

ASIAN NETWORK EXCHANGE

Special Section:
Japanese
Popular
Culture

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A Journal for Asian Studies in the Liberal Arts

Vol. XVII, No. 2, Spring 2010

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Vol. XVII, No. 2, Spring 2010

Co-Editors

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Spring 2010

Highlights in this Issue

We are pleased to bring to readers the current issue of the *ASIANetwork Exchange*, with its special section, Japanese Popular Culture. The articles in this section cover a range of subject matter from geisha to manga, from new research to new pedagogies. We are grateful to all the contributors to this special section, but we are especially grateful to Professor Jennifer Prough of Valparaiso University for her cooperation as Guest Editor in soliciting, assembling, and submitting the excellent articles that readers will find in this section. We wish to remind readers that the editorial staff will be selecting a Guest Editor for the Spring 2011 Issue of the *Exchange* in July, and we welcome all proposals. (See the Call for Applications on the following page.)

This issue also includes a very special submission from Professor Steven Emmanuel of Virginia Wesleyan University, whose ASIANetwork-Freeman Foundation Student-Faculty Research Award two years ago has resulted in the production of a prize-winning documentary film, *Making Peace with Vietnam*. In his article, Professor Emmanuel writes about the film, but focuses even more on the teaching and learning experiences derived from his team's short-term immersion in Vietnamese culture.

Our "Media Resources" section contains, in addition, a brief submission by the editors, calling attention to video-recorded presentations, now available on the internet, that address three of the controversies in Chinese studies today: the debates surrounding Giovanni Arrighi's *Adam Smith in Beijing*, the ongoing evaluations of the Cultural Revolution, and the current role of China in Africa.

Finally, we include an article by David Duckler, a student participant in Bard College's 2008 Student-Faculty Research project, which focused on contemporary Tibet. Although we always include the student papers in the "For Our Students" section of the journal, in this case, we might just have easily placed David's article in the "Research of Note" section. We think you will find

his piece on contemporary Tibetan literature, “Alai’s *The Mountain Stairway: A Grassroots Conception of Tibet*,” to be an outstanding example of the original research our students are capable of producing.

As always, we welcome readers’ comments and submissions.

Tom Lutze and Irv Epstein

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Call for Applications for a Guest Editor, Special Section of the Spring 2011 Issue of the *ASIANetwork Exchange*

The Board of Directors of ASIANetwork calls for applications for Guest Editor of the Special Section of the Spring 2011 issue of the *ASIANetwork Exchange*. Proposals should include the following information and meet the criteria listed below:

General Criteria

1. A successful proposal should have a unified theme of significance to the goal of the *ASIANetwork Exchange* to serve as a journal for Asian studies in the liberal arts.
2. The proposal should include a brief narrative including the guest editor’s conception of the theme, a rationale for the topics of proposed articles, and ideas on how the audience will be engaged.

Specific Criteria

1. The proposal should be innovative and geared toward a liberal arts faculty.
2. The proposal should identify 4-5 articles for the Section that will be solicited and edited by the author of the proposal to fill 32 pages (or more) of the journal.
3. The proposal should include at least one article incorporating original research and at least one article focusing on either pedagogy, media resources, or usefulness for our students.
4. The proposal should provide evidence of viability.
5. The proposal should be no more than 1000 words.
6. The author of the proposal should also include a one-page CV.

Other considerations

1. Guest editors must be members of ASIANetwork.
2. Board members or *Exchange* editors are not eligible to apply.

Please send applications by email to: Tom Lutze and Irv Epstein at anexchange@iwu.edu

Deadline for applications: July 1, 2010

About the Contributors

Special Guest Edited Section: Japanese Popular Culture

Jan Bardsley

Jan Bardsley is Associate Professor of Japanese Humanities and Chair of the Department of Asian Studies at UNC-Chapel Hill. She is the recipient UNC-Chapel Hill's Sitterson Award for Outstanding Achievement in Teaching First-Year Seminars (2001) and Tanner Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching (2009). She is the author of *The Bluestockings of Japan: New Woman Fiction and Essays from Seitō, 1911-1916* (Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2007). With Laura Miller, she co-edited the book, *Bad Girls of Japan* (Palgrave, 2005) and *Manners and Mischief: Gender and Power in Japanese Conduct Literature* (forthcoming from University of California Press).

Christopher Born

Christopher Born is a lecturer in Japanese language and culture at the University of Missouri–St. Louis, and has been admitted to the PhD program in Japanese literature at Washington University in St. Louis, beginning in fall 2010.

Laura Miller

Laura Miller, Loyola University of Chicago, has published widely on Japanese popular culture and language, including topics such as the wizard boom, the Korean Wave, girls' slang, and print club photos. She is the author of *Beauty Up: Exploring Contemporary Japanese Body Aesthetics* (University of California Press, 2006), and co-editor (with Jan Bardsley above) of *Bad Girls of Japan*. She recently completed, again with Jan Bardsley, *Manners and Mischief: Gender and Power in Japanese Conduct Literature*.

Jennifer Prough

Jennifer Prough is Assistant Professor of Humanities and East Asian Studies in Christ College (the Honors College) at Valparaiso University. Her research interests include: anthropology of Japan, anthropology of media, gender and manga, and tourism in Japan. Her book, *Straight from the Heart: Gender and Intimacy in the Production of Shōjo Manga* is forthcoming from University of Hawai'i Press.

Deborah Shamoon

Deborah Shamoon is Assistant Professor at the University of Notre Dame in the department of East Asian Languages and Cultures. She specializes in Japanese literature and popular culture, including television, film, anime and comics.

Other Contributors:**David Duckler**

David Duckler graduated from Bard College in 2009 with a major in Chinese Language and Literature. Under the guidance of Bard Professor Li-Hua Ying, David is completing his translation of Tibetan author Alai's *The Mountain Staircase*. After an extended research project on the aesthetic and spiritual dimensions of Chinese tea ceremony, conducted while teaching at Qingdao University, David is returning to the U.S. to further his studies in Chinese literature and philology.

Steven Emmanuel

Steven Emmanuel earned his doctorate degree in philosophy from Brown University. He currently serves as Batten Professor of Philosophy at Virginia Wesleyan College, where he teaches courses in intellectual history and comparative ethics, with a special emphasis on Asian thought.

Introducing the Guest-Edited Section

Japanese Popular Culture

Jennifer Prough
Valparaiso University

Over the past decade Japanese popular culture has become an important subject in the scholarship and teaching about Japan. The increase in popularity of Japanese popular culture both within and outside of the academy can be indexed in a number of ways: the number of books (popular and scholarly) published on the topic; the increased number of undergraduate students who take course in Japanese or Japanese studies due to their interest in manga and anime; and even the number of job openings at the college/university level for someone who specializes in “Japanese Visual Culture” or “Japanese Popular Culture.” As scholars and teachers of Asia are discovering, these topics are of interest to our students and often serve to make Japanese studies more visible outside of the academy as well. In support of these trends, this special section of the *ASIANetwork Exchange* will focus on Japanese popular culture, by combining articles on recent research and practiced pedagogy from a range of scholars and across various disciplines (anthropology, literature, and religion) from different professional levels (new scholars and veterans).

The essays that follow each engage in the symbiotic relation between research and teaching, as experienced by liberal arts faculty. They put scholarly perspectives on Japanese popular culture in dialogue with conversations that are held in our classrooms, student unions, and wider media. The first three articles directly address ways to teach about Japanese popular culture to undergraduates who may or may not have Japan related coursework. 1) Dr. Deborah Shamoan outlines her strategy in teaching Japanese popular culture with a focus on narrative media. In particular, Shamoan addresses the inclusion of theoretical approaches to popular culture, the use of multi-

media course materials, and the challenges of teaching to those with varying levels of interest, from those without a background in Japanese studies, to those who are *otaku* (fans). 2) Dr. Jan Bardsley by contrast outlines pedagogical strategies for teaching undergraduates about geisha and the field of geisha studies through a combination of text and film, art and literature. Similarly, 3) Chris Born's analyzes the role of Confucian values in the recent anime hits *Naruto* and *Bleach* and argues that contemporary anime can be used in the classroom to examine traditional values and is also a useful device for understanding the connection between Japanese popular culture and larger anthropological and historical themes. Each of these essays provides strategic information as to how to teach about Japanese popular culture, drawing on the authors' own research interests and teaching successes.

The final two papers offer current research on topics related to Japanese popular culture. 4) My essay provides a link between research on popular culture in Japan and the experiences of undergraduate students in the U.S., by examining the ways that Japanese culture is produced, packaged, and marketed by the manga industry in the U.S. In particular, I analyze the ways that distributors and fans utilize and engage with the "Japaneseness" of these products in their own marketing and understanding of these popular texts. Finally, 5) Dr. Laura Miller provides a cross media analysis, examining why animals are so frequently used as stand-ins for human figures in Japanese imagery. Miller explores the use of animals as a type of displacement that renders potentially dangerous or sensitive domains safe and acceptable. Thus, while Japanese popular culture is a broad topic, these essays seek to draw together the breadth of the subject through discussions of manga and anime, theater, film, and marketing in Japan and in the U.S.

TEACHING ABOUT ASIA

Teaching Japanese Popular Culture

Deborah Shamon
University of Notre Dame

Japanese popular culture has arrived on American college campuses as never before. Student interest in Japanese manga (comic books), anime (animated films and television shows), and video games drives much of the enrollment in Japanese courses and Japanese majors and minors. In response to student interest, as well as the establishment of popular culture as a topic of serious academic scholarship, the demand for courses on Japanese popular culture has never been higher. Yet the number of scholars specializing in the study of popular culture is still relatively small. This can potentially create problems, as faculty teach outside their expertise, and perhaps face an uncomfortable situation in which the students know more about the topic than the professor. In this article, I will offer some suggestions and advice for faculty creating a popular culture course for the first time, based on my experiences teaching undergraduates at the University of Notre Dame. The course I developed reflects my background in Japanese literature and film, and is but one example of many possible approaches to the topic. The sample syllabus and list of resources at the end of this article provide citations for all text and media sources mentioned.

Negotiating the Study of Popular Culture and Classical Literature

While the study of popular culture can and should encompass all fields in the humanities, professors of Japanese literature in particular seem to be frequently called upon to teach a course in manga, anime or film, or to incorporate those elements into existing courses. One common response is to create a course using anime or film adaptations of classic literature, such as the

anime *Tale of Genji*, but this approach does a disservice to both the students and the field. First, students may resent deceptive course descriptions, when they discover the course they expected on anime is in fact a course on classical literature. Second, the adaptations of classic literature will nearly always pale in comparison to the original, and the only lesson students will have learned is that the anime *Tale of Genji* is not that good. Showing a film adaptation in class is not the same as teaching students film theory and history. Popular culture texts like manga, anime, and film have their own histories and classics, which reward careful study. Moreover, as popular culture texts were created under different circumstances than those of highbrow literature, the analytic approach must also be different. The close reading of theme and character development appropriate to a literature course will either be dissatisfying with texts that are too simple, or will drive the content towards dense texts that are not necessarily representative of manga or anime genres as a whole. Finally, popular culture ought to be taught as a discrete field, with its own theories and praxis, and not simply as a pale imitation of high culture. While popular culture can and should be taught with various disciplinary approaches, my emphasis here reflects my background in literary and film studies, although I hope my suggestions will be of interest to those in other fields as well.

One of the first problems in designing an introductory course on Japanese popular culture is breadth: there are simply too many aspects to popular culture to cover in one semester. In my course, I limit the scope to narrative fiction, with an emphasis on formal and genre analysis, with units on novels, live action film, animation, and manga, but not music, video games, sports, martial arts, non-fiction television (such as game shows), and fashion, among other topics. Once relieved of the pressure to include every aspect of popular culture in a single course, I was free to explore each topic in more depth, rather than cover many topics superficially. This increased the intellectual challenge for the students as well. My approach provides a framework for the syllabus, which is divided into sections by medium, and allows for comparison of different genres across media. This approach also leads to an emphasis on formal

analysis, which is a concrete skill set students can learn in one semester.

Although it may appear to us as faculty that students are only interested in pop culture and disdain high culture, I have found that within a classroom setting, the opposite is often true. When teaching a survey of modern Japanese literature, my students readily embraced classics such as *Kokoro*, but when I included lighter fare such as *Irozange (Confessions of Love)* by Uno Chiyo), they found it shallow and silly. Many students have been conditioned by high school and college literature courses to expect to read dense, “writerly” novels, and to spend class time unpacking their meaning. When faced with a novel or other text in which the meaning or symbolism is obvious, they are unsure as to how to react. For this reason, I begin the popular culture course with two novels, to highlight the difference between high culture and pop culture. The first novel, *Norwegian Wood* by Murakami Haruki, encompasses both “pure literature” (*junbungaku*) and pop culture; although it is more dense and reflective than most popular fare, it was also a media sensation when it was first published, and allows for discussion of the difference between highbrow and lowbrow entertainment, as well as how a mass culture phenomenon can exceed the content of the original text. The second book, *All She Was Worth* by Miyabe Miyuki, is clearly genre fiction. In this case, students read a detective novel that is a good introduction to the use of genre rather than symbolism or characterization, to analyze a work of fiction. Starting with these two novels allows students to see how analysis of popular culture is different from “great books” courses they may have had in high school or college.

Even with a focus on narrative and genre, teaching each medium has its own challenges. First, in regard to teaching film, technical issues around screening material are significant. In order to maximize class time, all screenings must take place outside class hours. In classes where I show more than a few films, I schedule a weekly two hour screening time that is mandatory for all students and constitutes part of their attendance grade. Even with a mandatory viewing section, however, students need access to the films or TV shows for

repeat viewings, which should be encouraged when they are writing papers or studying for exams. Many universities have technical support to allow online streaming of video content, although uploading a two hour film can take some time and should be planned in advance. Students should also have access to a DVD through the school library, although having only one DVD for a large class, even with restricted lending hours, can cause a bottleneck. It's also important to realize the default setting of most anime DVDs is for dubbing rather than subtitles, and some students may hear a significantly altered script from the original unless they are specifically instructed to watch the subtitled version.

Analyzing Film and Television

Regarding theoretical approaches to teaching film, some universities with film departments offer tutorials for faculty in other fields on incorporating film into their classes. Consulting or collaborating with film studies faculty can be helpful in course design and pedagogy. The Society for Cinema and Media Studies has a section on its website devoted to teaching resources, including teaching film across the curriculum (<http://www.cmstudies.org>). When teaching film, I emphasize formal analysis and use of film terms. Students can learn these terms relatively easily; as they have been watching films all their lives, the concepts are familiar to them, even if they did not know the technical vocabulary. I chose not to use a film textbook in my popular culture course, in order to limit reading material, but in a different course I have used the textbook *Looking at Movies*. Although the book mainly uses examples from American and European film, it has very clear explanations with copious illustrations from recent films, and a DVD supplement with good example clips. If a textbook is not used, one alternative is handouts with lists of film terms, as well as a website supported by Yale University giving descriptions and examples of those terms (<http://classes.yale.edu/film-analysis/>). YouTube also has many good clips illustrating film terms. A key word search for “shot-reverse-shot,” for example, will turn up short tutorials made for aspiring filmmakers that can be useful for teaching.

As a part of the emphasis on formal analysis of film, the first written assignment in the course is a shot analysis. Students choose one short sequence (usually one to three minutes) and discuss all the formal elements they notice, such as shot duration, distance from the camera, *mise-en-scene*, editing, or sound, using the technical vocabulary they have learned, in an essay format. The paper must contain analysis as well as description, that is, not merely stating that the lighting is subdued or each shot is very long, but explaining why it is so, and how it adds to our understanding of both that scene and the film as a whole. This is a standard assignment in a film studies course, and allows students to reflect on the artistic choices made by the director and crew, as well as the narrative capacity of film as a medium.

Although television and film may look superficially similar, they have different modes of production and consumption that significantly impact the content. I emphasize how viewing environments and filming practices differ between television and film. Teaching television, however, is more difficult than teaching film, because there are few Japanese TV shows available with subtitles, and many series are prohibitively long. Some Japanese TV shows are available on the internet with subtitles, but in most cases these are in violation of copyright and may be taken down without notice. Even when a drama series is available, the narrative arc usually takes an entire season to unfold, making one episode relatively meaningless, and unless the syllabus is designed to allow discussion of one series over several weeks, it is unrealistic to expect students to watch the entire series. In this class, I have chosen to focus only on TV shows that are purely episodic, or that are collected in two hour digest format (which is common with anime).

Teaching Animation

Teaching animation is challenging because there are few secondary sources on animation studies, particularly in English on Japanese animation, written for an academic rather than a general readership. Again I focus on formal analysis, limited vs. full animation, and superflat theory, although this is admittedly challenging for undergraduates, and may not be appropriate for

all course levels. Any discussion of animation, however, should begin with a description of how hand-drawn cel animation was traditionally made. Although much anime is now created using computer imaging, it is still made to mimic the look of cel animation. Many students are unaware of how the process works, or even how it differs from live action (a student once asked me if the voices were recorded simultaneously as the animator draws). How-to books for aspiring animators can be good sources of basic technical information.

Regarding the history of anime, many early examples are available on DVD, although frustratingly, many are only available in the U.S. in heavily edited, dubbed versions, particularly *Tetsuwan Atomu (Astro Boy)*, *Tetsujin 28 (Gigantor)*, and *Mach Go Go Go (Speed Racer)*. For this reason, I only show brief scenes from these shows, focusing on the animation, rather than the story. The new DVD set *The Roots of Japanese Anime* collects prewar films, which provides a good comparison to the standardized look of recent commercial anime, and can prompt key questions on the definition of anime: is it a medium? An aesthetic style? A genre? Can all animation produced in Japan be classified as anime?

Teaching anime also brings up many of the same issues as live action because animation is produced for both film and television. While it is tempting to show only feature films, particularly the more sophisticated work by Miyazaki Hayao, Studio Ghibli is not representative of anime as a whole; in fact Miyazaki himself resists the use of the term anime, in order to make a generic and aesthetic distinction between his work and the mainstream animation industry. Any course including in-depth study of anime should include TV anime, although it can be difficult to show a very long and convoluted story arc in a limited time. I have compromised by showing film digest versions of two foundational anime TV series, *Mobile Suit Gundam* and *Galaxy Express 999*, while explaining to students that these are abridged revisions of the original story, and in some scenes the animation has been altered. Although this is not an ideal solution, the film versions of anime TV shows are frequently given a wide theatrical release in Japan and serve to increase the fan base, so there is a case to be made for viewing these as

authentic texts. In the case of *Evangelion*, I chose to use four episodes of the original TV series rather than the film versions, focusing on form and only a few aspects of the story.

Manga

Finally, teaching manga is perhaps even more challenging than anime. There is very little academic writing in English on manga or the comic book format in general. Like television, most manga stories are long, unfolding over many volumes. Although students can read each volume quickly, requiring them to purchase multiple volumes can be quite expensive. For the most part, I limit readings to one-volume stories or episodic series. An even bigger problem for teaching the history of manga is that while English translations have gained a large market in the U.S., for the most part, only the most recent series have been translated commercially, leaving almost the entire corpus of foundational works untranslated. Some of the most popular and influential manga artists are wholly unavailable in English, such as Mizuki Shigeru and Ikeda Riyoko. One exception is Tezuka Osamu, many of whose major works have been published in English, but the translation of *Atomu* (*Astro Boy*, published by Dark Horse) is piecemeal and not in order of original publication. Another exception is Tatsumi Yoshihiro, whose autobiography, *A Drifting Life*, provides a glimpse into the birth of the manga industry in the 1950s. As with anime, a vast quantity of manga, including older titles, is available on the internet with fan-produced translations (scanlation). The quality of scanlations varies widely, from unintelligible (sometimes produced by non-native speakers based on scanlations in other languages) to professional (in some cases, better than the commercial release), but again most of these sites are in violation of copyright and subject to removal.

As with anime and animation, the study of manga and comic books as a medium is still in its infancy. I use Scott McCloud's book *Understanding Comics*, an introduction to the American comic book medium and visual storytelling written in comic book format. His theories on transitions between panels are one possible approach to formal analysis of manga, analogous to editing techniques in film. McCloud compares transitions in

American and European comic books with Japanese manga; although his knowledge of manga is extremely limited, it is useful for guiding class discussion. However, his theories, as with any developing field, are incomplete and not wholly applicable to manga; for this reason it is best introduced to students as experimental and conditional, not as an established system. Thierry Groensteen's *The System of Comics*, recently translated from French, is another possibility for a theoretical foundation to the study of visual narrative.

The Otaku (Obsessive Fan)

Another difficulty in teaching manga and anime in college courses is the otaku, or the obsessive fan. Students who are fans of manga or anime can contribute positively to the class, by bringing a breadth of knowledge that other students lack. However, as the term otaku implies, some level of social dysfunction is not uncommon among hardcore fans, and some otaku can potentially be disruptive to the class. Aside from serious personality disorders, which should be dealt with outside class, I have found disruptive otaku behavior falls into two categories: 1. challenging the authority of the teacher and 2. resistance to academic analysis of the material. Regarding the first problem, simply acknowledging a student's expertise can help to reduce conflict. A hallmark of otaku behavior is obsessive collection and databasing of facts: mastery of a vast amount of information is a source of pride. A simple, casual comment from the instructor recognizing that knowledge can prevent the student from feeling the need to show off. Pushy behavior from an otaku student, attempting to usurp authority from the instructor, often stems from a desire to share their beloved movie or TV show with the rest of the class, and frustration that the course does not cover their cherished topic. For this reason, I assign all students to give one 5 minute oral presentation in front of the class on a topic of their choosing. Giving the otaku the chance to actually teach the class, if only for a few minutes, and allowing them to share their passion and receive acknowledgement of their expertise, greatly reduces this frustration and channels their excitement in a productive direction. This assignment also has the benefit of encouraging

students without much background in the topic to watch or read material in addition to class assignments. Listening to a wide variety of presentations also increases all students' knowledge of the field.

Regarding the second category of problematic otaku behavior, they often approach the material as fans, rather than as academics. Students, however, are not always aware that this is a problem; they need to be reminded of the difference between a fan and an academic approach. One way to do this is to have the students brainstorm the difference between these two approaches: the fan is not analytic, but focused on details (trivia such as continuity, schematics, or mythology) and affective responses (“Worst Episode Ever!”), and may be highly critical among themselves, but fiercely protective when dealing with outsiders. On the other hand, an academic approach demands an objective, rational tone, and a coherent argument, not just an accretion of details. The two are not incompatible; some of the best academic writing has been done by scholars who are also fans of their chosen material, and it is important not to disparage the fans. But constant reminders of the difference between a fan and an academic approach give students a guideline for the appropriate way to participate in class discussions and complete oral and written assignments. I also touch on the otaku as a topic in the syllabus, and encourage the students to reflect on their own experiences as fans, even if they do not self-identify as otaku. Again, this acknowledges the importance of otaku to manga and anime markets, but also encourages students to think critically about themselves and their own engagement with popular culture.

Not all students in a popular culture class are knowledgeable fans, however. I have found that many students have only the slightest familiarity with the topic, perhaps having only seen one or two anime TV shows or played a Japanese video game. These students can easily be put off if otaku students are allowed to be disruptive or intimidating in class, so it is important to curtail that behavior. It is also not uncommon to have students with no knowledge at all of Japan or Japanese pop culture, so it is important to explain things carefully and not to assume background knowledge of the history or language. Even for

students who are not fans, learning how to analyze popular culture texts is an important skill. As we all live in a media-saturated environment, students should learn how to consume that media with a critical eye, not only from Japan but from their own cultures as well.

Although there are many challenges in creating a new course on Japanese popular culture, it can be a rewarding experience to channel students' interests toward academic analysis, and encourage them to view popular media critically. Being aware of some of the challenges in advance, and building a course that incorporates the instructor's research interests should help instructors to succeed.

Sample Syllabus

Week 1: Novel—Highbrow/Popular Fiction

Murakami Haruki. *Norwegian Wood*. Trans. Jay Rubin. Vintage, 2000.

Week 2: Novel—Crime

Miyabe Miyuki. *All She Was Worth*. Trans. Alfred Birnbaum. Mariner Books, 1999.

Week 3: Live Action Film—Crime

Stray Dog, Kurosawa Akira, 1949.

Film terms on Yale Film Analysis website: <http://classes.yale.edu/film-analysis/>

Richie, Donald. "Stray Dog." *The Films of Akira Kurosawa*. Berkeley: U of California Press, 1965. 58-64.

Yoshimoto Mitsuhiro. "Stray Dog." *Kurosawa*. Duke UP, 2000. 158-165; 171-178.

Week 4: Live Action Film—Jidaigeki

Lady Snowblood, Fujita Toshiya, 1973.

Anderson, J.L. "Japanese Swordfighters and American Gunfighters." *Cinema Journal* 12.2 (Spring 1973): 1-21.

Standish, Isolde. *A New History of Japanese Cinema: A Century of Narrative Film*. New York: Continuum, 2005. 287-293; 308-314.

Week 5: Live Action Film—Science Fiction

Casshern, Kiriya Kazuaki, 2004.

Abbott, Stacey. "Final Frontiers: Computer-Generated Imagery and the Science Fiction Film." *Science Fiction Studies* 33.1 (2006): 89-108.

Masahiro Mori. "The Uncanny Valley." Trans. Karl F. MacDorman and Takashi Minato. *Energy*, 7(4), 1970. 33-35.

Williams, Peter and David Wallace. *Unit 731: Japan's Secret Biological Warfare in World War II*. New York: The Free Press, 1989. 31-50.

Week 6: TV—Tokusatsu

Ultraman Tsuburaya Eiji, 1966; episodes 2 and 14

Gill, Tom. "Transformational Magic: Some Japanese Superheroes and Monsters." *The Worlds of Japanese Popular Culture: Gender, Shifting Boundaries and Global Cultures*. Ed. D.P. Martinez. New York: Cambridge UP, 1998. 33-55.

Ragone, August. "Hero from the Stars: The Creation of Ultraman." *Eiji Tsuburaya: Master of Monsters*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2007. 113-129.

Week 7: TV—Anime

Galaxy Express 999, Matsumoto Reiji, 1979 (film version dir. Rintaro)

Poitras, Gilles. "Contemporary Anime in Japanese Pop Culture." *Japanese Visual Culture*. Ed. Mark MacWilliams. New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2008. 48-67.

Chi Hang Li et. al. *The Complete Guide to Anime Techniques*. New York: Barron's, 2006. (selections).

Murakami Takashi. "Super Flat Manifesto" and "A Theory of Super Flat Japanese Art." *Superflat*. Tokyo: Madra, 2000. 5-25.

Week 8: Film—Anime

Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind, Miyazaki Hayao, 1984.

Lamarre, Thomas. "From Animation to Anime: Drawing

Movements and Moving Drawings.” *Japan Forum* 14 (2) 2002: 348-365.

Lamarre, Thomas. “The Multiplanar Image.” *Mechademia* 1: 2006. 120-143.

Week 9: TV—Anime

Mobile Suit Gundam, Tomino Yoshiyuki, 1979; film version David Vernal, “War and Peace in Japanese Science Fiction Animation: An Examination of *Mobile Suit Gundam* and *The Mobile Police Patlabor*.” *Animation Journal*. (Fall 1995): 56-84.

Kinsella, Sharon. “Japanese Subculture in the 1990s: Otaku and the Amateur Manga Movement.” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 24: 2 (Summer 1998) 289-316. (excerpts)

Week 10: TV—Anime

Neon Genesis Evangelion, Anno Hideaki, 1995: episodes 9, 16, 25, 26

Ortega, Mariana. “My Father, He Killed Me; My Mother, She Ate Me: Self, Desire, Engendering, and the Mother in *Neon Genesis Evangelion*.” *Mechademia 2: Networks of Desire*: 2006. 216-232.

Lamarre, Thomas. “Introduction to the Otaku Movement.” *EnterText* 4.1 (Winter 2004/05). 155-163.

Azuma Hiroki. “The Animalization of Otaku Culture.” *Mechademia 2: Networks of Desire*: 2006. 175-187.

Week 11: Story—Manga

Tezuka Osamu, *Metropolis*. Dark Horse, 2003.

McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics*. New York: HarperCollins, 1993. 24-45; 60-80.

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- Yazawa Ai. *Nana* Vol. 2. VIZ Media, 2006.
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Viz Media, 1997.
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- Ch. 1 “Son for Hire, Sword for Hire”
- Ch. 6 “Waiting for the Rains”
- Ch. 7 “Eight Gates of Deceit”
- Ch. 9 “The Assassin’s Road”

Week 15: Horror—Manga

- Hino Hideshi, *Hell Baby*. Blast Books, 1995.
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Additional Resources

- The Roots of Japanese Anime DVD [http://
www.zakkafilms.com/](http://www.zakkafilms.com/)
- The Society for Cinema and Media Studies Teaching Resources
[http://www.cmstudies.org/index.php?option=com_
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Teaching Geisha in History, Fiction, and Fantasy

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The Intellectual Appeal of Geisha Studies

Artists skilled in performing classical music and dance, geisha are famous the world over as emblems of Japanese culture at its most erotic and exotic. Everything from novels and comedies to fashion and films document Euro-American fascination with geisha from the late 19th through the 20th centuries. Japanese essayists have long, and often ruefully, observed this foreign curiosity for the *geisha gaaru*. Yet, the literature on geisha in Japan includes a range of works, too, including fiction, academic study, tips for would-be connoisseurs as well as memoirs and etiquette manuals penned by geisha themselves. Well into the twenty-first century, geisha still intrigue at home and abroad. Exploring multiple representations of geisha in an Asian Studies course easily engages students, but also challenges them to think critically. Not only do they learn about geisha past and present, but they also understand geisha studies as a field. Their study also explores the constructed nature of gender, leading to comparisons of Japan, the U.S., and a host of models of ideal femininity and masculinity. It is students' involvement with learning how knowledge is produced, fantasies sustained, and questions asked and avoided, that makes teaching the geisha course rewarding.

My own engagement with geisha studies began ten years ago when I began teaching a unit on geisha in "The American Life of Japanese Women," a first-year seminar that examined representations of Japanese women in U.S. popular culture.¹ Many students had already read one of our main texts, Arthur Golden's 1997 best-selling novel, *Memoirs of a Geisha*.² Discussion of American fantasies about geisha proved so lively that I decided to create another first-year seminar on "Geisha

in History, Fiction, and Fantasy.” Fortunately, excellent academic studies and translations of Japanese work have appeared in the past ten years that expand our understanding of geisha, enabling me to make a fuller syllabus for this course.³ Eventually, I changed the class from a first-year seminar of twenty students to an introductory college course open to more students but generally limited to thirty-five. The more I taught this class, the more I enjoyed research in geisha studies myself, an interest that led me to scout additional materials in English and Japanese. The course topic consistently generates controversy in class as students debate the politics of tourism, femininity training, geisha performances that cross the boundaries of gender and race, and the complicated pleasures and perils of orientalism. The focus on geisha can easily lead into field trips and hands-on activities such as visits to a local museum to view Edo woodblock prints, a demonstration of the tea ceremony or kimono dressing, and a workshop in Japanese flower arranging. In this short article, I describe a few key units and texts in the course and, in conclusion, discuss its main aim, which is guiding students’ original research and their analysis of geisha studies as a field. I give specific details about the sources for these units in the notes.

The four most compelling topics to take up in a class on geisha are: 1) the working lives of contemporary geisha; 2) the inception and development of the profession in the Tokugawa period (1600-1868); 3) the harsh working conditions endured by girls and women in pre-war modern Japan; and 4) representations of the geisha emanating from Euro-American writers and artists that have had a global impact. These issues could also be explored in abbreviated form as a single unit in a more broadly focused class in Japanese literature, theater, or history and in women’s studies courses.

Geisha in Contemporary Japan

What is a geisha? By the end of the course, students are able to give a multifaceted response to this question, distinguishing definitions of geisha by historical period and primary texts. We begin, however, by talking about the

contemporary profession and delving into the working lives of the nearly 200 geisha and 100 geisha apprentices (*maiko*) active in Kyoto. Although practicing geisha can be found in other parts of Japan, much of the information available concentrates on the five geisha districts (*hanamachi*) of Kyoto. A focus on the ancient capital also leads well into the topic of tourism and the nostalgic desire expressed by many Japanese and foreign visitors to experience a romantic, old Japan. Important objectives in this initial unit are guiding students to becoming familiar with the basic Japanese vocabulary associated with geisha and to understand the hierarchy, customs, and etiquette that structure relations among geisha and between geisha and others. Students also learn about the geisha's commitment to becoming accomplished performers of classical Japanese dance and music. They examine the relationship between the income geisha earn from performing at frequent parties (*ozashiki*) to the high cost of their almost daily art lessons and lavish public performances.

This unit also responds to the current revival of interest in Japan in the geisha apprentice and the increase in teenagers choosing to move to Kyoto to become *maiko*.⁴ We cover the steps a young woman takes to become a geisha: learning to wear the kimono daily; caring for an elaborate hairstyle; speaking in a *hanamachi* dialect; undergoing rigorous arts training; discovering how to converse with clients; and projecting the image of a Kyoto *maiko* at all times. Since students realize that they are relatively close in age to the apprentice and many admit to a similar fascination with this arcane, highly costumed and disciplined lifestyle, spending time on the *maiko*'s training captures student interest at the outset of the course. A discussion of geisha and *maiko* training and lifestyle also opens up a conversation on femininity training. We observe how the rigors of tradition and hierarchy discipline the excessive display of heightened beauty, expensive, elaborate dress, and public visibility. We ask how the transformation of an ordinary teen into a *maiko*, for example, compares to the "makeover," a Cinderella-like experience heavily promoted in both Japan and the U.S. in magazines, cosmetics campaigns, and films. I should

note here that although the class generally enrolls more women than men, the topic of femininity training and makeovers generates vibrant responses from most students. Most have seen TV programs such as TLC's "What Not to Wear," for example, and are keen to discuss the implications of self-improvement messages and twenty-first century rhetoric about the possibility of transforming the body, whether to achieve the look of a maiko or the successful candidate at a job interview.

Several texts work well for this introductory unit on contemporary geisha. If one can order only one book, I would recommend choosing Liza Dalby's *Geisha* (1983), now available with a new preface for the 25th anniversary edition.⁵ The book describes her anthropological field research as a geisha in the mid-1970s and offers an excellent view of geisha history and arts. Dalby has created a beautiful website with more graphics, information about geisha, and answers to frequent questions from readers.⁶ Additionally, students always enjoy reading "Bad Girls Confined," a concise essay by ethnomusicologist Kelly M. Foreman that expertly delineates the geisha today, provides a brief overview of geisha history, and discusses perceptions of geisha in Japan and abroad.⁷ Most interestingly, Foreman observes how postwar Japanese have admired geisha arts but looked askance at these women who choose to remain single and devoted to the arts over finding their purpose in life through becoming wives and mothers. Students or instructors who seek more information on the geisha as artists should consult Foreman's book, *The Gei of Geisha: Music, Identity and Meaning* (2008), which offers an excellent in-depth analysis of performance structure, the geisha's relationship to arts masters, and contemporary patronage.⁸ For more on maiko, students can consult *A Geisha's Journey: My Life as a Kyoto Apprentice* (2008). A pictorial book intended for a popular audience, *A Geisha's Journey* describes in photographs and personal narrative the arduous apprenticeship that led one young woman to her debut as a full-fledged geisha.⁹ Students can read this book on reserve in the college library; alternatively, a pair can be assigned to present the book to the class.

Showing excerpts from various documentaries on geisha can be useful for teaching about geisha dance and costume, and for showing how tourists may be enthralled with the teahouse culture of Kyoto.¹⁰ One of my favorite films to introduce in this unit, however, is a Japanese film that pokes fun at one man's obsession with maiko. *Maiko Haaaaan!!! (Miiiss Maiko)*, (2007) takes a playful look at the geisha institution and Kyoto as the site of old Japan.¹¹ It makes fun of everything associated with geisha from pouting maiko to snooty teahouse managers and takes a satiric view of the Kyoto fieldtrip experienced by most students in Japan. The film offers a refreshing change from the reverential tone of the documentaries and their frequent images of deadly serious monks and arts masters. The comedy also shows how many Japanese can approach "old Kyoto" with a sense of humor, and encourages the students to maintain some critical distance as well. One can extend this line of analysis by assigning articles related to tourism, orientalism fashioned in Japan, and Kyoto nostalgia by anthropologists Millie Creighton and Dorinne Kondo.¹² Again, on the playful side, students can read Aimee Major Steinberger's manga *Japan Ai: A Tall Girl's Adventures in Japan* about a six-foot tall American girl's travel to Japan and how she adored the *cos-play* experience of becoming a maiko for a few hours.¹³ Talking about the tourist experience as, in part, the chance to try on new identities and experience a sense of the exotic leads into discussion of the fables of the Edo pleasure quarters.

The Pleasure Quarters in Tokugawa Japan (1600-1868)

Learning about the pleasure quarters established in the Tokugawa period introduces students to some of Japan's most colorful arts—the Kabuki Theater, Bunraku Puppet Theater, the woodblock prints of geisha, sardonic stories about visits to the pleasure quarters, and sumptuous costumes. One can link the 1629 law banning women from the public stage, a measure taken by the government to quell unruly audiences, to female performers needing to find other venues for performance. The figure of the geisha as a simply dressed female musician who

played the samisen for small audiences dates from this era. The chapter, “Rise of the Geisha: An Age of Glitter and Tragedy” in Cecilia Segawa Seigle’s *Yoshiwara: The Glittering World of the Japanese Courtesan* (1993) provides an in-depth view of this stage in geisha history.¹⁴ Students consider the geisha as a figure in Tokugawa popular culture by reading strikingly different kinds of literature. They gain a comic view of the pleasure quarters by reading the short, funny tales of the would-be dandy and consider the Edo-era ideals of masculinity.¹⁵ The famous Bunraku play *Love Suicide at Amijima*, however, presents the geisha and her lover as tragic figures.¹⁶ A recent Japanese film, *Sakuran* (2006) plays up the delightful, colorful aspects of the “floating world” of the pleasure quarters while depicting even the high-class courtesan’s life as a hard one with little chance for escape.¹⁷ Graphic sex scenes in *Sakuran*, in some of the Edo woodblock prints and pleasure quarters fiction may not be appropriate for all classrooms. Because the topic of geisha, aesthetic codes, and arts of the Tokugawa period is worthy of class in itself, it is difficult to give more than an introduction in this course although, many students enjoy choosing some aspect of this unit for their research projects.

Geisha on the Margins: Labor Law, Prostitution, and Protest

When studying the broad history of geisha, it is important to remember that thousands of girls and women, also called geisha, labored under cruel working conditions and had little control over their lives or bodies. Early 20th century geisha life on the margins has been captured by former geisha Masuda Sayo (1925-2008) in her *Autobiography of a Geisha*, translated by G.G. Rowley (2003).¹⁸ As a young girl, Masuda worked as a *komori*, a caregiver for children, before being sold to a rural geisha house where she worked as a maid while being trained in music and dance. She did not even know that she had a first name until a broken leg landed her in the hospital. Masuda describes the violent abuse and enforced prostitution that she and others suffered. She also shows how difficult it was to make a living after giving up her work as a geisha and how

fellow factory workers, for example, would look down on her once they knew her background. Despite the tragedies she endures, Masuda remains a resilient, optimistic person.

The idea of a geisha as an impoverished girl at the mercy of manipulative geisha mothers and rich, exploitive patrons comes across strongly, too, in the films of director Mizoguchi Kenji. His silent 1929 film, *Tokyo March* (*Tokyo kōshinkyoku*, now subtitled in English), for example, describes the painful life of a young woman forced into the geisha life when her uncle loses his job.¹⁹ In the 1950s as the number of girls graduating from high school and college rose and the expansion of women's rights became a much discussed topic, films such as Mizoguchi's *A Geisha* (*Gion Matsuri*, 1953) and Naruse Mikio's *Flowing* (*Nagareru*, 1956) depicted the geisha as a symbol of the persistence of patriarchal privilege in postwar Japan.²⁰ To expand this topic further, one can assign "Poverty and Prostitution," in Mikiso Hane's book, *Peasants, Rebels, Women and Outcasts: The Underside of Modern Japan* (1982).²¹

This unit leads into discussion of human trafficking and sex tourism today. The experience of girls like Masuda is not only a horrific tale of the past, but the reality of all too many children in the U.S. and around the globe. The last time I taught the geisha course, I was fortunate to have the Director of the Carolina Women's Center give a presentation on trafficking to and within the U.S. Not only did this moment raise awareness about trafficking today, but it also functioned to work against the idea that Japan alone has been the site of this problem. This unit also led to continued conversations about tourism, orientalism, and the quest for the exotic other as we read Vera's Mackie's article, "The Metropolitan Gaze: Travellers, Bodies, and Spaces."²²

Some students pursued this aspect of the course in their research projects, investigating the wartime enslavement of the so-called "comfort women" by the Japanese Imperial Army, the sexual labor of the Japanese girls and women sent abroad as *kara-yuki* (to China) and *ame-yuki* (to North America), and the fight against human trafficking.

Geisha Fascination Abroad

The issue of orientalist fantasy in the Euro-American West arises when the class turns to the many fanciful images of geisha in the 19th and 20th century evident in plays, novels, and visual culture created outside Japan. Students are often surprised by how many of these involve some form of comic cross-dressing that points to anxieties about sexuality, gender, and race in the West. Sidney Jones' operetta, *The Geisha, Story of a Teahouse*, first produced in London in 1895, offers one case of this.²³ *The Geisha* involves an English girl, who impersonates a geisha to win back her sweetheart, only to find herself betrothed to a Japanese lord. (A relatively short script, *The Geisha* is fun to perform in class by assigning students to read various parts). In the early 1950s, *Teahouse of the August Moon*, a novel adapted to stage and then screen, won major awards; the film featured the siren geisha character Lotus Blossom and depicted Okinawan women demanding lessons in how to become geisha from hapless U.S. occupying forces.²⁴ Actresses Shirley MacLaine and Lucille Ball disguised themselves as geisha to comic effect in film and TV as well.²⁵ In the cases of the Anglo impersonations, there is an unmistakable humor implied by the actresses "playing down" by costuming as a courtesan and as Asians, and an equally implicit admiration of their acting ability as the audience observes how well the actresses manage to pass for Japanese, at least in the eyes of their husbands, who are too taken at being in the presence of geisha to see clearly. Such impersonations raise the question of cross-race performance and the history of "yellow face" in American popular culture. To push the conversation beyond the Anglo and Asian binary, introducing the striking images of black geisha in the paintings of African American artist Iona Rozeal Brown works well to prompt new questions. Several of Brown's paintings are available in an online gallery.²⁶ Are the paintings about Japanese women imagining themselves as black, African American women fantasizing about themselves as a geisha, or is there a new hybrid created?

As the most famous of all recent books on geisha, Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of a Geisha* never fails to ignite class debate on representations of geisha abroad. Even though *Memoirs* is a long novel (448 pages), students find this tale of a girl's rise from poverty to geisha glamour a relatively fast and easy read. When I first began teaching this novel in the late 1990s, most students had already read this best-seller and signed up for the geisha class because of it. Although the students' enthusiasm for *Memoirs* made for lively discussion, we needed a way to achieve some distance. Using the hundreds of reader responses on amazon.com proved an effective way to move discussion ahead. I divided students into small groups, giving each group a different sheaf of reader responses, and asked them to characterize the various reactions to the book. They had to detect the most common responses and find a few to read to the class to give a good idea of the range of comments. This exercise helped the students reflect on their own reading of the novel and led to conversation on how many readers enjoyed "losing" themselves in the world of the geisha and how impressed they were that an American man had crafted such a believable story. This point opened conversation on readers' admiration for Golden's talents in creating the geisha as, in a sense, another instance of cross-dressing. Taking up the controversy arising in 2005 in China, Japan, and the U.S. over the Chinese actress playing geisha in the movie further complicated this discussion of cross-dressing.²⁷ Students debated questions of representation, asking how the geisha's image had changed when staged by onnagata, English operetta stars, Brown's paintings, and the *Memoirs* actresses.

Criticism of *Memoirs of a Geisha* fuels more debate, pushing the class to think in still other ways about geisha and the politics of representation. Asian American satire and short scholarly articles work well here. MAD-TV comedian Bobby Lee's spoof on the movie trailer of *Memoirs* through his own Sayuri impersonation is available on YouTube. Lee makes fun of the film's creation of the "exotic oriental beauty" by making himself over as a clumsy, homely geisha. San Francisco-based

guerrilla artist Scott Tsuchitani protested against what he saw as the American fetishization of geisha displayed in a major art exhibit in 2004 by pasting a comic self-portrait around the city. This poster depicts the artist as a nerdy geisha who wears thick, dark-rimmed glasses; the subtitle read, “Orientalist Dream Come True: GEISHA: Perpetuating the Fetish.”²⁸ Such satire makes the Asian American man as the cross-dressed character, calling into question how fascination with geisha shapes notions of his masculinity. In a somewhat different vein, anthropologist Anne Allison’s review of the novel in *Education about Asia* points out the authenticating strategies Golden uses in creating his geisha world and suggests questions that consider aspects of the narrative in terms of its phenomenal reception in the U.S.²⁹ “Innocence to Deviance: The Fetishisation of Japanese Women in Western Fiction, 1890s-1990s” Narrelle Morris’ 2002 article in the online journal *Intersections* is useful for placing *Memoirs* within a history of orientalist writing on Japanese women.³⁰ Some students decide to work on a related topic for their research paper, choosing to compare *Memoirs* to Japanese men’s novels featuring geisha such as Kawabata Yasunari’s *Snow Country* (*Yukiguni*, 1952) and Nagai Kafk’s *Geisha in Rivalry* (*Udekurabe*, 1918), while others opt to explore *Geisha, A Life*, the 2003 memoir penned by Golden’s alleged informant, former geisha Iwasaki Mineko.³¹

Guiding Student Research in Geisha Studies

By the end of this course, I want my students to understand how the field of geisha studies has been shaped, the kinds of questions that have been asked, and to contribute their own research and analysis. Choosing a research topic, writing a ten-page paper, and giving a ten-minute class presentation on the paper are the students’ major assignments.

Student’s research topics have ranged from those closely connected to geisha arts such as kimono, samisen music, flower arrangement, traditional Japanese dance, or fiction, plays, and film about geisha produced either in Japan or abroad. Students have also chosen to work comparatively by looking at Miss America or Playboy Bunnies as gendered representatives of

national culture, at Las Vegas as an American pleasure quarter, and the sorority as a source of sisterhood and femininity training. I provide a list of suggested topics, examples of excellent past projects for students to see, and a grading rubric that identifies the most important aspects of the assignment.

Taking the students step-by-step through drafting the research paper has proven effective. Once students have chosen a topic, formulating the research question becomes their major challenge. Devoting class time to brainstorming about possible research questions gives some example of how to do this. I ask the students to be explicit about their theoretical perspective. Which of the critical essays that we used in class offers a useful approach to their own research? What passages will they cite? As the time approaches for students to write a first draft, we review how to express and develop the paper; ways to make transitions; and lastly, talk about the uses of the conclusion.

Finally, in many iterations of this class, I have concluded with an oral final exam of ninety minutes. Students are divided into groups of three or four and eight broad discussion questions are posted for them one week before the exam. I grade students on their ability to synthesize issues and to support their claims with specific references to texts, field trips, visual materials, and student presentations. When the oral exam works well, time flies by and the conversation produces new ideas that speak to how much individual students have learned about geisha and geisha studies. I feel the course has succeeded when the most long and involved discussion and even debate at the oral exam turns on the question, "What is a geisha?" This shows that students have not only learned, but are actively participating in shaping new knowledge.

Endnotes

¹ The syllabi and schedules for versions of "The American Life of Japanese Women" and "Geisha in History, Fiction, and Fantasy" are online at <http://www.unc.edu/~bardsley/>

² Arthur Golden, *Memoirs of a Geisha* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997).

- ³ I give an overview of academic studies of geisha and recent Japanese publications in a review essay available online: “Liza Dalby’s *Geisha: The View Twenty-five Years Later.*” *Southeast Review of Asian Studies*, Vol. 31 (2009): 309-323. This retrospective review essay also describes the usefulness of *Geisha* as classroom text useful for interrogating performances of race, gender, and nation. An excellent list of resources for teaching about geisha compiled by Roger Sensenbaugh is available online on the website for SPICE (Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education) at <http://spice.stanford.edu/docs/179>. See also Pradt, Sarah J. and Kawashima, Terry “Teaching the ‘Geisha’ as Cultural Criticism,” *Education about Asia*, vol.6, no. 1 (2001): 26-31.
- ⁴ For information on the many forms this new interest in the maiko is taking in Japan, see Jan Bardsley, “The Maiko Boom: The Revival of Kyoto’s Novice Geisha,” *Japan Studies Review*, forthcoming in 2010 online at <http://asian.fiu.edu/>
- ⁵ Liza Dalby. *Geisha*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1983). 25th Anniversary Edition, Updated with a New Preface.
- ⁶ <http://www.lizadalby.com/LD/welcome.html>
- ⁷ Kelly Foreman, “Bad Girls Confined: Okuni, Geisha, and the Negotiation of Female Performance Space,” in Laura Miller and Jan Bardsley, eds., *Bad Girls of Japan* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 32-47. See also Foreman’s chapter, “The Perfect Woman: Geisha, Etiquette, and the World of Japanese Traditional Arts” in Jan Bardsley and Laura Miller, eds., *Manners and Mischief: Gender and Power in Japanese Conduct Literature*, forthcoming from University of California Press.
- ⁸ Kelly M. Foreman, *The Gei of Geisha: Music, Identity and Meaning* (Burlington, VT; Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2008).
- ⁹ Naoyuki Ogino, *A Geisha’s Journey: My Life as a Kyoto Apprentice*, translated by Gearoid Reidy and Philip Price (Tokyo, New York, London: Kodansha International, 2008).

- ¹⁰ The documentary, *The Secret Life of Geisha* (directed by James M. Prater, distributed by A&E Home Video, 1999; 100 minutes), although problematic in several ways, has some useful historical footage of geisha performances. *Japanese Dance: Succession of a Kyōmai Master* (directed by Nobuyuki Oka, distributed by Films for the Humanities & Sciences, 2000; 53 minutes) is effective for introducing students to the kind of dance practiced by geisha in Kyoto and to the philosophy and hierarchy of the traditional arts world.
- ¹¹ Mizuta Nobuo, director, *Maiko Haaaan!!! (Miiiss Maiko)* distributed by VIZ Pictures, 2007.
- ¹² Mille R. Creighton, "The *Depāto*: Merchandizing the West While Selling Japaneseness," in Joseph J. Tobin, ed., *Re-Made in Japan: Everyday Life and Consumer Taste in a Changing Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 42-57; Dorinne Kondo, "Orientalizing: Fashioning Japan," in *About Face: Performing Race in Fashion & Theater* (London: Routledge, 1997), 55-103.
- ¹³ Aimee Major Steinberger, *Japan Ai: A Tall Girl's Adventures in Japan* (Agoura Hills, CA: Go!Comi, 2007). The author is currently writing a book on cos-play, a popular phenomenon in Japan, the U.S., and other parts of the globe in which fans dress up as their favorite characters from manga and anime.
- ¹⁴ Cecilia Segawa Seigle, *Yoshiwara: The Glittering World of the Japanese Courtesan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), 169-203.
- ¹⁵ See James T. Araki, "Sharebon: Books for Men of Mode" *Monumenta Nipponica*, 24: 1/2 (1969): 31-45; "Age of the Dandy: The Flowering of Yoshiwara Arts," in Seigle, *Yoshiwara*, 129-168.
- ¹⁶ Chikamatsu Monzaemon, *The Love Suicide at Amijima* (Shinjūten no Amijima) in Chikamatsu, Monzaemon, and Donald Keene, *Four Major Plays of Chikamatsu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 170-208.
- ¹⁷ Ninagawa Mika, director, *Sakuran*, distributed by Asmik Ace Entertainment, 2007.

- ¹⁸ Masuda Sayo, *Autobiography of a Geisha*, Translated by G.G. Rowley (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).
- ¹⁹ Mizoguchi Kenji, director, *Tōkyō kōshinkyoku* (Tokyo March, 1929), distributed by Seisaku chosaku Kabushiki Kaisha Matsuda Eigasha : Sōhatsubaimoto Ōrudo Nyū, [2000?]
- ²⁰ Mizoguchi Kenji, director, *A Geisha (Gion Matsuri)*, distributed by Daiei Motion Picture Company, 1953; Naruse Mikio, director, *Flowing (Nagareru)*, distributed by Toho Pictures, 1956.
- ²¹ Hane, Mikiso. *Peasants, Rebels, Women, and Outcastes: The Underside of Modern Japan* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 206-225.
- ²² Vera Mackie, “The Metropolitan Gaze: Travellers, Bodies, and Spaces.” *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context*, Issue 4, (2000), online at <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue4/vera.html/>
- ²³ For an excellent essay on this play, see Yorimitsu Hashimoto, “Japanese Tea Party: Representations of Victorian Paradise and Playground in *Geisha* (1896),” pps. 104-124 in John K. Walton, ed., *Histories of Tourism : Representation, Identity, and Conflict* (Channel View Publications, 2005). The play is available online through Google Books.
- ²⁴ Vern Sneider, *The Teahouse of the August Moon* (New York: Putnam, 1951); Patrick, John, and Vern Sneider, *The Teahouse of the August Moon, a Play* (New York: Putnam, 1952); David Mann directed the film adaptation in 1956, which is distributed by MGM/UA Home Video.
- ²⁵ For analysis of Shirley MacLaine’s 1962 film, *My Geisha*, (directed by Jack Cardiff, distributed by Paramount Home Video), see “The Return of the Butterfly” in Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the ‘Yellow Peril’ Race, Sex, and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 176-201; “The Dark Heart of Fantasy: Japanese Women in the Eyes of the Western Male” in Susan Napier, *From Impressionism to Anime: Japan as Fantasy and Fan Culture in the Mind of the West* (New York: Palgrave, 2008), 103-124; Naoko Shibuasawa,

- “Hollywood’s *Geisha*” in *America’s Geisha Ally: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 255-287.
- ²⁶ View several of Iona Rozeal Brown’s paintings online the virtual gallery maintained by Spellman College at <http://www.spelman.edu/bush-hewlett/a3/>
- ²⁷ Rob Marshall, director, *Memoirs of a Geisha*, distributed by Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2005. The harshest criticism leveled against the film *Memoirs of a Geisha* has come from director Rob Marshall’s choice to cast three ethnically-Chinese actresses in the lead roles. He chose Zhang Ziyi, of *Hidden Dragon*, *Crouching Tiger* fame, as the protagonist Chiyo/Sayuri; then, Malaysian-born Michelle Yeoh, also of *Hidden Dragon*, to play the “good geisha” Mameha; and then, Gong Li, famous for *Raise the Red Lantern*, to play the “evil geisha,” Hatsumomo. China banned the film, claiming its citizens would be humiliated by seeing these stars playing Japanese “prostitutes.” Asian American actors such as Lucy Liu supported Marshall’s decision, arguing that demanding an Asian actor’s ethnicity had to match that of the character narrowed opportunities for Asian actors further than they already were. Chinese director Chen Kaige, however, believed the castings choices showed how little Hollywood understood differences among Asians. Several articles on the controversy can be found in online newspapers and blogs.
- ²⁸ Tsuchitani’s poster is actually a modification of the poster for the exhibit, also seen all over San Francisco in 2004, titled “*Geisha: Beyond the Painted Smile*.” The original poster is available at: <http://www.scottstsuchitani.com/pages/geisha/fantasy.html>
- ²⁹ Anne Allison, Review of *Memoirs of a Geisha*, *Education about Asia*, vol. 5, no. 2 (Fall 2000), 42-44. The same issue of *EAA* includes an article for teaching *Memoirs* in comparative perspective; see Nancy Traubitz, “*Suggestions for Comparing The Life of an Amorous Woman, Moll Flanders, and Memoirs of a Geisha*,” *Education about Asia*, vol. 5, no. 2 (Fall 2000), 33-39.

- ³⁰ Narrelle, Morris, “Innocence to Deviance: The Fetishisation of Japanese Women in Western Fiction, 1890s-1990s,” *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context*, Issue 7, March 2002, online at <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue7/morris.html>.
- ³¹ Kawabata Yasunari, *Snow Country* (Yukiguni, 1952) , Translated by Edward G. Seidensticker (New York: Knopf, 1969 [c1956, 1958]); Nagai Kafû, *Geisha Rivalry* (Udekurabe, 1918), Translated by Stephen Snyder (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007). Iwasaki Mineko with Randee Brown, *Geisha, A Life* (New York: Washington Square, 2003). Charging that Golden had betrayed a promise not to reveal her identity, Iwasaki sued the author. The two ended up settling out of court and Iwasaki published her own memoir in English and Japanese.

In the Footsteps of the Master: Confucian Values in Anime and Manga

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Since their introduction to Japan in the Sixth Century, the teachings of Confucius have played an important role in the creation and sustenance of societal values and order. While Japanese society has changed much since the dawn of the postwar era, these same basic principles are still highly influential, but are seen in some surprising forms. Geared primarily at pre-teen and teen-age boys, recent *shōnen* anime, especially *Naruto* and *Bleach*, evince Confucian values while encouraging the viewer to identify with and embrace them. While some critics of contemporary culture are quick to point out some of the societal breakdowns and subcultural variances common to the *Otaku* phenomenon, Confucianism is still alive and well, albeit in reinterpreted forms. Using *shōnen* anime in the classroom to examine traditional values creates a useful device for understanding Japanese popular culture and its connection to larger anthropological and historical themes.

Traditional Confucian Influences

That Confucius has historically had a great influence on Japanese society is no secret. In conjunction with Buddhism, the teachings of Confucius made their way to Japan from China via emissaries from Korea in 552, when the kingdom of Paekche was seeking allies in their struggles for power with the competing kingdoms of Koguryo and Silla. This ushered in a new era of learning as the Japanese elites began to adopt a new written language, mainland Asian philosophy, moral values, and religion. In a matter of roughly fifty years, these new concepts had become so influential that Prince Shōtoku incorporated them into his seventeen-article constitution in 604

AD. The entire first article of this constitution addresses the Confucian concept of harmony, or *wa*, stating,

Harmony is to be valued, and avoidance of wanton opposition to be honored...when those above are harmonious and those below are friendly, and there is concord in the discussion of business, right views of things spontaneously gain acceptance. Then what is there which cannot be accomplished?¹

Over the years, Confucianism waxed and waned in popularity as Buddhist doctrines increased in popularity. These doctrines of impermanence and disillusionment with humanity were popular from the Heian era until the beginning of the Tokugawa Period, primarily because of constant warring and cycles of upheaval. It makes sense that amidst all of the death and destruction, people would look for spiritual solutions for their miserable state. However, once the Tokugawa consolidated power and put an end to a bloody hundred years of war, he needed doctrines necessarily different from otherworldly Buddhism to govern the land efficiently. Or, as William Theodore De Bary puts it:

Buddhism, which had long since declined on the Continent but was still a living force in Ieyasu's homeland, generally took a pessimistic view of life in this changing uncertain world. It had little hope in human society or the moral order; all laws but the Law of Buddha's Liberating Truth were delusive and burdensome. The Buddhist solution was to 'leave the world' to seek total emancipation by Enlightenment or through the saving power of Amida. But Ieyasu and his successor sought peace and promise of this in the stress on rule of law and order throughout the universe, its optimistic view of man's political and social intelligence, and its insistence upon individual morality as foundation of the state.²

Thus, Confucianism once again became the basis for the legal system and moral education throughout Japan, though slightly different from earlier forms. Tokugawa's Neo-Confucianism differed from China in that the relationship of lord and vassal was stressed above all else, along with a focus on Japanese history rather than Chinese classics. However, Neo-Confucianism in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Japan, as represented by Chu Hsi's synthesis of speculative thought in the Sung school was only the culmination of a movement begun much earlier in the Sung period to revive the original Confucian tradition and reassert its validity for later times.³

Broadly, some of the key teachings of Neo-Confucianism as adopted by Ieyasu included the classical importance of the five cardinal relationships, each of which is characterized with specific virtues:

Between parent and child there is intimacy.
Between lord and minister there is duty.
Between husband and wife there is differentiation.
Between elder and junior there is precedence.
Between friend and friend, there is fidelity⁴

In addition to these relationships, Neo-Confucianism stressed the supremacy of virtues such as *li (rei)* <y “ritual propriety” and *ren (jin)* N benevolence or “human-heartedness,” and of course, filial piety, which Tokugawa scholar, Nakae Toju, calls the “summit of virtue.”⁵

Exploring *Shōnen* Manga and Anime

Despite the overall foundational importance of Confucianism to the understanding of Japanese culture, for new students of East Asia, these relationships and virtues may seem to be a relic of the past, given passing attention as something to be learned one semester for the purposes of passing tests and writing papers. (These facts tend to become stashed in short-term memory, only to be forgotten the next semester.) For this reason, it is helpful to find contemporary expressions of living Confucian values within Japanese society to illustrate Confucian

thinking in the classroom. Taken in conjunction with traditional materials, certain *shōnen* manga and anime illustrate Confucian principles as they might apply to daily life in contemporary Japan.⁶ That is to say, instead of working only with abstract concepts, when students analyze and discuss *shōnen* titles like *Naruto* and *Bleach* from the Confucian perspectives learned in their coursework, they are able to walk away with a more concrete example of how foundational values are referenced and even taught within these media.⁷

Naruto

One such example of this media is *Naruto*, by Masashi Kishimoto. Published by *Shōnen Jump* in both anime and manga forms, *Naruto* has gained a considerable following in both Japan and North America. The world of *Naruto* is a fun, fictional pastiche. As an asynchronous representation of Japan, hidden ninja villages exist to ensure the safety and protection of the citizens of the country in which they live. Each country is controlled by a *daimyo*,⁸ yet the viewer is never shown the *daimyo* or any samurai. The hidden ninja villages are not medieval, nor do they exist in any form of Confucian four-class system favored by Tokugawa Ieyasu.⁹ Modern technology exists side-by-side with ancient weapons, cup-ramen, and *yakiniku*.¹⁰ Ninja students are educated in special ninja schools where they are taught various forms of *jutsu*, or techniques. The schools these students attend resemble contemporary Japanese schools, complete with a homeroom teacher and organized seating. Ninja families have high expectations for their students, and each family or clan has specific individual traits based on their bloodline. For viewers, in many ways the inhabitants of *Naruto*'s "Hidden Leaf Village" or *Konohagakure*, could be friends and neighbors in any Japanese town, albeit with asynchronous vocations and traditions.

A hierarchy governs these hidden ninja villages. At the top of the pyramid is a village elder, known as the *-kage*, whose title is based on the country of origin. For instance, the Hidden Leaf Village is located in the Fire Country, so the chief village elder is the *Hokage* (Fire shadow). In the Wind Country, the

leader of the Hidden Sand Village is the *Kazekage* (Wind shadow). Each hidden village's *kage* is ultimately responsible for the growth, order, peace, strength, and security of the entire village. He or she is, in essence, the village's father or mother. Underneath the *kage* are various *jōnin* (upper-level) ninja who are responsible for the most difficult missions. These *jōnin* are often paired up with *genin* (lower-level), recent graduates from ninja training school, in order to show them the ropes on lesser missions. They are to teach the *genin* and *chūnin* (mid-level) life skills, from teamwork and strategy to discipline and advanced techniques. The village's *kage* will strategically pair up various *jōnin* with corresponding *genin* and *chūnin* based on temperament, skills, and background in order to create capable, self-sufficient teams for the future. All ninja must take various tests to prove their skills and abilities in order to rise in rank, similar to the traditional *iemoto* system found in various trades, traditional arts, and martial arts.

The main character, Naruto, is quite complex and is worthy of our attention as a postmodern Japanese hero figure. The first Naruto installation introduces the viewer to recent history, including Naruto's birth and vignettes of his early years. Naruto is an orphan who has the destructive spirit of a Nine Tailed Fox sealed inside of him. He becomes the vessel of this spirit when the Fourth *Hokage* used a sealing technique to subdue the fox inside Naruto when it was attacking *Konoha*. Due to the attacks of the Nine Tailed Fox, many valiant ninja died and much of the village was destroyed. Sealing the spirit of the Nine Tailed Fox into the body of the infant Naruto cost the Fourth *Hokage* his life. After the death of the Fourth *Hokage*, the previously retired Third *Hokage* took over the leadership of the village once again. Naruto, who is roughly twelve years old when the story begins, is an outcast. Having no parents, he lives by himself in a small apartment, subsisting on cup ramen, milk, and any food that his *sensei* may treat him to, especially ramen from the Ichiraku ramen shop. Naruto shows great heart and is willing to put forth great effort to be noticed, whether the attention is positive or not. In the first episode, Naruto is willfully defacing a Mount Rushmore-esque monument, containing the faces of *Konoha's*

past four *Hokages*, with paint and brush. He feverishly works, noting that now people will recognize him. Because the Nine Tailed Fox, the demon who caused so much death and destruction, is sealed up within Naruto, the village sees him as the fox, rather than the carrier of this fox. Thus, he is shunned and seeks to prove himself so vigorously.

Naruto is recognized, but not as he had hoped. He enters into the category of a *meiwaku*—a nuisance. In fact, throughout the entire series, now spanning multiple volumes and television episodes, Naruto figuratively and literally, is the embodiment of *meiwaku*, both through the *meiwaku* creature within him and the *meiwaku* he creates with his immature bravado. *Meiwaku* can be defined as an annoyance or a disturbance, especially when the disturbance disrupts harmony or *wa*, a key value in Confucian teaching. Much of Confucius' teaching was about maintaining harmony with society, with government, with nature, and especially in daily interactions. As Confucius said, "when harmony prevails, there will be no scarcity of people; and when there is such a contented repose, there will be no rebellious upsets."¹¹ Naruto's rebellious attempts to grab attention have disturbed the *wa* of the community, and so he must make amends. His *sensei*, Iruka, makes him clean up the entire mess. When Naruto grumbles, however, his *sensei* illustrates another Confucian tenet: benevolence. He promises to treat Naruto to ramen at Ichiraku if he finishes up. This gives Naruto the extra pep to get the job done.

Later on in the episode, the viewer learns more about Naruto's failure. Because he does not have the support of a loving family, he is not able to excel at school. He cannot do the complicated *jutsu* that require concentration and use of spiritual energy, or *chakra*. While he has sheer strength, he cannot channel it properly, and he cannot pass the qualifying tests at school to become a junior grade ninja. This results in his already weak self-confidence being sapped almost entirely. While his whole class graduates from ninja school and becomes *genin*, Naruto is left out. We see him sitting off to the side on a swing while the rest of the new ninjas are being congratulated by their families. One of the mothers says, "Isn't he the one? It's

good that he failed, he shouldn't become a ninja" in a shameful voice, referring to the fact that the Nine-Tailed Fox is sealed within. This is where the story begins to shift.

The benevolent and wise Third *Hokage* tells Iruka that he paired Iruka with Naruto *on purpose* because Iruka had a similar background. Like Naruto, he was always clowning around for attention and had no parents. (Iruka lost his parents during the rampage of the very same Nine Tailed Fox that Naruto is carrying.) Iruka remembers his shame and loneliness as the *Hokage* tells him to be more lenient on Naruto, but, knowing that the Nine-Tailed Fox killed his parents, there is also tension within Iruka over the fact that Naruto is the vessel of this creature.

The example of the *Hokage*'s relationship with Iruka-sensei and Iruka-sensei's relationship with Naruto are examples of contemporary takes on three of the cardinal Confucian relationships: Ruler-ruled, father-son, and elder brother-younger brother. The *Hokage* fills the role of brother, ruler and father for the entire village. He is characterized, as Confucius prescribed, by his wisdom and his benevolence, by duty and precedence. In the first episode, Iruka clearly shows benevolence and care for Naruto as his "younger brother" in the ninja hierarchy. (Other *jonin* fill this role in subsequent installments). Naruto works for acceptance and recognition both by the *Hokage* and his teacher. Where Naruto is a *meiwaku*, he is to be admonished and corrected, where he is weak, he is to be strengthened, and when he does well, he is to be rewarded. The Confucian relationships serve to shape Naruto into a respectable and productive member of society.

Throughout the series, Naruto's *meiwaku* constantly comes into play as teachers and friends attempt to shape him into a person who fits better with the group, being an individual in context, rather than a brash individualist. Naruto has lacked the parent-child bond, and has had very few ways of being actualized and encouraged. He has needed these relationships to guide him on his way toward becoming a *genin*. Once Naruto has become a *genin*, he is put on a three-man team with some

very different personalities, being instructed by one of the town's *Jonin* heroes: Hatake Kakashi.

Kakashi understands the importance of friendship within the context of striving to excel, follow the rules, and win the battle. When working with this new three-man group to introduce the importance of teamwork, he puts the three young ninja to a test. He has Naruto tied to a pole for disobeying, and gives two *bentō* to the remaining ninja, Haruno Sakura, Uchiha Sasuke (neither Sasuke nor Sakura like Naruto, but they tolerate him because he is on their team). While Naruto is tied up, they are told that they are not allowed to feed Naruto, and they should get ready for another test. Naruto is starving and both Sakura and Sasuke decide to give him some of their lunch, finally acknowledging their need for teamwork; a weakened member would be of no use in their quest. Naruto receives the lunch tearfully, and an enraged Kakashi-sensei explodes out of nowhere. After instilling much fear, he gently tells them “*gokaku*” (you passed!) and explains that they did the right thing. Sometimes rules should be broken in favor of taking care of your comrades. Feeding Naruto was the right thing to do, because those who abandon their comrades are *kuzu* (garbage).¹² In this exercise, Kakashi was trying to instill the values of duty and friendship into the next generation, to make a team viable and strong, building a sense of *wa* among disparate personalities. This is also the ultimate will of the *Hokage* for the entire village. Thus, Kakashi is illustrating the Confucian importance of benevolence and reciprocity.

That the *Hokage* plays such an important Confucian role is further demonstrated in another story arc. When Team Kakashi (the moniker given to Naruto's team) go on their first mission, it seems to be an easy one: to be *yojimbo* (bodyguards) for a certain bridge builder on the way to a neighboring country. Because the bridge builder lied regarding the serious danger of the mission, a relatively weak team was dispatched. They did not know that this man was highly targeted by corrupt officials and ninja who left their village (these rogues are similar to *rōnin*). These characters did not want the bridge to be built and were willing to kill to prevent this from happening. After safely leading

their charge back to his village, team Kakashi works very hard to keep this man protected, and then help defend his village and workers in order to get the bridge built. When the truth of his pretense comes out, the bridge builder asks them why they continued on and helped him. Kakashi responds, “Not doing right when you know it is right is the coward’s way. There are no weak soldiers under a valiant commander. They’re teachings of the previous *Hokage*.” This was taken straight out of *Analects* 2:24. Confucius said, “Faced with what is right, to leave it undone shows a lack of courage.” Kakashi wanted to help his young team train and succeed in a difficult situation, one that was even created under false pretenses for much less money, demanding the skills of much stronger ninja. When asked why Team Kakashi went above and beyond the ordinary *yojimbo* work, the words he uses essentially equate Confucius with the previous *Hokage*. Kakashi’s morals and integrity come from the same source that all the Hidden Leaf Village ninja look up to and strive to become. As most Japanese students have been exposed to the *Analects* from an early age, these values and moral authority would not be foreign to them; here too, readers are given concrete examples of Confucian values in action as we delve into the fantasy world of *Naruto* at our leisure.

Bleach

Bleach, like *Naruto*, is also a story of hard work, friendship, and winning at all costs, but stresses dimensions of struggling with the self and the spirit world. The main character, Kurosaki Ichigo, is a Japanese high school student with “naturally” blond hair (hence the title, *Bleach*, since everyone thinks he bleaches his hair). Ichigo can see ghosts, and eventually becomes a “Death God” (*shinigami*) helping direct the shades of the deceased to the afterlife. He becomes a *shinigami* after the *shinigami* assigned to his town, Kuchiki Rukia, is gravely wounded fighting a “hollow” or evil spirit. She has him plunge her spirit sword into his abdomen to give him a measure of her power so that he may destroy the hollow. (Hollows are attracted to people with strong spiritual energy, known as *reiatsu*. Ichigo defeats the

hollow, but all of Rukia's powers are mistakenly transferred to Ichigo. Now, Ichigo must accept the responsibility for his actions (had he not blindly attacked the hollow, he would not have endangered Rukia who blocked the hollow's counterattack, leaving her gravely wounded) and keep his town safe from the other hollows. Here, the concepts of *on* and *giri* are introduced, in the sense that Ichigo must atone for his *meiwaku* against the *shinigami* when he blindly rushed into the thick of a battle he did not understand. Ichigo spends a great deal of time establishing himself and training to defeat these hollows, getting progressively stronger and more impressive with each episode, despite his penchant to continue to rush into difficult situations headlong.

Ichigo spends lots of time establishing his identity as a substitute-*shinigami* as well as a high school student, loyal friend, and family member. Ichigo's relationships also evince Confucian underpinnings, despite the fact that they are often non-traditional. For instance, Ichigo's father is very odd; he is always shadowboxing and picking friendly fights with him. Everyone thinks he is a buffoon, only later to be surprised when they learn that he, too, is a very powerful *shinigami* in disguise. Initially, it seems that Ichigo does not respect his father much, and in most cases his father does not seem to relate well to his children. Due to a hollow's attack, Ichigo's mother, Masaki, died when Ichigo was very young. The hollow, Grand Fisher, used a lure to trick Ichigo into believing that a young girl was drowning in the sea. Masaki went to save him, and she was killed by Grand Fisher, who absorbed her soul. Thus, Ichigo blames himself for her death. Only later, in the story arc where Ichigo and his family go to the mother's grave on the anniversary of her death, does Ichigo learn that it was Grand Fisher who killed his mother, not Ichigo's wandering off. Grand Fisher shows up to try to kill Ichigo at this point, and Ichigo takes his new *shinigami* form and battles this hollow until it flees.

At the end of the arc, each of the members of the family prays in front of the grave and talks to the spirit of the mother. Ichigo's father smokes a cigarette, which he explains he only does on the anniversary of her death, since she once told him that his "hand looked cool" while he smoked. Ichigo wonders

how his father can smile and why no one blames him. Ichigo's father tells him that Masaki would be angry with him if he blamed Ichigo for her death, and that the woman he loved did not mind dying to protect her son: Ichigo is the one Masaki died protecting. Then Ichigo's father kicks him in the back and tells him to "live life to the fullest, age to the fullest, bald to the fullest, and die long after I do. And if possible, die with a smile. Otherwise, I won't be able to look Masaki in the eye. Don't be wishy-washy, you're still too young to look cool carrying your grief around." He lets his father walk away, and then addresses Rukia, who was listening nearby, saying, "Let me be a *shinigami* a bit longer, I want to grow stronger and stronger and protect them from the hollows. Otherwise, I won't be able to look my mother in the eye."

In this interchange, we see a father and son bonding in a moment of intimacy before the grave of the mother. Both father and son want to live up to her memory. The father encourages the son to live life to the fullest and have no regrets, especially since his wife gave her life for Ichigo without hesitation. The son wants to protect the family the way his mother protected him. There is a sense of Confucian reciprocity in this scene. The father, generally portrayed as an unconventional oddball now appears "cool" and gives his son samurai-like advice. The son begins to embrace his identity as a strong young man with a purpose, and in turn wants to overcome his past and grow stronger still for his family. These echoes of old Japan still reverberate and resonate with today's youth.

Manga

Understanding this atavistic tendency of the youth, manga publishers seek to deliver stories that will sell well in this climate. And it makes sense that such stories with strong values should be published by *Shōnen Jump*. In *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga*, manga expert and translator Frederick L. Schodt shed some light on Jump's success and popularity with pre-teen and teenage boys, as well as middle-aged corporate employees:

...*Weekly Boy's Jump* established a firm editorial policy that continues to this day. First, it conducted a survey of young readers, asking them to name (1) the word that warmed their hearts most, (2) the thing that they felt most important, and (3) the thing that made them the happiest. The answers were *yūjō* (friendship), *doryoku* (effort, or perseverance), and *shōri* (winning, or victory). These three words then became the criteria for selecting the stories, whether adventures or gags.¹³

Earlier *Jump* titles, like *Dragon Ball Z*, *Slam Dunk* and *Dr. Slump* catered to the readers' survey. The main characters never died, were never defeated, and succeeded on sheer force of will and determination. These manga also repurposed old Samurai values that were eschewed in the postwar era. As Schodt also explains, this is a major reason manga took off after the Second World War; people like Tezuka Osamu and one of his editors Kinai Takashi were looking to help create a better society and provide ways for children to find themselves in the destitute postwar conditions.¹⁴ As is true for *Naruto*, *Bleach*, and other contemporary *manga*, importance was placed on friendship, duty, training, and winning, key values that the readers embraced in the postwar era. So, there is an interplay between societal Confucian values already adhered to at some levels in the readership and what the editors and authors may be trying to promote into their stories.

Language of *Keigo*

These stories also illustrate core Confucian values that underpin Japanese society, from which much may be learned. For instance, rules of *sonkeigo* include three levels of politeness in the Japanese language: the plain or direct style, the distal or polite style, and the honorific style, *Sonkeigo* or *keigo*. *Keigo* is a type of language that requires a speaker to know his or her place within the context of whichever group or person with which he or she is speaking. If a speaker is in the out-group, she/he will need to use honorific language to honor the speakers with whom one is not as close, while using different language to humble oneself. Special verb forms and honorific prefixes are attached to nominals in order to show this respect. Mastering

keigo is important to make native speakers feel more comfortable when they are being addressed. When speaking with an older Japanese gentleman, it would be terribly inappropriate to use familiar forms, as it would show disrespect. Thus, *keigo* is used to preserve *wa* (harmony) by acknowledging differences between the speaker and who is being spoken to.

However, because of its power to localize and show the relative relationship between a speaker and the in or out group, *keigo* may also be used to distance oneself from an embarrassing or *meiwaku* person. In the *Bleach* series, there is an insecure character who is named Keigo, who is a class clown and given to excessive displays of emotion. He is often ignored or downplayed by members of the group who are embarrassed by his behavior. One classmate in particular, Mizuiro, often speaks in *keigo* to Keigo who catches on and asks why everyone is shifting to *keigo* (thereby distancing oneself by being overly polite.)

In fact, as relationships grow into friendship, Japanese friends may tell foreign friends that they no longer have to use the polite or “distal” style, because they are comfortable with the degree of commonality and closeness that plain-form Japanese implies. Thus, not only are manga and anime excellent tools for students of Japanese language, but for students who wish to explore how the language functions to create harmony and establish group norms within the Confucian hierarchy.

Conclusion

Recent attention has been given to Japan’s social ills. Stories of parasite singles, shut-ins (*hikkikomori*), freeter, low birth rate, *oyaji-gari*, and a few random acts by outlandish *otaku* are easy fodder for western reportage.¹⁵ While these stories are undoubtedly true, it is a sad fact that as a result of these stories, many in the West are given a mistaken impression that Japanese popular culture exists in a freakish, dysfunctional world of self-absorbed fantasy and abnormal obsession. Some may be inclined to think that the youth of Japan has abandoned its traditional values and gone off the deep end, but this is most certainly not the case. As is true with any subculture, those

involved in these types of activities are by no means in the majority; a few bad examples do not represent the entire culture, in the same way, a few racy or depraved manga do not define the entire genre. On the whole, it is safe to say that members of Japanese society still adhere to a strong work ethic, traditional values, friendship, reciprocity, and propriety. In the examples of *Shōnen Jump* manga and anime, we can see that these values not only are crucial to the power of the narrative, they are welcomed by readers. Using these media in the classroom helps illustrate the endurance of traditional Confucian values while providing an exciting platform to analyze and discuss them.

Endnotes

¹Wm Theodore De Bary, et al. *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, vol. 1. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 48.

²*Ibid.*, 324

³*Ibid.*, 384.

⁴“Regulations for the School of the White Deer Cave.” *Ibid.*, 356.

⁵*Ibid.*, 374.

⁶For particularly helpful in exploring the basic concepts of contemporary Confucian values in action, see Joy Hendry’s *Understanding Japanese Society* and T.R. Reid’s *Confucius Lives Next Door*.

⁷In the first chapter of his book, *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga*, manga expert Fred Schodt demonstrates that manga are an important cultural medium worth studying due to their “unfiltered” nature, offering “the reader an extremely raw and personal view of the world” (31). This is true for many original titles, but in the case of publishers like *Shonen Jump’s* Shūeisha, they are heavily edited; manga authors tend to create more of what they are required in conjunction with their editor. It would be worthwhile to study to determine whether or not the editors of *Shonen Jump* are purposefully directing the authors to infuse Confucian and other traditional values into their titles. As Shūeisha’s *senzoku* system is being challenged, this may change. For more on the *senzoku* system, see Sharon Kinsella, *Adult Manga*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2000), 54-62.

- ⁸Daimyō were the feudal lords of Japan, accountable to the Shogun. The feudal system began with the Kamakura Bakufu and lasted until 1868, with the restoration of the Emperor Meiji.
- ⁹Tokugawa Ieyasu's four-class system, in order of rank and importance, was: samurai, farmers, artisans, and merchants. See Joy Hendry, *Understanding Japanese Society*. (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 105-107.
- ¹⁰*Yakiniku* is Korean family-style barbeque, where meat and vegetables are placed on a central grill and everyone can cook and eat the morsels they choose.
- ¹¹Confucius, *The Analects*. (New York: Filiquarian Publishing, 2006), 108
- ¹²When Kakashi was about the same age, he had to learn the same lesson in a much harder way. Kakashi strictly adhered to all rules, because his father was one who did not. Kakashi was shamed by his father's actions, and resolved to play all things by the rulebook. During a mission, enemies captured one of his teammates. He insisted that he and his remaining teammate continue on, pressuring him to abandon his comrade to ensure the success of a mission, since he was in charge. His teammate refused and set off in hopes of locating and rescuing their captured colleague. Kakashi initially struck out on his own, but had a change of heart and went to help. Had they set out a bit earlier instead of bickering, they would have had greater success. Sadly, his colleague who had convinced him to search for their lost teammate was killed in the process.
- ¹³Frederick L. Schodt, *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga*. (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 1996), 89-90
- ¹⁴Frederick L. Schodt, *The Astroboy Essays*. (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2007), 21-33.
- ¹⁵An August 2009 New York Times article by Lisa Katayama describes a forty-something who carries a body pillow emblazoned with cartoon images of a preteen female around on dates, while Michael Zielenziger's *Shutting Out the Sun: How Japan Created Its Own Lost Generation* from 2006 detailed high suicide rates, an excessively consumerist society, obsessed with high-end goods, and maladjusted males who never leave their bedrooms.

RESEARCH OF NOTE

Marketing Japan: Manga as Japan's New Ambassador

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If one is rolling through any major bookstore in the U.S. today one will encounter a prominently placed set of shelves labeled “Graphic Novels.” This is a relatively recent phenomenon. Fifteen years ago, most comic books were sold in specialty stores in the U.S..¹ but since the turn of the century, comics have made a resurgence. This trend has been fueled by new marketing tactics such as the use of the term “graphic novel” in order to combat the connotations of geeky adolescent boys, and by the promotion of a succession of Hollywood blockbusters based on traditional American comics—X Men, Batman, Spiderman, Iron man, the Hulk, the Shadow, Watchmen, etc, and the end is not yet in sight. However, as you start to peruse the “Graphic Novel” section of your local bookstore you will notice that roughly three quarters of the shelf space is devoted to manga (Japanese comics). Manga sales in the US have escalated in the past decade, from \$60 million in 2002 to \$200 million in 2007.² In fact, the explosive popularity of manga along with the cross-promotion of American comics through Hollywood are the driving forces behind the increasing prominence of graphic novels in the United States overall.

At the same time, in Japan, the press, scholars, and even government officials are labeling Japanese popular culture “Japan’s new ambassador.” If one peruses the manga studies section of any major Japanese bookstore, one will find numerous books describing or examining the appeal manga and anime³ have for international audiences. Additionally, in the past decade,

the Japanese government has begun to capitalize on the global popularity of Japanese popular culture. This new way of promoting Japan is evident in the pamphlet “Creative Japan,” produced and distributed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It asserts that, “It is impossible to fully convey here the magic of contemporary Japanese culture, which draws on a creative tradition with unbroken links to the past. However, we offer this brochure in the hope that it will enable people from other parts of the world to gain a greater understanding and appreciation of Japanese contemporary culture.”⁴ With short introductions to manga, anime, games, art, fashion, food, literature, architecture, design and technology, the brochure promotes international relations and an understanding of contemporary Japanese culture. Likewise, the former Prime Minister Taro Aso, a fan of manga and anime himself, identified Japanese tourism and culture as one of three high growth areas that would help revitalize the economy by the year 2020.⁵ One of the more provocative moves toward achieving this goal included the 2009 appointment of three new Foreign Ministry officials, known as “Cute Ambassadors.” The ambassadors, three young women dressed in popular fashion styles, travel to international festivals and events in order to teach about Japanese culture and popular culture.⁶ Through the initiation of international exchange projects related to traditional culture and art as well as pop culture, Prime Minister Aso hoped to make use of Japan’s soft power to further develop overseas markets for national products. In these examples we see a manga and anime as cultural ambassadors to the world.

In recent years a handful of scholars have argued convincingly as to why Americans like manga and anime, positing: exoticism, a dissatisfaction with simplistic American media, post 9/11 disillusion, etc.⁷ In this paper I examine the ways that manga has been translated, distributed, and marketed in order to determine the ways in which publishers promote or conceal the “Japaneseness” of Japanese popular culture. In particular, I focus my attention on the ways that cultural difference enters into discussions of manga markets in the U.S. with regard to format, content, and audience. By examining the

instances where publishers have successfully made decisions to keep Japanese content and the ways that these decisions have led, at least in part, to manga's popularity in the U.S., some light can be shed as to the ways that cultural differences are being played out throughout Japanese popular culture⁸ with special reference to the ways that Japanese culture is produced, packaged, and promoted through the international manga market.

Manga on the move: Licensing and Distribution of manga in the U.S.

Manga is a main medium of entertainment in Japan and has held such stature for much of the postwar era (since 1945). Manga, which literally means “various or whimsical pictures,” today refers to the expressive print medium that combines words and images to tell a story, or comics. While the word itself refers to a broad spectrum of print media, from one frame political satire, to four frame funnies, to longer two to three page gag manga, to dramatic short stories, multi-volume serialized novels comprise the bulk of the genre. Since the 1960s, manga have comprised between twenty to forty percent of all Japanese publications, although in recent years it has remained around twenty-two percent. In fact, the manga industry is not a specialty industry, but rather, most manga come from a manga division within a major publishing house. The top four publishing houses in Japan today (Kodansha, Shogakukan, Shueisha, Kadokawa) have the largest market share of manga alongside the standard fare of fiction, non-fiction, magazines, etc. Thus, manga developed into a mass medium like television or film, ranging in quality from literature to pulp fiction, with themes of historical romance, futuristic fantasy, super hero conflicts, high school life, sports, and economics. That is to say manga have become a fundamental part of popular culture in Japan, providing the backdrop to many other important forms of popular culture in Japan including anime, television, film and video.

Contrary to manga production in Japan, where it is a critical part of the culture industry, its success overseas has been primarily driven by fan interest, rather than by large-scale

corporate interests, although that is beginning to change. That is, until recently, most manga sales overseas were initiated by the importing company not by the Japanese publishing houses. Accordingly, Japan artists and editors focus their creative energies on their Japanese audiences, yet publishing houses have established international divisions to manage the licensing of their products and broker contracts for manga with international companies. As fan bases overseas continue to grow, manga publishers in Japan have begun to think about marketing their products overseas, even though the national market is still primary.⁹

Manga entered the market in the U.S. as a result of the popularity of anime. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, small groups of fans worked together to obtain and circulate a range of Japanese anime (animated TV shows and feature films). In fact from the 1960s onward, several anime were showcased on American television in major children's television timeslots ("Astroboy," "Speed Racer," "Star Blazers"). By the early 1990s, two anime feature film releases ("Akira" and "Ghost in the Shell") in theaters in the U.S. started the anime/manga boom that this paper addresses.¹⁰

Anime was much easier to import initially because it only required the addition of subtitles or voiceover dubbing (voiceovers).¹¹ On the other hand, the language and formatting of manga was initially cumbersome to translate. It wasn't simply a matter of translating the content and dialogue, but manga are read right to left, frame by frame, and page by page. So to adapt a manga into an English edition required either redrawing or flipping each page. Flipping was cheaper but often rendered images backwards, a detail that was sometimes too distracting to readers.

From the 1990s, several companies have come to dominate the manga translation and distribution market in the US, in particular Tokyopop, Viz, and more recently Del Rey.¹² Interestingly Viz Media and Del Rey both have official connections to one or two main publishing houses in Japan. VIZ LLC, located in San Francisco, California, has been one

of the main translators and publishers of *manga* in English in the US since 1987, when it began as a subsidiary of Shogakukan. In 2005, VIZ merged with ShoPro to become VIZ Media, a joint venture owned by Shogakukan and Shueisha.¹³ Consequently VIZ publishes *manga* almost exclusively from these two publishing houses. As the name implies VIZ Media has a broadly diversified line of products both anime and manga.

In 2005, Kodansha began a joint venture with Random House, starting the Del Rey *manga* line which publishes Kodansha's most popular titles.¹⁴ Del Rey has been a division of Random house since the 1970s with a focus on science fiction titles and in 2004 they branched into manga, followed quickly by the contract with Kodansha. Both of these mergers represent a foothold for major Japanese publishing houses in the US market, while providing VIZ and Del Rey with nearly limitless access to manga titles. Finally, in July of 2009 Kodansha opened Kodansha USA, the first full scale branch of a Japanese publishing house here in the U.S., to release a line of manga called Kodansha comics. According to Irie Yoshio, Vice President of Kodansha and head of Kodansha USA, Kodansha will continue to license titles to Del Rey and others, and Random House will distribute its comics.¹⁵ This is an active attempt at learning about the American manga market by working directly within it (although the venture has been slow to take off, suffering several delays).

Tokyopop, located in Los Angeles started primarily in manga publishing in 1996. From the beginning Tokyopop has been integrated into the internet, from their beginnings as a website which provided information about Asian cultural themes especially pop culture to their elaborate fan community and promotional site today.¹⁶ Tokyopop does not have a direct relationship with one publishing house but rather samples titles that may have appeal here and contracts with individual publishers to license them. This status gives them flexibility in choosing titles they want to publish, but also makes each contract negotiation more complex. Tokyopop primarily publishes manga and web content, and in 2006 the company restructured into

two companies: one to focus on media and original titles and the other to focus on the web content.

Finally, there are several institutions that have been influential in the growing manga market in the U.S.: major bookstore chains and libraries. In my interviews at each of the three publishing houses discussed above, the importance of both online sales of manga and the major bookstore chains arose. Indeed, one of the early problems manga publishers faced was where to market and distribute their comics. Should they be distributed alongside American comics in specialty stores or in mainstream bookstores?¹⁷ Comic book stores have never been a primary market for manga distribution; most carry a few top of the line and alternative titles (e.g. Tezuka Osamu and cult classics like *Akira*, *Ghost in the Shell*, and more artistic titles like *Tekkon Kinkreet*). But in the late 1990s, as both VIZ and Tokyopop began publishing more manga series in standardized format, several major bookstores began to take interest. In particular Tokyopop sought a market in the malls, where kids hang out, and partnered with Waldenbooks at the turn of the millennium. The goal was to reach beyond the audience that already liked comic books to sell manga more broadly. Shortly afterwards, *Barnes and Noble* and *Borders* both began carrying lines of manga from all the major publishers. In 2007, seventy-five percent of Tokyopop's manga sales were through *Barnes and Noble* and *Borders* according to Kasia Piekarz, manager of marketing and merchandizing. Additionally, a few popular manga are sold at *Walmart* and *Target*.

In speaking with people in the manga industry in the U.S., one of the promotional connections that surprised me was its relationship to libraries. Both Tokyopop and Del Rey Manga have sections on their webpage devoted to libraries and booksellers, with articles on issues like "An Introduction to Manga," "How to read manga," rating systems, as well as links to helpful listservs and blogs like "Graphic Novels in libraries listserv," "Mangablog," etc. .¹⁸ All three publishers discussed the role that libraries have played in promoting manga as books that attract young people who don't otherwise like to read. Across the nation many public libraries have developed manga

collections for their young readers.¹⁹ Each of these publishers sought to reach a wider audience than those who only go to comic book stores, and the interest of big bookstores and libraries has been important to the industry. But establishing markets in the mainstream also raises the issue of how and what to translate.

Translating comics, translating culture

The process of translation is always about more than linguistic switching. Translators have to choose whether to keep the natural feel and spirit of the text intact while sounding fluent in the second language, or to keep the translation as close to the original as possible, losing some fluidity of prose in the process. The process for translating *manga* has changed over time from an erasure of cultural difference to its promotion because of national origins. Each of the decisions I discuss below involves preserving the “Japaneseness” of the text.

One such example is the attempt to market *Doraemon* to American television executives, an effort recounted to me by the head of the manga division at Shogakukan. *Doraemon* is a catlike robot from the 22nd century, who lives with a Japanese family and helps out their hapless son through futuristic devices that he pulls from the pocket in his belly. *Doraemon* is one of the most popular manga characters in Japan, and his image saturates commercial products from toys, to lunchboxes, to household appliances. However, in the late 1970s, when Shogakukan approached US companies to try to market *Doraemon*, they were told that cultural markers such as chopsticks, futons, etc., would have to be removed. In its original state *Doraemon* was deemed “too Japanese” for American children. But when the artists, Fujio Fujiko,²⁰ were approached with this proposition they argued that to erase these cultural elements was to lose the essence of their creation. Thus, *Doraemon* has never been exported to the US, although in the intervening years it has become vastly popular throughout Asia (with no cultural changes). What is important about this example is that the cultural aspects alone made the cartoon “too

Japanese” for a Western audience, while the creators considered that Japaneseness to be at the very core of *Doraemon*.²¹

However, by the mid 1990s, with the rise in anime fans and global popularity of Pokémon and Sailor Moon, not to mention Nintendo and Sony video games, Japanese content within popular media was no longer an issue. In fact, it was a selling point. In the case of manga, publishers and translators had long struggled with the logistics as to how to translate the manga format. As has been noted, manga is read from right to left. One can make a mirror image of the page (called flipping), without significantly altering the text itself, but then everyone ends up left handed (which is all but unheard of for samurai) and certain scenes can literally feel backwards. One can also cut out and rearrange each frame by hand but that is cost prohibitive. Throughout the 1990s, most manga published in the U.S. were flipped as publishers tried to develop a market for the genre, but growth was slow. The few titles that remained in their original format catered to die-hard fans. However, in 2002, Tokyopop standardized the price and format of their manga and printed them unflipped, marketing them as more authentic—both because the standardized format was closer to the Japanese original as was the ordering of frames and pages.²² And it worked, revolutionizing manga in the U.S. Other publishers followed suit, although still today not all manga published in the U.S. are read right to left.

The move to publish unflipped manga was a boon to the industry in several different ways. On the one hand, it made publishing manga much cheaper: now the words just had to be translated and replaced within the frames. At the same time, according to Stuart Levy, CEO of Tokyopop, manga publishers and artists in Japan resented the suggestion of modifying their artistic creations to cater to an American format. Once Tokyopop saw success with unflipped titles the Japanese licenses poured in.²³ Similarly, fans are known for being perfectionists when it comes to their desired media, and in the case of manga and anime fans, this translates to demanding that their texts remain as close to the original as possible. For instance, no one has

spent time in an anime club without debating the horrors of your favorite movie with a bad dubbing. The transition to original format manga was immensely popular among fans in the U.S., a point I will return to in the next section.

While this format change was one of the most significant transitions in manga publishing, there are other areas of manga content where cultural translation has been cumbersome. One such instance is sound effects. The Japanese language is full of onomatopoeia. Onomatopoeia is not really quite the right term because in Japanese there are a wide variety of words that not only represent sounds but also a feeling or action. For example, the sound of noodles being slurped is *suru suru* and the word for someone smiling is *nico nico*. The inclusion of onomatopoeias in the structure of the Japanese language makes sound effects in manga seem less awkward than in American comics, where such words are used only in the medium of comics. Onomatopoeias are written in *katakana* for emphasis (a separate syllabary used for emphasis or foreign loan words, much like italics are used in English) and are used to enhance and control the flow of the page. But these words are notoriously hard to translate. Like the issue of flipping, in the end it is both cheaper for the publisher and more authentic for the fans if the original sound effects are left as they are, and this is not infrequently done.

Finally, according to Trisha Narwani, manga editor at Del Rey, when Del Rey began publishing their manga, they made a consistent effort to include cultural notes in the side bars, in order to explain customs or situations that may not be readily understandable to readers and to distinguish their manga from their competitors. These cultural notes serve to explain customs that the audience may not understand, drawing them into the world of the text, and furthering their knowledge of Japan in particular. Each of the tailoring of the manga texts themselves discussed here reflects nuanced decisions about translation, from keeping the text as authentic as possible, to providing explanatory notes, to helping readers better understand the story and its broader context. Likewise, each of these decisions

highlights the “Japaneseness” of manga texts, rather than obscuring or erasing it as was necessary in earlier eras. But these decisions also reflect and affect the composition of the audience for manga in the U.S. is and what their relationship to Japanese culture might be, an issue which I will turn to now.

Selling Manga, Selling Japan

While manga is a big business and a central part of the culture industry in Japan, in the U.S. manga’s popularity has been driven primarily by its fans. This is seen in the perseverance of the earliest anime fans who circulated videos direct from Japan via mailing lists, to the countless anime and manga fan websites, including scanlation (scanned translations of manga) and anime sites that provide pirated copies of manga and anime. In fact, the advent of the internet played no small role in connecting fans of manga and anime across the globe both to the texts they love and to each other. Indeed, the manga industry in Japan has been relatively slow at really embracing the international popularity of its products and most of the growth in the market has been driven by U.S. fans dedicated to providing more access to manga and anime, and to marketing experts who saw the potential of the genre.

While fans can be credited with the emergence of the market for manga in the U.S., they are a complicated audience, and are difficult to satisfy. As the examples above attest, fans prefer the content of manga to remain as close to the original as possible. Del Rey Manga Editor Trisha Narwani put it this way, “We would never substitute Brittany Spears for a Japanese pop singer because we didn’t think our readers would know the singer. Our fans are interested in Japanese culture and want these things explained rather than erased.” Not flipping, preserving original sound effects, and even obscure cultural context, are all a part of efforts to remain authentic as demanded by many fans.

Yet, here again we encounter issues of translation, although fans tend to want a whole series translated with as little change

as possible, in marketing manga to American audiences publishers have to pay attention to the age of the target audience and what may or may not be appropriate for them. This is a thorny issue in publishing manga because acceptance of representations of violence, drinking, smoking, or sexuality is different in Japan than in the U.S. For example, several publishers related examples of titles for young girls that have a comic side-character smoking. In the U.S., cigarettes are changed into lollipops. However, such changes are part of what can upset fans about mainstream translations of manga.

In recent years both the manga industry in Japan and overseas have had to battle pirated manga and anime markets.²⁴ Today almost as quickly as an anime appears on television in Japan or a manga book hits the bookstore, you can get an online version with subtitles/translated by fans.²⁵ Not only is this access to new content cheaper than buying them in bookstores, but for many, this gives fans control over keeping the authenticity as strong as possible. Several editors noted that they too watch scanlation and fan sites in order to see what fans are interested in and occasionally find particularly good translators for freelance work. Yet, like the music industry, the manga industry in Japan and abroad is trying to find ways to counter this phenomena, primarily through offering its own online versions and translations of new manga.

Outside of the manga publishing industry, fan desire for authenticity provides an interesting relationship to the cultural content of manga more generally. As high school teachers and college professors attest, the interest in Japanese language and enrollment in Japanese history, literature, and culture classes today is dominated by students who want to learn more about Japan after exposure to manga or anime. For some, this leads to a desire to learn the language simply so he or she can just watch the original, or maybe even translate them someday. But for others, manga leads them to desire to learn more about Japanese culture and history. This is what former Prime Minister Aso was focusing upon in his campaign to promote Japanese culture through popular culture, and we witness it daily in our classrooms, as this special journal edition attests.

Yet, because many, although not all, fans of manga move beyond enjoying the medium as a dynamic storyteller to seek out information about the context behind the story, whether historical or contemporary, aesthetic or humanistic, I suggest that its draw is at least in part particular to Japan. Furthermore, these students do not typically remain interested solely in contemporary Japan, nor in manga or anime. In fact, while students initially express an interest in Japan via popular culture, they move on and show an interest in history and culture. Outlining the areas where Japan is important in the translation, distribution, and consumption of manga allows us to think about what makes them global ambassadors. The fact that manga sales really began to escalate when the Japanese qualities were preserved and even accentuated likewise indicates that there is something beyond complicated plots, dissatisfaction with Hollywood, and exotic locals that is transmitted through manga. As attested by the fans of manga who desire to learn more about Japanese language, history and culture, via popular culture, in fact, the selling of manga is not just about rebranding comics or challenging Hollywood, but is rather about the selling of cultural difference.

Endnotes

¹This article focuses on manga distribution in the U.S. although there are significant implications here for the global market more broadly. Most poignantly because the U.S. market is more firmly established, so companies from France and Europe that want to license manga tend to translate the English version rather than starting from scratch with the original Japanese. Clements, Jonathan. 1995. The mechanics of the US anime and manga industry. *Foundation* 64:32-44.

²Koulikov, Mikhail. 2007. ICv2 White Paper. In *ICv2 Conference on Anime and Manga*. New York, NY: ICv2.

³While manga refers to print comics, anime refers to animated shorts or films in televisual, video, DVD or feature film format.

- ⁴Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japanese Embassy in the UK. 2007. Creative Japan. The brochure is available in PDF form from <http://www.creativejapan.net/index.html>.
- ⁵to Masami. 2009. Aso reveals new plan to create 2 million jobs. *The Japan Times*, April 10.
- ⁶Kaminishikawara Jun. 2009. ‘Cute ambassadors’ roam globe to promote Japan’s pop culture. *The Japan Times*, June 17.
- ⁷See in particular, Kelts, Roland. 2006. *JAPANAMERICA: How Japanese Pop Culture Has Invaded the U.S.* New York: Palgrave, Macmillan; Napier, Susan J. 2005. *Anime: from Akira to Howl’s Moving Castle, Updated Edition: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*. 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave; and Napier, 2007). *From Impressionism to Anime*, (New York: Palgrave, 2007).
- ⁸My dissertation research focused on the production of *shM`jo* manga (girls comics). As I was conducting my research in 2000–2002 the American market for manga was just starting to be discussed in publishing circles in Japan; indeed, many of my interviews ended with an inquiry about whether or not *shM`jo* manga would sell to American girls. This paper comes out of a smaller follow-up project on manga in the US in dialogue with my research on the industry in Japan.
- ⁹It is important to note that marketing *manga* overseas in Asia predated attempts to market it in the U.S. and Europe.
- ¹⁰For a more detailed history of anime in the U.S. see, LaMarre, Thomas. 2009. *The anime machine : a media theory of animation*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; and Napier, 2005).
- ¹¹Dubbing is the process of rerecording voices for a foreign film or show, rather than relying on subtitles which are more cumbersome and out of the running for many children’s shows. Typically, dubbing strays further from the original text in an attempt to make the translation sound as natural as possible, while subtitles have a tendency to remain closer to the original text. As I will discuss later in this paper the decision to “dub” or “sub” an anime has played a role in

how anime are marketed and who the target audience is in the U.S.

- ¹²Traditional comic book publishers, DC, Marvel, and Dark Horse publish some manga as well, but this study focuses on the largest manga distributors. Additionally, there are several other small publishers who are increasingly visible in the manga market in the US.
- ¹³VIZ Media, LLC. 2006. *Announcing VIZ Media!* 2005. Available from http://www.viz.com/news/newsroom/2005/04_vizmedia.php.
- ¹⁴Del Rey Manga. 2006. *Manga: About us*. Available from <http://www.randomhouse.com/delrey/manga/about.html>.
- ¹⁵Reid, Calvin. Oct 5, 2009. Kodansha Sets Up to Publish Manga in U.S. *Publishers Weekly*, <http://www.publishersweekly.com/article/CA6700369.html>.
- ¹⁶See, www.tokyopop.com.
- ¹⁷Clements, Jonathan. 1995. The mechanics of the US anime and manga industry. *Foundation* 64:32-44.
- ¹⁸Tokyopop. TOKYOPOP's Guide to Manga for Retailers, Librarians and Educators. <http://www.tokyopop.com/corporate/booksellers/882>; Del Rey Manga. Bookseller and libraries resource page. http://www.randomhouse.com/delrey/manga/booksellers_librarians.html.
- ¹⁹One issue that came up in all of my interviews with publishers in the U.S. was the problem of rating manga to help libraries and parents know what is appropriate for different age groups. In part this is because the main demographic for manga in the U.S. according to these three publishers is boys and girls between the ages of 12-18. While there is not one standardized rating system each of the publishers has established a rating system. As was pointed out to me, this was particularly important because American parents are used to thinking that cartoons/comics are for kids and thus anything. Rating systems can be found on each publishers webpage as follows: Del Rey Manga. Bookseller and libraries resource page. http://www.randomhouse.com/delrey/manga/booksellers_librarians.html; Tokyopop.

TOKYOPOP's Guide to Manga for Retailers, Librarians and Educators. <http://www.tokyopop.com/corporate/booksellers/882>; and VIZ Media. Our Ratings. <http://www.viz.com/ratings/>.

²⁰*Doraemon* was created by two artists Fujimoto Hiroshi and Abiko Moto, who used the joint pen name Fujio Fujiko.

²¹Anne Allison's book *Millennial Monsters* provides an apt analysis of Japanese toys and their popularity in the US. Allison, Anne. *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys in the Global Imagination*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

²²McLean, Thomas J. 2007. Manga Man Explores Right-to-left Brand Cortex. *Daily Variety*, Oct 26, 2007; and Ibid. 2007. Levy looks back on 10 years of Tokyopop. *Daily Variety*, <http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117974761.html?categoryid=1050&cs=1>.

²³Ibid.

²⁴In general this is a bigger problem for anime than for manga. You can download and then own a DVD of a pirated fansub anime which is then not much different than owning the licensed copy. But reading manga via scanlation online just isn't the same owning the books. This is brought home time and again in examples like the popular *Naruto* which you can read almost all of online and in libraries, and yet *Naruto* is still one of the top sellers.

²⁵There are several chapters analyzing the scanlation phenomena in the forthcoming reader *Manga : an anthology of global and cultural perspectives*. Johnson-Woods, Toni. *Manga: an anthology of global and cultural perspectives*, (New York: Continuum, 2010).

Japan's Zoomorphic Urge

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One of the Japanese conduct books in my collection substitutes cats for humans in its illustrations.¹ For instance, in one drawing, an anthropomorphic cat giving a speech at a wedding reception makes the mistake of using the verb for cutting (*kiru*), and shocks the other feliform guests who are dressed in festive finery. Sometimes Japanese words are categorized as *imi kotoba*, language that should be avoided at weddings and other auspicious occasions. In this case, saying “to cut” might bring on the ruin of the marriage through magical association. What is interesting is that it is a cat, albeit one dressed in people’s clothing, using *imi kotoba*.

Having cats and other critters instruct or guide humans is not uncommon. Indeed, animals frequently appear as stand-ins for people in Japan. Humanoid animal characters are found in divination typologies, regional tourism campaigns, religious character goods, etiquette guides, and public service posters. This essay takes a closer look at the uses of the nonhuman as a form of contact with the cute and furry. Do animal characters in popular culture indicate more than a well-documented aesthetic preference for cuteness? Although the proliferation of animals as human substitutes denotes the adorable and cuddly, it is the way in which such a presentational code accomplishes other ends that is most fascinating. Using animal characters involves a degree of displacement that renders potentially dangerous or sensitive topics as safe and acceptable. I use the concept of displacement to mean the psychological mechanism that allows us to redirect attention and emotions away from areas thought to be indelicate or troublesome. As the example of the cat speech-giver used in the etiquette guide illustrates, animals defuse the preachy quality of authoritative

admonishments. Animals who step into human arenas also permit greater reader, audience, or consumer inclusion by erasing or abating traits such as ethnicity, gender, age or class from the imagery. The use of zoomorphism is readily apparent, often in front of us on a daily basis, yet we rarely notice it. Instead, the cuteness of the animal characters, rather than their roles as masked humans, has taken center stage.

Beyond the aesthetics of cute

Non-human animals emerge as useful metaphors for humans, yet they may also encode the essence of cuteness, and it is this aesthetic load rather than the lesson or the ideology behind the image that often becomes the center of our attention. Countless scholars and critics of contemporary Japanese popular culture have investigated the preeminence of the cute (*kawaii*) aesthetic that is at play here, and certainly it has something to do with the abundance of animal characters. However, I think it is useful to separate our analysis of zoomorphic images as *vehicles* for cuteness from their other possible uses and possible utility in many areas of culture. Most scholars who have written about the ubiquity of cuteness see it as a postwar phenomenon, but animals assuming human facades or identities are found throughout the history of Japanese visual culture. This long record of using zoomorphic imaging asks for a deeper explanation than merely pointing to surface aesthetics.

Beyond serving as a display of contemporary cultural interest in all things *kawaii*, animals are put to work making visible very human attributes and activities, some of which might make us uneasy. For example, an internet dating service named Boo!Boo uses swimsuit wearing pigs in its magazine advertisements. In one we see an overexcited male pig holding a cell phone running along a beach in pursuit of a swimsuit clad female pig. Dislodged from their representation of anything from reality, human-acting animals are freed from the demands of the rational eye.² According to Yoshimi Shun'ya, *kawaii* consumption functions as a way to shut out "problematic reality from one's perception."³ This explanation for the appeal of

cuteness does not explain the common use of zoomorphic animals in warning signs, manners guides, and public admonishments which do not shut out unpleasant realities, but rather discuss them head on through animal actors. This shift in looking at the reality of human life also masks the interests of those who employ such images in order to comment on or critique human foibles.

Other interpretations of the cute aesthetic have linked it to the rise of postwar affluence and female-driven economies.⁴ Disregarding cute themes running through prewar girls' consumer culture, scholars point to the seeming explosion in the 1960s or 1970s of cute commodities as an expression of female consumer desires. However, another reason we need to be careful about confounding zoomorphism with the aesthetic of cuteness is that it may prevent us from considering other potential meanings and uses of the humanoid nonhuman. As in the case of Hello Kitty analyses, the spotlight is often on her cuteness, not her humanness. Yet, many representations of Kitty-chan show her doing very human things. For example, an etiquette book aimed at female office clerks has an image of her accompanying a list of "taboos when using chopsticks."⁵ Hello Kitty is shown grabbing a morsel of food midair at the same time as her date. The drawing is not of an uncouth girl that we can laugh at, but of a national icon that makes us notice the behavior, and wonder if we ourselves have ever done something similar.

Zoomorphic images as a device for instruction

The use of animals to illustrate human behavior is found throughout history, in Japan and elsewhere. In English literature we find many famous animal characters in children's tales, from Charles Perrault's Puss in Boots to Beatrix Potter's Peter Rabbit. The Cassius Coolidge series of paintings of canines engaged in human vices, created more than a hundred years ago, are still hugely popular. One of Coolidge's most famous posters, "A Friend in Need," shows dogs smoking cigars and

playing poker, and is now among the 100 top-selling art reproductions in the US.⁶

The potency of animals in tales and legends is entrenched in Japan as well. Scrolls with drawings and paintings of animals have long been pressed into service as instruction and Buddhist proselytization. Consider the two-volume picture scrolls known as the *Jūnirui kassen emaki* (*Battle of the Twelve Zodiac Animals*). According to Sarah Thompson, the scroll “makes clever use of the rich tradition of Japanese animal folklore to parody three established genres of serious narrative picture scrolls: poetry contests, war stories, and stories of religious enlightenment.”⁷ It is a fifteenth-century story about the animals of the Chinese zodiac together with other non-Zodiac animals at a poetry contest and party at which a raccoon dog, *tanuki*, is publicly humiliated. The *tanuki* later seeks vengeance on the twelve official animals, but his rebellion against the established order does not end well. The scroll story covertly suggests that bucking authority will always end in disaster.

There are also numerous examples of animals used as substitutes for humans in popular woodblock prints. Rebecca Salter includes detailed reproductions of zoomorphic scenes and characters in her book on Japanese print culture. For example, the illustration entitled *Kōshi Bath* by Utagawa Kunisada III (1882) depicts mice visiting a public hot spring bathhouse. We see a fully clothed mouse family at the entrance where they pay the attendant. Other kimono-clad mice ascend to the dressing area, and finally “naked” mice are shown around the bath engaged in bathing and grooming activities.⁸

In Japanese literature we also find many stories about paramours and spouses who are really animals, such as foxes or snakes. In an analysis of this theme, Ria Koopmans-de Bruijn notes that “Humans are replaced within the narrative with nonhuman animals, in this case serpents, in order to permit the tale’s listeners to distance themselves more easily from the situation in question, thus allowing them to observe and to absorb its lessons with less resistance in an entertaining fashion.”⁹ This wonderful insight can easily be extended to contemporary popular culture as well.

The use of zoomorphic images as a form of didactic instruction continues today. Animal icons not only encourage us to touch, look or buy, they are there to instruct us in decidedly human behaviors and characteristics. We find animal teachers in cookbooks, dictionaries, and in the delivery of other kinds of factual information. For example, an English-Japanese dictionary for young people uses a striped cat who wears glasses to illustrate correct English sentences.¹⁰ A cookbook published by Kōdansha of Danish desert recipes has a drawing of a bear in a party hat sipping a smoothie.¹¹ A popular series of children's books uses a dog to teach Japanese culture.¹² The stories are about Shibawanko, a dog who lives with a kitty companion. The pictures instruct readers in "traditional" Japanese customs through illustrated activities, such as Shibawanko performing the tea ceremony or doing flower arrangement. Shibawanko also appears in magazines, calendars and Japanese study aids, and takes a touchable material form in toys, candy and cell phone straps.

Not to be overlooked is the potential for representing criticism that loses its sting if putatively about animals rather than humans. Not surprisingly, zoomorphic images are commonly seen in public service posters. In a collection of photographs of cute characters in Japan, the authors include many "working characters" found on street signs, at the post office, outside police stations, in pharmacy pamphlets, and elsewhere.¹³ These animal characters caution politicians against accepting bribes and admonish bike riders not to park in unauthorized zones. An analysis that only treats them as further expressions of the cute aesthetic is missing one of their functions, which is to appeal to a wide variety of people. Female, male, old and young, the dressed-up bunny in the poster could be any of us. In an interview in which he muses about how he came to understand why comic representations are so appealing and so effective, Scott McCloud recalls asking himself: "Why was it that I could identify with something like Charlie Brown more than I could with a hyperrealist John Bolton painting?"¹⁴ McCloud identified an important mechanism, one that he terms "iconic abstraction." He realized that as we move away from realism

in comics and other representations, it provides a way to introduce new meanings and allows for universal identification. Thus, in the case of Japanese zoomorphism, the iconic abstraction of using animals in a broad spectrum of media extends our thinking and vision to the unobservable everywoman and everyman.

Zoomorphic images can do the cultural work of instruction and admonishment that viewers might otherwise turn away from. Brian McVeigh has termed this use “authority cuteness,” a softening display of those in power so as not to appear intimidating.¹⁵ Sabine Frühstück found a similar function in Self Defense Forces recruitment posters that feature cute dogs exclaiming “I love peace!”¹⁶ Animals denote naturalness and a lack of manipulation. Sensitized to the hectoring of authoritative voices everywhere, from train station announcements to roaming *gomi* (trash) trucks, advice from a bunny or a kitty may be a little easier to stomach.

Zoomorphic images in other forms of popular culture

In 1999, comic artist Kubo Kiriko created a novel personality classification system based on twelve animal types that were adorably illustrated in a book that sold 1.5 million copies in its first six weeks.¹⁷ Her new zoomancy, which differs from the traditional borrowed Chinese zodiac, has unusual character types such as the lion, koala, and wolf. These animal types allow any and all viewers to see themselves and their friends as fitting the various assigned personality characterizations.

Other examples of zoomorphic characters are found in the divination goods and books boom. There are many animal divination schemas, such as Penguin Divination, White Bear Divination, and Panda Divination. In the Panda Divination system (figure 1), participants use their birth years and months to arrive at a number, which in turn is used to identify one of twelve Panda Types.¹⁸ A few of the types, for example, are the Creative Panda, Proprietor Panda, Hero Panda, and Stablemaster Panda. For each one there are descriptions of positive and negative personality traits, advice on how to achieve happiness, and best panda partners. The pandas are also



Figure 1. Panda Divination

Priestess, Hanged Man, and so on. For example, the tarot set created by Bi Anjeri and illustrated by Umezawa Saki features puppies on all the cards (figure 2).¹⁹ The Empress card shows a floating doggie wearing a light purple dress and a pink crown, and holding a pentagram-adorned wand, while the Queen of Pentacles is a dog wearing glasses, crowned with a purple tiara, clothed in a red and purple dress, and holding a yellow pentacle. Another new tarot deck uses cats, bunnies, alligators, and other animals.²⁰ The Empress is a brown bunny who is wearing a red cape, while the Emperor is a stern looking, enrobed cat who is seated on a throne. The device of substituting animals for the medieval European people who are

assigned lucky colors, fashion and lifestyle tips. The Creative Panda, for example, should select metallic and silver colors, while the Stablemaster Panda should stick with green.

An interesting trend in Japan is the creation of new tarot decks, which feature animals who take the place of the humans in scenes of the Major Arcana, cards intended to symbolize universal themes in the human experience. In place of people, we find animals in the roles of Magician, Hermit, High



Figure 2. Zoomorphic Tarot Queen of Wands

usually found in the most popular, traditional decks seen outside Japan, in essence de-ethnicizes the cards, allowing identification and insight.

The human is not simply replaced with an animal figure. The animal icons and characters themselves are subject to masking or disguise as something other than their original animal forms. People extend their love of and interest in animals in novel ways, such as making animal characters and icons do costume play as supernatural beings, divinities and goblins. Thus we find many Hello Kitty incarnations in which she wears the fake ears of the panda, a cow, or a *kappa* (water sprite). These images suggest that the viewers, as well, might mask themselves in a character and safely enter a dangerous or unexplored world. A few extended examples of kitty cosplay are worth exploring.

The Kabaya Food Corporation uses the Beckoning Cat, or *maneki neko*, as a theme for a line of crackers sold together with tiny cell phone straps. *Maneki neko*, a cat figurine with its paw raised as if welcoming one forward, is popular as a good luck charm and is commonly found at the entrance to shops. (The Beckoning Cat figure is said to have originated in the late Edo period, but actual evidence points to a more recent, Meiji invention.) In the cookie company's schema, consumers may buy *maneki neko* dressed up as different beings from Japanese folklore and religious history. The Beckoning Cat is outfitted as a *kappa*, Daruma (a round figurine of Bodhidharma), a badger, a fox, a frog, or one of the Seven Lucky Gods (*shichifukujin*), an eclectic group of seven deities who travel together on a treasure ship dis-



Figure 3. The Beckoning Cat and The Beckoning Cat doing costume play as Benzaiten

pensing happiness.²¹ In one manifestation, the Beckoning Cat does *kosupure* (costume play) as the goddess Benzaiten. Thus we find the convoluted image of a Beckoning Cat dressed as goddess who is in turn a Japanese version of the Hindu deity Saraswatî (figure 3).

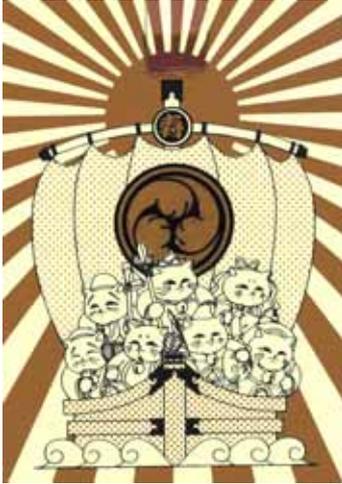


Figure 4. Namco Namja Town Seven Lucky Gods



Figure 5. Cat Benzaiten at Namco Namja Town

The game company Namco opened an indoor entertainment theme park in Ikebukuro named Namco Namja Town, and created a stable of cat mascot characters who are found throughout the complex and who adorn promotional goods. Namco also adopted the concept of the Seven Lucky Gods in feline form and often displays images of them on souvenirs, posters, and advertising (figure 4). Within the theme park there are also several statues of Benzaiten as a cat (figure 5).

Animal transvestites are found in stories about war and death, where they provide a type of camouflage. A popular anime in the 1990s was *Heisei tanuki gassen pompoko* (Heisei-era Badger Wars Pompoko), in which *tanuki* defend their territory against greedy human encroachment.²² The *tanuki* sometimes seem very human-like in scenes in which they wear salarymen suits while guzzling beer. Maekawa Masami created the illustrations for the

manga *The 47 Black Cats Samurai Clash*.²³ The black cats are *ronin* (masterless samurai) from the Ako Incident of 1701-1703, a story about forty-seven loyal members of the samurai class who took revenge for the death of their lord. Immortalized in plays, film, novels, and manga, this version is creepily sanitized through the device of substituting black cats for the vindictive warriors. In the climax of the story, a cat retainer cuts off the head of the opponent, carrying it in a bucket and placing it on his master's grave. Not a pleasant image, to be sure, but somehow the gruesomeness of the scene is made less shocking when we see cats do it rather than people. Fans of the manga can also buy small figurines of all the 47 kitty *ronin*.

There is a similar example in a manga series that was later made into a globally consumed anime. Created by the writer

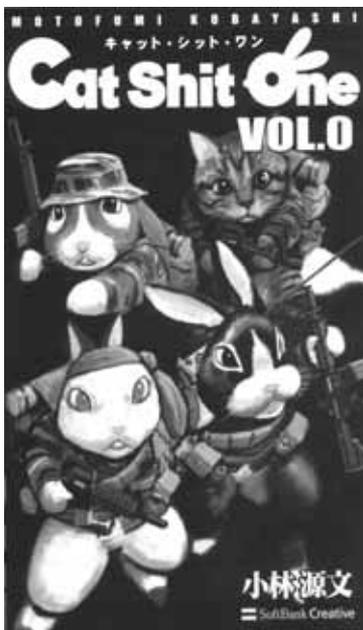


Figure 6. *Cat Shit One* by Kobayashi Motofumi

and illustrator Kobayashi Motofumi, it is a story about soldiers during the Vietnam War entitled *Cat Shit One* (figure 6).²⁴ Released in the U.S. as *Apocalypse Meow*, the narrative follows three American soldiers in a reconnaissance unit. Melding fiction and details about weapons and military uniforms, the series portrays the characters from different nations as types of animals: Americans are rabbits, Vietnamese are cats, the French are pigs, the Russians are bears, and the Koreans are dogs. (The posing of the Americans as rabbits is supposedly a pun

on the Japanese word *usagi*, rabbit, which can be romanized as USA GI.) Small kits for making the *Cat Shit One* figures may be purchased at comic conventions. Picturing Vietnam-

era soldiers as animals is somewhat disturbing, to say the least. It is difficult not to wonder what will be next—Kitty Comfort Women or Hello Kitty at the bombing of Hiroshima? Having imagined these possibilities, one notices how Kobayashi depicts Vietnamese sex workers in *Cat Shit One*. Whereas the figures representing soldiers are dressed in military garb, the prostitutes and exotic dancers in his drawings of sleazy nightclubs are “naked” cats with breasts who pole dance and entice customers. Reportedly, there was a kamikaze pilot version of Hello Kitty, one of a number of extensions of the icon that led Christine Yano to write, “The fact that anything, it seems, can be ‘Kitty-ed’ (that is, made cute) in Japan and elsewhere has uneasy ramifications, especially when extended to realms of history and politics.”²⁵

Finally, the power of contemporary Japanese popular culture might partly arise from its materiality. Among the examples of zoomorphic imagery, there is often a quality of visual tactility about them that adds to their allure. Zoomorphic characters are frequently made into small figurines or fluffy objects. Both forms of tactility, the actual and metaphorical, are one of the more productive avenues into our comprehension of popular culture. Fay Zika has described the way pictures and other images might actually have a tactile quality that we tend to overlook, thinking them to be essentially visual.²⁶ Usually, tactility is difficult to convey in flat visual images, but perhaps a use of animals seems to tempt us closer to a tactile experience. Like the unreasonable urge to pet a raccoon or chipmunk, this visual tactility is a type of symbolism that draws in the viewer, enticing the imaginary stroking. Zoomorphic images beckon us to a moment of engagement and a virtual sensory experience.²⁷

Images of human-like animals not only attract the viewer to hold or caress them, but also reveal a wish to insert distance between us and some troubling aspects of human behavior. Recalling the frequent juxtaposition of clothed and “naked” animals, we can link zoomorphism to a flirtation with the naughty or daring as well. The embedded nature of human relations makes it difficult to place ourselves in others’ shoes, so quasi humans release us from our webs of association. Zoomorphic

images likewise deflect our focus away from age, gender and ethnicity, inviting us to see ourselves in them. Rather than dismissing zoomorphism as another example of the bad taste of cutified female-driven consumer culture, we should ask what such substitutions of the human might be accomplishing beyond their surface aesthetic value.

Endnotes

¹Tanaka Toshiyuki, *Hatachi kara no manā* (Manners for After Age Twenty) (Tokyo: Shōbunsha, 1993), 131.

²I am ignoring YouTube videos of dogs riding bikes and piano-playing cats.

³Yoshimi Shun'ya, "Consuming 'America': From Symbol to System," in *Consumption in Asia: Lifestyles and Identities*, ed. Chua Beng-Huat, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 217.

⁴See, for example, Anne Allison, "Cuteness as Japan's Millennial Product," in Pikachu's *Global Adventure: The Rise and Fall of Pokemon*, ed. Joseph Tobin, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); and Sharon Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan," in *Women, Media, and Consumption in Japan*, ed. Lise Skov and Brian Moeran (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995).

⁵Mikasa Shobō, *Harōkitii no aisare manā 100* (100 Manners That Make Hello Kitty Loveable) (Tokyo: Mikasa Shobō, 2008), 29.

⁶Rankings of most popular posters are found at <http://www.velvetelvisart.com>.

⁷Sarah Thompson, *The War of the Twelve Animals (Jūnirui kassen emaki)*, PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, Art History, 1999.

⁸Rebecca Salter, *Japanese Popular Prints: From Votive Slips to Playing Cards* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006) 31. Another engrossing print in her collection is entitled *Cat's Variety Show* by Utagawa Yoshifuji, 38. In this one we are shown cats attending a performance at a playhouse.

⁹Ria Koopmans-de Bruijn "Fabled Liaisons: Serpentine Spouses in Japanese Folk-tales," in *Japanimals: History and*

- Culture in Japan's Animal Life*, ed. Gregory M. Pflugfelder and Brett L. Walker (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2005), 82.
- ¹⁰Benesse, *Challenge Dictionary, English-Japanese, Japanese-English* (Tokyo: Benesse, 1993).
- ¹¹Morten Heberg, *Dezāto sākasu (Desert Circus)* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2008).
- ¹²Kawaura Yoshie, *Shibawanko no wa no kokoro (Shibawanko's Japanese Spirit)* (Tokyo: Hakusensha, 2004).
- ¹³Matt Alt and Hiroko Yoda, *Hello, Please! Very Helpful Super Kawaii Characters from Japan* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2007).
- ¹⁴Rob Vollmar, "Manga in Manhattan, Scott McCloud's Twelve Revolutions, and Comics' Perfect Storm," *World Literature Today* (September 2008), accessed online at http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_hb5270/is_5_82/ai_n29462438/ See also Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1993)
- ¹⁵Brian J. McVeigh, *Wearing Ideology: State, Schooling and Self-Presentation in Japan* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2000), 150.
- ¹⁶Sabine Frühstück, *Uneasy Warriors: Gender, Memory, and Popular Culture in the Japanese Army* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).
- ¹⁷Kubo Kiriko, *Dōbutsu uranai (Animal Divination)* (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1999).
- ¹⁸Midori Mayu, *Panda uranai (Panda Divination)* (Tokyo: Orange Page Books, 2007).
- ¹⁹Bi Anjeri (author) and Umezawa Saki (illustrator), *Anjeri no yasashii tarotto nykūmon: Tarotto kādo de uranu, asobu (Anjeri's Simple Tarot Manual: Divination and Fun with Tarot Cards)* (Tokyo: Interwork, 2004).
- ²⁰Kagami Ryuji (author) and Ikeda Akiko (illustrator), *Dayan no tarotto kādo (Dayan Tarot Cards)* (Tokyo: Hakusensha, 2005).

- ²¹The idea of grouping these deities is not very old, and appears to have only begun a few hundred years ago. Three of the gods are from the Hindu pantheon of India, three are from the Chinese Taoist-Buddhist tradition, and one is native to Shinto.
- ²²Takahata Isao, director, *Heisei tanuki gassen pompoko* (*Heisei-era Badger Wars Pompoko*) (Tokyo: Studio Ghibli, 1994).
- ²³For more on this manga see John Tucker, “The Ako Vendetta in the Age of Hello Kitty,” paper presented at the Sothern Japan Seminar, Florida International University, 2009.
- ²⁴Kobayashi Motofumi, *Cat Shit One* (Tokyo: Softbank Publishing, 1998).
- ²⁵Christine R. Yano, “Wink on Pink: Interpreting Japanese Cute as It Grabs the Global Headlines,” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Volume 68, Issue 03 (August 2009), 686.
- ²⁶Fay Zika, “Tactile Relief: Reconsidering Medium and Modality Specificity.” *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 45, no. 4, 2005, 426-437.
- ²⁷The fact that so many of the human activities and actions are deflected onto cats in particular deserves more analysis, but space restrictions prohibit expanded discussion here.

MEDIA RESOURCES

Engaged Learning and Filmmaking by Way of Vietnam

**Steven Emmanuel
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Virginia Wesleyan professor Steven Emmanuel and five students spent four weeks in Vietnam in the summer of 2007. Their work, supported by an ASIANetwork Student-Faculty Fellows Grant, resulted in a documentary film that won several awards in national and international film festivals. In the following piece, he describes the project and talks about how the grant experience gave him a new perspective on study abroad.

Despite remarkable economic progress in recent years, Vietnam continues to struggle with serious problems such as poverty, environmental contamination, and disease. These problems are partly the legacy of decades of war and partly the disastrous economic policy of the early postwar period. The situation began to improve in the mid-1980s, when the Vietnamese government embarked on a program of liberal reforms known as renovation. The prosperity generated by those reforms mainly benefited people living in major urban areas. By 2006, three-quarters of Vietnam's population still lived in rural poverty, and many families still depended on subsistence farming to survive. To make matters worse, rapid industrial expansion, combined with the absence of environmental protections, posed significant threats to Vietnam's forests, waterways, and air quality. In addition to the increased health

risks associated with industrial pollution and environmental degradation, the growing disparity between urban and rural development exacerbated long-standing tensions between the government and Vietnam's ethnic minority populations.

Our Student-Faculty research project, carried out in the summer of 2007, focused on various humanitarian efforts undertaken by the Vietnamese government, foreign NGOs, and private individuals to address the problems of rural poverty and disease. Our main contact was Dr. Nuygen Viet Nhan, Head of the Department of Medical Genetics and Director of the Office of Genetic Counseling and Disabled Children (OGCDC) at Hue Medical College.

The Project

Dr. Nhan's office coordinates the efforts of government bureaucrats, medical researchers, foreign humanitarians, local civic groups, and Vietnam's religious community. Balancing the interests of all these groups is a delicate business. For example, elements within the Communist bureaucracy are hostile toward religion, yet arrangements are worked out so that government funding can go to support an orphanage or special education program operated at a Buddhist pagoda. There is also significant concern within Vietnamese Buddhist and Catholic communities about whether and how reproductive technologies ought to be used to ameliorate the physical and economic suffering caused by severe birth defects. In less obvious ways, humanitarian efforts are also shaped by culturally embedded attitudes toward physically and intellectually disabled persons and ethnic minorities.

As Americans, we were naturally conscious of the ever-present subtext of the "American War." Hue was the site of some of the fiercest and bloodiest battles in the conflict. Both Hue and Quang Tri province to the north were targeted for extensive bombing and herbicidal spraying missions. Few Americans are aware that nearly a million gallons of Agent Orange were sprayed over Hue province, or that the problem of unexploded ordinance still poses a severe hazard to the people

of Quang Tri, where bombs and mines left over from the war claim more lives every year.

Our research approach was interdisciplinary. Religious Studies major Julie Maggioncalda was interested in work done by Vietnamese Buddhists to improve the welfare of poor and intellectually disabled children. Lan Tran, an environmental sciences major, focused on governmental efforts to educate rural communities about environmental health issues, such as dioxin contamination. Business major Matt Ryan looked at the structure of the Vietnamese micro-loan program. Sarah Tytler, an international studies major, examined the impact of liberal reform on the rural economy by comparing published data with the perceptions of people living outside urban centers. Lauren Perry, a journalism and philosophy major, reported on the ongoing consequences of the war and Vietnamese attitudes toward Americans.

For my part, I was mainly interested in humanitarian work from the perspective of peace and reconciliation. I planned to produce a documentary film that situated the work of the OGCD in the context of efforts to heal the wounds of the war, with a special emphasis on humanitarian work being carried out by American veterans of the Vietnam War. A documentary film seemed an ideal way to tie together the various strands of student research and to disseminate the results to a broader audience. As a whole, the project promised to yield useful insight into current social and political realities in Vietnam, as well as some of the historical and cultural factors that shaped them. The film would also shed light on the important role that humanitarianism plays, not only in helping to create economic stability and prosperity in Vietnam, but in effecting reconciliation between our nations.

To support the documentary side of the project, we were fortunate to have at Virginia Wesleyan a modest video production studio, two professional HD video cameras, and some basic portable equipment. One of the students in our group, Matt Ryan, also had significant experience in the technical aspects of video production. He captured much of the footage included in the final version of the film.

In Country

From the moment the students stepped out onto the street on the very first morning in Hanoi, they knew they were completely out of their element. For a few of them, this was their first real experience traveling abroad. The sites and smells of the old quarter, together with the wilting heat and humidity of summer, were overwhelming. They all reported the feeling of having stepped back in time—a feeling that only increased as they traveled out into the remote rural areas of the country, where farmers still worked the fields behind water buffalos, and vestiges of the war could be seen everywhere in the form of bomb craters, war cemeteries, and abandoned military bunkers. The war they had merely read about—at best an abstraction for them—suddenly became tangibly real.

Due to the specialized nature of our project, we did not prearrange any travel or accommodations inside Vietnam beyond the first hotel. For the rest, we had only a very general plan and worked out the details of the itinerary as we went. There were, of course, a few people we had arranged to meet on the trip. These included Dr. Nhan and a few American humanitarians living and working in Vietnam. The rest was improvised.

After spending a few days in Hanoi to adjust to the new climate and diet, we began to make our way south toward Hue, where we would end up spending more than two weeks working closely with Dr. Nhan and his staff. We followed OG CDC case officers as they conducted home visits in rural villages, toured various rehabilitation and education facilities for sick and disabled children, met with families served by the heart surgery and micro-loan programs, and visited ethnic minority communities in the mountains of Nam Dong.

On free days and weekends we experienced cultural life in and around Hue or pursued our individual research projects. We rented motorcycles for local travel and hired drivers to take us to more distant destinations of interest. The students were especially interested in learning about Vietnamese Buddhism and life in the pagoda. They spent time with the monks of Tu Hieu, one of the oldest pagodas in the city, and

made friends at a few others. They learned about Buddhist teachings and practiced meditation. Julie Maggioncalda worked closely with the nuns of Duc Son and Long Tho monasteries, both of which ran special education programs for children.

From Hue we traveled south to Da Nang and Hoi An for a few days before concluding the trip with a tour of sites around Saigon and the MeKong Delta. We covered a lot of ground in one month. The students braved miles of walking through rice paddies in sweltering heat, twelve-hour days, and all the challenges of being culturally isolated for an extended period of time. They experienced parts of Vietnam that tourists never see, and confronted some of the harsher realities of life in the developing world. I asked a lot of them, but they never complained.

Engaged Learning

As I watched my students interacting with Vietnamese families, and especially with children in orphanages and other state-run facilities, I began to realize that they were not just studying the country, its culture, or its problems. The word *study* suggests an emotional distance that separates the inquirer from the subject. Yet the students were thoroughly engaged at every level: cognitively, emotionally, and morally. They bonded with the children, sharing songs with them, teaching them English, and playing games. They were not just learning about the effects of the Vietnam War; they were literally becoming part of the continuing story of that war and its legacy. They were actively engaging in the work of reconciliation, of healing wounds and building new bridges of friendship and peace.

For Ken Herrmann, an American veteran and humanitarian who appeared in our documentary, the key to bringing about true reconciliation is “the building of a relationship, showing that you care.” In the final analysis, meaningful change depends not on charity but the capacity for empathy, the willingness “to feel what the Vietnamese feel, to smell what they smell, to taste what they taste, to think the way they think.” My students were doing that; and they were indeed effecting change, even as they were being changed by the experience.

From a pedagogical perspective, one of the things that stood out for me was the extraordinary sense the students had of the relevance and importance of their work. Not a single one of them would return to the classroom the same kind of learner. Within weeks of coming home they began looking for ways to put their experience to work in the local community. A lasting contribution was the creation of “Mindful Marlins,” a student service organization that formed a partnership with Seton House Youth Shelters. Drawing on what they had learned from the Buddhist monks about meditation, the students began to offer a weekly relaxation/meditation session aimed at helping young girls in crisis develop skills for coping with stress and anger. That program is now in its third year.

Service Learning in a Global Context

Prior to the Vietnam trip, I had been thinking about some ways to contribute to our nascent service-learning initiative on campus. Up to that time our efforts were limited to partnering with local businesses and community organizations dealing with issues relevant to life in the Hampton Roads region. However, my experience in Vietnam had convinced me that we should start thinking about service-learning abroad, and more particularly with a view to getting students involved in projects in communities that had suffered the effects of violence, poverty, and social injustice. Though we sent many of our students on educational tours of the major cities of Western Europe, we did not provide any opportunities for them to experience first-hand the realities of the developing world. This was regrettable, given the fact that the greatest challenge facing their generation would be to develop global strategies for solving the world’s problems. If they were to make any serious progress toward creating a sustainable future, they would need to be educated about global realities, to experience the material conditions that define reality for the majority of the world’s population. It was not my intention to disparage the more conventional type of study abroad, but rather to describe a service-learning experience that could be transformative for our students.

The proposal that emerged was for a rubric course entitled “Service-Learning in a Global Context.” Students would spend the first part of the course in the classroom, where they would learn about the social, political, and economic history of the target community. In the second part, they would participate in a thoughtfully designed service project addressing the particular needs of that community, and engage in structured reflection on their service experience. The very nature of the service experience would force the students to draw upon, or learn to develop, skills and capacities that often remain untapped in the traditional classroom.

Two of the students from the ASIANetwork trip, Matt Ryan and Lan Tran, returned to Vietnam with me in January 2008 as members of the inaugural course. They brought invaluable leadership and a measure of continuity to the second trip, which also provided an opportunity to collect more footage for the documentary. In the classroom portion, the students studied the Vietnam War and its social, political, and economic consequences. In country, they interned with Ken Herrmann’s NGO, the Da Nang/Quang Nam Fund, Inc. My students lived and worked with participating students from other schools around the country. They took part in organized activities at an Agent Orange group home, provided direct aid to the homeless and to families with sick children, and made a special visit by boat to the Hoa Van leper colony to deliver food and medical supplies.

In 2009, two of my colleagues teamed up to offer “Service-Learning in a Global Context” in Ghana.

Documentary Film

Fortunately I was able to devote a sabbatical semester and the rest of the summer of 2008 to the task of editing. My colleague, Stu Minnis, who teaches video production, shared some of this work with me, as did Matt. Another colleague, Lee Jordan-Anders, performed some piano pieces for the soundtrack. One of the pieces was composed by a former student. Indeed, one of the more satisfying aspects of the project was the way it brought together so many of the creative resources of our campus community.

A rough cut of *Making Peace with Vietnam* was ready by late August. We previewed this version of the film at several campus screenings during September. After some additional editing, we decided to enter it into a handful of film festivals for the 2009 season.

As documentaries go, *Making Peace with Vietnam* is a very modest film. It could have benefited considerably from some professional editing, audio engineering, and scoring. But these technical shortcomings are balanced to some extent by the compelling nature of the subject matter, for which it has been well received by audiences both stateside and abroad. The film won Best Long Documentary in the Beijing International Film Festival, as well as awards in the Red Rock Film Festival in Utah and the Buddhist Film Festival in Sri Lanka.

Epilogue

Four of the five students who participated in the original ASIANetwork research project have now graduated. Sarah Tytler entered the Peace Corps and is currently serving in Tonga. Matt Ryan was accepted into the graduate film program at Florida State University. Julie Maggioncalda is working toward an MSW degree at the University of Pennsylvania, with a concentration in international social work. Lauren Perry followed up the Vietnam experience by joining our first service-learning trip to Africa. She now works for a law firm in San Diego as she prepares for her next step. The only student that has not graduated yet is Lan Tran. The year after Lan returned from Vietnam, she landed a prestigious two-year fellowship from the Environmental Protection Agency to study groundwater contamination in the U.S. She will graduate in May.

Video Resources on the Internet

Panels and Lectures Address China Controversies

Editors note: Over the past several months, colleagues have brought to our attention three public panel discussions and lectures that address contemporary controversies in Chinese studies. These discussions have been video-recorded and are available to view on the internet. These presentations may be useful either for scholarly pursuits or may be excerpted for classroom viewing. We wish to thank those who contacted us about these resources, and we encourage readers who know of other such video resources to let us know about them so that we can inform our ASIANetwork colleagues of their existence and availability.

Symposium on Giovanni Arrighi's *Adam Smith in Beijing* (March, 2008)

One of the contentious issues in Asian studies today is the debate over how to characterize China: Is it socialist? Capitalist? "Postsocialist"? One of the more intriguing and theoretically stimulating descriptions has been Giovanni Arrighi's notion of China as a historically rooted and successful "non-capitalist market economy," a social formation that may serve today as a beacon of development for other advancing societies. Arrighi's idea, which also suggests a decline of U.S. global hegemony in the face of a "rise of China," was presented most recently in his important, wide-ranging book, *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the 21st Century* (New York: Verso Press, 2007).

This study has sparked a broad scholarly response both from those who embrace his interpretations as well as from those who contend that he is wide of the mark or who accept parts of his model but reject others.

An important symposium was held in Baltimore in 2008 (prior to Arrighi's death last year) in which Arrighi himself presented his main arguments. In response, fellow panelists

David Harvey (CUNY) and Joel Andreas (Johns Hopkins) also spoke, offering their critiques. The panel presentation lasted some two hours, and the entire debate is available at the following web site: <video.google.com/videoplay?docid=2718530085458752500>.

Symposium: “Rediscovering China’s Cultural Revolution: Art and Politics, Lived Experience, Legacies of Liberation” (November, 2009)

Controversies continue to surface over the assessment of the most tumultuous political movement of the Mao period of Chinese history, the Cultural Revolution. The unequivocally condemnatory conclusions drawn by such recent books as Chang and Halliday’s *Mao: The Unknown Story* (New York: Random House, 2005) and MacFarquhar’s and Schoenhals’ *Mao’s Last Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2006) have been countered by more nuanced—and oftentimes largely favorable—accounts offered by Zhang, Wang, and Bai’s *Some of Us: Chinese Women Growing Up in the Mao Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001); Han’s *The Unknown Cultural Revolution: Life and Change in a Chinese Village* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2008), Gao’s *The Battle for China’s Past: Mao and the Cultural Revolution* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), and Andreas’ *The Rise of the Red Engineers: The Cultural Revolution and the Origins of China’s New Class* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

The co-author and author of two of these books, ASIANetwork members Bai Di, (*Some of Us*) and Han Dongping (*The Unknown Cultural Revolution*), joined Stanford’s Ban Wang and others in a symposium at UC Berkeley, entitled “Rediscovering China’s Cultural Revolution.” Presentations included discussions of poster art, theatrical art, and cinematic art of the time period and evaluations of their political and social impacts. The panel on art lasted about 100 minutes, and the entire symposium’s proceedings can be found at the following web address: <http://thisiscommunism.org/rediscovering_chinas_cultural_revolution.htm>.

Public Lecture: “The Real Story of China in Africa: Discussion with Deborah Bräutigam” (February, 2010)

Contentious viewpoints also abound in analyzing China’s growing involvement with Africa. Is the massive increase in foreign aid and foreign trade (from \$10 billion in 2000 to over \$100 billion in 2008) a reflection of the long-standing PRC principle of “mutual benefit,” as the Chinese government claims, or is it the embodiment of a new thrust by China into Africa to claim the continent’s rich resources, regardless of political costs to the African people, in much the same way as Western powers have behaved during their eras of empire?

These competing assessments are discussed and evaluated in this lecture, sponsored by the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations. Drawing on her extensive field work in both China and Africa, Professor Deborah Bräutigam (American University) discusses several of the “myths” she sees in Western analyses of China’s growing presence throughout the continent that are detailed more extensively in her recently published book, *The Dragon’s Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Her lecture, which lasts approximately one hour, can be viewed at <<http://www.ncuscr.org/programs/real-story-china-africa-discussion-deborah-brautigam>>.

FOR OUR STUDENTS

The following article has been excerpted from a longer paper produced by Mr. Duckler as a result of his study in Sichuan with Professor Li-hua Ying, supported by their 2008 ASIANetwork-Freeman Foundation Student-Faculty Research Grant.

Alai's *The Mountain Stairway*: A Grassroots Conception of Tibet

David Duckler
Bard College

Surveying the Literary Landscape

It seems that the current literature regarding Tibet is quite impoverished as a true cultural indicator of the region and its people. The West writes of Tibet as an exotic solution to its own malaise, or as the last refuge of Hermetic wisdom. The Han Chinese have used Tibet as a muse and as an antidote to materialism. The current literary criticism brushes over cultural and stylistic concerns to cut right to politics. In every case, Tibet as a cultural concept is simply used to complement something external to it, to stand in contrast to something else. The Tibetan writer Alai specifically rejects these negative and meaningless definitions of Tibet.

When I choose books about Tibet, my standards are not the same as with other books. I understand that this is a bias, but I am unable to alter my instinctual feeling towards such a book. The most important element lies hidden between the lines: a feeling for whether the writer anchors the text within Tibetan culture, or whether it floats somewhere on the outside.¹

Our search for a positive and self-existent conception of Tibet such as Alai describes must continue.

Buried beneath layers of misinterpretation lies the literature of Tibet written by Tibetans themselves. Tashi Dawa and Alai are the most prominent examples, almost household names in China. Tashi Dawa's writing is highly mythical in nature and extraordinarily concerned with the act of writing itself. Consider his short story, "Soul Knotted on a Leather Thong." This is the story of an author who is given the task by a dying lama to find and help two of the characters from his story. He takes the old story out of a box and relates it. Where it ends, the author's story begins. He finds his characters in a mythical land, the imprint of the Buddha's palm where the remains of an epic battle from a legendary Tibetan folk story are scattered about. The female protagonist, whose father was a bard who sang the legendary folk story, finds the author and brings him to the dying male protagonist. The author replaces the protagonist and promises the female that he will write her a better life.² This work, so rich in Tibetan religion and mythology, so writerly, is not a one-dimensional use of Tibet as a mirror for some nonliterary agenda. It is a story that can hold its own on the international literary stage.

Alai, like Tashi Dawa, makes use of Tibetan culture in a way that elevates his writing beyond that of either a quaint regional literature or a literarily impoverished storytelling useful only in understanding Tibetan history or politics. Our goal is to uncover what Alai draws from his homeland to lend his work such power. It is in Alai's generation of writers that an answer to that almost childish question, "what is Tibet?" may lie. If Tibet, like the Dalai Lama claims, is culturally dead or at least dying, then what do the formidable Tashi Dawa and Alai draw upon for inspiration?

Alai The Tour Guide

Alai's *The Mountain Stairway* is at times a work of history; it is also a cultural meditation, an epic journey, a collection of folk tales; it can strive towards the objectivity of an anthropological work and can occasionally soar to the subjectivity

of poetry. The work is not located firmly within the sphere of Lhasa or Beijing. Even the format of the work as an apparent travelogue lends it fluidity, as the point of view is in constant motion through physical space. It is difficult even to classify the work as fiction or non-fiction, travelogue or legend.

Alai was asked in interviews, “How would you describe this book to your publishers, your critics and your general audience? What words would you use to define and classify the piece?”

“This need to place a work within such and such a genre... I find it limiting. Perhaps the reason I left the work so ambiguous was to escape the critics.” Alai laughed aloud at this point. “Once they know where a work is located they seize the moment and move in to attack. I like to confound them every once in a while.” Such a response seems apocryphal from an author who wrote the internationally acclaimed *Red Poppies* before his *Mountain Stairway*. *Red Poppies*, firmly a novel, a historically-based fiction, made Alai a household name throughout China. To follow *Red Poppies* with such a difficult-to-place text suggests that the structure of the work has a higher purpose than as a safeguard against the critics.

A closer examination of *The Mountain Stairway*'s first section reveals Alai's intent. In this section's final chapter, Alai launches into an offensive against tour guides. He describes local guides that offer an introduction to Ngawa, his native land, as such: “I am all too familiar with these flag-brandishing, megaphone-touting shepherds tending the flocks of sightseers. These so-called ‘tour guides’ think nothing of accuracy, and they respect neither history nor culture. They esteem tips above all...”²³ Such a comment in a larger piece that never again mentions tour guides may seem offhand, except that he follows this observation by comparing himself to the very guides he has just insulted:

This makes me reflect, could my own writing become another form of misrepresentation? Everyone has a personal bias, but I place greater trust in my love and sense of responsibility for Ngawa and my people. If I

do not do justice to Ngawa in this book, then in the next book or project I will render the area more beautifully and completely and offer that as a gift to my land and my people. At the very least, I can hope to do better than those supposed “tour guides.”⁴

Alai intentionally makes himself into a tour guide before the second section of the book, which marks the beginning of his voyage home, the start of the reader's “tour.”

This text is not history, nor is it the record of a personal journey. It is an intentional literary guide to Alai's Tibet. In an era of Chinese inspiration-seekers and exoticizers writing about Tibet, Alai gives us an alternate perspective from which to understand a land that is altogether shrouded in mystery for the average outsider. The question to ask at this point is, Why? Why did Alai follow up his internationally acclaimed novel, *Red Poppies* with a piece lacking in the exotic appeal and novelistic tone that made his first bestseller? If his fictional work provides a portrait of the region, why did Alai follow it up with a memoir-style cultural and literary guide to Ngawa.

An article Alai wrote for the *Kawagebo Culture Society Journal* gives us insight into his motivations for writing *The Mountain Stairway* when he did. This article is largely devoted to criticizing the obsession of the Chinese literary critics with Gabriel Garcia Marquez and his *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. This critique stems from the fact that many people have analyzed *Red Poppies*, claiming that it draws heavily from Marquez's magical realism. Alai mocks these critics, asking them why they think only of Marquez and not other magical realists. He mocks them for their focus on magical realism and not on other possible literary influences.⁵ We must keep in mind that Tibetan literature, Alai's included, makes heavy use of the fantastic. Recall Tashi Dawa's story of an author finding his character in a hidden land called The Imprint of the Buddha's Palm. Alai's *Red Poppies* makes use of magical occurrences, like epic battles between sorcerers on behalf of their chieftains. This use of the fantastic also extends to Chinese writers like Ma Yuan and Ma Jian who draw upon Tibet as an influence.

The particular way that magic is incorporated into the text, both formally and thematically, seems to be one of the defining characteristics of Tibetan literature.

The accusation that Tibetans are stealing the fantastic elements of their work from the Latin American magical realist tradition is a serious one. Such claims take away part of what makes the literature of Tibet unique. Alai insists that while magical realists (Marquez as one among many) were important influences on Tibetan literature, so were other authors like Toni Morrison, Salman Rushdie, Margaret Yourcenar and Pablo Neruda.⁶ These influences provided stylistic tools added to the Tibetan arsenal in the same way that they were for all Chinese authors in the 1980s, but they did not fundamentally change what made the literature of Tibet uniquely Tibetan.

The fantastic elements in works by Tibetan authors draw their inspiration, Alai argues, from the native Tibetan folk tradition.⁷ This tradition, passed on orally, is rich in magic and extraordinary occurrences. Wendy Faris writes in *Ordinary Enchantments*,

...Latin American magical realist writing grew out of the first wave of postcolonial romantic primitivism, which affirmed the sense of a usable, natural, and indigenous past but had not yet articulated a distinctive style in which to portray that sensibility. It thus developed as a response to the conjunction of indigenous and avante-garde modes...⁸

Alai argues that the unique style of Tibetan literature, like magical realist work in Latin America, is a fusion of the primitive folk tradition and the avante-garde, utilizing magical realist form to contain stories that draw from the oral tradition.

Of course, once an author has released his work to the public, it is no longer his to remake. Alai has not been able to interpret his own piece for the general public, as much as it seems that he would have liked to in his critical article. Therefore, he began work on another piece, *The Mountain Stairway*, which, in the light of his comments regarding tour guides, can

be seen as his navigation through a physical space and a literary realm. Alai does not become both traveler and storyteller for our amusement. Instead, he writes to create a positive construction of Tibetan culture that embraces the folk tradition and the fantastic, to which his writing is so indebted. In an environment of exoticized and biased literature regarding Tibet and unproductive or even truth-distorting literary criticism, Alai takes on the responsibility of the tour guide in hopes of presenting something that strives towards a truthful and respectful representation of Ngawa Tibet.

The Collision of Literary and Physical Landscapes

In the Tibetan language, the land we know as Tibet is alternately called “The Land of Snow.” This is not without good reason—understanding Tibet begins with an understanding of its landscape. Ngawa Autonomous prefecture, Alai’s homeland, is situated in northern Sichuan province. Alai calls it a “transitional land,” for it is neither firmly a part of the Sichuan basin, nor the “Great Mountain Stairway” of the Himalayas. The land is gouged deeply by rivers: the Tatu, the Xiaojin, and the Dajin.

In interviews, Alai was asked about the land of Gyalrong, where nature still commands awe and inspires fear in man. He said,

In the past, crossing a mountain may have been a once-in-a-lifetime affair. A person was likely to die of cold, avalanche, starvation, anything. The greater fear and respect for nature meant more religiosity in people. Now the same journey takes only a day by car and it is unlikely that the passengers will die, so people fear nature less. In the future, perhaps we will have technology that makes travel easier yet and we will forget about the landscape entirely.

Alai was asked in response, “With the mountains on all sides, nature must be a major inspiration in your work and the work

of other Tibetan writers. Do you feel it plays a powerful role in your thinking?”

“Well... Of course. If I was a New Yorker, I would write about the cityscape, about urban life, but I am not. Every writer should use what they know, and Tibet is still a land where nature prevails. It cannot be ignored.” Alai’s contemporary Tashi Nyima, a Tibetan writer, sums it up more romantically,

As a poet I am constantly searching for new inspiration. Some journey all over the world for such inspiration, but I need only look outside. Every day is different. The colors in the sky at sunset, the way the leaves move in the wind—everything is always changing, and always beautiful.

Although Alai is not a fervent devotee of Buddhism, he shows an enormous amount of concern and respect for the environment. Alai mourns the cultural decline around the holy mountain Molto in *The Mountain Stairway*:

Molto marks the center of Gyalrong culture, but the natural devastation has brought about an irreversible decline of culture. Take for example the path around Molto. Bön and Buddhist disciples believe that winding around holy mountains accumulates good karma, but Molto’s path has been consumed. No...perhaps it is imprecise to say consumed in such a case. “Consumption” implies a beaten path slowly overwhelmed by green grass, vines and trees.... Fierce mountain wind and rain have stripped the topsoil layer by layer. Plant life will never again find a clump of dirt in which to take root. The last bits of green were waiting for the goats whose tongues were covered in sand. This path, formed by travelers feet treading over the grass and decomposed trees, is gone, faded away with the erosion of the land. I have never been one to circumambulate a mountain in prayer, but seeing a road

both ancient and holy sink into nothingness, my heart was seized by a wave of bitterness.⁹

It is important to note that he says cultural decline, not environmental decline. The bitterness he feels inside is not only because the land was stripped of trees, sliding day by day into the river to be washed away, but because the culture of the Gyalrong people is inextricably tied to the environment.

The idea of nature as both a spiritual landscape and a physical one is emphasized in Alai's discussion of General Panre, a conqueror from western Tibet who brought Gyalrong under the control of the ancient Tibetan empire. Consider Alai's treatment of the conqueror's castle: "The castle of the history books, the castle of legend, has disappeared in the weeds. The houses of the villagers, neglected by history and legend, looked down upon by the mighty rulers, still stand in the canyon where the weeds spread out like stars in the sky, waving in the gentle breeze."¹⁰ The land consumes the castle over time, but Alai glorifies the village, the land and the people. "Everyone knows that conquerors, those high and mighty monarchs, are only temporary, fading away in time. Only the land itself, the ancient villages and their people, truly persist through the ages."¹¹ The people and the village itself are tied to the land. They are unchanging and powerful. They represent an essential spirit of Tibet. It is the people and the land itself that Alai honors in his personal tribute to Tibetan culture.

The moments of remarkable beauty in *The Mountain Stairway* make Alai's discussions of desolation all the more bleak. Alai recalls his childhood, playing in the birch forest outside his village and drinking water from a sweet spring. But this discussion is cut short by his memory of deforestation: "...saplings and flowers were crushed to death in seconds, the slender white birch were scarred by the many collisions, and the village's loose fertile topsoil was pounded flat. The rain fell non-stop, washing mud and gravel down the slopes. That year, the sweet fountain of spring water was buried in the flowing sand."¹² His text is filled with this kind of lament for the destruction of the environment. While the bitterness he felt for

the disappearance of the mountain trail was due to the loss of a cultural relic, his anger towards deforestation in general seems to stem from his association between nature and the Tibetan identity:

When the birch forests disappeared, so too did the fear and love of nature passed down through the generations. People took their axes to the few remaining trees, seeking a little cash. Once when I returned home for the spring festival, I heard the villagers bustling about on the highway, loading stolen timber onto trucks under the cover of midnight darkness. It is in this way that I witnessed the absolute dissolution of the forests and the degradation of heartbroken souls into immorality.¹³

For Alai, nature is not only an essential element of religion, but also an upholder of morals. Once the landscape is removed, people lose the fear and love of the landscape that is so important to his understanding of Tibet.

Alai's love of nature can be seen from another, more literary perspective. He devotes ample narrative space to telling the many legends he hears about bear-men.¹⁴ Alai's preoccupation with the bear-men, or Yetis, of Tibet is not mere superstition. These Yetis represent the roots of mankind. They are the most primitive kind of humans. Even their existence itself is tied to the land when Alai links their disappearance with the deforestation.¹⁵ Seen in the context of the larger movement of the 1980s of root-seeking fiction, or the literary attempt to return to the roots of civilization, the discussion of the Yetis is more a discussion of the primitive roots of humanity and its originally intimate connection to the land itself.

By emphasizing the power of nature and its importance to the spiritual identity of Tibetans, Alai is giving it a position of privilege in his text. Importantly, this positioning of nature does not only manifest itself in Alai's thematic concerns, but also in his style of writing. Alai's text does not move through a traditional narrative line, but rather flows along the currents of

the rivers, and soars over the mountains. A traditional story or an average travel journal is apt to skim over the transitional moments between event locations A and B. Alai, however, makes the transitional spaces into moments of their own. The beauty, the desolation: These are the foundations of his text. The question then becomes, what will be built from this foundation? Where does the mountain stairway lead us? Keep in mind Alai's comment about fear and awe-inspiring religiosity. The grandeur of nature makes humans minute. If Alai is successful in his descriptions, then he is generating an awe inside the reader. While this may not make Buddhists out of all of us, it is likely to firmly support the addition of the next critical element in understanding Tibet and the folk tradition: spirituality

Faith and Making the Magical Real.

Tibet is undeniably a land of religion. As Tsering Shakya puts it, "Related to the question of modernization, another difficult subject for Tibetan writers was, and still is, religion.... It is through their religion...that Tibetans have always found their identity."¹⁶ Indeed, the landscape of Tibet is capable of inspiring a religious awe. Consider Alai's musing,

As I wandered the villages of mountain gods, I was hoping I could get my hands on an ancient pear wood block carved in the hands of some nameless artisan, but this wish has yet to be fulfilled. Though I have never been an antique collector, the idea of a carved wind-horse block tempts me. I want to find a lake reflecting the brilliant blue sky, nestled between snow-capped mountains on a warm spring day with blossoming flowers. By the lake there would be a carpet of green grass where I would sit to make rubbings from the wooden board and scatter them in the wind.¹⁷

This is not mere poetic fancy. Alai is showing us the power of the landscape and the legends to inspire spirituality.

Understanding the religiosity of Tibet is critical to unearthing the true nature of Tibetan literary culture.

Religion as a thematic influence in literature is a simple matter. Of course, much of the body of literature surrounding Tibet makes religion a central concern of the text. Of much deeper interest are the formal influences that religion lends to Tibetan storytelling. These influences all lead neatly to a literature based heavily on the spirit of the oral tradition from three different angles. The shamanism of the native Bön religion instills credibility upon the fantastic stories of multitudinous gods of nature, validating a high level of spiritual and magical language in the modern text. Second is the Buddhist concept of cyclical time played out through reincarnation, which disrupts the tendency towards picturesque fiction and moves storytelling towards tales of spiritual development. Third, and perhaps most complicated, is the influence of the four noble truths of Buddhism as a sort of medical prescription, diagnosing suffering and offering a cure. This scientific and non-religious, but still highly spiritual approach to the fundamental issues of life leads to an incorporation of the fantastic into the realm of believability. Such a phenomenon plays out as a sort of mirror to magical realism in that a text may incorporate magical events, but in the context of their culture, these events are believable. Still, these events remain extraordinary enough for the moment of hesitation needed in literature to separate fantasy from the fantastic. Together, these three elements of Tibetan spirituality manifest themselves in a unique literary culture.

Shamanism and the Fantastic

It is best to start with the most straightforward of spirituality's influence on literature. This is the shamanistic and animistic tendency of the native Bön religion, a tendency that persists even today in making Tibetan Buddhism internationally recognizable and highly distinct from Chinese, Indian or Japanese Buddhism. Alai is generous in the number of his stories regarding the clash between Bön and Buddhism in *The Mountain Stairway*. The most prominent example can be found

in Alai's account of Vairochana, a missionary who brought Buddhism to Gyalrong:

This region had always been the center of Bön, yet stories of Vairochana, the great disseminator of Buddhism, reached even this land between cypress-covered mountains. In caves, the master is believed to have left miraculous signs such as inscriptions and footprints, as well as many wonderful legends.... While struggling against the power and influence of Bön, Padmasambhava used his magical powers to defeat Bön sorcerers. He combined these magical contests with a second important strategy— after each victory, he would bring the local gods under his control by conferring onto them various titles.¹⁸

It is easy to make the mistake of separating all that is shamanistic from Tibetan Buddhism and calling it Bön, but Alai reminds us that even the great Buddhist Vairochana had to use magical powers and recognize the local gods in order to gain a foothold for his Nyingma Buddhist sect in Gyalrong.

Alai is equally generous in his animistic stories of those mountain gods that Vairochana tried to tame:

Slender fir trees strung with fluttering prayer flags and tapered to a point are arrows offered to the mountain god during the annual pilgrimage. Though the god is ancient, more distant than a thousand years of seclusion coalesced into mystery, local Tibetans living around Molto believe the god can still ride a horse-drawn chariot on the frigid winds, journeying between heaven and earth. The mountain god is locked in fierce battles, for not only does it require the yearly offering of arrows, but it also demands an endless supply of war horses.¹⁹

This mountain, Gyalmu Molto, was never successfully integrated by the Buddhists through Vairochana's title-conferring strategy. Thus the people appease it and help the god in the

wars that it constantly wages by sending it wind-horses, little scraps of paper with printed horses on them.

Alai is not content simply to tell us the stories of legendary mountain gods; he also relates the stories to the people to be sure that we understand their compelling influence in Tibet. Consider his discussion of Tibetan Buddhist sage Vairochana, responsible for bringing Buddhism to Gyalrong:

The most famous spot where the master meditated is a cave known as “Vairochana Grotto,” nestled in a verdant green forest ten miles outside of Chami village in Bar-khams County. Some vague marks on the walls are said to be imprints of his palms left behind from his meditative practice. At least, that is the firm belief of the locals who pilgrimage to the site in an endless stream. In this bright, spacious cave, there is a dead tree trunk six meters tall and seven wide with its roots still intact. Locals say that while Vairochana was disseminating Buddhism in Gyalrong, he also went to teach at the sacred Emei Mountain. When he returned, he plunged his walking stick into the bottom of the cave where it took root and grew into a sturdy tree. Today this tree trunk is a magical relic; the masses who come to worship Vairochana often take scrapings of the trunk and burn them with leaves to bring good luck and wealth.²⁰

The reader learns the legend of Vairochana’s hermitage but also reads that the legend still lives on as endless streams of pilgrims travel to the site and take scrapings from the tree trunk. This inclusion of legend into the present day, a legend that continues to affect people’s lives, shows that the fantastic lies close to people’s hearts not simply as literary genre but more, as truth. The living nature of these legends makes a literary reference to them particularly potent. When Gyalrong writers incorporate Gyalmu Molto, they bring connotations as immediate and unavoidable as we would find in a Western writer who places a fruit tree in the back yard of a character named Eve.

As a secondary example of the pervasive influence of shamanism in Tibetan literature, we need only to look to the epic of Gesar. If written in its entirety, this story would be the longest epic in the world. It is recited by specialized bards who consider themselves possessed by the spirit of Gesar or one of his cohorts. According to tradition, these storytellers are not born as bards, but instead wake up one morning and suddenly remember, word for word, the entire epic. The appearance of Buddhism has likely caused the current version of the epic to depart from its original meaning. Gesar is considered to be a Buddhist hero sent down from heaven with magical powers to rid Tibet of demonic influences (namely, non-Buddhist rulers). Gesar accomplishes this task through many feats of magic and trickery, then ascends back to heaven for a well-earned rest.

Consider the following passage from Alexandra David-Neel's summary of the legend. Gesar murders the demon-king Lutzen and faces Lutzen's loyal subjects:

Never can we kill such a magician, they thought despairingly. However, remaining faithful to their dead master, they attempted to avenge him by shooting poisoned arrows at the hero. Not one of these reached him, but he, carried away by anger, drew his sword of flame from its scabbard. Terrified at the sight of this supernatural weapon, the warriors prostrated themselves in token of submission, protesting their readiness to become his subjects and accept the Religion.²¹

This episode of the Gesar tale captures the violence and magic of pre-Buddhist Tibet, but puts it to the service of Buddhism. The Gesar epic is filled with tales of the hero using heavenly powers and triumphing over his enemies. Throughout the many stories, Gesar hovers tentatively in the intermediary space between human and god. At times he triumphs using power far beyond that of a mortal. At other times he is defeated and tricked, experiencing doubt or grief like a human being. This unique tone is a definite influence on Tibetan literature today.

Alai feels so indebted to the epic that he has undertaken the project of collecting and recording an abridged version himself.

The unique fusion of shamanistic and magical elements into Tibetan Buddhism gives a broad literary license for imaginative storytelling. Tibetan authors like Alai, through his use of the fantastic, and Tashi Dawa, in his direct reference to Gesar in “Soul Knotted on a Leather Thong,” are aware of their debt to a storytelling tradition steeped in Tibetan Buddhist legends.

Samsara and the Non-linear Narrative

There is an overwhelming sense in the West that we are *going* somewhere. The destination is not always the same, but we are moving forward to some distant, perhaps unreachable point called *progress*. This is clearly apparent in our politics, but also in literature and philosophy. For example, we have historical materialism and linear development of history. We also have the picturesque novel that privileges a single character and his or her personal growth. Christianity ends with final judgment and revelation. In such a goal-oriented and end-oriented society, it is sometimes hard to recognize that time need not move in a straight line, that people may amount to more (or less) than the sum of their life’s labor as they look back at the moment of their death.

Buddhism does not privilege the straight line. In fact, Buddhist time is cyclical. Buddhists believe that we have lived through countless previous lives and that most will live through countless more. We inhabit *samsara*—a process of birth and rebirth based on karma that continues until the soul reaches enlightenment.²² Everything that is done has been done in previous epochs. Everything that has been said has already been uttered countless times over the generations. Such an outlook admits linear development only in regard to spiritual and religious matters. All else is cyclical and thus illusion.

This Buddhist notion of time creates a hierarchy of significance that is different from the Western literary hierarchy. A story may gloss over the captivating struggles of a character to gain power or wealth, but dwell on moral and

spiritual matters. This tendency is tied closely with the shamanistic influence, for spiritual matters are not necessarily abstract in the way we tend to think of them in a monotheistic world, but are often tangible battles between gods or the encounter of a ghost. Alai embraces the hierarchy of the spiritual before the material in the route he chooses to follow throughout his travelogue: "...I began in Lhasa, the very heart of the Tibetan plateau, and followed the staircase down, tracing the veins of history as I descended step-by-step along the route of the conqueror, the route of cultural dissemination."²³ This route is the route along which Buddhism spread to Gyalrong. Thus the idea of *samsara* privileges a non-traditional narrative in which plot may be secondary to larger overarching ideas.

The boundlessness of time also lends to an association of the boundless landscape as holy, particularly in regard to mountains. A mountain is a symbol of the unmoving and unchanging. Its vast structure existed before we did and will exist long after we die; this reality gives it an air of importance as something that transcends *samsara* and thus becomes a god. In this way, Buddhist conceptions of time support the literary effects of the overwhelming landscape and of shamanism..

Becoming Familiar with the Fantastic

Alexandra David-Neel explains the Tibetan attitude towards fantastic occurrences:

None in Tibet deny that such events take place, but no one regards them as miracles, according to the meaning of that term in the West, that is to say, as *supernatural* events. Indeed, Tibetans do not recognize any supernatural agent. The so-called wonders, they think, are as natural as common daily events and depend on the clever handling of little-known laws and forces.²⁴

This is not surprising, given the main tenets of Buddhism. Gotama Buddha formulated the four noble truths not as a god, but as a sort of doctor. First, he observed that people suffer, then he

found the origin of the suffering. Next, he claimed that there was a way to end suffering, and lastly he showed how to end suffering.²⁵ He astutely diagnosed a problem in human nature that prevents us from reaching a higher state of being and then offered a prescription in the eightfold path.

This tradition of viewing religion or spirituality as a practical means to an end is evidenced by the development of the Tibetan sciences. Consider the *Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* as an example of formulating a practical guidebook to increase the chances of a better rebirth. This guidebook does not view the after-death experience as supernatural. It is a part of life and is as real as can be. Western thinkers such as Carl Jung have described Tibetan beliefs outlined in the *Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* regarding what we consider “supernatural” as “psychic science.”²⁶

This willingness to incorporate the magical into the everyday leads to a complex relationship with magical realism. As has already been mentioned, many critics pass off Tibetan literature that uses the fantastic as an emulation of Marquez’s magical realism. Alai vehemently rejects this idea, as was discussed earlier. The source of such accusations is easy to see. Tibetan culture is steeped in a religion that prompts the literary use of what we consider magic, but incorporates this magic into everyday and otherwise realistic settings. The fantastic elements have the requisite moment of hesitation on the part of the reader and the characters in the story because, while an extraordinary occurrence is explainable, it is still extraordinary and tied to powerful natural forces.

Nevertheless, it is important to remember that Tibetan magical realism is not Latin American magical realism. The political connotations of Marquez’s style do not carry over to the Tibetan use of magic. Alai and his contemporaries like Tashi Nyima, the Yunnan Tibetan poet, consistently assert that the fantastic is a positive defining element of their culture that stands alone as opposed to a negative opposition that relies on the concept of a colonizer and its linear/rational perspective.

Shamanism, *samsara*, and the four noble truths together forge a strong aesthetic in Tibetan literature that upholds the

essential folk tradition. The Gesar epic is the clearest example of this fusion, with its fantastic plot based on spiritual development that is reinterpreted over the generations by storytellers. It is important to understand that religion in Tibet is almost second nature. An old woman may sit all day spinning her prayer wheel with the most fervent faith in the Buddha, but not know the four noble truths. A seasoned monk may have devoted his entire life to religion, but be unable to explain the fundamental differences between Buddhism and Bön. Religion is an enormous shaping force, but a largely unconscious one. A person need not study the sutras to believe in the Buddha. Religion is an innate part of Tibetan culture, and, as Alai describes, culture lives through the people and within the land itself.

***Folk Tales and Grassroots Literary Anthropology
(Rewriting the Center)***

As described, both a root-seeking focus on the land and people and a spiritual vision of the universe affect Tibetan literature in their own ways. However, they also mutually support a third element that defines what makes Tibetan literature essentially Tibetan: the folk tradition. *The Mountain Stairway's* entire first section is devoted to the folk stories that surround Gyalrong and its origins.

The root-seeking movement in Chinese literature sought out the origins of the Chinese people, looking towards the primitive pre-Confucian Chu culture as well as the ancient cradle of Chinese civilization in the Yangze river valley. However, some authors, like Ma Yuan, saw Chinese culture as degenerate and overly corrupted by materialism. These authors flooded Tibet in the 1980s searching for a culture that would inspire nativist and primitive literature. While the Confucian cannon largely co-opted and replaced the older, more animistic traditional literature of China, Buddhism embraced and incorporated the animistic and shamanistic legends of the Bön. Thus, Tibet proved to be an excellent literary source for the root-seekers.

Recall the discussion of Alai's article defending *Red Poppies* as a work of literature independent from Latin American magical realism. Alai explains that the idiot in his story is based on a

famous Tibetan folk hero, Aku Tunpa. The constant speculation concerning which *external* source inspired Alai is jarring, considering the rich cultural landscape of folk stories that he describes in *The Mountain Stairway*. It is no wonder, then, that Alai feels obligated to so thoroughly introduce the reader to the native tradition from which his own and many other author's work derives.

Folk Tales as Historiography

Alai's *The Mountain Stairway* is an important text in helping us to understand the literary sources that Tibetan and Han Chinese authors alike are referencing in their work. One of the most predominant themes of *The Mountain Stairway* is the tension between "empirically verifiable history," as Alai puts it, and folk history. Alai shows that folk history and the oral tradition are still alive and well in Gyalrong, occupying perhaps a greater psychological space in people's minds than historiography. Consider the folk tale of the monkey and rock-ogress. There was once a devout Buddhist monkey, whose layperson's vows were conferred by Avolokiteshvara himself, meditating in the land of Tibet. Unfortunately this pious and upright monkey became the object of carnal desire to a rock-ogress. She issued an ultimatum: if the monkey would not marry her, she would find a rock-ogre husband and create a race of rock-ogres to smite all living things. Avolokiteshvara approved of this shotgun marriage and blessed them, predicting the spread of Buddhism throughout the land. The monkey and the rock-ogress bore children of each Buddhist class of being, from hungry ghosts to gods. Avolokiteshvara then cast crop seeds on the earth to feed the monkey's children. This marriage explains the presence of evil forces in the world, since the rock-ogress' lineage carries all the faults of mankind and the monkey's lineage carries all that is good.²⁷

It is a historian's instinct to discard this tale as worthless because it contributes nothing to a greater understanding of the Tibetan people's "true" origins. The tale is devoid of what one may be apt to call "historical fact." Yet such a dismissal is premature. John Powers, author of *History as Propaganda*, argues that Tibetan historical writing is all so biased that it

approaches fiction, but that it is valuable in understanding ideological struggles. He quotes Foucault, “The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language, relations of power not relations of meaning. History has no ‘meaning.’”²⁸ Powers does not argue that we must consider all sources to be equally true, nor does he debunk the various histories as false. Instead, he is interested in how these histories reflect a greater struggle. Powers calls history “the ideological battle of the production of historical ‘truth.’”²⁹ Herein lie the absolute facts of history. While each story may not capture the facts of a situation accurately, it will capture the interpretation of said situation on the part of the authors. Historical documents can be used to map out ideological struggles over the centuries. In a land where the development of spiritual capital has largely outpaced the development of material capital, historiography viewed as the footprint of conflicting ideologies seems especially relevant.

The creation story of the monkey and rock-ogress may not give us any clues as to the origin of the Tibetan people, but it does document a yearning by the author for a divine blessing on and approval of his people. It also shows an ideological refusal to connect evil with Buddhism, attributing it instead to an irreligious rock-ogress who suffers under the grip of carnal desire. This story of creation also gives the Tibetan people a divine claim to the land of Tibet, due to the fact that it was blessed by Avolokiteshvara as the land of Buddhism.

Alai uses folk tales in much the same way that John Powers presents history. The empirical truth of the folk tales is irrelevant. The important part lies in what clues the stories give us about the thoughts and emotions of the people who conceived of the story and passed it on for generations. It is important to remember that Alai's grand scheme is not to present a history, but rather to present a portrait and a tour of his homeland. The following passage is an example of Alai's folk storytelling:

The legend goes that early on the second morning after the birth of Trisong Detsen, his father the king went outside the palace to visit the mother and the baby, only

to discover that another consort who claimed to be the true mother had taken the boy. In order to determine which consort was the mother, the court officials put the little prince in a room and asked the two consorts to pick him up at the same time. The Chinese Princess Jincheng picked him up first, but Consort Nanang ferociously pried at the child in an attempt to rip him from Jincheng's arms. Jincheng, afraid for the baby's life, let go. Because of this, the officials were convinced that Princess Jincheng was the true mother. However, it is written in those history books that are based upon empirical evidence that Trisong Detsen was born in 742 AD even though Princess Jincheng had died in 739 AD. Trisong Detsen was in fact Consort Nanang's child. Why then do the folk tales contain so blatant a discrepancy?³⁰

Alai goes on to explain that this story is evidence of a fierce struggle between Buddhism and the native Bön religion. An examination of folk tales dealing with the issue of Trisong Detsen's birth may not reveal who his mother was, but it will more importantly indicate the ideological tensions of the time. The story is imbued with further meaning by the fact that it has survived as part of the oral tradition. It is being passed on even today, bearing witness to the fact that some element is still emotionally and spiritually resonant for the Tibetan people.

Alai tells another story of Vairochana in which he was exiled by the king on suspicion of slandering the king's wife. Driven away, he comes to Gyalrong, Alai's homeland, and escapes death and imprisonment through his miraculous yogic powers. Alai writes, "Of course, this is a folk interpretation of history, latent with the emotions of the people. Through their stories, the common folk shape history. Verifiable history itself remains unchanged in spite of folk revision."³¹ Alai honors the folk tradition, but he is not trying to assert it as the ultimate *objective* truth. Rather he presents it as a beautiful *subjective* truth: not a historical one, but a cultural one. The story is latent with "the emotions of the people." This is the kind of material that a true guide to Tibetan culture relies upon.

Folk Tales and Cultural Centrality

Tashi Tsering claims that writing in the language of a colonizer is a way to “write back to the center,” in effect a method to disrupt the cultural colonization and assert the centrality of the colonized entity.³² This concept takes on immense gravity in regard to a place that is fundamentally far from the center. Alai’s homeland, Gyalrong, was never under the solid political or religious control of Lhasa. In fact, Alai’s *Red Poppies* documents the final years of the chieftain system in the area and shows the complex power interplay between the local chieftains, the Chinese, and Lhasa. The question to be asked in such a land is therefore, upon what cultural center do authors base themselves and to what cultural center do they write?

Tashi Nyima related in interviews that he is opposed to the very idea of cultural centrality. In a lively evening salon, he and his literary colleagues—a Lisu minority poet, a journalist, and others—expressed their disdain for the assumption that all Tibetans, or even all of any ethnicity, can be grouped under the same heading. Asked where he would locate his own cultural center if he did not locate it in Lhasa, he stood up and gestured to his heart. “I am my center; you are your center.”

Alai would agree with Tashi Nyima; his extensive use of the folk tradition takes on another important role beyond a simple tribute to the source material of his literary inspiration. Many of the tales he tells are highly subjective and localized. For example, Alai relates the legend of a mountain god convention called to order to determine the hierarchy of gods. The meeting is about to convene when

...the sky darkened and a deity approached the convention on a cloud from the east. He lowered the cloud with a movement of his hand and walked imposingly towards the assembly with a leopard skin tied around his waist. Surveying the field, he saw that no seats were empty except for the dragon throne... so he simply strutted up to the front and sat straight down on the throne. The assembly erupted in outrage, but the

newcomer made a slight bow and stated with the utmost composure, “I am aware of the debate over scriptures and contest of martial arts, but since there are no seats below, it seems that I was pushed here. How can I oppose the will of the crowd?” He stood and bowed to the assembly. The other gods were unswayed and challenged him to an immediate debate on the scriptures. None could have known that this god from the east was so erudite, his speech so eloquent.... They challenged this upstart to a clash of arms. The god of the east demonstrated every form of martial arts conceivable.... After eighty-one days of struggle, he defeated every god. As a result, the assembly was convinced to let him once more ascend the throne.³³

Alai goes on to say that this story represents the desires of a marginalized people to be central, for

the legend of Molto’s enthronement convolutedly signifies a desire of the local tribes to become a cultural center. In truth, Molto appears nowhere among the names of holy guardian mountains on the Tibetan Buddhist roster. This does not stop the Gyalrong people from elaborating on their Molto mythology.³⁴

This tale cannot be seen as a Tibetan myth but rather a Gyalrong myth, or more specifically, a Molto myth. Cultural identity can be fragmented further and further until, like Tashi Nyima spiritedly demonstrated, the individual is the center. Recounting the many folk tales Alai encounters along his journey is a way for him to grant centrality to a marginalized land.

Alai said in interviews that the concept of culture as a uniting entity is an invention of academics. He argued that if one asked peasants from his hometown what culture they belonged to, they would respond with a blank stare. Even the legend of Molto, the pride of the local people, cannot be counted as a unifying force, for Alai prefaces it with the following, “I moved into the path of the shepherd and asked her about Molto. The

question seemed not to register on her blank face. I tried dropping the name Vairochana. She broke into a smile, pointing to the tree-lined midsection of the mountain."³⁵ The Shepherd is unaware of Molto and the glorious legend that lends centrality to her village, but she is aware of Vairochana and the legend that he meditated in caves on Molto Mountain. This account demonstrates the absolute subjectivity of cultural conceptions. Alai gives us a legend to upset the Lhasa-based centrality of a "unified" concept of Tibet, but he also gives us a personal story to upset a regional idea of unity. Through folktales, Alai respects culture as it is expressed through the autonomy of the individual. This is the very nature of the oral tradition—stories passed on, reinterpreted, and retold by individuals, sometimes adding and sometimes subtracting, based on the audience. This is the beautiful and subjective tradition that *The Mountain Stairway* honors.

A Tour Guide's Final Remarks

Alai's *The Mountain Stairway* pays homage to three intertwined elements of Tibetan culture that give the literature of Tibet its unique identity: the landscape, the religion, and the folk tradition. Each element is important individually for its effects on writing, but also critical in supporting and magnifying the effect of the other two. The vast landscape inspires religiosity while at the same time isolating people, allowing them to develop a unique oral tradition. The religion inspires a respect for the landscape, based on the shamanistic roots of Tibetan Buddhism, while also providing inspiration for a creative folk tradition. Storytelling incorporates both religion and landscape as dominant themes and thereby keeps them a part of the living tradition. Alai is able to include all three of these elements in his cultural tour of Gyalrong Tibet. In doing so, he gives us a relatively comprehensive picture of how Tibetan literature has developed towards the use of the fantastic, and why the imagery of nature and religion dominate the landscape of the text.

Despite those who doubt that culture survives in Tibet, Alai brilliantly delivers his own documentation of a living tradition in Gyalrong. We began with the question of what is Tibet? Alai

transcends the question itself, mapping Tibet without geographical boundaries, etching in topographical lines to indicate routes of religious and linguistic dissemination, marking locations by the stories they have to tell. In the end, “Tibet” is a straw man. What Alai presents is not the summation of culture within the bounds of geography (Tibet) but rather a mapping of geography in terms of culture. He constructs a literary image on the grassroots level, reveling in the minutiae, celebrating the glory of a people and their stories.

Alai’s Tibet is not constructed simply as a foil for some idea like colonialism, or materialism. Considering the amount of literature that subsumes Tibet into the dichotomy of oppressor/oppressed or into the Chinese dichotomy of feudal serfdom/liberation, Alai’s construction of Tibet makes his book unique. It does not subvert or abstract the culture of Gyalrong for the sake of literature but rather brings the literature closer to its inspiration, allowing Gyalrong culture to manifest itself untethered.

Endnotes

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The *ASIANetwork EXCHANGE*, A Journal for Asian Studies in the Liberal Arts (ISSN 1943-9938 [print] and ISSN 1943-9946 [online]), is published two times a year. As an important venue for communication among members, the journal includes information and articles in its sections Teaching about Asia, Media Resources, Research of Note, For Our Students, and Books that Beckon.

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