The "characterization" of Japan : from merchandising to identity

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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 [*henshin*]" 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 Shimbun* 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, mitasareru 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

[1]There 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

[2]See, 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).

[3]According 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

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

[5]The 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 Mouce 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 Shimbun* 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.

[6]See "*Te o tsunagō daisakusen*" (The Project of Holding Hands), accessed 14 October 2015, http://www.teotsunago.com/.

[7]See "*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 commentated, "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 child[8]). 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

[8]A *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 (*buri* 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.

[9]The "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.

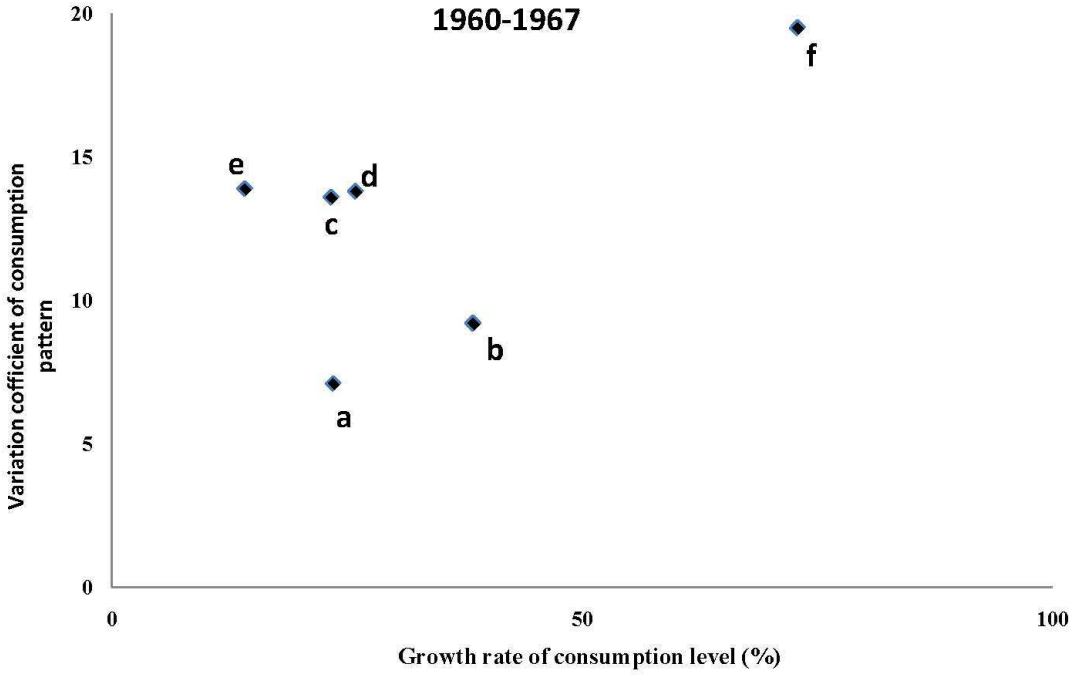

Figure 13. a: America; b: Italy; c: Canada; d: West Germany; e: England; f: Japan; Source: Cabinet Office Homepage.

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 (Bourdaghs, 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 *fīringu* (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 *fīringu* 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 *shijinrui* 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 *shijinrui* 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 wantsu e*" (from needs to wants) and "*hitsujuhin kara hitsuyokuhin 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 Tokyu 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

[10]These 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

[11]Ueno (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 *shijinrui*, *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 el at., 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 *jinbun 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).

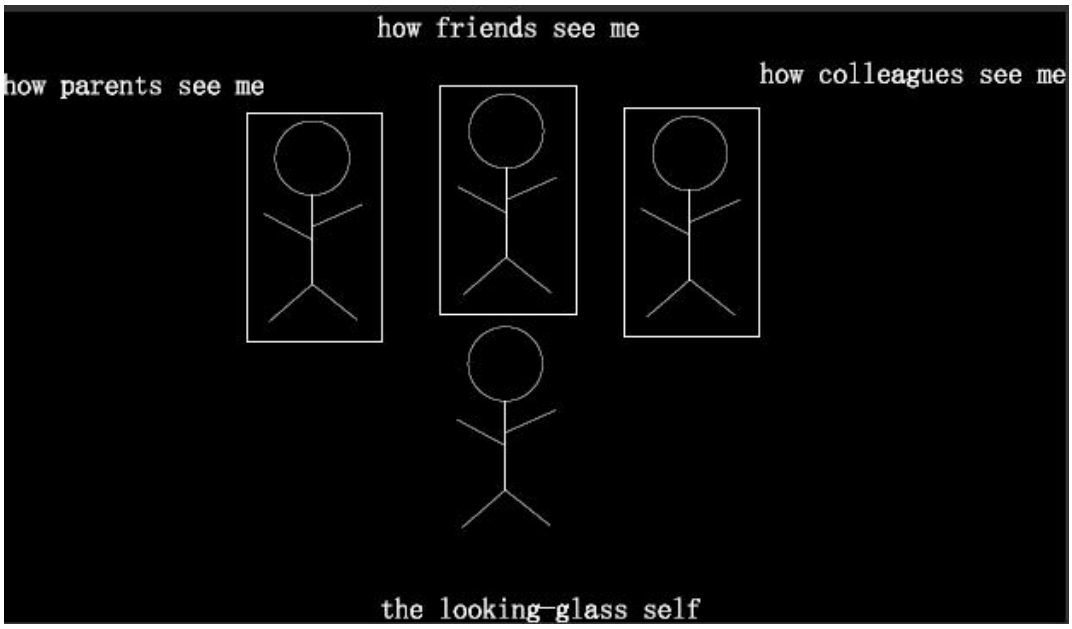

Figure 14. The looking-glass self; Source: Created by author.

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

[12]See http://kanae.2ch.net/test/read.cgi/csaloon/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.

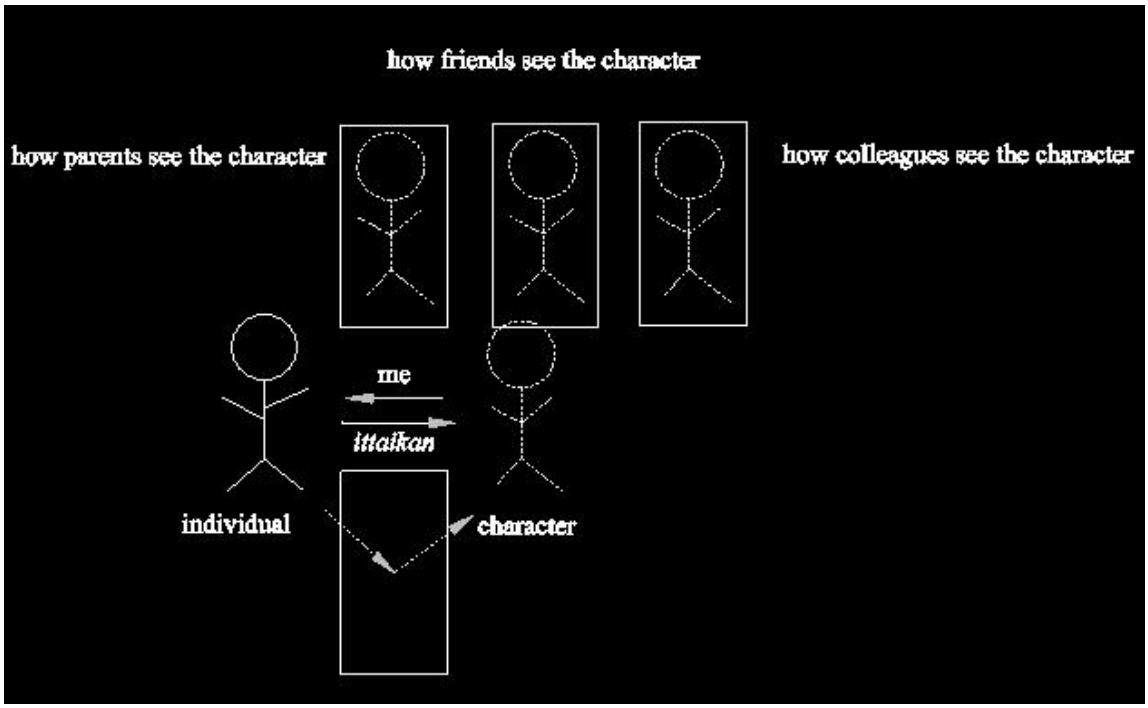

Figure 15. The twofold mirror mechanism; Source: Created by author.

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 *jinbun 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 Zaraki 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.

[15]In 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).

[16]The *Sūpā sentai* series is a long-runing (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.

[17]The 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.

[18]See 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 vitality[21]; 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

[19]See http://peace.2ch.net/test/read.cgi/win/1172464676/2, 26 February 2007, accessed 23 July 2015.
[20]See http://fox.2ch.net/test/read.cgi/poverty/1441377961/48, 5 September 2015, accessed 21 October 2015.
[21]There 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

[22]Self-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

[23]For example, in Japan Disney style wedding that can realize one's dream of a princess wedding is still a popular choice. The "Dinsey'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

[24]Postmodern 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

[25]In 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

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

[29]According 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).
[30]Nico 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.

[31]Ōtsuka (2004a: 107-176) proposes the term"*kyarakutāka suru* '*watashi*'" (characterized "me"), and emphasizes its uses in both text and ideology.

[32]Aihara 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.