

Representation or misrepresentation?

British media and Japanese popular culture

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Abstract

For thirty years products of Japanese popular culture, including comics and animated films, have been very popular in the West. This essay examines the British social representations of the Japanese and Japanese cultural products and contrasts them with the Japanese context in which they have been produced along with the Japanese representations within them. The British representations are shown to be based on a view of the Japanese as the cultural 'other' and Japanese cultural products as both different and at times transgressive. This contrasts with the Japanese representations within their media output that deal with issues of youth and gender within their society. Thus, the British interpretation provides an explanation for the social representation of the Japanese as a cultural 'other' and for the limited range of Japanese popular culture, such as anime, shown on mainstream British television.

Keywords: anime, British, Japan, manga, popular culture, representation, television

From the late 1980s to the early 21st century Japanese popular cultural rose from a cult interest to mainstream media in many Western countries, including the United Kingdom. Large numbers of Japanese comics (*manga*) and animated films (*anime*) were sold in English translations, gaining their own sections in British book and video stores with thousands of titles available from online retailers for English-speaking audiences. Japanese toys such as *Pokemon* and video games gained global appeal in this period.¹ The Oscar-winning anime works of Hayao Miyazaki were dubbed into English and distributed by Disney. With the live action version of *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*, Japanese programmes entered Western television for children. The anime classics *Akira* (Katsuhiro Otomo, 1988)

and *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* (Hayao Miyazaki, 1986) were shown by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in the early 1990s, along with the documentary *Manga!* introducing manga and anime to a British audience by presenter Jonathan Ross in 1994. Subsequently, despite popular children's anime such as *Pokemon*, anime for older teens and adults has barely featured on mainstream British television except in occasional late night slots on the BBC and Channel 4. To explore the reasons for this my essay will examine representations in Japanese popular culture and their interpretation in the British media.

The assumption that all cultures interpret the same message in the same way has been shown to be false by Liebes and Katz in their work on the interpretation of the U.S. soap opera *Dallas*, one of the most popular television programmes in the 1980s and 1990s in its country of origin and in many other countries around the world, including Britain. While it was highly tempting to see this as an indication of a universal interpretation of the programme Liebes and Katz showed that there were differences, such as a character's motivation, which in one culture was viewed as arising from personal qualities like jealousy whereas another culture highlighted the character's role or family relationships. Katz, Liebes, and Iwao also examined why the programme was unsuccessful in Japan. They found that for Japanese viewers it went against their expectations of soap operas (based on their own *dorama*). Also, inconsistencies which might have been viewed in the home culture as exciting or experimental, such as two characters hating each other one week and then working together the next, were viewed as vexing; this created a critical distance rather than involvement in the story. Media interpretation is influenced by the cultural context of the viewer, with differences in interpretation based on the cultural expectations of the audience.² The British interpretation of Japanese popular culture will be explored through the theory of social representations proposed by Serge Moscovici.³ It will show that stereotypical representations of the Japanese emphasising their cultural 'otherness' have influenced the British interpretation of Japanese media imagery, where perceived difference or distinctiveness has been stressed rather than similarity or commonality. It is argued that aspects of Japanese popular culture viewed through this lens have been negatively interpreted in the British media, emphasising the sexual and violent content and ignoring the cultural context of their production. This analysis shows why, despite its worldwide popularity, anime for young adults has rarely appeared in mainstream British television.

Social representations

Moscovici argues that social representations arise through communication in a culture. The way people discuss the objects and events within their lives influences the manner in which these are represented. New representations gain meaning by the process of *anchoring*, where the new representation is anchored to a known representation, such as a computer being viewed in its early days as a mechanical calculating machine. By the process of *objectification* a representation gains its own independent status, such as the modern representation of computers, which is more about social media than calculation in the popular conception. Representations are influenced by cultural change and development,⁴ in that transformations within a culture will influence the specific representations held; thus, for example, changing views of animals may lead to the representation of a fur coat shifting from a desirable symbol of luxury wear to a symbol of animal cruelty.

Social representations are the dynamic 'common sense' views of a culture. They are both a feature of individual cognition, in that a person holds and expresses views which may influence others, and they are also social in that views circulate through communication (conversation, books, television, and social media) which then influence the opinions of individuals. Different cultures with their different dynamics may develop different social representations, so the common sense of one culture may be very different to that of another. Communication also occurs between cultures as well as within cultures. Commonalities may exist between social representations, allowing for successful communication; misunderstandings may arise through differences in representation. The social representations of Zen in Japan and the United Kingdom were examined by Saito, who found that some aspects were simplified and others elaborated in the social construction of the British representation from its Japanese origin. This process was also demonstrated recently in my writing regarding the social representation of the Japanese schoolgirl in British popular culture.

The opening up of Japan to the West in the second half of the 19th century has led to complex communication between the cultures. European fascination with all things Japanese at the turn of the 20th century (such as tableware, prints, screens, *netsuke* figures, Geishas, and gardens) was termed *Japonisme*. British involvement in building Japanese infrastructure is illustrated by the Japanese driving on the left side of the road. Young fashionable Japanese adopting Western fashions and styles in the 1920s were referred to as *mobo* (modern boy) and *moga* (modern girl). The American occupation of Japan from 1945-1952 led to the influence of American culture

on Japanese society and the availability of Western cultural products. From the 1960s to the 1990s the powerful economic development of Japan was often viewed in the West as a model for commercial success through its business practices – yet also with anxiety, as British manufacturing (in areas such as motorcycle, car, and ship-building) lost out to Japanese companies. Since the bursting of the Japanese economic bubble in the early 1990s the Western image of Japan has been influenced less by the economy and more by ‘Cool Japan’ – its impact on young Western popular culture through video games, toys, anime, manga, and fashion styles.

Stereotypes

Unfortunately, there is a tendency to negatively view the cultural ‘other’;⁵ so that employing representations from one’s own culture in the interpretation of communication from another may lead to stereotyping and discrimination rather than questioning one’s own view. Stereotypes can be viewed as social representations.⁶ While the generalising nature of stereotypes makes them logically false, as Pickering shows, they have their origin in the social history of a culture. Japan is part of the Orient as viewed from Western Europe and Edward Said has argued that for centuries Western writers have engaged in *Orientalism*, making stereotypical judgements about the East. The Oriental man was viewed as weak and effeminate and the Oriental woman as erotic and exotic, with neither meeting Western ‘standards’ of behaviour. These gender stereotypes may say more about the Western male colonialists’ own sexual desires and fantasies, which they projected onto the Orient as a place where these would be unconstrained by Western conventions.⁷ Thus, as Levick points out: ‘[t]here is a historic accumulation of reportage, literature and other forms of art and media that have long represented Japan and other Asian nations as exotic, submissive and backward.’ These communications, in Moscovici’s theory, create and sustain such stereotypical social representations within a culture.

Cultural representation is complex, with different tropes applied in different contexts depending on the motivation. A number of stereotypical representations of Japanese men are employed in the West but all emphasise distinctiveness from the Western man.⁸ The image of the samurai is admired but also contains the Western fear of the cultural other: the collective Japanese operating as a cohesive group, willing to dedicate themselves to their common goal. After the Second World War, as Japanese economic development led to success in commerce at the expense of Western manu-

facturers, the fear of the Japanese collective manifested itself in the domain of business. With the bursting of the economic bubble in the early 1990s the threat of Japanese male economic power receded. In modern 'Cool Japan' the young Japanese man is viewed as immersed in a technological Tokyo (as represented in the film *Lost in Translation* [Sofia Coppola, 2003]) of computer games, manga, and anime.⁹

The stereotypical desirability and submissiveness of the Japanese girl was promoted in the West through Puccini's popular opera *Madame Butterfly* (1904), showing the devotion of a young Japanese girl to her American naval officer lover despite his abandonment of her. The obedient, cheerful, and submissive *Madame Butterfly* image of the young Japanese woman was admired by early British (male) travellers,¹⁰ becoming a Western stereotype¹¹ and representing the Japanese young woman as providing a non-threatening image to the Western male at a time of female emancipation within his own society. Combined with a fascination with the Japanese Geisha (such as the popularity of Arthur Golden's 1997 novel *Memoirs of a Geisha*), this eroticised representation has often featured in Western media, as Morris has demonstrated.

This combination of perceived threat and projected desire has been visible in Western media at the end of the 20th century and the early 21st century. As will be shown, the inferred (precocious) sexuality of Japanese girls and the 'otherness' (and implied transgressive sexuality) of Japanese men has featured in these reports – both are representations which will be challenged here by examining the Japanese cultural context of changing gender roles. Indeed, Western authors have referred to a Japanese 'Lolita culture'.¹² Not to be confused with the Japanese Lolita fashion style, the reference to Lolita here evokes Western social representations of precocious sexuality and transgressive male desire associated with Nabokov's famous novel of that name.¹³ Furthermore, in using the term 'culture' it presents the Japanese as monolithic – they all are alike – a common stereotypical presentation in the Western press.¹⁴ Japanese schoolgirls have been termed 'Oriental Lolitas' in the British magazine *New Statesman*,¹⁵ and Schodt warned of the risk of inadvertently importing with manga what he refers to as the 'Lolita complex virus' (an erotic focus on the young girl).¹⁶

As Gillespie argues, a transgressive social representation is one to be avoided due to its socially unacceptable status. Thus, in constructing Japanese culture as 'other' (with the implication that the West is different), then it is *they* who are transgressive, and their media products become problematised. Indeed both nudity and sexual references linked to young characters in manga and anime appeared to be the key concern of the British media.

This anxiety was expressed in an article in the *Sunday Times* newspaper's *Culture* magazine in 1995.¹⁷ While the article does explicitly acknowledge the different cultural contexts of the two countries, the headline 'under age, oversexed and over here' above a full-page colour image of a voluptuous manga girl is likely to evoke Western concerns about underage sexuality and decontextualises the manga image from its original source. The interest of Western media may have elements of the sexually prurient Orientalism described by Said. For example, erotic manga is a relatively small part of Japanese manga production but, interestingly, was imported in a greater proportion by Western distributors in comparison to other manga genres; this made it appear that erotic manga was a major feature of the Japanese output,¹⁸ which results in the self-fulfilment of the Western stereotypical representation.¹⁹ The representation of the Japanese in British television, emphasising cultural difference, will now be illustrated.

The Japanese 'other' representation on mainstream British television

The popular U.K. television show *Clive James on Television* (1982-1988), subsequently *Tarrant on TV* (1990-2006), depicting quirky television shows from around the world, often selected clips from the Japanese game show *Endurance*, in which participants had to endure strange tasks such as being locked in a telephone box with cockroaches poured on them. Indeed, Japanese television was frequently held up as a source of fun. While acknowledging the light-hearted nature of the programme the representation was of the stereotypical otherness of the Japanese within their game shows and television commercials, and the kookiness of the show and its contestants was emphasised in this context. However, the game show *Endurance* involved students and was actually based on activities undertaken during student rag activities. Furthermore, the word 'endurance' has a key quality in Japanese culture²⁰ – like the British 'stiff upper lip' – showing resilience in the face of difficulties (as was required in the post-war rebuilding of Japan). Rather than *Endurance* representing Japanese otherness it showed a confidence in being able to mock ones' own national character, similar to British comedy programmes such as *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, which was not acknowledged.

This tendency to interpret the Japanese as odd, particularly for amusement, is further characterised by the British-made Japanese game show spoof *Banzai!* broadcast on U.K. Channel 4 between 2001 and 2003 and, to

some extent, in the presentation of *Takeshi's Castle*, one of the few Japanese game shows given repeated runs in the U.K. (on Challenge TV). In the latter programme 100 contestants undertake a fun assault course to attack the castle of Takeshi Kitano (the famous Japanese actor and comedian), climbing walls and jumping across stepping stones. Most get knocked out before reaching the castle, falling in water or failing a task. In the U.K. version a new voice-over was added (by comedian Craig Charles) which, though sympathetic and amusing, contained elements of puzzlement and incomprehension, thus maintaining a critical distance and supporting the idea of the Japanese 'other'. Again, Britain had its own similar style of programme in the highly popular BBC show *It's A Knockout* during the 1980s.

The most comprehensive reporting on Japanese popular culture took place in the BBC television programme *Japanorama*, presented by Jonathan Ross, which ran for three series between 2002 and 2007. The magazine-style programme focused on a different aspect of popular culture during each 30-minute episode, such as *kawaii* and *otaku* (see below). However, a key feature of the show was the appeal of the exotic and the different. Items on culture included 'traditional' differences, such as the use of chopsticks and exchanging business cards, also items such as female sumo wrestling. Features on Japanese television focused on the erotic and unusual, such as cosplay or girls forcing themselves to cry. Combined with a visual style based on the artist Jun Mizuno, Japanese popular culture was presented as intriguing, enjoyable, and interesting, but definitely different.

As illustrated above, British representations emphasise distinctiveness rather than similarity and do not take into account the Japanese context. Shi-xu has shown that emphasising difference from a cultural 'other' (by focusing on the 'unexpected') can serve the ideological function of maintaining a sense of cultural distance and superiority. In his analysis of Dutch travel writing about the Chinese he demonstrated how the unexpected was used to show the deviance and unworthiness of the cultural 'other' and to discredit them. As an alternative he argues that discourse concerning the unexpected with an appreciation of its cultural context can lead to greater understanding of another culture.²¹ The Japanese cultural context will now be considered.

Representation in Japan: Kawaii culture

The Japanese term *shoujo* refers to a girl from the young teens to the early twenties (traditionally from puberty to marriage), of which the high school

girl is an exemplar. In the 1980s Japanese high school girls (15-18) developed shoujo culture, drawing on the concept of *kawaii* (cute) and which became a key influence on popular culture. Cute was often presented as child-like, in contrast with a negative social representation of adult life as involving hard work, duty, and lack of freedom.²² Products that were sweet, colourful, charming, 'natural', and soft were all cute: curvilinear 'cute' writing, cute toys, cute people, and cute consumer goods. The culture of cute, driven by the consumerism of the high school girl, pervaded adult culture in many ways, such as company advertising; for example, banks using cute images and words.²³ The classic example of cuteness is *Hello Kitty* (a white cartoon cat with a red bow in her hair).²⁴ Whereas in Japan the appeal of the cute was driven by high school girls, in the West *Hello Kitty* was targeted at younger children. In the West a ten-year-old might wish to dress like a twenty-year-old to indicate how 'grown up' she is, yet in Japan a twenty-year-old might appear to dress (in the opinion of a Westerner) like a ten-year-old. In this case she is not ten nor has she regressed to childhood; she is actually following the popular fashion styles. Indeed, Japanese street styles led by high school girl culture influence Western designers.²⁵ Culturally, cuteness was valued as symbolic of freedom and lack of responsibility. Indeed, during the 1990s the term *burikko* described an older Japanese teen or young woman *playing* cute and acting child-like.²⁶ Unfortunately, this could be viewed by Western audiences as appearing to confirm Western stereotypes of the child-like Japanese woman, leading to the misperception of mature Japanese women as younger than they are, which also problematises their sexuality.²⁷

In the 1990s there were concerns in Japan about *enjo kousai* (compensated dating), where middle-aged men paid high school girls to spend time with them, sometimes just buying the girls a meal but also actually paying for sex. Though more media hype than reality, with very few school girls actually taking part in it,²⁸ it was picked up in the Western media and represented as Japanese 'Lolitas' engaging in underage sex.²⁹ For example, an article in the *Guardian* in 1999 discussing the Japanese eroticisation of the schoolgirl included the following statement: 'a small percentage of schoolgirls, some as young as 12, are said to be cashing in on the media attention by dabbling in prostitution'.³⁰ The British women's magazine *Now* wrote in 1997 that young girls 'sell their bodies to satisfy their cravings for fashion', alongside a pull-quote stating 'sex with girls of 12 is legal'.³¹ The articles presented Japanese male desire for young schoolgirls who are apparently willing to comply to satisfy their own desire for consumer products. By highlighting the younger end of the purported age range the emphasis is removed

from the older teenage high school girl (and her decisions) and focused onto the younger, immature child (evoking the Western representation of transgressive sexuality and need for protection). Japanese films dealing with the issue at the time (such as *Bounce Ko Gals* [Masato Harada, 1997] and *Love & Pop* [Hideaki Anno, 1998]) showed high school girls as anything but willing subjects of male desire. In *Bounce Ko Gals* a middle-aged man takes a mature high school girl to a hotel room, but instead of the expected outcome she uses a stun gun on him and steals his money. In manga such as *Tennen Shoujo Man*, a 20-volume series first published in 1993, the high school girls are powerful fighters in martial arts. In the film based on the manga *Battle Royale* (Kinji Fukasaku, 2000) the high school girls are no less active or murderous than the boys.

Teenage girls in their economic role of consumers had a major impact on popular culture. The involvement of cute girls in shoujo culture may have been child-like but it was a rebellion against the traditional female role.³² In the West adult life was viewed as a time of independence, freedom, and personal choice, with youth as a time of waiting to grow old enough to do the exciting things in life. This can be contrasted with Japan, where youth was viewed as a period of relative freedom and leisure with adulthood as a time of duty and work, with the requirement to take on the responsibilities of a traditional gender role.³³ Furthermore, during the 1980s and the early 1990s, as a result of the gender expectations in Japanese society, with boys striving for high status jobs and the assumption that girls would only work until marriage, the teenage high school girl was (briefly) relatively free to enjoy herself in an affluent society, prior to taking on her (traditionally constrained) adult role.³⁴ The creation and consumption of cute culture provided a vehicle for the high school girl to escape from, and challenge, traditional female gender expectations. Yet within the media, particularly in the West, the interest in compensated dating shifted the focus away from the challenge to traditional gender roles in its concerns about transgressive sexuality.

Along with a static economy, cultural change in Japan by the turn of the 21st century meant that the position of women and girls and their expectations of adult life had changed, with most women remaining in the workforce after marriage. Although the gender wage gap and the expectation on working women to look after the home remained, changes to the employment laws and the increasing number of women in higher education improved the career prospects and economic power of women in Japanese society.³⁵ The changing role of women in society and the involvement of

female artists in manga and anime also resulted in the changing representations of male and female characters in popular culture after the 1980s.

Japanese women have challenged the commodified sexual representation of young women in popular culture, while feminists have expressed concern about the sexism within manga and anime.³⁶ While acknowledging both these criticisms, in a society where the majority of teenage girls read manga, modern manga and anime have also been used to present feminist themes and to offer alternatives to traditional expectations of female behaviour and sexuality.³⁷ In the award-winning anime by director Hayao Miyazaki (popular in both Japan and the West) the central character is usually an intelligent young girl dealing with the problems of an adult world, acting dynamically and not following traditional gender expectations. Her skill and ingenuity solves the problems that others (often adult male characters) have brought about. Within manga and anime alternatives to traditional gender behaviour have been explored and presented for a teenage female audience. These may be within the domain of a fantasy world or within the context of changing social conditions (as in stories located in high school). The stereotypical image of the Japanese girl was often countered by her activity and control. While the schoolgirl is often a central figure in manga and anime, the cute innocent girl often turns out to have superpowers, as in *Sailor Moon*, a popular anime series imported into the West in 1997.³⁸ Thus, the typically cute, short-skirted, 'ordinary' girl as portrayed by a female character may be a superficial 'mask' over her true nature, which is often more powerful and dynamic than that of the male characters around her.

Gender and culture: Shoujo manga and magical girls

One of the key subgenres of Japanese girls' comics (*shoujo manga*) is the magical girl genre (*mahou shoujo*).³⁹ These commonly involve a cute and apparently very normal teenage girl who discovers that she has secret powers; she might turn out to be a descendent of a long line of wizards and witches or have gained a magical power through some sort of accident. She may initially be reluctant to accept that she has these powers and not wish to be seen as unusual, especially by boys, so she will try to keep these powers hidden from most people. However, she is then obliged to fight evil beings determined to take over the world (or destroy humankind) by using these magical powers. This allows the story to include both ordinary scenes of

everyday life (going to school, being with friends, talking about boys) but also dynamic action sequences where she and her allies fight against evil.

One of the most successful titles of the magical girl genre is *Bishoujo Senshi Sailor Moon / Sailor Moon* by Naoko Takeuchi, both as a manga and an anime in production since the early 1990s. The main character Usagi Tsukino is a fourteen-year-old girl with the alter ego of Sailor Moon, a Moon Princess. She is accompanied by a talking cat named Luna and a group of friends who are the Sailor Senshi and also have superpowers. They all wear a mini-skirted version of the Japanese schoolgirl sailor uniform (*seifuku*). Her love interest is the young man Mamoru Chiba and also the mysterious Tuxedo Mask, who helps Sailor Moon fight evil and will eventually marry her. The series displayed typical teenage embarrassments and anxieties, their excitements and interests, as well as their adventures. The magical girl genre provides an example of anime that can be viewed in Japan as representing the conflict between traditional ideas of gender and the challenge to marriage and domestic responsibility as a woman's role.⁴⁰ Although different in form and style it can be seen as dealing with similar issues of gender as the 'magical' girls of American teen television, such as the school-based *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), whose main character, fifteen-year-old Buffy Summers, discovers that she has hidden powers and must fight vampires and demons of hell. Characters such as Buffy can be viewed as role models in dealing with the gender relationships existing within high school; hence, they offer an appeal to teenage girls in the way they play out their lives.⁴¹ Hurford has argued that teenage girl manga allows for alternatives to traditional gender roles to be explored. Cross-dressing and implied lesbian relationships have featured in this manga genre, such as the homosexual relationship between Sailor Uranus and Sailor Neptune in *Sailor Moon*. Likewise, the characters Willow and Tara in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* were among the first positive lesbian relationships on Western teen television.

Sailor Moon was imported into the United States and English-language versions of the manga and television anime ran from the late 1990s to the mid-2000s; it was the first successful teenage girl manga on American television.⁴² However, it was specifically targeted at the pre-teen market in the United States by the distributors. This may have been because of the cute style of drawing, the apparent kookiness of the characters, and other symbolic representations in the anime that gave it a child-like appearance to Western viewers. The anime was edited for scheduling reasons but it was also censored because of certain scenes and dialogue that was not deemed suitable for young children. Images of the girls' underwear were edited

out and the relationship between Sailor Uranus and Sailor Neptune was presented as familial.⁴³ It was this American version that was shown on British television, appearing on the mainstream independent channel ITV1 from 2001-2002. In the context of Western anxieties about Japanese popular culture, sexual references in Japanese anime presented to a Western pre-teen audience reinforces a Western social representation of Japanese manga and anime as containing ‘problematic’ material. Furthermore, removed from its original context and edited, the representation of animation as children’s entertainment is maintained and its feminist theme is diluted. Rather than being part of a complex discourse about teenage girls and the contesting of gender roles it is scheduled alongside *Transformers*, *Pokemon*, and other similar children’s anime.

Gender and culture: Japanese teenage male anxiety and fantasy

The changing position of women in Japanese society combined with the culture of the cute had a marked impact on teenage boys and young men in their own cultural lives at the end of the 20th century.⁴⁴ In a cute culture, male cuteness (like the members of the popular boy bands of the 1990s) became a desirable quality, influencing male culture. As Schodt pointed out, boys’ manga (*shonen manga*) of the 1970s were ‘filled with melodramatic stories featuring macho samurai/adventurer/sportsmen’.⁴⁵ He also noted that during the 1980s teenage girl manga and cute culture had an impact on male comics; the male ‘hero’ became feminised, weaker, and less dynamic. Indeed, the active and decisive characters are women. For example, Shinji, the male hero in *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (a hugely popular manga and anime of the mid-1990s by Hideaki Anno), is indecisive and weak despite being the central character; the female characters Misato and Asuka are much more dynamic. Changing gender relations and male concerns about the role of the Japanese teenage boy were played out within their manga and anime. For teenage boys, along with their male desire for the attractive girl, there was an anxiety of how to engage with girls in the changing cultural environment of female emancipation.

In the 1980s the male *otaku* emerged as a Japanese cultural phenomenon. *Otaku* refers to devoted male fans of manga and anime, which has associations with the English geek or nerd, though the term has much wider connotations in Japanese society. Otaku created a subculture around an engagement with the postmodern virtual world of manga, anime, games,

and figurines, with their focus of interest turned to the characters rather than the story.⁴⁶ Manga characters appealing to these fans were referred to as *moe*. Moe characters tend to be distanced from 'reality' by being super cute girl-like aliens, robots, or cat girls. This is typified by Rei Ayanami from *Neon Genesis Evangelion* who, while superficially a teenage girl, is a clone with a non-human soul. The fact that these moe characters are fantasies is an essential part of their appeal and allows the readers to enact their desires (and anxieties) within an entirely virtual domain.⁴⁷ The development of an amateur manga movement in the 1980s led to the creation of the subgenre *rorikon* (a corruption of the English 'Lolita complex') involving non-threatening fantasy teenage girl characters as the focus of male fans' erotic desire.⁴⁸ Responding to the question of whether the development of the Lolita complex implied male fan paedophilic interest, cultural critic Hiroki Azuma argued that it actually symbolised rebellion.⁴⁹ The male fans, like teenage girls, sought to escape from traditional adult gender roles. In the 1980s the traditional ideal gender role for the teenage boy was to study hard for examinations (termed 'examination hell') to enter the best universities, join the best companies, get married and have a family, and dedicate his life to the company in the role of a salary man. Otaku culture was a rejection of this. For these Japanese men at the beginning of the 21st century, fan culture provided a vehicle for alternative identity construction.

When a young man identified as an otaku murdered four small girls in 1988, *otaku* came to mean socially inadequate. However, after the popular film *Densha Otoko / Train Man* (Shosuke Murakami, 2005), where an otaku defends a girl from an attacker on a train (and, with advice from his online friends, overcomes his shyness and a romance develops), public opinion became more positive. Changing economic and social conditions by the turn of the 21st century meant that 'examination hell' was reduced and jobs for life disappeared. Male fan culture, like cute teenage girl culture, began to be viewed more favourably and gained an influence on wider mainstream culture in areas such as art and design and in the construction of 'Cool Japan' as a dynamic creative culture.⁵⁰

Boys manga and anime dealt with the concerns of male youth such as alienation, desire, and challenges to gender expectations and played them out in the form of fantasy. Despite its home success, Spall has pointed out that this form of teenage anime is absent from British television in contrast to child-focused Miyazaki animation. Spall cited Emily Mann of Orbital Comics who suggested the licencing fees, U.K. censorship laws, and differences in cultural history as possible reasons for this. She also stated, '[t]he British people have stereotyped anime as weird, sexual and

violent, and a network probably wouldn't want to risk showing something like that.' Spall recommended that British anime fans seek out the DVD release of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, which had been available on video in the U.K. from the mid-2000s and was distributed by the American-owned A.D.Vision (ADV) – the largest distributor of anime in the U.K. in the 2000s, until its collapse in 2009. Western fans of anime and manga embraced this culture and adopted *otaku* as a positive reference for themselves, with Western anime distributors employing the term and anime clubs relabeling themselves as otaku clubs.

An illustrative example of such 'male' anime is *Elfin Lied*, a 13-week series shown on Japanese television in 2004 which superficially fulfils all three characteristics of weird, sexual, and violent. Due to these reasons the anime has not been shown on US television, though was surprisingly shown uncut in the UK during the ADV-owned Anime Network's brief run on Propeller TV (a satellite channel) in 2007 (although it should be noted that this was not a mainstream channel). The opening scenes show what looks like a naked girl escaping violently from a strange research centre. However, this is not the case: the girl is a young adult Diclonius (a non-human creature with horns on her head and a split personality), the violent and human-hating Lucy (*ruushii*), and the childlike Nyu. The Diclonius have telekinetic powers and 'vectors' – powerful extending invisible arms. The reason the Diclonius hate humans is possibly because of the abuse they have suffered from human adults, such as at the research centre. Suzuki views this as an allegory of how young people in post-modern Japan are part of a consumer world yet frustrated that the acquisition of material things does not lead to happiness or satisfaction in life. She also argues that the nudity is there as a marketing feature to appeal to young adult males. The allegory is unlikely to be lost on the alienated male fans. In the anime the older humans are cold-hearted and it is only a young couple who attempt to provide a loving family for the neglected and abused alien. Barber argues that the anime not only plays to the fantasies of the young male audience but also engages with issues of self and place in society, a key concern of this group.

This context was absent in a recent documentary entitled *No Sex Please, We're Japanese*,⁵¹ first aired in the UK on 24 October 2013 on BBC2. The programme investigated Japan's declining population. The only Japanese men under pensionable age interviewed were two men identified as otaku. Despite stating that otaku were a tiny minority in the country, 22% of the hour-long programme was devoted to this section. The female BBC reporter questioned the two otaku, aged 38 and 39, about their fascination with the popular high school-based dating simulation game *Love+* for the Nintendo

DS console, introducing the section with 'I was about to discover a truly strange aspect of romance – Japanese style.' She emphasised their ages, which she contrasts with that of the virtual girl in the game: 'so she thinks she's going out with a 17-year-old but you are actually 39', conflating the fantasy of the game with a representation implying transgression in real life. She then acknowledged the game's set-up: 'ok, so you're ... when you're with them you're a teenage boy'. The second otaku replied, explaining his interest in the game, 'Of course. I think I was most passionate about love when I was in high school' – a response that is concordant with the otaku ethos as described by Azuma. The reporter concluded with

I can't quite believe the conversation I've just had with the Love+ guys ... men ... boys, whatever they are. They are 39 and 38 ... 40-year-old men who are going out with virtual girlfriends.

Despite the widespread popularity of 'sim' games and the fact that men of this age in Britain also play computer games, the terms 'strange' and 'can't quite believe' were used to characterise the fans, highlighting, in Shi-xu's term, the 'unexpected' which is couched in terms of deviance. Even their status as men was questioned with the phrase 'whatever they are'. While the reporter subsequently sought information about otaku culture the implication was of a problematic culture of Japanese men interested in (virtual) young girls and somehow associated with Japan's 'worrying' population decline. Otaku culture was presented in the programme as an example of Japanese male cultural 'otherness'.

Conclusion

When products of another culture are broadcast it is likely that there will be differences in media interpretation due to the different underlying dynamics. It has been shown here that the complex social representations underlying Japanese culture are not mirrored in British media. On the basis of the examples discussed in this essay it is clear that existing stereotypical representations can have a powerful effect on programme selection. Despite the world-wide success of Japanese popular culture, within mainstream British media its penetration remains limited. Japanese popular culture has been anchored to existing representations of the 'otherness' of the Japanese and the transgressive representations of sexuality attributed to them.

Rather than Japanese popular culture being viewed on its own terms, the cultural context of changing gender roles in Japanese society has been ignored. Adult manga and anime have been represented as transgressive in Britain, which becomes problematic when these forms are presented solely as children's entertainment. These socially-constructed representations driven by the dynamics of British cultural history have resulted in a highly selective subset of Japanese popular culture being available on mainstream British television. This phenomenon may ultimately increase rather than abate harmful stereotypes.

Notes

1. Allison 2006, 2004, 2000.
2. Hinton 2007.
3. Moscovici 1998; de Rosa 2012.
4. Duveen 2007.
5. Mantovani 2000; Ljungberg 2003; Said 1978; Shi-Xu 1995.
6. Hinton 2000.
7. McLeod 2010.
8. Matsumoto 2002.
9. Galbraith 2009a.
10. Holland 1909.
11. Hinton 2013b.
12. For example, in Martinez & Manolovitz 2010.
13. Hinton 2013a.
14. Levick 2005.
15. Jones 2003.
16. Schodt 1996.
17. Millar 1995, p. 9. Drawing on a variation of the phrase 'overpaid, oversexed and over here', used in the United Kingdom during the Second World War to express concerns about the large numbers of American soldiers stationed in the country.
18. Izawa 1997.
19. Hinton 2000.
20. Harvey 1995.
21. Shi-xu 2005, 1995.
22. Kinsella 1995.
23. McVeigh 2000.
24. Yano 2009.
25. Lyttle 2012.
26. McVeigh 2000.
27. Hinton 2013b.
28. Kinsella 2012; Asahi Shimbun 1998.
29. Hinton 2013b.
30. Fitzpatrick 1999.
31. *Now* 1997.

32. Kinsella 1995.
33. White 1993.
34. Moffett 1996.
35. White 2002.
36. Kinsella 2000.
37. Gwynne 2013; Hurford 2009.
38. McDonnell 2000.
39. Saito 2014.
40. Ibid.
41. Burr 2010.
42. Allison 2000.
43. Sebert 2000.
44. Kinsella 2000.
45. Schodt 1983, p. 87.
46. Schodt 1996; Horiguchi 2012; Azuma 2009.
47. Galbraith 2009b.
48. Kinsella 2000.
49. McNicol 2004.
50. Rivera 2009; Galbraith 2009a.
51. A title echoing a popular British comedy play of the 1970s called *No Sex Please, We're British* (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b03fhobg>).

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