses an ambiguous preoccupation with, and a deep uncertainty about, masculine gender stereotypes, such as those typical of the characters in weekly boys' and adult *manga* magazines.

Many of the men involved in the amateur *manga* medium perceive girls' *manga* and the female milieu surrounding it to be a progressive cultural scene within contemporary society. In 1992, an article appeared in the *Nihon keizai shinbun* about a salaryman who wrote girls' *manga*, which was strategically titled "Active Citizenship through Girls' *Manga*." In the article the man explained how, in his opinion, writing amateur girls' *manga* was not an escapist activity, but something that actively engaged him with society in a way in which working for a publishing company (producing original *manga* dramas) could not.⁴⁷ Implicit in this man's comments was a criticism of the purpose of Japanese corporations and the masculine culture through which men working for them communicate. This is an attitude shared by many other male fans of girls' *manga* including the editorial staff of the magazine *Comic Box*.

Toward the end of the 1980s, however, the number of men attending amateur *manga* conventions increased and new genres of boys' amateur *manga* began to rise in prominence at Comic Market. A type of ultra-cute (*chō kawaii*) girls' *manga* written by and for men was grafted from the styles of *manga* pioneered by female artists and used in small girls' *manga* story magazines, such as *Ribbon* and *Margaret*. The genre into which the majority of this male girls' *manga* falls is aptly referred to as *rorikon*—this term being derived from the term Lolita complex,⁴⁸ complex, in this case, being the operative word. *Rorikon manga* usually features a girl heroine with large eyes and a body that is both voluptuous and child-like, scantily clad in an outfit that approximates a cross between a 1970s bikini and a space-age suit of armor. She is liable to be cute, tough, and clever. The attitude toward gender expressed in amateur *rorikon manga* is clearly different from that expressed by the male fans of girls' *manga*, including gay love stories and parody.

Despite the differences of these particular male attitudes, the themes by which amateur *manga* genres have become defined have in common a similar preoccupation with gender and sexuality. Amateur *manga* genres express a range of the problematic feelings young people harbor toward established gender stereotypes and, by association, established forms of sexuality. While young people engaged with amateur *manga* do not fit the social definition of homosexuality, they share some of the uncertainties and

47. "Shojo manga de katsuyaku no shakaiin," in *Nihon keizai shinbun*, regular column "Tokyo wa shiawase desu ka?" August 13, 1993.

48. This is a reference to Vladimir Nabokov's novel, *Lolita*, and the theme of older male obsession with prepubescent girls.

modes of cultural expression more commonly associated with contemporary gay culture. *Yaoi*, *jūne mono*, parody, and *rorikon* express the frustration experienced by young people, who have found themselves unable to relate to the opposite sex, as they have constituted and located themselves within the contemporary cultural and political environment. There is, in short, a profound disjuncture between the expectations of men and the expectations of women in contemporary Japan. Young women have become increasingly unwilling to accept relationships with men who cannot treat them as anything other than “women” and subordinates. Men who persist in macho sexist behavior—like that often depicted in boys’ and adult *manga* magazines—are gently ridiculed and rejected by the teenage girls involved in writing parody *manga* or reading gay love stories. Young men who find this type of masculine behavior and friendship, which is concentrated within corporate culture,⁴⁹ restricting and uncomfortable have also been attracted to amateur girls’ *manga*.

The themes of Lolita complex *manga* written by and for men, on the other hand, express both the fixation with and resentment felt toward young women by another group of young men. Despite the inappropriateness of their old-fashioned attitudes, many young men have not accepted the possibility of a new role for women in Japanese society. These men, confounded by their inability to relate to assertive and insubordinate contemporary young women, fantasize about these unattainable girls in their own boys’ girls’ *manga*. The little girl heroines of *rorikon manga* reflect simultaneously an awareness of the increasing power and centrality of young women in society, and also a reactive desire to see these young women disarmed, infantilized, and subordinated.

From a broad perspective, both the obsession with girls relieved through *rorikon manga* and the increasing interest among young men in (girls’ own) girls’ *manga* reflect the growing tendency among young Japanese men to be fixated with the figure of the girl and to orient themselves around girls’ culture. The increasingly intense gaze with which young men examine girls and girls’ *manga* is, to use the words of Anne Allison, “both passive and aggressive.”⁵⁰ It is a gaze of both fear and desire, stimulated not least by a sense of lost privileges over women, which accumulated during the 1980s.

Amateur Manga in Britain and the United States

Points of striking and unexpected similarity between cultural trends in contemporary Japan and other late industrial societies often provide social

49. See Anne Allison, *Nightwork: Sexuality, Pleasure, and Corporate Masculinity in a Tokyo Hostess Club* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

50. Anne Allison, *Permitted and Prohibited Desires: Mothers, Comics and Censorship in Japan* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), p. 33.

insights at least as profound as those discovered at points of cultural difference, which are almost habitually focused upon in the academy.⁵¹ Points of similarity in the cultural developments of different societies illustrate the pervasiveness of international social and cultural processes. Amateur *manga* is a good example of this point. Genres that have arisen out of the Japanese amateur *manga* subculture in the 1980s bear striking similarities to a genre that has been present in the cultural output of television and comic fans in the United States and the United Kingdom since the early 1970s. Fine art drawings and paintings and literary parodies of popular television series, such as *Starsky and Hutch*, *M*A*S*H*, *Star Trek*, and, most recently, *Alien Nation* from the United States and *Red Dwarf* in the United Kingdom are a central constituent of Anglo-American fanzine subculture. Moreover, the addition of homoerotica and homosexual romance to these fanzines is also prevalent. Anglo-American homoerotic amateur fanzines are referred to as "K/S," or more simply still "slash" (/), in reference to the frequently portrayed relationship between Kirk and Spock in fanzine versions of the program *Star Trek*.⁵² The *yaoi* style emerging from Japanese *dōjinshi* is clearly the Japanese equivalent of Anglo-American slash.⁵³ Other similarities between *yaoi* and slash are the absence of a strong narrative structure⁵⁴ and the particular fascination with space exploration adventures: for Anglo-American fanzines about *Star Trek* and *Dr. Who*, substitute Japanese *manga* parodies of *Uchūsenkan Yamato* and *Captain Tsubasa*.

There are in fact links between amateur *manga* and fanzine production in these different countries. The most rapidly growing sector of British fan culture in the 1990s has been concerned with Japanese *manga* or animation, while so called "Japanimation" has been a popular category of American fan culture since the mid-1970s. Japanese animation companies have stimulated the interest of foreign fan audiences since the late 1970s as a market-opening device to introduce Japanese animation products to wider American audiences.⁵⁵ Most fan interest in Japanese animation in the United Kingdom was stimulated by the release of Otomo Katsuhiro's animated film *Akira* and the establishment of the magazine *Anime UK* in

51. See Phil Hammond, ed., *Cultural Difference, Media Memories: Anglo-American Images of Japan* (London: Cassell, 1997).

52. Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*.

53. According to Jenkins: "The colourful term, 'slash,' refers to the convention of applying a stroke or 'slash' to signify a same-sex relationship between two characters (Kirk/Spock or K/S) and specifies a genre of fan stories positing homoerotic affairs between series protagonists." *Ibid.*, p. 186.

54. Camille Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992).

55. Jonathon Clements, "Tales from the Edge of the World: A Survey of Japan's Manga and Anime Exports, with Special Reference to Economic, Legal and Cultural Influences upon Sales" (masters thesis, Leeds University, 1994).

1990.⁵⁶ Other British magazines for new fans of Japanese animation are *Manga Mania*, launched in 1993, and *Anime FX*, launched in 1996. The popularity of Japanese animation in Britain occurred at the same time as the explosion in growth of the amateur *manga* medium in Japan from the end of the 1980s into the early 1990s.

The genres of animation that have become popular within the new fan cultures in Britain and the United States and dominate animation video imports are derived from *rorikon manga* which arose out of the amateur *manga* medium in the late 1980s. Girls' *manga* written exclusively by and for men, and featuring cute little girls typically wielding heavy weaponry and fighting for survival in science fiction worlds, has been the principal influence on Japanese animation favored in Britain in the 1990s. The preoccupation with converting serialized dramas into homoerotic parodies that emerged spontaneously among women in the United Kingdom, America, and Japan suggests that all of these women have undergone some essentially similar social and cultural experience. The source of fascination here is not so much the often-cited differences between the role of women in the United States and Japan as the implied similarity of their experiences. At the same time, the popularity of Japanese animation and *manga* influenced by the *rorikon* style in the United Kingdom and the United States during the 1990s suggests that many young men in the United Kingdom, United States, and Japan are also experiencing similar circumstances, leading to closely allied tastes and interests. This type of international *manga* and fanzine subculture, emerging spontaneously from within amateur media outside the official organization of the media and culture industries, suggests, moreover, that the degree to which the media and culture industries in each of these countries actively produces a specifically national culture is extensive.

The Amateur Manga Panic

In 1989 amateur *manga* artists and the amateur *manga* subculture became the subject of what might be loosely categorized as a "moral panic" of the sort first defined at the end of the 1950s by British sociologist Stanley Cohen.⁵⁷ A sudden genesis of interest in amateur *manga* artists and Comic Market, among the media, began with the arrest of a serial infant-girl killer. Between August 1988 and July 1989, 26-year-old printer's assistant Miyazaki Tsutomu abducted, murdered, and mutilated four small girls, before being caught, arrested, tried, and imprisoned.⁵⁸ Camera crews and

56. Discussion with Otomo Katsuhiro, the *manga* artist and producer of the animated film *Akira*, January 1994, in Tokyo. These details are confirmed in Clements, "Tales from the Edge of the World."

57. Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (London: Granada, 1972), p. 9.

58. Charles Whipple, "The Silencing of Lambs," in *Tokyo Journal*, July 1993; John Whittier Treat, "Yoshimoto Banana Writes Home: Shōjo Culture and the Nostalgic Subject," *Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (1993), pp. 353–56.

reporters arriving at Miyazaki's home discovered that his bedroom was crammed with a large collection of girls' *manga*, *rorikon manga*, animation videos, a variety of soft pornographic *manga*, and a smaller collection of academic analyses of contemporary youth and girls' culture.⁵⁹ Miyazaki was a fan of girls' *manga* and in particular *rorikon manga* and animation, and it was revealed that he had written some animation reviews in *dōjinshi* and had been to Comic Market.⁶⁰

A heavily symbolic debate ensued Miyazaki's arrest, in which his alienation and lack of substantial social relationships featured as the ultimate cause of his antisocial behavior. The apparent lack of close parenting from his mother and father, his subsequent immersion into a fantasy world of *manga*, and the recent death of his grandfather—with whom he had apparently had his only deep human relationship—were posited as the serial causes of his serial murders. Emphasis on the death of Miyazaki's grandfather implied that the decline of Japanese-style social relations represented by older generations of Japanese fulfilling traditional social roles had contributed to Miyazaki's dysfunctional behavior. Emphasis on Miyazaki's apparently careless upbringing suggested, at the same time, that freer contemporary relationships were no substitute for fixed traditional social relationships, and that there was no real communication between modern, liberal parents of the 1960s generation and their children. Several journals described how Miyazaki's mother had neglected her son so that “by the time he was two years old he would sit alone on a cushion and read *manga* books.”⁶¹

Where his family had failed to properly socialize Miyazaki, the media, it was suggested, had filled this gap, providing a source of virtual company and grossly inappropriate role models.⁶² While one headline exclaimed that, in the case of Miyazaki, “the little girls he killed were no more than characters from his comic book life,”⁶³ psychoanalyst Okonogi Keigo worried that “the danger of a whole generation of youth who do not even experience the most primary two- or three-way relationship between themselves and their mother and father, and who cannot make the transition from a fantasy world of videos and *manga* to reality, is now extreme.”⁶⁴

59. A comprehensive photographic survey of the rooms of Japanese youth living in and around Tokyo in the late 1980s and early 1990s confirms that Miyazaki's room, stuffed with a large collection of *manga*, books, and videos, was in fact fairly typical. K. Tsuzuki, ed., *Tokyo Style* (Tokyo: Kyoto Shoin, 1993).

60. Otsuka Eiji, “M. Kun no naka no watashi, watashi no naka no M. Kun,” in *Chūō kōron*, October 1989, p. 438.

61. *Shūkan bunshun*, September 9, 1989, p. 36.

62. One discussion centered around the possible influence of two films, *Akuma no jōisan* and *Ketsuniku no hana*, on Miyazaki's behavior. See Treat, “Yoshimoto Banana Writes Home,” p. 354.

63. Whipple, “Silencing of Lambs,” p. 37.

64. Okonogi Keigo quoted in *Shūkan posuto*, September 25, 1989, p. 33.

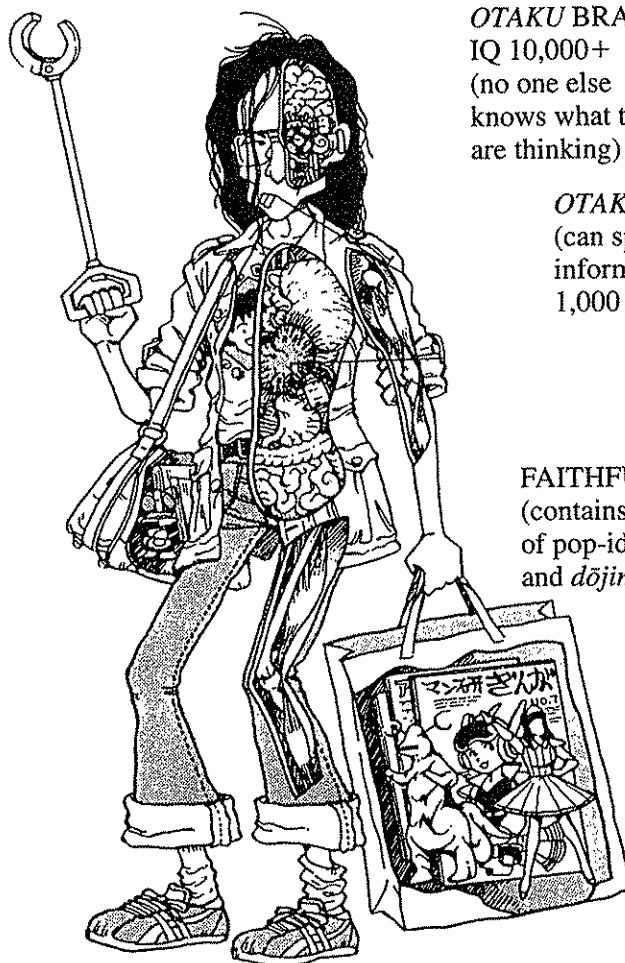
Figure 3. A Humorous Caricature of an *Otaku*

MAGIC HAND
(for pinching
little girls'
bottoms)

GREASY HAIR

GOOFY TEETH

OTAKU HEART
(very hardy)



OTAKU BRAIN
IQ 10,000+
(no one else
knows what they
are thinking)

OTAKU EYES
(can spot useless
information at
1,000 meters)

FAITHFUL CARRIER BAG
(contains plastic models
of pop-idols,
and *dōjinshi*)

This specimen sports a Chibi Maruko-chan t-shirt, a copy of a *manken* (manga circle) *manga dōjinshi*, and kitsch plastic models of Godzilla and 1980s pop-idol Nakayama Miho. Used with permission. From *Ikasu! Otaku Tengoku*, © 1992 Taku Hachiro/Ohta Shuppan, Tokyo.

Following the Miyazaki case, reporters and television documentary crews visited amateur *manga* conventions and specialist *manga* shops. Amateur *manga* culture was repeatedly linked to Miyazaki, creating what became a new public perception that young people involved with amateur *manga* are dangerous, psychologically disturbed perverts (see Figure 3).

The Birth of the Otaku Generation

Otaku, which translates to the English term “nerd,” was a slang term used by amateur *manga* artists and fans themselves in the 1980s to describe “weirdos” (*henjin*). The original meaning of *otaku* is “your home” and, by association, “you,” “yours,” and “home.” The slang term *otaku* is witty reference both to someone who is not accustomed to close friendships and therefore tries to communicate with peers using this distant and overly formal form of address, and to someone who spends most of his or her time

alone at home. The term was ostensibly invented by *dōjinshi* artist Nakamori Akio in 1983. He used the word *otaku* in a series entitled “*Otaku no kenkyū*” (Your home investigations) published in a low-circulation *rorikon manga* magazine, *Manga burikko* (*Manga cutie-pie*).⁶⁵

After the Miyazaki murder case, the concept of an *otaku* changed its meaning in the hands of the media. *Otaku* came to mean, in the first instance, Miyazaki; in the second instance, all amateur *manga* artists and fans; and in the third instance, all Japanese youth in their entirety. Youth were referred to as *otaku* youth (*otaku seishōnen*), *otaku* tribes (*otaku-zoku*), and the *otaku* generation (*otaku-sedai*). The sense that this unsociable *otaku* generation was multiplying and threatening to take over the whole of society was strong. While the *Shūkan posuto* put about the fear that “Today’s Elementary and Middle School Students: The *Otaku* Tribe Are Eclipsing Society,”⁶⁶ social anthropologist Ōtsuka Eiji confirmed that “it might sound terrible, but there are over 100,000 people with the same pastimes as Mr. M—we have a whole standing army of murderers.”⁶⁷

Police Action Against Amateur Manga

The practical results of the new and hostile attention directed at amateur *manga* were the partial attempts of Tokyo metropolitan police to censor sexual images in unpublished amateur *manga* and prevent their wider distribution at conventions and in specialist book shops. In 1993 guidance about the appropriate contents of *dōjinshi* were distributed at Comic Market for the first time. The Comic Market Preparation Committee determined to attempt the enforcement of public bylaws prohibiting the sale of sexually explicit published materials to minors under 18 years old, despite the fact that a large proportion of amateur *manga* is produced and sold by minors. In the Comic Market participant application brochure of August 1994, organizers warned amateur artists that “Comic Market is not an alternative society, it is a vehicle orchestrated by you which thinks about its useful role in society. It has become necessary for us to seek social acceptance.”⁶⁸

Eventually *manga* fan culture and amateur unpublished *manga* also became the target of extensive harassment by the police. During 1991 police arrested the managers of five specialist *manga* book shops where unpublished or amateur *manga* was available for sale. This activity began when six officers broke into the Manga no Mori book shop in Shinjuku and confiscated copies of unpublished *manga* works. Police collected the addresses

65. Nakamura Akio, “Part 1,” in *Otaku no hon*, p. 89.

66. *Shūkan posuto*, September 25, 1989, pp. 32–33.

67. Ōtsuka, “M. Kun no naka no watashi,” p. 440.

68. “Komikku māketto 46 sankā mōshikomusho setto,” p. 12.

of 15 amateur *manga* circles and subsequently took their members into police stations for questioning about the legal status of the printing shops where their *manga* booklets had been printed. Amateur *manga* artists were subjected to repeated investigations and harassment throughout the rest of the year. In total police took in 74 young people for questioning over their activities making amateur *manga* and removed 1,880 volumes of *manga* by 207 authors from the Koyama Manga no Mori book shop and 2,160 volumes of *manga* by 303 different authors from the Shinjuku Manga no Mori shop.⁶⁹ This scale of direct police activity represents a significant curtailment of the distribution of unpublished *manga*. Other than in specialist *manga* book shops in large cities, amateur *manga* is rarely on sale and is not usually available outside the social circles of young *manga* fans and artists. The seizure of amateur *manga* by local police forces suggests that it was not only the perceived problem of the harmful effects of *manga* on young minds that concerned the police, but also the independent and unregulated movements of amateur *manga* artists and amateur *manga*.

The Otaku Panic and the Reform of the Manga Medium

The divergence of the publishing industry from what became the contemporary amateur *manga* movement during the 1980s left the latter disorganized. The central organization of *manga* carried out by publishing companies and *manga* editors disappeared from the amateur medium and no alternative system of valuation, artistic discipline, or quality control replaced it. Artists who could not get their work published in *manga* magazines took advantage of this unregulated sphere to produce and distribute their work in amateur form. New genres of *manga*, driven by the strength of their popular appeal alone, emerged from the amateur *manga* medium. The same popular engagement with the *manga* medium that fueled the commercial expansion of weekly magazines during the 1960s encouraged the medium to divide into two separate media by the 1980s. The tremendous expansion of the amateur *manga* medium demonstrates again that the most salient characteristics of *manga* in postwar society have been its popularity and its accessibility.

Moreover, it is precisely the widespread access youth have had to the *manga* medium that has stimulated concern among political and educational authorities. Anxieties about the commercial propagation of *manga* and *gekiga* social dramas expressed through *manga* censorship campaigns between 1965 and 1975 resurfaced between 1990 and 1992 and were redirected toward amateur *manga*—currently the most uncontrolled and free area of the *manga* medium. Within the escalating debate about *manga otaku* that spread across society was expressed a sense of insecurity about uncon-

69. *Yugai komikku mondai o kangaeru* (Tokyo: Tsukuru Shuppan, 1991), pp. 18–21.

trolled and unregulated new cultural activities. Commenting upon the *otaku* panic, Yonezawa Yoshihiro remarked that:

The city, the lost zone of Japanese society, exists here at Comic Market. Without any interference or hindrance from outside, this abandoned and forgotten section of society has started to produce its own culture. The sense of being one body, of excitement, of freedom, and of disorder exists inside this single unified space. If anything frightful has come into being, it is no doubt the existence of this space itself.⁷⁰

The underlying argument explicit in both the *otaku* panic and the 1990–92 anti-*manga* censorship movement accompanying it was that *manga* has a negative influence on Japanese youth and, in particular, their sexuality. While these types of views held by conservative citizens' organizations and government agencies, involved in attempts to censor published *manga* magazines, were not interesting, reasonable, or acceptable to a wide section of the contemporary Japanese public, specific criticism of amateur *manga* subculture and *otaku manga* genres was more novel and engaging. Young people themselves were persuaded that amateur *manga* subculture was a serious social problem rather than a “cool” youth activity they might like to enter.

Otaku as a Symbol of Contemporary Japanese Society

The *otaku* panic also reflects many of the contemporary concerns of social scientists about Japanese society. These are powerful concerns about social fragmentation and the contribution of the mass media and communications infrastructures to this change. Since the 1970s, intellectuals have linked their concerns about the decay of a close-knit civil society to the growth of individualism among younger generations of Japanese. Individualistic youth culture has been accurately associated with either the failure or the stubborn refusal of contemporary Japanese to adequately contribute to society by carrying out their full obligations and duties to family, company, and country. The absorption of youth in amateur *manga* subculture in the late 1980s and 1990s was perceived by many intellectuals as a new extreme in the alienation of Japanese youth from the collective goals of society. *Otaku* came to be used as another rejuvenated and modernized version of the aging and overgeneralized concept of “youth.”

Otaku came to represent a younger generation so intensely individualistic they had become dysfunctional, a generation of “isolated people who no longer have any sense of isolation.”⁷¹ The dysfunctionality of *otaku* proved the unhealthy nature of individualistic lifestyles. *Otaku* represented

70. Yonezawa, “Komikku māketto,” p. 88.

71. *Shūkan posuto*, October 1, 1989, p. 32.

new Japanese who lacked any remaining vestiges of social consciousness and were instead entirely preoccupied by their particularistic and specialist personal pastimes. Like generations of youth before them, *otaku* were also diagnosed as suffering from Peter Pan syndrome, or the refusal to grow up and take on adult social relations. Ueno Chizuko, the leading feminist theorist, pressed this theory that amateur *manga* genres reflect the infantilism of young people, asking "Do the *yaoi* girls and *rorikon* boys really have a future?"⁷² Without social roles, *otaku* had no fixed identities, no fixed gender roles, and no fixed sexuality. Ultimately, *otaku* represented a youth who had become so literally antisocial they were unable to communicate or have social relationships with other people at all. The independence of amateur *manga* subculture from the rest of society, and its growth on the back of new media technologies available to the public, made it an appropriate focus for this sense of chaos and declining control over the organization and communication of younger generations.

The Universalization of Girls' Culture

At the same time, it seems the domination of amateur *manga* subculture by young women rather than young men has provoked particular unease. In the mid-1970s early girls' *manga* was perceived by some leftist critics as a reactionary cultural retreat from politics and social issues to petty personal themes. Girls' *manga* and soft (*yasashii*) culture were associated with the decline of political and cultural resistance in the early 1970s, sometimes referred to in Japanese as the "doldrums" (*shirake*). But by the 1990s, individualistic personal themes in girls' *manga* were being perceived as stubbornly self-interested, decadent, and antisocial.

Over the last two decades, far more women than men have been involved with making, enjoying, and becoming the idols of youth culture in Japan. By virtue of their exclusion from most of the labor market, young women have occupied a relatively marginal position in society. Instead of devoting themselves to work, most young women have focused on spending their incomes from part-time and temporary employment on culture and leisure. During the 1980s in particular young women became the main consumers of culture. The engagement of *ojōsama* with culture and leisure has been criticized as a form of selfish resistance to society. For many young men, young women have increasingly come to represent an illicit free zone outside the company where their individual interests and desires can be pursued. Girls' *manga* too carries themes associated with escapism, self-indulgence, and willful feminine individualism.

Genres derived from girls' *manga* represent, for better or worse, one of

72. Ueno Chizuko, "Kyūjū nendai no sekusu reboryūshon," in *Otaku no hon*.

the most dynamic fronts of the *manga* medium as a whole in the recent period. However, they have been humiliated by the *otaku* panic and marginalized by the recent anti-*manga* censorship movement.⁷³ Amateur *manga*-derived genres are excluded from virtually all of the magazines of leading publishers of *manga*.⁷⁴ The snobbery indirectly expressed toward *manga* genres is reminiscent of a broader distaste in polite Japanese society for contemporary culture produced for, and sometimes by, young women. As Skov and Moeran have highlighted, there is “an almost apocalyptic anxiety that the ‘pure’ and ‘masculine’ culture of Japan has been vulgarized, feminized, and infantalized to the point where it has become ‘baby talk’ beyond the comprehension of well-educated critics.”⁷⁵ Drawing notice to this vein of criticism that perceives girls’ culture as an unwelcome alien influence within Japan, *manga* critic Kure Tomofusa described how “when academics looked at girls’ *manga* they were amazed. They felt like English missionaries discovering that there were different societies in Africa.”⁷⁶

The crossover of young men into girls’ culture has provoked particularly fierce opposition. The universal popularity of *manga* genres pioneered by women implies that rather than being a discrete feminine section of *manga* culture, girls’ *manga* is in fact central to the contemporary medium, as indeed young women are to contemporary Japanese culture in general. It also implies that the individualistic and self-interested themes of girls’ *manga* are themes with universal appeal. It is striking that although the majority of amateur *manga* artists and fans are young women, the media panic about *otaku* was focused almost entirely on the young men who have adopted young women’s culture as their own (see Figure 3). The anxieties released by the sight of young men flocking to a female-dominated *manga* movement is reminiscent of the criticism targeted at “wiggers”—or white American boys emulating black ghetto culture or making black music—in the United States.

Crowds of teenage girls screaming at the sight of their favorite pop stars taking their shirts off on stage, or spending hours staring morbidly at posters of James Dean, has been humored and accommodated in Japan as much as it has in the United Kingdom. In Japan, the migration of women into male

73. See Kinsella, “Change in the Status” and *Adult Manga* for more detail on the censorship.

74. One exception is *Afternoon*, a monthly *manga* magazine published by Kōdansha in which a selection of *otaku-kei* (amateur *manga* style) stories, such as “Aaah My Goddess” and “Discommunication,” have been serialized from the late 1980s. Significantly, these have been adaptations of *rorikon manga* rather than any other genre, such as *yaoi*, that could be interpreted as directly ridiculing masculinity.

75. Skov and Moeran, eds., *Women, Media and Consumption in Japan*, p. 70.

76. Interview with *manga* critic Kure Tomofusa, June 1994, in Tokyo.

Figure 4. Boys Just Wannabe Girls



A little girl pulls off her frock to prove to her friend's stunned parents that she is in fact a little boy who just wants to be a girl. Captions, from top to bottom: "A boy!?" "Don't be stupid," "It's true...", "Look." Used with permission. DISCOMMUNICATION © Riichi Ueshiba/Kodansha Ltd., Tokyo.

culture, into bars, trousers, and golf courses, is gradually becoming more acceptable. But the emergence during the late 1980s of hordes of teenage Japanese boys who scream and faint at the sight of their favorite female pop idols, who adore girls' *manga*, or who fetishize images of young girls from afar in their own boys'-girls' *manga*, has been met with shock and incomprehension (see Figure 4).

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