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The "characterization" of Japan : from merchandising to identity

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**The “Characterization” of Japan: From
Merchandising to Identity**

Ruobing Han

Front cover illustration: Character goods sold in Ghibli museum, Tokyo, Japan
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The “Characterization” of Japan: From Merchandising to Identity

Proefschrift

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Author's Note

All interviews and sources in Japanese and Chinese are translated by the author unless otherwise stated. Citations are written in full author-title format upon first appearing in dissertation, with subsequent mentions listing only the author, date, and page number. Japanese names are written in the Japanese order (family name first) using Modified Hepburn Romanization. Chinese names are written in the Chinese order (family name first) using Pinxin. The titles of manga, anime and other Japanese sources used in this dissertation are kept in Japanese followed by a translation in English. All relevant Japanese and Chinese terms are written in italics and then followed by a translation in English or vice-versa. In order to distinguish Chinese terms from Japanese terms, Chinese terms are specially noted. Japanese terms, Chinese terms and English translations are used throughout this dissertation according to what is appropriate in a given situation. The images used and quoted in this dissertation are solely for the purpose of academic analysis and comply with fair use.

Introduction

The Kingdom of Characters

Japan is known as the “Kingdom of Characters.” This moniker comes from the name of a travelling exhibition organized by the Japan Foundation that had toured from 2010 to 2015. This exhibition mainly introduces the manga and anime characters that have emerged in Japan since the postwar and the daily life in such a kingdom as well as the popular trends which may reveal the direction of further development of characters in Japan. Its debut was in China and then in Italy and most of Europe, Asia, Oceania and America, which attracted a lot of local people. The purpose of the exhibition, according to the Japan Foundation, is to make viewers have “a better understanding of the cultural and historical background behind the Japanese love of characters as well as the future of characters in contemporary Japan” (“Foreword” to “JAPAN: Kingdom of Characters”, 2010).

The organizer of the exhibition, the Japan Foundation, established in October 1972, was a special legal entity supervised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, whose object is to promote international cultural exchange through organizing a wide range of programs around the world. It has established 24 overseas centres including Beijing, Seoul, London, Paris, Moscow, New York and Sydney in 23 countries. The programs it operates focus on three fields: culture, language and dialogue. The Japanese government also gives the Japan Foundation great supports each year, since as Japan’s only cultural agency responsible for international cultural exchange it creates many opportunities to foster friendship and understanding between Japan and the world.

Particularly when the Japanese government has devoted itself to exploiting the potential of the nation’s cultural influence through the concept of “Cool Japan” since 2002, the Japan Foundation plays a critical role.¹ This development was first described by Douglas McGray in his 2002 article “Japan’s Gross National Cool” that highlights Japan’s soft power, which includes pop music, anime, manga, fashion, film, cuisine, and the phenomenon of cuteness. Japan Foundation is an important tool for promoting Japan’s “national cool,” to foreign audiences.

With increasing attention paid to Japan’s softpower, the Ministry of Economy Trade and Industry (METI) establishes a special office for promoting the creative industry and the “Cool Japan” strategy, one of whose key elements is Japanese content represented by Japanese popular culture. According to the statistics published by METI on “The Current Situation and Future Development of Content Industry” in April 2016, the foreign sales of Japanese content has reached 13.8 billion dollars, mainly including manga (24.1 per cent), game (19.3 per cent), character goods sale (7.9 per cent), anime (0.2 per cent) and film (0.1 per cent), which accounts for 2.5 per cent of global demand for content. Among these aspects, one element which goes

¹For details of the development of “Cool Japan” see Chapter 5.

through the process of development of them and becomes ever more important as well as reflects the contemporary Japanese society is characters.

Characters are omnipresent in contemporary Japan. As the introduction to the above-mentioned travelling exhibition writes, “Used unhesitatingly by both adults and children in private and public spaces, before we realize it, these characters have become a part of our daily landscape” and appeared in many possible places such as “bank passbooks, train commutation passes and local police boxes” (see **Figure 1**). Therefore, “Anyone who has ever travelled to Japan has probably had the awe-inspiring experience of finding manga and anime characters in every corner of the city,” as the exhibition director Aihara Hiroyuki notes (“JAPAN: Kingdom of Characters”, 2010).

“Not only in areas like Akihabara and Harajuku, which have come to be known in foreign countries as sacred sites for characters, but in supermarkets and souvenir shops in every little town across the country, one finds countless goods emblazoned with images of Hello Kitty and Pocket Monsters,” continues Aihara, “Droves of adults march into movies produced by Studio Ghibli and it is not at all unusual to see people immersed in making figures from *Mobile Suit Gundam*.”

Indeed, driven by the postwar boom in manga and anime, characters have quickly become part of Japanese daily life via books and screens. It is very normal in Japan to see various genres of manga placed outside the front of bookshops; many people on the train, regardless of age or gender, will have some kind of manga materials, such as pocket books and digital sources, to read; and anime is often broadcast on television, at the cinema, or on big screens in the street. Such an environment opens up many channels for Japanese people to discover manga and anime, and makes them familiar with the characters in them.

Convenience shops, vending machines, restaurants, hotels, museums, café and shopping centres are flooded with huge numbers of character-based goods, but the saturation does not stop there: items that are part of a person’s personal belongings—for example, bags, clothes and mobile phones—are also rife with such “characterization.” In the introduction to the exhibition, a 2004 survey conducted by the Bandai Character Research Centre in Japan is mentioned.² In response to the question “*Naurakano suki na kyarakutā ga aru?*” (Are there any characters you like?) 90.2 per cent of the respondents (1,210 people including men and women ranging in age from 3 to 69) admitted that there were, and in answer to the question “*Naurakano kyarakutā shōhin o shoyū shiteiru?*” (Do you own any character goods?) 79 per cent of the respondents said yes. These figures indicate the popularity of characters among people who are likely to have some character goods because of their fondness for them.

How did the current status quo come about? Why has this happened? Does this phenomenon tell us something about Japanese society? These are the main questions that this study aims to answer.

²Other details on this survey will be discussed in Chapter 3.

From above descriptions, a fact can be found, that the phenomena of characters in Japan are also the commercial built on various commodities, and consumption has been an effective way to express one's affection for characters. This dissertation undertakes a study of the merchandising and consumption practices that have developed around characters. Through accounts that trace various economic, cultural, and social practices, this dissertation aims to examine the penchant for characters in Japan and its consequences. "Characterization" of Japan is an attempt to treat a seemingly trivial phenomenon seriously, demonstrating how it matters in the Japanese context, as well as outside of Japan. We will start with the very basic question: what is a character?



Figure 1. Kyoto city subway one-day free passes and JR West train IC card featuring characters; Source: Collected by author, April 2015.

Character, Commodity and Consumption

Character

“Character” (*kyarakutā*), according to the *Nihon kokugo daijiten* (the second edition, 2006: 309), the most comprehensive dictionary in Japan, has three meanings. The first refers to personality, characteristic and the personas appearing in a play, film, novel

and manga and so on. The second refers to the symbols or words in one system. The third refers to the characteristics projected in advertising campaigns or activities which include the uses of distinctive things, celebrities, animals and plants and so on. Other dictionaries offer similar definitions, for example, according to *Kōjien* (the fifth edition, 2006: 674), the term refers to personality; personas in a novel, film, play, manga story, and so on; and a letter or symbol. On the introduction of the use of the term “character” as a fixed phrase particularly referring to personas appearing in manga and anime to Japan, many scholars have cited the influence of Disney (Kayama and Bandai Kyarakutā Kenkyūjo, 2001; Tsuji, Umemura and Mizuno, 2009). In the 1950s, along with its relaunched animation works in Japan, Disney also introduced a character merchandising contract in which the personas in its animation works were described as “fanciful characters,” “character” for short. Before that, the personas in manga and anime had been always called “*tōjōjinbutsu*” (literally, “those who enter the stage”) or “*shuyōjinbutsu*” (literally, “the leading characters”). Impacted by Disney, the English term began to be recognized and used. For example, in an article titled “*Shōnen Sarutobi Sasuke manga eiga ni naru*” (The Work Magic Boy is Adapted for Film), in the 13 November 1958 edition of the daily newspaper *Yomiuri Shinbun*, the persona, Sasuke, was introduced as “*shuyōjinbutsu no kyarakutā*” (literally, “the main characters”), combining both Japanese and English terms.³

The use of the term “character” in this dissertation refers to not only the virtual characters in manga and anime but also those originating from other media and platforms. As a form of creative expression, manga makes use of the specific and still design of characters, while anime endows them with movement, which as Marc Steinberg argues, provides a “dynamically immobile image” (2012: 9). Both of them are useful to give characters narratives that are important to construct the imaginary character worlds and attract readers and audiences to follow and enjoy as well as develop a “contract” with such worlds. As Martin Barker argues, “A ‘contract’ involves an agreement that a text will talk to us in ways we recognize. It will enter into a dialogue with us. And that dialogue, with its dependable elements and form, will relate to some aspect of our lives in our society” (1989: 261). The contract to some extent provides a means for readers and audiences to enter the fantastic worlds of characters that manga and anime construct, while integrating their imaginations with the characters’ world. It can be understood as a kind of “collaborative creativity,” as Condry points out, whose “platform is better viewed in terms of characters and [character] worlds” (2013: 113).

The existence of characters as the platform implies that a character can be independent from the media forms of manga and anime, and function as what Thomas Lamarre (2009: xxiii) and Azuma Hiroki (2007:125) call a “nodal point.” In his study *Kyarakutā to wa nanika* (What is Character), Odagiri Hiroshi points out three constituent elements of a character, which are “image, inner personality and

³To establish this, I searched for the term “character” (*kyarakutā*) in the newspaper databases of *Yomidasu Rekishikan* (from 1874) and *Asahi Kikuzou II* (from 1879). This article is chronologically the first found in the two databases that relates the term to manga and anime. After this article, the English term is widely used in articles about manga and anime.

meaning” (2010: 118-125). “Image” relates to character design, the “inner personality” highlights the personality that the persona presents, and “meaning” symbolizes the attributes or character type of the persona. A character is always the result of the integration of design combined with personality and symbolic meaning (Saitō, 2011). The second element is often linked to the discussion of *kyara* (chara). In fact, characters in Japan are also known as *kyara*. *Kyara*, is not simply an abbreviation of the term “character,” but also refers to a psychologically complex sense, or “a proto-character situation” for all characters, as manga critic Itō Gō has argued in his book *Tezuka izu deddo* (Tezuka is Dead) (2014: 124). In the sense of the latter, *kyara* is different from character. Itō suggests that *kyara* is something similar to personality: it “precedes the character itself, evoking the feeling of some kind of existence or life force” (2014: 126-152). On the other hand character is based on *kyara* and can be read as a body image that expresses a certain personality and makes one imagine the life behind the text. However, in Japan, *kyara* has many other meanings. The term also refers to a real person’s personality⁴ or the type of one’s role that he/she acts in social communication.

Here none of these three elements is absolutely necessary, which reveals one key factor of characters, flexibility. According to Odagiri, even if a character only has a name and one of these elements, as long as it can maintain its coherence through these, the character can be offered many options for transforming and extending to other media or platforms. For example, a manga character can be translated across different media from manga to anime, games and light novels, and so on. And the character can make these different media have an integrated and synergistic relationship with each other and therefore a network of multiple media surrounding the character is constructed. Moreover, this flexibility also indicates that many personas in other forms of media, such as designs (Hello Kitty) and video games (Pokémon), can be defined as characters and together they create the phenomenon of characters today.⁵

Significantly, it is this flexibility that allows characters to become commodities and enter our lives. A direct driving force for the commoditization of character comes from manga and anime. In his examination of the rise of the comic strip in America, Ian Gordon has argued that “[b]y stressing individual characters, the new comic art form lent itself to promotion and marketing” (1998: 7). This is the case in Japan too. The key factor that supports the sustainable development of manga and anime is the character merchandising which followed Disney’s arrival in Japan, as this provides a mechanism for the commoditization of characters in order to make a profit. Tezuka Osamu, the producer of TV anime *Tetsuwan Atomu* (Astro Boy, 1963) and the creator of the manga of the same name, was the pioneer who relied on the example of Disney in practicing character merchandising in Japan. During the 1960s, the market became

⁴For example the phrase of *kyaradacchi* refers to the establishment of one’s personality; see also Chapter 4.

⁵For details on the mixed media network see Chapter 2.

flooded with a variety of items, such as food, toys and accessories, which featured the character, Atomu.⁶

Following the first success, the potential of characters in marketing was quickly recognized by producers, and this led to the boom of character goods in the following decades. The statistics show that by the early 1980s the market scale of character goods surpassed 1 trillion yen (Kayama and Bandai Kyarakutā Kenkyūjo, 2001:192). Then, in the 1990s, despite the uncertain period following the rise and fall of the Bubble Economy, sales of the character retail market exceeded 1.5 trillion yen and continued to grow and reached a peak of more than 2 trillion yen in 1999 (*Charabiz DATA*, 2010). Since then, retail sales have essentially remained stable at around 1.5 trillion yen (*Charabiz DATA*, 2015). In this sense, the commoditization of characters, which began in the 1960s led to the development of a sizable segment of Japanese economy.

Commodity

Commodities, according to Herbert Marcuse, can be used by people to realize themselves and find their soul, which implies that “the very mechanism which ties the individual to society has changed” (1986: 9). This is the alienated phenomena proposed by Karl Marx (1844), in which the organic connection among labor, production and consumption is replaced by the relation of commodity mediated by its exchange-value. For Marx, every commodity has a use-value and an exchange-value. If the use-value expresses the social relationship between a person and an object, the exchange-value is purely an expression of the relationship between objects, without any social meaning. However, as clearly pointed out in *Capital* (1867), Marx argues that the commodity in fact represents a certain quantity of human labour. If commodities actually represent human labour, then the relationship between different commodities actually expresses a relationship between different acts of labour (Lee, 2000). Hence, what exchange-value expresses is also a social relation, but commodity conceals it by the relation of objects, which Marx calls fetishism.

Commodity fetishism, as many scholars have noted, implies the transformation of cultural and social values into the attributes of objects. For example, Wolfgang Fritz Haug (1986) reveals how “commodity aesthetics” make the commodity further fetishized. He argues that commodity aesthetics is a technique that produces the appearance of commodity rather than its substance and plays an important role in attracting consumers’ attention. According to Haug, this is a new commodity fetishism created by a perceptual technique. Judith Williamson (1978) focuses on the “ideology” that commodity fetishism produces in social life. By decoding advertisements, Williamson argues that the real distinction between people in contemporary Western society is decided by their position in the process of production. However, according to her theory, advertising conceals the real structure of society, obscures fundamental class differences, and recreates them through the consumption of particular commodities.

⁶See Chapter 1. Marc Steinberg (2012) also focuses on Atomu and does a very excellent job of examining this character’s history.

Nevertheless, it must be borne in mind here that objects per se are inscribed with certain socio-cultural meanings and values, thus we should take another look from objects themselves.⁷ As Arjun Appadurai argues in the introduction to *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*: “We have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories. It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things” (1986: 5). In his chapter “The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process” in the same volume, in which commodities are regarded as having life histories and as being recorded as a cultural biography, Igor Kopytoff notes, “A culturally informed economic biography of an object would look at it as a culturally constructed entity, endowed with culturally specific meanings, and classified and reclassified into culturally constituted categories” (1986: 68). Thus “the production of commodities is also a cultural and cognitive process: commodities must be not only produced materially as things, but also culturally marked as being a certain kind of thing.” Moreover, “out of the total range of things available in a society, only some of them are considered appropriate for marking as commodities” (1986: 64), since culture can intervene the development of commoditization by precluding some things such as “public lands and monuments” (1986: 73). In other word, in different societies, the standard for “the commodity candidate of things” (Appadurai, 1986: 13; emphasis in original) is different. And this difference is determined by culture and society.

Consumption

Thus commodities should be assessed as “things in a certain situation, a situation that can characterize many different kinds of thing, at different points in their social lives,” as Appadurai points out. He continues, “This means looking at the commodity potential of all things rather than searching fruitlessly for the magic distinction between commodities and other sorts of things; this also means breaking the significantly with the production-dominated Marxian view of the commodity and focusing on its *total* trajectory from production, through exchange/distribution, to consumption” (1986: 13; emphasis in original).

According to Steven Miles, people are increasingly recognizing the fact that “our lives are not solely determined by our relationship to the means of production” and that we in particular cannot ignore the impact of consumption (1998: 2). Without this recognition, there will be a “failure to observe the actual changes which have taken place over the last century in the balance of influence between these two forms of interactions with goods” (1998: 2). Miles also argues that consumption is generally defined as the “purchase and use of goods,” at the heart of which lies not only an economic conception but also a cultural one (1998: 3). The latter plays a particularly important role in the “reproduction, representation, and manipulation” of social

⁷A more elaborate discussion on social meanings and values will follow in section on consumption of this introduction.

culture and supporting our present realities (1998: 3). In short, consumption is “a set of social, cultural and economic practices” (1998: 4).

The development of consumption as a historical process has been thoroughly studied, especially in relation to Europe and North America. For example, the series of *The Fontana Economic History of Europe* (1973-1980) edited by Carlo Maria Cipolla study the multiple effects of structure, convention and fashion on consumption in Europe; Fernard Braudel examines the daily consumer life of Europeans in pre-industrial period including food, drink, dress, fashion, housing and technology in his *Civilization and Capitalism, 15-18 Century* (1979); and the critical essays in American History from 1880 to 1980 brought by Richard Wightman Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears in *The Culture of Consumption* (1983) focus on the new cultural values and sensibilities raised by the evolution of consumer capitalism in American society and point out that these direct to the shift from a “producer ethic to a consumer ethic.”

The most recent publication is Frank Trentmann’s *Empire of Things* (2016), a monumental volume of over 800 pages, tracing the story of consumption since the 15th to the 21st century. He first looks at the changing meaning of the concept of consumption per se and notes that the term experiences a “miraculous metamorphosis between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries” (2016: 2). According to Trentman, originally meaning the using up, consumption was emphasized as wasteful or involved spending and led to certain economic loss or moral decline until the seventeenth century when it instead became “something positive and creative” (2016: 2). For instance, from the late seventeenth century, consumption began to be considered as an important process for “enlarging market for producers and investors” (Trentman, 2016: 2), as Adam Smith pointed out in *The Wealth of Nations*, “Consumption is the sole end and purpose for all production” ([1776] 1937: 625).

The 18th century was when people first experienced the expansion of the commoditized world with many new commodities being brought into Western society, which caused changes to the content and customs of consumption. These changes stimulated “a demand for pleasure and play in the area of consumption” (Bell, 1972: 33) and caused the consumption of luxury goods to become fashionable and trendy. This era has been closely examined by Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford, who study the cultural meanings that are derived from the process of consumption in their *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe 1650-1850* (1999). Christopher Berry (1994) also takes an interest in the idea of luxury, and his study reveals the relationships between luxury consumption, government, social order and social identity. By interpreting acquiring luxury goods and services as a public display of economic power, as early as the end of the nineteenth century, Thorstein Veblen (1899) proposed the idea of “conspicuous consumption” and emphasized both the cultural and social significance of consumption. These approaches examine consumption and its culture, consumer culture, from a broader perspective and position them as an important requirement for the development of society.

In the 20th century, consumption became a means towards shaping individuality, particularly following the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism. Fordism promoted the take-off of mass production and standardized goods while improving the potential of

consumption (by increasing workers' income). However, as the main way of accumulating capital in the industrial age, since the 1960s certain structural defects in Fordism have been exposed—it ignored the consumer market segment, could not meet the diverse requirements of consumers, and had, therefore, what David Harvey terms “rigidity” (1990). This led to a conflict in the market and created the conditions for the arrival of post-Fordism, in which the heterogeneity and individualization of people were carefully considered. Consumer choice became one of the premises for production; the centre of social life had been shifted from production to consumption.

In Harvey's opinion, two aspects of these changes in life and consumption deserve close attention: the growth in importance of immaterial characteristic of commodities and, correspondingly, the growing importance of the production of a symbol system and visual images. They give the term “consumption” a critical distance from the meaning of “using up” and divert the focus on the “*significance and character of the values, norms and meanings*” produced in consumption practices (Lury, 2011: 10-11; emphasis in original). Further, Jean Baudrillard (1988) positions the sign-value of commodity as the starting point and examines consumption in a perspective of the political economy of the sign. He suggests that consumption, in fact, is a kind of symbolic act or act of using signs, which constructs a symbolic society at a deeper level.

The symbolic interpretation of consumption must certainly be based on the socio-cultural context, since objects are concrete manifestations of social practices. The work of anthropologists Marry Douglas and Baron Isherwood (1979) looks at the function of commodity in rituals and points out that goods can be a symbol of social status. Douglas particularly notes the significance of objects for humans, especially in producing and maintaining social relationships.

The fact that consumer culture is neither an independent symbol system nor a negative and direct reflection of the existing social reality and order was emphasized by Pierre Bourdieu (1979; 1980). He argues that specific social practices can form a bridge between the subjective agents and the objective social structures and can internalize the latter to become the “habitus” of the former. The habitus is, on the one hand, shaped by social practices, while on the other contributes to social production, since it can generate and regulate the practices that form the social life. Moreover, the close relationship between the habitus and practices is always presented as being embodied in the body. For Bourdieu, habitus can contribute to the cultural competence of an individual, for instance in terms of taste, which can be seen as one's internal “cultural capital.” In Bourdieu's view, the ownership of goods presents multiple chances for people to demonstrate the cultural capital they possess, and therefore consumption is an important way of achieving “distinction.” In this way, he revisits the complicated relationships between culture and social class, and extends the power relations behind capital from the economic field to the cultural and social fields, thereby avoiding economic determinism.

Since the 1980s, the theoretical discussion on consumption, which also focuses on different aspects and uses concrete examples, has been burgeoning. Those include works such as Daniel Miller's *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (1987), Colin Campbell's *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (1987), Gary

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Cross's *Time and Money: The Making of Consumer Culture* (1993), Ben Fine and Ellen Leopold's *The World of Consumption* (1993), Scott Lash and John Urry's *Economies of Signs and Space* (1994), Grant McCracken's *Culture and Consumption* (1990), Celia Lury's *Consumer Culture* (1996), David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989), Mike Featherstone's *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (1991), Zygmunt Bauman's *Intimations of Postmodernity* (1992), Martyn Lee's *Consumer Culture Reborn* (1993), George Ritzer's *The McDonaldization of Society* (1993), Sharon Zukin's *Point of Purchase: How Shopping Changed American Culture* (2004), Andrew Wernick's *Promotional Culture* (1991), Robert Bocock's *Consumption* (1993), Gabriel and Lang's *Unmanageable Consumer* (1995), Paul du Gay *et al.*'s *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman* (1997), Thomas Frank's *The Conquest of Cool* (1997), John Fiske's *Understanding Popular Culture* (1989), Don Slater's *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (1997) and Joanne Entwistle's *The Fashioned Body* (2000), and studies such as Russell Belk's "Studies in the New Consumer Behaviour" (1995), Fred Davis's "Of Maids' Uniforms and Blue Jeans" (1989), Fredric Jameson's "Postmodernism and the Consumer Society" (1985), Mica Nova's "Modernity's Disavowal: Women, the City and the Department Store" (1997), Stuart Hall's "Encoding/ Decoding" (1990), Arjun Appadurai's "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy" (1990), Morris Holbrook's "Nostalgia and Consumption Preference" (1993), Robert Kozinets's "Utopian Enterprise" (2001), John Clark's "'Mine Eyes Dazzle': Cultures of Consumption" (1991) and Barbara Stern's "Deconstructive Strategy and Consumer Research" (1996).

As part of contemporary consumption, character consumption is embedded in the web of complex processes that involve many of the practices of consumption described above. At the same time, it is rooted in the social and cultural context of Japan. In the next section, I will try to demonstrate that the study of character consumption can offer us a window into a better understanding of the complicated interactions between people and commodities.

Character Consumption

Character consumption in general refers to the purchase and use of specific commodities—character goods derived from character merchandising. Character goods are akin to mass-produced cultural goods which, though criticized by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1944) as falling into the trap of standardization, facilitate the production and consumption of culture and enable people to enjoy it. Thus, on the one hand character goods share features with other commodities, such as the use-value and exchange-value proposed by Marx. On the other hand, as Baudrillard (1988) argues, with fetishism turning to the sphere of consumption, sign-values become inherent to commodities, in particular character goods.

Indeed, putting children as the primary target of character goods turned them into children's favourites and thus secured strong roots in the development of children's culture in Japan. Because of their affinity for manga and anime, Japanese children soon become consumers of character goods. This to some extent has accelerated the socialization of children, by urging them to take on the role of consumers

prematurely. From this starting point character goods then extend beyond the children's market to adults. This extension not only led to the expansion of character consumption, but also secured for characters a role in social-cultural phenomena, such as the *shōjo* (girls) and *otaku* (geeks), resulting in the diversification of character consumption.

Such diversification also highlights the symbolic qualities of character consumption, which coincides with the very postmodern tendency of consumption. According to Miles, this trend focuses on the “symbolic processes characteristic of consumption” (1998: 23). Therefore, consumption is much like what Baudrillard describes “a *systematic* act of the manipulation of signs” (1988: 22-25; emphasis in original) which constitutes the meanings or discourses that can realize consumers' self-worth.

As many scholars have discussed, consumption is related to a “choosing self” (Slater, 1997: 59) and highlights self-realization (Lears, 1983) and self-improvement (Pendergast, 2000). In his book *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, Mike Featherstone has argued that influenced by the postmodern qualities such as “‘liquefaction of signs and commodities,’ the ‘effacement of the boundary between the real and the image,’ ‘floating signifiers,’ ‘hyperreality,’ ‘depthless culture,’ ‘bewildering information,’ ‘sensory overload’ and ‘affect-charge intensities,’” the aestheticization of everyday life has come into play (2007: 64-80), and significantly, this postmodern world encourages everybody to believe that they can “be whoever they want, as long as they are prepared to consume” (Miles, 1998: 24). Thus consumption may go beyond specific social restrictions and become a way of taking control of their lives. This sense of control can be also gained by consuming characters. As Anne Allison puts it, a character is “a device for self-realization (*jikojitsugen*)” (2004: 40). In particular, by satisfying individuals' need for sensibility and individuality, character consumption realizes the idea of self, including the construction and expression of self-identity.⁸

At this point, character consumption must be placed in the bigger picture of contemporary Japanese society. Consumption per se is closely related to the social context, as revealed by Veblen and Bourdieu through their understanding of the social significance of consumption (despite their focus on social mobility). As I will explain in chapters of this study, character consumption is also linked to social and cultural practices such as *iyashi būmu* (healing boom), and may reflect and be affected by specific culture complexes such as the *amae* (dependency) and the animist sensibility in Japan. Noticeably, this dissertation explores two aspects of the relationships between character consumption and Japanese society. The first of these is the new symbol system that has been constructed as a result of character consumption, and which is full of signs that may change one's perception of reality and even bring out the “more real than real” world of hyper-reality (Baudrillard, 1988). In this sense, the consumption of characters is equated with the consumption of signs, through which a “characterized identity,” comprised of character signs, is born (self-identity-construction).

⁸For a more elaborate discussion on characters and self-identity see Chapters 3 and 4.

The second relates to the new way in which society is represented in contemporary Japan. Sign-value makes the use of commodity not only symbolic but also expressive, for example, consumption can be representative of class, taste and individuality, as discussed above. Therefore consumption is a means for expressing self-identity. This is particularly based on the body, since consumption is “a body project” (Clammer, 1997: 12). Through various modification works, the body, a “presentation of self in everyday life” (Goffman, 1959) and a “site for the inscription of a variety of signs and values about identity and difference” (Appadurai, 1997: 84), is inevitably transformed into the most beautiful consumer product (Baudrillard, [1970] 1998). This is precisely what is happening with character consumption in Japan. As I will explain in Chapter 4, with the “characterized identity” consumers are keen to pursue the bodies of characters and consume their own bodies through makeovers and shape-overs. It occurs not only out of individual need but also out of socio-political necessity. For example, the Japanese belief, Shinto, cultivates a sense of belonging and an animist sensibility, and lies the foundation of using anthropomorphism to create character-styled bodies for many objects, from natural creatures to everyday items. In the case of politics, politicians both use characters and character-styled bodies in order to approach the public. The same application can be found in the way that the public expresses its political voice. As Michel Foucault (1995) has argued, there has always been conflict between power and the body. In such a contention, mediated by the body characters are put at the centre of the social stage and play an active role in social communication.⁹ Characters become a form of discourse and reflect, constitute and represent contemporary Japan. A “characterized society” is thus formed.

Nevertheless the impact of characters is not peculiar to one particular society but, as Allison and Christine Yano have argued, should be investigated in a global context because the phenomenon has already awakened the global imagination and stimulated a global desire. And this phenomenon is much like the “decentered globalization” proposed by Iwabuchi Koichi (2002) that features a general transnational flow. Driven by Japan’s cultural exports and exchange of manga and anime, characters have been brought onto the world stage and received a warm welcome. Today more and more consumers in other areas of the world are consuming Japanese characters.

This process has, in part, been led by the Japanese government, which has carefully constructed a platform for the export of characters through related cultural policies and diplomacy. As I indicated at the beginning of this introduction, characters have been a crucial aspect of the strategy of “Cool Japan” and promoted as an image of the nation. On the other hand, characters per se can provide the pleasure and fantasy that readers, audiences or consumers all over the world may become captured by, and more importantly characters makes them have shared experience (of characters) with each other whereby a connecting bridge is constructed.

⁹For more on the role that characters play in social communication see Chapter 4.

Studying Characters

The phenomenon of character consumption has attracted interest of scholars for some time. Generally speaking, the character research conducted by Japanese scholars usually comprises three different features. The first is an initial exploration, which is always dependent on related studies and tends to lack theoretical independence. However, in turn, this provides the foundation for a broader perspective, in which characters are explored through various aspects. For example, Saitō Ryōsuke traced the history of Japanese toys in his book *Shōwa gangu bunkashi* (A Cultural History of Shōwa Toys, 1978), which recorded the development of character toys in the postwar period and provided much evidence for further contemporary textual research. Equally, while Kan Tadamichi (1968) and Tsurumi Shunsuke (1984) paid little attention to characters, their studies discussed many cultural phenomena and social events relating to Japanese children and characters in the postwar period.

From the late 1980s onwards, a clearer understanding of characters began to emerge. Many scholars began to focus on characters in their discussion of manga, anime, and (sub)cultures such as *shōjo* and *otaku*. However, this was also the period when theories about Western consumption and postmodernism were widely introduced and applied in Japan. From such a theoretical basis, since the late 1980s some Japanese scholars have tried to interpret characters by combining the study of them with discussions of Western theories. For example, Ōtsuka Eiji (1989) proposed the “theory of narrative consumption,” which highlighted the significance of narrative in understanding the character worlds and their function in contemporary consumption in Japan. As a social critic and anthropologist, he contributed many books on characters, including *Manga no kōzō: Shōhin tekisuto genshō* (The Anatomy of Manga: Commodities, Text and Phenomenon, 1987), *Iyashitoshite no shōhi* (Consumption as Healing, 1991a), *Tasogare toki ni mitsuketa mono: “Ribon” no furoku to sonojidai* (Things Found at Twilight: “Ribbon” Premiums [furoku] and Their Age, 1991b), *Sengo manga no hyōgenkūkan: Kigotekishitai no shubaku* (The Expressive Space of Postwar Manga: The Curse of the Symbolic Body, 1994), *Kyarakutā shōsetsu no tsukurikata* (How to Make the Character Novel, 2003), *Atomu no meidai: Tezuka Osamu to sengo manga no shudai* (The Atomu Thesis: Tezuka Osamu and the Main Theme of Postwar Manga, 2003), *Monogatari shōmetsuron: Kyarakutāka suru “watashi”, ideorogika suru “monogatari”* (The Extinction of Narrative: The Characterized “Me”, and the Ideologicalized “Narrative”, 2004) and *“Otaku” no seishinshi: 1980-nendai-ron* (Intellectual History of “Otaku”: A Theory of the 1980s, 2007).

Ōtsuka’s discussions indeed have a fundamental and leading significance in the study of characters and have enlightened subsequent researchers. Azuma Hiroki (2001; 2007) is one such researcher, who uses Ōtsuka’s perspective as the basis for his work, but pays less attention to the narrative of the character world, instead stressing the relationships between characters and a “database.” The premise of Azuma’s work is based on his study of the practices and postmodernity of *otaku* consumption—which

follows the typical pattern of character consumption.¹⁰ By aligning this with postmodern theoretical discourse, he has coined the term “database consumption” to help us to understand the economic, cultural, and social changes evoked by character consumption in contemporary Japanese society (since the mid-1990s).

The third feature of studies of characters in Japanese academia is the preoccupation with a practical analysis of the character industry through marketing data and the interpretation of business terms since the middle of the 1990s. For example, Tsuchiya Shintarō (1995) analyses the structure and strategy of the character industry and points out that the character industry, as a “soft business,” will remain in a crucial position in the future in Japan. Yamada Tōru (2000) looks at the character industry from the perspective of the market for characters, while Ushiki Ri’ich (2000) focuses on interpreting the legal knowledge that surrounds character merchandising and sets out a legal framework for a character business. A similar effort is made by Tsuji Yukie, Umemura Osamu, and Mizuno Kōji (2009), who offer us a comprehensive understanding of characters from the perspectives of culture, commerce and intellectual property. Moreover, since the mid-1990s, many institutes have deployed data investigations, such as the surveys conducted by the Bandai Character Research Institute (2000, 2004) and the annual reports published by Character Databank Company (since 2002), and have analysed the whole industry in detail.

Based on these studies, many Japanese scholars have tended to explore the phenomenon of characters within Japan’s cultural soil. For example, Tsurumi argues that Japan has “its own long-standing tradition of cartoons and even narrative comics” such as the *chōjū-jinbutsu-giga* (Scroll of Frolicking Animals, 12th century) which may “call to mind Walt Disney’s animated cartoons of Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck” (1984: 30-31). Shimizu Isao (2009) traces Katsushika Hokusai’s (1760-1849) manga in the Edo period as a source for modern characters. Aihara Hiroyuki (2007) suggests that characters are derived from traditional Japanese beliefs, such as Shinto and Buddhism, which in part affect the Japanese to establish spiritual connections with objects. In his famous exhibition “OTAKU: characterology=space=cities,” Morikawa Ka’ichirō (2005) reveals that *moe*, a kind of affective response to characters, is comparable with *wabi-sabi*, the traditional Japanese aesthetic value.¹¹ Aoki Sadashige (2014) argues that characters could be the force that the enterprises and the nation rely on to contribute to building their brands. This, in part, explains why characters are appointed as Japan’s ambassadors, representing Japan on the world stage, and carrying a great deal of expectation from the Japanese government.

When compared with the abundance of research into the subject by Japanese scholars, academic publications in English that focus on characters are rather scarce. This is surprising but reasonable, considering the fact that the broad-ranging analysis of characters by Japanese academia is relatively recent. It is for this reason that most of

¹⁰For details of otaku consumption and Azuma’s study see Chapters 2 and 3.

¹¹*Wabi-sabi* as a kind of Japanese aesthetics suggests such qualities as “impermanence, humanity, asymmetry, and imperfection” (Juniper, 2003: 2); See “Venice Biennale the 9th International Architecture Exhibition the Japanese Pavilion,” 2005, accessed 1 March 2016, <https://www.jp.fgo.jp/j/project/culture/exhibit/international/venezia-biennale/arc/9/02.html>.

the initial studies of characters in Japan were attached to research on other topics, such as children and mass culture, although it should be mentioned that in many of these studies characters were not clearly highlighted or recognized as a subject in their own right. In her study Linda Simensky points out, there is literary absence on the topic of cartoon characters in Western academia, particularly that of character merchandising (2012: 217). However, there are some researchers making contributions, for example, John Canemaker's *Felix: The Twisted Tale of the World's Most Famous Cat* (1991), Jim Korkis and John Cawley's *Cartoon Superstars* (1990), Alan Bryman's *The Disneyization of Society* (2004) and *Disney Discourse* (1994) edited by Eric Smoodin.

The most solid book on the topic of the Japanese characters is Marc Steinberg's *Anime's Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan* (2012) which elaborates on the initial development of character merchandising in Japan. Steinberg also looks at the designer toys within the logic of character merchandising. In addition Anne Allison's *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination* (2006) offers a detailed exploration of the development of Japanese character toys in both Japan and America. Ken Belson and Brian Bremner (2004) reveal the story of a specific character, Hello Kitty, and the billion dollar feline phenomenon caused by her. Yano traces the global development of the character, in her book *Pink Globalization: Hello Kitty's Trek across the Pacific* (2013). Allison and Yano also contribute to an earlier book, *Pikachu's Global Adventure: The Rise and Fall of Pokémon*, edited by Joseph Tobin (2004), which analyses the phenomenon of Pokémon all over the world. Debra Occhi (2012) in her study "Wobbly Aesthetics, Performance, and Message: Comparing Japanese Kyara with their Anthropomorphic Forebears" specifically examines the development of *yurukyara* (literally, the "wobbly" character) and points out that they root in the religious, the civic and the commercial.

Furthermore, this topic is always included in the discussion of manga, anime, and Japanese popular culture. For instance, Frederick Schodt outlines the world of Japanese comics in his books such as *Manga! Manga!* (1983) and *Dreamland Japan* (1996) and introduces many manga characters to the West. Ian Condry looks at the collective action that surrounds anime and characters in his study *The Soul of Anime* (2013). Anne Cooper-Chen discusses the globalization of Japanese popular media and the interaction between fans all over the world and characters such as cosplay in her *Cartoon Culture* (2010). The book *Debating Otaku in Contemporary Japan* (2015) contributed by Patrick Galbraith, Thiam Huat Kam and Björn-Ole Kamm *et al.* involves the role that *otaku* play in character consumption. *Mechadenia* (2006-2015), a series of ten books edited by Frennchy Lunning, not only interprets the studies of Japanese scholars but also provides many analyses of Western researchers about manga, anime and fans and so on. Thorsten Botz-Bornstein examines the aesthetics relating to characters in his *The Cool-kawaii* (2011). These indeed provide a variety of perspectives for studying characters.

Sources, Methodology and Structure

As I have explained in the literature review section above, from the late 1980s onwards, Japanese scholars have gradually built up a broad academic basis for research

on character consumption. However, these studies are lacking any theoretical perspectives and have not engaged in any dialogue with the theoretical literature on consumption, which has been burgeoning in Europe and North America since the 1980s. Integrating theoretical approaches towards consumption into the analysis of character consumption is an important contribution of this thesis, which will contribute to a more thorough understanding of the phenomenon.

This main goal of this dissertation is to pinpoint the place of consumption surrounding characters within the Japanese society, to paraphrase John Clammer, to demonstrate “its role in daily routines, its transforming effects on social relationships, its attitudes to the body and its place in the construction of meaning systems” (1997:24). As characters were increasingly transformed into commodities, as consumers were drawn to consume, their presence became emblematic for Japanese society. Exploring the merchandising and consumption of characters in Japan within a commercial, cultural and social context, and gaining a deep understanding of them have become more necessary than ever now, as the global expansion of Japanese characters is booming.¹²

My analysis is based on the combination of sources such as governmental and institutional documents and commercial statistics, newspapers and magazines, online surveys and interviews, from Japan to elsewhere. The bulk of examples which I have chosen and cited in this dissertation are well known in Japan and beyond. Besides, I introduce relatively unknown instances (such as Binchō-tan) whose distinctive features (such as *moe* anthropomorphism) may have been discussed in Japanese but have not been fully made recognized to the English-speaking world.

In this thesis I rely primarily on qualitative research methods. I work on the data collected from above described sources based on archival research including studying the historical periods of the postwar Japan and reading a vast literature and discourse on characters and character franchises; textual analysis including interpreting Internet users’ opinions and stories that appeared on newspapers and news; case studies including focusing on the case of China, interviewing Chinese readers/audiences/consumers of the 1980s generation and analyzing the particular Chinese character Green Dam Girl; interpretation of statistics including that of character retail market, content industry and whitepapers on *karōshi* (literally, death from overwork), youth and national livelihood in Japan, and character industry in China; and interpretation of visual materials, including that of Kumamon and Green Dam Girl.

My approach is interdisciplinary, with a strong emphasis on social scientific methods: semiotics, sociology of consumption and psychological analysis. In particular, Baudrillard’s (1983; 1988; [1970] 1998) semiotic interpretation on consumption introduces a paradigm for my analysis of character consumption. Douglas and Isherwood’s (1979) and Grant McCracken’s (1988) studies of the social and cultural attributes of consumption provide a basis for my understanding of characters and subcultures. Baudrillard’s and Featherstone’s (1991) understanding of

¹²See Chapter 5 and the example of “Pokémon Go” in Conclusion.

the postmodern tendency presented in contemporary consumption provide a foundation for my analysis in Chapter 3 and 4. Charles Horton Cooley's (1902) "the looking-glass self" and George Herbert Mead's (1934) theory of the self found the models for my interpretation of the interaction between the individual and the character. Marcel Mauss's (1979) "the techniques of the body," John Fiske's (1989) "the body politic" and Michel Foucault's (1980; 1995) and Bryan Turner's (1996) theoretical works on the body, power and society provide a basis for my investigation of characters, self-expression and social communication. Carl Jung's (1983) theory on transference and William James's (1890) research on possessions and the self provide a direction for my analysis of individuals' psychological needs for characters. These studies, covering commodity, sign, identity, the body, aesthetic, politics and communication, form a wide spectrum of theoretical interpretations for discussing the emerging phenomenal status of characters and its impact on Japanese society, and gravitate toward a certain direction that reveals the process of the "characterization" of Japan.

I will also focus on the historical development of character merchandising and character consumption by tracing from the early practices in Britain and America at the outset of nineteenth century to the most recent practices in Japan since the postwar. Although it is chronological, it is thematic, following the different features in each era. The historical development also helps us to understand both character merchandising and character consumption. As Martin Heidegger suggests in his *Being and Time*, "The interpretation of something as something is essentially grounded fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception. Interpretation is never a presuppositionless grasping of something previously given" ([1953] 2010: 146).

Moreover, I will look at the transnational flow of characters based on Japan's cultural exchange activities, and their diffusion within a particular local context by examining the local economic, cultural, social and political factors. As Frank Lechner argues, "Diffusion, the simple spreading of things or information, ties people through common practices or shared experience" (2009: 15). The diffusion of characters is also based on people's common practices or shared experience and therefore creates an ever more intimate cultural connection between Japan and other areas in the world.

This dissertation consists of five chapters, each focusing on a different aspect of character consumption that in my view are critical for exploring the topic: the rise of character merchandising in Japan, character consumers and consumption, characters merging into one's self-identification and the implications of this for individuals and society, and the role that characters play in cultural exchange and cultural diplomacy and their diffusion in neighbouring country, China. These are the main aspects that my analysis will focus on. Topics, such as the pictorial techniques of manga and anime; the art history of manga and anime; the designs of characters; the development of characters in advertising; the classification of characters; the profit formulas used in the character marketplace; and the legal protection of characters, will not be explored in depth, as they lie outside the scope of this study.

Chapter 1 reveals the mechanism by which characters become commodities: character merchandising. I discuss the definition of this key concept and point out its

characteristics and its significance for exploring characters. I briefly review its history and underline the important role that Disney played in its development, especially as the concept arrived in Japan in the wake of Disney. I then examine its initial development in Japan, in which the success of Tezuka and his character, Atomu, marked a milestone.

Chapter 2 looks at consumers and consumption in the historical process of characters permeating various aspect of Japanese life. The chapter explores the development of character toys along with the clear expansion of consumers from children to adults. By focusing on how characters become part of *shōjo* culture and *otaku* subculture in Japan, the influence of Disneyland, and the media mix, the chapter then examines the diversity and novelty of character consumption.

In Chapter 3, I mainly answer the question of why consumers consume characters. First I look at what they look for in characters, comfort and desire which highlight the inner connection between individuals and characters. To examine both factors, the chapter includes data from domestic surveys conducted in Japan and personal voices I collected online. The chapter also focuses on the symbolic world constructed by character consumption, which includes a shift in the individual's sense from reality to "hyper-reality," narrative consumption and database consumption. Through this process, the individual gains a sense of self and thus characters become closely linked to one's self-identity.

The body provides an important physical material for self-identity. Chapter 4 looks at how characters, mediated by the body, involve in society and social communication. The chapter covers the display and cosplay of the body, the necessity of socio-political uses, and the use of the body as a medium for communication. By studying these aspects, a deeper understanding of the role of characters in contemporary Japanese society can be achieved.

The final chapter shifts the focus to the world stage. I examine the process of characters going overseas, particularly to neighbouring countries, primarily China, where I conducted personal interviews with some who were born in the 1980s. By gathering the responses from these Chinese voices, it becomes clear how Japanese characters have taken root in China. I then focus on a recent trend in China that reveals the phenomenon of recontextualization in the process of the cultural diffusion of characters. My goal here is to show that a close cultural interaction is being constructed between China and Japan, mediated by characters.

My concluding remarks provide a critique of characters. By analyzing the alienation of character consumption and the illusionary "dream" built by producers and marketers, I argue that characters reflect social development and its inevitability. It is the importance of characters for understanding contemporary Japanese society.

Chapter 1

Character Merchandising in Japan

This chapter begins from a fact that characters may be connected to commodities. This has been seen since the 1920s and particularly developed since the postwar period in Japan. For example, the popularity of a particular style hat led by the manga character, Shō-chan, in the 1920s (see Page 42). The hero-character boom led by Akadō Suzunosuke in the 1950s tied the toy industry to characters and produced many character toys including swords, masks, and sunglasses and so on (see Page 38). In the 1960s the robot-character boom led by Atomu and character stickers promoted confectioners' interests through the use characters, and retailers began to try every means of incorporating characters into their products (see Page 41). The kawaii-boom led by Hello Kitty and fancy goods in the 1970s combined cute characters with stationery, decorations and so on, starting the widespread "pink globalization" (Yano, 2004; see Pages 65 and 138). The opening of Tokyo Disneyland in the 1980s satisfied Japanese fantasies and desires for a paradise of Disney characters and commodities (see Page 67). Furthermore, the popularity of Pikachu and games in the 1990s facilitated the games industry to become a powerful medium for characters' media mix and even a symbol of soft power of Japan (see Pages 72 and 140). The birth of the virtual character-singer, Hatsune Miku, and the arrival of high-tech products after 2000 revealed the capacity of characters to adapt to new media such as the Internet and mobile phones, and the possibility of exploring digital products, including music software, video sharing website and collaborative network (see Page 73).

Indeed, the world surrounding characters is a completely commercial one, full of all kinds of goods, and this is reflected in the daily routines in Japan. The daily parts show that in the morning children wake up with stuffed Pikachu toys and their parents go to work by Atomu-decorated train; at lunch office ladies who wear the Hello-Kitty-brand knitwear buy a sandwich packaged by Miffy in convenience shop and a dessert with Gudetama face on it (see **Figure 2**) for afternoon tea; and at night, young and middle-age men sit in a Gundam-themed bar and enjoy a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere. Character goods can be found almost "anywhere"—not only in children's room but also at adults' workspaces, at "anytime"—by becoming one's daily necessities including food, transport, clothes and energy (for example, coal, see chapter 4), and for any activity—including entertainment, communication, gift giving, and political campaign, and so on (Steinberg, 2012: 79). It seems that there is a quite high and wide acceptance for this kind of commodity culture in Japan. One might wonder how characters are used in the process of commercialization. Is there a mechanism behind this process? The answer is yes, and that process is called character merchandising. The commercialization of characters cannot occur without character merchandising and so this process forms the starting point for this dissertation.



Figure 2. Gudetama pudding in convenience shop; Source: Photo taken by author, April 2015.

The Definition of Character Merchandising

Character merchandising is defined as the process of granting the rights to exploit a character under licence. Although this commercial activity has been in existence for over 100 years (Ruijsenaars, 2003), and industry giants such as Disney have created business empires as a result of it, it is only in recent decades that it has become significant enough to merit treatment as a distinct definitive subject. In *The New Oxford Companion to Law*, character merchandising is defined as the “exploitation of the names and images of famous personalities and fictional characters in connection with the manufacture and distribution of a wide variety of mass-market merchandise” (Evans, 2009). The character will normally be the subject of licensing agreements granting one or more third parties the rights to use the character. This definition emphasizes the authorization of licensing, which is usually in the form of creating contracts and gaining profits through the sale or leasing of rights to a character. The authorized rights are always closely linked to copyright, trademark, and intellectual property laws.

Yet character merchandising does not only confer legal rights and authorization. Its essence is commercial exploitation, which is, in short, to make a profit by stimulating consumers’ desires for character goods. With this in mind, in 1994 the International Bureau of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) made the importance of characters in commercial use quite clear:

Character merchandising can be defined as the adaptation on secondary exploitation, by the creator of a fictional character or by a real person or by one or several authorized third parties, of the essential personality features (such as the name, image or appearance) of a character in relation to various goods and/or services with a view to creating in prospective customers a desire to acquire those goods and/or to use those services because of the customers' affinity with that character.

This definition primarily points out a key word: desire. So what produces desire? Japanese sociologist Ueno Chizuko has argued that, "Commodities produce desire, not the reverse" (1987: 62). At the beginning of *Capital*, German philosopher, economist and sociologist Karl Marx writes, "The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as 'an immense accumulation of commodities,' its unit being a single commodity. Our investigation must therefore begin with the analysis of a commodity" ([1867] 1990: 29). Marx points out that a commodity has two aspects: a use-value and an exchange-value. The value of a commodity in terms of its use expresses a relationship between need and satisfaction; the value of a commodity in terms of its exchange expresses its "equivalence" in other commodities. For Marx, both definitions rest on the fact that a commodity is an expression of a certain amount of human labour. Hence Marx concludes that the value-form of commodities is actually an expression of a social relationship. However exchange-value may create an illusion in which social relationships between people become relationships between things, which Marx calls fetishism. Fetishism makes the commodity a "mysterious thing" (Marx, 1867). French philosopher Herbert Marcuse (1964) expands this, by stating that people can recognize themselves, and find their soul in commodities; commodities generate and satisfy their desire. Thus the definition highlights the point "in relation to various goods and/or services," as it is through character merchandising that consumers are offered a commoditized world in which their desire is generated and satisfied. From the examples mentioned above, the "various goods" could include toys, food, household items and digital products; and the "services" could include entertainment industry, such as theme parks, restaurants, resorts, and so on.

Moreover, this definition provides a reason for consumer desire: "the customers' affinity with that character." This affinity, I argue, has a basis in both the material and immaterial planes. The former refers to "the material ubiquity of the character image," as Marc Steinberg points out (2012: 42). As we will see, characters not only stay in manga books or on television screens but also appear in various media forms that are widely dispersed throughout the Japanese society (such as the media mix, see chapter 2). The latter, I argue, relies on the affective connection between individuals and characters, which is not merely their appeal of characters. For example, in Japan their long experience of living with manga and anime is credited with providing a foundation for consumers' welcoming of all types of characters and they even begin to seek their emotional satisfaction (such as comfort, see chapter 3) from characters.

Further, desire represents a kind of strong psychological needs. When we discuss desire, another two terms are always linked to it: “need” and “want.” A “need” refers to something essential, while a “want” suggests the feeling of a lack of something and “desire” represents the craving to fulfil that want. The three in fact imply a progression from the physiological to the psychological. This is reflected in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, which places “physiological” needs at the bottom, and “safety,” “love/belonging,” “esteem” and “self-actualization” at the top, thus showing that as the top of the hierarchy is reached the needs become more psychological (1943: 370-396). In this sense, the role of characters is involved in the extension of material status to, among other things, ideas, meanings, and the trends that form the symbol system itself. It also marks characters (and character worlds) “both as free-floating ideas and as objects of emotional attachment” (Condry, 2013: 113).

The two concepts I have discussed above suggest that characters have an important capacity: they can provide “a means for embellishing commodities” (Gordon, 1998:7). The qualities that characters can use for this purpose is their “essential personality features,” as above WPO’s definition notes. These features are the basis, and more importantly they are the key to make a character different from others. In this regard, the International Association for the Protection of Industrial Property (AIPPI, 1995) prefers to call these features distinctive elements that can be used to enhance the sales of products and services in character merchandising:

AIPPI recognizes that one of commercial practice is the use, among others, of names or images of characters, real or fictional persons, events, groups and entities of the most varied kind, literary and artistic works, their titles and other distinctive elements, for the promotion or sale of products and services.

AIPPI recognizes that such practice, of growing development and success, is currently known as merchandising, and includes, among others, the following: character merchandising, personality merchandising, event merchandising and brand merchandising.

The distinctive elements in the above quotation refer to the titles, names, images, and personalities, and so on, presenting different attributes of the character and forming the character for merchandising purposes. For example, as the primary character of Pokémon (work title of the character), Pikachu (name) is designed (image) as a mouse-like creature with dotted eyes, a small nose, black tipped and pointed ears, red circular cheeks and lightning bolt shaped tail, whose main colour is yellow. Pikachu appears on goods such as stationery, household, and vehicles targeting children and adult consumers and can be regarded as a symbol of several things: a loyal and brave fighter, the advancement of electronic technology, an intimate pet or friend, a strong sense of nostalgia for childhood (personalities and attributes of the character), or the influence of Japan on the global market. According to the “Top-earning Fictional Character” published by *Forbes*, Pikachu ranked the eighth with an income 825 million dollars in 2003 and tenth with the same amount in 2004.

The elements mentioned above can be applied individually, or work together, at times in groups of two or three, or even all of them altogether, as long as the coherence of the character is maintained (Odagiri, 2010). It is this flexibility of application that enables the diverse use of characters in products and services, often reaching spectacular sales. After all, the key principle behind character merchandising is to use characters to generate further profit (Bryman, 2004: 80). Characters function as a stimulating mechanism or selling point, which attracts people to acquire the related goods and services. This to some extent accelerates the process of commoditization of characters by which characters and commodities become tightly integrated. The distinctive elements of a character can further explore the commoditization process and by doing this great commercial potential is discovered.

Behind the great commercial potential can be the huge profits, which are the motive of many such as character-creators, manufacturers and studios to take part in character merchandising and the force for their further exploration. For example, as we will see in next sections, for both Walt Disney and Tezuka Osamu, character merchandising guarantees their profits that are the important financial support for their later creations. Yet character merchandising is usually seen as an effective marketing strategy. But it is not only for goods, services and the related activities but also for the character self. In many cases, it can act like a ubiquitous and constant advertisement that impresses the character image in consumers' mind and strengthens the affinity between character and them. In this sense, the goods and services that characters attach to also become part of the material ubiquity discussed above and therefore develop a mutual relationship with characters. Such a relationship promotes the increase of character merchandising that is given credit for the current boom of character business.

Huge sales indicate the economic significance of character merchandising. Nevertheless, my claim here is that the significance of character merchandising not only lies in its contribution to the economy, but also in the powerful impact on society and culture.

First, character merchandising conduces to the growth of commodity economy, both quantitatively (desire requiring more goods) and qualitatively (distinctive elements for exploring goods), and because it makes characters subject to the market in a process that eventually leads to mass commoditization. It is also in this process that character merchandising encounters various cultural elements and creates a diverse commodity culture (see chapter 2). Renowned scholar of comic books and consumer culture, Ian Gordon, looks at the initial development of American comic strips and defines them as "representations through which an increasingly commodified society saw and constituted itself" (1998: 6). This definition in fact directs to character merchandising, since character merchandising is the very key in the commercial aspect of comic strips, as I will examine in next section. Thus, character merchandising fits very well with the statement of Japanese scholar Yoshimoto Mitsuhiko in relation to the commodification of daily life in postwar Japan. Yoshimoto observes that it was "no longer the question of commodities in the world but that of the world as a commodity" (1994: 194).

However, we should keep in mind that character merchandising is not simply about the material practices. As Ian Condry argues in his book *The Soul of Anime*, the reality of character merchandise “arises not only from their materiality but also from their grounding in social relationships” (2013: 120-121). He takes the example of Anne Allison’s examination of the Pokémon phenomenon: “In Pokémon one sees the principles of both gift exchange and commodity economy at work. Pocket Monsters, the currency of play here, are simultaneously traded and accumulated; they build capital for the player but also relationships with others” (Allison, 2006: 217). Pokémon was designed by Tajiri Satoshi who aimed to create a video game based on social exchange. This idea came from his childhood experience of collecting insects. The main task in this videogame is to capture and collect Pocket Monsters, and trade them with other players by connecting their game devices in order to gain all of the monsters. In this way, “an almost infinite network” (Allison, 2006: 217) of commodity, character and relations is built and attached to character merchandising.

Here, notably, it is character itself that plays the key role in the network. In Pokémon case, it is those Pocket Monster characters serving as a tool for player to forge social ties with others. This causes us to focus on the interaction between characters and individuals. First, it corresponds to the aforementioned affinity, which may involve characters in a symbolic world and implies that characters may be (affectively and socially) meaningful to individuals and society. Thus Allison (2006) concludes that characters and character goods can (re)enchant the everyday world. Then, as this study will show, by creating consumer desire and providing diverse consumer products, character merchandising and consumption are closely intertwined with each other. To take the same example of Pokémon characters, since debut in 1996, they have been transformed into various commodities that attract people all over the world to consume: in 2016 their new game product “Pokémon Go” triggers a global craze as soon as it appears to the market and greatly stimulates consumer desire (see chapter 2 and Conclusion).

Today it may be taken for granted that characters merge with everyday consumption practices. Character merchandising usually relies on the existing characters that had earlier appeared in manga, anime, games and films, and so on. Their familiarity constitutes the foundation that the character merchandising can build on (see chapter 2). People’s familiarity can be seen as the initial interaction between them and characters, which in turn is expanded by character merchandising by transforming characters into commodities that can be purchased on a daily basis in a variety of forms. As Alan Bryman notes in his book *The Disneyization of Society*, consumers “anticipate the possibility of being able to buy [character] merchandise and may even be disappointed if the opportunity to do so is not available” (2004: 81). When confronted with the same kind of products, for example a normal school notebook and a notebook with a character depicted on, they may prefer to start an interaction with the character by buying the latter. How much money a person spends on character goods and how often this happens reveals the level of interaction that person wishes to have with that specific character.

In this sense, consumption becomes an important means for one to access, explore and enjoy characters. These interactions lie at the core of consumer capitalism that, as we will see throughout this thesis, aids individuals in expressing their individuality, emotions, identities, and believes. More importantly, it is a process for one to create desire not only to acquire goods and services but also to “find meaning, connection, and intimacy” from them (Allison, 2006: 13). This potential for developing a relationship can be considered “added values” of characters that are linked not only to the practical benefits of commodities, but also, as this study will show, to human needs and social interaction.

The flip side of the character merchandising should not be overlooked, however: not all people love characters; not all consumers want to consume character products; the emotional attachment may be mixed with contradictions; and one may participate in interaction as the result of certain social pressures. Japanese critic Asada Akira, for example, has looked at the popularity of subculture regarding to characters in Japan, particularly in nationalism, and interpreted it as a lack of self-confidence and the self-seclusion of the Japanese economy in an age of globalization (2000: 58-59). Other type of criticisms include addiction to character goods, such as the influence on the public order (see, for example, Schreiber, 2016; Abrams, 2016), and deviations from socially-accepted norms, such as virtual marriages with characters (see, for example, Kumakura, 2007; Lah, 2009). In these cases, characters are seen to be invaders, and character merchandising as the facilitator of this invasion. Criticisms of Japanese characters overseas were recorded by American anthropologist Christine Yano in 2004, more than a decade before “Pokémon Go” craze as follows: “Pokémon is variously seen as the devil, evil incarnate, a manipulator of vulnerable minds, and/or an instigator of violence and crime” (2004: 108).

These two contrasting views on character merchandising have motivated my interest in the topic. (Re)thinking the relationships between object, character, self, and society will help us to grasp the complex social dynamics behind character in Japan and beyond.

A Brief History of Character Merchandising

T. J. Jackson Lears, in his book *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (1994), has examined the history of advertising and comics, showing how these visual cultural forms related to the market in America. These visual cultural forms bring about an “abundance” of images, and these images, Lears believes, are derived from commerce, which made “enjoyment of the fruits of one’s labors less important than the pursuit of disposable goods” (1994: 117). This argument is supported by Gordon, who observes: “Visual images were an important element in the emergence of the culture of consumption” (1998:6). Gordon further points out, particularly comics (and cartoons) and the characters in them have at times been found by commercial users to be more like ciphers: they seem less storytelling devices and more advertising media or business trademarks that can sell a range of products

(1998: 12). This corresponds with the basic mechanism of character merchandising, which is also the driving force behind the phenomenon, and supports its development.

In order to examine the broad trends in character merchandising, we should start by looking at examples of earlier efforts in the world. In his study “Dr Who? The First Cartoon Character,” Mark Bryant (2007) argues that two hundred years ago (1809) an English character, called Dr Syntax (see **Figure 3**), was “hugely successful, spawning many imitators and even creating the first ever market for tie-in merchandise.” Dr Syntax was a character in a comic poem series of the same name: the comic caricatures were drawn by the famous British artist Thomas Rowlandson and the illustrative verses were written by William Combe. The comic poem series made Dr Syntax an immense success, as well as one of the most popular characters at that time. He was synonymous with popularity and attracted the attention of numerous businesses. The image of his face appeared on many goods including plates, figurines and handkerchiefs, and so on, and British manufacturers even managed to export Syntax products abroad.



Figure 3. “Doctor Syntax Behind the Scenes at the Opera”; Source: Harry Beard Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, UK.

Another British character, Ally Sloper (1867), was also famous for being used in merchandising. Ally Sloper was created by the writer and former civil servant Charles Henry Ross and developed by his wife Marie Duval, who took over the duties of inking and fully illustrating this character. Sloper appeared in humour magazine *Judy* in 1867 (before that, his prototype had appeared elsewhere), before his stories were separately published in collectable books from 1873. These publications were responsible for building Sloper’s reputation as a star and helped the character along the commercial route. In his study “Ally Sloper: The First Comics Superstar?” Roger Sabin suggests that the book *Ally Sloper’s Guide to the Paris Exhibition* (1878; the fourth of *Judy* line) marked the possibilities of comic publication as an advertising medium, and an advert for “Brand and Co’s Own Sauce” in it could be seen as “the earliest example of a

publication starring a comics character for subliminal advertising” (2009: 179).¹ This advert also indicated that the world of Sloper had extended into areas of everyday consumerism, which helped to root the character in various corners of consumers’ lives. Sloper was depicted as a real-life character who was an entrepreneur, selling cheap consumer goods. This depiction enabled him to endorse the consumer goods sold by him. According to Sabin, “Direct endorsement of products by the character in his funny papers/comics from the 1873-1916 period would include offers of goods in which the manufacturer’s name was not mentioned, e.g. cigars (‘Ally Sloper’s Torpedoes’) and pills (‘Sloper’s Pills...cure liver complaint, headache and stomach troubles’), as well as adverts for those of named producers, e.g. bicycles, neck-ties, magic lanterns, and melodeons—the latter with an image of Sloper in the advert itself” (2009: 179). Being marketed under Sloper’s name, these products bound the character to the rise of consumerism and, more importantly, they made him an advertising star, especially as advertising had become a major form of revenue for comic publication.

In the early period of characters, comic strips and comic characters were usually owned by their publisher, who would actively look to expand the character’s role into various forms of advertising. In 1884, Sloper had his own publication—*Ally Sloper’s Half Holiday*, which, as Sabin argues, not only increased the impact of Sloper’s advertising efforts but also further developed the “dialogue” between Sloper and the reader (2009: 179-180). This dialogue was promoted by the editor of the publication, Gilbert Dalziel, who positioned adverts for the products endorsed by Sloper in regular positions—both at the back as well as, unusually, at the front of the comic, among the pages used for reader interaction including competitions, letters, and so on. At first the reader interaction was open to all and readers were sent Sloper products as free gifts as long as they gave their name and address. This evolved into a competition format in which readers sent their jokes and funny stories into the publication and those that were published won Sloper products. Through these gifts and prizes, Sloper succeeded in catching the readers’ attention. However this format also gave rise to some problems: the emergence of “bootleg” Sloper merchandise, including products such as “paperweights, mugs, door stops, walking sticks, tie pins, puppets, and games never advertised in Sloper’s publication” (Sabin, 2009: 181). This unofficial Sloper industry did increase his popularity. In the words of the newspaper *Brighton Society*, Sloper was the most famous fictional character in Britain: “He stars in a full fifty per cent of our pantomimes and hops it with the best at sixty per cent of our fancy dress balls” (21 November 1896, quoted from Sabin, 2009: 185).

At the same time, in the United States, comic strips and comic characters had become a major revenue source for distribution syndicates and publishers (Rhode, 1999). Unsurprisingly, the creators also took part in the commercial exploitation of their creations and made a lot of money. In his book *Comic Strip and Consumer Culture 1890-1945* (1998), Gordon traces the early development of character merchandising in America and examines in detail how Richard Felton Outcault and

¹Sabin (2009: 179) also points out that the popularity of the sauce lies much in its bottles rather in the advertisement. The bottles for the sauce at the time were made with Sloper’s image on them.

his characters—the Yellow Kid and Buster Brown—joined the tide of commerce. This case study provides an adequate overview of the inherent relationship between legal rights, the economy, and characters. As the “first comic strip character,” the Yellow Kid, who was an unnamed figure in a series of large comic illustrations, appeared in Pulitzer’s *Sunday World* between 1895 and 1896 (Gordon, 1998:14). Why did not he have a name at first? An explanation is offered in an interview with Outcault for *The Bookman* magazine: “The Yellow Kid was not an individual, but a type. When I used to go about the slums on newspaper assignments I would encounter him often, wandering out of doorways or sitting down on dirty doorsteps. I always loved the Kid. He had a sweet character and a sunny disposition, and was generous to a fault” (Blackbeard, 1995: 135).

Obviously Outcault did not intend to create a single character but a common type. However the Kid had several distinctive traits: he “was bald with jug ears and buck teeth, and always wore a yellow nightshirt” (Gordon, 1998: 31). These features made him stand out from the other child characters and, more importantly, accounted for his popularity in the mass market of retail products.

According to Rick Marschall and Warren Bernard, “the Yellow Kid did not so much presage but embodied the variety of licensing and merchandising uses that cartoons and cartoonists were to assume” (2011: 27). As the creator, Outcault played an active role in the commercial exploitation of the character. He completed many business deals to connect the Kid with other products. However, because of deficiencies in the copyright law on characters at that time, most of the Yellow Kid products on the market were not authorized. Outcault tried to secure his legal position regarding the Yellow Kid. However, because of a regulation that stipulated that “copyright protected specific drawings, but did not protect an artist/creator from the use of...established characters in their original drawings” (Winchester, 1995: 19), even though creators owned the drawings that represented their labour and skill, they did not have the right to control the subjects in them. Thus, the Librarian of Congress stated that “only the title [of] ‘The Yellow Kid’, not the Kid’s likeness could be copyrighted because of an irregularity in the application” (Lesser, 1975: 120). As a result, the image of the Kid was used freely by manufacturers for unauthorized products including “songbooks, buttons, chewing gum, chocolate figurines, and cigars” (Gordon, 1998: 32). Outcault could do nothing but accept it.

When Outcault realized that the Yellow Kid had slipped out of his control, he gave up the character, but his experience with the Kid had taught him to recognize the market potential of a character. The term “potential” here has two implications: one is the fact that a character should have distinguishing features rather than a generalized type; the other highlights the possibility of a character being used to market other products. Thus, after the failure to protect his rights over the Yellow Kid, Outcault created a new strip series for the *New York Herald* containing the distinctive character of Buster Brown (1902)—“the longest continuously licensed comic character” in America (Beerbohm, 1997: 5). He effectively held the rights to Buster’s likeness from the beginning and by doing so he was able to license the rights to his character to a wide variety of manufactures. For example, at the St. Louis World’s Fair in 1904, the

companies authorized to use Buster Brown were the Brown Shoe Company and the inexpensive watch company Robert Ingersoll. They worked together to use Buster Brown as a marketing promotion strategy for both of their products: Robert Ingersoll launched a Buster Brown watch and bundled it with a pair of Buster Brown shoes produced by the Brown Shoe Company. According to Gordon, the significance of this cooperation was “not so much that it borrowed the reputation of a popular comic strip character to sell products but that it linked these products in such a fashion that the character gradually constituted a brand name” (1998: 49). The combination of the Buster Brown watch and the Buster Brown shoes enlightened other manufacturers to Buster’s worth as a business brand name. They followed suit and sold various products including “textiles, harmonicas, a soft drink, coffee, flour, bread, apples, suits, hosiery, and pianos” (Gordon, 1998: 49) under the Buster Brown brand name.

This is reminiscent of the use of Ally Sloper, who endorsed numerous products and gave those products his name. Compared with Sloper, Buster Brown was obviously a much more established brand with its own right. Sloper had revealed the capacity of characters for advertising, which had connected him with a wide range of products, named and unnamed, authorized and unauthorized. However, Buster Brown exerted the same advertising effect while becoming an extensively marketed nationally known brand under effective copyright protection. In contrast to Sloper’s “random” naming practices, Buster Brown had pulled the various commercial practices surrounding him into the orbit of character merchandising.

In 1906, Outcault left the *New York Herald* for Hearst’s *New York American*, which resulted in the loss of the exclusive rights to the comic strip title Buster Brown. However, because he was able to retain all the other rights to this character, his profits were not affected: Outcault gained “\$44,000 as royalties from a Buster Brown stage show alone between 1903 and mid-1907.” In addition, Outcault established the Outcault Advertising Agency, and according to an estimate by Gordon, the US Copyright Office in the Library of Congress received “over 10,000 individual copyright registrations for advertisements using Buster Brown created by Outcault’s agency” (1998: 47; 55). These advertisements marked a shift towards a focus on the visual image of a comic strip character. Manufacturers and advertisers used Buster as an eye-catching image, a visual symbol as well as a “business trademark” (Gordon, 1998: 51). For example, for the Brown Shoe Company, Buster Brown was not only a name for its products but also a key factor in its rapid development. It was partly because of Buster’s popularity in the market and his fame among readers that the shoe company did not need to spend much on advertising as Buster Brown was the best advertisement for it, as well as a trademark that clearly marked out its products.

Buster Brown showed that a character could play multiple roles—as an advertising medium, a brand name, and a business trademark—and this profoundly influenced the subsequent development of character merchandising, particularly where Disney was concerned. Moreover, in this process Buster Brown was closely linked with consumer goods, and was transformed into items that people wanted, required, and desired, thus enriching consumer culture in America. Buster was portrayed as a young boy who always got into mischief and made mistakes, although at the last always

learning his lesson and correcting his errors. Thus purchasing Buster products not only mean consuming, but also provided a means of connecting consumers with Buster's "rebellious" personality (Gordon, 1988:55). In this way, people who consumed Buster products were establishing their own cultural identities.

After Buster Brown, Bud Fisher's *Mutt and Jeff* (1906) had huge success in merchandise. Fisher learned from Outcault's lesson and he prepared the copyright notice for the strip and registered it with the Copyright Office in advance, guaranteeing maximum benefits for him. As Robert Harvey examines, "The soaring popularity of *Mutt and Jeff* made Fisher rich beyond his wildest dream. By 1916 popular magazine articles were reporting that he earned \$150,000 a year, five years later, *Mutt and Jeff* animated cartoons and merchandising, as well as the constantly growing circulation of the strip, had increased his annual income to about \$250,000" (1994: 38). Additionally there were Peter Rabbit (1902), Felix the Cat (1919) and Bonzo the Dog (1922). Like Dr Syntax, Peter Rabbit and Bonzo the Dog were British characters. They both succeeded in character merchandising and were popular not only with British people but also the people in other areas. Peter Rabbit was created by Beatrix Potter in her children story series. After the tale of the character was first published, Potter created a soft toy of Peter Rabbit and made it be patented. This also made Peter Rabbit a licensed character to appear on a wide range of merchandise.² While different from the above-mentioned characters, Felix the Cat who was especially popular in the mid-1920s debuted in the cartoon (silent animation) field and was also a notable example of character animation.³ From the late nineteenth century, animated film entered a period of rapid development, and by the beginning of the twentieth century there had been several successes in the field, including Winsor McCay's *Gertie the Dinosaur* (1914). According to Pall Wells's description, McCay's animation works "reveal the deep-rooted fears of the Modernist era" by addressing "anxieties about relationships, the status of the body, and advances in technology" (1998: 16). *Gertie the Dinosaur* was seen as the first character animation that highlighted animated characters on screen. By the 1920s cartoon had ushered in its Golden Age, which directly contributed to Disney's creation and its character merchandising successes.

With the birth of Mickey Mouse (1928), the well-known character star, an "organized system" of character merchandising was created by Disney (WIPO, 1994: 6).⁴ According to Cecil Muncie (1974: 85-105), the beginnings of Mickey Mouse merchandising can be marked by three successive events. First, in late 1929, Walt Disney authorized a New York company the rights to use Mickey on its products. It is

²Peter Rabbit is very popular in Japan. According to Francesca Williams (2013), almost 80 per cent of the Japanese have heard the name of the character. Many of them visit the home town of the character and like to purchase its character goods.

³As Felix the Cat became popular, there were many kinds of goods featuring the character including tie pins, brooches, dolls, pillow tops, and candy, and so on (Bryman, 2004: 82).

⁴According to Bryman (2004: 82), Walt Disney's first commercial success could be traced to cartoon series featuring the character Oswald the Lucky Rabbit which brought out many profitable goods. But he met the similar copyright problem of Outcault's the Yellow Kid and received very little. Thus, like Outcault, Disney began to guard his merchandising rights and created a new character, Mickey Mouse.

said that when Walt was in New York, a man approached him in the lobby of the hotel and offered him \$300 cash for permission to use the likeness of Mickey Mouse on school writing tablets. Disney explained, “At the time, the company needed money, so I took the Three Hundred...it was the first licensing contract” (Thomas, 1998: 96)—thus this accidental meeting was the beginning of Disney’s merchandising career. In that same year, Walt Disney Productions was transformed into four separate companies, one of which (Walt Disney Enterprises) was responsible for its merchandising career. Second, in January 1930, Charlotte Clark began the small-scale production of Mickey Mouse dolls in a house rented by the Disney Company. And finally, but most importantly, in February 1930, Disney signed a contract with the George Borgfeldt Company for the international licensing, production, and distribution of Mickey Mouse merchandise. However, the Mickey merchandise produced by George Borgfeldt was of poor quality and cheap. While Disney was at first dissatisfied, at that time it was still a small organization with no capacity to police the quality of the merchandise produced or the many unlicensed items in circulation. But, quite unexpectedly, those unsatisfactory products bred the success of Mickey Mouse merchandising. As Richard DeCordova notes, “By the beginning of 1932 there were twenty-one licensees in the United States alone, most producing a number of different Mickey Mouse products. Children could, with enough money, have the image of the mouse on almost all of their possessions—their underwear, pajamas, neckties, handkerchiefs, and jewellery; their toothbrushes, hot water bottles, and bathroom accessories; their silverware and china; their toys and games; and their school supplies” (1994: 205).

This success was accelerated by the arrival of Kay Kamen. It was Kamen, affectionately known as the “father of modern licensing” and also as “a stickler for quality,” whose commitment to ensuring the quality of the Disney characters in every home in America effectively brought about the huge profits that were to guarantee Disney’s long-term development. Kamen was a wonderful salesman and by the time (1932) he signed to join Disney, he had an extensive background in marketing and merchandising which helped Disney to establish a department specializing in the secondary commercial exploitation of its characters. The first thing Kamen did was to cancel the contract with the George Borgfeldt Company and upgrade the Disney character merchandise to meet “new, higher standards of art work and design.”⁵ He also used his huge marketing networking to expand the business around Disney. As a result, under Kamen’s direction, “during the 1933 Christmas season, over 50 department stores had Disney characters in their shop windows and more than 6 million dollars of themed merchandise was sold”; by 1934, “200 stores had Disney-themed window displays”; in just four years “Kamen and his methods had raised over \$35 million for the Disney Company” (Ladonisi, 2012), as well as extending its overseas business to Paris, Milan, Lisbon, Toronto, Australia, and South America. It was these additional monies that helped Walt to pay his staff and also fund his first

⁵See Robert Heide and John Gilman, “The Master of Marketing,” *The Main Event*, Scoop, accessed 8 November 2015, <http://scoop.previewsworld.com/Home/4/1/73/1017?articleID=42056>.

full-length feature film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937). By 1938, “more than 2 million dollars’ worth of Snow White merchandise had been sold and over 117 manufacturers were licensed by Kamen to produce the characters from the film” (Ladonisi, 2012).

Coincidentally, one of Kamen’s major coups during this time was the first-ever Mickey Mouse watch (1933), produced by the Ingersoll-Waterbury Watch Company,⁶ the same manufacturer that had produced the Buster Brown watch. With its previous successful experience, the Ingersoll Watch Company might be eager to work with a character again, especially as it was on the brink of bankruptcy. Kamen guaranteed that the watches were introduced and featured at the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago in the same year, which saved Ingersoll and helped this troubled company survive the negative influence of the Great Depression. Macy’s New York department store “sold over 11,000 watches on just one day soon after they went on sale” (Bryman, 2004: 83), and “2 million more watches were sold from June 1933 to 1934” (Ladonisi, 2012). Undoubtedly this Mickey Mouse merchandising helped Mickey’s popularity to grow rapidly in the early 1930s and Mickey soon “eclipsed Felix the Cat as the world’s most popular cartoon character at that time” (Solomon, 2008).

These initial successes also guaranteed the creativity of Disney, enabling Walt to spend the profits on the release of new works in the 1940s. However, the 1940s was a difficult decade, during which Disney struggled for survival. Unbalanced investment and the Second World War added more pressure. It was the U.S. government that saved Disney from difficulties because of their need for an ambassador of goodwill. Mickey Mouse and the other Disney characters were certainly the right ones for this role. Thus, Disney began its government service and made a lot of films during the war. This experience made Disney re-appreciate the economic value of its films and the extra benefit it could gain by re-releasing them. As a result, Disney was brought back on track. It then released its films into other national markets, contributing to the popularity of Disney characters all over the world. By 1954 the year before the first Disneyland opened, “more than seven hundred other companies were releasing some three thousand other ‘Disney’ items, from Mickey Mouse weather vanes to Donald Duck hats to Minnie Mouse pencils” (Gomery, 1994: 77).

Beginning in the early 1950s, Disney developed its television network and fantasy theme park divisions. The former explored a new media field, and the latter, as Susan Davis suggests, was “one major vehicle for merchandising” (1996: 407), which opened up a golden age of profit. Triggering a new trend in character merchandising, the theme park, including the hybrid shops, restaurants, resorts and other related consumption forms, maximized the opportunities to access and purchase various forms of Disney character merchandise, and in some sense built a paradise for characters. So far the four primary divisions of the present Disney Empire are Parks

⁶The Ingersoll Watch Company grew out of a mail-order business (R H Ingersoll & Bro) started in New York City in 1882 by Robert Ingersoll and his brother. Ingersoll later bought the bankrupt New England Watch Company in 1914 and renamed it the Ingersoll Watch Company. The company went bankrupt in 1921 following its over-expansion during the First World War. It was purchased by Waterbury Clock Company in 1922.

and Resorts, Studio Entertainment, Consumer Products, and Media Networks, and character merchandising undoubtedly is a key factor among them all. As a 1958 article of *The Wall Street Journal* observed, “Disney figures it is created approximately 2,000 imaginary personalities over the years and, at last count, over 140 US firms and more than 700 abroad were helping Disney to cash in on the popularity of some 50 of these characters. About \$2 million in royalties came in from these merchandising activities last year” (quoted from Bryman, 2004: 84).⁷

The Impact on Japan

Disney’s practices had a deep impact on Japan. The most immediate was the fact that it was Disney introduced the character merchandising that could create a secondary income source for Japanese character creators and provide a legal basis that guaranteed their right. Thus, to trace the history of character merchandising in Japan, we must start with Disney. And Disney was often regarded as the first enterprise to utilize agreements to license its characters for commercial exploitation in Japan (Steinberg, 2012).

In 1929 the Mickey Mouse film *The Opry House*, was released in Japan at the same time as in the US. It was the first Disney animated short film to be shown in Japan, and led the way for subsequent screenings of Disney creations: from 1930 to 1938 15 Disney animations (see **Table 1**) were shown, including the first full colour cartoon, *Flowers and Trees* (1932), and the first animated film using a multiplane camera, *The Old Mill* (1937) (Tsugata, 2007: 16).⁸ These also contributed to the popularity of Disney characters and, unsurprisingly, even the emergence of unauthorized manga visions and other goods.⁹ This revealed, as Steinberg observes, “the significant position of Disney characters in the prewar period, but [this was] not yet bound to the character merchandising, as it would be in the postwar period” (2012: 94-95). This growth in unauthorized merchandise was due to the fact that although Disney started to extend its ambitions beyond the national border in the 1930s, it was not until the postwar period that it was able to develop character merchandising and manage the related rights in Japan. In Europe, as early as 1930 Disney had licensed Walkburger, Tanner and Company of St. Gall, Switzerland, to manufacture handkerchiefs featuring Mickey and Minnie Mouse through the George Borgfeldt Company, and William Banks Levy had become Disney's representative (1930-1933) in England, receiving the authority to license Mickey and Minnie Mouse character merchandise. However, in

⁷For a detailed account on the development of merchandising of Disney see Bryman (2004:79-102).

⁸The third Mickey Mouse film produced by Walt Disney, *Steamboat Willie* which was also the first synchronized sound cartoon, was released in 1928. There is debate about this work’s release date in Japan: some scholars note that this work was still not officially released in Japan (Rao and Omulil, 1986), and some note that this work did not land in Japan until 1933 (*Japan Pictorial*, 1982).

⁹See, for example, Hirosei Shinpei’s manga *Mikkī Chūsuke* (Mickey Chūsuke, 1934) and Shaka Bontarō’s manga *Mikki no katsuyaku* (The Activity of Mickey, 1934). According to Ōtsuka (2013), they both are the pirate works of Mickey Mouse.

contrast to these international licensing practices, Disney simply exported its works to Japan until most of foreign creations were banned during the Second World War.¹⁰

In the postwar period, Disney's influence became even stronger, as the United States' occupation had a major impact on the culture and society of Japan. According to Japanese historian Tsurumi Shunsuke (1984), the control of United States created new values for the Japanese in three areas: first in food, second in lifestyle, and lastly in the sense of justice. As the primary provider of foodaid at the time, the United States brought "flour, corn, powdered milk, and chocolate and chewing gum for children," as well as a flood of American films (Tsurumi, 1984: 19). By this opportunity, Disney creations returned to the nation from 1950. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* restarted Disney's journey into Japan and was followed by *Bambi* (1942) in 1951, *Pinocchio* (1940) in 1952, *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) in 1953, *Dumbo* (1941) in 1954, *Fantasia* (1940) and *Peter Pan* (1953) in 1955, and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) in 1960 (Tsugata, 2004: 217-224; Stingray and Nichigai Associates, 2010: 892-893). For Japanese children at the time, "going to visit the cinema to see Disney films on specially designated days [had] become a part of primary school education in Japan" (Ono, 1983, quoted from Kinsella, 1996: 241). This memory actually validates what *Shūkan Shinchō* (Weekly Shinchō) magazine noted in 1957, when it stated that "cartoon fever had reached Japan" (quoted from Minakawa, 2009: 109). In the 1920s and 1930s, alongside Disney many other American comic and cartoon works and characters, such as Max Fleischer's Betty Boop (1930), also came to Japan and became well known (Kinsella, 2000; *Kinema jumpō*, 1932). As happened to Disney, because of the war, further works including these characters were not able to be released until the 1950s, and it was not until then that related character merchandising opportunities took off in Japan.

What cartoon fever implied was a tendency towards American lifestyle at the time. Such a tendency was driven much by the images of American prosperity presented during occupation and later, including the affluent consumer goods in American military shops and the middle class abundance projected in American films, television shows, comics and cartoons, and the advanced technology imported from America, which laid the foundation of the development of mass media in postwar Japan. As Marilyn Ivy observed the American serials on television at the time, "These descriptions of 'typical' American families surrounded by consumer luxuries and electric appliances such as refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, and washing machine---- and with family car parked in the driveway----had a powerful impact on the Japanese psyche. The middle-class 'American way of life' became the utopian goal and the dream of many Japanese in the 1950s, a goal tied to unflagging hard work as the basis for commodity acquisition" (1993: 249). Among these, Disney was noticeable since it delivered an American worldview, American superiority and values, and its characters

¹⁰According to the reports of film magazine *Kinema jumpō* (21 September and 21 November edition, 1931) of 1930s, the Disney works that were exported include animated films, comic strips, and illustrations of Disney characters. Because of the war, most of the foreign animations were banned in the public sphere. There was exception such as Chinese animated film *Tieshan gongzhu* (Princess Iran Fan) was made in 1941 and released in Japan in 1942. The Japanese animation works at the time such as *Momotarō: Umi no shinpei* (Momotarō, Sacred Sailors, 1945) were created for promoting militarism.

were always recognized as an American identity and style (Dorfman and Mattelart, 1971).

Year	Title and the Original Release Date
1930	<i>The Skeleton Dance</i> (1929)
1933	<i>Mickey's Orphans</i> (1931)
	<i>The Klondike Kid</i> (1932)
	<i>Building a Building</i> (1933)
	<i>Flowers and Trees</i> (1932)
	<i>Three Little Kittens</i> (1933)
1934	<i>Musical Farmer</i> (1932)
	<i>Funny Little Bunnies</i> (1934)
1935	<i>The Band Concert</i> (1935)
	<i>The Tortoise and the Hare</i> (1935)
	<i>Who Killed Cock Robin</i> (1935)
1936	<i>Three Orphan Kittens</i> (1935)
	<i>Thru the Mirror</i> (1936)
1937	<i>The Country Cousin</i> (1936)
1938	<i>The Old Mill</i> (1937)

Table 1. Disney shorts screened in Japan from 1930-1938; Source: Tsugata, 2007: 16.

Cartoon fever also rapidly led to the appearance of character toys on the Japanese market. As Steinberg notes, the advertisement for the first Disney toy—a Bambi rifle advertised in the *Gangu shōhō* (Toy Trade) journal (later renamed Toys Magazine) in 1952—indicated that it had been authorized by Disney to use its characters. Subsequently, in 1957, Disney produced a series of inflatable Disney character shapes and balls, which were also advertised in this magazine. Again, the advertisements prominently featured a “notice” claiming that “the copyright is owned by Walt Disney Production and the products here are the result of a contract engaged with Disney’s representative in Japan, Nagata Masaichi” (Steinberg, 2012: 102).

At the beginning of its exploitation of character merchandise, Disney chose a native film firm—Daiei Motion Picture Company—as its film distributor as well as its representative for matters of character merchandising. Nagata Masaichi, as the leader of Daiei, actively led the development of the merchandising of Disney characters, which were described as “fanciful characters” in the contract with Disney (Kayama and Bandai Kyarakutā Kenkyūjo, 2001:186). It is from this particular contract that the term “character” was imported to Japan and it was also the first to include legal references to character merchandising (Odagiri, 2010). In 1952, Nagata licensed the character image of Bambi to the confectioner Ikeda Seika for the production of “Ikeda Bambi” caramel (Ogawa, 2015). However Nagata’s exploitation appeared to be less

At the same time, a production company aspiring to be the “Disney of the Orient” (*tōyō no Diziniū*) (Yamaguchi, 2004: 66), Tōei Dōga (Toei Animation), was set up in 1956. Its most extraordinary achievement was the introduction of the advanced American animation production system in Japan, which made it possible to finish production of a feature-length film within a reasonable time (Yamaguchi, 2004: 67-68). In the words of Ōkawa Hiroshi, the head of Tōei, “...we shall progressively produce and give birth to American-Disney’s professional standard of animated film” (*Eiga nenkan*, 1960: 332, quoted from Hu, 2010: 91). Indeed, this system not only improved the efficiency of production but also contributed to early outstanding animated features such as *Hakujaden* (The White Snake Enchantress, 1958), *Shōnen Sarutobi Sasuke* (Magic Boy, 1959), and *Saiyūki* (Journey to the West, 1960). Tōei’s capacity to imitate the Disney pattern was manifest, in terms of both art and technology, which greatly inspired young would-be animators all over Japan. It is worth mentioning that *Saiyūki* was based on the manga *Boku no Songokū* (My Songokū, 1952) by Tezuka Osamu (1928-1989), who was later hailed as the “god of manga” (*manga no kamisama*). This was Tezuka’s first real involvement in producing animation and actually launched his animation career. One year after the release of *Saiyūki*, in 1961, Tezuka formed his own animation studio—Mushi Production (the company was initially called Tezuka Osamu Production, but was given its current name in 1962). It was Mushi Production that produced the first character merchandising star in Japan—Atomu.

Before turning to Atomu, it is important to note one more key element in the rise of characters: the mass communication environment of postwar Japan. Due to procurement of goods and services by the American military during the Korean War, the Japanese economy received a boost in the early 1950s and this ushered in the first period of high growth (Kosai, 1986: 70-74). With the economic recovery, televisions, washing machines, and refrigerators, the so-called three sacred treasures (*sanshu no jingi*), quickly became popular in Japan and became common items in households (Yoshimi, 1999: 155). The mass media, including newspapers, magazines, radio programmes and films, also flourished in Japanese life and a diverse mass communication environment gradually came into being (Ivy, 1993: 247-248). In this environment, the development of manga was remarkable. After the war, poverty and hunger had compelled the Japanese to explore new spiritual handholds to assuage their fear of an uncertain future. At the time, manga, as an easily affordable form of entertainment, was a favourite with most Japanese people. Thus, in the postwar years there was a boom in *shinbun manga* (newspaper-published serialized manga), manga magazines, *akahon* (literally, “red book”),¹¹ and *emonogatari* (graphic stories). By the 1950s, children’s manga was particularly popular. Many manga masterpieces targeted children, such as Tezuka’s *Tetsuwan Atomu* (Mighty Atomu, 1952), the tale of a child robot, and Fukui Ei’ichi (1921-1954) and Takeuchi Tsunayoshi’s (1922-1987) *Akadō*

¹¹*Akahon*, literally meaning red books, was mainly the picture printings for children since the early Meiji period. It was always cheap, easy and made by red paper.

Suzunosuke (1954),¹² the tale of a child swordsman. These manga accompanied children as they grew up and greatly enriched their lives. Meanwhile, influenced by the mass communication environment, they also took advantage of other media, making their characters mass media stars.

The first mass media character star was Akadō Suzunosuke who was also the first manga character to be turned into other media (Kan, 1968: 109-110). He comes from the manga work of the same name which depicted a young swordsman who was not afraid of difficulties and insisted on his faith about sword. The peak of his fame came in 1957, as a result of the success of his radio show and television dramas. By the end of his radio show, according to Honma Masao, the character had been known by “90 percent of boys and 80 percent of girls” (2000: 76-78, quoted from Steinberg, 2012: 229). While the boom was much promoted by his transmedia movement (something to which I will discuss in chapter 2), more importantly it benefited from character goods—Akadō toys.

According to Allison, since the early 20th century, the toy industry had grown to be a vital part of the Japanese economy. Based on their “high quality, low price, and detailed design,” Japanese toys (mainly metallic products) had quickly won a reputation around the world (2006: 36-40). By the middle of the 1930s the industry had welcomed its golden age: its products were exported to international markets such as the U.S., Britain, British India, Australia, New Zealand, and the Philippines, and the value of the trade reached 42 million yen in 1937, taking fourth place in Japanese exports at the time (Saitō, 1971: 228-231). However, with the outbreak of the war between China and Japan, the whole industry sank under dim prospects due to the fact that the materials needed were too precious to use for playthings. At first the production of metallic toys was only limited, but by 1938 production for the domestic market was prohibited (Saitō, 1989). Production remained constricted after the war due to shortages. The makers tried everything to produce toys, including using empty food tin cans discarded by the Supreme Command Allied Powers (SCAP), the offices of the occupation led by General Douglas MacArthur (Saitō, 1971). With these they primarily produced Jeep models that imitated those of the American soldiers; this contributed to the revival of the whole industry. Because these toys were not only popular with Japanese children but also with the American soldiers, many of them were exported by SCAP officials for American children. In this way, Japan’s postwar toy trade was revived and it not only gradually returned to prewar levels but also contributed considerably to rebuilding the national economy. By 1953, the value of exports had reached 8.2 billion yen (Saitō, 1971: 311). With the rise of the mass media in the postwar period, the toy industry also paid close attention to the stars of the mass media.

Allison (2006) also notes, since the late 1950s mass media characters were increasingly transformed into toy merchandise under the influence of manga and television on children’s mass culture. This toy merchandise was known as *masukomi*

¹²Fukui was the original creator who suddenly passed away after finishing the first episode and then Takeuchi took over the work and developed it.

gangu (mass communication toys) and was very popular with children. According to Japanese toy specialist Saitō Ryōsuke, a popular item among those *masukomi gangan* was the Akadō sword, which was made into a toy by Takayoku Gangu KK, “the first maker to use the term *masukomi gangu* in its promotions” (1978: 279-282). Following the popularity of the Akadō sword many other mass media characters such as Gekkō Kamen (Moonlight Mask, 1958), Maboroshi Tantei (the Phantom Detective, 1957) and Hakuba Dōji (the White Horse Boy, 1960) were transformed into the production of the related toys, most of which were swords, knives, guns and watches modelled on the characters’ accessories or attributes.¹³ These props realized the children’s dream “to *be* the character” in real life (Steinberg, 2012: 103; emphasis in original). And they actually increased the intimacy and interaction between the toys and the children, and immersed the children in the world of characters and became an effective means of entertainment. Children liked to spend their pocket money on these toys, as evidenced by the fact that “several hundred thousand Akadō swords were sold in the first three years” (Saitō, 1978: 279). Their direct motivation for this was very much based on a desire for characters, which was further magnified with the coming of the next media star, Atomu.

Since its introduction in 1953, television had rapidly become popular all over the country. According to Japanese scholar Fukushima Akira, the national broadcast of the crown prince’s wedding in 1959 facilitated the growth in the coverage rate of television: “10.4% in 1958, and 23.6% in 1959, but 44.7% in 1960” (2008: 41). In 1960 colour television became available and soon caught up with Japan’s newspapers as the major form of mass media. Television also attracted the attention of many children, so much so that there was “at least one among five children watching television for five hours a day” (Fukushima, 2008: 41). At this time, many Japanese creators chose to attempt the challenge of creating a television animation series.

Despite this enthusiasm, the production of television animation requires both time and money. For example, according to Yamaguchi Yasuo (2004: 75) who used to be an animation director of Tōei, at Tōei, using the imported American production system, it took 200-300 staff one and a half years and at least 60 million yen to produce a feature-length animation. By this gauge, to make a 30-minute television animation would take 100 people half a year and 20-30 million yen. When Tezuka decided to make the animated TV series, *Tetsuwan Atomu* (see **Figure 6**) based on his manga stories, he spent an average of 2.5 million yen per episode, despite trying to adopt the limited animation method which minimizes the number of drawings and maximizes their utilization (Yamamoto, 1989).¹⁴ However, after considering the balance between the production costs of the television programme and the desire to dominate the

¹³According to Steinberg, all of these toys were unlicensed because at the time “it was still rare for toy makers to pay royalties either for the use of the character image or for producing items based on the character” (2012: 236).

¹⁴For example, comparing with the method of full animation that projects the work at 12 to 18 frames (distinct images) per second, Tezuka’s limited animation method does it at 8 or less frames per second. Being developed by Tezuka, such a limited animation method becomes an important feature of Japanese animation.

market, he ultimately sold each episode at a price of 550,000 yen (Tezuka, 1999: 242).¹⁵ 550,000 yen versus 2.5 million yen, such low price did not cover the huge production costs and Tezuka himself recognized this. Hence, he expected to rely on the royalties from character merchandising, in the same way as Disney, and on the income from his manga to guarantee the production of the TV animation.



Figure 6. Atomu manga advertisement; Source: *Asahi Shinbun* newspaper, 18 March 1964.

In fact, as Tezuka mentioned in interviews and his autobiography, Disney had influenced him in many ways: when he was very young, he was fascinated by Mickey Mouse; after Disney films could again be seen in Japan, he went to see *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* over 50 times and *Bambi* over 80 times; and he was not only inspired by the way Disney earned money through licensing the use of characters, but by the style it used in its character designs (Tezuka, 1973; 1978; 2000). According to Yamamoto Ei'ichi, one of the six original members of Mushi Production, the company's goal in the early years was "creating interesting commercial animations to make a profit to finance experimental work" (Yamamoto, 1989: 63). After the first

¹⁵There is a debate about the price. The official price published by Tezuka was 550,000 yen. However, according to the memory of Yamamoto Ei'ichi (1989: 94) who was an early member of Mushi Production, the price was 750,000 yen. Tsugata (2007: 122-126) suggests Mushi Production received an additional 1 million yen, a total of 1,550,000 yen for each episode.

experimental film *Aru machikado no monogatari* (Story of a Certain Street Corner, 1962), Tezuka focused on profitable work in the form of the *Atomu* TV series. When Tezuka made a deal with Fuji Television, one of the premises of the agreement was the participation of a sponsor. Thus Tezuka contacted Morinaga Seika and Meiji Seika the two foremost confectionery companies in Japan. Perhaps because of the prior experience of cooperating with Disney, or because *Atomu* was an untested character, Morinaga hesitated, but Meiji agreed to come on board. Thus Tezuka linked up with Meiji Seika as the sponsor, and this company utilized *Atomu*'s image on the premium (*Atomu* stickers, see **Figure 7**) in its product Marble Chocolate, which later came to be “the most desirable of food premiums available at the time” and helped Meiji to become number one in the chocolate market (Steinberg, 2012: 58).



Figure 7. The advertisement of *Atomu* stickers of Meiji Marble Chocolate; Source: *Yomiuri Shinbun* newspaper, 11 August 1963.

When the *Atomu* TV series was broadcast, it was a major success, with an average rating of 30 per cent, and this increased Mushi Production's royalty income. Tezuka set up the copyright department of Mushi Production especially to handle its merchandising career (Kitano, 1998). According to an article of *Asahi Jānaru* (Asahi Journal) magazine, “The group that signed the agreement with Mushi Production was called the *Atomu* Committee and included both regular and associate members, a total of 50 companies. They represented many industries, including food, stationery, clothes, shoes and toys, and according to Yimayi, the manager of Mushi Production, the number of related products totalled over 800” (24 May 1964, quoted from Takeuchi, 2008: 231). The market was soon inundated with *Atomu* character goods. Because of this, *Yomiuri shinbun* newspaper (22 August 1964) commented that *Atomu* was the “top manga star,” who had followed the trend for character merchandising led by Disney and had made a huge profit for Tezuka's Mushi Production. *Shūkan Gendai* (Modern Weekly) magazine pointed out that Mushi Production “used to be a small company with funds of only 2 million yen, but it has now grown to be a medium-sized enterprise with 150 staff and annual sales of 120 million yen” (30 January 1969, quoted from Takeuchi, 2008: 231). *Atomu*'s extraordinary popularity and commercial success

enabled Tezuka to eliminate Mushi Production's debts and sustain its further development.¹⁶

Atomu was indeed the first character merchandising star, but he was not the first to practice merchandising in Japan. In addition to the above-mentioned Akadō Suzunosuke, as far back as the 1920s when modern manga was just germinating in Japan,¹⁷ a character called Shō-chan (little shō) became a favourite with many businesses. Shō-chan came from the manga book *Shō-chan no bōken* (The Adventures of Little Shō, 1923) drawn by Kabashima Katsu'ichi (1888-1965) and authored by Oda Shōsei (1889-1967). He first appeared in the pictorial magazine of the publisher of the *Asahi Shinbun* newspaper, the *Asahi Gurafu* (Asahi Graphic). According to Takeuchi Osamu (1995), the work was inspired by Austin Bouen Payne's comic strip, *Pip, Squeak and Wilfred* (1919-1956), which was being serialized in the British newspaper the *Daily Mirror*. This was confirmed by Suzuki Bunshirō, then chief editor of the *Asahi Gurafu* magazine. Because of this, the style of Shō-chan was in line with Western aesthetics. What is more, the realism that was also embedded in this work contributed, as Ōtsuka Eiji suggests, to building a regular and recognizable character, potentially making *Shō-chan no bōken* the "first character manga" in Japan (2013: 95). More and more readers thus began to notice the character—Shō-chan.

Like Ally Sloper, the British character discussed in last section, the written correspondence between *Shō-chan no bōken* and its readers played a special role in its development. However, in contrast to Sloper's letters, which mainly exchanged humorous materials for gifts or prizes, most of the letters to Shō-chan were to express the readers' wishes to be his friends. Their concerns were about the more specific details (the setting) of the character. For example, readers would take note of slight changes to Shō-chan's face and would express concern in their letters that he might be sick; if Shō-chan's leg seemed shorter, they would ask whether he had been hurt in his adventures; if Shō-chan was wearing a knitted cap with a large pom-pom on top in summer, they began to ask whether he was likely to get heatstroke or where he had bought the hat (Takeuchi, 1995, quoted from Ōtsuka, 2013: 78-96). It was at the moment when readers were wondering about the hat that some merchants saw a business opportunity and launched the Shō-chan-bō (little Shō's hat). As a result, the popularity of the Shō-chan-bō swept the nation and became a social phenomenon. The Osaka branch of the *Asahi Shinbun* newspaper gathered all the local boys called Shō-chan near Osaka city and provided them with free food and free Shō-chan-bō, sponsored by the hat merchants; pictures of the boys wearing hats and meeting (see

¹⁶According to Kitano Tai'itsu (1998: 28), the income that character merchandising of Atomu brought out supported the subsequent Tezuka's anime works such as *Janguru taitei* (Jungle emperor, 1965) and *Wandā surī* (W 3, 1965). However, Tezuka did not suggest that anime works should aim at creating a successful character with much commercial potential. He later said, "if only Atomu was not that successful."

¹⁷In *Nilon mangashi*, the earliest history of manga in Japan, Hoseikibara Seiki argues that manga originates from the Japanese traditional painting, *chōju-jinbutsu-giga* in 12th century and is deeply impacted by the traditional painting. Such influence continues to the early modern era, for example, Katsushika Hokusai's creations in late Edo period. However, Ōtsuka (2013: 17-18) suggests that from then on manga was gradually separated from the tradition and deeply influenced by Disney, which spawned the development of modern manga.

Figure 8) were published in both the *Asahi Shinbun* newspaper and the *Asahi Gurafu* magazine, to great promotional effect (Tsurumi, 1984). The Shō-chan-bō was not only seen as the earliest example of a character product that created a precious memory for the young generation of the time (see **Figure 9**), but also as another name of this kind of bobble hat, which gradually became an indispensable part of Japanese daily life (see **Figure 10**).¹⁸



Figure 8. The New Year Party for “Shō-chans” who wore Shō-chan-bō in Osaka; Source: *Asahi Grafu* magazine, 28 January 1925, 12-13.

In this period another key manga character was Norakuro who, as Ōtsuka (2013) argues, embodied the structuralism and the artistic influence of Disney. In fact during the prewar development of Disney in Japan, its greatest contribution was creating shocks in the art and technique spheres that encouraged many Japanese creators to engage in manga and anime careers. Norakuro’s creator Tagawa Suihō (1899-1989) was a member of the avant-garde structuralism movement in Japan that tended to interpret Mickey Mouse in terms of geometry, and this was reflected in Tagawa’s style. In this sense, Ōtsuka argues that Norakuro “did not inherit the characteristics of Japanese traditional painting so much as Disney’s Mickey Mouse” (2013:12). Although the artistic form was in line with Disney’s creations, the character merchandising was not. After his serialization in children’s magazine *Shōnen Kurabu* (Boys’ Club), Norakuro soon became popular with children and his image appeared on various Japanese children’s goods, including stationery, clothes, bags, lunch boxes, musical instruments, and toys (Katō, 1968). However, most of these products were unlicensed because there was still little sense of profit and still less legal protection around character merchandising. It was rare for the creators to require manufacturers to pay royalties for the use of their characters. Tagawa even stated, “There is nothing wrong

¹⁸For example, according to Ōtsuka, “People of a similar age to my grandmother still call a knitted hat with a bobble on it a Shō-chan-bō” (2008: 116); a textile businessman recalls his of production line in the 1970s and writes in his biography, “At that time I wanted to produce a small number of ladies’ hats and a large number of Shō-chan-bō” (Yamaguchi, 2004: 96).

because these products are so good that they make everyone happy to use Norakuro; rather than receiving royalties, it promotes Norakuro at no cost” (Katō, 1968: 104-105; Yamaguchi, 1990: 248). As Odagiri Hiroshi (2010) argues, aside from the individual personality of the creator and the lack of a strict legal framework, this is indicative of the initially different attitudes between Japanese creators and American creators. Nevertheless, after Disney’s re-launch in Japan with its character merchandising, everything changed.

Following Disney, Tezuka Osamu pioneered the ideas of character merchandising, marking his characters with copyright symbols and receiving royalties through licensing the use of his characters (Yamamoto, 1989; Tsuchiya, 1995; Yamaguchi, 2004; Schodt, 2007; Steinberg, 2012). Tezuka then exported his most successful character, Atomu, including the TV series and toy merchandise to the United States (TV series aired in the U.S. in September 1963) and other countries, which opened up the overseas market for future Japanese TV anime series. Furthermore, Tezuka chose to use a contract instead of a buyout, which guaranteed an income of about 200 million yen for Mushi Production (Yamamoto, 1989), and he even went to the United States himself to sign it. In this sense, Tezuka and his character Atomu really paved the way for the development of character merchandising in Japan. It was with Atomu that character merchandising in Japan stepped into a new era.



Figure 9. A poster of the exhibition of *Shō-chan no bōken* held by Hankyū-men’s (department store), Osaka, ©2014Kabashima /Oda/ HIROKEN Co., Ltd All Rights reserved; Source: Hankyū, “*Ima mo furubinai modan na gafū: Nihon hatsu no kyarakutā manga ‘shō-chan no bōken ten’*” (Until today still fresh modern drawing style: the exhibition of the first character manga in Japan), 8 September 2014.



Figure 10. The hat brand *Kashira* (CA4LA) launched the Shō-chan-bō collection in 2014 for the 90th anniversary (2013) of Shō-chan; Source: CA4LA Online store.

Conclusion

The overall goal of this chapter has been to locate characters within the system of merchandising, and, by looking at the definition of character merchandising and its history, explore how characters are connected with commodities and involved in consumers' daily lives. In this regard, two hundred years ago through tie-ins with various products Dr Syntax, the British comic character, pioneered the creation of a consumer market for characters, and this was even extended abroad. With the development of advertising, another British character Ally Sloper (1867) became a celebrity endorser of products and services in the late nineteenth century. And beginning with later American character, the Yellow Kid (1895), the importance, especially for the creators, of holding the legal rights to character merchandising to protect the use of the characters became even clearer. The arrival of Buster Brown in 1902 heralded the production of a paradigm for subsequent development; as an early successful case, it revealed the versatility of character merchandising in advertising, branding, and trade-marking. These practices led to Disney's successes, and it created an organized system for character merchandising, a key factor in the success of the whole Disney empire.

Generally speaking, it was Disney that introduced the concept of character merchandising to Japan, including the importation of the term of "character," the first use of contracts surrounding the rights to use a character, and its character promotion strategy. Disney was the enlightener of Japan. This also explains why Disney characters such as Mickey Mouse and Winnie the Pooh are so popular with the Japanese and why they always occupy the top spots in the rankings of character retail products.¹⁹ Moreover, character merchandising balanced the finances for creators, who were able to receive royalties through licensing. Hence, character merchandising in Japan is also known as the "copyright business." The term "character merchandising" did not become well known until the late 1970s, when the boom in Star Wars and the

¹⁹For example, *Charabiz DATA* (2010: 26) ranked Mickey Mouse and Winnie the Pooh as the fourth and sixth of the best 100 characters of 2009 in Japan in terms of popularity.

popularity of the cinema-complex model laid the foundation for the use of this term.²⁰ The popularity of this term implies that characters have become part of daily consumption and have attracted more and more consumers to consume them. This implication is a theme that unfolds in the next chapter—in which consumers of characters and character consumption are studied. The chapter will explore in detail the kinds of consumer products that characters are transformed into, what kind of consumption of characters has arisen, and also the kind of culture and society that these items depict.

²⁰Although since the 1960s the term character merchandising had appeared in the reports of Japanese newspapers such as above mentioned 1964 article of Atomu being “top manga star,” it was followed by the Japanese term, *shōhin keikaku* (commodity plan). Cinema-complexes, known as “cine-con” and usually built with other commercial facilities such as shopping centers, typically have more than one screen. They were developed following the growth of the film industry. According to Odagiri (2010: 40-46), the earliest example of a Japanese cine-con might be the Tōkyū bunka kaikan (Tōkyū cultural center), Shibuya, Tokyo, which opened in 1956. The boom of *Star Wars* promoted the popularity of cine-con further and encouraged people to become more emotionally involved in and have more direct encounters with character merchandising.

Chapter 2

Character Consumers and Consumption

In his pioneering book *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*, anthropologist Daniel Miller looks at the relationship between people and things and argues that “the human subject cannot be considered outside the material world within which, and through which, it is constructed” (1987: 86). He suggests to investigate things in the specific contexts, since the diversity of commodities, the various origins of their production, the multiple interests invested in them during their different stages (such as design and promotion) and the distinctive social-cultural contexts of their use and consumption have made a complex material culture (Lee, 2000: 11). “What underlies this complexity is less an appeal for pluralism than a recognition of a pluralism which already confronts us,” continues Miller (1987: 175). He focuses on mass consumption and notes that the materiality of commodities matters. His argument is particularly relevant for character consumption. As I explained in Chapter 1, characters are commodified through the practice of character merchandising, by which the rights to characters are licensed to various producers and transformed into a great variety of character goods. In this sense, character merchandising may function as an effective mechanism that continually provides new forms and materials for consumption, which already displays a certain degree of familiarity. Since the 1970s characters have become an important feature of mainstream consumption, functioning as a social-cultural tie between private and public, connecting old and young, men and women, consumers with different interests and preferences. The story of how characters entered their lives offers an effective tool for the investigation of the relationship with between people and objects. This is the main objective of this chapter.

Character Consumers

It is taken for granted that children are the main consumers of character commodities. Producers of toys and food for children frequently employ character goods in order to appeal to their consumers. Indeed, the Shō-chan-bō, the Akadō sword and the Atomu stickers described in the previous chapter are all products targeted specifically at children. In their study *Children as Consumers* (1998) Barrie Gunter and Adrian Furnham suggest, children from an early age spend a lot on sweets, toys, clothing, electronics, entertainment and hobbies. In this sense, “children are, like adults, avid consumers” (Jansson-Boyd, 2010: 158). And their behaviour is easily influenced by the mainstream media, particularly television (Bushman and Huesmann, 2001). Moreover, Gunter and Furnham note, the focus on the children consumers has been especially directed towards “understanding the types of products and services they purchase and the extent to which they influence family purchase decisions” (1998: 2).

In Japan as well, character merchandising primarily targeted children and by doing so inculcated them to become “fully functioning capitalists even as financed by parents” (Yano, 2013: 29), whose desire to consume character goods was increasingly

stimulated. However, character consumers are not only children but also adults (which can be seen from previous Ally Sloper's products such as cigars). Thus as characters developed in Japan, producers quickly realized that character goods could potentially develop into a market for adults and step by step began to expand their markets. Today, both children and adults are important consumers of characters in Japan.

Targeting Children

Starting with Atomu in 1963, large quantities of licensed character goods emerged in the market, especially the Atomu stickers that were launched by the sponsor of the *Atomu* television series, Meiji Seika, as the premium in their chocolate products and were quite popular with children. For example, as Steinberg examines, its first official campaign took the form of "a prize-in-the-mail variety of premium" (after this campaign finished it turned to the in-package premiums): children could receive the Atomu sticker as a reward in the mail by sending two tops of Marble Chocolates boxes; at last through this campaign Meiji had "received a total of 3.7 million requests for sticker sheets—overwhelming the local post office—and saw its Marble Chocolates sales soar" (2012: 58). According to Tsugata Nobuyuki (2007), it was from the experience of Atomu in 1963 that business executives learned that character merchandising could be a powerful source of revenue; with this in mind, many sponsors such as toy makers and food companies preferred merchandising rights to characters over other forms of advertising.

For example, a competitor of Meiji Seika, the confectionery company Glico looked at Tetsujin 28-gō (Iron Man no. 28), the main character of the manga of the same name, created by Mitsuteru Yokoyama (1934-2004) in 1956. The manga was later adapted into a television anime series by the Television Corporation of Japan and aired on Fuji TV from 20 October 1963. The series concentrated on the adventures of a young boy called Kaneda Shōtarō, who controlled a giant robot named Tetsujin 28-gō. The television series was among the first Japanese animation series to feature a giant robot. Glico sponsored the broadcast of the TV anime series and promoted the character goods, Tetsujin 28-gō badges, through its products, using a similar method to the Atomu stickers.

Following Mushi Production and the Television Corporation of Japan, Tōei soon started its television production and distribution and launched its first television anime series, *Ōkami shōnen Ken* (Wolf Boy Ken, 1963), which imitated Tezuka in that it utilized character merchandising to pay its debts and turn a profit. Its characters appeared on the labels of products such as *manga kokoa* (manga-cocoa-powder, see **Figure 11**) and *terebi gannu* (television-chewing-gum) produced by Morinaga Seika, which had lost the battle for Atomu sponsorship with Meiji Seika. The battle, known as "chocolate war," led by Meiji Seika's product, Marble Chocolate which was warmly welcomed by Japanese children because of the novelty of the package design, products

and marketing campaign (Steinberg, 2012: 58).¹ In response to Meiji's success, Morinaga also released the similar chocolate product, Parade Chocolate, but at last still lost. The key to help Meiji win the war was its cooperation with Atomu and launched the Atomu stickers in its Marble Chocolate.

Leading candy manufacturers, such as Meiji, Glico and Morinaga, usually placed “character-cum-stickers” on their products, which made them extra desirable for young consumers (Ichihashi, 2002). Pharmaceutical producers constituted the second largest category of sponsors: Fujisawa Yakuhin sponsored *Shōnen ninja kaze no Fujimaru* (Fujimaru of the Wind, 1964), Takeda Seiyaku sponsored *Urutoraman* (Ultra Man, 1966), and Ōtsuka Seiyaku sponsored *Kyojin no hoshi* (Star of the Giants, 1968). What the early sponsors of characters had in common was that they were all closely linked with “the body and growth of children” (Hikawa, 2005:15). This was by no means a coincidence.



Figure 11. The advertisement of *Okami shōnen Ken* stickers in Morinaga Seika's manga-cocoa-product; Source: *Yomiuri Shinbun* newspaper, 25 November 1963.

As Millie Creighton notes, children are cherished in Japan since ancient times in Japan, as it testifies by the saying “*ko wa takara*” (children are treasures) (1994: 35), and today the common expression of children as treasures equates to offering them more consumer goods. I argue, this implication also reveals an important aspect of the postwar Japanese children's lives.

After the Second World War, attention paid to children increased. In 1949, the Japanese government released *Jidō Hakusho* (The Children's White Paper) and established a national day for children. In 1951, *Jidō kenshō* (The Children's Charter) was published, which aimed to increase the understanding of children and ensure their happiness. In the high-growth period that followed, when technological innovation (*gijutsu kakushin*) was seen as the most effective way of rebuilding the nation (*Keizai*

¹According to Steinberg's examination, there were two marketing campaigns of Marble Chocolate in the 1960s: the first period (1962-1963) was developed around Uehara Yukari, a five-year-old girl who soon became famous because of the chocolate and was affectionately known as “Marble-chan” (Little Miss Marble); the second period (1963-1966) was based on Atomu (2012: 48).

hakusho, 1956), children were seen as forming the foundations for it. As Prime Minister Ikeda Hayato (1899-1965) stated in his speech to the Japan Congress in 1962, “I will do my best to develop the talented person [*hito zukuri*] that is fundamental for building the nation [*kuni zukuri*]...particularly to cultivate children and young people’s good moral character and patriotism and make them learn knowledge and technology that are necessary for the progress of the era.” Ikeda’s words indicated that with the recovery from the devastation of the war and the increase in economic prosperity, the talent pool that children represented was the future of the nation as well as the family. Hence, in the survey conducted by *Yomiuri Shinbun* newspaper in 1968 based on a national sample of 10,000 persons between 15 and 79 years of age, to the question “what is your chief concern in life?”, 24.1 per cent answered “my family,” and 24.4 per cent, “my children” (1 January 1969, quoted from Ishida, 1971: 102).

This concern for children found articulation in the term “edutainment” (Creighton, 1992: 49), a combination of education and entertainment. The idea of this concept was especially reflected in children’s lives. For instance, according to Japanese children’s culture specialist Katō Osamu’s study, in one report in the prewar magazine *Fūzoku gahō* (Folklore Illustrated) a father recalled his experience of an *omocha-ya* (toy shop) and stated, “The toy shop is another aspect of family education. And it has many indirect benefits. I approve of the toy shop that can care for children” (2010: 26-27). Katō notes that most of the advertisements for toy shops in Tokyo at the time were based on education, which demonstrated that “the idea that toys must be educational is one of common sense between the producers and those who need the toys” (2010: 27).

This common sense continued in the postwar period which was particularly valued by mothers. Japan is a country that places a high value on mother–child bonding; thereby the mother is seen as the best and most important early educator for her children (Creighton, 1994: 37). For instance, as Tony Dickensheets investigates “The Role of the Education Mama” in Japan and points out that the ideal of *ryōsai kenbo* (good wife and wise mother) defines the task of Japanese women and places them as the “managers of household affairs and nurturers of the nation’s children” (1996: 74).² Since 1955 these wise mothers hold their convention called *Nihon hahaoya taikai* (Japan Mother’s Congress; by 2016 it has been the 62nd) every year. They focus on the impact of societal changes on children and respond it actively.³ Particularly they care about their children’s education. Norma Field (1995: 63) examines the childhood of Japanese children and notes that in postwar period many activities were directed at education and developed it to be a rights-centered, antimilitarist and democratized domain. Japanese mothers also threw themselves in those activities. Except for the

²*Ryōsai kenbo* was constructed in the ideology of late Meiji period. According to Kathleen Uno (1993: 293-322), at the end of 19th century, the term was promoted by the Ministry of Education, and gradually became an official discourse on woman in Japan at the end of the Second World War. After the war though the restructuring of the state and society and the democracy nurtured by American occupation affected this term, as Uno suggests, it still remained influential in Japan until the late 1980s. In postwar period, the term particularly emphasized the role of the latter, the wise mother.

³For example, the first *Nihon hahaoya taikai* was held for protesting the hydrogen bomb test conducted by U.S. in Bikini Atoll.

mother congress, they took part in the nationwide *akusho tsuuhō undō* (movement against harmful books, mainly against harmful manga) for constructing a good reading and cultural environment for children.⁴ Thus Dickensheets argues, “They, more than any other group, will shape Japan’s future” (1996: 75).

The Japanese government also shared this view. As an illustration of this, when the Japanese government realized that societal changes were taking place following the fast postwar economic growth, it feared a negative effect and thus published the *Jidō fukushi hakusho* (Children Welfare White Paper, 1963) in which it pointed out the importance of mother for family: “Children in our country are in a dangerous stage... which has been caused by the collapse of the family. The solution for it is the mother’s return” (quoted from Kan, 1968: 159-160). An evidence for “mother’s return” could be found in the fact that, according to Japanese sociologist Ochiai Emiko, after the Second World War, particularly during the era of rapid economic growth (1955-1970), the female labor participation rate followed a downward path and many full-time housewives emerged, and the statements in Japanese society at the time maintained that “women should be housewives” and “women’s primary role should be homemaking and child care” (1997: 15; 21).⁵ Japanese mothers were expected to devote themselves to every aspect of the lives of their young children, and thus had to consider which kinds of characters were better for their children’s growth and education.

Akadō was such an example that was welcomed by Japanese mothers. Following the transmedia effect of the *Akadō* series, Akadō became the nationally known media character star (see chapter 1). Naturally characters about fighting and war were not welcomed by mothers because of their associations with violence and militarism (Kan, 1968: 96-98). However, Akadō was an exception. The reason mainly lay in the fact that Akadō built up “an ideal image of children’s education of self-improvement [*shūshin kyōiku*],” as Japanese children’s literature specialist Kan Tadamichi suggests (1968: 110). As a young swordsman, even though he had the superior skill of *shinkūkiri* (vacuum-cutting), Akadō did not kill anyone except the enemies of his master, and even this was in the sense of delivering justice. To his master, he was filial and loyal. To others, he was friendly and liked to help them. Through his own actions, Kan argues, Akadō actually “perfected his own personality” (1968: 110).

Moreover, Akadō kept up with the pace of the age. As Kan points out, in the *Akadō* manga series, there was “a volume depicting aliens that wore a flying cape the same as Superman’s” (1968: 140). In this story, Akadō was not sure how to get on with these aliens, who came from a “Country of Stars,” so his master took him to consult a scholar who understood the Western advanced knowledge very well. The scholar used his astronomical knowledge to explain and told Akadō that it was possible for aliens to arrive on earth because of their advanced technology. This story to some extent

⁴Out of worry of children’s reading life, Japanese mothers established *akusho tsuuhō undō*. But then the movement was exaggerated to be a social political issue of censorship of culture and widely criticized.

⁵However, the female labor participation rate at the time still maintained high: in the mid-1960s state labor policies encouraged full-time work for unmarried women, and part-time work for married women because of their responsibilities for childrearing (Uno, 1993: 305).

expanded children's imaginations while corresponding with the popular topic of the time, technology. Hence, Japanese mothers generally accepted Akadō and they allowed their children to read and watch the *Akadō* series.

The 1950s and 1960s were the period of rapid development of the mass media including newspapers, magazines, radio, film and television, as discussed in Chapter 1. The popularity of television in particular had significantly changed the lives of children and teenagers. According to a study conducted in 1960, "Japanese over the age of ten, including those who did not have a set at home, watched television for an average of 56 minutes every weekday, however, from 1960 to 1964, the average time spent on watching television increased three times" (Ishida, 1971: 85). This data demonstrates how television began to beat the centre of teenagers' lives, breaking down the existing fabric of time. The toy specialist Saitō also points out, "Beginning in the Shōwa-40s [1965-1974]...was increasing unbanization, the shrinking of outdoor free play spaces in children's neighbourhoods, as well as the decrease in play time due to the encroachment of television and cram schools..." (1978: 282). In short, children and teenagers spent much their leisure time watching television rather than with each other and playing games. Even if they did play, the games were almost all learnt from the television, such was the popularity of character accessory goods. Their motivation might be the dream of being the character or the intention to follow a trend, but the outcome was that Japanese children and teenagers' lives seemed to have become assimilated with a certain standardized pattern. This was what the Japanese critic Ōya Sōichi (1957) pointedly called the *ichioku sō-hakuchika* ("the dumbing down of the 100 million").

According to Kan, the risk that television brought about was soon realized by mothers, which triggered the *kōzairon* (debate about the merits and demerits) of the mass media (1968: 9-10). One side argued that as the products of advanced technology, the mass media and the content they diffused were not the issue but rather that the concern related to whether the receivers were able to discriminate between the content or not. In contrast, the other side pointed out that the mass media exaggerated the importance of entertainment and disseminated certain ideologies, such those regarding violence, sex, and war. A popular anecdote at the time talked of the mother who, because of these concerns, urged her child to study hard instead of watching television. Yet some mothers appealed to the television station to add the words "broadcasting ends" at 8 pm in order to "protect children from the bad influence of television" (*kodomo o terebi no warui eikyō kara mamorō*) (18 February 1960 *Yomiuri Shinbun* newspaper).

However, the arguments surrounding the mass media are not unique to Japan. Based on his study of mass media, American media theorist Neil Postman argues that it is not good for children, as it can lead to *The Disappearance of Childhood* (1982). He contends, "The electric media and the graphic revolution together represented an uncoordinated but powerful assault on language and literacy, a recasting of the world of ideas into speed-of-light icons and images" (1982: 72-73). Japanese mothers expressed the same concerns. They saw the mass media as the cause of the literacy crisis among their children. Yet Postman specifically points to television as the most

powerful of the mass media forms, as it reveals to “children at the earliest possible age” many things, including “the joys of consumerism and the satisfactions to be derived from buying almost anything” (1982: 96). Television turns children into consumers, the same as adults, which means that “in the direction of requiring no distinction between child and adult sensibilities, inevitably the two stages of life merge into one” (1982: 99).

Postman’s statement throws light onto another implication of the mass media, that is, the changing role of children as consumers. Generally, children are “prepared consumers” or “future consumers” (Kawakatsu, 2010: 58), who rely on their parents to consume on their behalf. This is in part because children are less socialized and need their parents to pay close attention to them. As the Japanese children who spent their childhood during the Shōwa-30s (1955-1965) recalled, “The happy memory of that sweet touch [of Morinaga milk-caramel and television-chewing-gum], the images of the granny who was the owner of the *dagashi-ya* [similar to a penny candy store], friends who had shaved heads, our mother who gave us pocket money and us begging for 10 yen are still fresh in the mind. The stickers within the caramel were what we wanted...” (Ichihashi, 2002: 8-10). The fact that they needed to beg mother for pocket money to buy television-chewing-gum means what would be bought or not bought was much decided by the parents.

More importantly, the reason why those children wanted the chewing-gum was because of the premium, the Ōkami shōnen Ken character stickers. In fact, at the time, the Japanese children had certain amount of spending money each month. According to Boye DeMente and Fred Thomas Perry’s study in the 1960s, “Primary school children [received] from \$1 to \$2, while the average allowance for middle-school students [was] \$2” (1967: 126). In the 1960s, one dollar was equal to 360 yen (Lewis, 2007). And the character items were cheap, such as above mentioned television-chewing-gum was only 10 yen. Thus, as the mass media opened the door to consumerism for children, they became the “present consumers” (Kawakatsu, 2010: 58) or “direct consumers” who had particular desires for particular commodities, characters and character goods. As the *Yomiuri Shinbun* newspaper commented, “With the development of television, the familiarity, cuteness, and distinctiveness of characters of manga, anime, mascots, and so on, have been the selling point, whereby those characters become popular with children” (24 March 1975). For Japanese sociologist Saitō Jirō, these characters were much like the advertising celebrities, as he looks at Atomu and suggests that Atomu became an “advertising boy for candy makers before becoming the hero within the world of children’s play.” He further predicts that “children became absorbed in the game of ‘consumption’ rather than in the game of playing the characters” (1975: 49, quoted from Steinberg, 2012: 110-111).

This leads us back to character goods. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, Miller has emphasized that the materiality of commodities matters. John Clammer maintains that “consumption behaviour involves, at one level, individual choice, but at another level both choice constrained by what is available in the market and the tyranny of fashion and by the willing acquiescence to that tyranny” (1997: 48). As we will see below, the diversity of character goods (mainly character toys) brought by two

monster character booms in the 1960s and the early 1970s and the popular trend that they created released much or excessive desire of Japanese children at the time to consume.

Setting sail anew, the toy industry flourished in the postwar period, producing a wide range of character toy accessories that were popular choices with children (see chapter 1). Particularly since the mid-1960s, toys as an important part of character goods market developed fast. Building on its previous successful experience with characters, the Japanese toy industry became more involved in character merchandising—in a more innovative way. According to Allison (2006), since the mid-1950s many high-quality materials such as vinyl, plastics, and battery-powered electronics had been used in toy manufacturing, which had improved the variety and quality of the toys. A tendency for a sense of realism had also appeared: toys were created in the shape of characters and had begun to provide a new model for the toy industry. These toys could broadly be classed as “character toy figurines” (thereby differentiating them from the previous character toy accessories and the subsequent character toy models) and their emergence implied the coming of what above mentioned toy specialist Saitō calls the *honmono jidai* (the era of real things) of character toys (1978: 282). Saitō notes that this tendency became more apparent after 1965 with the toyification of characters from *Obake no Q tarō* (Monster Q tarō, animated for TV in 1965), *Osomatsu kun* (literally, Mr. Nothing special, animated for TV in 1966) and *Urutora Q* (Ultra Q, 1966). Of these, the last, *Urutora Q*, contained spectacular special effects and introduced a large number of *kaijū* (monster) characters, fuelling the *kaijū būmu* (monster character boom).

As a vital form of mass media, the overwhelming influence of television attracted many creators, including Tsuburaya Eiji (1901-1970), who was known as “the god of special effects” (*tokusatsu no Kamisama*) in Japan. Tsuburaya followed in Tezuka’s footsteps in the exploration of special effects for television—earlier in his career, Tsuburaya had created the monster film *Gojirā* (Godzilla, 1954). In 1966, the first *Urutora* series, *Urutora Q*, produced in black and white by Tsuburaya Production, was broadcast on the Tokyo Broadcasting System with a total of 28 episodes. The second series, *Urutora man*, was more popular and began airing two weeks after the first series ended.⁶ These works were based on both the influence of previous monster films, and on the appeal of threats from supernatural monsters and aliens, which combined could realize the universal fantasy of children to have an improved human body that featured the superpower and technology and met the expectations of the era. As a result, both the characters and the narrative became popular with children. This led to what was known as the first monster character boom.

⁶Although Tsuburaya intended this second series to be more paranormal, futuristic, and aimed at adults, the Tokyo Broadcasting System intended to target children as they had shown an interest in the monsters, and thus convinced him to add more monster characters (Ragone, 2007).

Driven by the monster character boom, the soft vinyl monster character figurines made by toy company Marusan Shōten became particularly popular.⁷ The new materials made the mass production of toy figurines possible and the various ranges of monster characters attracted children's attention, effectively giving rise to a consumption phenomenon. More importantly, these toy figurines had the same effect as character accessories: consuming them meant getting closer to the world of the characters. While manga and anime provided the narratives that gave the characters a world in which to exist, consuming character accessories to some extent realized the children's dreams of being the character; they provided a way for children to become involved in the character's world. Toy figurines enabled the re-enactment of the character's actions in reality in its most tangible form. Purchasing toy figurines made children feel even closer to the character's world, and even that the character was real, and that they had a degree of control over the character (Steinberg, 2012). Thus, even though there was then a change in the producer of the toys (Marusan went bankrupt and became Blue Mark) and the materials used, the figurines were still the number one mass communication toy targeting children (Saitō, 1978).

Meanwhile, in 1966 the British science fiction series *Sandābādo* (Thunderbirds) was broadcast by Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai (Japan Broadcasting Corporation).⁸ Similar to the *Urutora* series, the theme of the stories was technology, but unusually the vehicles and equipment themselves became popular with the audience. Toy manufacturer Imai Kagaku seized on the opportunity to release toy models of Thunderbirds 1 to 5 and the secret bases. Among them, children particularly loved the transformable Thunderbird 1 model and the interchangeable Thunderbird 2 model, which began the trend for "transformation and union" as the central features of character toys (particularly character toy models) in the 1970s (Hikawa, 2005: 18).

In 1971, another special effects series, *Kamen raidā* (Kamen Rider), was broadcast. This work featured a motorcycle-riding superhero who owned a morphing superpower that allowed him to fight supernatural criminals (monsters). This series generated the *henshin* boom (transformation boom), also known as the second monster character boom. Children were especially fascinated by two Kamen raidā character items: the Kamen raidā snack and the Kamen raidā belt. The former was launched by food company Karubī (Calbee) and was similar to Meiji's chocolates in that it put Kamen raidā cards in its snack products. However, this product caused an over-consumption phenomenon among children. According to a *Yomiuri Shinbun* newspaper article titled "*Kamen raidā: Kanetsu no dōshin*" (Kamen Rider: The over Enthusiasm from Children), many boys and girls only bought the products for the cards and threw away the food (9 October 1972). The product was thus called a

⁷Just like television animation, special effects pieces required a lot of time and money, and so needed the royalties coming in from character merchandising and overseas market sales to ensure financial stability. Many child-friendly enterprises, including the pharmaceutical business Ikeda Yakuhin, the stationery companies Kyokuto Nōto and Shōwa Nōto, and the toy manufacturers Marusan Shōten and Masudaya, gained licences to launch numerous character goods related to the *Urutora* series.

⁸The story of *Sandābādo* followed the exploits of International Rescue, a secret organization headed by the Thunderbirds fleet of advanced technological vehicles and equipment that rescued people who were in danger.

misplaced commodity.⁹ However, as it was clearly the premiums that the children desired, this phenomenon to some extent illustrated that children had become present consumers and that their desires had been completely directed towards characters.

Also in 1971, Popy, one of the most important toy manufacturers in Japanese toy history, was set up. Aware of the popularity of Kamen raidā, Popy quickly launched the Kamen raidā belt as toy merchandise for the character. Although Popy was not the first manufacturer to produce this product, only it captured the fantasy of this product and turned it into a reality. In the story, the belt was the key item needed for the character to *henshin* (transform) into the superhero. The belt created by Popy had the same colour, gloss, and size, and the same glowing function as the one in the television programme: when the switch was rotated, the belt would glow (Igarashi, 2004). When the belt was released onto the market, it received a warm welcome from children and about 3.8 million sets were sold (Bandai, 2006). This number also made a record of character merchandising at the time: the royalties that Popy paid for Kamen raidā (for the series *Kamen Rider Stronger*, 1975) reached up to 1.2 billion yen (Ikada and Takahashi, 2001). While the Kamen raidā belt was still actually a character toy accessory, like the Akadō sword, it embodied the essence of *honmono jidai* as it was produced as a complete physical replica of the one that belonged to the character. Such a product greatly satisfied children's imagination and "they would like to bodily incorporate these goods themselves and, by doing so, thereby acquire the powers they promise," as Allison suggests (2006: 112).¹⁰ This was the secret of Popy's success and paved the way for its subsequent development in the character toy field: working on the reproduction of imaginary characters. After the belt, Popy thus created a new line of miniature die-cast metal replicas of the Kamen raidā motorcycle, marking the start of die-cast toy production in Japan (Tsuchiya, 1995).

Toys Beyond Children

At the beginning of this chapter I indicated that the character merchandising expanded from children to the adult market. In this section, I will examine how adults were included in character consumer group. I argue that it firstly followed the shift of manga and anime whose readers and audiences were expanded to young adults.

Since the early 1960s, there had been many manga works created for appealing to adults. In 1964, the first young-adult manga magazine in Japan was established by Nagai Katsuichi (1921-1996) with the help of Shirato Sanpei. It was named after one of the characters in Shirato's manga, *GARO*. This magazine respected the manga per se and originality over commercial value, which ensured considerable freedom for creators. Shirato was the first creator for the magazine, publishing his *Ninja gekiga* (dramatic pictures), *Kamuiden* (The Legend of Kamui, 1964), which contained the themes of class-struggle and anti-authoritarianism. This work was a hit among

⁹The issue even received attention from the Parent-Teacher Association of Japan. Karubī was forced to adopt various measures, such as printing "Please do not waste snack" on the individual packets and "Please do not allow one person to buy many" on the retail box to enlist the retailers' help (Kinoshita, 1997).

¹⁰*Henshin* is a crucial reason for consuming characters. I will return to this question in Chapter 3.

Japanese university students, who became the major force behind the student movement of *zenkyōtō* at the end of the 1960s (Kinsella, 2000).¹¹ Another magazine welcomed by university students was *COM*, published by Tezuka in 1967 in response to the success of *GARO* (Yonezawa, 2007). With the hope of some new successes in his work, Tezuka started the magazine and published the first seven stories of his work *Hi no tori* (Phoenix, 1967) in it.¹²

According to Japanese anime critic Hikawa Ryūsuke (2005), in the period from the later 1960s to the early 1970s, various values associated with social events such as the Vietnam War, the struggle for a security treaty, and pollution problems, became interwoven in Japanese society, igniting a fierce clash of opinions. In the realm of television anime, *Kyojin no hoshi* (Star of the Giant, 1968) and *GeGeGe no Kitarō* (Spooky Kitarō, 1968) were distinctively different from previous works, which had been dominated by special effects. The former was the first sports television animation and the latter was best known for its popularization of folklore monsters known as *yōkai*. Both had been adapted from manga that appeared in the *Shūkan shōnen magajin* (Weekly Boy Magazine) and contained “anti-technology elements such as mud, tears, sweat, cemetery and resentment” (Hikawa, 2005: 18). This contrasting attitude towards technology echoed the flexibility and fickleness of Japanese society, which appealed to many readers, especially students, who grew to be loyal fans of the *Shūkan shōnen* magazine. The magazine continually provided works that resonated with these readers. For instance, *Rupan sansei* (Lupin the Third), published in manga from 1967 to 1968 and animated for TV in 1971, apparently had an “adult sense of sex and violence” (Hikawa, 2005: 18). As a result, *Shūkan shōnen* magazine became a platform on which young adults could approach the struggles for self and society, thus winning over even more young adults to its readership. As the contemporary commentary of *Yomiuri Shinbun* newspaper observed, “The role of manga has shifted from the ‘snack’ to the ‘staple,’ and correspondingly the role of young adults from literature consumers to manga consumers” (Osaki, 1969).

I argue that at this point the development of character toys forked into two directions, exploration and extension, meaning into the exploration of new products for children and the extension of the market towards adults.¹³ The first direction was promoted by *Majingā Z* (Mazinger Z), Nagai Gō’s manga published in 1972, later animated for television. This work features a young hero who controls a giant robot called Majingā Z. The robot was constructed from a fictitious material—*chōgōkin* (Super-Alloy). This was a narrative that opened a window for character toys. The show’s sponsor, Popy, utilized its new production line—die-cast—to metaphorize

¹¹*Zengaku kyōtō kaigi* refers to the student movement that occurred in Japanese universities from 1968 to 1969. It started with disagreements over specific problems such as university tuition fees and developed into an irreconcilable conflict between students and universities.

¹²The seven stories include the volumes of *Dawn*, *Future*, *Yamato*, *Universe*, *Hō-ō* (Phoenix), *Resurrection*, and *Robe of Feathers*. Some scholars argue that following *GARO* there was a *geikiga* era in which *COM* was regarded as old-fashioned and outdated. Those who still read *COM* were always laughed at by other students (Natsume, 1999).

¹³Characters and toys discussed in this section are mainly for boys and adult males. Characters and toys for girls and adult females will be discussed in section on *shōjo* culture.

chōgōkin and produced die-cast character models of Mazinger Z targeted at children aged 3 to 10 years old. These character models, which featured the ability to “transform and unite,” gave a sense of “actuality” (Onozuka, 2009: 26-28) rather than *honmono* (the real things), which the previous character toy figurines had offered. The new products and new characters immediately triggered a toy boom, as well as a massive increase in the popularity of giant robot characters. One million sets of Majingā Z models were soon sold and *chōgōkin* had become a buzzword in Japanese society (Tsuchiya, 1995: 84). In the wake of the popularity of giant robot characters, Popy focused its character exploitation on giant robot models and launched a 90-cm-high giant model series which was both a visual and a tactile reproduction of the giant robots.

Furthermore, toy manufacturers were becoming increasingly involved in the creation of characters. For example, Popy’s industrial designer, Murakami Kasushi known as the “man of *chōgōkin*” (*chōgōkin no otoko*) who was responsible for developing Majingā Z models, took the lead in exploring the character Yūsha Raidīn (Brave Raideen, 1975), working in cooperation with the SF Design Studio. The animation of the same name was created by Suzuki Yoshitake and directed by Tomino Yoshiyuki and Nakahama Tadao (1932-1980). In the process of producing this animation, Raidīn was intentionally positioned as the main character in order to highlight the message of “character=toy merchandise” for business purposes (Hikawa, 2005: 20).

The second direction—the extension of character toys was revealed in 1974 with the release of *Uchū senkan Yamato* (Space Battleship Yamato), which was produced by Nishizaki Yoshinobu (1934-2010) and directed by Matsumoto Leiji. This was a seminal series in the history of anime, marking a turn towards more complex and serious works that attracted the attention of many young people and adults. It was a science-fiction war adventure story in which a space battleship called Yamato hunts for a certain type of new space device (called the “Cosmo Cleaner D”) to save the earth. The many details of the ship (which was equipped with a “wave-motion engine”), its weapons (the “wave-motion gun”), and the characters carried audiences away with their rich creativity, while presenting a kind of humanity that could arouse much more sympathy from adults than children. In fact, as it was broadcast, *Yamato* was not very welcomed and in part because of the competition with another popular work, *Arupusu no shōjo Haiji* (Heidi, Girl of the Alps, 1974), it was forced to end after just 26 episodes. However the science-fiction fans had other ideas, and voted for *Yamato* to help it win the annual *Seiun* (“Nebula”) Science-Fiction Award and appealed to the television station to bring it back. As a result, a film version of *Yamato* was created and released in cinemas. It was following the film that a *Yamato* craze came. According to the reports of *Asahi Shinbun* newspaper, the tickets were so hard to get that many fans had to queue outside the cinema from the night before, and cinemas even started to show the film at four o’clock in the morning (5 August 1978). Character merchandising also played a role in boosting *Yamato*’s crazy popularity. The animation store, Rappot, launched various *Yamato* character goods including printed

T-shirts, stationery, posters and *genga* (key frame animations) from the film,¹⁴ selling 15 million yen's worth of goods in a week (Tsuchiya, 1995).

Toy manufacturer, Popy, decided to participate in the commercial exploitation of *Yamato* at the last moment (Inumata and Katō, 2010). It launched a series of battleship models of the same name which targeted the young people rather than children, and proved very popular. In addition, following the film release of *Yamato*, Popy continued to update its products: for example, the company produced a display model ("image model/Uchū senkan Yamato") based on a film poster (Inumata and Katō, 2010: 49). Though having less operability, this display model reproduced the charm of the battleship in the poster and attracted many young anime fans.

From the above it is clear that there was a turn towards adult, both in aspects of the narrative of works and in character merchandising. I argue that there were three reasons for this turn. First, the creators were aiming to appeal to those who were born after 1955 and had been raised on mass media. They were known as *gendaikko* (the Modern Children) (Abe, 1961), and had grown up with manga and anime characters and had been cultivated to be character consumers. The second reason for this turn towards the activities of fan groups was that with their common interests in manga and anime, these *gendaikko* had found like-minded friends and formed their own communities. And, in 1975, the first Comic Market was held, which further stimulated their enthusiasm. More than seven hundred *Yamato* fan clubs were established by fans; a special manga edition of *Yamato*, which imitated the animation with the aim of promoting fans-created works, was serialized in the magazine *OUT*. The latter actually planted the seeds for the growth of *otaku* subculture in the 1980s. The third reason for the change in direction was emphasized by the inspired meanings behind the narratives. As a science-fiction story depicting a war adventure, *Yamato* transmitted certain nationalistic messages, as was the intention of its producer (Matsumoto and Nishizaki, 1978). *Yamato* was thus named after a Second World War battleship belonging to the Imperial Japanese Navy, with the aim of awakening national pride and confidence among young adults.

Certainly, this was relevant to the economic situation at the time, as the Japanese economy had not grown as quickly as it was then growing since the early 1970s, and the negative consequences of high-speed growth such as environmental pollutions and the future of nation were beginning to be questioned and concerned about. As scholar Takekawa Shun'ichi (2012) argues, *Yamato* was much like an educator, telling the young adults how to face and overcome difficulties by showing how the characters of the space battleship were inspired by faith and friendship to cope with the crises together. This educational spirit was also present in the subsequent works, *Gingatetsudō 999* (Galaxy Express 999, manga published in 1977 and animated for TV in 1978) and *Kidō senshi Gandamu* (Mobile Suit Gundam, the first TV anime series broadcasted in 1979). Both series were science fiction works. The former depicted an ordinary boy who experienced many adventures on the way to his destination, which was the end of the line for the Galaxy Express 999 train. The story revealed much

¹⁴From then on *genga* becomes an important aspect of character products.

about growth and life. *Gandamu* was similar to *Yamato* in that it started in the midst of a future war in which human and giant robots were fighting together to protect their homeland. Both series to some degree reassured the Japanese about the anxious situation at the time and were popular with them. But the popularity of the latter also rested on its character merchandising, which inaugurated a new era of characters toys.

Interestingly, like *Yamato*, *Gandamu* also took time to produce results: as TV anime (first series aired from 1979 to 1980) it had failed to begin with and was not truly a success until the release of the film animation (1981). According to Condry, this was because that *Gandamu* had “complex story arcs, with storylines extending across many episodes” which meant “if you missed an episode, it would be difficult to catch up the following week” (2013: 125). And that time was still a period without advanced technology and services such as VCRs and Video rental stores. The main characters were still the giant robots as in the earlier *Yūsha Raidīn*, but were designed to be very human. It was in part because the narrative of *Gandamu* portrayed the growth of a young person who had to do battle with his enemies alongside the Mobile Suits Gandamu that protected his fellow citizens and homeland. As Tsuchiya Shintarō in his book *Kyarakutā bijinesu* (Character Business) argues, “In terms of the development of giant-robot-works, *Gandamu* may have been a late bloomer but its character goods were immediate successes” (1995: 90-93).

This time Bandai, the parent company of Popy, took on the sponsorship of *Gandamu* and produced the character toy models. These models were made from plastic and were known in Japan as Gunpla, a portmanteau of Gundam and pla[stic]. The plastic material could highlight the details and made the model kits more sophisticated. And significantly, compared with the previous character accessories and character figurines, the character models provided consumers with a capacity for recreation, based on the fact that they could transform and unite the model kits as they wished. If accessories and figurines could allow consumers to access the world of characters, the models could both allow fans to approach the character world and to create another one outside of the existing world of Gandamu.

Around the time when Gandamu model kits went on sale, the model magazines such as *Hobby Japan* had introduced many ideas and methods of transforming Gandamu plastic models and published a special issue series on “How to build Gundam.” Along with the rebroadcast of *Gandamu* TV series at the time and the announcement of the plan of film animations, Gandamu plastic models became a hit among primary and secondary school students. Their considerable enthusiasm for Gunpla led to temporary stock shortages in the market (3 May 1981 *Yomiuri Shinbun* newspaper); to obtain the limited Gunpla items available, consumers crowded into shops, even causing an accident that left a dozen injured and four badly wounded (25 January 1982 *Asahi Shinbun* newspaper); this accident was reported by the media, and as a result Gunpla became a household name (Futabasha, 2009).

Because modifying the models required a certain understanding from and creativity among the players, there was a gradual expansion of appeal from children to adults (Inomata and Katō, 2010), especially after Bandai improved its production lines, that also challenged the existing impression of “anime belonging to children.” The initial

model kits lacked articulation and had single-colour, which required the players to use glue to build them and paint them by hands. To improve on this Bandai tried various strategies (or tactics), such as introducing an injection system, using polycap (soft plastic) as the connecting material for the articulation of joints, using colourful plastics, and introducing the concept of snap-fit models, all of which greatly improved the craftsmanship and quality of the model kits. These improvements stimulated the adult players' passion for assembling model kits, opened up the Gandamu world and created a "larger world" in which models not only belonged to children but also adults (Kawamura, 2011).¹⁵ Another aspect of this "larger world" was the high sale figures. New products on the *Gandamu* series are still being launched. By the end of March 2011, 406 million Gandamu model kits were sold (quoted from Wagner, 2015: 50), and in 2016 (from March 2015 to March 2016) the Gandamu franchise generated 78.6 billion yen in revenues (Bandai Namco Fiscal Year 2016 Financial Statement).

Moreover, not only the main Gandamu mobile suits were available in plastic model kits but also their details including the vehicle and the weapon parts. There was even a Mobile Suits Variation range that did not have its own anime series or films as the basis. However, relying on the promotion of model magazines, these ranges became popular and familiar with players. From these ranges, players created many do-it-yourself Gandamu plastic models, and not only that, they interpreted those models in details based on the narratives of Gandamu, which expanded and deepened the whole character world (Kawamura, 2011). In this way, many new models, specifically, new "Gandamu-characters," were derived. Gandamu plastic models became a means for consumer to create their own Gandamu world that pointed to a tendency in which the character was separated from its original narrative. As part of this separation process, character-models were able to react to the growth (development) of the characters; and the dominant participant became mainly the consumer who gradually took on the leading role in the subsequent development of characters and established a very complicated relationship with them (something to which I will discuss in chapter 3).

Arguably, the toy industry played a vital role in stimulating children's consumer desires and prompted them to become present consumers. From today's perspective, it might seem to be a natural development that toys would incorporate characters. But at the time, the Japanese toy industry had to experiment to work out what it could rely on for income, and this experimentation included character toy accessories, toy figurines, and toy models. Most importantly, the industry's development saw an extension of consumer groups, with adults also becoming character consumers. Along with this expanded consumer group, character consumption began to manifest its pluralism in the subsequent development, as asserted by Miller at the beginning of the chapter, and engaged with various aspects of Japanese consumers' lives.

¹⁵Bandai explores different product series for consumers of different ages (see, for example, Kawamura, 2011: 54). On the other hand, the updating of products also attracts the original children consumers. When they have grown up, they are still the loyal players of Gandamu model kits (15 November 2005 *Yomiuri Shinbun* newspaper).

Character Consumption

As many scholars have argued, the significance of consumer goods rests in not only their utilitarian and commercial values but also their ability to carry and communicate cultural meanings (Douglas and Isherwood, 1979; McCracken, 1988). On the other hand, consumer goods are always produced and marketed according to certain cultural codes. Cultural anthropologist Grant McCracken maintains that the cultural meaning of consumer goods is “constantly in transit” which requires us to “see consumers and consumer goods as the way-stations of meaning” (1988: 71-72). This mobile quality of culture meaning implies that consumption is like a kind of communication mode in which “consumers are not seen to be the mere products of structural forces such as advertising and the media,” as Steven Miles (1998: 29) points out, they are always “subject to certain pre-established patterns of consumption and social convention, but symbolic goods are purposefully managed by consumers within cultural rules and codes laid down for and by them.”

Shōjo Culture, Kawaii, Disneyland and Otaku Subculture(1970s-1980s)

This section will examine character consumption as a relevant phenomenon which is included in some particular cultural aspects and cultural segmentation in Japanese society and expresses them. Such relevance contributed to the diverse character consumption in the 1970s and 1980s which specifically interwove *shōjo* (girl) culture, *kawaii* (cute), *otaku* (geek) subculture, and Western consumer culture represented by Disneyland.

Subcultures are always defined as groups that have their own distinctive styles but also share the values of the larger society. In her book *Fashioning Japanese Subcultures*, Kawamura Yuniya points out, in the modern society such as Japan, “there is a great diversity of such subcultures” and they can “project a certain image, which is composed of costume, accessories, hairstyle, jewellery, artefacts, and a distinct vocabulary” (2012: 8-9). Consumption is an efficient tool for them, as Paul Willis (1990) notes, that they use cultural goods to express identity and resistance. At the same time the cultural industry can often re-absorb the components of their style and transform them into goods again. David Muggleton (2000) suggests that as the “elective, build-your-own, consumer identities” become dominated, the identification of the members of subcultures present “fragmented, individualistic, and stylistic” features (Kawamura, 2012: 68). In Japan, *shōjo* and *otaku* play important role in subcultures. The former expresses their distinctive style in the 1970s and 1980s by using a cute writing-style, which led the development of *kawaii*. The latter contributes to the consumption of mass media images such as anime, science fiction and games. But Thaim Huat Kam (2012: 2-23) argues that *otaku* is like a labelled group. The fact that *otaku* is labelled explains Japanese’s certain rules on how popular culture should be consumed which present the demands of contemporary capitalist Japan as common sense, continues Kam. In short, *otaku* are the “perceived violators” labelled by the individuals’ common sense under certain social and historical conditions.

In the 1970s, *shōjo* culture blossomed. *Shōjo* culture had developed at the beginning of the twentieth century, and its driving force was mostly young Japanese girls. At that time, many works of literature, such as novels for girls, were published that provided their audiences with imaginary things. These works soon became popular with Japanese girls and gradually *shōjo* culture took shape in Japan. With the rise of *shōjo* culture, terms such as “purity,” “fragility,” “dreaminess,” and “mysteriousness” were used to describe Japanese girls, which consequently evoked a fantasy of how girls should behave in Japanese society. In the postwar period, Nakahara Jun’ichi launched the magazines such as *Soreiyu* (Soleil, 1946), *Himawari* (Sunflower, 1947) and *Junia Soreiyu* (Junior Soleil, 1953), which introduced the cultivation of a personal aesthetic that included developing an appreciation of literary masterpieces, Western clothing styles, and art, thus greatly promoting *shōjo* culture in the fields of literature, fashion, art and life. However, according to Kan, *shōjo* culture, namely, “a happy theory of staying in the corner,” reveals the idea that girls actually does not care about the overall situation of society but the small status of self and the ways in which to defend it (1968: 239). That is to say, *shōjo* culture to some extent is independent and girls have their own particular interests. In the realm of character consumption, girls are less interested in monster figurines and robot models, which originally appealed to boys, than in fancy things, such as *shōjo* manga and cute goods.

Shōjo manga started in the postwar period. Many scholars often trace the god of manga, Tezuka, as the pioneer since he created the manga work—*Ribon no kishi* (Princess Knight, 1953) which featured a princess character and published it in girl magazine. Even Tezuka himself thought that he created a *shōjo* manga. However, Tezuka was not the mainly inventor for *shōjo* manga (Shamoon, 2012) but a contributor for connecting the prewar and postwar *shōjo* culture. The main character of Tezuka’s *Ribon no kishi* was created with the exaggerated eyes. Tezuka claimed such a feature was much impacted by the prewar Takarasiennes’ eye makeup.¹⁶ In short, Tezuka was much a successor to prewar *shōjo* culture. But along with Tezuka, a clear tendency to draw the exaggerated eyes emerged. This tendency was actually developed by Nakahara Jun’ichi and his aesthetic represented in his *shōjo* magazines: “an ornate, decorated style, use of flower motifs, and exaggerated eyes” (Shamoon, 2012: 87; Matsuda, 2015). This style also inspired the *shōjo* manga artists (particularly the female artists) in the 1960s who contributed to using and developing it as a particular style of *shōjo* manga. Moreover, in the 1960s, many *shōjo* manga works, such as *Mahōtsukai Salī* (Sally the Witch, 1966) and *Himitsu no Akko-chan* (The Secrets of Akko-chan, 1962), in particular featuring the magical girl characters were turned into television and got rise to the popularity of girl toys such as magical compact (Odagiri, 2010: 30).¹⁷

Here it is not to deny the influence of Tezuka, though the girl character that he created was criticized that lacked emotive details such as highlights in the same

¹⁶Takarasiennes are the actors of *Takarazuka kagekidan* (Takarazuka Revue). All of them are female.

¹⁷In *Himitsu no Akko-chan*, the main character Akko-chan can use the magical compact to realize her *henshin* (transformation) and by doing so borrow the power of the compact to help others. The work also impacts on the subsequent development of magical girl characters and girls’ *henshin* boom.

exaggerated eye (Shamoon, 2012). Tezuka and his *Ribon no kishi* indeed gave enlightenment to the later development of narratives of *shōjo* manga.¹⁸ Noticeably in the 1970s, various themes, including science fiction and fantasy, nonsense jokes and boy-love were unprecedentedly brought into the story-setting of *shōjo* manga by the famous *Hana no nijūyo-nen gunni* (Fabulous Year 24 Group). This group included Aoike Yasuko, Hagio Moto, Ōshima Yumiko, Takemiya Keiko, Kihara Toshie, Yamagishi Ryōko, Kimura Minori, Sasaya Nanae, and Yamada Mineko, most of whom had been born around Shōwa 24 (1949). The group made a major contribution to the popularity of *shōjo* culture: on the one hand, they incorporated the development of girls' interests by combining the literary genre with the independence of *shōjo* culture; on the other, they expanded the world of girls and opened it up by gaining more acceptance from the wider population.

In the 1970s, the term *kawaii* became a key word of *shōjo* culture (Koga, 2009). As Sharon Kinsella summarizes in "Cuties in Japan," *kawaii* or cute essentially means "childlike"; it celebrates "sweet, adorable, innocent, pure, simple, genuine, gentle, vulnerable, weak, and inexperienced social behavior and physical appearances" (1995: 220). This analysis, while concise and comprehensive, in fact conceals the evolutionary meanings of *kawaii*. According to Mio Bryce (2004: 2266), since ancient times the Japanese have loved "small, and cute things": at first the word "kawaii" was equated with "*utsukushii* (pretty)"; it was then used to express a passion for all things "miniature," symbolizing the "mixed sentiments of love/affection and sense of pity/compassion"; finally, in the modern period, it became "visually formulated and fixed in meaning, as being small, soft and somewhat playful." Moreover, continues Bryce, in the modern period there were some differences between prewar and postwar conceptions: influenced by Western culture, the image of cuteness in the prewar period represented "innocence, sincerity, defenselessness, and appealing to the spectator for protection"; after the war the docile images were gradually changed into "a more active, independent and rather comical representation."

At the time, as noted by Kinsella (1995), in Japanese society a cute style of handwriting had become popular among Japanese teenagers, mainly girls, who were always sensitive to fashions. This new style was different from traditional serious Japanese handwriting, which used forceful strokes, as it used rounded characters with many decorations of small hearts, tiny stars and various emotional face-marks. In his study, Yamane Kazuma calls the cute handwriting *hentai shōjo moji* (anomalous girlish writing) and argues that it belongs to *shōjo* (1986: 17). On its origin, he notes that many believe that illustrator Mizumori Ado sets the trend for using round characters; while others define it as *manga-ji* (comic writing), implying a similarity between the cute handwriting and the comical expressions of manga (1986: 43).¹⁹ However,

¹⁸According to Deborah Michelle Shamoon, Tezuka gave the main character with two souls, male for protecting her kingdom as a boy and female for acting as a princess, which promoted the "later narrative tendencies toward gender ambiguity" (2012: 89). For details concerning the development of *shōjo* manga in this period, see also Shamoon (2012: 101-136).

¹⁹Although Yamane (1986: 33-50) affirms both the influences of Mizumori and manga, he argues that neither of them is the origin of the cute handwriting.

wherever it came from, it was girls that carried forward the style and promoted the trend, leading to the boom in *kawaii*. The style is always seen as the deviant subcultural aspect of *shōjo* culture since “girls use this writing style to confront gender socialization, in which femininity is linked to elegance and refinement not only in their comportment, but in how they fashion their writing of language” (Miller, 2011: 16). Yano maintains, “This form of bottom-up (no pun intended) cute culture suggested girls out of control; however, what it really portended was girls gaining control of their consumer lives ...” (2013: 52).

Kinsella points out, although “cute culture was not founded by business” (1995: 225), *kawaii* in Japan soon exhibited rich potential as a thriving commercial culture, driven by the enormous variety of cute, fancy goods available. As Shimamura Mari notes in the subtitle of her book *Fanshū no kenkyū* (The Study of Fancy, 1991), “*kawaii* dominates people, things and money,” which indicates the capacity of *kawaii* to embrace business. This capacity was first explored by the company Sanrio, which originally sold silk, but today is most well known for its character Hello Kitty. As the founder of Sanrio Tsuji Shintarō recalled, he found that if cute designs and cute characters were added to the products, they would “sell in a completely different way” (2000: 93). Thus from the early 1960s, Sanrio began to focus on selling Mizumori Ado’s character goods by highlighting their cuteness as their symbolic value. In 1970, Sanrio experimented with “cute”-decorated goods such as writing paper, fancy diaries, and other stationery, which greatly attracted the girls who were using cute handwriting. At the same time, Sanrio attempted to create its own characters. In fact, as soon as Tsuji realized the importance of cute characters, he was so eager for Sanrio to have its own that he first commissioned designers, and then hired them. By hiring them Sanrio could have the original licence and avoid paying royalties. Since 1962, hundreds of original characters have been invented by Sanrio, including the superstar Hello Kitty (1974), KiKi & LaLa, boy and girl siblings (1975), My Melody the bunny (1975), Tuxedo Sam the penguin (1979), Keroppi the frog (1988), Monkichi the monkey (1991), Chococat the cat (1996), Sugarbunnies (2004), and Cinnamoroll the puppy (2011), which together founded the Sanrio empire. Moreover, Tsuji also utilized existing famous foreign characters, for example, gaining the licence for Snoopy from Peanuts and becoming the exclusive representative of Barbie dolls in Japan.

At the dawn of character merchandising, Disney had had a hand in the development of the whole industry; in the 1970s it still signified everything in the world of children’s culture. Like Tezuka, Tsuji also idolized Walt Disney, and intended to make his company’s flagship character. Hello Kitty thus became a superstar on the same scale as Mickey Mouse, not only in the marketplace but also in the imaginary world of characters. As I have discussed above, by forging a link with *shōjo*, *kawaii*, and fancy goods, Sanrio had opened up a new field for the industry. But Sanrio proposed to go much further than that by exploring the term of *asobi* (play).

As Yano points out, “Like the seen-but-not-seen aspects of *shōjo*, *kawaii* as exemplified by Hello Kitty includes cute and its distancing through twist of meanings, commentaries, and nuances that fall within the framework of *asobi*” (2013: 59). *Asobi*

refers to play that is “more than a mere physiological phenomenon or a psychological reflex” (Huizinga, 1949: 1), which means that this behaviour can be extended to the meanings and uses of characters (Yano, 2013). In contrast to the characters that almost always came from anime or manga, a new characteristic in the 1970s was the emergence of non-narrative characters, with Sanrio’s Hello Kitty being the prime example. Without strong story-telling, there were only fragmented images of these characters. Indeed Sanrio has only given Hello Kitty a basic backstory, with simple images. However, these do depict the details of Hello Kitty: a round head; small ears and a red bow; dot-style eyes and nose; three-line whiskers on each cheek; white and pure; and mouthless. From the images it can be ascertained that Kitty is a cat (because of the whiskers and the name) or a girl (because of the bow). Undoubtedly Kitty is a character, as that is what Sanrio always reaffirms and emphasizes. The ambiguity regarding being a girl or a cat comes from Kitty’s lack of narrative as well as her being mouthless. Mouthless characters are known as *muchiyo kyara* (expressionless-character), a popular term in the world of characters. The lack of a narrative and expression does not mean that the character is boring and emotionless, but rather that it is easy for consumers to imagine a story or an expression and project them onto the character. In this way, characters like Hello Kitty become the ones consumers want; consumers can arbitrarily combine Kitty with their personal situation through playing with her. Kitty’s appeal and image is thus not always the same, a factor which has also helped Sanrio to deeply explore this fanciful world.

In the late 1970s and the 1980s, Sanrio updated its range and extended it, using the same strategy of *asobi*: it offered new colour options, fashion costumes, more decorations, and varied poses for Hello Kitty, with the aim of appealing to women. The consequence of this change was surprising, because it resulted in the introduction of a surprising number of character goods, of impressive quality, covering almost the whole female world, from cuteness (for girls) to coolness (for young women) to fashion (for women). Thus today Kitty appears on countless goods, even those for men (see **Figure 12**) (Adelstein, 2015). Everyone has the chance to access Hello Kitty’s happy life with a set of cute Kitty-decorated kitchen devices; to drive a small, white, cool Hello Kitty car equipped with Hello Kitty wheel covers and pink or blue Hello Kitty seats; to wear a luxury customized ring containing a Kitty-shaped diamond; or to buy a man’s t-shirt with a radiographic image of Kitty on it. These items are just the tip of the iceberg. Around 2004, Kitty’s face was “plastered on 22,000 different goods and sold in over 40 countries” (Belson and Bremner, 2004). Ten years later, Kitty spanned “more than 70 countries and more than 50,000 products” and was “worth some 7 billion dollar to Sanrio” (Lisanti, 2014; Marsden, 2015).

By producing not only children’s goods but adult-oriented items too, Hello Kitty realized the expansion of characters from children to adults. Although her success is located in a relatively independent female culture, ultimately her history merges into one stream (from children to adults). Established on the premise of *kawaii*, such cute characters have enriched the industry as well as absorbing other fields, elements, and cultures into the character business. Therefore, the 1970s saw a change in the quality of character consumption, which also created the conditions for its diversification in

the 1980s. By the beginning of the 1980s, the scale of character market had surpassed 1 trillion yen (Kayama and Bandai Kyarakutā Kenkyūjo, 2001: 192) and expanded rapidly in the following years. This signalled the arrival of the character industry as the leader of the related market.



Figure 12. Poster for Hello Kitty Men Project; Source: Sanrio Homepage News for “Hello Kitty Men Project Start.”

The most eye-catching spectacle in the 1980s was the opening of Tokyo Disneyland (TDL). Within just half a year, more than 5 million visitors had streamed through the park’s gates; a year later, this figure was almost 10 million. These high numbers show the excitement that TDL brought to the Japanese people: in Disneyland there was a real-life character paradise. However, one may wonder why the Japanese did not see Disneyland as exotic. This was partly because it had been more than 30 years since Disney had re-entered the Japan market and therefore most Japanese were familiar with Disney’s creations and characters; in addition, TDL had adopted a strategy that aimed to build familiarity among the Japanese.

According to Raz Aviad, “Disneyland is recontextualized in Tokyo...in two forms: making the exotic familiar and keeping the exotic exotic. The ‘exotic’ stands for the original American fantasy, the ‘familiar’ denotes ‘Japan’” (1999: 61). If we follow Raz’s analysis focussing on character, these two forms can be translated as making Disney characters familiar to the Japanese visitors while retaining the fanciful nature of the imaginary character world of Disneyland. It is easy to appreciate that the former had been achieved through the use of screens, images, and various types of character merchandise. But how was the latter achieved? In Baudrillard’s description (1983), Disneyland is the archetypal simulacrum in that everything in it is presented as imaginary in order to make people believe that the rest is real, but the fact is that the whole world has fallen into a more real than real world, hyper-reality (something to which I will discuss in chapter 3). The distance between the hyper-reality and the simulation present in Disneyland is somehow shortened. Disneyland intuitively reproduces the world of characters in reality, which not only allows people to access

the character world but to be in it. This coincides with one of Disney's philosophies—that of the “dream world” (Brannen, 1992: 217), in which the emotions of the Japanese are further stimulated by a sense of longing. Raz quotes an American teacher's words after a visit to TDL: the teacher thinks that what the romance of the past offers for Americans is but a charmed vision of the future for the Japanese, thus “instead of a sense of loss, there is a sense of longing” (1999: 66).

This sense of longing has to be maintained by TDL, because it can be easily turned into a strong desire to consume, especially as TDL presents a commercial culture full of American consumer values. As we know from Chapter 1, as the major vehicle for merchandising, Disneyland maximizes the opportunities for visitors to access and purchase various types of Disney character merchandise. Complexes of shops, restaurants, theatres, and entertainment facilities surround the characters. The World Bazaar, TDL's version of Main Street, the main shopping area of Disneyland, is equipped with even more shops selling character merchandise than other Disneylands (Raz, 1999). Moreover, TDL uses the Japanese festivals and events cleverly as a way to attract the Japanese to return. This technique, the local adaptation of Disneyland, can also be seen as a familiarization strategy. For instance, during the *shōgatsu* (New Year's celebrations), TDL launches special programmes and character goods: in the latest official TDL blog post, the New Year celebration schedule for 2016 has been released, and it includes a *wafuku* (traditional Japanese-style cloth) parade in which Mickey, Minnie, and their friends will wear traditional clothing to celebrate with the Japanese visitors, and *wafuku* Disney character dolls will be available as limited edition character merchandise.²⁰ As this time of the year is the busiest for TDL, one Japanese visitor's metaphor is apt: “if you look at it from above, the crowd of people swallow up the ground...”²¹

To sum up, the hyper-reality of Disneyland triggers surprise and excitement among the Japanese that they are in an imaginary character world; Disneyland therefore becomes what they are longing for, and their longings are hugely satisfied by the ability to purchase various character goods in a familiar way. Hence, Raz argues, when confronting the “black ship” of Disneyland, the Japanese are prone to “Japanize” it with “more colorful and playful themes characterizing the local practices of consumption” (1999: 14). For them, consumption is an effective way to catch and maintain the fantasy of Disneyland and the creativity of the character world. Thus, in the wake of the opening of TDL there was a character theme park boom: Sanrio Puroland (*Pyūrorando*), which opened in 1990 in Tokyo, combined entertainment, hands-on experiences, and shopping to provide a one-stop shop for Sanrio characters; and the first Anpanman Land opened in 1994 to offer the opportunity to enjoy the characters of the *Anpanman* TV anime series as well as the consumption of related

²⁰Almost every year Tokyo Disneyland holds such *wafuku* parade; See “Disneyland and DisneySea *shōgatsu*,” Tokyo Disney Resort Official Blog, accessed 1 December 2015, <http://www.tokyodisneyresort.jp/blog/pr151020/>.

²¹See Question of “On whether go to Tokyo Disneyland during the New Year,” Oshiete goo, accessed 1 December 2015, <http://oshiete.goo.ne.jp/qa/240433.html>.

character goods (by 2015 there were four “lands” and one museum²²). These theme parks not only promoted the incorporation of characters into the Japanese life world through qualitative methods (their diverse offerings) but also through quantitative ones (their huge amount of products).

The 1980s also saw the rise of *otaku* subculture. In general, the term “otaku” was used to describe a certain group of people who had an unrelenting exclusive “love for 2D,” including manga, anime, games, and so on, and who stayed alone at home most of the time and were lacking in social skills (Katayama, 2009; Kinsella, 1998; Kam, 2013). However, many scholars argue that this definition contains misunderstandings and prejudices and is not a comprehensive interpretation of *otaku*. They offer analyses of *otaku* from their own standpoints. These scholars include author and critic Okada Toshio (1996), who was once called the *otakingu* (otaku king), and who introduces the term “otakuology” in several of his books; psychiatrist Saitō Tamaki (2000), who discusses the significance of fiction for *otaku*; manga artist and critic Ōtsuka Eiji (2007), who traces the spiritual development of *otaku* in the 1980s; and philosopher Azuma Hiroki (2001; 2007), who examines the postmodern characteristics of *otaku*. Based on their analyses, I suggest that the characteristics of character consumption in *otaku* are embodied in three aspects.

According to Azuma, by the end of the 1980s *otaku* had spread through two generations: the fans and audiences of *Yamato* and *Gandamu*, born in the 1960s, formed the first generation, while those born in the 1970s who had continued the passion of the first generation formed the second generation (2007: 13). These groups were obsessed with consumption that focused on manga, anime, and games: 2D culture. As Japanese economist Morinaga Takurō (2005) suggests, consumption was a key part of the *otaku* lifestyle. *Otaku* were frequently seen as pioneers who were passionate about purchasing the goods that they were interested in regardless of the price. When a character figurine or character model was released, they would queue through the night to be among the first to get it, as mentioned above with regard to the *Yamato* and *Gandamu* merchandise. They also aimed to acquire many non-commercial items: an *otaku* would collect everything relating to his/her favourite character, even a rubbish bin from the company that created the character. Thus the *otaku* market was always growing. According to the Nomura Research Institute, “the market capitalization (only for new products) of *otaku* relating to manga, anime and games (including the overlaps among these three categories) reached 124 billion yen in 2004, with 620,000 consumers” (2005: 52).

Although *otaku* were viewed in a much more negative manner after the Miyazaki incident,²³ they were not excluded from society and their consumption behaviours were not pathological. Their seemingly irrational consumption lay in the fact that they

²²Anime or manga museum (or gallery) always combines the art experience such as exhibitions with goods such as character shops and services such as character-themed restaurants and cafés. There are a dozen such museums (or galleries) in Japan. The famous includes Ghibli museum and Fujiko F Fujio museum.

²³Miyazaki Tsutomu was arrested in 1989 for the murders of four young girls. Police found quantities of anime videos and *shōjo* manga at his home, leading *otaku* to be labeled as dangerous criminals.

saw the goods they bought as symbolic commodities with high additional value (Ōtsuka, 2007; Azuma, 2001). At the same time these symbols could be used in their own creations, as the Gandamu model kits were by the fans who not only reproduced the Gandamu world but also expanded it through their created Gandamu. In this sense, for *otaku*, their consumption was their production: this is the second characteristic of *otaku* character consumption.

Additionally, these signs were very important as a way to constitute their identity and help them to find a sense of belonging. *Otaku* had their own communities in which they consumed together and also communicated with each other. Thus, the third aspect is that they were also significant information collectors, sharers, and consumers, who frequently promoted communication through media and technology (Galbraith, 2010; Grassmuck, 1990). This contributed to them becoming dynamic character consumers in the subsequent information society. The 1990s saw the emergence of the third generation of *otaku*, who were good at utilizing the new media to share information and communicate with each other. In line with this, we will now turn our attention to another aspect, the media mix, by which character consumption is included in multiple media forms.

The Media Mix (after the 1990s)

The media mix, as a Japanese model of media convergence, is popular in the Japanese character industry. It refers to the circulation of characters in multiple media or platforms, which balloons the amount and range of character goods and brings out new consumption patterns. The phrase developed in the late 1980s and was in widespread use by the 1990s. In his book, *Anime's Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan*, Steinberg focuses on anime and suggests that the media mix mainly consists of two intertwined phenomena: “the translation or deployment of a single work, character, or narrative world across numerous mediums or platforms (also known as repurposing) and the synergetic use of multiple media works to sell other such works within the same franchise or group” (2012: 142). These two phenomena expose the mechanism of the media mix, and through them I will examine how the media mix applies to the character industry and influences character consumption. Particularly after the 1990s, with the development of media and technology, more and more new forms have been added, ultimately making it a major factor in the trend for character consumption.

According to Ōtsuka, the attempt of the media mix can be traced back to the 1920s when Shō-chan had combined with the media of newspaper, manga, records and films (2013: 90). In the postwar period, as seen in Chapter 1, Akadō as the first media star made contribution to the transmedia activity. First shown in manga, with the rise of the mass media Akadō soon appeared on radio, television and film screens, which led to him becoming a hit character and to the popularity of his character toys. Along his transmedia activity, Akadō made a multiple dimensional media environment which, as Kan suggests, “actualized the representative form of the three-dimensionalization of mass communication [*masu komi no rittai*ka]” around children (1968: 93). The term three-dimensionalization of mass communication was always seen as the media mix's

precursor that emphasized the synergy of multiple media and put manga as the important medium form (Steinberg, 2012). For example, before Akadō, there were some three-dimensionalized works such as *Fuefuke dōji* (Flute Playing Boy, 1953) which first showed in radio and then was adopted for manga works. Manga here created a foundation of characters' popularity. After Akadō, Atomu was the next media star and his rise combined the media mix with character merchandising closely.

In the 1960s, as the new and influential medium, television began to play important role. As shown in aforementioned merchandising practices, with the success of *Atomu* TV series, many merchants particularly food and toy makers also took part in Atomu's character merchandising which brought the character to various products (platforms). Such practices provided a basis for the commercial exploitation of characters that supported the formation of the early character industry chain: characters first through manga became popular, then were transferred to television, and finally transformed into commodities (Yamada, 2000). Television was targeted by many producers, including Tsuburaya, who launched the *Urutora* special effects series. This series was first shown on television at almost the same time that the manga version was published and many character goods were launched in the market at that time too; this generated the first monster character boom. The popularity of the *Urutora* series indicated that television had become the central component of the media mix and was leading the development of mass communication methods. By the 1970s, the central position of television had been strengthened. In 1974, the first season of the TV anime *Space Battleship Yamato* began airing. Like the *Urutora* series, *Yamato* was also first shown on television, with the manga version being published almost simultaneously. Without manga as its basis, at first it *Yamato* received depressing TV anime ratings. Nevertheless, *Yamato* finally triggered a boom, driven largely by its film release in 1977 (see section 2.1.2) and various character goods. With *Yamato*, the increasing capacity that anime, manga, film, and other media or platforms had to complement each other and together be successful was remarkable.

Moreover, in the 1970s, the new medium of games became popular and carved out a space in children's consumer lives. In this decade ATARI²⁴ launched *BREAKOUT* and Taito released the game *Space Invaders*. Both triggered a games boom among children, who would happily wait in long queues to buy them. They also created the conditions for the subsequent gaming fad in the 1980s. In 1983, Nintendo invented the Family Computer (Nintendo Entertainment System) and opened a new era for the games industry. Driven by gaming software such as *XEVIOUS* (1984) and *Super Mario Bros.* (1985), sales of the Family Computer reached 19 million sets (Takita, 2000), which encouraged family gaming. By the 1990s, with the arrival of the second generation of computer games consoles, including the Super Family Computer, the Nintendo Game Boy and the Sony Play Station, games had become must-have items for children.

²⁴ATARI Company was founded in 1972 in U.S. whose products helped define the development of electronic entertainment industry in the world from 1970s to the mid-1980s.

At this point, the media mix also became weighted in favour of games, specifically in the form of Pokémon. The Pokémon franchise started with a pair of video games in 1996, with its first release being *Poketto monsutā aka midori* (Pocket Monster Red & Green) and the second *Poketto monsutā ao* (Pocket Monster Blue) (at first this was a limited edition, before being generally released). Pokémon soon became a hit, particularly among primary school students. In the same year, manga versions of Pokémon were published by *Gekkan Korokoro komikku* (Monthly CoroCoro Comic) magazine.²⁵ The anime series was first broadcast on TV Tokyo in 1997 and continues to air today (different series). Since 1998, films have been released every year; a total of 19 had been released by August 2016. Furthermore, the franchise has succeeded in exploiting trading card games; it was the first to incorporate these as part of the media mix. Alongside these there were picture books, TV programmes, music CDs, novels and various character goods. Each of these media acted as a way to expand the world of Pokémon. “The *general* consumption of any of the media mix’s products [would] grow the entire enterprise” (Steinberg, 2012: 141; emphasis in original) of Pokémon, turning it into one of the most important franchises of the 1990s.

Moreover, since 2000, many new trends, such as light novels, have been introduced to the media mix. Light novels refer to those that tell the story of a certain character and are illustrated with anime-style images of the character. Young readers are the main target audience. Light novels are frequently serialized in magazine and published in *bunko* imprint,²⁶ for example, many light novels published under Fujimi Shobo’s (Fujimi publisher) *Fantasia Bunko* (Fujimi Fantasia Bunko) are serialized in Fujimi Shobo’s *Doragon Magajin* (Dragon Magazine). Although a genre of literature, light novels feature images of the characters and thus have become a popular choice in the media mix. For example, the Suzumiya Haruhi franchise, which was first published by Kadokawa’s *Sunīkā Bunko* (Sneaker Bunko) in a light novel format, was followed by manga versions, anime series, video games, and a flood of merchandise onto the market.

Since the early 1990s, the evolution of technology and the development of the Internet have changed the daily lives of young people. The new ways of communication, including computers, mobile phones, blogs, bulletin boards, discussion forums, and tweets, have interwoven to create a closely connected media net through which young people can enjoy and consume characters. To take an example of mobile phones, according to Larissa Hjorth (2003: 51), many official sites of characters offer the download services for the use of characters in mobile phones, such as Bandai’s site “*Doko-demo Kyarappa!*” has a one million subscriber group who

²⁵This manga version was firstly created by Anakubo Kōsaku with the title of *Fushigi Pokemon pippi* and was printed in *Bessatsu Korokoro komikku* (the separate volume of CoroCoro Comic) magazine from April to August 1996 and then turned to the *Gekkan Korokoro komikkumagazine*. According to Yamada Tōru, this manga was like the “Bible” for boys with a circulation of 1.6 million copies (2000: 62). Except for this version, there were others created by different creators.

²⁶*Bunko* or *bunkohon* are affordable and portable small-format paperback books usually in A6 (105×148 mm or 4.1"×5.8") size. Many major Japanese publishing companies have their light novel imprints such as Asahi’s *Sonorama Bunko* (Sonorama Bunko) and Kadokawa’s *Sunīkā Bunko* (Sneaker Bunko).

enjoy daily supplies of characters by paying only 100 yen a month. This consumption of characters through mobile phones promotes the role that characters play in individual expression, identity and social communication.

Following the release of *Shin seiki evangerion* (Neon Genesis Evangelion), the third generation of *otaku* became established. In many respects *Shin seiki evangerion* continued the trends of *Gandamu*, such as the robot theme, the futuristic world, and the complex story. When its anime was released in 1995, it became a hit among audiences, especially among the youth and adults that formed the major component of *otaku*. Compared with the previous two generations of *otaku*, this generation has grown up in a fairly advanced technological environment in which their concerns and the ways in which they consume have changed greatly. As Azuma notes, “The third generation pays more attention to mystery and personal computer games than the first generation’s science fiction, their fan events have moved onto the Internet, and their fan creations are completed using CGI [Computer Generated Imagery]” (2007: 14). The changes are also reflected in the transformation of Akihabara, Tokyo, which was known as the Electric Town, where household electronic goods used to be sold after the Second World War. Since the 1980s, Akihabara has become a sacred place for *otaku* (Torii, 2001). The stores shifted to personal computers, games, software, and manga and anime characters: posters and advertisements featuring female characters were put up inside and outside their stores (Morikawa, 2003). Thus *otaku* cannot only buy electronics but can also enjoy the 2D atmosphere there.

From these changes we can see the inevitable tendency for *otaku* to become part of the media and technology worlds. Through the use of media and technology, they have become what Jacques Attali (2006) calls “virtual nomads” who allow selves to be surrounded by a virtual universe and actively engage in it. This engagement is particularly embodied in their strong interest in the Internet, which has also set a trend for consuming characters, for example, Hatsune Miku. Miku is a character who originally featured in the Vocaloid music software that went on sale in 2007. This music software, known as “a singer in a box,” used the image of a young female character and allowed users to create music by entering melodies and lyrics. After its release, Miku soon reached the top of the software sales rankings. One year later, more than 40,000 units had been sold, with an average of 300 units per week (23 July 2008 *ITmedia*). Miku won the AMD (Association of Media in Digital) Award, the Seiun Award, the Animation Kobe Awards and the Good Design Award. The Committee of the Good Design Award specifically pointed out that Miku “reveals the new possibilities for content on the Internet,” which is the key to understanding the popularity of Miku.²⁷

Miku’s instant success was the result of her diffusion on the Internet. Many users created original songs using Miku and uploaded their work onto the Internet to share with others. Inspired by these online works, others became fans of Miku. Nico Nico Douga (literally, “smile video”), a sharing website in Japan, made a big contribution to

²⁷See “Hatsune Miku Good Design Award of 2008,” accessed 1 May, 2014, <http://www.g-mark.org/award/describe/34937?locale=ja>.

Miku's popularity by providing a web platform. As a result, as well as music, fans could also create anime videos using Miku's character image and post them on Nico Nico Douga. A significant feature of Nico Nico Douga was that, unlike other video sharing sites, comments could be overlaid directly onto the video, in sync with a specific playback time. This emphasized the sense of sharing in two ways: it combined a watching experience shared with other viewers, and communication with the creator of the video. Furthermore, the sense of sharing could be found in the calls for ideas and the reuse or remixing of others' creations into one's own works. Some creators would post their unfinished work online and ask others for help; as long as the source was indicated, creators could borrow elements from others' works to make their own creations. In this way, Miku was not only a piece of music software or a character but also user-generated media through which users, fans, and audiences could actively participate in consuming as well as producing Miku. This suggests a "participatory turn," as emphasized by Henry Jenkins (2014) when discussing contemporary media convergence, following which character consumption began to shift onto a more participatory stage.

One thing that we should note here is that neither Urutoraman nor Pokémon nor Haruhi nor Miku originate from manga and anime. I argue that this change is a significant result of the media mix. Although early media mix practices place manga and anime at the centre, with other forms such as special effects, games, light novels, and software become the increasingly important components and sources, they are all capable of producing the starting points for characters. In this sense, the media mix not only provides a multiple platform for developing characters but also expands the whole industry by absorbing various other characters such as business logo characters, design characters, government and institutional characters, and event characters. Driven by the media mix, today's character industry has an ever broader conception, including characters from all areas.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the historical development of characters through two key words: consumer and consumption. I have argued that each word addresses different characteristics of the different development periods of characters: the extension of the consumer group through which both young and old became loyal consumers of characters in the initial development phase, and the diversity of character consumption driven by the involvement of various cultural aspects in the thriving development of the industry.

Consumers, as the targets of character merchandising, not only decide on the economic direction of the industry but also reflect its trends and values. Children were not only the natural consumers of characters but were also the demographic most valued by Japanese society, and thus character producers initially attempted to draw their attention and actively explored various character goods that would appeal to them. Toy producers played a particularly important role: the products that they launched from the 1950s to the 1970s, from character toy accessories to toy figurines and toy models, satisfied children's ideas about characters as well as their consumer

desires. Surrounded by these character goods, children became present consumers who expressed their direct desires for characters. From the 1970s character producers began to focus more on the adult market, following the trend of manga and anime shifting towards a more adult audience. With the rise of youth manga and the release of the anime *Yamato* and *Gandamu*, more and more young adults became fans and consumers of characters. This expansion effectively laid a broader foundation for the subsequent diverse character consumption.

In the same decade, character consumption became part of *shōjo* culture, which contributed to the development of cute culture and led the boom in the consumption of fancy goods. Many cute characters, appearing on a wide range of goods, were created to target girls and young women. In the 1980s, the opening of Tokyo Disneyland realized the reproduction of the imaginary character world in reality, as well as providing a paradise for character consumption. Many Japanese consumers were surprised by this paradise and enjoyed it. In the 1980s *otaku* gradually formed their distinctive subculture. They were obsessed with manga, anime, and games, and had a special love for 2D characters. Their consumption of characters was also part of their own production process, in which they valued information collecting, sharing, and communicating. Hence, *otaku*, particularly the third generation, were good at using media and technology. This was in part because they had grown up in an advanced technological environment. Since the 1990s they act as pioneers who have mastered the new media and the Internet and set the trend for consuming characters.

This chapter has provided a historical overview of characters as well as a mirror that has shown how the intimate relationship between consumers, including children and adults, male and female, and characters has been built through merchandising and consumption in Japan. This relationship has also rooted characters in consumers' mind, and this will be the focus of the third part of this dissertation.

Chapter 3

Character, Affect and Identity

To discuss why consumers, across different generations and genders, are attracted by characters and consume them, I will firstly place the phenomenon within a psychological context. This perspective also helps us to know the cognitive process and experience involved when individuals use and purchase character goods and services. As Japanese creator Koike Kazuo states, characters “build a bridge which leads to people’s hearts” (2011: 32). And this bridge, according to Ivan Vartanian, “function[s] as a means of getting in touch with one’s emotions and ha[s] become a kind of tool for bringing internal psychic machinations out into the open” (2005: 7). In the book *87% no nihonjin ga kyarakutā o suki na riyū* (The Reasons Why 87 Percent of Japanese Like Characters), the Japanese psychiatrist Kayama Rika suggests that it has been a “character therapy age” in which characters can help to release stress and reflect the inner self (2001: 12-13). Moreover, many scholars have argued, characters associate with qualities such as self-pleasure, comfort, intimacy, warmth, happiness, healing and nostalgia, and so on (Allison, 2004: 40, 2006: 19-28; Kandō, 2006: 6; Yano, 2012: 10-11, 20; McVeigh, 2000: 137-138). These qualities make the consumption of characters fall into the affective aspects of individual lives and guide their attention and perception. In short, character consumption can satisfy individuals’ psychological needs. How does it work precisely?

Already at the end of the 19th century, American philosopher and psychologist William James noted that possessions help to reveal who we are. In *The Principles of Psychology*, considered a monumental text in the history of psychology he argued, “In its widest possible sense...a man’s Self is the sum total of all that he can call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house...his lands and horses, and yacht and bank-account” ([1890] 2007: 291). The same point is made a century later by the scholar of marketing, Russell Belk. He explains that our possessions are parts of ourselves, which does not only raise “important issues concerning the role of possessions” but also offer a “more promising way of considering the symbolic importance of consumption in our lives” (1988: 139-168). The implication behind the perspective is that the marketplace has been a source of mythic and symbolic resources which consumers can use to construct their self-identity (Hill, 1991; Holt, 2002).

Comfort and Desire

With regard to the question of “what are the psychological benefits of being with characters or character goods,” the Bandai Character Research Institute (Bandai Kyarakutā Kenkyūjo) conducted a survey in 2004 based on 1,210 respondents ranging in age from three to sixty-nine. It in detail discovered eight typical elements that individuals want from characters, including “tranquillity,” “protection,” “escape from

reality,” “mood transition,” “a return to childhood,” “self-realization,” “hope for transforming [*Ihenshin*]” and “vitality,” and provided supporting data for this. As the lead researcher at the Bandai Character Research Institute and the director of the exhibition, “JAPAN: Kingdom of Characters” (see Introduction), Aihara Hiroyuki offered analysis of these eight elements in his work *Kyaraka suru Nippon* (Chara-ized Japan, 2007: 27-45). These eight elements, I suggest, can be summarized in two directions: characters can provide individuals with comfort, and characters can satisfy individuals’ desire for the self---in short, comfort and desire. I will carry out here by borrowing these elements and combining them with my own online fieldwork.

As I discuss in Chapter 2, with the development of the media mix, there has been a participatory turn that has led to more and more people wanting to share their opinions and communicate with others. And with the coming of the information society, the Internet has gradually become an effective way for people to actively explore and communicate information about their common interests—in this case characters. In order to illustrate these eight elements in detail, I have collected some online data that addresses individuals’ specific thoughts and feelings about characters from the biggest online community in Japan—2 *channeru keijiban* (2 channel textboard) or 2channel (2ch for short). 2ch has been described as Japan’s most popular online community, with around ten million users accessing it each day (NetView, 2008). One of the most distinctive features of 2ch is the complete freedom to post anonymously. Many discussions and conversations about characters, manga, anime, *otaku*, and so on happen here. The famous novel *Densha Otoko* (Train Man, 2004), which describes the story of *otaku*, is also based on the posts of one anonymous user on 2ch.

Comfort

Japanese scholar Araki Nagateru has argued that character consumption is not only an “‘affective experience’ [*kanjō keiken*] based on consumers’ contact with characters, but also an ‘experience value’ extracted by the accumulation of ‘affective experience’” (2002: 2). This is consistent with the insistence of African-American philosopher Alain Locke (1983) that value-modes depend on thought-action, as well as on “attitudes” which direct the affective aspects of human behaviour. Value can trigger a consumer response, which means an increase in experience value can whet consumers’ appetites to consume characters. Character consumption and experience value can thus help explain each other, in effect forming an “experience circulation.” This circulation is not the origin, but it can be used to help explain character consumption. In this respect, Araki continues: “Experience value can intensify character consumption and make an intense circulation. But not all consumers participate in such an intense experience circulation [like fans]. Generally due to certain other elements, such as the differences of individuals and environment, oblivion, changes in hobbies, and transitions of interest, circulation will decline. However it is precisely these ‘other elements’ that stop consumers from extreme actions, such as obsessively collecting or entering a state of dissociation, but ensure the formation of a temperate circulation. Only the high experience value is not enough to explain character

consumption...but it plays a vital role in discovering character consumption and understanding its characteristics” (2002: 2).

Here Araki suggests that affect, which stimulates consumers to consume character goods continually while creating an intimate interaction between the individual and characters, is the key element to understanding character consumption. This has much in common with Robert Plant Armstrong’s (1981) opinion of art as an “affecting presence” which relates to the “visceral values” of humans. Armstrong argues that those visceral values account for “the universe of man’s interiority” and his emotions, which means that we have to understand which affective resources characters are linked to in order to understand the meaning of characters for individuals. Therefore, what do individuals look for in characters?

According to a market report in 2008 on Office Ladies (OL for short) from *Sankei Living Shinbun* newspaper, more than 80 per cent of the office ladies surveyed liked characters and their reasons were almost all related to comfort: regarding Winnie-the-Pooh, one said “I feel that I am healed by him, which does not mean it releases my tensions but he gives me peace of mind”; regarding Miffy, one pointed out, “She can warm my heart and she is so colourful”; of Rilakkuma (“Bear in relaxed mood”), one said “his lazy and boring image comforts me and I like him very much.” These characters are known as *iyashi-kei*-characters (healing-type characters), which became popular as part of the *iyashi būmu* (healing boom) in Japanese society in the mid-1990s.

According to Chikako Ozawa-de Silva, *iyashi* (healing) means to “enable a change in the attitude people have toward their illness and difficulties” (2006: 170). The *iyashi būmu*, as Lisette Gebhardt has argued, constituted “in various aspects a central moment of Japanese contemporary culture, which found a great response in the 1970s when western esoteric teachings and practices were adopted” (2004: 326, quoted from Kühne, 2012: 216). But it did not frequently appear in the mass media until the mid-1990s and expanded from its original fields of medicine and clinical psychology to literature, art and commercial enterprises (Ozawa-de Silva, 2006: 169). Since then, *iyashi* itself has become a marketable commodity. It has been linked to many products or services in the market such as music, cosmetics, café, robot interaction, pet therapy and characters. These things or services are always “designed to produce an affective engagement with consumers” (Plourde, 2014: 116) that helps to build a comfortable environment for them.

In effect, human beings naturally strive for comfort and thus there is always a strong demand for it. Comfort meaning a lack of hardship, is a basic quality of individuals living in the world, especially when they meet the personal uneasiness such as stress or social unrest such as disaster and economic depression.

According to a survey reported by *Shūkan Tōyō Keizai* (Weekly Toyo Keizai) magazine in 2011, 60 per cent of Japanese were suffering the work force (Hoffman, 2011). The aim of this report is to provide more “coping tips” to people who need them, which indicates that stress has been a serious issue needed to be managed in Japan. Tracing the history in Japan, work force is still a dangerous aspect following the development of economy. For instance, in the late 1970s, *karōshi*, had set off alarm

bells in Japan. In the late 1980s, the Japanese government began to look at this problem and publish the related statistics. Today it is still an issue needed attention. For example, in 2015 the claims for compensation for *karōshi* reached 2,310 cases (including both aspects of the cardiovascular disease and mental stress), according to the data from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. A recent government survey which is also the part of the nation's first white paper on *karōshi* published in October 2016 suggests, a fifth of the Japanese workforce faces the risk of death from overwork (8 October 2016 *The Guardian*). The affected workers, mainly salarymen and OL, in fact are exploring ways to deal with work force.

As Jeannie Lo observes through her fieldwork in Japan, OL frequently use characters to “clutter their desks” (1990: 43). It is also found in salarymen who use characters to decorate their computers or go to a character-themed café on their way home (April 6 2009 *Yomiuri Shinbun* newspaper). Aihara (2007) argues, their motive is simple, but sometimes representative of frustration: when the problems they encounter, such as difficult tasks or receiving embarrassing complaints from directors or customers, are too difficult for them to deal with in the working environment, they turn to characters for self-distraction. Unlike the indifference displayed by real people, the characters always smile and guard them silently, seemingly understanding their sadness and grievances. This process allows salarymen and OL to endure tensions in the workplace, and offers a way of escaping from reality by allowing them to take cover in a character-protected nest. Certainly this escape cannot be purely seen as a negative behaviour because the tension effectively allows them to grow emotionally.

It is very common to see individuals redirect their feelings from one person to another, or from a person to an object due to a sense of familiarity. This psychological phenomenon is known as transference. In this process individuals experience a variety of contrasting feelings related to love and psychological growth, as Carl Jung notes in *The Psychology of the Transference* (1983). He maintains that the key to individuals' successful growth and transference is the ability to endure the tension of those conflicts while not giving up. Thus, a seemingly simple transfer of emotions is actually a process that involves the self's struggle with the reality outside of the self. If individuals want to survive, they have to keep fighting until they have a breakthrough: characters seem to provide an opportunity for individuals to steer away from storms of the heart as well as reality.

It also explains why some enjoy the companionship of characters to the point that they sometimes like to place themselves in a character-decorated environment that is like “a nest of comfortable familiarity, both knowable and knowing” (Steinberg, 2012: 81). For them, characters are much like “protective amulets” (Aihara, 2010). Significantly, being with characters, individuals can obtain tranquillity.

As shown in above cases of OL and salarymen, tranquillity means that being with a character calms a person down and alleviates her/his stresses. In Japan, not only the stressed workers but also other groups such as children, teenagers and college students seek tranquillity from characters. It is partly due to the problem of modernity: in a modern city, without the traditional or established patterns for interacting with others but with various communication devices, relationships are evolving in an ever more

convenient and instant way, resulting in individuals having more than enough acquaintances, but no close friends. For example, The Whitepaper on Youth of 1990 suggested that most Japanese young people had “superficial acquaintances but hardly any close friends” and half of them had never the experience of joining a community event (quoted from Woronoff, 1997: 218). Likewise, the *Kokumin seikatsu hakusho* (Whitepaper on National Livelihood) of 2007 specifically pointed out the problem of the dilution of *tsunagari* (connectedness) in family, local community and at work and its negative influence to people’s spiritual lives. Additionally, there are the related issues of *futōkō* (school-refusal) and *hikikomori* (social withdrawal), in which those affected refuse to leave their house for work or school and seldom communicate with family at home but instead immerse themselves in their own worlds.¹ These problems lead to alienation at the expense of intimate relationships, thus preventing the building of deep relationships with others, and pushing individuals into a crisis of emotional desertification. It is also one aspect of what Allison calls “prosthetic sociality” which “is percolating in the sociological gap left by the weakening of human ties in the family, workplace, and community in Japan today” (2013: 101).

Japan has a traditional collectivistic culture in which individuals are interdependent; its members are expected to value their family and friends, whom they can ask to help alleviate their stress. In general, people build their most personal and intimate relationships with family and friends. As this bond is gradually weakening in Japanese society, individuals are turning to substitutes, rather than their family or friends, to release the stresses of their relationships. For example, an 1958 article of *Yomiuri Shinbun* newspaper titled “*Hitori tanoshii seikai, nitasarenu aijō no aite motomete*” (The Happy World of One Person: Seeking the Object of His Love) introduced a Japanese boy why he loved the manga world so much because he could not feel enough love from his parents who were busy working (3 May). In other word, when the existing route is blocked, they look to find others to comfort their lonely hearts. This is where characters come into view.

The fracturing of an individual’s relationships, both internal and external, can easily result in insecurity, fear, and nervous breakdown, factors of “social precarity” proposed by Allison in her *Precarious Japan* (2013), which encourage individuals to find protection or a chance of escaping from reality or at least a way to adjust their moods. These needs are particularly strongly felt by children, who stand on the cusp of life and are generally controlled and educated by adults and society. Society requires children to be socialized, rather than it being their own choice. However, it cannot be denied that during this process children may feel tensions between themselves and society. Their lack of social experience and capacity sometimes means that they are unable to rid themselves of those troubles.

As Japanese scholar Taki Mitsuru (2003) has shown that Japanese children feel a lot of stress in terms of peer relationships such as being isolated and ignored at school. A 1985 youth survey conducted by the Management and Coordination Agency suggested

¹There are lots of reasons for both issues, such as bullying at school and overbearing or absent parents at home (Jones, 2006). Ide Sōhei (2007) and Ikegami Masaki (2014) also explain these issues in sociological and psychological perspectives respectively.

that when the Japanese youth needed advice, “only 19 per cent looked to fathers and 37 per cent looked to mother as counsellors” (quoted from Woronoff, 1997: 218). Similarly, in above *Kokumin seikatsu hakusho* of 2007, 23.5 per cent of the Japanese fathers almost did not communicate with their children in normal life and overall 60.4 per cent only talked to their children within 30 minutes. Hence, in answer to the question “mother, father, friends or characters, who makes you feel secure?” in the aforementioned Bandai survey for children who felt stressed, Aihara (2007: 48-49) points out that 56.3 per cent of the respondents opted for “mother,” while the second answer given was not “father” or “friends,” but “characters.” That is to say, compared with fathers and friends, characters are perceived as offering children a greater sense of security. Though one can argue that fathers as the primary breadwinners are busy working, meaning that they have little time for parent–child communication, the fact that characters are chosen over friends reveals children’s experiences of the difficulties of school relationships, as Aihara concludes. Or to put it in another way, it is that children choose characters to take the places of friends, which may explain why children sometimes create certain dialogues with character toys or dolls. Here the role that characters play is like an imagined friend from a fairytale. To some extent, characters could even be seen as a visual way of expressing fairy tales.² According to child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim (1976), fairy tales may be imaginary but they can help children to cope with mental pressure and emotional growth. Thus, although the dialogue behaviour may be based entirely on a child’s imagination, it provides them with a way to find a listener who can help to ease their anxiety.

Likewise, the above-mentioned OL and salarymen’s contact with characters as well as many other extreme cases can be understood in this way. For example, with the development of video games, the contact between individuals and characters evolves into a way of dating. The dating-simulation game “LovePlus+” produced by Konami company allows a real man to develop a romantic relationship with a virtual character girlfriend and attracts a lot of attentions. As a fan of the game says, “There is not a lot of romance in my life and this helps me cope with some of the loneliness” (quoted from Wakabayashi, 2010). It indeed has been a serious situation of male-female relationships in contemporary Japan (see, for example, Rani, 2013; Bumpass *et al.*, 2009).³ And some people have developed a kind of fetishistic love for characters such as character-figurines and character-pillows (see, for example, Katayama, 2009; and chapter 4). Here it is not to deny the potential problems behind such a virtual relationship, but it is characters that to some extent relieve the tension between the relationships in reality, which in turn, enables the game players to gain a better real life. As the producer of “LovePlus+” Uchida Akari notes about the players, “They

²See, for example, Tezuka argued that he was not so much drawing manga as “writing a story with a unique type of symbol” (Schodt, 1983: 25). Dani Cavallaro has elaborated on the interaction between anime and the fairy tale tradition in her study *The Fairy Tale and Anime: Traditional Themes, Images, and Symbols at Play on Screen* (2011).

³According to a recent survey of Japanese people aged 18 to 34 conducted by the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (September 2016), almost 70 per cent of unmarried men and 60 per cent of unmarried women are not in a relationship; moreover, around 42 per cent of the men and 44.2 per cent of the women admitted they were virgins (Aoki, 2016).

became more positive about real-life dating and managed to get a girlfriend, they started getting on better with their wife, they began paying more attention to the way they dressed, they became more inclined to take vacations (together) — all sorts of things” (quoted from Fondi, 2014).

In this sense, characters are much like a light that may brighten individual lives. In fact characters per se have the qualities that may adjust individuals’ moods and deliver the pleasant message to them. As one 2ch poster says, “I like manga in which the conversations between characters make me laugh...”⁴ Generally speaking, laughter is the key to emotional change. It brings out pleasure, and problems such as relationship stress, insecurity, and the tension of conflict seem to be able to be laughed off in the presence of characters. It also can be understood as characters’ “whimsical effect” which, according to Nenkov Gergana and Scott Maura, is “associated with fun and playfulness” (2014: 327). Nekov and Scott particularly look at the whimsical effect of cute products and suggest that exposure to those whimsically cute products can “increase consumers’ focus on approaching self-rewards and make consumers more likely to choose indulgent options” (2014: 326).

Different from the studies introduced in Chapter 2, Neil Steinberg investigates cuteness in a scientific perspective and also points out, “Seeing cute creatures stimulates the brain’s pleasure centre...and improves concentration” (19 July 2016 *Mosaic*). He specifically traces the childlike, an essential aspect of the concept of cuteness, from Konrad Lorenz’s “kindchenschema” or “baby schema,” as defined in this scientist’s paper on “innate releasing mechanism” for affection and nurturing in human beings, including “fat cheeks, large eyes set low on the face, a high forehead, a small nose and jaw, and stubby arms and legs that move in a clumsy fashion.” The theory also applies to young animals. Here these features may remind us the Disney characters. Actually, Disney characters had experienced the evolutionary transformations in their own appearances, as historian Stephen Jay Gould who was also a famous writer of popular science, suggested in his “A Biological Homage to Mickey Mouse” (1983). Gould specifically examined the changes in Mickey Mouse’s appearance and pointed out that these changes directed to an increasingly juvenile trend which was called “neoteny” (1983: 82). Thus, Mickey gradually became more childlike and had many neotenous features: “a relatively large head, predominance of the brain capsule, large and low-lying eyes, bulging cheek region, short and thick extremities, a springy elastic consistency, and clumsy movements” (1983: 86).⁵ More importantly, these juvenile features could trigger viewers’ emotional responses which could be seen as an internal motivation for the changes in Mickey’s appearance. Although Disney and his artists might discover this “biological principle” unconsciously as Gould speculated, they indeed demonstrated it very well and created

⁴See <http://kanae.2ch.net/test/read.cgi/csaloon/1405128512/>, 14 July 2014, accessed 14 October 2015.

⁵The neotenous features or tendencies are not only shown in Disney characters but also other characters, such as Betty Boop and Teddy Bear. As Barry Bogin argues, “The cartoon of Betty Boop illustrates some human features which are sometimes labeled as neotenous, such as large head, short arms and legs relative to total height, and clumsy, childlike movement” (1999: 159). Similar with Mickey Mouse, there is evolutionary transformation in the Teddy Bear’s appearance, such as the increasingly large forehead and short snout (Hinde and Barden, 1985).

a “biological illusion” (1983: 89). The biological illusion could evoke pleasant feelings of audiences towards Disney characters and stimulate their desire to consume them. As a young Japanese female explains why she likes collecting Mickey Mouse items since childhood, “Mickey’s face becomes rounder than before and his clothes and personality always develop with the times changed” (15 June 1980 *Yomiuri Shinbun* newspaper). Today the biological illusion is already a key motive to consume cute products, not only characters. For instance, as a Japanese wine consumer says, “Since I am not particularly knowledgeable about wine, I usually pick a bottle with a cute label” (quoted from Tokuda, 2016).

Arguably, characters are perceived as able to promote a safe, relaxed, and enjoyable atmosphere for individuals. The comfortable world they are seeking is thus equal to a character-suffused world which, as Yano notes, has the potential for “comforting sociality” (2013: 61), particularly confronting with the uncertainty arose from the threat of natural disaster. In this regard, characters play a positive role in boosting morale. For example, after the earthquake and tsunami struck the north-east of Japan on 11 March 2011, numerous characters held the Japanese people’s hands, “hoping to deliver smiles to everyone in Japan, from small children to all the adults fighting for survival in and also out of the disaster area.”⁶

Comforting sociality also corresponds to the rise of *iyashi būmu* discussed above. At the end of the 1990s, the pursuit of comfort and healing was greatly triggered by the economic pressures, the long depression of the Lost Decade (the 1990s), and social anxieties, the Kobe earthquake and Aum shirikyō sarin gas attack in 1995 (Plourde, 2014: 119). In 1999, *iyashi* was selected as the buzzword of the year because “it had been a national theme [*kokuminteki tēma*].”⁷ It seems that comfort had been a national need for Japan in order for it to find a way out of current hard situation and return to *kako no eikō* (past days of glory) (Kayama and Bandai Kyarakutā Kenkyūjo, 2001: 91). Hence someone on the one hand turned to the *iyashi* products in the market such as above *iyashi-kei* characters, on the other hand they started to juxtapose the “uncertainties and anxieties of the present with presumed verities and comforts of the... past” (Roberson, 1991: 25) through characters, which were “highly codified figure[s] that [call] up nostalgia and childhood” (Yano, 2013: 66).

Similar to transference, described above, being surrounded by characters makes it easy to recall the feelings, desires, and happy times unconsciously retained from childhood. Japanese psychoanalyst Doi Takeo points out in his work *Amae no kōzō* (The Anatomy of Dependence, 1971), the postwar generations of Japanese have expressed a desire to be indulged like children, and they have a particular inclination for childhood. For example, in 1989 when TV anime *Himitsu no Akko-chan* was put on the air again after two decades, its character goods became popular with not only girls but also their mothers who were the first generation of audiences of this anime.

⁶See “*Te o tsunagō daisakusei*” (The Project of Holding Hands), accessed 14 October 2015, <http://www.teotsunago.com/>.

⁷See “*Yūkyan shingo ryūkōgo tashō happyō*” (Announcement of the U-CAN top new words and slang for 1999), accessed 2 March 2016, <http://singo.jiyu.co.jp/nendo/1999.html>.

As the report of *Yomiuri Shinbun* newspaper of the time commented, “This work was the shared experience of childhood between mothers and daughters” (27 February 1989). Likewise, those long-term characters, such as Doraemon (existing from 1969 to present) and Hello Kitty (existing from 1974 to present), can function as “a shared bridge” (Yano, 2013:32) which collects cross-generational memories.

Even if the characters are not their actual childhood characters, they produce the same feelings. For instance, Chibi Maruko-chan, a character that did not emerge on television until the 1990s, having been created in the 1980s, was modelled on the writer’s childhood and depicted the daily life of children in the 1970s. As a Japanese female says, “As the manga artist Sakura Momoko [1965-] is about my age, I find lots of similar experience in *Chibi Maruko-chan*. For instance, there was a story about American yoyos, which came into fashion in the 1970s...I remember that it also happened in my hometown and I found it so funny that somebody described such nonsense in detail” (quoted from Ishikawa, 2007: 86). The present characters realize or refer to the dream of *ano koro* (that time), thus establishing a “spirit paradise,” as Japanese author Yoshimoto Banana writes (1992: 48). In that paradise, there is only innocence and happiness without distress. In another of her works, *Deddo endo no omoide* (The Memory of a Dead End, 2003), Yoshimoto directly links the spirit paradise to the character world: when the heroine she depicts is asked to describe an image of happiness, the heroine replies, “I remember Doraemon and Nobita,” and explains, “I have a small clock with their picture on it. The two of them are reading manga in front of the sliding screen in Nobita’s room. They’re smiling. Manga is scattered around, Nobita is sprawled out on his stomach on a cushion folded in two, resting on his elbows, and Doraemon is sitting cross-legged, reading manga while eating *dorayaki* [pancakes with red beans]. It’s the relationship between the two of them, or maybe the middle-class Japanese household, along with Doraemon being a freeloader in their home... I always think, this is what happiness is” (quoted from Anya, 2015: 236).

Characters do not divide the past and the present but offer a combination of both. As Dipesh Chakrabarty argues, “...nostalgic memory... is to recover and preserve, make the past a part of the present” (1998: 290). This combination, I suggest, makes characters become an efficient tool for knowing the self. Characters meaning memories of *ano koro* can provide comfort at the same time they are a means for those who need them to fight against the present hard reality. In this sense, experiencing the nostalgia of childhood through characters looks innocent but is, in fact, more intentional. As the nostalgia becomes stronger an individual’s own consciousness of the self or his or her own needs will become clearer. This intentionality serves less as a hope of “returning to childhood” and more as a way of “remaining in childhood” (Aihara, 2007: 36), which is similar to the motivation of some Japanese women to

remain cute or even to be a *burikko* (pretending child⁸). As Kinsella notes, “Being cute mean[s] behaving childlike—which [involves] an act of self-mutilation, posing with pigeon toes, pulling wide-eyed innocent expressions, dieting, acting stupid, and essentially denying the existence of the wealth of insights, feelings, and humor that maturity brings with it” (1995: 237). It is also representative of above neoteny, which elicits response from others on the one hand, and stimulates self’s desire for cute products on the other hand. In this sense, “remaining in childhood” can be looked upon as one major reason why so many adult consumers participate in an infantilized trend and consume characters. And not only many female but also male adult consumers who are affected by the “Peter Pan Syndrome”⁹ are interested in the cute products and would like to consume characters. Significantly, through such consumption they can understand themselves better, including both their past and their present selves.

The Desire for the Self

Hence consuming characters is also a process of self-learning, in which characters are always adopted as an individual’s referents. As Japanese scholar Ishikawa Satomi points out, “In Japan, consumption, especially that of popular culture, is often... an experiment and exploration of oneself... the implicit in the analytical perspective... is a postmodern theory of subjectivity” (2007: 18). It means that the consumption of characters is situated within and draws upon existing discourse of consumption as an efficient means of being self, a tendency that begin to present in Japan since the 1970s. In this section, I will look at how individuals pursue their individuality through consumption and on this basis examine how characters help them realize and inspire themselves.

I agree with Ishikawa that “subjectivity should be seen as a heterogeneous assemblage of self-images that is constituted through the meaning systems or discourses present in a given society” (2007: 18). Particularly when consumption in such a society has presented a postmodern tendency, I suggest. Generally speaking, postmodernism recognizes that “consumption is more significant for its sign-value or symbolic qualities than for its use-value” (Miles, 1998: 23). Accordingly, the term consumer culture, as Mike Featherstone has argued, “points to the ways in which consumption ceases to be a simple appropriation of utilities, or use values, to become a consumption of signs and images in which the emphasis upon the capacity to endlessly reshape the cultural or symbolic aspect of the commodity makes it

⁸A *burikko* is a grown-up female who acts like a child. This term was developed by a cute idol in the 1980s, Matsuda Seiko who used this style look to attract the attentions of both the males and females. Literally, this term means pretending a child (*huri* meaning *furi*, pretence, and *ko* meaning child) and sometimes has negative associations, such as it is used to distinguish a girl whose cuteness is natural or forced. Not all people like *burikko* and some believe that it is a cover for people who do not want to take on serious responsibilities.

⁹The “Peter Pan Syndrome” is a concept of a male adult who is socially immature. This term became well known in Japan after Dan Kiley’s book of the same name was translated into Japanese in 1984 (Taga, 2005). It also points to some issues of Japanese such as extending the duration of being a student, taking on the temporary job rather than the permanent and just doing nothing but leaning on parents, which is always relevant to the discussion of *amae* (dependence).

appropriate to speak of *commodity-signs*" (1995:75; emphasis in original). It highlights the significant ability of consumer goods to be divorced from their utilitarian quality and economic values. This ability also contributes to transforming commodities into the signs required to satisfy human "needs"; however, this is something of myth, as French sociologist and cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard (1988) states, because human beings are never actually satisfied and their "needs" are never actually met. Here Baudrillard is referring to a situation of "a constant fluidity of differential desires and meanings" (Miles, 1998: 26). Such a situation enables consumer objects to become interchangeable, which helps the consumer to construct their meaningful, but not stable, world.

Furthermore, Baudrillard focuses on the mass media, which he thinks are responsible for the image and information overload that threatens the sense of reality. This is also the origin of the postmodern "depthless culture" of which Fredric Jameson (1984) speaks. For Featherstone, the proliferation of signs and images brings out the "aestheticization of reality" (1991: 15), in which consumers are satisfied that their worlds are aestheticized (symbolized by signs and visualized through images). Consumption thus becomes a means of enjoying the fine life and having an aesthetic experience, and has the "therapeutic ethos" (Lears, 1983). As Lears notes, the ethos implicitly casts the endless pursuit of commodities, services, physical satisfaction, and self-actualization as the modern replacement for religious salvation to fill spiritual emptiness. Thus, consumer culture provides a new structure for lifestyles, values and aesthetics in Western society, as well as a system of power discourse for modern society.

This is the case in Japan, which, as Clammer (1997: 2-9) argues, is one of the most sophisticated consumer societies in the world. He points out that as the first non-Western society to accomplish industrialization through its own efforts, Japan also has succeeded in creating a mass consumer society featuring scale, intensity, and high-quality products and services. This consumer society implies an important transition from mass production to mass consumption, marking the "appearance of consumer capitalism" with the domination of "a culture based increasingly on desire rather than need, one in which signs rather than just economic/materialist forces" exist. Further, it requires "an entire reorientation to life, to what is possible and to the realization of the idea of the making of the self as an at least partly autonomous project rather than as simply the plaything of history or of social forces beyond the control of the individual."

The story starts with the postwar high-growth Japanese economy. With regard to this, although some glimpses have been given in previous chapters, it may now be useful to give a systematic overview. After surviving the desperate poverty of the early postwar years, Japan succeeded in recovering economically to its prewar level and ushering in an ever more prosperous era. The year 1955 has been pinpointed by many Japanese scholars as the dividing line (Kosai, 1986; Yoshikawa, 1995; Morikawa, 1995), after which the "rapid transformations of all areas of Japanese life" (Ivy, 1993: 247) started. In 1955, the semi-public Japan Productivity Centre and the Japan Housing Corporation were established. These two agencies, together with the Japan Highway

Public Corporation, created in 1956, opened the way for Japan to move to an American-style mass-production and mass-consumption society. In that same year, according to the *Keizai hakusho* (Economy White Book, 1956), Japan received an international balance of payments surplus of 535 million dollars, which was illustrative of the relative prosperity of the economy. Meanwhile the domestic prices kept stable (Kosai, 1986: 96). Therefore, in 1956 the Japanese government claimed, “Now is no longer ‘postwar.’ We have to face a totally different situation now. Growth within recovery is over. Our future development must rely on modernization...moving towards a new Japan on the wave of technological innovation is the important subject at present” (*Keizai hakusho*, 1956).

Modernization and technological innovation were symbolic of the time and supported the Japanese economy. They not only contributed to industry but also to creating a “bright, new consumer life” (Vogel, 1965). Technology led to the development of household appliances, and televisions, washing machines, and refrigerators, known as the three sacred treasures, began to penetrate every corner of national life. Mass media, such as newspapers, magazines, radio, and film, flourished and caused leisure booms in sports, fashion, and travel. What therefore emerged were changes in the Japanese attitude towards consumption, resulting in the popularization of Japanese domestic consumption. This phenomenon was defined by the Japanese government in the annual *Kokumin seikatsu hakusho* (Whitepaper on National Life, 1959) as the “consumer revolution” (*shōhisha kakumei*). The term confirmed the development of consumption in Japan and soon a goal of maintaining the fast development of the Japanese economy was set in the *Keizai hakusho* for 1960. In that same year the Japanese government announced the *kokumin shotoku baizō keikaku* (income-doubling plan), which aimed to double national and per capita income by the end of the decade. Thus during the 1960s, living standards and income increased considerably (see **Table 2**) and promoted the arrival of mass consumption (see **Figure 13**). By 1970, per capita income had not doubled but quadrupled (see **Table 2**). Between 1955 and 1957, on average less than 1% of households had televisions and washing machines, and the ownership of refrigerators stood at less than 3% (see **Table 3**); by the 1970s the penetration of televisions, washing machines, and refrigerators had reached more than 90% (*Shōhidōkōchōsa*, 2004).

Japanese sociologist Yoshimi Shun’ya criticizes the consumption of households in the 1950s and 1960s, “Throughout the high economic growth period, the Japanese people have affirmed their own cultural identity by consuming more advanced and varied electric appliances even while living in restricted accommodation” (1999: 152). Such kind of identity was regarded as a virtue, as the slogan of the time “*shōhi wa bitoku*” (consumption is a virtue) stated (Low, 2006: 135), which inspired the Japanese to pursue happiness through consuming. In this still restricted period, consumption featured a homogenous trait: “every household contained the same electric appliances in similarly constricted domestic spaces [standardized housing projects]” (Ivy, 1993: 249).

Year	total national income (1 billion yen)	total employee income (1 billion yen)	per capita income (1,000 yen)
1960	12912.0	6483.1	172
1961	15572.3	7670.2	206
1962	17499.2	9151.7	231
1963	20191.9	10672.5	262
1964	23377.0	12475.8	305
1965	26065.4	14528.2	336
1966	30396.1	16811.9	386
1967	36005.3	19320.1	448
1968	42479.3	22514.0	525
1969	49938.3	26500.7	609
1970	59152.7	31942.2	708

Table 2. Total national income, total employee income and per capita income during the 1960s; Source: *Heisei 20 nendo nenji keizai zaisei hōkoku* (The Annual Financial Report of 2008), Cabinet Office Homepage.

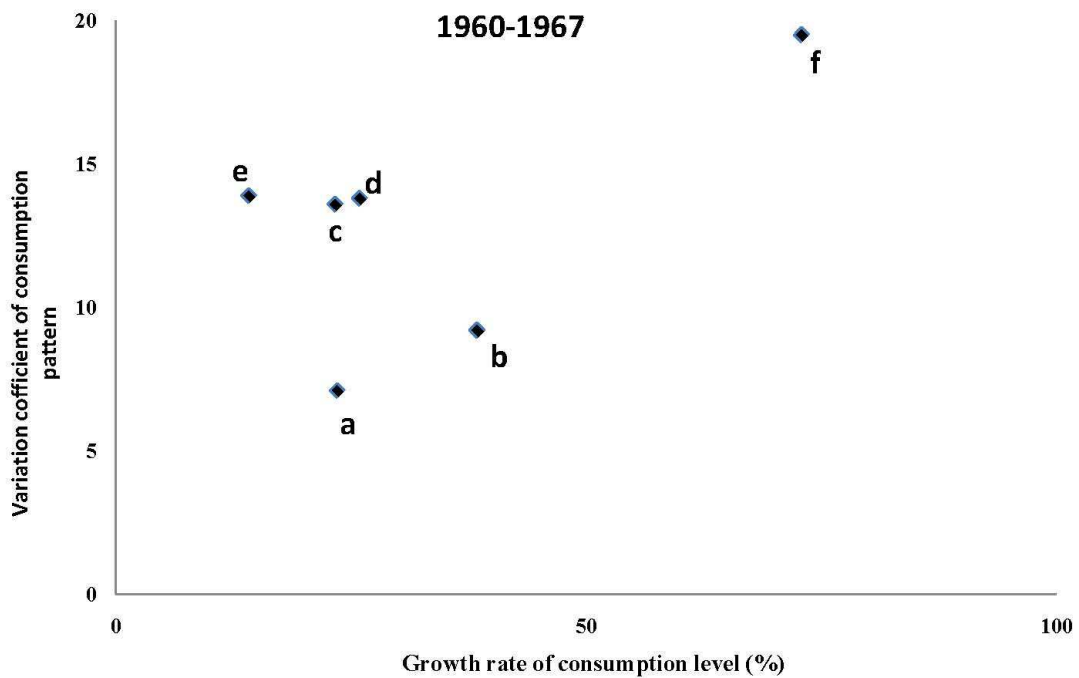


Figure 13. a: America; b: Italy; c: Canada; d: West Germany; e: England; f: Japan; Source: Cabinet Office Homepage.

	Per 1,000 people			
	car	television	refrigerator	washing machine
America	315	274	265	235
Canada	187	165	178	173
France	70	16	49	56
West Germany	36	23	39	45
Italy	18	14	20	6
Swiss	54	6	98	39
Sweden	88	12	187	119
Japan	2	7	27	4

Table 3. The ownership rate of cars (0.2%), televisions (0.7%), refrigerators (2.7%), and washing machines (0.4%) from 1955-1957 in Japan; Source: NIESR: Economic Review, Nov. 1959, Cabinet Office Homepage.

Around the early 1970s, influenced by the global market and the oil shock, the growth of the Japanese economy slowed. By that time, however, the living standards of most Japanese people had reached a certain level of consumerism, and it started to shape and be reflected in consumer activity. Many, who had used to want to be *hitonami* (an average person) within a collective culture or within the homogenous consuming practices in the previous decade, had begun to question their living situation as well as their material life. They started to purchase popular items not only to imitate others, but also to distinguish themselves from others as they desired an individualized lifestyle (Akuto, 1994; Ueno, 1987). One example reflecting this change was the popularity of Japanese popular musician Inoue Yōsui's song "*Kasa ga nai*" (Got no umbrella, 1973) which revealed that the concern of many at that time was not to act their role in society (and politics) but to enjoy their personal lives (Bourdagh, 2012). This tendency facilitated the diversification and differentiation of consumption, and it especially encouraged consumers to develop their own strong personal preferences (Ivy, 1993; Miura, 2014). Thus consumption became more important insofar as it was a means of giving expression to the consumer's individual nature which was particularly intensified through the 1980s.

Against this backup, according to Ishikawa, the Japanese youth of the late 1970s who had been "stigmatised as *shirake sedai* (the passion-free generation) or *fusoku naki sedai* (the lack nothing generation)" and whose main criterion in making decisions was *firingu* (feeling) gradually gained attention (2005: 117). They were depicted in the famous "brand-guide" novel *Nantonaku kurisutaru* (Somehow, Crystal) which was published with 442 footnotes for brand products in 1980 and evoked the *burando shikō* (brand-name consciousness) in Japan. This novel juxtaposed the two strands of commodity culture and identity and emphasized *firingu* as a key link between both sides. As the novel writes, "...Jun'ich and I [hero and heroine] will live without any

worries. We will go on buying and wearing and eating things that will somehow make us feel good. We'll listen to music that somehow makes us feel good, and take walks in places that somehow make us feel good..."(quoted from Inouye, 2008: 179) Riding the wave of this novel, those Japanese youth began to be called *shijinruu* generation (new breed of human) and became familiar to and accepted by the wider public. Born in the middle of the high-speed growth period, the *shijinruu* generation had grown up in a wealthy environment, believed that purchasing things could buy happiness, and so bought things merely to follow their hearts. They held the sign-values of commodities in high esteem and had a high sensitivity for novelty, such as fashion (Akuto, 1994), and created "a rapidly changing and continuous sequence of new wants" (Campbell, 1992: 56), as shown by the two popular phrases "*niizu kara wonsu e*" (from needs to wants) and "*hitsujuhūin kara hitsuuyokuhūin e*" (from objects of necessity to objects of desire) (Miura, 2014: 101).

Japanese social commentator, Fujioka Wakao who was also a famous advertising executive, provided an alternative explanation for the changes in Japanese society followed the hyper-consumption phenomenon. In his book *Sayonara, taishū* (Farewell to the Masses, 1984), he introduced the term *shōshū* (micro-masses) which implied fragmentation of the consumer market into smaller groups, as opposed to mass trends of the previous decade. Yet Fujioka pointed out that the term *jibun rashisa* (being oneself), centred on hobbies, self-improvement, sensibility, and self-expression, would become dominant in society, attributing less value to *mono* (things) and more to "*mono igai no mono*" (other things beyond things) (Creighton, 1994: 85-86). For example, the popular advertising slogans at the time promoted "*Jibun, shinhakken*" (Yourself, rediscovered), "*Fushigi, daisuki*" (The wonderful, the favourite), and "*Oishii seikatsu*" (Delicious life).¹⁰ These examples fit with the form of consumption characterised by Baudrillard (1988: 21-22) as "neither a material practice, nor a phenomenology of 'affluence.'" For Baudrillard, consumption is something "not defined by the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the car we drive, nor by the visual and oral substance of images and messages, but in the organization of all this signifying substance." Thus, he argues, "Consumption is the virtual totality of all objects and messages presently constituted in a more or less coherent discourse. Consumption, in so far as it is meaningful, is a *systematic* act of the manipulation of signs" (emphasis in original). In this sense, consumption in Japan during the 1980s had presented the postmodern features: the sign value of commodity was magnified and became a key to satisfy consumers' desire of being selves.

This postmodern tendency was further practiced in consuming activities of the 1980s. One example was the self-styled "creative life stores" such as Tokyū Hands, Loft, and Mujirushi Ryōhin. Miura Atsushi, a Japanese researcher on consumer society, observes those stores and notes that they were linked to a new kind of demand first appearing in Japan at the time: "a demand that turned its back on the passive acquisition of mass-produced goods and established brands, and instead viewed

¹⁰These slogans were created by Itoi Shigesato, a famous copywriter in Japan, for Seibu department stores, which also unleashed the wave of advertising slogans at the time and then became the keywords of consumer culture of the 1980s (Kamiya, 2012).

products as raw material that the consumers themselves could decide how best to ‘finish,’ symbolizing the coming of the age of *zakka* (accessories) (2014: 107-108). He argues that different from those big, hard and expensive products such as car, house and the luxuries, the smaller, softer and cheaper accessories became “the most effective tools” for consumers’ self-expression (2014: 109). Moreover, consumers’ own sensibilities devoted to the rise of the age of accessories, since most of those designs were out of their utility.

As Japanese researcher on semiotic marketing, Hoshino Katsumi points out, “Consumers [of the 1980s] consume according to not only their needs but also their desires. Their consumer choices are not based on the good or the bad but on like or dislike...When comparing objects per se, they prefer to look at the affective attributes of the objects and make choices according to their sensibility” (1985: 13). These consumers could not explain their choices or they had given up trying to explain what their criteria were for choosing, as Ueno notes in her book “*Watakushi*”*sagashi gēmu* (The Search for “Me” Game), “because they had no reason, thus no explanation” (1987: 79). However, Ueno argues that their non-explanation might come from the fact that consumption was a “nightmare” that made them not understand their own desires.¹¹

Standing on his experience as a marketing magazine editor during the 1980s, rather than a nightmare, Miura (2014: 114) argues that it was the fast development of consumer society that made consumers “lose” selves. As the image of Tokyo described by Clammer showed: “faster paced, bigger, and with an enormous concentration not only of population, but of business, the media, universities, fashion-houses, departmental stores, publishers and booksellers, the government bureaucracies, restaurants, theatres and the other paraphernalia of a major (and very affluent) capital city” (1997: 69). Clammer suggests that the advanced state of consumer culture in Tokyo in fact symbolized the same situation of the whole context of Japanese society. Within such an environment, “people [pour] vast quantities of information into their stomachs without time enough to chew, then reaching out to shove even more into their mouths before the last helping is even digested,” as a 1989 article titled “Epitaph for the 1980s” that Miura contributed maintained. At last, this article pointed out, “It is still too soon to tell [what kind of era of the 1980s it is].”

Furthermore, such an era was one in which media images such as the advertising played important role. It was them that brought out the overloaded information what Baudrillard has discussed. Many Japanese intellectuals also looked the development of media images and affirmed it, such as Asada Akira whose analysis echoed Baudrillard’s theory regarded the advertising copywriters as “new heroes” who brought “simulations and promotions of hyper-reality, promote[d] differentiation within

¹¹Ueno (1987: 56-81) maintains that “urbanization” and “normalization” bring out the affluence of Japanese society and then the latter is replaced by “differentiation” which plays the important role in improving people’s lives. But in fact “normalization” does not go away but parallels to “differentiation” and impacts on consumer choice: people want to be different from others at the same time want to be the same as others.

consumer capitalism, within which consumption itself promote[d] liberation and new forms of subjectivity” (Clammer, 1997: 23).

By the 1990s subjectivity were further impacted by those media images, such as the advertising phrases at the time almost put “being oneself” as a starting point, which also promoted a wave of *jibun sagashi* (self-seeking) in Japan’s consumer society. Miura argues that this wave inspires individuals to pursue their individuality and sensibility through a variety of consumption and in this process that they are offered the chance to achieve a multiple identity which is “a characteristic form of self-identification today” (Miura, 2014:118). On the other hand, it is the very multiplicity that makes individuals also confused about who they are and keeps them seeking the self from everything that is possible.

Characters are a familiar and favourite tool for one to realize this purpose. As shown in previous chapters, since the war characters have been a part of daily life. For example, the postwar “manga generation” and the “first anime generation” (born between 1955 and 1965; see also *gendaikko* in chapter 2) (Yamada, 2000: 28) had grown up with the companionship of manga and anime characters and within an abundant character goods environment. And their fondness for characters still exists in their heart. For instance, in a 2000 survey conducted by Bandai Character Research Institution, for males in the fifties, 54.7 per cent of them had character goods and 64 per cent admitted that they had their favourite characters (Kayama and Bandai Kyarakutā Kenkyūjo, 2001: 86). Following them, the subsequent generations such as *shinjinrui* (born between 1960 and 1975) generation had grown up in a similar and ever more abundant character environment. Along with *shinjinrui*, *otaku* who were specifically interested in manga, anime and the science fictions also appeared (see chapter 2). Ishikawa suggests that there is evident commonality between *shinjinrui* and *otaku*: “both groups are strongly inclined to define a person [and self] with reference to her/his preference for particular consumer items” (2007: 123). Moreover, Ōtsuka (2007: 194-195) points out, character consumption can make up for the depression in which the existing consumer values have lost the lustre. At the same time, it can act on the coming era and help to unveil the consumption pattern of new era. This function of character consumption can also be applied to individuals: help them out of the personal depression (confusion about the self) and find the self. So how does one seek the self through characters?

Last section has revealed that characters can play role in one’s self-learning. Self-learning is about understanding the concept of self, which is thought to have three primary aspects: cognitive self, affective self and executive self (Heatherton et al., 2007: 3). The cognitive self is also referred to as the known self: it aims to depict an image of the real self in both physiological and psychological terms. The affective self and the executive self are equal to the felt and active selves that highlight emotional and behavioural aspects. In this process of self-learning, none of these three aspects is stable, which causes the knowledge of self to be flexible. This flexibility implies that *jibun sagashi* is a continuous process in which individuals would continue to look at the self. At the same time, an individual’s self also depends on social interpersonal interactions and others’ perceptions, as a century ago Charles Horton Cooley’s

concept of “the looking-glass self” assumed (see **Figure 14**). It also supports the theory of self developed by George Herbert Mead (1934), which holds that an individual needs a reflexive self, which can be developed through taking on the role of someone else and responding to it, to constitute “me,” which is distinct from “I,” the active side of self. Mead concludes that “I” and “me” continue to interact with each other and together form the self. Mead’s “self” theory is well practiced in Japanese culture, which affirms the “ability or willingness to play another person’s role” and “melt into another’s self” through the sense of *ittaikan* (the feeling of oneness) (Lebra, 1986: 361).

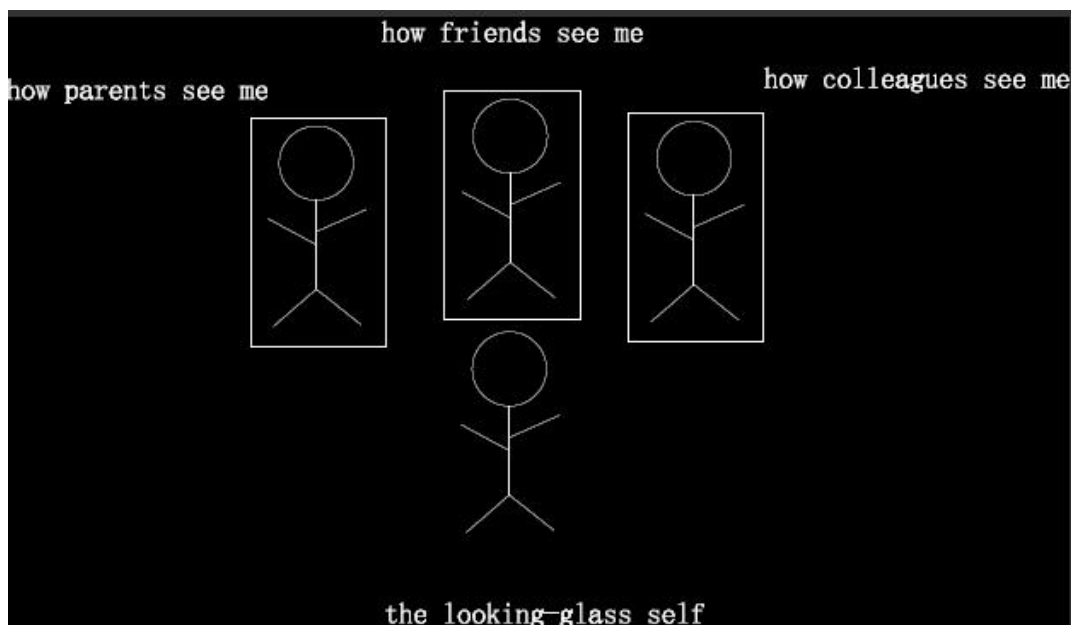


Figure 14. The looking-glass self; Source: Created by author.

Within this framework, we can consider the function of characters in knowing one’s self, which can be interpreted as providing a similar mirror mechanism, but with dual significance. The first aspect refers to the relationships between the individual and characters, which produce a relevant self. Such a relevant self emphasizes the emotional resonance between the individual and characters or the individual’s empathy with characters, meaning that looking at characters is equal to looking at the self (the individual becomes characters and plays characters’ role). Based on this aspect, the second significant aspect thus comes into play, which is that characters’ the looking-glass self can help to grasp the “me” and evoke a response of “I” (see **Figure 15**). For example, one poster on 2ch states: “...I like manga works that describe the life of characters that are not students but social men who have entered society. Regardless of what is about, work or private life, as long as it is real life, including, for example, workplace relationships...”¹² When looking at “social man” characters, the individuals

¹²See <http://kanae.2ch.net/test/read.cgi/csaloona/1405128512/>, 31 July 2004, accessed 14 October 2015.

are actually looking at themselves.¹³ In this sense, they have already gained an *ittaikan* with social man characters while at the same time they can take on the role of others such as social man characters' colleague and gain social man characters' the looking-glass self. Such the looking-glass self is in fact "an object to oneself from an outsider's perspective," as Mead puts it (1934: 136) and by seeing it, "I" am able to "reflect upon the meaning of alternative ways of expressing self" (Baert, 1998: 68). At this point, we should note the characteristics of characters that also act as mirrors. As Baudrillard has argued, "As a mirror the object is perfect, precisely because it sends back not real images, but desired ones...what is more, you can look at an object without it looking back at you. *That is why everything that cannot be invested in human relationships is invested in objects*" (1996: 96; emphasis in original). That is to say, the image that characters reflect is not only that of the relevant self but also the desired "me," which is decided by the desired "I." Individual choices of characters are in effect the results of that "I" reflecting upon the meaning and expressing an affirmation of "me" from "I." Ultimately, within the internalized dialogue between "I" and "me," the desired self is realized.

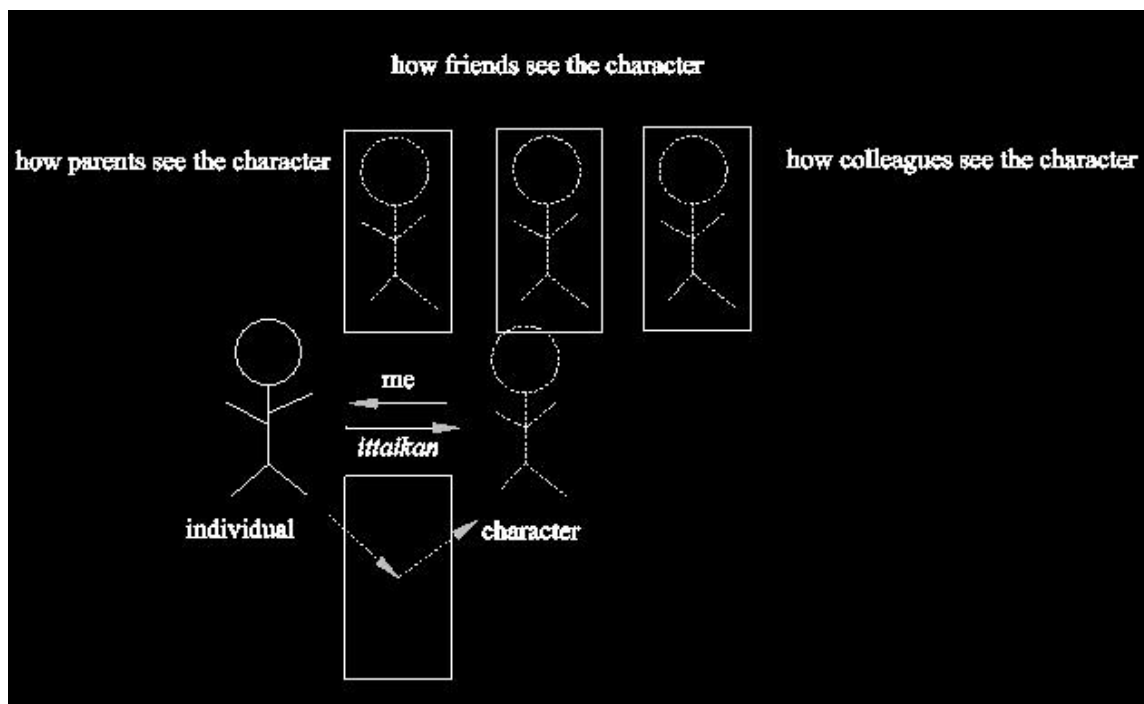


Figure 15. The twofold mirror mechanism; Source: Created by author.

In fact individuals have found another way in which they can realize themselves more directly (though still imaginarily), that is, by transforming into a character, an idea which is reified in the *henshin* (transforming). Since it became popular in the 1970s (see *henshin būmu* in chapter 2), the enthusiasm for *henshin* still exists

¹³ It is not limited to only human-characters. The key for gaining an *ittaikan* with characters is whether individuals can feel the emotional resonance or not. Moreover impacted by the animist sensibility, individuals may invest their emotions into non-human characters. I will return to this question in Chapter 4.

somewhere within one's heart because it is an efficient way of pursuing one's ideal self, especially when this ideal self is unable to be achieved in reality. More importantly, it promotes one's *jibun sagashi* that he/she may be not satisfied with the known self, and in turn, he/she tries to seek the unknown self, or the futuristic self. He/she expects to have a key like Doraemon's *dokodemo doa* (anywhere door)¹⁴ that can open an omnipotent world in which there are not any limitations to self. He/she favours particular special characters and goods, such as Kamen raidā and his *henshin* belt (see chapter 2),¹⁵ the Sūpā sentai (Super task force) and their *henshin* bracelets,¹⁶ and Bishōjo senshi sērā mūn (Sailor Moon) and her magical compact,¹⁷ which can act as switches to trigger the potential superpowers of his/her lives.

Such superpowers are obtained by taking on the role of supernatural others and thus are not real. However, from them one may feel a real energy called vitality which can activate his/her lives and inspire him/her to have a positive attitude. As a poster on 2ch points out, "I like characters with magic and superpowers that can have physical fights... such as Guy and Lee in *Naruto* and Zarakī in *BLEACH*..."¹⁸ These characters are known to be energetic, always full of the power to fight, while also conveying their positive feelings about friendship, dreams and *seishun* (youth, which is also Guy and Lee's catchphrase in the story). Their superpowers, although they come from the fictional world (something to which I will interpret further in next section), is, however, delivered into one's heart, in the form of emotional support that encourages the individual to experience the positive and avoid the negative.

Characters can function as realizing and inspiring one's self and therefore satisfy an individual's desire for the self. Like comfort, desire is a kind of individuals' affective response. They both contribute to constructing an interaction paradigm between individuals and characters. This structure exposes individuals' psychological needs for characters, as well as the intimate connection between the self and characters. In a very real sense, it is this inner connectivity that cements the interaction. Affect has the "capacity to guide attention and increase recall" (Jansson-Boyd, 2010: 81) which makes an individual tend to rely on a character and absorbs it into his or her self-

¹⁴*Dokodemo door* is one of Doraemon's magical gadgets which allows travel to anywhere by simple going through the door.

¹⁵In 2006, Bandai launched the new "No.1 Kamen raidā *henshin* belt" and attracted many adult consumers over thirty and forty (24 June 2006 *Asahi Shinbun* newspaper).

¹⁶The *Sūpā sentai* series is a long-running (from 1975 to present) superhero team genre of special effect shows produced and broadcast by Tōei. *Sentai* refers to the task force. Characters in this series always need some special items for their transformation into the superheroes. For example, in the 1980s because of the work *Taiyō sentai sun barukan* (Sun sentai sun Vulcan, 1981) the bracelet-style items became popular and therefore toy makers caught this opportunity and launched the related character goods, bracelet toys.

¹⁷The work *Bishōjo senshi sērā mūn* tells the story of five teenage girls who can transform into the pretty guardians and battle against villains. According to *Yomiuri Shinbun* newspaper (13 March 2016), with its new series are on the air since 2014, 5,000 related character goods have been launched in the market. Among those, the most popular one is *henshin* compact which is limited to two products per customer.

¹⁸See <http://kanae.2ch.net/test/read.cgi/csaloon/1412348704/473>, 9 December 2014, accessed 14 October 2015.

identity, thus allowing him or her to take part in daily social life with a character-based identity.

The “Characterized Individual”

As the emotional need for characters and the inner linkage between the self and characters become stronger, individuals may gain a sense of “reality” from characters. As someone states on 2ch, “...specifically, I think she [Suzumiya Haruhi] is the most ‘real’ of all 2D characters, although the narrative setting is fictional. It is the realities reflected in her personality and her motivation that echo inside people who watch this anime series. This may be the reason why this anime sells so well...”¹⁹ One may query whether this “reality” should even be considered reality. Indeed, it is not. So what does “reality” refer to here? Aida Miho argues if that people are living in the real world and they have the “same experience in the same location” but “experience different realities,” “what people recognize as real is only one perception that emerges as a result of their attribution of meanings; this is not the real but what should be called ‘reality’” (2015: 111). That is to say, if the character Haruhi is real to one person, it is because one attributes “realness” to the character. However, as for attributing the same meaning to an object, this is not necessarily the case, as Aida suggests. As a post titled “recent female characters in manga and anime without any sense of reality” on the 2ch states, “speaking of the sense of reality or human nature... recently characters have been over-symbolized and become very boring...”²⁰ The author of this post cannot feel the “reality” of characters. Aida continues, people “construct each individual ‘reality’ and, based on respective judgments, attribute (or do not attribute) the meaning of real” (2015: 112). Thus, whether a character is real or not is not the issue because the reality of it is based on the meaning of reality that each person attributes to it. In short, although the same signifiers of reality exist, these have a different significance for each individual.

Based on such a “reality,” many of the aspects discussed earlier seem to make sense: the pursuit of sensibility and the subjectivity of consumers can be seen as a process of individualizing “reality”; the superpowers of some characters goods may not be real, but those who perceive them as real can sense the “reality” of them through feeling the vitality²¹; characters are certainly fictional, but those who take comfort from them are able to sense their “reality” as well.

The “reality” is about characters as well as about the individual’s self. In such a “reality,” characters may feel more genuine to individuals. Individuals probably gain a strong sense of involvement with characters, build the *ittaikan* with them and obtain the “reality” of the self. This is why individuals may feel that characters are so “lifelike” or “psychologically believable” (Ang, 1985: 33) that they begin to treat them as they

¹⁹See <http://peace.2ch.net/test/read.cgi/win/1172464676/2>, 26 February 2007, accessed 23 July 2015.

²⁰See <http://fox.2ch.net/test/read.cgi/poverty/1441377961/48>, 5 September 2015, accessed 21 October 2015.

²¹There are some superpowers that have been realized in reality, for instance, one of Doraemon’s magical gadgets, *chūkenpā*, the robot-dog, has been produced by Sony as part of its artificial intelligence robot series.

would themselves, or see themselves as characters. In media and communication studies this is called a “para-social interaction” (Horton and Wohl, 1956), through which the individual develops a one-sided relationship with a persona in the media and views the persona as their “surrogate friend” (Stern, Russell and Russell, 2007: 26). An example of this can be found in *nichijō-kei* (daily-life-type) characters. *Nichijō-kei* works, also known as *kūki-kei* (literally, “air-type”), refers to manga and anime that use slice-of-life techniques to emphasize certain life scenes such as those that take place in school and at home; the characters in them include *bishōjo* (young-pretty-girl) characters and their friends, teachers, brothers and parents. The stories that they tell are “light and non-sense, and focus on the daily lives and conversations of characters” (Yamamura, 2015: 60). Rayna Denison points out, this genre focuses upon the “inward looking and gentle progression of time” and “makes the audience feel the link with their real lives” (2015: 112). Thus these characters to some extent are like “ours,” existing around us and sharing the same “reality” with us. Sometimes the stories even move into real-life locations. These real-life locations then become regarded as “sacred places” and trigger *seichi junrei* (pilgrimage) tourism booms in Japan. One such “sacred place” is Washimiya-machi, a town located in Kukishi City, Saitama Prefecture. A shrine that appears in the anime version of the manga *Raki ☆ Suta* (Lucky Star, 2004) is modelled on the local Washimiya Shrine. As the anime is actually being broadcast, a large number of travellers visit this area and the Washimiya Shrine (Tabuchi, 2008). For people who are not familiar with *Raki ☆ Suta*, when they visit the Washimiya Shrine, they only feel the reality, not the “reality.” But for those who complete a pilgrimage to this setting, it is the “reality” that they feel motivating them to do so.

A similar example can also be found in naturalism literature, which seeks to depict a believable everyday reality. Even if the works are fictional, the characters are always created based on a real individual’s body and thoughts. By maintaining a stance of objective reality in the text, naturalism builds a sense of “reality” as well as the unity of the fictional character with the real individual. When naturalism became popular in Japan, this unity particularly emphasized the building of “self-character,”²² which was studied as a result of the later development of *shishōsetsu* (the I-novel).

In recent literary trends, this “reality”-making skill is embodied in the creation of “character novels,” which is investigated by Ōtsuka in his *Kyarakutā shōsetsu no tsukurikata* (How to Make the Character Novel, 2003). In contrast to naturalism and the I-novel, the reality that character novels depict is the fictional reality of anime and manga, in which the self does not refer to a real individual but to an unreal character. This is the progressive significance that character novels possess in breaking the traditional fiction form. This not only applies to the new literary genre but also to content that relies on the fictional reality of character world. Ōtsuka also notes that the first author to consciously create a character novel was Arai Motoko who, during an interview on the occasion of winning her first Science-Fiction Award in 1977, explained that she had wanted to write a novel about a character like Rupan (the

²²Self-character is also applied in the social context. I will discuss further in Chapter 4.

character in *Lupin the Third*). Ōtsuka suggests that Arai's answer did not point to "noveliz[ing] Rupan but to present[ing] a similar impression to Rupan's anime in her own words" (2003a: 25). It, in fact, shows Arai's strong desire to write a fictional reality. Regarding this, Aihara argues that "although Arai did not use any character images in her later works, her answer at the time might be explained as a result of her true feelings for the character world in which Rupan exists, and that these feelings in fact have a broad consensus among the Japanese" (2007: 65). These true feelings make them sense of "reality" of character world. Relying on such "reality," the borders between character world and individuals, and the fictional and the real become blurred.

Certainly, the existence of blurred boundaries should not only be understood within the text but also within the context, particularly when the features of postmodernism have been deeply intertwined with consumer life through the development of the mass media. On this, Jameson has elaborated on "the transformation of reality into images" and the "fragmentation of time into a series of perpetual presents" (1983: 125). And Baudrillard (1983) proposes a simulacrum that is composed of models, codes, information, and signs that include some cybernetics. This facilitates the transfer of consumer life into symbols that represent consumers' particular social mentalities (including individuality and subjectivity), status, tastes, and lifestyles. As Baudrillard argues, "The TV and the media long since left their media space to invest 'real' life from the inside... We have all swallowed our receivers, and this produces intense interference on account of the excessive proximity of life and its double, and the collapsing of time and distance" (1996: 26). In short, individuals have been immersed in a world of simulation beyond their control: although they still believe their own perceptions and insist on extracting and seeking reality from the media, they do not realize that the qualities of reality have changed.

Baudrillard focuses on the term "media events" and notes that individuals do not distinguish the representation of events on TV from actual events because these events are a combination of reality and media. Baudrillard points out the "truth" of the media, "it is their function to neutralize the lived, unique, eventual character of the world and substitute for it a multiple universe of media which, as such, are homogenous one with another, signifying each other reciprocally and referring back and forth to each other. In the extreme cases, they each become the content of the others—and that is *the totalitarian 'message' of a consumer society*" ([1970] 1998: 123; emphasis in original). To some extent, the totalitarian message is always followed by an overload of information that offers too many choices, which it is hard for individuals to choose between, in turn, causing them to become passive and silent. The silence of individuals in a sense removes the existence of society. The boundaries disappear between different classes, ideologies, and cultural forms, and between the media strategy and the reality, and these are all exposed in the sign system. Thus the production of meaning depends on differences within the sign system but without reference to external real life. Additionally the media, in Baudrillard's words, "opens on to a generalized virtuality which puts an end to the real by its promotion of every single instant. The key concept of this virtuality is High Definition. That of the image,

but also of time (Real Time), of music (High Fidelity), of sex (pornography), of thought (Artificial Intelligence), of language (digital language), of the body (the genetic code and the genome)... The fact that Artificial Intelligence veers off into over-high definition, into a crazy sophistication of data and operations, merely confirms that this is indeed the achieved utopia of thought” (1996: 29-32).

Although what Baudrillard reveals here is much about the problems of technicism, this is what provides the technical support for characters and their world-building. We can find evidence of this from the development of characters and the consumer society landscape discussed in previous chapters: the platform of the mass media in postwar Japan, including magazines, manga, TV, film, and radio, and the media mix strategy which added many new media such as personal computers, telephones, and the Internet, have inevitably highlighted the power of media images and pushed characters into “over-high definition and a crazy sophistication of data and operations.” In this sense, the fictional reality of the character world is also built by virtue of technology and the media, and more importantly, these have helped it to evolve into a postmodern simulacrum which brings out the more real than real—that is, hyper-reality.

As Baudrillard suggests, hyper-reality refers to a condition in which the distinction between what is real and what is fiction is ambiguous; it is “the generation by models of a real without origin or reality” (1988: 166); it allows artificial production (or reproduction); and it does not become false or ridiculous, but more real than real. I argue that a character world that involves hyper-reality contains three aspects. The first is that the character world involves the creation of a world of signs. This is also significant as a paradigm to explain character consumption. As discussed in the first section of this chapter, with the increasing significance of commodity-signs, within the world of signs consumption becomes a process in which what is true or false is beside the point and instead consuming in accordance with a particular image, such as that of a character, is all important. Thus consumers may like to purchase commodities, such as clothes, cars, or houses, which are in the same style as those of particular characters, or to arrange their own life in line with the dream-like lifestyle of the character world, and by doing so ultimately gain great fulfilment and happiness from the character world.

The second aspect focuses on the “reality” that individuals feel in the character world. For instance, in the example of the person above who likes social characters, he or she likes a character world which depicts the interpersonal relationships of social characters, and he or she believes that their dramatic relationships are real, with the result that this may have an impact on his or her view of interpersonal relationships in reality. Thus surely those relationships of characters are fictional and those that support their beliefs are his or her “reality.” Due to this “reality,” the character world appears more real and attractive than reality. Hence, video or computer games are more fascinating than school. For example, boys are fascinated by Pokémon games and construct their own world independent from school and family by communicating with the characters (see chapter 4); and those hyper-real character theme parks discussed in the last chapter, such as Disneyland, are more amazing than

other places because they provide a “reality” that fosters the illusion of the imaginary character world.

In this sense, the real world seems to come last; nevertheless this is only in theory: the real is thus reborn within a system of signs. In Baudrillard’s words, “The very definition of the real becomes: *that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction... the real is not only what can be reproduced, but that which is always already reproduced*” (1983: 146; emphasis in original). Therefore, the third aspect of the hyper-real character world relates to the reproduction of signs. Baudrillard refers to the reproducibility of signs as an “implosion.” For Baudrillard, when the system reaches the limit following an intense degree of simulation, it presents a tendency to collapse from its own dynamics. This collapse swallows all the energy of the real, including that of meaning, so that signs cease to refer to anything but can only be reproduced and accumulated, which in turn moves the system further away from the real world. The system collapsing from within is seemingly “involution,” but it promotes the “evolution” of signs. These evolved (reproduced) signs do not have meaning. The value of one sign is highlighted by its difference from others. The hyper-real thus becomes more stable and stronger. For example, the princess world or prince dream built by Disney can be seen as the consequence of implosion: Disney princess series produce or reproduce various princess images through signs without reference to the real. One may want to be the Disney princess but not the princess in reality.²³

Character world, as a world full of signs, is not messy and always has a code. It is similar to the collective vision within consumption, as Baudrillard argues: “Few objects today are offered *alone*... the object is no longer referred to in relation to a specific utility, but as a collection of objects in their total meaning... thus [they] constitute object *paths*, which establish inertial constraints on the consumer who will proceed *logically* from one object to the next” (1988: 31; emphasis in original). Taking the example of Gandamu (see chapters 2 and 3), it has remained on television screens for more than thirty years and has launched many series, such as *Kidō senshi Gandamu* (Mobile Suit Gundam, 1979), *Kidō senshi zēta Gandamu* (Mobile Suit Zeta Gundam, 1985), *Kidō senshi Gandamu daburu zēta* (Mobile Suit Gundam ZZ, 1986), *Shin kidō senki Gandamu uingu* (Mobile Suit Gundam Wing, 1995), *Kidō senshi Gandamu daburu ō* (Mobile Suit Gundam 00, 2007), and *Kidō senshi Gandamu eiji* (Mobile Suit Gundam Age, 2011). The characters in the different series have different traits or use different machines, weapons, and systems to make them distinct from each other, although some have similar appearances (for instance, the mobile suits in the Universal Century timeline are all designed with two eyes and horns, and use three pale primary colours) and the same mission to battle their enemies. All of them are called Gandamu and contribute to the total meaning of Gandamu. Correspondingly, the consumption of Gandamu characters is to master the total meaning of Gandamu

²³For example, in Japan Disney style wedding that can realize one’s dream of a princess wedding is still a popular choice. The “Disney’s Royal Dream Wedding” program launched by Tokyo Disneyland includes the wedding ceremony inside Cinderella Castle and the same style wedding dress, hairstyle and makeup of Princess Cinderella.

character world, the direction of character paths, which, as Ōtsuka suggests, can be understood alongside the “theory of narrative consumption” (*monogatari shōhiron*).²⁴

According to Ōtsuka (2001a), the term “narrative consumption” developed from a marketing strategy called “story marketing” which emerged in the late 1980s with the aim of promoting products through telling a story and implying certain values. Thus narrative consumption refers to those consumers who are inspired by the narrative to continually collect the small narratives or fragments that are already prepared and to accumulate them in order to put together a grand narrative. The more small narratives consumers collect, the closer they become to completing the grand narrative. This may help us to understand the examples mentioned earlier: as the first mass media character—Akadō Suzunosuke—showed, the motivation for children to buy Akadō toys may have been their wish to be the character through playing with Akadō’s accessories; likewise, those who played with Gandamu models continually bought various model kits because they wanted to reproduce the scenarios of the Gandamu world. The fundamental driver behind both the children’s and the players’ consumption may well be neither the accessories nor the models, but rather the narratives. They bought the character accessories or models to gain access to the character world, thus actually acquiring small narratives by playing with those character toys, because these helped them to reproduce certain scenes in the character world. However, in contrast to these “small narratives as concrete commodities,” Ōtsuka ([2001a] 2010: 104-109) suggests that the example of the Bikkuriman chocolate and stickers is different, because there is no original anime or manga work that goes with it. On every Bikkuriman sticker there is a character with short introduction. While one sticker on its own does not hold any attraction, when the consumer has a number of them they can then read the information as a small narrative, which acts like a trigger to stimulate the consumer to collect more. With this accumulation, a grand narrative is thus gradually revealed, which in turn accelerates the consumer’s purchasing of chocolate. In this process, “what is being consumed is the grand narrative in its differential and fragmented ‘small narrative’ commodity form,” Ōtsuka concludes.

The grand narrative here is in fact the “worldview” of a character world. It is this worldview that makes the getting-closer process for consumers like the Gandamu model kit players a self-creating process in which, on the one hand they try to access the Gandamu world, and on the other they create and expand the character world through their own efforts. With regard to this aspect, Ōtsuka notes that narrative consumers have the capability to create and perform narrative. Even though their creations are not the official works, these creations belong to the grand narrative, to the worldview of the Gandamu world, as well. And these creations are acknowledged by the producer. According to Ueda Masao who is a producer of the original

²⁴Postmodern theories of consumption have dominated the discourses on cultural and social practices in Japan since the 1980s. The studies by Ōtsuka and Azuma (mentioned later) both involve Baudrillard and his theoretical concepts of hyper-reality and simulacra. Ōtsuka (1989: 14-16) yet elaborates on the example of Gandamu.

Gandamu series, “When asked about these fan works, we always said, ‘It [is] possible that [is] the way it is’” (quoted from Condry, 2013: 125).

This follows the same logic of *niji sōsaku* (secondary production) as used by *dōjin* (fans), who use existing narrative segments or characters as the basis for their own works and usually sell these versions at the Comic Market. Ōtsuka argues that through secondary production the role of the narrative consumer becomes that of the producer, or more accurately the “prosumer” (Toffler, 1980).²⁵ The relationships between the producer and consumer thus will be overlapped. As Ōtsuka concludes, “At this future point in time, the commodity producers [*okurite*; literally “senders”] will become excluded from the system of consumption and will no longer be able to manage the commodities they themselves had originally produced. For this reason, the final stage of narrative consumption points to a state of affairs wherein making a commodity and consuming it merge into one. There will no longer be manufactures [*seisansha*]. There will merely be countless consumers who make commodities with their own hands and consume them with their own hands. Let us be clear here: this would mark the closing scene of the consumer society that saw the endless play of things as signs” ([2001a] 2010: 113).

It can also be seen as a result of the existence of simulacra and hyper-reality, because those prosumers’ works reduce the distinction between the copy and the original, give the parodic versions equivalency with the original, and ensure their consumption. This greatly empowers prosumers to continually create: they even go beyond the grand narrative to recontextualize the character world—this marks the symbolic moment when the grand narrative fades but a database arises (Azuma, [2001] 2009: 53-54). Indeed the character world is not just based on narrative and there are many characters that have been created and developed without a relevant story and background, such as Hello Kitty and Di Gi Charat. As Hello Kitty was discussed in the previous chapter, here I will focus on the character of Di Gi Charat, which relies on the presence of character elements.

In contrast to a grand narrative, the character world of Di Gi Charat makes use of a “database,” as Azuma Hiroki ([2001] 2009) suggests, in which diverse elements “float.” Consumers tend to pay more attention to small details and neglect the connection to the whole, which Azuma describes as a “database model” of consumption. In this model of consumption, he notes, there is no longer a hierarchical narrative but horizontal elements. This is especially clear in consumption by *otaku* (the third generation, see chapter 2), who always focus on specific parts and the data regarding characters, but do not need to know and understand the content, logic, and meaning behind them. This consumer behaviour is also known as “*kyara moe*” (chara-moe) (Azuma, [2001] 2009: 36). *Kyara*, as I discussed in Introduction, may refer to the qualities of a character design that can give the character a sense of

²⁵In their book *Take Today: The Executive as Dropout* (1972), Marshall McLuhan and Barrington Nevitt look at the development of electronic technology and suggest that the consumer will become a producer. The same point is made by John Fiske in *Understanding Popular Culture* (1989), who argues that consumers can use commodities to produce a self-identity, social attributes, and relationships, for instance, by tearing new jeans to do so.

life. Endō Toshiaki (2011) thus argues, database consumption can be observed as a process in which characters supported by narratives become *kyara* supported by database. Azuma continues by saying that although these fragments and elements imply the irrelevance of narrative, their presence does not mean that the character world has disappeared. In contrast, based on the “assemblage programs” of the database, which serves to read and combine various elements, numerous worlds parallel with the original are produced. These worlds all are presented as simulacra extracted from the database.

And what is the function of *moe* in the above term? Briefly, *moe* reflects the desire embodied in elements because generally *moe* refers to a fetishistic love for characters that easily evokes the affective response (Galbralth, 2012) towards anything associated with characters or any parts of a character.²⁶ The affective response is easily transformed into desires that inspire consumers to consume character elements individually, thus promoting the rise of the consumption of *moe* elements (*moe yōso*). This accurately explains the appearance and the popularity of Di Gi Charat: the character is constituted of character elements that evoke *moe* and are consumed because of *moe*, which suggests a new way in which characters and individuals can be closely linked with each other. According to Azuma ([2001] 2009: 42-47), with the development of the Internet, since the late 1990s there has been database of *moe* elements constructed on websites that is convenient for consumers to understand, search, and use. Whenever a new character is launched it is classified and registered in the database (see **Table 4**).²⁷ This process also brings “the originality of an ‘original character’” into the simulacra world.

Yet from the perspective of structuralism, the consumption of *moe* elements highlights the deconstruction of characters in a way that is similar to Ōtsuka’s concept of the properties of characters (see **Table 4**). For Ōtsuka, properties do not refer to the “character-settings that narrative gives but to the basics, such as gender, age, eye-colour, hair and personality” (2004a: 130). Characters that are born through the arrangement of these properties can, in turn, also be deconstructed into these properties. More importantly, the goal of such deconstruction in terms of elements or properties is to realize certain reconstructions like a “bricolage.” This is not a simple “take-ism,” as John Clarke argues: “When the bricoleur re-locates the significant objects in a different position within that discourse, using the same overall repertoire of signs, or when that object is placed within a different total ensemble, a new discourse is constituted, a different message conveyed” (1976: 177). Through such a “bricolage,” characters can be involved in an ever-active interaction with individuals. For instance, as Azuma points out, in the recent fad of *bishōjo gēmu* (young-pretty-girl game),²⁸ players do not pay attention to the back story or storyline but to a certain

²⁶For the discourse concerning *moe* in Japan see Patrick Galbralth (2012: 343-374).

²⁷This indicates that the database is continuing to be updated with an ongoing flow of information. The updates facilitate using a database as a device that “sorts good simulacra from bad ones.” If it cannot recognize the process, it will be eliminated by the market (Azuma, [2001] 2009: 60-61).

²⁸*Bishōjo gēmu* is a video game developed around dating interactions with beautiful girl characters. Above mentioned dating-simulation game “LovePlus+” is also a *bishōjo gēmu*.

scenario in which they can create characters from the database of elements (they give different roles to characters by combining those elements differently) and enjoy the particular operation of their created character. The players' involvement in fact creates "a different version" from the original work but one which is "as valuable as the original" (Azuma, [2001] 2009: 83; emphasis in original). In this way, they realize the reconstruction of the original by their own hand. Their interaction experience with the characters thus becomes a process of self-creation.²⁹

Hair	Cyan hair, red hair, dark brown hair, gold hair, silver hair
Ears	Rabbit ear, fox ear, wolf ear, elf ear, cat ear
Clothes	Sailor uniform, gym suit, white coat, bikini, mini skirt
Gender	Sister, brother, office lady, salary man, young wife
Accessories	Glasses, apron, hat, swim-ring, ocular band, sticking plaster
Face	Glaring eye, baby face, cat tongue, sleeping face, nosebleed

Table 4. Examples of *moe* elements and *moe* properties; Source: List of *moe* elements and *moe* properties on Nico Nico Daihyakka (Nico Nico Pedia).³⁰

Significantly, in this interaction experience with characters, individuals are always self-conscious of what they consume and what they desire. In fact, from the perception of "reality" to the true feelings for the fictional reality of the character world, and from the play of signs influenced by simulacra and hyper-reality to narrative or database character consumption, individuality is immensely important and the self is satisfied.

In the earlier discussion, I focused on the role that character plays in the process of knowing, affirming and inspiring oneself. It is also a process through which individuals can gain an identity. Impacted by the flexibility of self-knowledge, identity is actually changeable. Joanne Finkelstein has taken the example of the Marx Brother's comedies, which were quite popular in the 1930s, to illustrate how "identity could be switched by changing a name, hat or coat, and [how] part of the entertainment of doing so was to produce a sense of chaos and uncertainty" (2007: 13). This ability to change lies in the fact that identity is "never a final or settled matter," as one will never stop modifying one's self but will keep rewriting or revising one's biographies (Jenkins, 1996: 17; Beck, 1992). This goes some way towards creating the conditions in which characters can be part of an individual's self-identity.

When individuals can invest their emotions and moods (comfort or desire) in characters, when they would rather believe the "reality" of characters, and when they want to get closer to the character world, we can see that a self is born that tends to

²⁹According to Azuma, although "they use the original data, at least in their mind, this activity is led by a consciousness fundamentally different from plagiarism, parodying, and sampling" ([2001] 2009: 83).

³⁰Nico Nico Daihyakka belongs to Nico Nico Douga, a video sharing website in Japan similar to YouTube (see chapter 2). Users can upload, view, share, and comment on video clips. Many of the most popular videos are representative of otaku tastes, such as anime, computer games, and pop music. Nico Nico Pedia is a Wikipedia-style website managed by Brazil search engine company on which users can edit and read the information of words and phrases or comment on them.

rely on characters in his or her emotions and mind. I suggest calling such a self the “characterized self” or “characterized identity” (the term I borrow from Ōtsuka Eiji, 2004a)³¹ through which an individual enjoys existing in the hyper-real character world and consuming characters that are the simulacra generated through narratives or the combination of elements.³² Conversely, character consumption strengthens the “characterized identity,” as in a consumer society consumption is an effective way for individuals to decide whom they want to be and whom the self can become. Individuality is created by deciding which characters to buy and how to consume them: thus the phrase “you are what you buy” is undeniably supported by character consumption.

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at psychological needs to reveal what individuals seek from characters. The development of consumer society in Japan has highlighted individuals’ pursuit of their individuality, likes, and dislikes, especially with regard to being self. The two main factors of comfort and desire strengthen the inner connection between the individual and the character, and drive the individual to access the character world and consume characters. This access is based on the construction of a “reality,” which confirms individuals’ perceptions. The same efforts can be found in literary naturalism and character novels, which open the literary path for “reality”-making. The sense of “reality” may evoke one’s true feeling toward the fictional reality of character world. Furthermore, the “reality” is contributed to by the mass media and technologies, which have led to the postmodern simulacrum and hyper-reality in which the real is “dead” but reborn within the system of signs. The character world has also fallen into the world of signs, resulting it in becoming more real than reality and it is this that attracts individuals to consume characters in terms of either narratives or elements. These forms of consumption facilitate the satisfaction of individuality through which the character can become part of an individual’s self-identification and form a “characterized identity.” However, there are two aspects to identity: identity construction and identity expression. The former has been explored in this chapter and in the next chapter our focus will shift to the latter.

³¹Ōtsuka (2004a: 107-176) proposes the term “*kyarakūtāka sūru ‘watashi’*” (characterized “me”), and emphasizes its uses in both text and ideology.

³²Aihara argues that the changes in individuals’ perception of reality caused by character world imply a process called “*kyaraka*” (chara-ization) (2007: 64-66). He notes that in this process individuals seem to have the personality of characters and therefore they feel truer about character world. Then he connects his discussion with the use of *kyara* (referring to certain types of roles that one acts) in social communication and emphasizes a more general and abstract transformation. This dissertation focuses on character consumption which contains both the consumption of the specific characters (narratives) and *kyara* (database). Here I tend to view the two consumption patterns as a series of phenomena triggered by characters.

Chapter 4

Character, the Body, and Japanese Society

In Chapter 3, I have discussed how characters are involved in the process of individuals' identity construction and how this can lead to a form of "characterized identity" – an identity influenced by characters. Identity construction and identity expression are two different aspects of the same process. Thus we must now turn to the ways in which "characterized identity" is expressed and diffused.

British sociologist Anthony Giddens augured that "certain types of bodily appearance and demeanor plainly become particularly important with the advent of modernity" (1991: 99). These types he sees as new expressions of the self, which are standardized as a result of commodity capitalism, since the logic of capitalism may make everything be transformed into a consumer good with a value, including the expression of identity. In a consumer society, increased attention to physical appearance becomes constitutive of self-identity (Miller, 2006: 11-12). The body thus becomes the focus of an increasing amount of transformation, and through this the body is increasingly tied to one's self-identity (Entwistle, 2000). The close relationship between personal identity and the body provides us with a means of thinking about the expression of "characterized identity." Indeed, the body as the material incarnation of one's self is always the primary tool for self-expression and its image is an important part of one's overall self-image.

Characters and the Body

Self-image, although offering a relatively stable mental picture, includes not only elements known by that person about the self (which form the self-identity) but also those details available to others, namely bodily appearance. These details constitute the material basis of an individual. To be specific, aspects such as height, weight, and skin colour become the materials of identity expression. This leads to increasing attention being paid to the materiality of the body.

Many scholars position the materiality of the body as the starting point for interpreting certain social practices. In the argument about "habitus," Pierre Bourdieu (1979) points out that "habitus not only operates on the level of everyday knowledge-ability, but is inscribed onto the body, being revealed in body size, volume, shape, posture, way of walking, sitting, ways of eating, drinking, amount of social space and time an individual feels entitled to claim" (Featherstone, 2007: 88). All of these elements of the body betray the habitus of one's origins. Yet Bourdieu develops the body as a symbolic entity that is an important bearer of social status. French sociologist Marcel Mauss (1979) suggests that the body is transformed into cultural symbols through "the techniques of the body" and these techniques guide individuals to use their bodies in particular societies. The same point is made by British anthropologist Marry Douglas, who points out that there are two bodies: the physical body and the social body. In her *Natural Symbol*, she argues that the former is

constrained and modified by the latter and that “there is a continual exchange of meanings between the two kinds of bodily experience so that each reinforces the categories of the other” (1973: 93). Yet Douglas proposes a natural tendency for the body that is symbolized by society. From these approaches we can see that the body is not only a natural phenomenon but also a socio-culturally constructed object.

The historian and philosopher Michel Foucault placed intense emphasis on the importance of the body, putting it at the centre of his scholarship. For Foucault, the body is not only the starting point but also the destination, because the body is marked by the past and gives rise to the desires, failings, or mistakes which will mark the future. Foucault points out that the emergent disciplines of modernity are closely linked to the management of individual bodies. He starts from the interdependent relationship between power and knowledge, which is embodied in his view of a discourse. For Foucault, discourses are practiced on the body and hence the body is implicated in the “exercise of power” (1980: 58). The investment of power in the body is in fact a method of surveillance by which an individual can realize the self-management of his/her own body through discipline, as occurs in dieting, and the bodies of populations are managed, in the sense of bio-politics. In contemporary society, Foucault’s view of the body encourages individuals to care for themselves, especially when potential dangers threaten human health. In Western society, individuals are asked by governments to maintain an appropriately healthy body (Entwistle, 2000). However individuals focus on caring for their body not only because this is required by an organization but because it is also required by the self, whose importance is magnified within consumer culture.

As Featherstone has argued in his influential study “The Body in Consumer Culture,” in the context of contemporary consumer society, the body is always seen as the vessel of the self that points to “the performing self,” placing “greater emphasis upon appearance, display and the management of impressions” (1982: 18-33). For Featherstone, the body is the visible carrier of the self. A similar point is made by Chris Shilling (1993), who argues that the aesthetic of the body increases an individual’s ability to gain more satisfaction via the effective control of appearance. Featherstone thus concludes that through many visible images, consumer culture widely promotes the circulation of fashionable body image and directs people’s understanding of the body through advertising and the mass media. He also suggests that there are two categories: the inner body and the outer body. The former refers to concerns about the maintenance and repair of physical bodily functions; the latter refers to “appearance as well as the movement and control of the body within social space” (1982: 18). Of the relationship between these two, he notes “it is the appearance and management of impressions of the outer body that is of particular interest... the prime purpose of the maintenance of the inner body becomes the enhancement of the appearance of the outer body” (1982: 18). Therefore, consumer culture becomes increasingly concerned with bodily appearance.

This leads to a rise in products associated with appearance. More directly, the body becomes the “finest consumer product,” as suggested by Baudrillard ([1970] 1998: 129-136). According to Baudrillard, the body is omnipresent in “advertising, fashion,

and mass culture” and is surrounded by a “hygienic, dietetic, and therapeutic cult.” Yet “the obsession with youth, elegance, virility/femininity, treatment and regimes, and the sacrificial practices” are all attached to it. However, these “rediscoveries of the body” do not mean that the body is liberated. It is still “indexed to the code and the norms of a society.” In short, the body is moulded under the conditions created by the logic of capitalism. It has been transformed into a consumer product that can be manipulated and packaged for pleasure, desire, and play. In essence, this is the body as a sign.

So how is the body embodied in character consumption? It starts with individuals’ increasing awareness of the body of the character. In the example given in Chapter 1 of *Shō-chan*, the readers paid attention to the body of *Shō-chan*. They looked at the changes to *Shō-chan*’s body and actively speculated on the reasons for those changes. Ōtsuka notes that it might be because the readers were able to sense “another reality” from *Shō-chan*’s body, that is, the “reality of the character” (*kyarakutā no riariti*) (2013: 78-79). As I discussed in the last chapter, although the character world of *Shō-chan* was fictional, readers who perceived it as existing felt its “reality,” thus mistaking the character world for real life. It was certainly not the case that the readers could not differentiate between the fictional and the real. Their fevered imagination regarding the changes to *Shō-chan*’s body came from the fact that they could empathize with the character. This effect was what Ōtsuka calls “the principle of reality” (*genjitsu gensoku*) in the fictional reality (2013: 87-88).

Another aspect of the “the principle of reality” is the realist technique expressed by the bodies of characters. Aihara argues, “The complicated real world can be displayed simply and sympathetically by the manga-style body of a character in a realistic and classic way” (2007: 79). The realism and sympathy that Aihara mentions refers to the most important characteristic of the body of a character, namely depicting the “reality of an actual body” (*nanami no shintai no genjitsu*) (Ōtsuka, 2004b: 28). This is also one of the main issues that the Tezuka Osamu—considered the “god of manga”—tries to expound in his manga works. As the pioneer of postwar manga, the most distinctive feature of Tezuka’s work was his use of manga symbols (non-realistic expression) to realize an intersection with reality (Ōtsuka, 2004b: 28-31). For example, in a scene of his *Shōri no hi made* (*Until the Day of Victory*, 1954), the character’s body, created from a pattern of symbols, was shot by a machinegun and injured and bloodied. Ōtsuka calls the body created from patterns of manga symbols a “symbolized body” (*kigōteki na shintai*) (2004b: 25), and notes that it was Tezuka who first used the “symbolized body” to describe a realistic scene. By giving the “symbolized body” such realistic attributes, Tezuka also opened up the possibilities for the development of postwar manga in Japan.

In Tezuka’s subsequent works the character’s body was given realistic attributes, as can be seen with Atomu—Tezuka’s most successful character. In Tezuka’s story, Atomu was a robot invented by Dr Tenma for the purpose of replacing his son, who had been lost in a traffic accident. In his book *Inside the Robot Kingdom: Japan, Mechatronics, and the Coming Robotopia*, American writer Frederik Schodt argues that in contrast to earlier robots, Tezuka’s robot has “an extremely original, humanistic

bent” (1988: 75). Thus Atomu’s robotic body expresses much humanity and, even though he is a robotic boy, there is the possibility that he could die like a human. The published schematics of Atomu’s body show “a maze of wires and circuitry,” which means that unlike some American superheroes Atomu could be “damaged or malfunction and have to be repaired” (Schodt, 1988: 76).

However, although the bodies of the characters created by Tezuka could exhibit a sense of “reality,” they were “symbolized bodies” with considerable symbolic meaning: they did not depict a real body. Following Tezuka, there was a tendency to create increasingly realistic character bodies, especially in *shōnen* manga and *shōjo* manga, both of which developed the trend of using a clear image of a real body. According to Ōtsuka (2004b), the former such as Takamori Asao (1936-1987) and Chiba Tetsuya’s *Ashida no Jō* (Tomorrow’s Joe, 1968) focused on the specific expression of the boy’s body, and not only described it as a whole but also looked at parts of the body such as the face, muscles, and skeleton. These details corresponded with those of a real body. In this sense, the exploration of the body of a character became that of a real body. *Shōjo* manga, such as Shimanaka Takako and Yamato Waki’s *Mayuko no nikki* (Mayuko’s Diary, 1970), adopted both the techniques of the “symbolized body” and a real body image to depict girls’ bodies, which promoted readers to become aware of a sexual body as well as the inner self in the girl’s body (Ōtsuka, 2004b: 77-79). In this way, the bodies of characters may be ones quite closely linked to bodies in reality. The sense of “reality” has increased, making it easy to arouse a certain resonance and desire among readers and audiences.

Furthermore, individuals began to reproduce the bodies of characters as a desirable consumer product. In Japan, “garage kits” (*garēji kitto*), model figures portraying the bodies of human or other living creatures, frequently depicted characters. Their development can be considered an extension of the character toys explored in Chapter 2. In contrast to other “character toys” launched by toy manufacturers, garage kits were originally produced by amateurs. When character toys were first produced, although the industry had focused on the characters and produced toys based on them, the products in some aspects could not meet the amateurs’ individualized requirements. Unable to find the right character toy on the market, fans had to produce them themselves. As garage kits became popular, many professional makers participated in production and developed it to be a major category of character goods. Garage kits always reproduce characters in a high precision and fidelity way and hence satisfy consumers’ desires to own a perfect representation of their ideal character body.

In contrast to the garage kits, *dakimakura* (hug pillows) also pursue the idea of owning the body of a character, albeit in a simpler way. Rather than reproducing the body of a character, its image is printed directly onto a large pillow as long as a full-size human body.¹ Thus the body of the character is turned into a body-sized pillow, which gives the character’s body a physical attribute. The physical attribute is that it can be embraced and thus bring security to those embracing it (Galbraith, 2009).

¹A *dakimakura* is available in two main sizes, 160cm or 150cm in length with a 50cm circumference. The images of the bodies on it are mainly 2D female characters but also include male characters.

Thus, as one consumer of *dakimakura* notes, “There are two things you should be mindful of when buying a body pillow... First, there’s image quality. And then you have to choose one that feels good on the skin” (quoted from Katayama, 2009). In other words, the security it offers comes from two aspects: the large pillow per se (product quality) and the depiction of the character’s body on it (image quality); this combination satisfies consumers’ imaginations and realizes direct contact between them and characters.

Through the above practices with regard to the bodies of characters, including the building of a “reality,” the realistic expression of the character body, and the consumption of character bodies, individuals gradually build up good feelings about and intimacy with the bodies of characters. This enables the image of the character body to become part of the cultivation of the aesthetic of their own bodies. In fact, it corresponds with the requirements of consumer society, in which the body is seen as the finest commodity and “an object ready for transformation” (Featherstone, 2000: 2). I suggest that this is mainly reflected in two phenomena: the display and the cosplay of the body.

The display of the body refers to a tendency to associate the visual representation of the body with characters. And the term cosplay, abbreviated from “costume play,” originates from a form of character-acting performance in which the participant imitates a character usually selected from manga, anime, a game, fiction, or film by dressing up in the character’s costume. To some extent cosplay is also a kind of display, because the essence of it is to build an ideal body like that of a certain character through the use of costumes, accessories, and cosmetics.

As anthropologist Ted Polhemus points out, the boundaries of the body are not clear, “it does not end with the skin...should include hair, nails, and the bodily waste materials...surely the decorative body arts and body painting should also be considered...it has been shown that it is insignificant to sharply differentiate between bodily decoration and adornment on the one hand and the closing of the body on the other” (1978: 28). Therefore, individuals are keen to consume the decorations, accessories, and daily items related to characters and combine those with their own bodies and lives. For instance, with their increasing concerns about Shō-chan’s body, the readers also looked at the character’s hat, Shō-chan-bō. When sales of the hat were launched, the readers were eager to buy it. Ōtsuka notes, “The premise of the readers’ desire for Shō-chan-bō is that they see Shō-chan’s body as their own” (2013: 90). The same phenomenon can be seen with Akadō toys and *henshin*-functional toys. Children wanted these character toys and by playing with them their desire to be the characters could come true. Moreover, today one can often see on the streets of Tokyo a “Hello Kitty girl,” who dresses up in many Kitty items including pink-bow hair-clips, a Kitty watch, a Kitty print dress, and a Kitty-head-style handbag. These combinations constitute a personal lifestyle. According to an article in the *Daily Mail* (11 June 2014), since she became hooked on Kitty at 14 years old, one English woman has spent £50,000 on collecting Kitty items, and she has led a completely Kitty-styled life. In Japan, a 1980 article of *Yomiuri Shinbun* newspaper told a same story of a young Japanese female whose life was full of at least 5 thousand character items of Mickey

Mouse and other Disney characters (15 June 1980). Moreover, such complete character lifestyles are often enjoyed by *otaku*, in whose bedrooms all kinds of character items can be found.

Furthermore, the bodies of characters, whether “symbolized” or reflecting a real body image, often have some characteristics that individuals aspire to. For example, in their questions about Shō-chan the readers also raised the fact that Shō-chan never seemed to grow up and his body seemed to stay young. Here what the readers had noted was the issue of time stagnation in the character’s body. This has been a convention of character creations since Shō-chan (Ōtsuka, 2013). Thus many characters have the potential traits of a real body that they may never grow up, and be unchanging or forever young. This corresponds to the aesthetic of looking good in consumer society: the emphasis on bodily appearance leads to having a youthful body being important to personal happiness. Hence individuals begin to value “makeovers” and “shape-overs,” which include a long list of body modification practices, such as anti-ageing treatments, dieting, exercise, make-up, and cosmetic surgery, in order to achieve a beautiful body or the same body as their favourite character. The phenomena of “Barbie Syndrome” and “Ken Syndrome” which represent some people’s hopes of becoming a real-life Barbie or (her boyfriend) Ken doll attest to their intense affection for the unreachable character body.² In another instance, in order to gain the same fitness and strength as the character Popeye, one man even “injects himself with a potentially lethal cocktail of oil and alcohol to grow fake biceps” (11 March 2014 *Daily Mail*).

In Japan, the first signs of this trend emerged with the prewar trendsetter, *modan gāru* or *moga* (the Modern Girl), who used make-up to create big Betty Boop eyes, as Laura Miller explains in her book *Beauty Up: Exploring Contemporary Japanese Body Aesthetics* (2006). Miller also offers the example of a visual anthropology brochure used to promote the science of beauty in Japan, and notes that it is entitled the “Cinderella Book.” In her another study of youth’s beautification practices, Miller notes that a Japanese girl may think of “the enormous pools of emotion found in her favourite manga characters” and modify her eyes (2004: 85-87). The popular strategies used by Japanese girls for this purpose, as Miller examines, specifically include changing the “composition of eyes” such as wearing the colourful contact lens and using eyelid tapes and glues or having the double eyelid surgery. Yet the fact that longevity and health products are popular in Japan today is, to some extent, due to the fact that individuals want to remain as youthful as these forever-young characters. Such modification work may improve health or lead to morbidity, but ultimately through these practices those individuals’ bodies are closely tied to characters and their personal achievement of their likenesses, because such bodies can always win more attention and approval from others. This is similar to the “anti-ageing” or “amortality” trend (Mayer, 2011) that exists in today’s society, which requires various efforts to breach the limits of the laws of nature and create an ideal body that is

²In Japan, there is similar example: Vanilla Chuam, a Japanese woman, has spent over 100, 000 dollars on more than 30 plastic surgeries to look like a French doll (McCormack, 2013).

admired by others. With the development of technology and science, rather than being an unachievable dream, not ageing appears to be possible for people in everyday life. In this sense, new avenues are available to assist in the aim of achieving the likeness of a character's body and the modifications necessary in the pursuit of this goal.

Compared with display, cosplay directs to a more completed and marked representation. Cosplay was first popularized by *dōjinshi* (fanzine) artists at the Comic Market, when they dressed up as the characters they had created to promote their own *dōjinshi* works. Anime fans then copied this practice, as cosplay offered a visible and achievable way to express their passion for a specific character. Fans' participation facilitated the objectification of cosplay: gradually cosplay was not attached to the Comic Market but became one of its main areas and those who purely wanted to enjoy the pleasure of dressing up without it being related to the narrative-creation of *dōjinshi* emerged. Hence many cosplay events have been held at the Comic Market and more and more fans and *dōjinshi* artists have become cosplayers and formed various groups and circles.

For these performers, cosplay is an efficient way of realizing the conjunction of the self and a character, inasmuch as they wear the character's costume and copy the character in all its actions. Thus display and cosplay can be distinguished by the fact that while display is much like free self-expression with an individualistic style, cosplay has to comply with some "official" regulations, at least those relevant to the background of the character. This distinction highlights another style of self-presentation that uses the self's body to express "alternative identities, scenarios and experiences" (McCormick, 2007: 4, quoted from Gn, 2011: 584) whereby the actual self is hidden and an anonymous self emerges. By virtue of the anonymous self, the cosplayer can be seen without any aspects of self, at least in the viewers' eyes. Viewers can easily accept cosplayers' performances because they think that these players are the characters and they are acting.

This factor maintains a line between cosplay and reality, by limiting cosplay to within a particular time and space such as the Comic Market. In response to the question "what do you think about cosplay?" put forward in an online questionnaire, one respondent said, "I do not have any experience of cosplay but I can accept it when it is in some event. If it steps out of the event it would feel strange... When a male cosplayer wearing his cosplay costume appeared in an Izakaya [a little pub] he triggered uproar right away. The surrounding people all took pictures of him."³ Thus a cosplayer, only in a relatively independent field, may escape from the criticism of the public that may see cosplay as an irrational activity and be endowed with great freedom to use a character's body for self-expression and to gain great self-gratification.⁴ Here, although cosplay must be located within certain clearly delineated spaces, it actually offers the possibility of functioning both as an explicit expression

³See "What do you think about cosplay?" Oshiete.goo, 3 June 2003, accessed 14 August 2015, <http://oshiete.goo.ne.jp/qa/565068.html>.

⁴According to Rahman, Liu and Cheung, cosplay is about the "imaginative self and performing identity," which can "give participants pleasurable experiences, meaningful memories, self-gratification, and personal fulfillment" (2012: 317-318).

and as an implicit, autonomous symbol that is involved in the programming of everyday life. The use of the term “implicit” reveals a series of potential opportunities in which the boundaries of cosplay may become blurred with those of real life, allowing it to exchange its stage with that of real-life, as has happened with the new phenomenon of the Maid Café (*meido kafe*).

Since the turn of the millennium the Maid Café has stepped into public view and become increasingly popular. The highlight of the Maid Café is that it brings cosplay into the daily lives, or to put it in the other way around: the real world is cosplay-ed. Try to imagine drinking a cup of coffee in café, something which you may experience every day, but instead of a normal café you have entered a two-dimensional atmosphere in which all the waitresses are two-dimensional characters. In such a situation it may be hard for you to distinguish between the cosplay-ed world and real life and therefore the “reality” of the Maid Café generates.

The Maid Café is part of a subcategory of “cosplay restaurants,” and the first Maid Café, Cure Maid Café, opened in Akihabara, Tokyo, in March 2001, with the aim of selling cosplay costumes (Hotta, 2005: 34). “Cure” means *iyashi*, implying that this café aims to provide a calm environment in which customers (at first mainly *otaku*) can have a rest after spending the day shopping (mainly the character goods) in Akihabara while enjoying a character-surrounded (costumed staff) atmosphere. Starting with the Cure Maid Café, the waitresses at Maid Cafés all wear the same, maid-style uniform, which is the unique feature of Maid Cafés. Alongside the concept of *iyashi* and the costumed waitresses, Maid Cafés also have other characteristics, driven by its subsequent development.

In 2002, another Maid Café, Café Mai:lish, opened and set a new trend in this service industry (Hotta, 2005: 34-42). Its main goal was to increase the positive feelings about Akihabara, where not only computer-related products but also popular culture items such as manga, anime, and games are sold. The waitresses in Mai:lish were professional cosplayers. They had their own cosplay names while working. These names were usually the ones they used in their cosplay activities. In this way, they simultaneously blended in with the maids (inside the shop) and other characters cosplaying (outside the shop). After 5 pm, the waitresses were allowed to dress as they wished and were able to show their “real body,” but they were still not allowed to be their “real self.” Thus the waitresses working in Café Mai:lish actually had a double anonymity, which might be hard to achieve in a space like the Comic Market. However, although having a similar theme of *iyashi*, Café Mai:lish chose to break the “calm atmosphere” found in the Cure Maid Café by allowing the waitresses to offer cordial greetings to the customers. During the order taking and serving the maids often had friendly conversations with the customers. This gradually developed to be one of the key features of Maid Cafés. For example, when a customer enters the shop, the waitresses line up and say, “Welcome home, Master (Mistress).”

Since the establishment of Café Mai:lish, various features have been added to Maid Cafés. For example, the waitresses now not only have their own name badges but are also introduced and promoted on each café’s website; a greeting is not enough and interaction during ordering and service is also important; waitresses can add other

character elements to their own maid costumes such as angle wings (see the list of character elements in chapter 3); and events are held regularly. Based on these changes, some rituals and rules have formed that customers are expected to follow. For instance, the maid and customer seldom talk about things relating to work and home or the world outside the shop, but instead talk about the “present self” inside the shop; additional services such as back massages are offered but not sexual ones; and photography of the waitress or the café’s interior is forbidden without permission and/or paying an extra fee.

The rules in a Maid Café function to make it an intermediate space in which the body can be adapted to be representative of a maid character; it can be endowed with one, two or more identities; and the dressed body can connect the fictional reality of characters (2D) with real life (3D). Thus the Japanese novelist and critic Honda Tōru has pointed out that the Maid Café in fact creates a “2.5 dimensional space” (*2.5 jigen kūkan*) (2005: 19). Being somewhere between fiction and reality, the customers feel as if they are living in the same dimension as the maids. As someone posted on 2ch about his/her feelings when he/she first visited a Maid Café: “...because they are 16- or 17-year-old girls who do not have any connection with the real world I am able to enjoy another dimension or a fictional world.”⁵ In his study, Patrick Galbraith (2011) points out that visitors to Maid Cafés do not see maids as real but as characters. And, as he has observed, there are no mirrors in a Maid Café so the customers cannot see themselves and therefore can perform as themselves in the role-play. In this process the customer’s body does not change but it becomes unconsciously engaged in a way that can be understood in terms of affect (Gn, 2011). According to Brian Massumi, affect is “a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body’s capacity to act” (1987: xvi).⁶ That is to say, the setting of a Maid Café and the intensity it passes to customer will draw out an autonomic reaction from the body (Maasumi, 1996): the customer’s body will respond to the maid’s body—the cosplayer’s body that is in fact the body of a character.

Maid Cafés must be placed in the context of *otaku* consumer culture. The “2.5 dimensional space,” the affect, and the characters’ bodies greatly cater to the fantasies of *otaku* and cultivate their loyalty as consumers. However, *otaku* consumers have not turned Maid Cafés into a niche consumer market. It is their continuous interest and loyalty that have contributed to the Maid Cafés’ survival, development, and growth, and which have attracted more and more mass consumers including salarymen, tourists, and women to Maid Cafés. Maid Cafés have gradually become more commercial and professional, and have become a popular part of the service industry. Following Maid Cafés, a number of similar businesses have been launched including Butler Cafés, High School Girl Cafés, Shrine Girl Cafés, and so on.

⁵See “The first time visit to a Maid Café,” 2ch, 6 September 2012, accessed 14 August 2015, <http://hayabusa6.2ch.net/test/read.cgi/otaku/1346594496/31>.

⁶In this sense, it also can be referred to as *moe* (see chapter 3), accurately “maid *moe*.” For more detailed discussions concerning “maid *moe*” see Galbraith (2014).

Shōjo culture also plays a crucial role in the development of Maid Café and cosplay. Since the 1970s, girls have been closely linked to character consumption (see chapter 2). *Shōjo* is regarded as a way of life that has swept through Japanese society (Ōtsuka, 2001a). Participants in *shōjo* culture are always fashion-conscious, like the above-mentioned *moga* who become the stylish Western modern girls by making up like Betty Boop, which means that they are particularly sensitive to the functions of costume and the body. As Japanese scholar Sugiura Yumiko (2008) points out, young Japanese women always match their clothes to suit the occasion because they believe that “appearance is productive” (quoted from Narumi, 2009:11). For them, fashion, dress, and the body are tools that can help to build good interpersonal relationships and produce something useful for their participation in social life. This is the body as capital for realizing personal purposes, which also can be observed in cosplay activities. Today cosplay in Japan is mainly performed by young women.⁷ Some of them are keen on cosplaying the young-girl-character who wears the sailor school uniform. Mitamura Fukiko (2008) argues that sailor-style school uniform is a typical example of cosplay, and its proliferation in *shōjo* culture makes Japanese females have the experience as a cosplayer. Therefore, for instance, for the waitresses who work in school-themed cafés and wear the sailor-style school uniforms that they would have worn as students, cosplay is the nostalgia of their girlhood, a chance of re-being one’s self, as well as a means of practicing self-exploration.⁸

From the above discussion, it is clear that display and cosplay are two differing forms of body consumption. In a consumer society, the body can be seen as “a changeable form of existence which can be shaped and which is malleable to individual needs and desires” (Turner, 1996: 5). Through their efforts and work on their bodies people can achieve the appearance they want. This is the body as a project that can be intentionally modified, completed, and improved. The body can thus be seen as an artefact—it is the “uncertain body” that is “less bound up with inherited models of socially acceptable bodies... and tied more to modern notions of the ‘individual’ and personal identity” (Entwistle, 2000: 18). Characters fit into this uncertain body, especially when an individual has a “characterized identity.” Based on the “characterized identity,” the body is modified, completed, and improved to match the body of the character. We can call such a body a “characterized body.”⁹ At this point, both the inner and outer self are in a close relationship with characters. However, it should be noted that contemporary notions of selfhood are strongly influenced by society. As Bryan Turner in his *The Body and Society* argues, “the new self is far more mobile, uncertain and fragmentary...because the modern self

⁷In Japan many female cosplayers are fans of *yaoi* works (depicting gay male relationships) and call themselves *fujoshi* (literally, “rotten women”). They prefer to cosplaying male characters, namely cross-dressing. In his study “Cosplay, Learning, and Cultural Practices,” Okabe Daisuke (2012) has investigated the phenomenon based on his fieldwork in Japan.

⁸Mitamura (2008: 128-131) suggests that many Japanese females have the sailor-style uniform complex because it is a symbol of their girlhood. One article of *Asahi Shinbun* newspaper also points out, “the sailor suit is changing from adorable and cute, a look that ‘appeals to the boys,’ to a uniform that ‘girls like to wear for themselves’” (7April 2012).

⁹The “characterized body” also directs to the anthropomorphic transformation of the body of objects, which I will interpret in next section.

corresponds to and is produced by a new uncertainty, differentiation and fragmentation of the risk society” (1996: 21).

“Characterized Bodies” in Japanese Society

Sean Sweeney and Ian Hodder (2002: 1) suggest that following a shift from industrial age to the post-industrial age, the body also complete the transformation what Turner calls “from a labouring one to a desiring one.” The shift means the body has become separated from many of its traditional functions, such as its relationships with property, control, and ownership. Thus the utility of the body is deconstructed. In turn, an emphasis on pleasure, desire, differentiation, style, and appearance becomes central to one’s self-identity. According to Turner, “we should argue that the notions of the self in consumer society ought to be seen in terms of the body-image that plays the distinctive role in the understanding and evaluation of the self within the public arena. It is typically the surface of the body which is the focus of advertising, self promotion and public relations. It is also the body surfaces which are the foci of the social stigmatization...the modern consuming self is a representational being...” (1996: 7). Turner calls this change the “social dislocation of the body,” meaning that “the body has been more exposed to the playful manipulation of consumerist culture” (1996: 6), which also contributes to the aestheticization of the body.

The aestheticization of the body refers to the fact that after the utilitarian functions of the body become less important, the appearance, visual effects, viewing values, and consumer values of the body are highlighted, which creates the conditions for the involvement of characters and the formation of the “characterized body.” In short, the aestheticization and the “characterization” of the body go hand in hand. However, it does not mean that the body has been completely separated from its utility. The attentions to bodily appearance to a large degree have some utilitarian goals, for instance, the above-mentioned importance of a productive appearance for young Japanese women and not aging trend, like a character. Thus the aestheticization provides a way for individuals to accumulate their bodily capital.

However it should be noted that the aestheticization of the “characterized body” is also driven by social forces, or more accurately by ideology. In his book *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Terry Eagleton has argued, “The aesthetic is no more than a name for the political unconscious: it is simply the way social harmony registers itself on our sense, imprints itself on our sensibilities. The beautiful is just political order lived out on the body, the way it strikes the eye and stirs the heart” (1990: 37). In this sense, the aesthetic of the “characterized body” in fact “transform the individual bodies into the body politic” (Fiske, 1989: 92). Eagleton also notes that power and order may become aestheticized, and the aesthetic may become a mode of asserting social control by “inserting social power more deeply into the very bodies of those it subjugates, and so operating as a supremely effective mode of political hegemony” (1990: 28). John Fiske who also looks at the impact of a social law or power on body argues, “The relationship between the body beautiful and the body ugly, between the healthy and the unhealthy...are social relationships of norms and deviations, and therefore political relationships aimed at naturalizing in the body the norms of those with most

power in the social formation” (1989: 92). The aestheticization is thus not subject to individuals’ sensibilities, but uses the name of aesthetics to discipline the sensitive body, thereby functioning as a form of regulation. In essential, it has been a kind of discourses and plays the same role of power in disciplining the body.

This brings us back to Foucault’s point that the body is a product of power. In his *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault points out that the body is “directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs” (1995: 25). The historical moment of discipline acting on the body was “directed not only at the growth of its skills, nor at the intensification of its subjection, but at the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful...” and then it became “a policy of coercions” (1995: 137-138). In other words, in traditional society, power disciplines the body in an apparently mandatory and violent way. However, in contemporary society the discipline of power is transformed into people’s voluntary and happy impulses through concealment of the “knowledge” of the body and realization of the “truth” discourse, and so becomes a kind of collective unconsciousness in our daily lives.

Hence the “characterized body” in fact conceals the impacts of both sides: the inner desire coming from an individual’s heart and the external demand of the social environment in which the individual lives. The former is specifically embodied in the display and cosplay of the body, and the latter will be examined from two perspectives: the sense of belonging and political use.

Spiritually the sense of belonging in Japan is in part affected by its indigenous belief, Shinto.¹⁰ In Japanese culture, there is a native belief in *yaoyorozu no kami* (eight million gods). As the essence of Shinto, *kami* refers to the divinity that is manifest in diverse forms: “rocks, trees, rivers, animals, places, and even people” (Picken, 1994: xxii). It can be interpreted as animism, in which animate and inanimate objects have spirits or souls. And *yaoyorozu no kami* can be interpreted as the meaning of “myriad” or polytheism, which relates to almost every object that comes into contact with people and their world. Within such an environment, Japanese people gradually start to believe that they can build the same spiritual connection with those objects as with humans and even form an attachment to them.

These ideas dovetail nicely with the contemporary desire to forge spiritual relationships with characters, as Aihara (2010) argues in the introduction to the exhibition, “JAPAN: Kingdom of Characters.” As the previous examples show, the characters of robots, monsters, animals, superheroes, and so on are well welcomed in Japan. Aihara notes, “Comparing a variety of animals and natural entities in one’s surroundings to one’s own feelings allows people to establish a spiritual mooring... The Japanese tend to sense a mysterious power from having anthropomorphic characters in their midst that is akin to the power of the culture’s many gods.” This

¹⁰Many scholars also suggest that characters are not only drawn from Shinto but also from Buddhism, with its symbolic value of animals and metamorphosis (McVeigh, 2010; Buljan and Cusack, 2015).

provides an explanation as to why cute Hello Kitty emerges to draw attention to safety in trains instead of indifferent warning signs; Atomu becomes a money box produced by Daiwa Bank, implying the promise of prosperity; and Pikachu's image is depicted on a plane belonging to All Nippon Airways, evoking strong feelings of intimacy and warmth (Allison, 2006). Through these characters they feel a familiarity that ties in to their personal attachments and common beliefs: since ancient times the spiritual and the material have been inseparable; "the phenomenal world is seen as permeated by and given life by a spiritual world" (Reader, 1998: 46). This is an integral part of the Shinto belief, as explained by *Jinja Honchō* (Association of Shinto Shrines),¹¹ as well as the origin of the feeling that characters evoke—a sense of belonging and a place of spiritual refuge. Here the anthropomorphism is not only an artistic expression but also a specific embodiment through which the spirit can visit the world and be active in the theatre of Japanese life.

However, animism, spirit and anthropomorphism may be not appropriately interpreted as "an essential, timeless component of Japanese culture as if the latter itself is stable, coherent, and homogeneously shared by all Japanese (which it is not)," but as "an animist sensibility [that] percolates the postmodern landscape of Japan today in ways that do not occur in the United States," as Allison suggests (2006: 12-13). She continues, "Investing material objects and now consumer items with the sensation of (human/organic/spiritual) life, such New Age animism perpetually (re)enchants the lived world...in this sense (and others), Japan offers an alternative capitalism to...the standardized (Western) form capitalism would take in any and all countries across the world." It is the "New Age animism" that helps consumers to form attachment with characters.

I would like to suggest that this "New Age animism" also makes conditions for using anthropomorphism as an abundant source to create characters, which are widespread in Japan. For instance, the baseball team the Hanshin Tigers personalizes one part of its team name, "tiger," through the use of mascot characters including Torakkī (To-luckey), Rakkī (Luckey) and Ki-ta,¹² which represents the players' sportsmanship and the baseball fans' enthusiasm. Enterprises use characters to embody their corporate culture or product culture, for instance Kyoro-chan (a bird) who embodies confectioner Morinaga Seika's chocolate product; Pyon-chan (a rabbit) who embodies pharmaceutical company, Esuesu Seiyaku, and Sato-chan (an elephant) who embodies Satō Seiyaku.

In order to revitalize local economies and develop *furusato* (hometown)-themed tourism, regional governments have created anthropomorphic characters known as

¹¹See "What is Shinto?" *Jinja Honchō*, accessed 18 September 2015, <http://www.jinjahoncho.or.jp/en/shinto/index.html>.

¹²Torakkī (To-luckey) was created in 1987 and his name combines the Japanese words Tora (tiger) and Lakkī (lucky). Lakkī (Luckey) was originally created as Torakkī's sister, but since the mid-1990s she has been positioned as his girlfriend. Ki-ta is Lakkī's younger brother and was released in 2011. They all are mascot characters for the Hanshin Tigers.

*yurukyara*¹³ headed by Hikonyan. Hikonyan was created by the local government of Hikone city for the 400th anniversary of founding of Hikone Castle in 2007. According to the profile published on the official website of the character, “Hikonyan is designed as an anthropomorphic white cat [see **Figure 16**] that is said to help the third lord of the castle, Ii Naotaka, out of lightning and therefore he wears the same helmet with Ii’s family helmet currently saved in the castle museum; his name is elected from 1,167 submissions; in the local the character is affectionately known as *mochi* [the Japanese rice cake]...”¹⁴ During the celebration, Hikonyan appeared on various local products and made considerable revenue for the city. Finally, the celebration events attracted more than 750,000 visitors and Hikonyan also became nationally known.¹⁵ After the celebration ended, there were many voices asking for keeping it as the local character and thus Hikonyan became the *yurukyara* of Hikone city. Following Hikonyan, there are more than a thousand such characters including Kumamon (for Kumamoto Prefecture), Bari-san (for Yimabari city), and Sanomaru (for Sano city) that have been created.¹⁶

In regard to the body of *yurukyara*, an important fact is that they are always embodied in the form of *kigurumi* (costumed-character) which provides them a physical body with mobility and accessibility. Thus *yurukyara* can engage in real life and have close interaction with people. For example, in the big events of *yurukyara* held each year such as “*Yurukyara matsuri*” (“Yuru-character Celebration”, first held in 2008, since 2013 has been renamed as “the local characters Expo in Hikone”) and “*Yurukyara guranpuri*” (“Yuru-character Grand Prix”, first held in 2010), those costumed-characters can dance on the stage and play with children and adults off the stage. Yet they often appear at the corner of life and act as a sale man selling oranges, or a fireman popularizing security knowledge or a salaryman going to work.¹⁷ These contribute to building the “reality” of *yurukyara* which, as I discussed in Chapter 3, makes individuals perceive that they are real and therefore become attached to them.

¹³*Yurukyara* is a contraction of *yurui* character. *Yurui* literally means “loose,” “wobbly,” or “slack” but in this application it has a number of connotations including “gentle” or “weak,” “laid-back,” “light-hearted” or “unimportant,” “healing,” and “cute” (Inuyama, 2011; Occhi, 2012). The broadness of the meaning brings about a large number of *yurukyara* who become an instant phenomenon in Japanese society. *Yurukyara* are created not only for the local places but also the enterprises, governmental institutions and parties.

¹⁴See <http://hikone-hikonyan.jp/profile/>, accessed 1 March 2016.

¹⁵See “*Nyūjōsha ga 75 mon jin o toppashimashita!*” (Tourists broke 750, 000), 400th anniversary of Hikone Castle News, 25 November 2007, accessed 2 March 2016, http://hikone-400th.jp/news/2007/11/1125post_99.php.

¹⁶According to the 2015 ranking of “*Yurukyara guranpuri*” (Yuru-character Grand Prix), a big event for voting people’s favorite *yurukyara*, there were 1,727 *yurukyara* including both the local *yurukyara* (1,092) and enterprises’ *yurukyara* (635) that took part in the event. See “*Yurukyara guranpuri*,” accessed 2 March 2016, <http://www.yurugp.jp/about/>.

¹⁷See the example of Kumamon in Chapter 5, and Kumamon’s twitter, accessed 2 March 2016, https://twitter.com/55_kumamon.



Figure 16. Hikonyan; Source: The official website of Hikonyan.

Another anthropomorphic phenomenon around characters that has arisen is the world of “tan.” Originally the term “tan” is similar to “chan,” used above as an ending-nickname to call children or cute things. Here it refers to an anthropomorphic *moe* character world. According to *Gijinka tan hakusho* (Anthropomorphism tan White Book), the phenomenon of “tan” has developed from the *dōjin* subculture on the Internet such as 2ch since the late 1990s, and differs from the existing anthropomorphism found in manga and anime: it mainly transforms objects (most of which are everyday items without narratives) into *moe* girl-character images (2006: 4-5). For example, among them a famous character is Binchō-tan. The pronunciation of “tan” in Japanese is as the same as that of coal. Binchō-tan is an anthropomorphic character made out of traditional Japanese charcoal called *binchōtan*. Binchō-tan is a girl and her image is constituted of the *moe* character elements of big eyes, blue hair, and a small body, with the obvious characteristic of carrying a *binchōtan* on her head. Binchō-tan quickly attracted a following and is now the local mascot for the hometown of *binchōtan*—Minabe machi—which has built a metaphorical bridge between the character and actual charcoal. As a form of commercial exploitation, Minabe-machi has adopted the image of Binchō-tan to promote their local speciality: the character appears on the packaging and promotional posters for *binchōtan*, which also provides the character with a chance to appear in the daily life. More importantly, in this process the charcoal is endowed with a *moe* “characterized body.” As well as charcoal, many other objects have been given a corresponding character-tan. For example, the habanero chilli pepper has been turned into Habanero-tan, a little girl with red hair and a green plant stalk as her hat; the high-speed train Fasutekku (Fastech) has been transformed into Fasutekku-tan, a young girl whose cat-like ears are the same shape as the air brakes of the train; and the chain of Seibun-irebun

(Seven-Eleven) convenience shops has become *Sebure-tan* (abbreviated from *Sebun-irebun*), a girl whose uniform is red and green, the same colours as the shop, her shoes are printed with the number 7, and her hair-grip is in the shape of the number 11. “Tan” gives objects a *moe* “characterized body” and in this sense it can be referred to as “*moe* anthropomorphism” which, according to Galbraith, emphasizes “the affectivity of the human form” (2012: 354-355). It is the affectivity that stimulates the strong desire for the (*moe*) “characterized body.”

The tendency towards the “characterized body” is sensitively captured by Japanese politicians. They actively use the “characterized body,” or even become a character, to increase their intimacy with the public. As Fiske writes, “Though the body may appear to be where we are most individual, it is also the material form of the body politic, the class body, the radical body and the body of gender; the body is where politics can best disguise itself as human nature” (1989: 70). The formula of characters plus politics equals a political mask can thus be formed. The campaign stage becomes a display case for the political mask, and audiences (the public) are attracted and cheer for the politicians behind the masks.

This trend has arisen in response to the proliferation of characters in public sphere. Many governmental institutions, public sector organizations, large-scale events and governmental policies also use existing popular characters or create their own as their mascots. For instance, in 1987 the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department designed its mascot character, *Pīpo-kun*, with the aim of building up the image of a beloved and trusted police force; the train on the Kanazawa Seaside line in Yokohama has licensed the image of *Atomu* for its promotional posters since 1989; Expo 1985 in Tsukuba used the character mascot *Kosumo hoshimaru*; and finally, with the introduction in 2016 of the *Mainanbā* (My Number) Policy (an individual number system), the Japanese government has created a character, *Maina-chan*, for promotional purposes. These characters are anthropomorphic creatures and their bodies represent most *kawaii* traits: they are “sweet, adorable, innocent, pure, simple, genuine, gentle, vulnerable, and weak” (Kinsella, 1995: 220). They exist not merely as symbols but also as transitional objects that, as Miller’s analysis of the “zoomorphic urge” in public culture in Japan states, “allows us to redirect attention and emotions away from areas thought to be indelicate or troublesome” (2010: 69) and find a new feeling of sustenance. In such a way, the public can live in a relatively free environment by circumventing sensitive words such as state, rights, and rules. Through characters, the relationship between the official and the public shifts from being distant to being softer and closer.

Such a softer and closer relationship leads to the widespread uses of characters in politics. In 2007, the members of the Democratic Party of Japan (*Minshutō*) designed a *yurukyara*, *Minshu-kun*, based on their party symbol of a red ball, and used him in local campaign material to help their candidates win the twenty-first elections to the

House of Councillors.¹⁸ The Democratic Party wanted Minshu-kun to be imagined as a close friend who would serve the citizens and solve their problems. The campaign materials also enabled Minshu-kun to inhabit the personal sphere of people's homes as easily as the public space. Thus, when Minshu-kun appeared on the street, people did not feel awkward, some but rather were glad to meet him, accept him, and even to watch his anime series.

A similar character strategy was adopted by the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (*Jimintō*, LDP). In November 2012, the LDP called on the whole of Japan to submit character illustrations that represented party leader Abe Shinzō and secretary general Ishiba Shigeru in order to stimulate voters' focus on the forthcoming lower house election. However, this was not the LDP's first attempt to utilize character: during the leadership of Koizumi Jun'ichirō, a character called Shishirō (Mr. Lion) was created to promote Koizumi as "the lion-hearted" Prime Minister. "Shishi" means "lion," and referred to Koizumi's wild mane of grey hair. Shishirō had an animated lion's body but his head was replaced by Koizumi's face and hair. For the purposes of party publicity, Shishirō was commodified in Koizumi character goods, including "T-shirts, mugs, hand towels, stickers, fans and mobile-phone straps." Shishirō's image also appeared on the Internet, on the website of the LDP, as a download for desktop backgrounds and in computer games (*The Japan Forum Newsletter*, 2002). As a character, Koizumi was popular.¹⁹

Koizumi's proliferation benefited not only from the half-character body of Shishirō, which rendered him much more approachable and acceptable, but also from the "self-character" constructed by Koizumi himself. Through it Koizumi used the body in the way mentioned by Fiske above and perfectly aligned politics with human nature. According to Aihara, in contrast to the stereotype of a politician, what Koizumi offered was a "thin, poor and slovenly otaku image," with his particular lion-like hair making him look as if he had just woken up (2007: 90-94). Nevertheless, when he participated in television talk shows, his words were always concise and powerful, positive and imaginary, and frank and humorous, which triggered a "Koizumi fever" and was welcomed by the mass media. They described him as "'maverick,' a 'wide horse,' 'lone wolf,' 'a bit of an oddball' (*henjin*), 'a lone reformer,' a 'pied piper,' and 'Koizumi the Lionheart'" (Mulgan, 2013: 48). Some of his phrases became buzzwords, such as *kome hyappyo* (one hundred bags of rice) in 2001, and *sapuraizu* (surprise) in 2004. These phrases were easily adopted by the public and worked as a form of communication between the public and Koizumi.

In fact the public were less interested in Koizumi's specific policies than in him. They were interested in the buzzwords mainly because they had been spoken by Koizumi. As Aurelia George Mulgan (2013: 48) examines, a Japanese male, though, had never voted and paid attention to election, visited LDP's gift shop to buy 20

¹⁸As the Democratic Party of Japan and the Japan Innovation Party merged into a new one, the Democratic Party (*Minshintō*) on 27 March 2016, the logo of the party also changed. Minshu-kun thus was not adequate for the new party. In April, Minshu-kun retired from his stage. In September, the Democratic Party began to raise new *yurukyara* designs.

¹⁹In her book *Pink Globalization*, Yano has elaborated on the phenomenon of Shishirō (2013: 63-67).

posters of Koizumi. He explained that he in fact was not a supporter for LDP but wanted to have the poster of Koizumi in his room. He bought so many posters because his friends and relatives also wanted them. In addition, Koizumi often invited one member of his cabinet—Tanaka Makiko to be his television show partner who usually played the role of a neighbourly “*oba-san*” (aunt) (Aihara, 2007: 92). The image of them acted like an *otaku* and an *oba-san*, providing television entertainment, even though their focus was a serious election. The public cared less about their views than about enjoying the performance and so they came to be called the “national dolls” (*kokumin no onocha*) (Takazawa, 2001: 80). Their style of speech, mannerisms, appearances, and other characteristics unrelated to politics became fascinating to the public. The reason why they were called “national dolls” lay in the “self-character” which Koizumi intentionally constructed with his own body, including his appearance, the words he said, and the performances he gave in front of the mass media. This overlapped with Koizumi’s role as a politician and it was this role that the public responded to. This creation of a self-character brought results: Koizumi won the election and Shishirō was a commercial success. And Koizumi maintained his self-character to the end: he brought the character-effect into his administration, which the media called “theatre-style politics” (*gekijōkata seiji*). Koizumi chose to grasp the hearts of the people and not wake them up until they believed that the world in which Koizumi’s character existed was the real one. This is the hyper-reality that Koizumi created, with which he also realized the “characterized politics” (*kyarakutāka suru seiji*) (Ōtsuka, 2001b: 234).

Ōtsuka (2001b: 234-235) proposes the term the “characterized politics” during an analysis of the self-character of the former Prime Minister Obuchi Keizō (1937-2000), who was known as *Heisei-ojisan* (Heisei-uncle).²⁰ When he became Prime Minister in 1998, *The New York Times* commented that he was lacking in charm, like a “cold pizza.”²¹ Despite this, Obuchi always attempted to create intimacy with the public and was famous for his *bucchihon* (Obuchi’s telephone).²² As a result of this, Obuchi’s image was used on a Heisei-Obuchi telephone strap, thus creating Obuchi merchandise. For Ōtsuka, this reveals a process in which Obuchi himself becomes a dramatic character that effectively attracts the attention of the public.²³ This is also the case for Koizumi. However, Koizumi intentionally established his Shishirō character. Thus following Ōtsuka’s view, I would like to argue that the characterized politics or the characterization of politics refers both to the use of a specific character, such as

²⁰Heisei is current era name in Japan, starting on 8 January 1989, the day after Emperor Shōwa died. At that time Obuchi was serving as the Chief Cabinet Secretary and was responsible for formally announcing the end of Shōwa era and the new era name of Heisei for the new emperor.

²¹The article quoted the words of Neuffer, who was a specialist in Japanese politics: “Obuchi has all the pizzazz of a cold pizza. He wouldn’t be calling the shots. He’d simply be a puppet for the party elders” (Kristof, 1998).

²²*Bucchihon* combines Obuchi’s “buchi” and telephone’s “phone,” referring to the phenomenon that Obuchi often phoned famous people. Since Obuchi did this without any prompting, it always made the recipient feel embarrassed. This word was one of buzzwords in 1999.

²³The same point is made by Kayama Rika who argues the fact that human beings are gradually characterized has been accepted in Japan (2001: 10-11).

Shishirō, and to the building of a self-character. These two important features are both embodied in recent practices.

As the characterization of politics has been widely recognized and adopted, it has quickly spread throughout Japan. For instance, Japan Communist Party (*Nihon Kyōsantō*) has created a series of characters as members of its promotion department (*kakusan-bun*) to promote the Party's path, guidelines, and policies.²⁴ In addition, Komei Party (*Kōmeitō*)²⁵ has launched Komesuke, a *yurukyara* based on rice, the most familiar staple food for the Japanese, to bring the party closer to the public.

However, for politicians the characterization is particularly embodied in their self-characters which emphasize the *kyaradachi* (the establishment of a personality). This term is well recognized as being used by Asō Tarō. It is said that during the LDP's leadership election in 2007 he evaluated himself and his competitor Fukuda Yasuo (the former Prime Minister): “[*Watashi wa*] *kyara ga tachisugiteiru*, [*Fukudashi wa*] *amari sō ja nai*” (I invest too much in establishing my *kyara* but Fukuda not) (16 September 2007 *Asahi Shinbun* newspaper). Today a trend of “*kyara* being everything” (*kyara ga subete*) has become very popular in Japanese politics (Aihara, 2007: 90). In this context *kyara* can be understood as the personality of a politician which is important for building his/her recognizable and distinctive self-character. As shown in above example of Koizumi, politicians first use their bodies to construct a character-image and from that character-image their *kyara* is derived. The self-character of politicians consists of their character-image constructed by their bodies and their *kyara*, and the two are always inseparable. For example, Asō is keen on establishing his *kyara*. He admits publicly that he loves to read manga and browse 2ch. According to *Asahi Shinbun* newspaper, there is an anecdote about him being seen reading the manga *Rōzen meiden* (Rozen Maiden, 2002) in Tokyo Haneda Airport when he was Minister of Foreign Affairs, which earned him the sobriquet *Rōzen Asō* and *Rōzen kakka* (his excellency Rozen) (15 September 2008). Further, Asō makes many visits to Akihabara and delivers campaign speeches in which he labels himself as a manga *otaku*.

Another example offered by Aihara (2007: 94-95) is that of Higashikokubaru Hideo, who adopted *kyaradachi* to help him win the election to be governor of Miyazaki Prefecture in 2007. Before Higashikokubaru became a politician he was well-known as a comedian. During the election campaign, he sometimes acted in funny ways, sometimes imitated other politicians, and sometimes gave speeches in dialect. The public was thus impressed by his versatility and drawn to the self-character built by him. In the same year, in the elections for the governor of Tokyo, Ishihara Shintarō beat his competitor Asano Shirō. Ishihara was known as an influential author in Japanese literature. While he was still at university, he won the Akutakawa Prize for his novel *Taiyō no kisetsu* (Season of the Sun). This novel was then adapted for theatre, and its performance led to the birth of the postwar rebellious youth subculture known

²⁴See “*Nihon Kyōsantō, Kakusan-bun*” (Japan Communist Party, promotion department), accessed 18 September 2015, <http://www.jcp.or.jp/kakusan/>.

²⁵*Kōmeitō* is a political party in Japan. *Kōmei* means “justice” or “fairness.”

as the *taiyōzoku* (sun tribe). As the author, Ishihara was seen as the leader of the *taiyōzoku*. During the election, Ishihara exhibited his charisma by his powerful statements that always caused a public discussion. Aihara commented on it for *Asahi Shinbun* newspaper in an article by using a metaphor of “class president vs. class committee member” and implied that Ishihara had become the leading role of this election and must welcome his victory (2007: 96).

A more recent example is provided by Koike Yuriko who won the election and became the first female governor of Tokyo in July 2016. During the election, she also came to Akihabara, stood in front of the Gandamu Café, and expressed her idea of “turning Tokyo into an Anime-land.” She built the self-character based on her own experience of cosplay, “Last year I cosplayed the character Mahōtsukai Sarī [the magical Sally, see **Figure 17** and **18**] and became Mahōtsukai Yuri[ko] [the magical Yuri] and this year is the Ribon no kishi” (17 July 2016 *Dirī* news). She yet appealed to the public, “I am living in Toshima where the origin of anime, Tokiwa-sō,²⁶ is situated. In order to promote Tokyo, I will devote myself to connecting Toshima and Akihabara to create attractive content for the world and attract many foreign tourists. Please support Mahōtsukai Yuri to be the governor of Tokyo!”

Here, although the self-character may not have a “characterized body” or a specific character to which it relates, it expresses the self-image of politicians for the public, especially in the context of the idea that “contemporary elections are in need of building on a visual foundation” (Grabe and Bucy, 2009). Furthermore self-character can play the same role as that of character. Koizumi’s *otaku* image is devoted to strengthening the thought that he has simple and powerful ideas, which in turn makes the public feel reliable and tranquil; Higashikokubaru’s funny actions can entertain the masses (mood transition) and bring out their vitality; Ishihara’s leader personality can evoke people’s nostalgia for their youth, implying that a powerful political pattern arrives following the election of a former spiritual leader; and Koike’s magic acts as a kind of superpower that promotes the future development of Tokyo. What the individual seeks from characters is also embodied in the self-character of politicians. Thus “characterization” is quite a smart and modern strategy through which politicians can construct images that appeal to the public, and gain their support. The rise of “characterization” as a political force has created incentives for politicians to adopt a character or construct and act a self-character themselves.

Hence, Foucault argues that “the power exercised on the body is conceived not as a property, but as a strategy, that its effects of domination are attributed not to ‘appropriation,’ but to dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, functionings; that one should decipher in it a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity, rather than a privilege that one might possess; that one should take as its model a perpetual battle rather than a contract regulating a transaction or the conquest of a territory” (1995: 26-27). Yet Foucault notes that it is not only the “overall effect of its strategic positions, acquired or preserved, of the dominant class” but also “an effect

²⁶*Tokiwa-sō* is a Japanese style apartment building in Toshima, Tokyo. From the 1950s and 1960s many young manga and anime artists including Tezuka Osamu lived here and developed their manga and anime career.

that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated.” Thus it is not only politicians who use the “characterized body” for their own purposes, but the public too. The public expresses its opinions of certain politicians through “characterization” of politicians’ bodies. For example, on the 2ch one poster uses ASCII character art to depict the “characterized body” of Asō (see **Figure 19**) as a response to the policy of “*kane ga nee nara kekkonshinai hō ga ii*” (no money, no marriage) that Asō proposed in a conversation with college students in Tokyo in 2009 (24 August 2009 *Asahi Shinbun* newspaper). In their works, many *dōjin*, light novel authors and illustrators depict “characterized bodies” that include certain metaphors, such as Seitō-tan (Party-tan) for parties, and Kenhō-kyūjyō-chan (the Ninth-article-of-the-constitution girl) and Kenpō-musume-tachi (Constitution-girls) for the Japanese laws.

The above practices show that characters have been socio-politically identified and accepted in Japan. The sense of belonging is visibly depicted in the character’s body and coordinates with beliefs and emotions, which have laid the foundation for their political use. Politicians sense these connections and have used them on their own bodies. They use characters as a strategy and technique to soften power and ensure that it is taken for granted. This hugely affects the attitudes of both politicians and the public towards characters and the “characterized body,” and also pushes characters to the centre of the social stage, where they influence social interaction and social communication.



Figure 17. In order to coincide with the election activity, Koike’s twitter account posted the picture of her cosplay experience in 2015, with tweets: “I will put Tokyo as the source of culture, since there are many cultural sources in Tokyo such as Comic Market and major publishers. Tokyo will try its best to support Comic Market”; Source: Twitter of Koike Yuriko.

Communication as the Essence of Characters

The term “body techniques” mentioned at the beginning of this chapter is proposed by Mauss to mean “the ways in which, from society to society, men know how to use their bodies” (1973: 70). He also notes, “In any case, it is essential to move from the concrete to the abstract.” That is to say, aside from concretely representing and modifying the body, how the body is utilized, which may imply an abstract and deeply rooted function in social communication and delivering meanings within certain socio-cultural contexts, is also crucial.

In contemporary society, with the body becoming the finest commodity, new techniques are constantly being invented, particularly when the body encounters characters. In fact, when characters are embedded in self-identity, social belonging or political uses through “characterized bodies,” they are involved in a communication process. In some sense, the essence of identity-expression and the diffusion of ideological meanings lies in the communication in which characters per se can function as the medium to send, deliver, and accept information. This provides a broad understanding of three key elements to communication as the essence of characters: first, modifying the self’s body and forming a “characterized body” for communication; second, using the “characterized body” as the self’s body for communication; and third, using the body of a character as a medium for communication. The first two have been examined in the previous two sections, and the third one will be explored in this section. The body of a character, existing in the fictional world and always revealing many potential traits of a real body, does not necessarily direct to “a given entity with a specified functionality and direction of activity” but “a construction site of exploration and connection” and therefore it can be used to actualize not “merely the specific set of affects...but the entire (or, at least a larger) range of affects” (Cox, 2003: 2-3). I argue, it in fact transforms the body of a character into an abstract field and reveals the potentials of its whole entity, the character. Thus I will examine how a character functions as a medium. Marshall McLuhan suggests, “The medium is the message” that can “create an environment by its mere presence” (1964: 8). That is to say, characters can influence their surroundings, especially their communication environment.

In fact, character consumption per se assures a certain type of communication, and characters serve as a language that consumers can choose to use. The birth of Atomu in the 1960s is an example of this. The development and the robot theme of Atomu was a manifestation of the attitudes of the era, the policy guidance of the nation, and the expectation of the people—science and technology. As discussed in previous chapters, postwar Japan had pinned its hopes on science and technology as the way to realize economic recovery and improve the nation’s standing in the world. It was believed that Japan would never have the chance to return to the world stage if it did not master the technology of mass production. Thus, in the 1950s the Japanese government and its leaders embarked on an exploration of the domestic consumer market for electrical goods and built up the idea of the *akarui Nihon* (bright Japan), symbolizing the future of Japan. By the 1960s, this had had a measurable effect and the

popularity of the three sacred treasures was the best evidence of this. Against this backdrop, Atomu, as a robot who stood for peace and combined technology and fantasy, became a national hero. According to Schodt, Atomu was “a child of science” who lived in a future full of technological gadgets and hence created “a standard of living that Japanese could only dream about” (1988: 76). The national hero thus, as he suggests, was linked with “a wonderful future that science and technology could provide.” The Japanese, and particularly the future of family and nation—the children—were fascinated by Atomu and the advanced technologies beyond him (see, for example, Allison, 2006; Schodt, 2007). Children were the loyal audience of the *Atomu* television series as well as the consumers of Atomu character goods. Inspired by Atomu, when they grew up they became the backbone of the technology industry in Japan (Wagner, 2015).

In the 1970s, the atmosphere changed and came to have a much softer feel as, with the rise of the *shōjo* culture and *kawaii* style, cute characters stepped onto the historical stage, including the superstar Hello Kitty. In Chapter 2 I noted that Hello Kitty was originally designed as a decorative character that provided the gift company Sanrio with new business opportunities. She was also embodied in Sanrio’s market strategy as well as its company slogan—“small gift, big smile.” By linking to the cultural tradition of exchanging gift, Hello Kitty goods became a good choice of consumers for gifts, which involves the character in the wide and active social communication. Japan has a long history of gift exchange, and the obligation and responsibility of the individual, family, society, and state to use gifts to build and maintain close social relationships corresponds with the social need for *kizuna* (bonds).²⁷ Significantly *kizuna* focuses on emotion, which caters to the appeal of the individuality and sensibility that have arisen as a result of the prosperity of consumption. These emotional ties are pursued by individuals because they constitute the foundation of an individual’s life and the needs of the nation because they sustain “a strong interpersonal network” that suffers from the “threats of modernity and stresses of daily life,” as Yano points out (2013: 69). At the same time, Yano continues, Hello Kitty radiates a wish of happiness which helps social communication to go more smoothly and achieve more smiles. Hello Kitty promotes various products and appears on many gifts because she is able to oil the wheels of social communication.

In the 1980s some qualitative changes occurred (see chapter 2) which implied the diversification of character consumption in Japan on the one hand and on the other hand the issues increasingly came out. Against this background, an example was the Bikkuriman boom (see chapter 3), in which the characters, the story settings and the worldviews all came from character stickers—the gifts included with the Bikkuriman chocolate products. These stickers did not rely on any existing manga or animation narratives, but could be collected together to construct the world of Bikkuriman

²⁷Particularly the aftermath of the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami reminded the Japanese to value the bonds among people and therefore *kizuna* was selected as the buzzword for the year. See “*Yūkyan shingo ryūkōgo tashō happyō*” (Announcement of the U-CAN top new words and slang for 2011), accessed 2 March 2016, <http://singo.jiyu.co.jp/nendo/2011.html>.

characters. Therefore, from Ōtsuka's (2001) perspective, Bikkuriman was typical of "narrative consumption" because the narratives of the Bikkuriman characters were constructed by consuming the chocolate, sticker by sticker. It was the process of collecting small segmented images and fragmented text, in which every Bikkuriman sticker was a medium for content and transmitted useful information, which contributed to the "grand narrative" of Bikkuriman. However, such a content medium was not separate from the social context, particularly when it caused the same "reverse consumption" phenomenon as had happened with the Kamen raidā snack (see chapter 2). Consumers were eager to purchase the Bikkuriman chocolates but only for the stickers included with them; they spent much money while causing a huge waste of chocolates; although the prices of the rare stickers had surged, consumers still wanted them, regardless of cost (6 August 1988 *Yomiuri Shinbun* newspaper). These actually represent the negative aspect of contemporary consumption. But with individuality and sensibility have been the key factors in the development of consumption in Japan (see chapter 3), such negative impact may point to "the capacity for self and lifestyle transformation," particularly "for the individual who has 'only one life to live'" (Featherstone, 2007: 115). In this sense Bikkuriman was the medium for the content as well as for the social context, accurately reflecting the issues and situations in Japanese society.²⁸

In the 1990s many social issues were triggered after the Bubble Economy collapsed. This increased the stress and uncertainty of the Japanese to such a level that they were desperate for comfort and fell deeply in love with *iyashi-kei* characters (see chapter 3) such as Tarapanda (Lazy panda). In some sense, *iyashi-kei* characters were an extension of cute culture, but during such a disturbing period they were endowed with a special mission: they were a medium of security that could relieve the restlessness of individuals and communities, and the unrest of state and society.

These examples reveal the ability of characters to act as a means of communication, either material (as a commodity or gift) or immaterial (in terms of emotion and security). The role that characters play in communication has become even more important. Particularly driven by the development of computers and the Internet, face-to-face social interaction has broken down and a "stranger society" has gradually been constructed (Giddens and Sutton, 2009). In such an environment, communication has been emphasized as having a vital function and has become the key word for the era. Being a vital means of communication, especially social communication, has effectively facilitated characters' involvement in the activities of constructing, maintaining, and expanding the social network of contemporary Japanese society.

²⁸Although the consumers of Bikkuriman chocolates were mainly children, the money they spent on the product had reached the adult level. An evidence for it was the phenomenal sale record: 400 million Bikkuriman chocolates were sold in three years. According to Children Research Institute's Takayama Hideo, what attracted children was Bikkuriman's "irrational world." He argued that children were sensitive with the change of the time and reflected the social trends: the omnipotence of technology had been less attracted than the mystery world (18 April 1988 *Yomiuri Shinbun* newspaper).

In the mid-1990s, the tamagotchi as a character-raising game quickly dominated the Japanese toy market: its name is derived from *tamago* (egg) and *wotchi* (watch) and also offers an indication of what it looks like—a portable game device with a round, egg-shaped body. By simply pressing the three buttons on it, a player can take care of a computerized “virtual pet” and bring it up. Its cuteness and roundness first attracted girls, who were considered social trendsetters, but tamagotchi rapidly became popular with a much wider market. The popularity of the tamagotchi lay in its role in communication through its ability to form close relationships. Players had to devote themselves to their characters, raising them as if they were their own “child.” The player had to feel a sense of responsibility as the parent and invest emotionally in the digital creature. Thus the game was also an intimacy-building process in which through the “child’s” development one sees one’s own existence and a strong sense of self (Ishikawa, 2007). When the “child” had grown up, the player could choose for the tamagotchi to be “married off,” make friends, or create a “family” through connecting with another tamagotchi. In this way, tamagotchi is helped to forge intimate relationships between players. The characters thus could act as the language or social capital for exchanging, communicating, and interacting.²⁹

A similar example can be found in the world of Pokémon. Pokémon is one of the biggest successes for character merchandising, with its success beginning with the Game Boy game. According to Tajiri, the game’s designer, his motivation for creating the game was to provide children with “a means of relieving the stresses of growing up in a postindustrial society” (Allison, 2004: 41). Today people spend a lot of time on various indifferent technological devices, thereby neglecting social interaction and communication. To counter this, through his work Tajiri aimed to endow such devices with a sense of humanity. Thus in the Pokémon game, players are always encouraged to receive and share a variety of information through the characters. For them, the characters are not only part of the game but also represent other players. The exchange in the virtual world actually symbolizes interaction between real people. Eventually, this leads to the players getting a “space of their own,” as Allison points out, that “cushions kids from the world of school, home, and daily pressures” (2004: 42). This allows them to avoid the difficulties of the real world and to build intimate and pure relationships. Such friends and pure friendships are not unique to Pokémon. In other character-mediated worlds, such as that of Yu-Gi-Oh trading cards,³⁰ the most fascinating thing for consumers is that through collecting, exchanging, and playing with the character cards they can gain information that helps them to make friends and find something in common to build their own social circles. Similar to tamagotchi and Pokémon, the play environment of Yu-Gi-Oh trading cards is full of

²⁹Many scholars also have argued that the relationships established and maintained through *tamagotchi* are superficial or a kind of techno-intimacy (Ishikawa, 2007; Allison, 2006). I will return to this question in Conclusion.

³⁰Yu-Gi-Oh trading cards are a collectible card game based on the Yu-Gi-Oh manga and its anime adaptations and series. The game was released by Konami company in 1999 and soon became a bestseller. In 2011, total sales of the Yu-Gi-Oh trading card game had reached 25 billion cards and held the Guinness World Record at the time. See “Guinness World Records,” accessed 2 March 2016, <http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/best-selling-trading-card-game>.

intimacy, pureness, interaction, and communication, and more importantly, it is an indispensable part of their social network.

Undoubtedly characters' involvement may divert attention from the existing network, such as the primitive familial bond. Characters such as tamagotchi, which became a "real pet" and a "real friend" to some extent, are seemingly able to establish a stronger connection with children than parents, suggesting the possibility of characters acting as a replacement for family (as the survey in chapter 3 showed). This creates an incentive for parents to try to use a common topic—characters—to rebuild their relationships with their children. By purchasing character goods for their children, taking them to character theme parks, and reading and watching manga and anime together with their children, characters appear to help parents to bridge the gap between them and their offspring.

Moreover, contemporary parents are distinct from the earlier generation, who do not accept characters and see them only as a childish culture. For example, one reason why she had a Mickey-Mouse-styled life explained by the young Japanese female mentioned above was that "my mother likes Mickey very much and always buys his character items for me...when I realize it, my surrounding has been all 'Mickey's'" (quoted from *Yomiuri Shinbun* newspaper). Particularly since the first character-raised generation (of the 1960s), whose childhoods were flooded with characters and character goods, most Japanese have grown up with the companionship of characters. When they become parents, it is easy for them to accept characters and they are happy to enjoy characters with their children (Yamada, 2000). Characters are thus not a replacement for a social network, but informational tools used to maintain them. As tools, the multiplicity of characters diversifies the forms and understandings of relationships. Following this, individuals' social networks are rapidly expanding. As Douglas and Isherwood (1979) argue, the scale of communication is increased by the informational component of consumer goods. Individuals can build connections with like-minded others through sharing information. The emergence of collaborative characters led by the development of the Internet is a good example of this. As a user-generated medium, Hatsune Miku, discussed above in the section on the media mix, brings her fans together to share and communicate information about her with others and together enjoy all things of Miku. For those who take part in this collaborative activity, the relationships among them may be not directly formed but are maximally expanded. While they may not know each other, through this common interest—Miku—they can still connect on the same platform. In this way, it is possible to construct an anonymous network and attach it to individuals' social networks. And character is the knot, combining both and expanding them further.

Conclusion

When Turner proposes the notion of a "somatic society," he points out that it is a "society within which major political and personal problems are both problematized in the body and expressed through it" (1996: 1). Indeed, the body constitutes the territory of the self, depicts the image of the self, and is inseparable from the self. Yet in

contemporary consumer culture the body has become the finest consumer good and a project that can be worked on and increasingly linked to one's self-identity. This situation has furnished the right conditions for individuals to consume characters in a bodily way: on the one hand, through working on it the body is transformed into the "characterized body" to express one's "characterized identity" directly and visibly; on the other hand, the "characterized body" takes on ideological meanings such as social belonging and political uses. Here both identity expression and ideological meanings are involved in a process of information exchange. In this process characters are the media that can serve as a communication method between an individual and others, and individuals and society.

Thus the essence of characters is communication. Through the self's body, the "characterized body," and (the bodies of) characters, individuals effectively construct, maintain and expand their social network in both material (commodity, gift) and immaterial (emotion, security) ways. This promotes characters to being the central knot that connects various social relationships. In this sense, characters can influence society through their breadth and depth, resulting in a character-based society. This is, in fact, the "characterization" of society, which means that characters, as a form of discourse, reflect, constitute, and represent contemporary Japan.

Chapter 5

Characters on the World Stage

In Chapter 4, I argued that characters as media could promote themselves as the central knot that connected various social relationships. The impact of characters on Japanese society is expanding, in terms of both their social breadth and depth, and their contribution to the “characterization” of the society. Hence characters, as a form of discourse, reflect, constitute, and represent contemporary Japan. Against such a backdrop, the use of characters as ambassadors for the nation is taken for granted. In 2008, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs appointed Doraemon as the first anime cultural ambassador, and in 2013 he was also chosen to support Tokyo’s bid to host the 2020 Summer Olympic Games. Also in 2008, Japan’s tourism ministry appointed Hello Kitty to be the ambassador for Japanese tourism in both China and Hong Kong. In 2014, Pikachu became Japan’s cheer-ambassador for the FIFA World Cup. More interestingly, in August 2016, for promoting Tokyo, the next host city, Doraemon, Captain Tsubasa, Hello Kitty and Pac-man appeared in the closing ceremony of Rio Summer Olympic Games. According to *The New York Times*, others who showed together with them were “Abe-Mario”: the Prime Minister of Japan, Abe Shinzō, emerged by dressing as Super Mario (Rich, 2016).

As ambassadors, characters are promoted into the international arena, that is, onto the world stage. Indeed the phenomena surrounding characters are not confined to Japan. There is a lot of evidence of this. For example, the man who can read five manga books a day in Switzerland, the girls who devote themselves to cosplay in Italy, the boys who hold *otaku* events in Brazil, the Spanish young man who hugely enjoys Japanese historical manga, the Canadian woman who hopes to become an anime singer (Sakurai, 2010), the Korean man who married his Japanese character pillow (Funk, 2010) and the Chinese girls who work in the Maid Café in Shanghai (12 July 2011 *Chinanews*). In this sense, characters can be said to belong to the world.

As early as the 1960s Japanese characters were brought to the world stage through Japan’s cultural exports and exchange. This process created the right conditions for promoting Japanese popular culture as the “leading exporter of fantasy” (Cross, 2006: xv). As Allison (2006) points out in her study of the development of Japanese character toys in the U.S., Japan built up a particular kind of global imagination that attracted children from all over the world. Allison links this global imagination with the globalization of contemporary consumer culture, especially with children’s consumer culture, which has created a longing among children for Japanese characters and Japanese character franchises. This, in some ways, has expanded the relationship between Japanese characters and American children, suggesting the “characterization” of America and the world, which Allison examines in detail through Pokémon and dubs the “Pokémonization” of the world. The same point is made by Joseph Tobin on viewing Pikachu’s global adventure, “as Einstein taught us to view light, as both particle and wave, matter and energy; that is, both as physical commodities that get

shipped to specific sites around the globe and also as a wave of interest and awareness that began in Japan” and is diffused throughout the world (2006: 291).

Anime scholar Susan Napier suggests that the global imagination built by anime “offers a space for identity exploration” for both Japanese and non-Japanese people, and thus potentially creates a global cultural identity (2001: 27). Agreeing with the point of view that “Japanese popular culture has invaded the U.S.,” Roland Kelts focuses on Japanese animation in America and notes that the seemingly different cultural outlooks between both nations are not barriers and in fact “Japan is a lot closer to America than ever before” (2006: 8). Anne Cooper-Chen (2010) looks at East and South Asia and Europe by examining many aspects of the globalization of Japanese popular media, manga and anime, including the differences in cultural production in domestic and foreign markets, fan cultures, and cultural exports, and points out the importance of overseas enthusiasm. Yano, who specifically traces the globalization of Hello Kitty, posits that Kitty is a global product that stimulates global desires. This facilitates Kitty’s success in transnational flows and commodification. She also points out that Kitty embodies “Japan’s Cute-Cool” which, as a form of soft power capital, has conquered the world. Thus, Yano concludes, “Hello Kitty’s success as a global icon was part of a triumphal discourse of personal, corporate, and national achievement” (2013: 16). Aoki Sadashige (2014) also makes the same suggestion that characters, which exist at the heart of Japanese society and the nation, have power and could become the national image of Japan.

These ideas shift our attention to the development of characters within the global context. In this chapter, I will examine characters in other locations, that is, the exportation of characters to other regions and how they have become an indispensable part of people’s cultural lives in those regions. I will look at the process of characters going overseas, in which the Japanese government plays a significant role by encouraging cultural exports and exchange and creating related cultural policies, including appointing characters as ambassadors.

To analyse how characters influence other regions in the world, I will then offer a case study of China, which is the biggest market in Asia and one of the most successful destinations for Japan’s cultural flow. Indeed Asia is one of the most significant regions for exports, and one which Japan wants to explore further. For example, in a 2005 government program, “Japan’s 21st Century Vision,” Japan gives priority to the “economic integration of East Asia,” especially with China and South Korea. The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI, 2010) also points out that the primary target for Japan’s cultural industry should be a “China-centric Asia.” In his study, *Recentring Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism*, Iwabuchi Koichi has elaborated on the significance of Asia for Japan, leading to “Japan’s return to Asia” in the form of the diffusion of commercialized Japanese popular culture including “animation, comics, characters, computer games, fashion, pop music and TV dramas” in the 1990s (2002: 1; 16). He particularly examines the growth in popularity of Japanese TV dramas and popular music in this region, which provides an useful interpretation of how Japanese pop-culture fares against local culture in the context of globalization. As Japan has built its dreamworld in Asia, it is

clear that the main destination for Japan's cultural flow has shifted to the Asian region, where China, as the biggest market, can never be ignored.

I will explore in detail how Japanese characters have developed in China and are received by the local people, and how this has affected the rise of a character culture in China. From this, I argue that characters are useful in illustrating today's fragmented and recontextualized postmodern cultural diffusion. However we should also note that there is resistance, and restrictions are in place in China. Against the backdrop of such tensions, it is worth exploring how an intimate and dynamic cultural connection between China and Japan is growing, with characters acting as the bridge between the two countries.

Characters Going Overseas

Japanese characters' adventures overseas begin with Japan's cultural exports, which usually experience the same process of moving from anime to manga and then on to character merchandising. It generally "begins with the [overseas] broadcast of animated series from Japanese television; as the series gains popularity, the original comic work is translated and published in book form" (Ono, 1996: 6, quoted from Cooper-Chen, 2010: 26). Following this, character products are exported (or licensed to the local producers) (Shiraishi, 2013). Nevertheless, the last two steps are a relatively slow process, which is frequently threatened by local piracy. For instance, while anime was being exported to China as early as the 1980s, manga did not appear in the local market until about 10 years later and character goods about 20 years later; before that the existence of most of these items in China was unlicensed.

According to Tsugata, the earliest record of anime going overseas can be traced to the literature of the Daishō period: "in 1917 the work of *Momotarō* [Peach Boy] produced by Kitayama Seitarō was 'exported' to France" (2004: 166). Here the term "export" was only an attempt then—it was not until the 1960s that official exports took place. Tōei first exported its animation films, including *Hakujaden* (1958),¹ *Shōnen Sarutobi Sasuke* (1959) and *Saiyūki* (1960),² to America in 1961. These were followed by *Arabian naito Shindobatto no bōken* (Sinbad, The Sailor, 1962) and *Aniju to Zushiōmaru* (The Orphan Brothers, 1961)³ in 1962. According to Japanese scholar Kusanagi Satoshi, from the start, *Hakujaden*, which was known as the "first oriental in-colour feature-length manga film," was aimed at the overseas market. The leader of Tōei at the time, Ōkawa had stated, "We could use the artwork and movement to make up for the disadvantage of the Japanese language [a non-international language] and to help the audiences understand our art" (quoted from Kusanagi, 2003: 30). To realize this goal, as we have seen, the initial export of anime was led by Tōei, which launched five films in American cinemas in the space of two years. In 1963, after having been broadcast in Japan, the television anime series *Tetsuwan Atomu* was exported to America by Tezuka (see chapter 1) and received a warm welcome from American children. As both the animation films and the television anime had opened

¹The film was released in America under the title of *Panda and the Magic Serpent* (Kusanagi, 2003: 32).

²The film was released in America under the title of *Alakazam the Great* (Kusanagi, 2003: 32).

³The film was released in America under the title of *The Littlest Warrior* (Kusanagi, 2003: 32).

the door to the American market, the conditions were created for the successful exportation of subsequent Japanese works, such as the TV anime series *Uchū senkan Yamato* in the 1970s, the animated film *Kaze no tani Naushika* (Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind, 1984)⁴ in the 1980s, the TV anime series *Bishōjo senshi sērā mūn* and *Pokémon* in the 1990s, and the film *Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi* (Spirited Away, 2001) in the 2000s.

In contrast, translated manga did not really enter the American market until the late 1980s. In 1987 two events marked a turning point: a historical manga, *Kozure ōkami* (Lone Wolf and Cub, 1970), was translated and published in the US, which triggered the enthusiasm of American comic book readers, and VIZ Media began to explore the possibilities of translated manga (Schodt, 1996). Since then many manga works have been translated into English which, as Cooper-Chen has pointed out, “acted as a gateway to the world,” because these English versions are then used by European publishers to translate them into their own languages (2010:43-44).

Similarly, before the appearance of manga, many anime works had been broadcast in Europe, beginning in the 1970s. In 1976 the animated film *Arupusu no shōjo Haiji* was released in Italy. By the early 1980s more than 150 animation works, including both TV anime and animated films had been exported to Europe. Tōei had also introduced its TV anime series *Doragon bōru* (Dragon Ball, 1986) to France, gaining a phenomenal 67 per cent rating (Tsugata, 2004: 166-167). At the same time, Japan began to focus on its neighbours, the Asian region. According to Japanese scholar Shiraishi Saya (2013: 56-57), Doraemon had been introduced to Taiwan via television and manga in the 1970s, and the local school buses were even named “Doraemon Kindergarten.” By the early 1980s Doraemon anime was being exported to Hong Kong, where images of him could be found on baby biscuit tins as well as on posters about the local police aimed at children. By the early 1990s the TV anime series had been widely broadcast throughout Asia, including in mainland China, Thailand, Singapore, Korea, Malaysia and Indonesia. Doraemon thus became the best known character in this region, even being called the “Asian Hero” (Lyer, 2002, quoted from Kelts, 2014).

However, there are certainly exceptions to this reliance on manga and anime for exports, such as Hello Kitty, *yurukyara* and Mario (see chapters 2 and 4). Without anime and manga to support it, Hello Kitty was exported as a global cultural commodity. According to Yano, Sanrio always intended to turn Hello Kitty into a “global figure”; the character was created in 1974 and appeared on the American market in 1976, the European market in 1978 and the Asian market in 1990 (2013: 9). Similar to Hello Kitty, the export of *yurukyara* also rests on commercial exploitation. For example, in 2012 Kumamoto University, Kumamoto Prefecture and Kumamoto city opened a promotional centre in Shanghai, China, which also aimed to promote their *yurukyara*, Kumamon, and included exclusive stores and online shopping

⁴According to Brain Ruh (2010: 43-46), the American version of the film is known as *Warrior of the Wind* and many original scenes have been unnecessarily cut. Such modifications are not satisfactory to the creator of the work, Miyazaki Hasao, or to the American audience.

opportunities.⁵ Since the early 1980s, Japanese video game industry began to play important role in the global market and developed soon; by the 1990s it had been the market-share leader that contributed to making Nintendo's Mario the best selling video game franchise (with more than 500 million units sold as of September 2016) and the most recognizable game character in the world.⁶

According to the statistics for 2010 of the Association of Japanese Animations, Japanese anime production companies provided products for over 112 countries, reaching some 87.2 per cent of the world's population and making huge profits: for instance, "Japan's anime industry saw [its] overseas sales peak at ¥16 billion in 2006" (Nagata, 2010; 2012). Consequently Japanese culture has been widely introduced to the rest of the world, which is consistent with the policy of the Japanese government.

Since the postwar period, culture has been an important issue in Japan. In 1947, former Prime Minister Katayama Tetsu (1887-1978) proposed the building of a *bunka kokka* (cultural nation) in his cabinet policy speech (Neki, 1999). In the postwar recovery period, culture was a key aspect of technology and innovation. By the 1970s culture was being utilized in Japan's foreign policy and, in 1972, the Japan Foundation was established by an act of the Japanese Diet to undertake the international dissemination of Japanese culture. In 1979, in a policy speech, former Prime Minister Ōhira Masayoshi (1910-1980) argued that what the Japanese were pursuing had shifted from *mono no yutakasa* (material abundance) to *kokoro no yutakusa* (spiritual abundance), the "transition from economy to culture," and thus he pointed out that the "*bunka no jidai*" (the era of culture) had already arrived (1982: 284, quoted from Kumon, 1993). In 1980 Ōhira convened more than two hundred people to constitute a study group and published a report titled "*bunka no jidai*," which exerted a significant enlightening influence on the subsequent development of Japanese governmental policy in the 1990s. Yet another important issue discussed in this report was internationalization. Realizing that many countries had an interest not only in Japan's traditional culture but also in its modern culture, the report stressed the value of the cultural aspects of international communication and widely introduced modern Japanese culture to the world beyond Japan. This cultural communication with other countries was helpful in creating a Japanese cultural identity. Hence, at the beginning of the 1990s, the Japanese government focused on internationalization.

In 1991, the Cultural Policy Promotion Conference of the Ministry of Education had an in-depth discussion on *bunka no jidai*.⁷ In 1995, in its report titled "*Atarashi bunka rikkoku*" (Building a New Nation through Culture), this conference proposed the strategy of *bunka rikkoku* (nation building through culture) and, based on this, the

⁵See, Kumamon's micro-blog and Taobao Juhuasuan, accessed 5 March 2016, http://www.weibo.com/u/2537989652?is_hot=1, and <https://ju.taobao.com/jusp/other/jupan3/tp.htm?spm=608.2291429.102204.2.ZF7mgH>.

⁶See, "Top selling software units," Sales data, Nintendo, accessed January 2017, <https://www.nintendo.co.jp/ir/en/sales/software/index.html>.

⁷The Ministry of Education is now the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (*Monbukagakushō*). This conference published the report titled "*Bunka no jidai ni taisuru wagaku ni bunka shinkō no tōmen no juten hōsaku ni tsuite*" (On the Focus of the Development of Culture in the Era of Culture).

government published “*bunka rikkoku 21 puran*” (The Plan for Nation Building through Culture in the 21st Century) a year later. This plan aimed to further expand international cultural exchange and facilitate the development of cultural dissemination. From 1997 to 1998, the Japanese government devoted itself to the strategy of *bunka rikkoku* and published “*Bunka shinkō masutā puran*” (The Master Plan for Cultural Development, 1998), in which it emphasized the close connection between culture and internationalization. Thus influenced by these policies during the 1990s, many Japanese cultural products were exported around the world. The Japanese government even provided cultural sources, such as Japanese TV dramas and anime, free of charge, which laid the foundation for the overseas success of Japanese popular culture.

By the 2000s, the attention of the Japanese government had been increasingly caught by culture, the concept of “soft power,” and “Cool Japan.” In the 1990s Joseph Nye proposed the concept of “soft power,” referring to “the ability to get others to want the outcomes you want because of your cultural or ideological appeal” (2000: 123). He noted that Japanese culture had had a transnational effect in some respects, such as the success of Pokémon in America, which could “confer it significant soft power” and help the nation to “succeed once again” (2000: 124). The same point was made by Douglas McGray (2002), who positioned the growing cultural appeal of Japan as its “national cool.” McGray’s view soon spread across Japan and was reprinted by *Chūō kōron* (Central Review) magazine as the special slogan for *bunka rikkoku*, which contributed to making “Cool Japan” a popular phrase in Japanese society (Lam, 2007; Odagiri, 2010).

As the mass media became excited about the term, the Japanese government also began a series of measures to promote culture, especially popular culture. In 2001, the Agency for Cultural Affairs published the *Bunka geijutsu shinkō kihonhō* (Basic Law on Promotion of Culture and Art), in which “films, manga, animation, and computer and other digital arts” were defined as “media art.” In 2002, the culture review conference held by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture particularly emphasized the importance of promoting “media art,” and pointed out that “media art is a proud part of our culture all over the world that could promote the further development of all aspects of culture and art” (quoted from Tsugata, 2004: 198). In the same year the Tokyo government established the “Tokyo International Animation Fair” in order to absorb more of the attention being paid to Japan by the world. However, in his annual policy speech, Prime Minister Koizumi Jun’ichirō stated that the Japanese government would focus on the development of intellectual property, especially on intangible property such as content products. According to METI, content products include films, anime, games, books, music, and so on; the creation and circulation of these products constitutes the Japanese content industry.⁸ In 2003 METI advocated advancing the internationalization of the content industry through

⁸See “Content Industry,” Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, accessed 2 March 2016, http://www.meti.go.jp/policy/mono_info_service/contents/.

employing content as the branding for Japan, and this policy became the basis for Japan's cultural diplomacy.

In 2004 Koizumi called for a discussion on promoting the government's cultural diplomacy (*Bunka gaikō no suishin ni kansuru kondankai*) and in the following year published a report, one of whose three basic ideas was to pursue "21st century cool."⁹ In 2005 the Japanese government released "Japan's 21st Century Vision" which pointed out that because of the coming of "an age of cultural attraction," Japan would invest more in increasing free cultural exchange in order to "build stable international relations." Moving on to 2006, "A New Look at Cultural Diplomacy" was suggested by the then Minister for Foreign Affairs, Asō Tarō, who argued that "any kind of cultural diplomacy that fails to take advantage of pop culture is not really worthy of being called 'cultural diplomacy'." He also affirmed the power of characters such as Atomu and Doraemon, who had enriched the meaning of robots as the friends of human beings and, more importantly, as potential brand images for Japan abroad. "We have all grown up nourished by Shakespeare and Beethoven and other forms of culture emerging from the West. Yet we are now at the point where culture made in Japan—whether anime and manga or sumo and Japanese dietary culture—is equally able to nourish the people of the world, particularly the younger generations. We would be remiss not to utilize these to the fullest" he said.

Moreover, Asō announced in the same speech that "a Nobel Prize in manga" and "ambassadors of anime" would be set up. The International MANGA Award was established in 2007 and the character ambassadors have already been described at the beginning of this chapter. The manga prize is open to manga artists from all over the world in order to give them a real "feeling of association with Japan" and the chance to get closer to their beloved characters. As Asō's (2007) congratulations on the creation of the award states, "To the girls in Copenhagen, Denmark, who have grown up together with Tamagotchi, Pokemon, and Sailor Moon, to the Chinese boys who could not have lived a day without Saint Seiya, and to Zinedine Zidane, Francesco Totti, and all the boys who have penned likenesses of Captain Tsubasa...Manga is about love. Manga is about friendship. Manga is about growing-up. Manga is about everything—it knows absolutely no boundaries. Manga, in a word, is the most universal unifier of the hearts and minds that are young or young at heart." In 2009 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs became one of the main sponsors of the World Cosplay Summit and it also appointed three girls as kawaii ambassadors in order to promote Japanese fashion. So far the manga award, anime ambassadors, support for international cosplay events and introduction of kawaii ambassadors have constituted the "pop-culture diplomacy" of Japan.¹⁰

In sum, Japan's internationally oriented cultural policy and the increasing attention it pays to popular culture are the keys to turning characters into the ambassadors of Japan. Since the postwar era, the government of Japan has valued the development of

⁹See "The discussion on cultural policy," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accessed 2 March 2016, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/culture/koryu/kuni/jigyo/kondankai.html>.

¹⁰See "Pop-culture Diplomacy," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 14 August 2014, accessed 2 March 2016, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/culture/koryu/pop/index.html>.

culture and regards it as a significant part of its policymaking process. By the beginning of the 1980s, with the social focus shifting to culture, as proposed by the Prime Minister Ōhira, how to facilitate the internationalization of Japanese culture, particularly modern culture, had become a crucial issue for Japan's government. As a result, in the 1990s, the policies of the Japanese government positioned culture as the foundation of the nation, as the strategy of *bunka rikkoku* showed, and thus a wide range of popular cultural products were exported overseas. By the 2000s, driven by the idea of "soft power" and the slogan "Cool Japan," the government of Japan had taken intensive steps to promote Japanese popular culture through laws, plans, various cultural events, and consequently Japanese pop-culture diplomacy. In this way, characters have gradually come to represent Japan on the world stage.

Japanese Characters in China

Though supported by the government of Japan, many scholars do not consider this pop-culture diplomacy to be working very well, as it is limited by many issues including historical tensions, nationalism and regional protection (Lam, 2007; Dalot-Bul, 2009; Kadosh-Otmazgin, 2012; Ishii, 2013; Iwabuchi, 2015). As Allison (2008: 107) argues, "it is not so much Japan itself as a compelling culture, power, or place that gets signified" as it is a signifier for "a blend of fantasy-ware" that evokes individual emotions and identity (as we have seen in chapter 3). Thus there is another voice that says that even though Japanese pop-culture cannot be free of these limitations, it is unexpectedly welcomed by consumers outside Japan because of its characteristics such as cultural "odourlessness" and "*mukokuseki*" (stateless) (Iwabuchi, 2002) and the fact that it creates "shared memories" with the local people (Nakano, 2008). As Asō (2006) also states in the above speech, "You can see this clearly if you take a peek in any of the shops in China catering to the young otaku-type manga and anime fans. You will find the shops' walls lined with any and every sort of Japanese anime figurine you can imagine. With all due respect to Mickey and Donald, whether you look at J-pop, J-anime, or J-fashion, the competitiveness of any of these is much more than you might imagine... It is that fact that is bringing about a steady increase in the number of fans of Japan. We have a grasp on the hearts of young people in many countries, not the least of which being China."

Here the country that Asō is specifically describing is China. As early as 1980, the export of the Japanese television anime series *Tetsuwan Atomu* (*Tiebi Atongmu* in Chinese version) to China paved the way for the presence of Japanese characters among Chinese audiences. The Chinese generation of the 1980s was the first to grow up with Japanese characters. Nevertheless China is not an easy market to explore. Taking the popularity of television for example, there was such a great gap between access in urban and rural areas, varying from 86.33 per cent to 3.99 per cent respectively in the mid-1980s (Kong, 1985), that the contact of Chinese audiences with anime varied considerably from place to place. However there were other problems too. One was piracy. Due to the lack of related laws and regulations in China, this was a serious problem for manga and character merchandising. The other issue was the policies of the Chinese government in this regard. It has always maintained vigilance

against potential threats from foreign culture and, since 2000, has treated cultural imports even more carefully and conservatively. However, these issues provide us with a clearer backdrop for investigating the development of Japanese characters in China: there are concentrated areas of character consumers (mainly in urban China) and in a given period their spread followed clear and simple steps: through television anime in the 1980s, through manga in the 1990s and on the Internet since 2000.

In short, I argue, the case of China demonstrates both receptivity and restriction. Receptivity refers to the fact that Japanese characters have been mainstream and beloved by Chinese audiences since the 1980s. I will examine this aspect through interviews with a group of Chinese who were born in the 1980s and for whom Japanese characters have been an indispensable part of their childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.¹¹ Restriction refers to the Chinese government's tightening of policy, especially since 2000 when Chinese television stations began to reduce the broadcasting of anime. These restrictions forced Chinese audience to search for Japanese works from other sources, which in turn fuelled the diffusion of Japanese characters.

After China carried out its Economic Reform in 1978, foreign anime works soon became available in China. In 1980 *Tetsuwan Atomu* was broadcast on Chinese Central Television (CCTV), which marked the historic entrance of anime into China. It is said that this import was the result of the endeavours of the leader of the Tokyo Chinese Association, Han Qingyu, who suggested that CCTV should accept this anime as a form of programme-cum-advertisement. According to Han (2013), at that time the Japanese electronic enterprise *Kashio* (Casio) wanted to buy the broadcasting rights for China, on the condition that it could display its product advertisements on CCTV. Thus when anime first appeared on Chinese television screens it was free, but with the pay-off that *Kashio's* electronic watches were quickly familiar to Chinese audiences. Although this anime series did not arrive in China until 20 years after its original release, its science-fiction theme and robot character made Chinese audiences, both children and adults, feel that it was fresh. Atomu thus became the first well-known Japanese character in China. As a female Chinese interviewee said, "I remember that at the moment the anime song began, my father and I would sit together in front of the television and wait for Atomu."

Following Atomu, many anime works, such as *Tatsu no ko Tarō* (Taro the Dragon Boy, 1979), *Hana no ko Rururin* (The Flower Child Lunlun, 1979) and *Ikkyū-san* (The Little Monk, 1975), were introduced to China, not only on CCTV but also on local Chinese television stations. The participation of local TV stations not only provided

¹¹On March 2016, I conducted semi-structured interviews online with ten Chinese (including four male and six female interviewees), who were born in the 1980s and whose favorite characters included Japanese characters. They come from different positions such as teacher, journalist, worker and guide. The questions I asked them depended on their own stories with Japanese characters. For example, a male interviewee told me that he likes Doraemon very much, I asked him questions including when was the first time and how to know Doraemon, why like this character, is there any special reason or not, and so on; for another female interviewee who likes to buy Doraemon goods, I asked her questions including what kind of products she prefers, how many products she has already had, and so on.

more ways for Japanese animations to be broadcast but also enabled more Chinese audiences to watch them.

The 1980s was only the beginning of this cultural influx and, as well as anime, many cartoons from other areas were also imported to China. However, the 1990s witnessed the domination of anime in China. In 1990, a local Chinese television station was the first to import *Seinto Seiya* (Knights of the Zodiac, 1986), which was immediately popular with Chinese children and young people. Chinese publishers sensed the business opportunities that could arise from it and printed the manga of the same name, which contributed to a boom across the country. In just one year, from 1990 to 1991, 6 million manga books were sold, stimulating more Chinese publishers to participate in manga publishing (Chen and Teng, 2006). Thus many works, including *Doragon bōru* and *Ranma 1/2* (Ranma One-half, 1987), appeared in the Chinese market and drew the attention of Chinese readers, but many of them were unlicensed and produced without the government's permission. And at that time Chinese children's pocket money did not stretch to buying many manga books. Despite this, the demand for manga grew quickly. "At the time my two cousins and I all loved manga, but we did not have enough money. Hence I bought the first volume and they bought the second and third. We exchanged books to read," noted a female interviewee.

In 1991 Doraemon came to China with its anime being broadcast on CCTV. Because of the different translations, Doraemon was known as both *Jiqimao* (Robotic cat in Mandarin) and *Xiaodingdang* (Little bell in Cantonese) in China, and is now affectionately called *Lanpangzi* (Blue fatty). Similar to Atomu, this robot character soon captivated Chinese children's hearts with his magical gadgets such as his four-dimensional pocket (*yojigen poketto*) and anywhere door (*dokodemo doa*). Although this story is about a robot, it is the friendship between Doraemon and his friends which captivated Japanese children from the very beginning. Chinese children felt the same way: "I like Jiqimao. He always helps his friend solve problems. I think every child should be in some way like Daxiong (Nobita in Mandarin), who has shortcomings and often makes trouble, as well as having special feelings for a girl," said a male Chinese interviewee. For him, Doraemon and his friends are not only characters in a story but also "real" people who are like his friends or himself, thus creating a sense of "reality." As I have discussed in Chapter 3, though the sense of "reality" is the perception of the viewers, it helps them identify with the characters, which is the key factor in stimulating their desire for the work and its characters. However, because CCTV only imported part of this series, the dissatisfied Chinese audience was forced to turn to the manga books of the same name.¹² Through both the anime and the manga, Doraemon became one of the most memorable characters in this Chinese generation's childhood.¹³

¹²In 1991 the People's Fine Arts Publishing House imported and published 43 volumes of Doraemon manga. The rest of the volumes (44 to 60) were pirated for the Chinese market. The copyright was then transferred to Jilin Arts Press.

¹³A 2008 survey of the favorite manga and anime works of Chinese college students (who were born between 1986 and 1990) ranked *Doraemon* at four out of more than four hundred Japanese works (Chen and Song, 2009: 189-214).

By the late 1990s, Japan’s cultural flow into China had become smooth and instantaneous. This was a benefit of the close cultural exchange between China and Japan at that time. China and Japan did not re-establish diplomatic relations after the Second World War until 1972. However, prior to this there had been some non-governmental exchanges, such as the Japan–China Friendship Association, which in 1956 created the Japan–China Cultural Exchange Association as a window for communication.¹⁴ After the resumption of relations, various economic and cultural exchanges were frequently promoted, especially the latter, which involved a number of areas, mainly sport, film, music, art, and opera. In 1978, China and Japan concluded the China–Japan Treaty of Peace and Friendship. The third article of the treaty made their intentions clear: “We should make efforts to further develop the economic and cultural relationship and promote exchanges between the two countries.” Based on this treaty, in 1979 China and Japan signed a Cultural Exchange Agreement and agreed to “develop exchanges of culture, education, academia and sport between the two countries” that would “facilitate the understanding and friendship between the people.” In the same year, Prime Minister Ōhira visited China, marking the beginning of frequent visits between the leaders of the two countries in the 1980s. These formed the foundation for the cultural exchange of anime, manga, and characters between China and Japan in the 1980s and 1990s. Characters became the ambassadors for the friendship: in a friendship event held in Tokyo in 1981, Atomu and Sun Wukong, representing Japan and China respectively, shook hands for the first time (see **Figure 20**).



Figure 20. “Atomu and Sun Wukong” created by Tezuka Osamu and Yan Dingxian (the character designer of Sun Wukong in *Danao tiangong* [Havoc in Heaven, 1961]) together at a friendship event in Tokyo in 1981; Source: “Talking: The Imagination Connected by Sun Wukong,” *PeopleChina* news.

¹⁴See “Japan–China Cultural Exchange Association” (*Nihon Chuūgoku bunka kōryū kyōkai*). Accessed March 2, 2016. <http://www.nicchubunka1956.jp/>.

In many respects, the 1980s and 1990s were a Golden Age for various exchanges between China and Japan. The two countries explored multiple routes for cooperation and to very good effect. According to an opinion survey on diplomacy conducted by the Japanese Cabinet Office, in the 1980s the percentage of Japanese people who felt friendly towards China increased from approximately 70 per cent to 80 per cent; in the same survey China was seen as the second most trustworthy country after America (*Seiron chōsa*, 1980). On the tenth anniversary (1988) of China–Japan Treaty of Peace and Friendship, Prime Minister Takeshita Noboru (1924–2000) of the time visited China and gave a speech titled “Seeking New Development,” which aimed to strengthen the cultural exchange between Japan and China (6 July 2000 *Chinanews*). In the 1990s, the Emperor of Japan visited China (1992) and later China and Japan published a Joint Declaration (1998) on expanding cooperation in various fields. From this platform more anime, manga, and characters came to China.

Many later works such as *Bishōjo senshi sērā mūn* (first shown in Japan from 1992 to 1997 and broadcast in China in 1997) and *Suramu danku* (SLAMDUNK, first shown from 1993 to 1996 and shown in China in 1998) were introduced into China shortly after premiering in Japan, which forged a lasting impression with Chinese audiences. “My friends and I often repeated the line in *Meishāonv zhānshì* [Sailor Moon in Chinese version] that ‘*Shuībingyue, biānshēn*’ [Sailor Moon, transforming] while role-playing the guardians after class. I guess this might be the earliest ‘cosplay’ in China,” one female interviewee recalled. “There were many stickers and notebooks of the characters sold in the school shops. I saved up my pocket money to buy those items. I could not bear to use the stickers and made a collection book for them especially.” There were many inexpensive character products on the market, such as toys, foodstuffs, cards, stationery and decorations, which were welcomed by Chinese children. However, most of them were not authorized until official character merchandising widely developed in the Chinese market after 2000.

Since 2000, the Chinese government has also focused on the development of culture industry. This term was first utilized in a government document in 2000 (Han, 2002). The cartoon and comic industry is an important component of it. Due to Japan’s success, China is actively learning from Japan’s experience and imitating its model. At the same time, in order to leave room for the domestic development of the industry, the Chinese government began to tighten the policies on importing and broadcasting foreign works, indicating a shift in the form of cultural influence from “content” to “format,” as suggested by Nissim Kadosh Otmazgin (2013). Certainly, this is in part because of concerns about cultural aggression and imperialism. As noted in the social commentary at the time, “since the early 1990s, Japanese anime works such as *Seinto Seiya* and *Doraemon* smoothly entered China and easily dominated the market. What is welcomed and accepted by the generation of the 1980s in China is Japanese works

not our *Danao tiangong* [Havoc in Heaven].¹⁵ We thus have lost a generation, the battlefield [the market] and all chances” (Yang, 2005: 11). The same issue was noted by the Chinese Ministry of Culture, “Cultural aggression has created the phenomena of ‘Hari’ [Japan-lover], ‘Hahan’ [Korea-lover] and ‘Chongmei’ [America-lover]. Over time these will affect our cultural traditions and cultural security” (The Report of Development of Cartoon and Comic Industry, 2006: 22).

Hence in 2000, the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT, 2000; 2006; 2008) stipulated a clear limitation: the broadcasting time of imported anime could not surpass 25 per cent of the total running time for children’s programming each day and must equal less than 40 per cent of the total animations shown. Before this, there had not been any limitations on the running time and number of anime programmes. In the following years the regulations became stricter and more specific. In accordance with the requirements of SARFT in 2006, the broadcasting of any foreign animations or related programmes between the hours of 17.00 and 20.00 each day was forbidden—only Chinese works could be shown then; however programmes co-produced by domestic and foreign producers were initially approved by SARFT for broadcast during this period. In 2008, this time limit was extended from 17.00 to 21.00. These practices produced a marked effect: since 2006 no foreign animations have been broadcast on prime-time television; foreign animations are aired outside of these hours and most are repeats of old episodes. Here we can see a clear decline in the cultural importation of anime into China. In contrast, domestic production has grown rapidly: in 2007 Chinese cartoon production for television exceeded 100,000 minutes, in 2008 it overtook Japan, and by 2011 it had leapt to the top of the world ranking with more than 260,000 minutes being produced (Masuda, 2012; *Annual Report on Development of China’s Radio, Film and Television*, 2012).

However such restrictive policies have not isolated Chinese audiences from Japanese works and characters, but rather have encouraged them to gain information through other avenues, such as the Internet. Since the late 1990s the Internet has gradually grown in popularity in China as an important platform on which to collect information. When Chinese audiences could not watch anime on television, they turned to the Internet for other sources. There were a lot of Chinese anime and manga websites that were introducing and translating the latest information from Japan at the time. They also broadcast many anime series collected from foreign channels, most of which were undoubtedly unauthorized.

In order to transmit these video resources quickly, many Chinese fans established fan-subtitle groups, often called fansubs for short. The rise of Chinese fansubs began around 2001. They grew so fast that works like *Kidō senshi Gundam shūdo* (Mobile Suit Gundam Seed, 2002) and *Seito Seiya meïō hādesu hen* (Saint Seiya: Hades arc, 2003)

¹⁵*Danao tiangong* is an award-winning Chinese animated feature film directed by Wan Laiming and produced by Shanghai Animation Film Studio. It tells the story of the mythical Chinese Monkey King, Sun Wukong. The film was created at the height of the Chinese animation industry in the 1960s, and received numerous awards. The whole work was drawn by hand, with more than 70,000 original pictures forming the first part (the film was divided into two parts) and taking almost two years to complete. The style of the film and the musical accompaniment used in it were heavily influenced by Peking operatic traditions.

were translated and distributed almost simultaneously. In this way, more and more Japanese works were brought into China, and fansubs became the major transmitters which, according to *The New York Times*, slaked the Chinese thirst for foreign popular culture (French, 2006). Although fansubs play a key role in diffusing anime and characters in China, they are unauthorized. According to Jordan Hatcher (2005: 514-542), fansubs are “situated among current copyright policy debates over user rights and the boundaries of copyright law.” He notes, “Within Japan, fansubs could potentially be within the law because the Japanese take a more relaxed attitude towards some aspects of copyright law and include private use and non-profit exception into their law.” It is the same in China. In 2006 China’s National Copyright Administration was urged to fight the illegal for-profit downloading of films, music, software, and educational textbooks on the Internet. Because most Chinese fansubs had only been created for interest rather than profit, even though they might be situated in a grey area legally, they were therefore approved. In 2009 SARFT prohibited video-providing websites from distributing unlicensed sources for films, dramas, animations, and documentaries. However fansubs use BitTorrent, a protocol for peer-to-peer file sharing, for distribution, meaning that they were not constricted by this requirement. Likewise, in the new version of the Chinese Copyright Law of 2010 there was no direct restriction on them. Thus fansubs have been able to survive despite the Chinese government’s policies.¹⁶

The birth of fansubs showed that there was a solid fanbase for anime and manga in China, and their development implies that this group is growing. Seemingly it is just a form of internal communication among fans, but as a result of the Internet this kind of niche communication has been widely received and accepted by the masses. According to a survey of 5,000 Chinese university students in 2008, when asked “what is your favourite cartoon and comic?”, 82.76 per cent chose Japanese works, 8.8 per cent chose Western works and only 8.5 per cent chose Chinese works (Chen and Song, 2009). Another survey of 600 university students in 2011 showed that more than half of them accessed anime and manga through the Internet, while 34 per cent accessed it through television and just 15 per cent through books (Zhu and Chen, 2011). Both surveys also asked about the consumption of character goods, but neither the level of ownership of goods nor spending on them was high. On the one hand this was because university students do not have much purchasing power, and on the other because many character goods in the Chinese market are pirated and so, although not expensive, are always of low quality.

Ever since anime’s arrival in China, Japanese enterprises have planned to extend their character merchandising industry to China. However, due to the lack of related Chinese laws and regulations, the Chinese market was not widely explored until around 2000. When this did occur it was undertaken in two main ways. In the first instance, the Japanese company chooses a Chinese firm to act as their agent, for example, Aiyong Company Shanghai (Animation International Company) is

¹⁶In recent years, the Chinese government has strengthened the administration of fansubs. In 2014 several big fansub groups closed or stopped updating.

authorized to license the merchandising rights for Doraemon and is responsible for promoting the commercial exploitation of the character in China. Aiying can license 80 to 100 Chinese companies a year to produce over 1,500 character goods to a value of 200 million yuan each year; Doraemon sells exceptionally well as various commercial events are held in China each year (Mei and Xu, 2012). From 2012 to 2014, an exhibition of Doraemon's secret gadgets with hundreds of Doraemon statues toured Hong Kong, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Beijing, Qingdao, Chengdu, and Hangzhou. The character was enthusiastically welcomed wherever he went. "The exhibition shows us a vivid Doraemon. It once met with a typhoon and many people were so worried about whether the Doraemon (statues) had blown away or whether they had raincoats that the host had to continuously post on the microblog to update the audience," one exhibition planner, Lin observed. "There was a scene designed to put on the side of the street, but too many people rushed out to take pictures and in the end we had to move it to inside the door" (Mei and Xu, 2012). It is not just children and teenagers who are crazy about Doraemon, but their parents too. As a female interviewee who has a child said, "I am very excited because Doraemon was also a witness to my childhood." Hence when the 3D Doraemon film, *Stand by Me*, was released in China in 2015, she went to see it at the cinema with her child.¹⁷

The second method of introducing character merchandising is to set up branches like those of Sanrio and the above-mentioned Kumamon promotional centre. These not only explore the character industry opportunities but also promote cultural exchange between China and Japan. As the promoter of Kumamon Sakamoto Takahiro (2012) notes, "The centre can contribute to the prefecture for its industry communication, to the city for tourism, and to the university for absorbing more Chinese students."

As introduced in Chapter 4, Kumamon is Kumamoto Prefecture's *yurukyara* who not only greatly promotes the local place but also brings out numerous business opportunities and huge profits. Similar to Hikonyan, Kumamon is designed as an anthropomorphic black bear character. Bear in Japanese is *kuma* symbolizing Kumamoto Prefecture and his black colour corresponds to the same colour of the local famous Kumamoto castle. "Mon" comes from the local dialect and means people. Hence Kumamon implies "the people from Kumamoto." As his particular tongue, every sentence Kumamon speaks will end with "mon." Different from other cute *yurukyara*, Kumamon is designed with a wall-eyed facial expression that makes him not welcomed at the beginning. However, he indeed changes the existing image of a bear character and creates a pear-shaped body and his movements are always comical and funny, which gradually draws people's attention. In 2011, he was voted as the winner of "Yuru-character Grand Prix."

¹⁷This film includes many short stories from the first time Doraemon came to Nobita's house to Doraemon bidding farewell to Nobita, which brings memories to audiences who have grown up with the companion of Doraemon. Although *Stand by Me* was released in China one year later, the box office of this work in China broke that in Japan after only a dozen days and ranked number one of the export animated films of 2015.

With regard to his commercial exploitation, Kumamoto Prefecture adopts a “royalty free” marketing strategy that does not charge producers for usage of the character’s image, as long as the products as something to do with the local place. This strategy in turn increases popularity of Kumamon: according to an Internet poll, 87.4 per cent of the Japanese recognized this character (Fujii, 2013). In 2012, sales of Kumamon items reached 29.3 billion yen and his image appeared on “everything from cookies and bags of rice to bed covers in a luxury hotel to an airplane for Solaseed Air” (Fujii, 2013). Thus Kumamon is also known as the *Kumamotoken eigyō buchō* (the business manager of Kumamoto Prefecture).

Moreover, one of the popular marketing strategies for *yurukyara* is to utilize social network platforms such as twitter, blogs and facebook, on which characters can have an immediate and intimate connection with people. To take an example of Kumamon, his twitter account which has more than half a million followers (as of August 2016) is responsible to record the daily life of the character and updates tweets at least three times a day, which enables followers to pay close attention to the character and have immediate interaction with him. Yet the character smartly uses twitter for promoting himself. For example, he created an event titled “*Kumamon shinshutsukibotsu daisakusen*” (the Project of Elusive Kumamon): Kumamon appeared in the streets of Osaka city and distributed his name cards on which printed the key words or QR codes of his blog and twitter. This event indeed helped win many attentions to Kumamon’s blog and followers on twitter. However, after one month Kumamon suddenly disappeared from Osaka city. For this, the governor of Kumamoto Prefecture specifically held an emergency press conference, urging people to find Kumamon and post the message on twitter if saw him somewhere. Hence as the posts about Kumamon increased on twitter this *yurukyara* became a topic at the time. This event then was animated and broadcasted on the official website of Kumamon, also known as “*Kumamon o sagase daisakusen*” (the Project of Seeking Kumamon) (*Kumamoto kenchō chūnu Kumamon*, 2013).

When Kumamon came to China, the character adopted the same strategy. Information about the character is frequently posted on his micro-blog (see **Figures 21** and **22**), which is similar to twitter (twitter is blocked in China). Some posts are about his daily life and are posted simultaneously with his twitter account, while others are about promotional events and news in China. Because of his funny and cute image, he soon became popular on the micro-blogging site and is affectionately known as *Mengxióng* (Moe bear), *Xiongbenxióng* (Kumamoto bear) or *Buzhang* (Manager). His image is also widely recognized by Chinese micro-blog users, who become his fans, frequently repost his posts, share his image and interact with him on the micro-blog. As of 6 February 2016 he had 171,900 followers. In order to attract more Chinese fans, he adopts a localized strategy and adds some Chinese elements: for instance, on traditional Chinese festivals he expresses his congratulations and celebrates with the Chinese (see **Figure 23**).



Figure 21. The verified Sina micro-blog account of the Shanghai branch of Kumamoto traders with its small blue v-mark; Source: Sina micro-blog.



Figure 22. The Sina micro-blog account of Kumamon authorized and recommended by the above-verified account of Kumamoto traders; Source: Sina micro-blog.



Figure 23. Kumamon eating the Chinese traditional food, Laba rice porridge to celebrate the Laba festival; Kumamon expresses his congratulations for the 2016 spring festival; Source: Sina micro-blog of Kumamon.

These practices facilitate the character's access to Chinese fans and their lives. And with the increasing interaction with Kumamon, a kind of intimacy has been established. For example, in the comments from those following his micro-blog, Chinese fans are curious about what kind of Laba porridge Kumamon is eating and teasingly warn him not to eat too much in case he puts on weight; they also wish him good luck on New Year's Eve. When the earthquake hit Kumamoto Prefecture in April 2016 and Kumamon's twitter also stopped updating, many Chinese fans expressed their concern for the character.¹⁸ They created drawings and posters around the theme of supporting the local people and place by using Kumamon image (see **Figure 24**). In addition the character actively attends a series of cultural communication events in China such as "The Future of China and Japan: A Photography Exhibition for 100 Children" and "The Competition for the Most Original Micro-blog [for 'image of Japan' and 'Japanese style in China']" held by the Japanese Embassy (Zhao, 2013; 21 February 2016 *Renminwang* news).

The development of Japanese characters in China since 2000 has been down to factors, the economy and culture. Character merchandising has brought Japanese characters into the lives of the Chinese in the form of a commodity and has triggered certain emotions and desires. As I have pointed out in this dissertation, emotion and desire are two key factors in stimulating character consumption and alongside the growth of these factors in China the commercial side of characters is rising. For example, the opening of Shanghai Disneyland (16 June 2016) reveals a large potential for character business in China. During soft opening month, there have been around half a million visitors attracted (Lin, 2016). At the official opening ceremony on 16 June 2016, Chinese Vice Premier directly pointed out that the opening of Shanghai Disneyland meant a lot of U.S. dollars and RMB (Chinese currency) (16 June 2016 *BBC Zhongwenwang*). It is estimated that Shanghai Disneyland will draw at least 12 million visitors in its first year (Fritz, 2016), which will greatly promote the consumption of characters in China. It is an opportunity for Japanese government when marketing its national brand and "cool" culture, for example, Kumamon's cultural practices in China, above and before Disneyland Sanrio had opened a Hello Kitty theme park in China in 2015. As "cool has become the central ideology of the late consumer capitalism" (Dailot-Bul, 2009: 262), consumption, "the social practice through which persons are drawn into the work of fantasy" (Appadurai, 1996: 82), indeed provides a way for the Chinese to become involved in the fantasy of Japanese characters, thereby constructing a closer connection between China and Japan.

¹⁸On 14 April 2016, a 6.2-magnitude earthquake hit Kumamoto Prefecture and caused serious damage. Kumamon played important role in supporting and comforting the people in local disaster area. His image was soon applied to posters, flags, leaflets and donation boxes for rising funds (IJI, 2016). Thus he disappeared from twitter for one and half a month until 1 June his account started again.



Figure 24. “Pray for Kumamoto” created by Chinese artist, Tiancai de zhuqing daren; Source: Micro-blog of Tiancai de zhuqing daren, 16 April 2016.

The Shared Present between China and Japan

With the development of technology and the media, many new character-related aspects such as fan creations, databases of character elements, cosplay, and anthropomorphism, have been introduced into China. Like Japanese fans, Chinese fans also create fan works of anime, manga, and characters; form fan circles; hold and participate in cosplay events; and consume character products. In this, as we saw in Chapter 3, there is a postmodern tendency for consumers to no longer gather information following a line of narrative but rather, to gather it by playing with the small narrative or data in a fragmented way: as Appadurai proposes, “we begin to think of the configuration of cultural forms in today’s world as fundamentally fractal, that is, as possessing no Euclidean boundaries, structures or regularities” (1996: 46). This tendency also affects the diffusion of characters, particularly within today’s

decentred information environment, which means that Japanese characters have the same cultural impact as Atomu, Doraemon and Kumamon did, but indirectly.

Green Dam Girl (Chinese: Lvbianiang) is one such example. She is an anthropomorphism of a piece of software produced by the Chinese government—Green Dam Youth Escort—created by Chinese Internet users. She is influenced by Japanese character culture in many aspects, such as the idea of anthropomorphism, a design consisting of character elements, her impact on society and her non-narrative but simple profile (as below):¹⁹

Name: Green Dam Girl

Favourite phrase: “I hate bad information!”

Birthday: 11 June 2009

Residence: personal computer

Personality: always feeling confused and forgetting key words; likes using her power to peek at others’ privacy

Description: a rich girl who has 40 million yuan as her pocket money; the committee member for discipline in her class, she is conservative and often messes everything up; a female shaman who can drive out information

With regard to her image, because there are no specific details or any official appearances, a lot of different images of her have been created and published online by Chinese Internet users. Nevertheless, these images all have something in common in their depictions, with bunches, a river-crab hat, a discipline armband, a rabbit toy, a key and a soy-sauce container being common features (see **Figure 25**).

These features suggest a similarity with Japanese characters, as if they have come from the same database of character elements. This is particularly true if the first and most popular version of Green Dam Girl is compared with Kawashiro Nitori (see **Figure 25**), a *moe* Japanese character from the *Touhou porojieku* (Eastern Project²⁰). It is said that the creator of Green Dam Girl referenced Kawashiro Nitori when designing her.²¹ Both characters have a hat, a key and bunches, which are typical character elements (see chapter 3), seen as symbols of *moe* in Japanese character culture and often given to young girl characters, such as Hatsune Miku.

¹⁹See “Green Dam Girl”, “moegirl-pedia,” accessed 5 March 2016, <https://zh.moegirl.org/zh/%E7%BB%BF%E5%9D%9D%E5%A8%98>.

²⁰*Touhou Project* is a Japanese *dōjin* game series focused on bullet hell shooters made by the one-man developer Team Shanghai Alice, whose sole member, known as ZUN, is responsible for all the graphics, music, and programming.

²¹Most of Chinese Internet users published their creations of Green Dam Girl image anonymously. The website of Green Dam Girl (*Mengniang baike*) mentioned later also does not record the detailed information of the creator. See “The story of Green Dam Girl event,” “moegirl-pedia,” accessed 5 March 2016, <https://zh.moegirl.org/%E7%BB%BF%E5%9D%9D%E5%A8%98%E4%BA%8B%E4%BB%B6%E5%A7%8B%E6%9C%AB>.



Figure 25. The most popular version of Green Dam Girl created by Chinese Internet user and the Japanese character, Kawashiro Nitori created by Yurami Kohaku-san; Source: Mengniang baike website and Nico Nico Seiga website.

However, for Green Dam Girl these elements not only refer to *moe* but also to specific actual meanings in China that relate to her background. The origin of Green Dam Girl is the Green Dam Youth Escort, a piece of software promoted by the Chinese government as a means of purifying the Internet environment. The software was commissioned by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) through an open tender and developed by Jinhui Company and Dazheng Company. MIIT purchased the software for 41.7 million yuan (\$6.1 million) and provided it as a free download for users for one-year's use. However, because of some suspicious aspects of it, such as it automatically updating the list of prohibited sites from an online censorship database and collecting private user-data, the software is considered to be a form of electronic censorship and a tool for state surveillance. In accordance with notices issued by MIIT in April and May 2009, the campus networks in all primary schools and secondary schools had to install the software and on 1 July of the same year all personal computers produced in China had to come with the software pre-installed, which led to a feeling among the public that it was mandatory.

A change came about a day before that the notices would be valid: MIIT suspended the pre-installation of the software for objective reasons, including the heavy workload the installations caused and the short turnaround time (30 June 2009 *Xinhuanet* news). In August the minister for MIIT offered an explanation for the “mandatory

installation” and pointed out that it was not true that it was mandatory to install it; however, he noted that the ministry would improve the project after listening to various opinions and would instead promote it publicly including in schools and at Internet bars (13 August 2009 *Chinanews*). This change was in part because the software had exposed many functional defects, such as its misrecognition of texts, pictures, and videos as inappropriate content and its shielding of sensitive of political words regardless of their legality. By 2010, the project was teetering on the brink of collapse, reportedly because of financial problems. After MIIT’s offer of a free licence for one year, it was hard for the project to turn a profit.²²

Regardless of this, these events inspired Chinese Internet users to create a character for the software. They gave the character a “river-crab hat.” “Hat” is a *moe* element, but “river crab” in Chinese has a special associative meaning. In Mandarin Chinese, the term “river crab” (Chinese: hexie) has the original meaning Chinese mitten crab, which sounds similar to the word for “harmonization” (Chinese: hexie), symbolizing the “harmonious society” (Chinese: hexie shehui) that the Chinese government is committed to building. One of the goals of such a society is to construct a harmonious Internet environment by blocking and filtering pornographic and violent information, which of course was the main aim of Green Dam Youth Escort. Because it is a sensitive political word, the use of “harmonization” is limited on the Internet. Thus Chinese Internet users tend to use the term “river crab” instead. In addition, the image of a river crab waving its claws can be a metaphor for either “hegemony” or “rampage,” both terms which satirize some of the functions of the software, such as its ability to hide and control information, and limit freedom on the Internet.

The soy-sauce container in her hand is like a sealing-tool, revealing her job—a *miko* (Japanese female shaman) who can prevent the appearance of unacceptable information on Chinese websites. The term is also borrowed from a Chinese Internet phrase—*dajiangyou* (literally, “getting soy sauce”), meaning “passing by,” a kind of nonchalant or no-comment attitude, which pokes fun at the software’s inaction. The discipline armband (Chinese: fengjizhang), as a symbol of *fūki iin* (a disciplinary supervisor),²³ often appears on Japanese characters (such as Hibari Kyōya in *REBORN!*). While the term discipline (Chinese: fengji) in combination with the red of communism has been used in China for a long time, its use in popular culture has been influenced by manga and anime. The rabbit toy which the character holds is the mascot of Green Dam Youth Escort. Moreover, because of her stupidity (often misjudging information) there is a key around Green Dam Girl’s neck in case she cannot find it.

As soon she appeared on the Internet, she received a warm welcome from Chinese Internet users. Many of them were fascinated by her and took part in the process of developing the character by creating derivative animation videos, songs, and novels

²²This project then became a public welfare matter (21 July 2010 *Xinhuanet* news).

²³*Fūki iin* (the disciplinary supervisor) refers to the pupils who used to be responsible for managing discipline on school campuses. They checked uniform and bags and monitored those who arrived late or left early. They were the models for other students. Such roles no longer exist in contemporary Japan but often appear in Japanese anime and manga.

about her. Green Dam Girl was soon familiar to Chinese Internet users and had even spread to Japan and become recognized by Internet users there.²⁴

Timeline of Green Dam Girl	
May 2009	Notification issued by MIIT regarding requirement that the software be pre-installed on all newly produced computers.
From June 2009 to 2010	Birth of Green Dam Girl.
	Baidu BBS and Baidu Fan Club for the character were created.
	Green Dam Girl appears in Japan's NicoNico-pedia and 2ch.
	Green Dam Girl entry was created for Wikipedia and Baidu Baike. ²⁵
	Derivative works including <i>dōjin</i> novels, games, manga, and songs were created and released by Chinese Internet users.
	Green Dam Girl entry on Baidu Baike was deleted.
	The first cosplay image of Green Dam Girl emerged.
	All references to Green Dam Girl on the Internet were banned in China.
	In order to collect information about her, Chinese Internet users established the Green Dam Girl wiki. It was then renamed <i>Zhonghua mengniang xiaobaike</i> (Chinese moe-girl-pedia) and used as a place to collect information about all anthropomorphic <i>moe</i> characters in both China and Japan. It is now called <i>Mengniang baike</i> (Moe-girl-pedia).
2011	The first garage kit of Green Dam Girl was released at the Hyper Comic Galaxy Festival in Guangzhou, China.

Table 5. The main events of Green Dam Girl from 2009 to 2011; Source: *Mengniang baike*.

This timeline (Table 5) shows us that Green Dam Girl grew up on the Internet and was cultivated by Internet users. In a way she triggered the boom in *moe* girl characters in Chinese popular culture. The creation of the Chinese “moe-girl-pedia”²⁶ was also inspired by the existence of Green Dam Girl. This website has an important role not only as a way of introducing *moe*, Japanese *moe* elements and *moe* characters into China, but also for enabling communication among fans from China, Japan and other countries or areas (it has three versions, in Chinese, Japanese and English).

Significantly, the attention paid to Green Dam Girl is the result of the Chinese Internet users’ “intertextual makeup” (Barthes, 1977: 145), through which they realize recontextualization, defined by Per Linell as the “dynamic transfer-and-

²⁴See “Ryuibā nyan,” “Niconico-pedia,” 17 June 2009, accessed 7 March 2006, <http://dic.nicovideo.jp/a/%E7%B7%91bar%E5%A8%98>.

²⁵Baidu Baike is Baidu Encyclopedia, a Chinese-language collaborative Web-based encyclopedia provided by the Chinese search engine Baidu.

²⁶An online collaboratively built encyclopedia of *moe* girls.

transformation of something from one discourse/text-in-context ... to another” (1998: 154). Green Dam Girl specifically demonstrates the recontextualization of character elements. Derived from consumption that separates a specific character from its original narrative (including a work, a worldview, or the setting of the character) and “takes apart the object into moe elements and objectifies them within a database” (Azuma, [2001] 2009: 53), character elements to some extent have finished the process of decontextualization. These deconstructed yet decontextualized elements provide much room for reconstruction, thus when they are diffused and applied to another context—China—a new local character is born, endowed with local cultural meanings. As Stuart Hall in his “Encoding /Decoding” suggests, “It is possible for [one]...to decode the message in a *globally* contrary way...[and] retotalize the message within some alternative framework of reference” (1980: 137-138; emphasis in original).

Moreover, the local cultural meaning of the character lies in the social impact that Green Dam Girl, as an anthropomorphism of Green Dam Youth Escort software, has as a weapon for social criticism. From what is stated above regarding the history of the software, it is clear that it had many problems, including the government’s promotion of it and its mandatory installation, and this started a series of social controversies. Many Chinese Internet users held a negative view of the software, but without access to the power of expression, they created a character who acted as a spokeswoman and did not “labor in the service of an existing reality but only [gave] voice to the mystery of that reality” (Horkheimer, 1972: 217). They actively created derivative works about the character and enjoyed them. Although the character was initially banned and deleted many times by the Chinese government’s Internet censors, fans continued to develop and support the character. This reveals an attempt at criticism in China which, based on the focus of this dissertation, I will call “characterized criticism.” As we have seen in Chapter 4, in Japan it is not a new concept to express one’s political opinions through the use of characters. In particular, it can be a way of introducing irony into self-entertainment. Thus the seemingly self-appreciative behaviour of creating Green Dam Girl, and continually supporting and enjoying her, is in fact a way for Chinese Internet users to express their ire and dissatisfaction with the software, the whole debacle, and the government.²⁷

The above analysis of Green Dam Girl manifests a clear cultural connection between China and Japan. It shows that reading manga, watching anime, purchasing and collecting character goods, and consuming characters have been the shared experience between Chinese fans and Japanese fans. This just accounts for the recent popularity of 2D culture in China.

As a concept originating in Japan, 2D particularly refers to the fantasy world of 2D characters, which has been widely recognized in China as an interesting field.

²⁷Many scholars argue that the Green Dam Youth Escort software causes the debate about the boundary between the public power and private right in China (Du, Liang and Li, 2009). However, as the software stops providing service, the enthusiasm of Chinese Internet users towards Green Dam Girl gradually become their pure love of the character.

According to a 2015 report for the 2D industry²⁸ in China conducted by *iResearch* Institute, since the first generation in the 1980s 550 million Chinese consumers have been involved in this industry and the number of core consumers who watch anime or read manga each week has reached 50 million and is estimated to peak at 80 million in 2017. In response to the question of “what aspects of 2D culture are these consumers interested in?” the 76 per cent that cited anime, 14.8 per cent that cited manga and 2.8 per cent that cited Japanese games formed a much higher percentage than those who cited Chinese comics—1.9 per cent—and cartoons—1.2 per cent. To the question of “what is your favourite character?” only one Chinese character made it into the top 20, the rest being Japanese. Furthermore 99.4 per cent of Chinese consumers have a favourable opinion of Japanese works. To the question of “why do you like 2D world?” the 63.4 per cent “believe that they themselves identify with the 2D world and they can obtain comfort and love from it.” To the question of “how do you think of 2D world?” the 47.5 per cent “express that they understand and accept 2D world” and 45.6 per cent “express a strong wish to live in a fantasy world and even become a 2D character.” These aspects to some extent correspond with what I have argued earlier, individuals’ true feeling towards character world and their psychological needs for characters (see comfort and desire in chapter 3). In this sense, Chinese consumers are identifying with characters through an ever more lively interaction, which is not only about shared memories but also a shared present.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that characters belong to the world. When they travel overseas, characters are widely welcomed and loved by people throughout the world. Driven by Japan’s cultural exports and policies, characters as cultural products and cultural ambassadors have been brought onto the world stage as part of the Japanese government’s expectations of exercising soft power and branding Japan. However, there is something we should keep in mind inasmuch as the reality is far more complicated than has been assumed. Even if Japanese characters have been wildly accepted by the Chinese audiences and fans (especially for those who grew up in and since the 1980s), this does not mean that Japan’s pop-culture diplomacy is capable of neutralizing the tensions between China and Japan. As a poll conducted by the China Foreign Languages Publishing Administration and the Genron NPO of Japan in 2015 suggests, even though 70.1 per cent of Chinese agree that the relationship between China and Japan is important and expect to strengthen their cultural exchange, some 78.3 per cent of Chinese still have a poor impression of Japan (Zhang and Wang, 2015). Many scholars also note that the Chinese fans tend to have a detached attitude whereby on the one hand they can love manga, anime, and characters, but on the other will not change their political opinion as a result of their preference (Iwabuchi, 2015; Ishii, 2013; Nakano, 2008). In short, cultural exchange and soft power may have limited influence in a country such as China, without even considering the historical

²⁸The 2D industry referring to a flat world overlaps with the anime, comics, games, and novels (ACGN) industry but is narrower than it.

issues and recurring diplomatic spats (Vyas, 2012). For instance, one reason for the Chinese government's tightening import policy of Japanese cultural products since 2000 is that Koizumi, as the Prime Minister, constantly visited the Yasukuni Shrine during his six-year tenure and pushed China and Japan into a very difficult relationship.

However, it cannot be denied that in the process of going overseas, characters may have become deeply rooted in both the past and present of other regions, as the case of China shows. Since Atomu's arrival in China in 1980, more and more Japanese characters have been introduced to China and are recognized by Chinese audience. These characters evoke memories of childhood, especially for members of the generation born in the 1980s, who identify with characters and view them as their friends or like themselves. And although there are restrictions, they still actively search for (via the Internet), create, and enjoy (through fansubs) the related sources of manga, anime, and characters. The official entrance of Japanese character goods into the Chinese consumer market has created a broader group of consumers who are keen to collect and purchase character products. Furthermore, despite their origins, these characters promote the diversity of the local culture. By borrowing character elements and recontextualizing them, the Chinese Internet users have created their own character, Green Dam Girl, who is not only a spokeswoman for expressing their opinions of society, but has also contributed to the current 2D boom in Chinese popular culture. In this sense, bridged by characters, both shared memories and a shared present have been forged between China and Japan.

Conclusion

This dissertation has endeavoured to achieve one basic goal: to show the development of merchandising and consumption around characters in Japan. Based on the historical and transnational development of character merchandising, from the initial explorations in the world to contemporary practices in Japanese society, it describes the origins of character merchandising and its impact on Japan. Character merchandising resulted in the character commodity boom, and more importantly stimulated the desire of consumers to consume characters. However, the diversity of character commodities is not the only reason for this. A theoretical analysis suggests that the main reason behind the rise of character consumption lies in the development in Japan of mass consumption which exhibits postmodern characteristics that emphasize individuality and sensibility. Thus character consumption becomes a method of self-identification for individuals, in which characters, mediated by the body, can influence contemporary Japanese society broadly and deeply. Such influence has also resulted in characters being representative of the country and acting for it on the world stage. By triggering the global imagination and desires, characters have strengthened the transnational cultural connections between Japan and other countries.

In order to accomplish the aforementioned basic goal, this study began by examining the term “character merchandising.” In terms of commercial exploitation, Dr Syntax, Ally Sloper, the Yellow Kid, Buster Brown, and other early characters contributed to the development of character merchandising and laid the foundations for Disney, which ultimately constructed an organized system to fully exploit the potential of merchandising. Following Disney’s global steps, the dawn of characters in Japan also included character merchandising, with the term “character” being introduced to Japan in the 1950s. As discussed in Chapter 1, character merchandising is defined as the process of licensing the rights to a character for exploitation. Thus merchandising not only guaranteed the sustainable development of manga and anime due to the income it created, but also facilitated the emergence of a number of character goods in the market. At the same time, the rise of the mass media, especially television, in postwar Japan offered immediate advantages for this market: it created a media environment for the characters and cultivated the number of character consumers.

On the other hand, as we saw in Chapter 2, producers such as toy makers and food companies, which were authorized to produce character merchandise, also actively participated in the market. This led to a character commodity boom in the 1970s, when the group of character consumers expanded considerably to include children and adults, men and women. In the 1980s, the development of characters tended to be more culturally diverse, because of their links with *shōjo* culture and *otaku* subculture and, especially the opening of Tokyo Disneyland provided a paradise for consuming

characters. Since the 1990s, new media and technology, such as the Internet, have endowed characters with considerable dynamism and have embedded them in social communication networks while bridging the connection between Japan and other areas. In this sense, character merchandising, as Allison argues, “glues society at its roots” (2004: 40).

At this point it is important to emphasize that the appearance of character merchandising was a new phenomenon in Japan. This not only refers to the fact that character merchandising was a new concept borrowed from the West, but also that it offered a new way of selling products by combining commodity and character together under licence (Steinberg, 2012). And recognition of the move towards character merchandising is a recent phenomenon that did not begin to emerge until the 1970s. The attention paid to the character market supports this. While it was clearly understood that character merchandising offered a big market with much potential in the period up to and including the 1980s, it was not until the 1990s that specific statistics about its position in the retail market were provided. These figures provided an intuitive understanding of the character industry, especially as, despite the effects of the collapse of the Bubble Economy, the scale of and sales in this market continued to increase, leading to expectations about its future development. Since 2000, the market has matured and become a relatively independent field that is an indispensable part of the Japanese economy today.

Given this, it is possible to say that character merchandising has experienced long-term development in Japan. Today it is regarded as a characteristic of Japan, not only supported by its economic effect but also because characters are “enchanted commodities” that can “function as transmitters of enchantment and fun as well as intimacy and identity” (Allison, 2006: 16-17). This essentially explains why individuals consume characters. Chapter 3 explored how consuming characters satisfies individual pleasure, builds affinities between individuals and characters, and helps to construct self-identity, aspects which coincide with the postmodern tendency of consumption in Japan. With the development of mass consumption in postwar Japan, individuality and sensibility became the goals pursued by consumers. When they consume characters, comfort and desire are the two key factors that stress the inner connectivity between the individual and the character, and stimulate the individual to access the character world. In terms of exploring the inner aspect, Aihara Hiroyuki’s pioneering work, *Kyaraka suru Nippon* (The Chara-ized Japan), is especially noteworthy. This book is based on the Bandai Character Research Institute’s domestic survey of 2004, and from the psychological functions of being with a character or character goods draws out eight elements, including “tranquillity, protection, escape from reality, mood transition, a return to childhood, self-realization, hope of transformation, and vitality” (2007: 27-50), which provide a comprehensive framework for the data, ideas and practices of relationships between individuals and characters.

Further, the inner connectivity demonstrates the intimacy felt for fantastic character worlds, which depends much on individuals’ perceptions of “reality.” In this regard, as long as they can sense the “reality,” the fictional character or character world is “real” because they believe it is real. As fans of Hatsune Miku have said, “We don’t

care if it is real, we just care if it feels real” (Kelts, 2014). However the “reality” of characters such as Miku, who is a virtual celebrity singing songs created by software and dancing via computer technology, also relates to the hyper-reality developed by the media and technology. More importantly, it involves the character world in the postmodern simulacrum of a world full of signs. This, in effect, involves the consumption of characters into the realm of signs, which is specifically embodied in narrative consumption and database consumption. Proposed by Ōtsuka Eiji, narrative consumption emphasizes the existence of a grand narrative that can be approached through accumulating the segments of the narrative, which implies that an understanding of the character world can be gained through the consumption of small narratives. In contrast, Azuma Hiroki investigates character consumption in the form of a database model, by highlighting the collapse of the grand narrative and the shift of the character world towards one consisting of character elements. Both models are useful to individuals who can construct a style for themselves through choosing, combining or creating narratives or elements. As such, the self is realized and characters become an important part of this constructed self-identity.

An equally important factor, emphasized in Chapter 4, is that characters provide a means for the expression of identity, specifically through the body. This is very true for the Japanese, who believe that the body reveals the true self (Igarashi, 2000). The integrity of the body is magnified within the context of consumption and consumer culture and becomes the “finest consumer product.” This transformation has twofold implications: consuming the body of a character and consuming one’s own body as that of a character. Therefore when walking the streets of Japan, it is not unusual to see numerous exquisitely produced character garage kits and person-height-sized character pillows displayed in shop windows; men and women whose appearance, make-up, accessories, and costumes are very like those of certain characters; and cafés, restaurants, and theme parks which have a 2.5-dimensional atmosphere.

In many respects, the body is not only the private property of an individual but is also a juncture for various social discourses. As we have seen in this dissertation, the sense of social belonging that relies on the animist sensibility makes conditions of using anthropomorphism to create character-styled bodies for many objects, from natural creatures to everyday items. In the case of politics, politicians both use characters and directly transform their bodies into characters in order to approach the public. The same application can be found in the way that the public expresses its political voice. This shows that in the dialogue between politicians and the public characters can function as the medium for social communication. Indeed characters are an important medium that can deliver the spirit of the era, build bonds with each other through gift giving, reflect social reality, meet social needs, and effectively construct, maintain, and expand social networks. Thus, as far as social breadth and depth are concerned, a character-based society exists.

As characters have permeated Japan, they have even been appointed as ambassadors for the country. Since the 1960s the government of Japan has promoted cultural exports and exchange, and in recent years it has announced a series of cultural policies. These policies particularly focus on a China-centric East Asia. In part this is because

China has a big domestic market, but more importantly it is because Chinese fans share their memories and the present time with Japanese characters. As shown by the interviews with some of the Chinese generation of the 1980s, characters have accompanied them from their childhood, through adolescence and into adulthood. They do not merely like Japanese characters but also identify with them and consume them. This is the current reality in China, where an increasing proportion of the population is attracted by Japanese characters. Characters also contribute to local cultural diversity in China—the Chinese Internet users have recontextualized Japanese characters within the context of Chinese society and have created their own character culture. In this sense, the consumption of characters is not necessarily linked to cultural imperialism or national identity but rather to ever more intimate cultural interaction.

Their transformation into commodities and permeation in Japanese society through merchandising and the building of intimate relationships with consumers through consumption seems to have answered the central question of this dissertation, “How have characters become an indispensable part of Japanese lives?” Then, “does it tell us something about Japanese society?” This question is not easy to answer because the phenomena of characters in Japan indeed involve many aspects. However, through an analysis of this study, some conclusions can be drawn. Firstly it reveals the specific conditions and situations in each era of Japan after the Second World War. For example, in the 1950s Disney’s impact on Japan start from the influx of American culture, which represented not only a cartoon fever but also a tendency towards American lifestyle in the postwar period. The revival of Japanese toy industry relied on the export policy of the US occupation period. By the 1960s and 1970s, the development of television promoted children to enjoy and consume characters. The background of the era was the fact that the high-speed growth of postwar Japanese economy had brought with radical changes including urbanization, technology and media (Ashkenazi and Clammer, 2000: 7-9). In the 1980s *otaku* subculture began to play an important role in consuming characters, which reflected and was affected by the development of consumer society in Japan. Since the 1990s characters are closely linked to healing (*iyashi*), comfort for sociality, connectedness (*tsunagari*) between individuals, and nostalgia for childhood or a past (*ano koro*) because of economic downturn, horror attack, natural disaster, and work and life stresses. These also imply a central place for that key element in consuming characters—consumer affect.

As Clammer suggests that a major theme of Japanese culture is “the pre-eminent place given to emotions” (1997: 12), with which consumer affect fits very well. Consumer affect cements the intimate connection between one’s self and characters while contributing to involving character (signs) into one’s identity and forming a “characterized identity.” With such identity the individual can effectively collect the self-knowledge and practice self-seeking (*jibun sagashi*), self-realization (*jiko jitsugen*) and self-creation. This trend also coincides with the postmodern tendency of consumption in Japan: commodity-sign, sign value, individuality and sensibility are much valued by consumers.

Significantly, consumer affect contributes to “consumer aesthetics” that are not only about the “New Age animism” suggested by Allison (2006: 11-12; see also chapter 4), but also inscribed on the body and bring out the “characterized bodies” in Japanese society. The “characterized bodies” are identity-expression of individuals and satisfy the social-political needs. Driven by such consumer aesthetics, characters involve in social communication and imply a new pattern, as well as become a form of discourse of Japanese society.

Is there something distinctive about Japan? I would like to suggest that the phenomena of characters, involving the specific historical development in Japan, consumer affect and consumer aesthetics, contribute to a consumer style (the term I borrowed from Allison) that may be internationally recognized as “Japanese.” Particularly with Japanese characters travel globally, it becomes familiar to consumers all over the world. This is exemplified by the process of Japanese characters diffusing in other places of the world. As the case study of China showed, many of those encodings through characters on identity, intimacy, communication, consumerism and social-cultural/political interactions are what Chinese consumers practiced in the past and are practicing today. However, Chinese consumers also have their own encoding/decoding process (see chapter 5). In this sense, such a character consumer style has been organized around “Japan,” to paraphrase Yoshimi Shun’ya, “less as an overt symbol than as an invisible system of signs, meanings, and desires” (1999: 102-128, quoted from Allison, 2000: 69).

It is important to note that there are still some issues and arguments associated with characters. For example, many postmodern experiences, as discussed in this study, such as sign-play, depthlessness, hyper-reality, and simulations, can be seen in characters, but these experiences may also create alienation which implies “a sense of disempowerment” of the management of objects and symbols (Clammer, 1997). Pleasure can be given by character consumption, but, as noted in Chapter 1, as the recent social worries both in and beyond Japan show, it can be followed by obsession, violence, censorship and disorder: examples include the stories of “real man marries a character pillow,” “Saudi Arabia has banned Pokémon” and “maintaining vigilance against the cultural invasion of Doraemon in China” (Philips, 2010; Cheng, 2014). These stories are also the evidence for *The End of Cool Japan* (2016), as McLelland *et al.* assert. They remind us that with the idea of “Cool Japan” there are many ethical, religious and nationalistic challenges. Allison observes the phenomenon of tamagotchi and points out that the emotion and communication that people build through the character is a kind of “techno-intimacy” which represents the prosthetic interaction and sociality and in fact makes them ever more likely alone (2013: 101).

Yet as a new way to promote the proliferation of commodities and a key factor in stimulating desire, characters inevitably fall into the aspect of consumerism that “has a fundamental influence upon the everyday social life in advanced capitalist societies” and “offers us the illusion of consumer freedom” (Miles, 1998: 5). This indicates that character consumption is essentially driven by the development of capitalism, and that it is easy to lose individuals in their desire for consumption and excess, such as the all-Hello-Kitty-style fashion and life, and the precarious body modifications made to

match a certain character mentioned in Chapter 4. When individuals cannot help themselves from indulging in this trap of character consumption, its negative impact or a mistaken cognition towards character commodities occurs.

In effect, this is more of a “dream” created by producers and marketers. As Hockheimer and Adorno (1944; see also Adorno, 1991a; 1991b) point out, in the culture industry consumers are, in fact, deceived by the producers and marketers. The ultimate goal of the producers and marketers is to dominate the market and make huge profits. To this end, the production of cultural products is governed and standardized. However, cultural products per se can offer the illusion of individuality. It is this comforting illusion that conceals the ideology of the culture industry and distances the subject from the material reality. Thus inspired by this dream, numerous character “super-consumers” appear, who find satisfaction in possessing more character goods and are proud of being the trendsetters of character consumption. This is exemplified in the consumers of the Kamen raidā snack and the Bikkuriman chocolates (see chapters 2 and 4)—they are purchasing the characters (stickers), but discard the food.

By making this assessment, I am not trying to deny the importance of characters and the role that they play in production and consumption, but to provide an alternative viewpoint that helps us to better understand them. For example, as we have seen in this dissertation, when individuals are free to construct and express their identity through consuming characters, they are exposed to “the risk of the chosen and changed personal identity” (Beck, 1992: 136) or the risk of a multiple personality. However, as discussed in Chapter 3, the existence of a multiple personality does not necessarily imply schizophrenia but rather is an inherent requirement of society. It also illustrates the opinions of both Azuma and Mead. For Azuma, the existence of a multiple personality can be understood as a “cultural movement,” corresponding to the fact that “our society itself is strongly seeking a multiple personality-type model” (2009: 112). For Mead, “A multiple personality is in a certain sense normal,” since it is the “social process itself” that requires us to divide “ourselves up in all sorts of different selves” and answer to “all sorts of different social reactions” (1934: 142). That is to say, characters mirror the fundamental development of a society.

In this sense, characters are more than the personas in manga, anime, games, light novels, or other media; they are a key that can open a door for us to understand contemporary Japanese society. This is not only because characters as commodities have permeated the daily lives and cultivated many character consumers, but also because, in the process, characters have gradually become embedded in various aspects of Japanese society. As we have seen in this dissertation, character consumption is combined with multiple cultural aspects, such as *shōjo* culture and *otaku* subculture, and constitutes an important part of contemporary consumer culture in Japan. The popularity of characters also comes from consumer affect and animist sensibility, which also create an affective foundation for the presence of characters in Japanese society. Motivated by the former, characters become a means of being oneself and are an important part in the process of individual self-identification. The latter

contributes to using characters to build upon a sense of social belonging, on which the use of characters in socio-political life is based.

Furthermore, following the global spread of characters, they have not only created a bridge between Japan and other countries but have also helped consumers in the world to indulge in the global imagination and desires that they evoke. The recent worldwide hit of “Pokémon Go,” the GPS-crossover game for smartphones based on Pocket Monster characters, is such an example. Since the debut in game in 1996, Pokémon has been 20-year-old. During these two decades, more than 280 million video game software units and numerous products have been sold worldwide, and animated TV series had been broadcast in 95 countries and areas (Yoshida, 2016). Hence, though “Pokémon Go” is not first released in Japan (due to the technique reason), it makes the instant hit in Australia, New Zealand, the U.S. and most of Europe, for example, in the Netherlands a popular playing and meeting place for “Pokémon Go” players has been named the Pokémon capital. The thirsty Chinese fans even play the unofficial version (the game had not been released in China by September 2016) by borrowing the artificial maps based on countries where the game is available. The hit is in part because of the new and attractive concept of the game, using augmented reality technology, which links the fictional character world to the real life (GPS data) and therefore constructs the “reality” of these Pocket Monster characters. But significantly, it indicates a fact that these Japanese characters have been deeply embedded in the lives of consumers all over the world. Thus when these Japanese characters reappear in the new commodity form, their enthusiasm is rekindled easily and quickly.

Most passion is offered by its home country, Japan. In the first three days of the release of the game, more than 11 million people downloaded the game, which made the game the number one most download app in Japan. The game was even “treated as a national event, with widespread news coverage and a cautious endorsement from the government” (Soble, 2016). Such a hit also promotes the new development of character merchandising and consumption. For example, many local places such as Miyashiro Prefecture and Miyazaki Prefecture (where are impacted by the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake) expect that this game will help them attract more visitors and rebuild the local tourism (through setting the popular monster characters in these local places and attracting the players to catch). Besides, the politicians look at the hit and use it. On the final stage of election of the governor of Tokyo, another candidate Masuda Hiroya sought votes by putting forward a slogan, “Go to vote through Pokémon Go!” (*Pokemon Go de senkyo ni Go!*). These examples all direct to an evident fact that characters have been embedded in Japan widely and deeply.

Though it is a specific field, character is a broad research subject. Many aspects are worth exploring further. For example, many scholars have pointed out that the Japanese self is a mode that allows for the embracing of conformity together with space for expression of individuality (freedom) (Clammer, 1997: 161; Kondo, 1990); moreover, social stratification including distinctions of class, income, age, gender, and so on plays the crucial role in consumption practice and consumers in Japan, then do

Conclusion

these also embody in the consumption of characters? If so, then how? If not, then why? These indeed raise fruitful directions for future research.

This study has demonstrated how characters are embedded in Japan, focusing on character merchandising and character consumption. It has not only studied characters, but viewed them as crucial to understanding contemporary Japan. In this regard, it is important to understand not only how and why characters have become an important component of Japanese society, but also the implications behind the development of characters with respect to the relationships between objects, people, and society. The importance of characters, in my opinion, should be understood as an abstract but specific framework from which we can establish an image of contemporary Japanese society. To establish the framework, I have accessed multiple disciplines and developed a historical and theoretical approach that may be useful for others interested in the study of characters and will hopefully encourage further research. It is my hope that this study will help to deepen and expand the understanding of characters and the merchandising and consumption that surrounds them, as well as the economic, cultural, political, and social aspects of the kingdom of characters, Japan.

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Summary

This study examines the merchandising and consumption practices that have developed around characters in Japan. Although merchandise based on characters had appeared on the Japanese market in the early twentieth century, characters did not exert influence until the 1960s, when they were transformed into various commodities as a result of character merchandising. Since then characters have begun to play an important role in the social, cultural, and political development of contemporary Japan.

A wide range of topics is involved in this study, from merchandising to consumption, and from individuals to society, both in Japan and elsewhere. In particular, this study focuses on the events that are crucial for understanding how characters are embedded in contemporary Japanese society: the rise of character merchandising and the commodity boom it brought about; the development of character consumers and their consumption activities; the involvement of characters in one's self-identity and the implications of this for individuals and society; and the role that characters play in connecting Japan with other places. From studying these subjects, a clear image of the "characterization" of Japan can be established.

This study consists of seven parts: an introduction followed by two chapters describing the history and characteristics of character merchandising and character consumption; two chapters discussing theoretical interpretations regarding the relationships between characters, individuals, and society; a final chapter looking at the performance of Japanese characters on the world stage and their diffusion in a local context; and a conclusion.

In the introduction the main concepts are explained, along with theoretical discourses on commodity and consumption. Chapter 1 examines the development of character merchandising from the exploration in U.K. and U.S. in the early nineteenth century to practices in Japan in the postwar period. The three sections focus respectively on the definition of character merchandising; its brief historical development from the British character, Dr Syntax, to Disney; and the impact on Japan following the arrival of Disney.

The popularity of character commodities gave rise to the consumption of characters. Chapter 2 concentrates on the development of character consumers and consumption in Japan. Not just children but adults too have become loyal consumers of characters. Character consumption also involves in various cultural aspects of Japanese society, including *shōjo* (girl) culture and *otaku* (geek) subculture, and the popularity of Disneyland. Moreover, the advances in technology and the media expanded the platforms available for character consumption, absorbed many media forms, and ultimately constructed a mixed media network for characters. All of these factors have contributed to the diversity of character consumption in Japan.

Summary

The reasons why consumers consume characters are explained in Chapter 3. Characters can provide them with comfort, and help them to realize, affirm, and inspire the self, factors which strengthen the internal connections between them and characters. This close connection with characters also encourages consumers to sense the “reality” of characters and the character world, although the extent to which this occurs depends on individual perceptions. In addition, as the postmodern features have been deeply intertwined with consumer life through the development of the mass media, characters become part of the postmodern simulacrum of a world full of signs. This, in effect, has moved the consumption of characters into the realm of signs, specifically into either narrative consumption or database consumption. Significantly, this is a process in which characters have become linked to one’s self-identity, therefore enabling the formation of a “characterized identity.”

Chapter 4 discusses how characters, mediated by the body, are involved in society and social communication. The body, as the basis for the expression of self-identity, is the primary site that the effects of characters can be seen on: with an increasing awareness of characters’ bodies, individuals begin to modify themselves to achieve “characterized bodies.” The “characterized bodies” comes not only from an individual need but also from socio-political necessity, specifically the sense of social belonging and the use of characters in politics. Moreover, characters can act as media and promote the development of social communication.

Chapter 5 turns to the world stage and concerns the role that characters play in building close connections between Japan and other nations. The chapter first looks at the progress of characters going overseas and highlights that a direct driving force for this is the Japanese government’s policies on cultural exchange. The focus then shifts to the particular context of China, where Japanese characters have been steadily consumed by Chinese audiences since the 1980s. Those audiences have grown up with the Japanese characters and like and identify with them, as well as using them to build their own character culture. In this sense, Japanese characters not only construct shared memories, but also a shared present between China and Japan.

The questions of how and why characters have become an important component of contemporary Japanese society and what the implications behind this development are, are not easy to answer. However, through an analysis of this study, some conclusions can be drawn.

Character merchandising, as a mechanism that transforms characters into commodities, caused the character commodity boom in Japan. This led to characters being widely consumed by consumers, including by children and adults, both male and female, while securing a role for them in socio-cultural phenomena, and creating a diverse range of ways to consume characters. Character consumption provides a means for consumers to pursue the expression of their individuality and sensibility, which not only deepens the inner connection between them and characters, but also closely ties characters to their self-identity.

Furthermore, consumers use characters to express their self-identity, which is reflected in the display or cosplay of their bodies. This is a form of personal presentation, but it is also a requirement of society that characters are put at the center

of the social stage and play an active role in social as well as international communication. In this sense, characters, as a form of discourse, reflect, constitute, and represent contemporary Japan.

Samenvatting

In deze studie zijn de merchandising en consumptie praktijken onderzocht die zich rond karakters hebben ontwikkeld in Japan. Hoewel producten gebaseerd op karakters voor het eerst op de Japanse markt verscheen aan het begin van de twintigste eeuw, oefenden karakters geen invloed uit tot aan de jaren 1960, toen ze werden gevormd tot diverse producten als gevolg van merchandising. Sindsdien zijn karakters een belangrijke rol gaan spelen in de sociale, culturele en politieke ontwikkeling van het hedendaagse Japan.

Een breed scala aan onderwerpen is betrokken bij dit onderzoek, van merchandising tot consumptie, en van het individu tot aan de samenleving, zowel in Japan als elders. In het bijzonder richt deze studie zich op de gebeurtenissen die van cruciaal belang zijn voor het begrip van de inbedding van karakters in de hedendaagse Japanse samenleving, namelijk de opkomst van karakter merchandising en de ‘commodity boom’ die daardoor werd voortgebracht, de ontwikkeling van karakterconsumenten en hun consumptieactiviteiten, de rol van karakters in de persoonlijke identiteit en de implicaties daarvan voor individuen en voor de samenleving en de rol die personages spelen in het verbinden van Japan en andere landen. Door het bestuderen van deze onderwerpen kan een duidelijk beeld geschetst worden van de “karakterisering” van Japan.

Dit onderzoek bestaat uit zeven delen: een inleiding, gevolgd door twee hoofdstukken die de geschiedenis en de kenmerken van “karakter merchandising” en karakterconsumptie beschrijven. Daarna volgen twee hoofdstukken waarin theoretische interpretaties bediscussieerd worden met betrekking tot de relatie tussen karakters, individuen en de samenleving. Als laatste volgen een hoofdstuk over de prestaties van Japanse karakters op het wereldtoneel en de verspreiding ervan in een lokale context en een conclusie.

In de inleiding worden de belangrijkste concepten van deze studie uiteengezet, samen met theoretische verhandelingen over producten en consumptie. Hoofdstuk 1 gaat in op het ontstaan van karakter merchandising in het Verenigd Koninkrijk en de Verenigde Staten aan het begin van de negentiende eeuw, tot aan de praktijk in het naoorlogse Japan. De drie secties richten zich respectievelijk op de definitie van “karakter merchandising”, de korte historische ontwikkeling van het Britse karakter Dr Syntax tot Disney en de impact van de komst van Disney op Japan.

Door de populariteit van producten omtrent karakters ontstond het fenomeen karakterconsumptie. Hoofdstuk 2 richt zich op de ontwikkeling van karakterconsumenten en consumptie in Japan. Niet alleen kinderen maar ook volwassenen zijn trouwe consumenten van karakters geworden. Karakterconsumptie speelt ook een rol in verschillende culturele aspecten van de Japanse samenleving, waaronder de *shōjo* (meisje) cultuur en *otaku* (geek) subculturen en de populariteit van Disneyland. Bovendien heeft de vooruitgang in de technologie en de media de

platforms die beschikbaar zijn voor karakterconsumptie uitgebreid, vele media vormen geabsorbeerd en uiteindelijk een media netwerk voor karakters samengesteld. Al deze factoren hebben bijgedragen aan de diversiteit van karakterconsumptie in Japan.

De redenen waarom consumenten karakters consumeren worden toegelicht in hoofdstuk 3. Karakters kunnen hen geruststellen en helpen bij het realiseren, bevestigen, en inspireren van het zelfbeeld, factoren die de interne verbindingen tussen hen en karakters versterken. Deze nauwe band met de karakters stimuleert consumenten om de “werkelijkheid” van de personages en hun wereld te voelen, hoewel de mate waarin dit gebeurt afhangt van de individuele percepties. Bovendien, gezien het feit dat de postmoderne kenmerken diep zijn verweven met het leven van de consument door de ontwikkeling van de massamedia, zijn karakters deel gaan uitmaken van het postmoderne simulacrum van een wereld vol tekens. Dit heeft in feite de consumptie van de karakters verplaatst naar het rijk van tekens, in het bijzonder naar ofwel de verhalende consumptie of de database consumptie. Belangrijk vooral is dat dit een proces is waarbij karakters worden verbonden met de eigen identiteit, wat de vorming van een “gekaracteriseerde identiteit” mogelijk maakt.

In hoofdstuk 4 wordt besproken hoe karakters via het lichaam betrokken zijn bij de samenleving en sociale communicatie. Het lichaam, als basis voor de expressie van de identiteit, is de primaire plaats waar de effecten van tekens te zien zijn. Door een toenemend bewustzijn van het uiterlijk van karakters beginnen individuen zich te veranderen om “karakterlichamen” te krijgen. Dit komt niet alleen voort uit een individuele behoefte, maar ook vanuit een sociaal-politieke noodzaak, in het bijzonder het gevoel van sociale verbondenheid en het gebruik van de karakters in de politiek. Bovendien kunnen karakters fungeren als media en kunnen de ontwikkeling van sociale communicatie bevorderen.

Hoofdstuk 5 wendt zich tot het wereldtoneel en heeft betrekking op de rol die karakters spelen bij de opbouw van nauwe banden tussen Japan en andere landen. Het hoofdstuk beschouwt eerst de voortgang van het overwaaien van personages naar het buitenland en benadrukt dat de belangrijkste drijvende kracht hierachter het beleid van de Japanse regering over culturele uitwisseling is. De focus van het hoofdstuk verschuift dan naar het specifieke geval van China, waar de Japanse karakters gestaag geconsumeerd zijn door het Chinese publiek sinds de jaren '80. Het Chinese publiek is opgegroeid met de Japanse karakters, vinden ze leuk, kunnen zich met ze identificeren en gebruiken ze om hun eigen karaktercultuur op te bouwen. In die zin zorgen Japanse karakters niet alleen voor de opbouw van gemeenschappelijke herinneringen, maar ook van een gemeenschappelijke heden tussen China en Japan.

De vragen omtrent hoe en waarom karakters een belangrijk onderdeel van de hedendaagse Japanse samenleving zijn geworden en wat daarvan de implicaties zijn, zijn niet eenvoudig te beantwoorden. Echter, door de analyse beschreven in dit proefschrift kunnen enkele belangrijke conclusies getrokken worden.

“Character merchandising”, als zijnde een mechanisme dat karakters heeft getransformeerd tot producten, heeft de “character commodity boom” in Japan veroorzaakt. Dit heeft geleid tot grootschalige consumptie van karakters door

consumenten, onder meer door kinderen en volwassenen (zowel mannen als vrouwen) en heeft ondertussen een rol voor hen veiliggesteld in sociaal-culturele fenomenen en een breed scala van mogelijkheden gecreëerd om karakters te consumeren. Karakterconsumptie verschaft de consument een middel om zijn of haar individualiteit en gevoeligheid uit te drukken, wat niet alleen de innerlijke verbinding tussen hen en karakters verdiept, maar wat karakters ook nauw verbindt met de eigen identiteit.

Bovendien gebruiken consumenten karakters om hun eigen identiteit uit te drukken, hetgeen tot uiting komt in het vertoon van uiterlijke kenmerken of in “cosplay”. Dit alles is een vorm van persoonlijke presentatie, maar het is ook een maatschappelijke vereiste om karakters in het middelpunt van het maatschappelijke toneel te plaatsen en een actieve rol te laten spelen in zowel sociale als internationale communicatie. In deze zin vertegenwoordigen, weerspiegelen en omvatten karakters als een vorm van vertoog het hedendaagse Japan.

Curriculum Vitae

Ruobing Han was born in Zibo, China on January 22, 1988. Her educational endeavors began at Shandong University in China, where she received her B.A. degree in Japanese Studies in June, 2010. She then began her M.A. study at the School of History and Culture at the same university, and then from 2011 as an exchange student studied in Nihon University, Tokyo, Japan.

In 2012, she finished her M.A. study and was awarded the chance to begin her doctoral study at Leiden University, where she conducted her PhD research for four years. She will be assuming as an associate researcher at Shandong University, China, beginning from April, 2017.

Ruobing's publications have appeared in *Economic Research of East Asia* (in Japanese). Building on her PhD research, Ruobing's next project will focus on a comparative study on character consumption in China and Japan.