6-2015

Otaku – A Case of Assigned Identities

Steven O'Branovich

Union College - Schenectady, NY

Recommended Citation

Steven O'Branovich

Professor Madancy

3/17/15

Otaku – A Case of Assigned Identities

Introduction

With the international rise in popularity of *anime* and *manga* in the 1990s, Japan shattered its image as a nation of soulless salary men and robots and became an entertainment giant. Since then, *anime* has become an even larger force in the global cultural landscape, growing from a niche tape-trading market at science fiction conventions to inspiring large-scale conventions of its own. The driving force behind this expansion is a group of people known as *otaku*. Internationally, *otaku* are often defined simply as enthusiastic fans of Japanese popular culture and of *anime* and *manga* in particular. In Japan, however, the term "*otaku*" has a more negative connotation, denoting enthusiasts whose obsession with their hobbies drives them to seclusion and deviant behavior.

Despite making positive strides in recent years, the overall perception of *otaku* in Japan has been negative. Connections drawn between *otaku* culture and Tsutomu Miyazaki, who killed, mutilated and sexually assaulted four young girls between 1988 and 1989, created the notion that *otaku* had a high capacity for sexual deviance and the potential to be violent criminals. This idea was strengthened by the sarin gas attacks on the Tokyo subway system carried out by the Aum Shinrikyo cult in 1995. The public image of *otaku* may also have been worsened by concerns about the future and morality of the youth population amid deteriorating economic conditions throughout the 1990s.

While the 2000s have not seen the total vindication of *otaku* culture, mainstream acceptance became an increasingly plausible reality. Akihabara, a major gathering place for *otaku* in Tokyo, became a tourist attraction, drawing Japanese and foreigners alike to witness and

interact with the new ambassadors of Japanese culture.[1] *Otaku* have even begun to be portrayed in a positive light in mainstream popular culture. In 2004, a popular television series called *Densha Otoko* ("Train Man") told the supposedly true story of an *otaku* who rescued a girl from a group of perverts on a train. The *otaku* then wins the heart of the woman he saved, following the advice of his friends online in his courtship. Given their roles as proliferators of Japanese culture, *otaku* have begun to break away from the negative stereotypes that have defined them since the late 1980s. In America, too, *otaku* have become increasingly accepted to the point that *anime* and *manga* and related products are no longer limited to video stores, and *anime* conventions such as Otakon are welcomed with open arms not only by their hosting venues but by the hosting cities as well.

In this paper, I will be analyzing recent and evolving perspectives of *otaku* and whether or not these perceptions are deserved. I will argue that, despite recent improvements, the overall image of *otaku* is more negative than positive and that this perception is not justified. The main points of my argument will be that *otaku* are wrongly assigned blame for contemporary social concerns, that *otaku* have a positive influence on the Japanese economy and product innovation, and that *otaku* are instrumental in the spreading and proliferation of Japanese culture.

To support and develop my arguments, I will be relying primarily on scholarly articles in order to gain insight on the historical context and social climates surrounding the changing meanings and perceptions of *otaku* and *otaku* culture. In particular, I will be making frequent use of the published works of Patrick Galbraith, as well as my personal Skype interviews with him. Dr. Galbraith has published several books and articles on the subjects of *otaku* and Japanese popular culture, including *The Otaku Encyclopedia: An insider's guide to the subculture of cool*

---

[1] Patrick Galbraith, "Akihabara: Conditioning a Public "Otaku" Image," *Mechademia* 5 (2010): 219-220.

Japan and "Akihabara: Conditioning a Public Otaku Image." It should be noted that many of his publications seem to be written with the aim of promoting awareness of *otaku* and their situation, so there are probably some pro-*otaku* leanings in his arguments. He holds a Ph. D in Information Studies from the University of Tokyo and is pursuing a second Ph. D in Cultural Anthropology at Duke University. Dr. Galbraith currently resides in Tokyo and is notable for establishing the first English-language tour of Akihabara in 2006.

The scholarly articles will be supplemented with popular press articles from sources including *Kotaku* and *Wired* to gain a sense of public opinion on the issues being discussed. *Kotaku* is a news site focused on developments in technology and popular culture in Japan and around the world. The site also provides news on upcoming releases of *anime*, *manga* and video games, as well as opinion pieces on various topics. Additionally, I will be consulting reports published by the Nomura Institute, a group that publishes findings on consumer trends and habits.

This paper is divided into three chapters. In the first chapter, I examine the origins of the word "*otaku*" and the evolution of its meaning over time in both America and Japan. This process will consist of analyzing the gender ratios and the age demographics of *otaku* in each decade from the 1970s through the 1980s, as well as the 2000s through to the present day. Next, I explore the connotations that the word "*otaku*" had during each of these periods, and how the definition has changed since the last period.

The second chapter is an exploration of the factors that have contributed to any negative perceptions of *otaku*, primarily in Japan. I first discuss the notion that *otaku* are potential criminals with violent tendencies and a penchant for sexual deviance by examining the connection made by Japanese media outlets between *otaku* culture and the Miyazaki incident and Aum Shinrikyo sarin gas attacks. I will then proceed to explore the linking of *otaku* to various

4

social concerns, especially between the amateur *manga* movement and the alleged decline in youth morality, and between the assumed social withdrawal of *otaku* and a concern over the ability of Japanese youth to secure a job and continue the traditional Japanese way of life.

The last chapter serves to address the points raised in the second chapter about social concerns and assess them for validity. Specifically, I refute the connections between declining youth morality and social withdrawal and *anime* and *manga*, and I then posit more likely causes for these problems. Additionally, I make note of the positive effects that *otaku* and *otaku* culture have had on Japan. In particular, I focus on the global expansion of Japanese culture, the influence *otaku* have on product development and innovation, and how the continued, steady spending of *otaku* has contributed to the Japanese economy.

Chapter 1 – Who's That Pokémon?

In this chapter, I will be examining the history of *otaku* in Japan, the birthplace of the term, in order to gain a better understanding of the people being examined in this paper. By monitoring the change in *otaku* from their origin in the 1970s until now, I will be able to determine what it means to be an *otaku* in both Japan and America. To do this, I will be reviewing a combination of scholarly literature, interviews, and opinions gathered from online forums. In this chapter, I argue that discrepancy in the definition of "*otaku*" between American and Japanese societies is primarily found in its scope, with the Japanese definition being far more detailed than the comparatively simple and narrow American definition.

Although its traditional use is antiquated today, "*otaku*" literally translates to "your house" and in traditional Japanese, it was a polite form of the pronoun "you". In today's terms, "*otaku*" essentially refers to anyone with an obsessive interest in *anime*, *manga*, video games and other facets of popular culture.[2] According to a 2004 study, there were approximately 6.46 million people comprising the *otaku* population in Japan at that time.[3] In Japan, the stereotypical *otaku* is male and frequents Akihabara, a district in Tokyo known for its abundant electronics stores.

The term "*otaku*" was first applied to fans of *anime* (Japanese animation) and *manga* (Japanese comics) in 1983, in Akio Nakamori's essay "Otaku no Kenkyuu," in which Nakamori describes *otaku* as "maniacs" and "fanatics" obsessed with all things having to do with *manga*,

---

[2] Melek Ortabasi, "National History as Otaku Fantasy: Satoshi Kon's *Millenium Actress*" in Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime, ed. Mark W. MacWilliams. (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 2008), 277.

[3] "New Market Scale Estimation for *Otaku*: Population of 1.72 Million with Market Scale of ¥411 Billion," Nomura Research Institute, Ltd. Last Modified October 6, 2005. http://www.nri.com/global/news/2005/051006.html.

anime, idols and more.[4] Idols are highly commercialized pop singers who are usually teenage girls or young women that may perform individually or in groups. The use of "*otaku*" as a label for these people began to stick when it was noted that people attending *anime* and *manga* conventions c. mid 1970s - early 1980s addressed each other as "*otaku*" when meeting for the first time.[5] The reason for this particular form of address is thought to be caused by a lack of social experience; kids who stayed at home all day would pick up their mothers' speech patterns, including the use of "*otaku*" as a pronoun, by proxy.[6] Thus, the term was derogatory since its inception, as it was used to make fun of the poor social skills of *otaku*.

The earliest *otaku* emerged during the animation boom of the 1960s and 1970s, before "*otaku*" was being used as a label. They were known primarily for being fans of science fiction *anime* and *manga* such as *Space Battleship Yamato* and *Mobile Suit Gundam*.[7] This generation was also the first to start publishing fanzines (fan-made magazines) about their favorite *anime* and *manga*, and organizing conventions. To learn more about the gender demographics of *otaku*, In June and October 2014, I interviewed Patrick Galbraith, who conducts tours of Akihabara and is a journalist and cultural anthropologist specializing in Japanese popular culture and its associated fan culture. Galbraith stated that, at this point, *otaku* were approximately evenly split between male and female fans, though women tended to produce more content, in particular, *doujinshi* – self-published books, including *manga* and written works, featuring original characters or characters from existing professional works, than men and were more likely to

---

[4] Matthew Alt, "What Kind of Otaku Are You?" April 2, 2008, accessed October 20, 2014, http://neojaponisme.com/2008/04/02/what-kind-of-otaku-are-you/.
[5] Roland Kelts, *Japanamerica: How Japanese Pop Culture Has Invaded the U.S.* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 157.
[6] Patrick Galbraith, *The Otaku Encyclopedia: An insider's guide to the subculture of Cool Japan* (New York: Kodansha), 171.
[7] Hiroki Azuma, *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, trans. Jonathan E. Abel and Shion Kono (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 6-7.

7

engage in *cosplay* as well.[8] *Cosplay* comes from "costume play," and it refers to dressing up as one's favorite characters from television, video games, movies, etc. Essentially, this is the group that set the stage for *otaku* culture as it exists today.

As *anime* continued to grow in quality and diversity, the second generation of *otaku* emerged in the 1980s, roughly coinciding with the *loli* boom of the early to mid-1980s. The term "*loli*" is derived from Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Lolita* (1955) and it refers to young female characters who are valued for their purity and cuteness, but who may be portrayed with sexual undertones. During this second generation, *otaku* culture continued to prosper and branch out into new subcultures, such as those obsessed with optimizing computers with the latest software, building robots for recreational a competitive use, and using model kits to create plastic or resin figures of *anime* and *manga* characters. A slight shift in the fan base also occurred in this era, as the *loli* boom created a greater male demographic in both the overall *otaku* population and in the comic market. Despite the change in gender distribution, Galbraith notes that the age range remained fairly consistent, ranging from middle- and high-school-aged children through adulthood (roughly ages 15-40s).[9]

Throughout the 1990s, *anime* began to mature, as can be seen in shows such as *Neon Genesis Evangelion* and *Ghost in the Shell*, which, in addition to providing entertainment and action in a science-fiction environment, explored philosophical themes including life and death, as well as the interface between humanity and robotics. The 1990s also saw the rise of the internet and home computers, which allowed *otaku* to communicate outside of conventions and club meetings, and to expand their creative output to the production of software and video games, such as *Touhou Project*, a series of independently-produced shooting games that debuted in 1996.

---

[8] Patrick Galbraith, Skype interview, October 1, 2014.
[9] Galbraith, Skype interview, October 1, 2014.

With the end of the *loli* boom, Galbraith notes that the gender ratio within the fanbase returned to a roughly equal mix of men and women.[10]

Since the 1990s, *otaku* culture has become increasingly digital, with massive online communities, such as 2channel, a public forum for discussing all types of popular culture, as well as fan-run websites like Akiba Blog appearing in droves online. This is not to say that interpersonal communication has diminished, however, as *anime* and *manga* conventions are still popular events, including AnimeJapan (Tokyo) and Jump Festa (Chiba). In fact, the Summer 2014 meeting of Comiket (Japan's largest *anime* and *manga* convention) in Tokyo had an attendance of roughly 550,000 people.[11] Despite the addition of digital media, however, the only significant change in the Japanese *otaku* since the dawn of the new millennium seems to be that rather than focusing on one specific interest, many *otaku* are now broadening and diversifying their interests. For example, while a first-generation *otaku* might be exclusively dedicated to science fiction *anime*, a current *otaku* might have moderate interest in multiple fields, such as *moé anime*, *anime* featuring sweet, endearing characters that the viewer can feel attachment towards, and idols simultaneously.[12]

In America, the term "*otaku*" is a very recently acquired term, as the first usage that I am aware of occurred in 1994 with the creation of Otakon, a Baltimore-based *anime* convention whose name is derived from "otaku convention." The definition of "*otaku*" in America, however, is different from what it is in Japan. To gain a better understanding of this difference, I went to fakku.net, a site that posts *doujinshi* from Japan, most of which are translated into English for the global community to read free of charge, to ask the site's users what "*otaku*" meant to them. I

---

[10] Galbraith, Skype interview, October 1, 2014.
[11] Comiket Chronology. Accessed October 20, 2014. http://www.comiket.co.jp/archives/Chronology.html
[12] Galbraith, Skype interview, October 1, 2014.

started the thread on October 15, 2014 and collected the results on October 19, 2014. Most of the six respondents agreed that *otaku* are fans of *anime* and *manga* to varying degrees of extremism and that *otaku* are usually very enthusiastic about Japanese culture. Another interesting subject that came up in this forum was that "*otaku*" was not a particularly mainstream term in America, so its use is primarily limited to people who consider themselves to be *otaku*. This definition is supported by other popular outlets, such as Wikipedia, which states that "otaku" "…is typically used to refer to a fan of anime/manga but can also refer to Japanese video games or Japanese culture in general."[13] Similarly, Know Your Meme, a site dedicated to explaining internet memes, defines "*otaku*" as "a Japanese slang term used to describe someone who has obsessive interests in specialized subcultures and hobbies, particularly in regard to anime, manga, pop idols and video games."[14] Much like the Japanese, then, Americans define *otaku* as fans of Japanese popular culture. However, the scope of the American definition is limited mostly to fans of *anime* and *manga*, and the obsessive connotation found in the Japanese definition is not necessarily present in America.

To summarize, the use of "*otaku*" to refer to people with interests in specific areas of popular culture is a modern phenomenon, having only started in 1983, approximately thirty years ago. While the term originated in Japan, its meaning differs depending on where in the world it is used. As it stands today, an *otaku* in Japan is defined as someone, typically a male between the ages of 15 and 30, who displays obsessive interest in (a) particular area(s) of popular culture, such as *anime*, *manga*, robotics, etc. In America, however, an *otaku* is someone who enthusiastically partakes in the consumption of *anime* and/or *manga*, obsessively or otherwise, and who has at least some interest in Japanese culture. Therefore, the American definition is

---

[13] "Otaku." Wikipedia. Accessed November 3, 2014. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otaku
[14] Otaku. Know Your Meme. Accessed: November 03, 2014. http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/subcultures/otaku

more selective, as it limits *otaku* interest solely to subcultures of Japanese origin, whereas the

Japanese definition allows for the inclusion of all aspects of popular culture and even non-

cultural fascinations. Even though the two definitions disagree on how narrow a scope should be

used, there is some overlap in that both can applied to fans of *anime* and *manga*.

Chapter 2 – As Seen on TV

In this chapter, I will be examining the popular perceptions of *otaku* in Japanese and American societies. Despite recent trends toward a more positive image, the term "*otaku*" still carries a negative connotation, particularly in Japan.[15] To determine why this is, I will gather popular opinions and descriptions of *otaku* from the popular press and supplement those views with scholarly literature that discusses the probable causes thereof. Specifically, I will focus on areas of social concern and how these affect the media's portrayal of *otaku*. I argue that the negative image of *otaku* in Japan is primarily caused by sensationalist media practices in reaction to national tragedies and public concern over social and economic issues, while American unease with *otaku* is far less severe and stems more from the notion that cartoons are meant for children, which would suggest that *anime* and *manga* fans are mentally and socially immature.

In Japan, the classic *otaku* is believed to be a somewhat reclusive, socially awkward male who is either fat or notably skinny (but not in between) with an obsessive interest in *anime*, *manga*, video games, video games, idols, etc.[16] This description, and, in particular, the word "obsessive," conjures up a negative image of *otaku* with the connotation that they are of poor physical and/or mental health. Even in the earliest days of the term's use, *otaku* have been

---

[15] Andreas Welin, "The Meaning and Image of *Otaku* in Japanese society, and its change over time" (Göteborgs Universitet, 2014).

[16] Toshi Nakamura, "Japanese Media Seems to Want Otaku to be More "Otaku-ish"," Kotaku East, last modified May 24, 2013. Accessed November 10, 2014. http://kotaku.com/japanese-media-seems-to-want-otaku-to-be-more-otaku-is-509475256.

labeled unkempt, out of shape, and "lurking in the shadows". [17] These depictions suggest that the average Japanese, then, is uncomfortable with the notion of *otaku*, finding them socially abnormal and creepy.

While much of the initially distasteful perception of *otaku* was the result of their separation from the mainstream and 'normal' social behavior, the notion in Japan that *otaku* are potentially dangerous is rooted primarily in two deadly and sensational crimes: the Tsutomu Miyazaki killings and sarin gas attack committed by the Aum Shinrikyo cult. The first of these crimes occurred in 1989, when four young girls were kidnapped, sexually assaulted and killed by Tsutomu Miyazaki. After killing the girls, Miyazaki further brutalized the corpses, sending teeth and bone fragments to the girls' families and even cannibalizing two of the bodies.[18] After he was arrested, the police released to the press photographs of Miyazaki's room, which showed a massive collection of videotapes. Despite the fact that *anime* accounted for only a small fraction of these tapes, some 5,763 in total, their presence, along with the sheer volume of tapes, was enough for the Japanese media to label him as *otaku*.[19]

Following his arrest, Tsutomu Miyazaki quickly gained notoriety in the Japanese press, amassing a variety of nicknames, including "Otaku Murderer," "Little Girl Killer," "Dracula," [20] "Killer Nerd," [21] and "Cannibal Nerd."[22] When police searched his room, they found a collection

---

[17] Matthew Alt, "What Kind of Otaku Are You?" April 2, 2008, accessed October 20, 2014, http://neojaponisme.com/2008/04/02/what-kind-of-otaku-are-you/.

[18] Galbraith, *Otaku Encyclopedia*, 153.

[19] Galbraith, *Otaku Encyclopedia*, 153.

[20] "The Otaku Murderer: Tsutomu Miyazaki (21 August 1962 to 17 June 2008) Part 1," June 17, 2013, accessed January 14, 2015. http://soldierexecutionerprolifer2008.blogspot.com/2013/06/the-otaku-murderer-tsutomu-miyazaki-21.html.

[21] "The Otaku Murderer: Tsutomu Miyazaki (21 August 1962 to 17 June 2008) Part 2," June 17, 2013, accessed January 14, 2015. http://soldierexecutionerprolifer2008.blogspot.com.au/2013/06/the-otaku-murderer-tsutomu-miyazaki-21_17.html.

[22] "The Cannibal Nerd: The Rise and Fall of Tsutomu Miyazaki," accessed January 14, 2015. http://www.drkiller.net/the-cannibal-nerd-the-rise-and-fall-of-tsutomu-miyazaki.html.

of 5,763 video tapes, including several examples of violent *anime*, which led many reporters to associate him with the label "*otaku*."[23] This association sparked panic among parents, who feared that *manga* and *anime* might have a negative effect on their children and lead to sexually deviant behavior.[24]

In addition to the *anime*, there were also large numbers of extremely violent and gory horror films among Miyazaki's collection. By watching these films, Miyazaki claimed, he became unable to distinguish between the fantasy on the screen and real life.[25] This dissociation was thought to be a threat to the well-being of Japan's youth, a fear that was apparently reinforced when three Japanese teenagers brutally killed fifteen rabbits and some chickens around the same time as Miyazaki's killing spree, citing inspiration from a film called *The Shocks*, which was similar in nature to many of the films found in Miyazaki's apartment. *The Shocks* is a live action film series which "contains actual footage of everything from executions by hanging, firing squad and the electric chair to autopsies and grisly accidents."[26] In addition to the actions of these teens, juvenile crime in Japan reached unprecedented levels in Japan, comprising 51.3% of all recorded crimes, according to a report from Japan's National Police Agency in 1989.[27] As a result, *otaku*, who were associated with Miyazaki in the popular press, came to be seen as potential perpetrators of violent and/or sexual crimes, due to their alleged fixation with seemingly violent media.

---

[23] Julian Ryall, "Nerd Cult Murderer Executed," June 17, 2008, accessed January 14, 2015. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/japan/2144503/Nerd-cult-murderer-executed.html.
[24] Sharon Kinsella, "Japanese Subculture in the 1990s: *Otaku* and the Amateur *Manga* Movement." *Journal of Japanese Studies* 24 (1998): 309-310.
[25] Tim Pitcher, "The Manga Culture: Fantasy and reality in Japanese comic art," *Criminal Justice Matters* 11 (1993): 17. Accessed November 17, 2014, doi: 10.1080/09627259308553312.
[26] Ronald E. Yates, "Japan's Video Violence Called Spur to Crime," *Chicago Tribune*, August 27, 1989, accessed November 17, 2014. http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1989-08-27/news/8901080148_1_mari-konno-tsutomu-miyazaki-violent-videos.
[27] Yates, "Japan's Video Violence."

14

According to Patrick Galbraith, at the time Miyazaki was arrested, there was already some public concern regarding the *otaku* subculture, with the common perception being that *otaku* were socially-withdrawn, reclusive youth who had abandoned the real world. In particular, male *otaku* were perceived as "failures – socially, economically, and sexually."[28] The nature of Miyazaki's room, Galbraith continues, allowed the media to easily push the idea that Miyazaki fit many of the stereotypical characteristics of an *otaku*. Namely, he lived in a windowless room which made it easy for him to isolate himself, and the large quantity of films and comics provided a ready escape from reality.[29] As a result, *otaku* gained even more negative attention and came to be seen in the media as everything wrong with Japanese society throughout the 1990s.[30]

Additionally, Miyazaki's crimes changed the popular definition of "*otaku*" from a gender standpoint. Galbraith notes, "…today, we think of *otaku* as male, but before 1989, they were often described as both men and women who behaved in ways the older fans or outsiders found unacceptable."[31] I believe that the evidence shows that the shift in gender perception of *otaku* is likely due to the violent and sexual nature of Miyazaki's crimes, as acts of violence and sexual dominance are more traditionally associated with men than women.

The negative attention brought to *otaku* by the Miyazaki incident, in addition to the already critical perception of them, led to an outcry against violent and, in particular, sexually explicit *anime* and *manga*. Makoto Fukuda, a high school student and self-identifying *otaku* at the time, recounts his experience:

---

[28] Patrick Galbraith, as cited in Jesse Hicks, "Otaku Anthropology: Exploring Japan's Unique Subculture," May 9, 2012, Accessed January 14, 2015. http://www.theverge.com/2012/5/9/3004622/otaku-spaces-patrick-galbraith-manga-anime-review.
[29] Galbraith, as cited in Hicks "Otaku Anthropology," 2012.
[30] Galbraith, "Akihabara," 216.
[31] Galbraith, as cited in Hicks "Otaku Anthropology," 2012.

> I was a high school student who loved anime and manga at the
> time of Miyazaki's crimes, and the cruelty and abnormality of his
> acts is not the only thing I cannot forget about them. I also was
> struck by a storm of otaku-bashing following wide media coverage
> that emphasized that Miyazaki was an otaku who owned an
> enormous collection of anime and horror videotapes. I well
> remember being annoyed by widespread and sensationalistic
> headlines that looked as if they were trying to identify the
> abnormality of his crimes and the causes of his acts only with the
> fact that he was an otaku. There were also calls to abolish 'harmful
> comics,' and shops dealing with doujinshi, self-published manga
> comic books, including some with sexual content geared for adults,
> became the targets of harsh criticism.[32]

As Fukuda's account indicates, in the wake of the Miyazaki killings, *otaku* were blamed for all of the social issues associated with Miyazaki and his actions, including sexual perversion and social withdrawal.

The second incident came in 1995, when a cult called Aum Shinrikyo released sarin gas into the Tokyo subway system, killing twelve people and injuring thousands.[33] It was discovered that Aum's world view contained several tropes from and references to science fiction technology and *anime*, which was sufficient evidence for some to consider Aum Shinrikryo an *otaku* cult,[34] with mass media outlets referring to the cult's leader, Shoko Asahara, as "anime like" or "otaku like," according to Patrick Galbraith.[35] Asahara was said to have been influenced by science fiction and apocalyptic *anime*, going so far as to name several parts of his operation in homage to *Space Battleship Yamato*, a popular science fiction *anime* in the 1970s,[36] as well as *Genma War* and *Akira*, which also contained science fiction and apocalyptic themes.[37]

---

[32] Makoto Fukuda, as cited in Maren Williams, "Otaku: Japan's Favorite Scapegoat – and Tourist Draw," October 8, 2012, Accessed January 14, 2015. http://cbldf.org/2012/10/otaku-japans-favorite-scapegoat-and-tourist-draw/.
[33] Galbraith, *Otaku Encyclopedia*, 33.
[34] Galbraith, as cited in Williams, "Otaku: Scapegoat," 2012.
[35] Galbraith, *Otaku Encyclopedia*, 33.
[36] Galbraith, *Otaku Encyclopedia*, 33.
[37] Yumiko Iida , "Between the Technique of Living an Endless Routine and the Madness of Absolute Degree Zero: Japanese Identity and the Crisis of Modernity in the 1990s," *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 8 (2000): 438.

In addition to incorporating ideas from *anime* into their world view, Aum Shinrikyo also produced their own *manga*, depicting, among other things, Asahara's enlightenment, images of the apocalypse, and people joining Aum and living happy lives.[38] Further illustrating the cult's fantastical persuasions was its internal promotion system, which has been compared to role-playing games such as *Dungeons & Dragons* in that members could gain rank and a holy name through donations and training.[39] The recruitment process was similarly themed, in that potential members were shown footage of Asahara performing superhuman feats, such as levitation, as well as animations depicting him "flying through cities and passing through walls," much like the heroes in many of the science fiction programs that were popular at the time.[40]

According to Asahara's doomsday scenario, the Earth was to be engulfed in war following a nuclear strike on Japan from one or more of the following: the United States, Jews, Freemasons, and rival Japanese religious groups. Following the nuclear apocalypse, Aum Shinrikyo and its members would be the only remnants of humanity, surviving to clean up the mess that Earth had become and start society anew.[41] Despite changes to the plot following the Tokyo subway attacks, a popular *anime* and *manga* series called *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995), which debuted later that year, featured a similar doomsday plot, in which a recently discovered being known as an Angel explodes in a botched experiment, killing half of Earth's population. In order to combat the 16 other Angels that are headed towards Earth, a select group of teenagers are chosen to pilot giant robots and protect Tokyo.[42] According to Hiroki Azumi, a professor at Tokyo University, the series' creator, Hideaki Anno had not intended for his plot to

---

[38] Iida, "Crisis," 439.
[39] Ibid, as cited in Iida, "Crisis," 439.
[40] Murray Sayle, "Nerve Gas and the Four Noble Truths," *New Yorker* April 1, 1996. Accessed January 28, 2015. http://www.culthelp.info/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=871&Itemid=11
[41] Sayle, "Nerve Gas."
[42] Galbraith, *Otaku Encyclopedia*, 201-203.

17

be so similar to Aum's, and the subway attacks in Tokyo forced him to be more conscientious in his depiction of violence in the *Evangelion anime* by also showing the consequences of violence, so as to avoid negative press.[43]

Despite the lack of an actual connection between the plots of Aum's and *Evangelion*'s apocalypse scenarios, the negative association between Aum Shinrikyo and *otaku* culture forced this author to censor his work in order to avoid degrading his and his followers' social reputation. The connection between the Aum Shinrikyo cult and *anime* further fueled the belief that *otaku* were criminals waiting to happen, giving them a reputation of being violent in addition to their alleged sexual deviance. These incidents also created the stereotype of *otaku* as abnormal and male, as both Tsutomu Miyazaki and Shoko Asahara (born Chizuo Matsumoto) had some attachment to *anime* consumption.

The trend of associating *otaku* with violence continued in 2004, when a seven-year-old girl was raped and killed, and, according to Brian Ashcraft of Kotaku, an online journal that reports on Japanese popular culture, journalist Akihiro Otani tried to connect the crime with *otaku* culture. Otani asserted that collecting figures, as some *otaku* do, is similar to collecting corpses, despite the fact that this incident was an isolated case, rather than a serial murder. Following the stabbing of two people in Osaka in 2010, the same reporter noted that, "The location where the stabbing happened is close to a known otaku district, Nipponbashi." Otani would later add, on TV Asahi's Super J Channel, "It's necessary to investigate to see if there isn't a connection to otaku culture."[44] While it is likely that Kotaku is biased in favor of *otaku*,

---

[43] Krystian Woznicki, "Towards a cartography of Japanese anime – Anno Hideaki's Evangelion Interview with Azuma Hiroki," *BLIMP Filmmagazine*. February 20, 1998. Accessed January 28, 2015. http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9802/msg00101.html.

[44] Brian Ashcraft, "Insensitive Jerkwad Connects Stabbings with Japanese Geek Culture," June 12, 2012, accessed January 14, 2015. http://kotaku.com/5917663/insensitive-jerkwad-connects-stabbings-with-japanese-geek-culture.

especially given that the article addressing these comments refers to Otani as an "insensitive jerkwad," the quotes taken from Otani are a clear example of Japanese media outlets antagonizing *otaku* regardless of the strength of the evidence against them.

Yet another instance occurred in 2008, when a self-identified *otaku* named Tomohiro Kato carried out an attack in Akihabara, an area of Tokyo known for being a popular *otaku* meeting spot, where he killed seven people and injured 10. Despite evidence that Kato's attack may have been the result of mental illness, the popular press once again insinuated a possible link between *otaku* culture and violent crime. [45] The incident even aroused the American press, as Kris Sangani of *Engineering & Technology Magazine* wrote, "The homicide rate in Japan is one of the world's lowest, but a number of recent murders have been attributed to the Otaku obsession with Manga and social networking sites - which many in Japan now blame for the social alienation of many young Japanese."[46] If Japanese popular opinion of *otaku* is actually consistent with what Sangani writes, then it is clear that the trope of *otaku* culture being associated with violent crime that was created by the Miyazaki incident back in 1989 continues to influence the common perception of *otaku* today.

As I mentioned previously, Miyazaki's collection of horror and sexually-themed *anime*, *manga* and films sparked public outcry regarding the content of *anime* and *manga*. Of primary concern was the sexual content associated with *doujinshi*, fan-produced *manga*, which is often derivative of existing publications. Fearing a negative influence on youth sexuality and opposing the unregulated nature of *doujinshi* production, Japanese police launched a series of investigations in 1991 in an effort to discourage the public sale of amateur *manga*. The campaign

---

[45] Williams, "Scapegoat," 2012.

[46] Kris Sangani, "Otaku World," November 5, 2008, accessed January 14, 2015. http://eandt.theiet.org/magazine/2008/19/otaku-world.cfm.

included breaking into a bookstore in Shinjuku, a popular shopping district of Tokyo, and

confiscating more than two thousand volumes of *manga* and interrogating their authors about the

legality of their printing facilities.[47] The measures taken against these artists reflected poorly on

otaku, with one TBS (Tokyo Broadcasting System) reporter proclaiming in 1991 that "There are

100,000 Miyazaki Tsutomus here," referring to the participants of Comiket.[48]

As a result of these fear-based legal actions, all sexually explicit *manga* were required to

have a *seinen* or "adult" label on the cover, beginning in January 1991, and all *manga* were

required to blur, obscure or otherwise censor all depictions of genitals.[49] Similar measures

continued in the following years, as Comiket, (Comic Market) the largest annual *doujinshi*

convention in Japan, was heavily scrutinized for the content of amateur publications, with police

examining individual volumes and strictly enforcing the ban on selling sexually explicit works to

minors. In 1993, the first ever content guide for *doujinshi* was distributed at Comiket, further

affirming the limitation of authors' freedoms. The guide was enforced by the Comic Market

Preparation Committee, who were especially focused on restricting the sale of adult *doujinshi* to

people eighteen years or older, despite the fact that many of the authors and readers of such

works are, in fact, minors.[50]

The issue of explicit content in *manga* would continue to be a relevant issue with the

2002 trial regarding the legality of an erotic *manga* called *Misshitsu*. While many *doujinshi* were

confiscated in the early 1990s, *Misshitsu* became the first *manga* to be banned entirely for its

violation of Japanese obscenity laws. Despite appeals to the Japanese Supreme Court lasting five

years after the initial trial, the ban remained intact due to the lack of censorship of the characters'

---

[47] Kinsella, "Japanese Subculture," 312.
[48] Galbraith, *Otaku*, 234.
[49] Galbraith, *Otaku Encyclopedia*, 233.
[50] Kinsella, "Japanese Subculture," 311.

20

genitals, as well as the depiction of certain sex acts, including rape and incest, that were considered taboo.[51] In addition to taboo sex acts and graphic depictions thereof, *anime* and *manga* also gained a bad reputation for their depictions of underage characters in sexually explicit scenarios, as in *Lolita Anime* (1984) and *Cream Lemon* (1984), or for the use of tentacles to circumnavigate obscenity laws, as in *Urotsukidoji* (1987). The portrayal of such unsavory images did little to ease parents' fears about the content of *anime* and *manga* that were within their children's grasp. As the producers of some of these works, in addition to being consumers, *otaku* were adjudged to be a horde of male perverts with bizarre fetishes and ill intent toward little girls.

Aside from fears of violent and sexual crime, there was and is also the concern about unhealthy social development, as *otaku* are stereotyped as spending most of their time in their rooms watching *anime* or playing video games, rather than playing outside or socializing with friends. The association between *otaku* and this type of isolationist behavior served to further exacerbate the negative perceptions of the *otaku*, as Japan is traditionally a very group-oriented society, leaving little room for individualistic behavior. The increase in individualism among more recent generations in Japan has many parents questioning their children's ability and desire to fulfill mainstream societal duties.[52] The fear of a youth population that is unwilling to carry out its expected duties, namely maintaining a birth rate through marriage and sustaining the economy by finding a lifetime career, may therefore contribute to the negative perception of *otaku*, as *otaku* tend to exhibit the individualistic, occasionally isolationist qualities that are thought to effect social disinterest.

---

[51] Patrick Galbraith, "The *Misshitsu* Trial: Thinking Obscenity with Japanese Comics," *International Journal of Comic Art* 16 (2014): 126, 130-131. https://www.academia.edu/7448982/The_Misshitsu_Trial_Thinking_Obscenity_with_Japanese_Comics.
[52] Lawrence Eng, "The Politics of Otaku," last updated September 1, 2001. Accessed November 10, 2014. http://www.cjas.org/~leng/otaku-p.htm.

As mentioned before, it was widely noted by the media that Miyazaki and Asahara seemed to be detached from reality, an observation that contributed to the idea that *otaku* had also cast aside the real world in favor of the fantasies found in *anime* and *manga*. However, it should be noted that *otaku* were already thought of in this way, due in part to concerns raised by Itou Seiko's novel *No Life King* (1988), which explored the concept of technology, particularly computers, video games and virtual reality, taking people out of touch with reality and drawing them into the digital realm.[53] Throughout the 1980s in general, *otaku* were viewed as "introverts, indulging in a fantasy world," possibly as a means of escape from physical relationships and their own personal problems.[54] The timing of *No Life King*'s release, just months before Miyazaki, an avid video collector, was captured, made it all too easy for journalists to make a connection between technology and the escape it afforded and a decline in socially acceptable behavior.

Those who have decried *otaku* as socially withdrawn have usually pointed to two specific consequences: a declining a birth rate and a breakdown of Japan's traditional social fabric. As of 2007, the birth rate in Japan was 1.28 births per female, "the lowest in the developed world."[55] If *otaku* are as antisocial as their critics suggest, then it would make sense that they are less likely to marry and reproduce than 'normal' Japanese, thereby contributing to the low birth rate. Suzanne Hall Vogel claims that in recent years, a trend of "2-D lovers" has emerged in Japan, people who have "turned to virtual reality and the "*otaku*" (staying home and engaging virtual reality, such as comics or video games) subculture and avoided the demands of three-

---

[53] Patrick Galbraith, "Akihabara," 216.

[54] Iida, "Crisis," 428.

[55] Mark Driscoll, "Debt and Denunciation in Post-Bubble Japan: On The Two Freeters," *Cultural Critique* 65 (2007): 165.

dimensional relationships with real human beings."[56] One such 2-D lover is a man who goes by the moniker Sal 9000, who married his virtual girlfriend in the game *Love Plus* in 2009 in a real-life ceremony. While he claims to understand that his wife is simply a character and that the marriage is in no way legally binding, he nonetheless takes her on dates, bringing her to such exotic locales as Disneyland and Guam. He has said that she is better than a human girlfriend, who may be less patient with him or less forgiving for offenses such as unpunctual communication.[57] If *otaku* are turning from real women to virtual women to satisfy their sexual and romantic needs, as Vogel suggests, it would indeed appear that *otaku* are not doing their full part to maintain Japan's birth rate.

Another concern voiced by critics of *otaku* culture is that many *otaku* activities encourage isolation and socially independent behavior. Such concerns had been present since the 1970s, amid fear that an increased sense of individualism among youth might spell an end to a traditionally interdependent Japanese society. Many who subscribe to this belief felt that the amateur *manga* subculture of the 1980s and 1990s was an example of such individualism.[58] As a result, *otaku* became symbolic of a generation of young Japanese men who preferred to become engrossed in their hobbies, play by themselves and never grow up, rather than taking on the social responsibilities that their parents and society in general expected of them. Specifically, there was concern that the occult nature of the amateur *manga* movement would leave children unsure of their place in mainstream society, creating social and communicative issues for them in their later years.[59] Chizuko Ueno, a feminist theorist, posited that amateur *manga* genres reflect infantilism among their audiences, who display an interest in simulated, fictional sex, rather than

---

[56] Suzanne Hall Vogel, "Japanese Society Under Stress," *Asian Survey* 52 (2012): 693-694.

[57] Kyung Lah, "Tokyo man marries video game character," CNN, December 17, 2009. Accessed January 28, 2015. http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/asiapcf/12/16/japan.virtual.wedding/.

[58] Kinsella, "Japanese Subculture," 313.

[59] Kinsella, "Japanese Subculture," 313-314.

maturing to physical intercourse themselves. This idea leads her to question, "Do the *yaoi*[60] girls

and *rorikon*[61] boys really have a future?"[62] Without a strong social footing, it was reasoned,

Japan's youth would not be able to secure its own future, let alone the future of Japan, a notion

that caused *otaku* to be viewed as a social detriment.

Aside from the obvious consequence of population decline, a decreasing birth rate also

raises the specter of making retirement financially unsustainable for Japan's older generations. In

order for a worker to retire comfortably at age sixty, Japan's corporate retirement age, that

worker must receive a pension. With fewer children being born, there will be fewer workers

available, and this generation's workers' pensions will not be fundable, as there simply will not

be enough workers to tax from the next generation. According to *Shukan Shincho*, a Japanese

magazine, as of 2005, there were four workers per pensioner, and by 2050, that ratio could be as

low as 1.5:1 or even 1:1.[63] If that prediction comes true, it would prove disastrous for an already

stagnant Japanese economy and create disharmony between generations as younger workers

directly funded the retirement of their seniors.

Japan's greatest issue with *otaku*, then, is that they can be linked to most of the social

issues plaguing Japanese society. *Otaku* are perceived as contributing to the declining birth rate

and social withdrawal due to their stereotypically poor social skills and antisocial behavior. As a

result, it is theorized, the marriage age is being pushed back, fewer babies are being born, and the

number of people being added to the workforce is decreasing every year. *Otaku* have also been

linked to a worsening of youth morality, particularly within the amateur *manga* community, as

---

[60] A genre of *manga* associated with homosexual male romance stories, which may or may not feature explicit
sexual content.
[61] Lolita complex
[62] Chizuko Ueno, as cited in Kinsella, "Japanese Subculture," 314.
[63] Driscoll, "Debt," 165.

24

doujinshi sold at conventions such as Comiket have been found to contain graphic sexual content. Lastly, and perhaps most damning of all, the crimes of Tsutomu Miyazaki and the Aum Shinrikyo cult, both of whom were shown to be avid consumers of *anime* and *manga* – Aum Shinrikyo even owned a computer store in Akihabara[64] - created the image of *otaku* as violent and sexually deviant young men.

In America, *otaku* are not so widely criticized as they are in Japan, but there is certainly an air of unease about them, particularly among older generations. This is likely due to the traditional American convention that cartoons are family-friendly and made for the amusement of children. As Kaylee Walters points out, it wasn't until fairly recently, until the late 1980s, that some "cartoons began being marketed to adults, and became unsuitable for kid viewing."[65] As a result, some parents of *anime* fans become confused and concerned for their child's development and maturation when fandom continues into adulthood, as I can attest from personal experience. In my case, my mother would often confront me with phrases such as "I wish you would pick something more rooted in reality," or "I just hope you grow out of this soon," with regard to my *anime* fandom when I was in high school. If my situation is any indication, it would seem, then, that American parents' discomfort with *otaku* is based on their belief that childish, fantastical pursuits may stunt the social development of their children, rather than from any issues of potential violence or immorality resulting from the consumption of *anime* and *manga*.

The combined gravity of the Miyazaki incident and Aum Shinrikyo's sarin gas attacks on the Tokyo subway system created a negative image of *otaku* as potential criminals capable of violent and/or sexual crimes on a large scale. Specifically, these events gave rise to the perception that *otaku* are dangerous single, young men, seeking to wreak havoc on the social and

---

[64] Galbraith, "Akihabara," 222.
[65] Kaylee Walters, "Mature Cartoons: The Evolution of Subgenres in Adult Animation," 2008.

25

moral fabric of Japanese society. In addition, the isolationist and self-absorbed lifestyle that came to be associated with *otaku* sparked fear that Japan's youth were becoming disinterested with reality and might never mature into adults, ending up socially awkward, sexually confused and ill-prepared to successfully adapt to mainstream society. The thought of letting the *otaku* lifestyle exist unchecked caused many to worry that *otaku*, with their perceived anti-social bent, would further decrease the nation's birth rate and harm the already stagnant economy. As a result of these fears, the public image of *otaku* in Japan became increasingly negative during the 1980s through the mid-1990s. Though this trend has reversed since the 2000s, *otaku* are still met with some disdain by Japanese society in general. Meanwhile, in America, *otaku* are not thought of as particularly violent or sexually deviant, resulting in a much milder image than their Japanese counterparts contend with. That said, there is still some negativity surrounding *otaku* in America outside of their distance from mainstream interests, as their hobbies are not accepted by everyone as mature, legitimate pursuits.

Chapter 3 – Revenge of the Nerds

In this chapter, I will be exploring the positive aspects of *otaku* culture and addressing the negative points raised in the previous chapter so that I may contrast the two. To do this, I will examine the economic contributions that *otaku* provide through direct sales and product innovation, as well as the part *otaku* have played and continue to play in spreading Japanese culture throughout the world. Furthermore, the correlation between *otaku* and the negative social issues that are attributed to them will be investigated. The research for this chapter will be conducted primarily through scholarly articles and economic surveys. In this chapter, I argue that *otaku* have made several contributions to Japanese society in the forms of cultural, economic, and technological influence and that the connections made between *otaku* culture and the problems of declining morality and social withdrawal are not as well-founded as detractors of *otaku* would make them out to be.

Perhaps the most immediately noticeable effect *otaku* have on Japanese society is their economic impact. According to a survey published by the Nomura Research Institute in 2004, Japan is home to approximately 2.85 million *otaku* who spend as much as 290 billion yen in pursuit of their hobbies every year.[66] In other words, approximately 2.23% of Japan's population[67] generates 11% of the revenue generated by *anime*, *manga*, video games and idols.[68] On the day this survey was published, December 1, 2004, the exchange rate was 102.6694 ¥/USD,[69] meaning that *otaku* had spent more than $2.82 billion. Another report by the Nomura

---

[66] Ken Kitabayashi, "The *Otaku* Group from a Business Perspective: Revaluation of Enthusiastic Consumers," *NRI Papers* 81 (2004), 2.
[67] http://www.tradingeconomics.com/japan/population. Accessed February 11, 2015.
[68] http://www.freecurrencyrates.com/exchange-rate-history/USD-JPY/2004. Accessed February 4, 2015.
[69] http://www.freecurrencyrates.com/exchange-rate-history/USD-JPY/2004. Accessed February 4, 2015.

Research Institute published the following year had this figure elevated to 411 billion yen.[70]

Using the same conversion method as before yields a rate of ¥113.3658/USD,[71] which equates to

more than $3.625 billion. While this number comprises only 0.078% of Japan's gross domestic

product, it nonetheless represents a steady flow of revenue.[72] Following the collapse of Japan's

bubble economy in the early 1990s, the economic climate has been stagnant, to say the least, and

the resulting recession is still a problem for Japan to this day. Despite the recession, however,

otaku remain a consistent commercial force, as they have proven their willingness to spend

money in pursuit of their hobbies.

The studies published by the Nomura Research Institute indicate that the largest group of

otaku by both population and market share is comprised of *manga* enthusiasts, some 350,000[73] to

one million people, spending as much as ¥100 billion per year.[74] It is important to note that this

number takes into account fan-made publications, such as *doujinshi* and fanzines. In 2008 at

Comiket, Japan's largest biannual *doujinshi* convention, there were as many as 35,000 circles[75]

selling their works.[76] Earlier in 2003, 2,496 new titles were produced, circulating an average of

13,546 copies each.[77] Given the sheer volume of amateur artists, it is unsurprising that some of

them go on to become professionals and contribute to the *manga* industry proper.

If the stereotype of *otaku* being almost entirely men in true, then it would hold that the

amateur *manga* community is also mostly male. In fat, the opposite is true – not only are many

---

[70] "New Market Scale Estimation for *Otaku*: Population of 1.72 Million with Market Scale of ¥411 Billion," Nomura Research Institute, https://www.nri.com/global/news/2005/051006.html. Published October 6, 2005. Accessed February 4, 2015.
[71] http://www.freecurrencyrates.com/exchange-rate-history/USD-JPY/2005. Accessed February 4, 2015.
[72] http://countryeconomy.com/gdp/japan?year=2004. Accessed February 18, 2015.
[73] "New Market Scale."
[74] Kitabayashi, "The *Otaku* Group," 2.
[75] A "circle," in this context, is a group of collaborating artists.
[76] Patrick Galbraith, *Otaku Encyclopedia*, 45.
[77] Galbraith, *Otaku Encyclopedia*, 65.

28

otaku female, but women actually comprise the majority. A 2012 study of Animazement, a North

Carolina *anime* convention, be Nina Exner showed that out of one hundred people surveyed

between the ages of 10 and 30, sixty were women (60%), and between the ages of 10 and 21, the

proportion grows to forty-two out of fifty-nine (71%). Furthermore, the proportion of females

that used libraries for "book or *manga* discussions" was 21.9%, as opposed to 2.4% for males,

and "*anime* club meetings or screenings" got a similar response, with 14.1% women using the

library for that purpose, compared to only 2.4% of male respondents.[78] In Japan, the

concentration of female *manga* readers and artists is even higher, as Sharon Kinsella notes that

prior to 1989, women constituted approximately 80% of all *doujinshi* artists at Comiket. Since

then, the number of male artists has risen to about 35%, likely contributing to the notion that

otaku are predominately men, but the fact remains that the majority of amateur *manga* artists and

readers is female.[79]

One such example is Clamp, a group of four female *doujinshi* artists formed in 1987 that

specializes in *shōjo manga*, which are written primarily for young girls. Often characterized by

romance stories, usually from the perspective of female protagonists, and more emotionally

expressive characters, works in this genre are more appealing to girls, who are drawn to the

empowering female characters present in a strong, positive manner. Despite their beginnings as a

small circle publishing *Captain Tsubasa* fan parodies,[80] Clamp has gone on to produce several

successful *manga* series, including *Cardcaptor Sakura*, a magical girl[81] series in which Sakura

finds, battles, and seals away the spirits of magical cards; *Angelic Layer*, in which characters

---

[78] Nina Exner, "Anime-zing in North Carolina: Library Views of Anime Fans," *North Carolina Libraries* 70 (2012): 31-32.
[79] Kinsella, "Japanese Subculture," 300.
[80] Daniel H. Pink, "Japan, Ink: Inside the Manga Industrial Complex," Wired, October 22, 2007. Accessed February 18, 2015.
[81] A genre involving girls, often in grade school, who can access magical powers by transforming into an alter ego.

create custom battle dolls; *Chobits*, a sequel in which a boy rescues a lifelike female robot and develops feelings for her; and *xxxHolic*, which is about a boy who can see supernatural beings, his friends, and a witch who grants wishes.

Clamp has also collaborated on other successful projects, such as *Code Geass: Lelouch of the Revolution*, a series about the titular Lelouch, who uses a power bestowed upon him to help Japan rebel against the invading Britannian army, for which Clamp provided character designs. While these series each received significant edits for their American releases, especially *Cardcaptor Sakura*'s depiction of same-sex relationships, the *manga* and *anime* adaptations of these stories were very well-received by readers and critics. As of 2007, their works have sold over 100,000 copies.[82] *Otaku*, then, do not merely consume *manga*; they create it as well, publishing significant quantities, at both the amateur and professional levels.

The creation of *doujinshi*, while an expression of fandom, raises the issue of copyright infringement, as most of the works are based on existing *anime*, *manga* and video games. Despite this concern, the authors and publishers of original series usually give their blessing to fan-made works rather than pressing charges. Kouichi Ichikawa, an event organizer for *doujinshi* conventions, explains that while publishers may have prosecuted amateur artists in the 1980s and early 1990s, fan works are now respected as an expression of fandom. Since *doujinshi* are circulated in low numbers, he says, they do not diminish professional *manga* sales. Rather, they attract a readership for the original source *manga* and produce future professional artists.[83] By allowing *doujinshi* to be published and sold, professional authors can then study the interests of their fans and use this information for future story ideas.[84] This form of market research has even

---

[82] Pink, "Japan, Ink".
[83] Pink, "Japan, Ink".
[84] Galbraith, *Otaku Encyclopedia*, 65.

been established as a valid promotional tactic by publishing companies, who recognize the value in using these fan-made productions to gauge reader interest. As a result, some fanzines have begun working directly with publishers and professional artists, imposing voluntary restrictions on their fan publications and officially obtaining permission to create their parodies.[85] In this way, *doujinshi* have grown from simple fan creations into legitimate marketing tools.

A similar phenomenon can be observed in English-speaking countries in the form of abridged series. Abridged series are parody videos that condense the plot of a given *anime* while making fun of the show as a whole and criticizing plot points and character flaws. One of the first and most successful abridged series, *Yu-Gi-Oh! The Abridged Series*, was created in 2006 by Martin Billany, better known by his internet alias, LittleKuriboh. In his show, Billany frequently lampoons the show's plot and the frequent stupidity of its characters, exaggerating their personalities almost to the point of creating his own characters. He also uses his show to attack 4Kids! Entertainment, the company that produced the English version of the show, for their censorship and localization practices, using the villains of an unpopular story arc to represent the company.

While Billany's use of footage from the show, along with his critiques of 4Kids! Entertainment, has resulted in numerous copyright claims against his work, he has continued to produce new content, arguing in one episode that his show is an example of fan support for the official product and that it has, if anything, increased the English-speaking *Yu-Gi-Oh!* fanbase. In an article for *Transformative Works and Cultures*, Zephra Doerr claims that while abridged series are of questionable legality, due to copyright issues, they are an important form of fan-produced content, as they allow greater discussion of a given work both within its fan base and

---

[85] Kitabayashi, "The *Otaku* Group," 6.

between the fans and the creators of the show. Further, these works can serve to foster communication between a show's creators and/or licensors and its fans.[86] Speaking from personal experience, I agree with the arguments that Billany and Doerr make, as my viewing of abridged series has brought me closer to some of my friends who also enjoy them, and while attending Otakon, a Baltimore-based *anime* convention, I observed several people discussing Billany's works and attending his panels, demonstrating the impact that his abridged series has had upon the *Yu-Gi-Oh!* fanbase. Much like *doujinshi*, then, abridged series serve as a means of expressing fandom via creative innovation of existing works.

The role of *otaku* in product development is not limited solely to creative content, however, as several advancements in home computers are also the result of *otaku* activities. For example, *anime* and idol *otaku* who wanted to record their favorite programs required a device that would allow them to not only record the shows, but also to store large numbers of them. In addition to storage, there was also a need for editing software, which would facilitate the removal of commercials or unneeded segments, such that the finished product contained only the desired episode or idol performance. Out of this necessity, these *otaku* consulted their computer assembly enthusiast friends, who began buying and assembling TV tuner boards and hard drives.

The resulting increase in sales caused electronics manufacturers to realize the importance of more powerful hardware, take the basic designs developed by the *otaku*, refine them, and then produce them for sale to the general consumer market.[87] This process of development based on consumer modifications led to such advances as the water-cooled PC, which was quieter than the fan-cooled PC, and the use of LCD screens, which allowed smaller, less bulky computer

---

[86] Zephra C. Doerr, "Abridged series and fandom remix culture," *Transformative works and Cultures* 9 (2012). Accessed February 18, 2015, doi:10.3983/twc.2012.0396.
[87] Kitabayashi, "The *Otaku* Group," 6.

monitors.[88] While the technological modifications and developments made by *otaku* may not always reflect widespread popular interest, they have led to several important innovations that have improved consumer electronics, and the undying lust that computer assembly *otaku* possess for superior machinery will likely continue to be a contributing factor in the continuing evolution of home computers.

Proof of the positive economic impact of *otaku* spending habits is most visible in the bustling streets of Akihabara, a major retail district of Tokyo. Once known as a place to buy cheap electronics, the influx of *otaku* in the late 1980s and 1990s hoping to build better computers and television recorders has turned the area into a haven for all things related to *anime*, *manga*, video games and any other facet of *otaku* culture. The revenue generated by these sales allowed the town to prosper throughout the 1990s, despite the crash of the bubble economy. The financial success of Akihabara, combined with the technological innovations its inhabitants came to be known for, enticed many software companies to set up shop in the surrounding area, such that "a 2003 report by the Japanese government shows that 742 software developers, Internet ventures, and data processing companies were located within one kilometer of the Akihabara train station."[89] The boom of tech companies caused Akihabara to become known as the "Silicon Valley of Japan," with digital and creative content valued at 11 trillion yen for the year 2000.[90] The economic potential of the area was so great at this time that the Tokyo Metropolitan Government invested 100 billion yen in local IT projects, citing *otaku* as one of the main reasons

---

[88] Kitabayashi, "The *Otaku* Group," 7.
[89] Patrick Galbraith, "Akihabara: Conditioning a Public "Otaku" Image," *Mechademia* 5 (2010): 220.
[90] Galbraith, "Akihabara," 220.

for the competitiveness of Japanese digital and creative contents.[91] The positive influence *otaku*

have had and continue to have on Japan's domestic economy, therefore, cannot be denied.

On the international front, *otaku* have done an excellent job of promoting and spreading

Japanese popular culture, particularly through the mediums of *anime* and *manga*. In fact, former

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Aso Taro, proclaimed at a crowd rally[92] in Akihabara that "thanks to

otaku, Japanese culture, so-called subculture, has undoubtedly been spread throughout the

world."[93] Evidence of this spread can be seen in international sales figures of *anime* and *manga*.

For instance, in the United States alone, *anime* and related products generate as much as $4

billion dollars every year.[94] Additionally, *manga* generated $210 million in 2007, up from $60

million in 2002.[95] The spread of *manga* may be even greater in Europe, where, in 2006, volume

9 of *Naruto*, a long-running popular series, has sold approximately 1 copy per 640 people in

France and 1.5 copies per 580 people in Italy, far surpassing the rate of one per three thousand

people in the United States.[96] Based on these statistics, it can be inferred that *manga* is a

significant medium of Japanese culture in the western world. As Cooper-Chen notes, most

western fans discover the *manga* of a particular series after watching the *anime*, which suggests

that if a given *manga* is popular, then so, too is the corresponding *anime*.[97] Provided that the

markets for *anime* and *manga* are both healthy, it can therefore be concluded that Japanese

popular culture is alive and well in the west.

---

[91] Galbraith, "Akihabara," 220.
[92] I do not know the exact year of the rally, but it must have been between 10/31/2005 and 8/27/07 (his reign as Minister of Foreign Affairs).
[93] Galbraith, "Akihabara," 220.
[94] Steven T. Brown, "Screening Anime," in *Cinema Anime*, ed. Steven T. Brown (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 6.
[95] Casey E. Brienza, "Books, not Comics: Publishing Fields, Globalization, and Japanese Manga in the United States," *Publishing Research Quarterly* 25 (2009): 101.
[96] Anne Cooper-Chen, ""Japan's Illustrated Storytelling": A Thematic Analysis of Globalized Anime and Manga," *Keio Communication Review* 33 (2011): 86.
[97] Cooper-Chen, "Thematic Analysis," 87.

The spread of *anime* and *manga* to the west as a major cultural force began with the practice of fan-subbing, a practice in which fans of the show receive tapes of *anime* episodes from Japan, often through tape-trading at science-fiction conventions or through Japanese pen-pals, and then proceed to translate the dialogue themselves. The translation is then edited onto the tape itself or else typed into a transcription, which can then be distributed to other fans of the show. The first such production was a fan-sub of *Vampire Princess Miyu* in 1988 by Robert Woodhead and Roe Adams, who would go on to found AnimEigo, the first American company dedicated to officially licensing and importing *anime* from Japan.[98]

Fan-subbing was made even more popular with the dawn of the internet, which allowed fan-subbers to share their work with the entire world. The first person to do so was Sue Shambaugh, who translated episodes of *anime* and posted the scripts online for people to print and read while watching their own copies of the show. She also gave her customers the option of paying a small fee to have neatly printed and formatted copies of the scripts mailed to them.[99] Internet-based translation is still very common to this day, with sites such as www.animefreak.tv and www.animeseason.com featuring fan-translated episodes of hundreds of *anime* available to watch for free. The fan-translation community has gotten large enough that some people, including one of my close friends, even develop preferences for one translation group over another. *Manga* has enjoyed a similar abundance of fan-translation, with sites such as www.mangareader.net and mangafox.me offering free translations for anyone to read and download.

The popularity of online translations has even grown to the point that officially-licensed sites, such as www.crunchyroll.com, have appeared, offering viewers the chance to see translated

[98] Galbraith, *Otaku Encyclopedia*, 70.
[99] Galbraith, *Otaku Encyclopedia*, 70.

episodes of *anime* and drama shows a week after they air in Japan for free. With a paid account, customers can watch these programs without advertisements, in high-definition, and as soon as an hour after the original airing, with access to the site's full catalog. While it could certainly be argued that most fan-subbing and translation detract from sales, Anne Cooper-Chen argues instead that such translation increases the attention that a series may receive internationally, increasing the series' fanbase and, therefore, its popularity.[100]

In addition to generating revenue, the international popularity of *manga* also helps to promote interest in Japanese culture. In 2006 survey conducted by Jean-Marie Bouissou to determine the usefulness of *manga* as a cultural power, it was determined that reading *manga* significantly increased interest in Japan and Asia. The study was conducted by surveying French *manga* readers aged 14-31. Three quarters of the respondents, and even more of the younger respondents (92%), indicated a desire to travel to Japan after becoming a *manga* fan, with two out of three respondents expressing interest in learning Japanese.[101] Furthermore, half of those surveyed said that they "would like to meet Japanese people and 'learn more about Japan'."[102] Based on this evidence, it can be reasonably concluded that *manga* is an effective tool for promoting Japanese culture and a desire to learn more about Japan amongst its readership.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the primary complaints against *otaku* is that they promote poor moral values and anti-social tendencies, as much of the *anime* and *manga* that they consume is violent or sexually explicit. To assess the validity of this notion, I will examine the content of some of the most popular *manga* published since 1985. One such series is

---

[100] Cooper-Chen, "Thematic Analysis," 89-90.
[101] Jean-Marie Bouissou, "Japan's growing cultural power. The example of manga in France," *Reading manga: Local and global perceptions of Japanese comics* (2006): 12 (see link in full citation for page clarification).
[102] Bouissou, "Cultural power," 12.

36

Dragon Ball (1984-1995), the second-best selling *manga* ever serialized in *Shonen Jump*,[103] with

over 230 million volumes sold worldwide as of 2012.[104] The premise of the series is that an alien

named Goku, who is living on Earth following the destruction of his home planet, and his friends

defend Earth and other victimized worlds from those who wish to conquer them. While best

characterized as an action or fighting *manga*, there is actually very little gory violence to be

found, though several characters are killed by the end of the story, some of whom are killed

multiple times. Furthermore, most of the more powerful attacks that the characters can execute

consist of energy blasts and can therefore not be imitated by children. In terms of sexual content,

there is some innuendo and mild nudity. For example, in one scene, Goku disrobes so that he

may bathe in a river, and in another story arc, the titular Dragon Balls, which grant a wish to

anyone who assembles all seven, are used to acquire a pair of panties belonging to one of the

female characters. However, there is no explicit sexual activity that occurs.

Another popular series is *Yu Yu Hakusho* (1990-1994), which was also serialized in

Shonen Jump and has sold over 49 million volumes in Japan as of 2011.[105] The *manga* tells the

story of Yusuke Urameshi, a middle school boy who is charged with protecting the living world

from Demon World and its denizens. Much like *Dragon Ball*, the series has a large number of

fight scenes, though they are portrayed in more graphic detail, with more blood and gore. Also

like *Dragon Ball*, there is very little nudity or sexual content. What may be of concern to parents,

though, is a later story arc in which the antagonist, Sensui, sets out to punish humanity for all of

---

[103] A weekly magazine that publishes chapters of several *manga* concurrently. It is one of the most popular and best-selling *manga* publications in the world.

[104] Egan Loo, "2013's Dragon Ball Z: Battle of the Gods Film Story Outlined (Updated)," last modified December 3, 2012. Accessed February 25, 2015. http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/interest/2012-12-03/2013-dragon-ball-z/battle-of-gods-film-story-outlined.

[105] "Top 10 Shonen Jump Manga by All-Time Volume Sales," Anime News Network. Last updated October 23, 2012. Accessed February 25, 2015. http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2012-10-23/top-10-shonen-jump-manga-by-all-time-volume-sales.

its wrongdoings by opening a portal to Demon World and effectively causing an apocalypse. In this storyline, three of his henchmen are local students who agree to help him in order to get revenge on their classmates who have ostracized or bullied them. While this part of the plot may cause parents to fear that their children could seek violent retribution on their oppressors, it should be noted that these three characters are shown the error of their motivations and go on to lead healthy, sociable lives after the crisis is averted.

A more recent popular series is *Naruto* (1999-2014), which has sold over 126 million volumes as of 2012.[106] *Naruto* is the story of a *ninja* who aspires to become the leader of his village so that he can prove to himself that he is the best *ninja* and to earn the respect of the villagers. The main protagonist, Naruto, has been ostracized since birth, as a powerful fox spirit that attacked his village was sealed inside him when he was born, causing the villagers to fear and despise him. In terms of objectionable content, the series contains graphic violence and some nudity. Said nudity is usually used for comedy rather than for erotic value, however, and such illustrations are always censored. For example, Naruto sometimes employs a technique called the "Harem Jutsu," which involves him producing several clones of himself in the form of naked women in order to catch his opponent (or instructor) off-guard. Whenever he uses this technique, a cloud of smoke appears, concealing the breasts and genitals of his clones so that the reader does not see any explicit nudity.

While most mainstream *manga* franchises contain some violent and sexual content, it is usually on a level that is deemed acceptable for general sale, resulting in few complaints. Some *manga*, however, does contain questionable content, such as *To Love-Ru* and its sequel, *To Love-*

---

[106] "Top 10 Shonen Jump Manga by All-Time Volume Sales," Anime News Network. Last updated October 23, 2012. Accessed February 25, 2015. http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2012-10-23/top-10-shonen-jump-manga-by-all-time-volume-sales.

Ru Darkness, which fall in the harem genre, a genre in which a usually male protagonist gains

the affection of several beautiful and often voluptuous girls. The series gained controversy after a

parent found a copy in their son's room and discovered that the book contained full frontal

nudity. After reviewing the book, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government's Youth Healthy

Development Council decided that it did not violate obscenity standards, and therefore did not

need to be age-restricted.[107] While potentially objectionable series such as *To Love-Ru* are

available for general sale and may contain unsuitable content for younger readers, such works do

not comprise the majority of the market. Furthermore, considering the fact that it is easier than

ever to access far more sexually explicit material via the internet, it seems unlikely that *manga* is

solely responsible for any significant decline in morality.

Another concern often raised about *otaku* is their social withdrawal and their inability to

fit in with society. Social withdrawal is indeed a serious problem in Japan, particularly among

the youth population, and severe withdrawal has even been given its own term – *hikikomori*.

Specifically, "*hikikomori*" refers to someone who isolates themselves from the outside world,

refusing to leave their house for a continuous period of at least six months. *Hikikomori*, like

otaku, also have the connotation of being mostly young men.[108] It is estimated that there are

between 1 and 1.5 million *hikikomori* in Japan, placing their population on a similar scale as that

of *otaku*.[109] Dela Pena asserts that most *hikikomori* choose to withdraw because they do not feel

welcome in society, that they do not fit in and do not get any emotional support, even from

---

[107] "Tokyo's Youth Healthy Development Council Looks at To Love-Ru Darkness," Anime News Network. Last Updated June 2, 2012. Accessed February 25, 2015. http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2012-06-02/tokyo-youth-healthy-development-council-looks-at-to-love-ru-darkness.
[108] Joseph L. dela Pena, "Otaku: Images and Identity in Flux," *CUREJ-College Undergraduate Research Electronic Journal* 9 (2006):18.
[109] Tuukka Toivonen and Yuki Imoto, "Transcending labels and panics: the logic of Japanese youth problems." *Contemporary Japan Journal of the German Institute for Japanese Studies Tokyo* 25 (2013): 64.

family.[110] Due to their detachment from mainstream society and reserved behavior, it is easy to

note overlaps between *hikikomori* and the stereotypical *otaku*, as well as between *hikikomori* and

figures like Tsutomu Miyazaki and Shoko Asahara. It is likely that *otaku* are being confused with

hikikomori and are assumed to be more reclusive than they actually are. Marc Hairston, a

professor at the University of Texas at Dallas notes,

> While otaku and *hikikomori* share some similar characteristics, it should be
> emphasized that there is only a slight overlap between the two groups. Most
> *hikikomori* are not otaku, and most otaku keep their hobby compartmentalized in
> their life and are able to spend the rest of their time in normal school or work
> activities.[111]

While the overlap between *otaku* and *hikikomori* is indeed present, I do not find it plausible that

it is as large or significant as public perception may believe it to be. Toivonen and Imoto contend

that social pressure is likely a leading cause of social withdrawal, specifically citing the

expectation that young people find full-time employment quickly after graduation, despite the

lack of permanent positions.[112]

Social withdrawal among *otaku* is probably not as large of an issue as it is classically

believed to be. In addition to fan translations, the internet also facilitated the growth of online

communities, such as 2chan, short for 2channel, a website with open forums for discussion of

any and all topics, including *anime* and *manga*. Many *otaku* frequent the site, a fact that was

introduced to mainstream Japan in 2004. That year, a television show called *Densha Otoko* or

"Train Man" debuted, earning widespread viewership. The show tells the supposedly true story

of an *otaku* who one day witnesses a woman being sexually harassed on a train. The *otaku*

successfully distracts the harasser, allowing the woman to flee. After she gives him an expensive

---

[110] dela Pena, "Otaku: Images," 17-18.
[111] Marc Hairston, A Cocoon with a View: *Hikikomori*, Otaku, and *Welcome to the NHK*," *Mechademia* 5 (2010). Accessed February 25, 2015. http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/mechademia/v005/5.hairston.html.
[112] Toivonen and Imoto, "Transcending Labels," 79-80.

tea set as thanks, the *otaku* consults his friends on 2chan, and, following their advice, begins

dating the woman he saved. Not only does the show offer an (allegedly) true story of an *otaku*

successfully socializing with and dating a "normal" girl, but it achieved significant mainstream

success, with the final episode grabbing the attention of 25.5 percent of the national audience.[113]

The popularity of the show also helped to dispel the notion that *otaku* are psychopathic weirdoes,

offering instead the image of kind, passionate human beings who are not only capable of leaving

their homes, but who can also communicate normally with other people.[114]

The social nature of *otaku* is also on display at *anime* and *manga* conventions, where

anywhere from a few hundred to a few hundred thousand people, depending on the size of the

convention, gather in celebration of their common fandom. Whether in Japan, America, or

anywhere on Earth, *anime* and *manga* conventions offer a wide variety of activities designed to

promote interaction between fans. For example, many conventions feature cosplay contests,

dances and even raves, in which people can mingle, discuss their favorite series and characters

and exchange compliments on their costumes. Other events include autograph sessions and

panels with the creators and directors of various *anime* and *manga*, as well as *anime* screenings.

These events encourage fans to talk amongst themselves and allow them to get closer to and

interact with the people who create their favorite shows.

For more direct interaction between fans, most conventions also have events such as

video game tournaments and panels led by fans. These panels can involve anything from lectures

about *anime* history to question-and-answer sessions about taking a term abroad in Japan, to

audience participation games involving trivia or character-based improvisation. Another

common feature at many American conventions is the artist alley, where fans can buy and sell

---

[113] Galbraith, *Otaku Encyclopedia*, 61.
[114] Galbraith, *Otaku Encyclopedia*, 61.

pre-made prints based featuring characters from *anime* and video games. Some artists also accept commissions or, rarely, trades as requested by customers. In each of these cases, the convention promotes active socialization by bringing fans together for face-to-face communication, fostering interpersonal skills that internet-based communication rarely utilizes. Sometimes, the interactions can lead to lasting friendships or collaborations between fans, culminating in the formation of a band or an amateur *manga* circle.

In America, one of the largest *anime* conventions is Otakon, an annual event, which has been active since 1994. Currently held in the Baltimore Convention Center, Otakon has attracted over 20,000 registered attendees[115] every year since 2004, and over 30,000 total attendees every year since 2002, with an estimated 109,000 total attendees in 2014.[116] Having attended the 2013 and 2014 editions of Otakon, I can say from experience that it is a truly massive fan gathering that effectively takes over a significant portion of the Inner Harbor, the city's main tourist and commercial area. The convention takes place over three days in early August or late July, and immediately upon arrival, it is obvious that the event is a gathering place for fans of all aspects of Japanese popular culture. As far as the eye can see, there are thousands of people dressed as their favorite characters, both alone and in groups, with at least as many people lining up to be photographed with them.

Waiting in line to pick up entry badges is a spectacle of its own, as the line wraps all the way around the perimeter of the building two or three times at the peak of congestion before finally moving inside, snaking its way through two floors before finally arriving at the registration booth. While daunting, the line affords ample time to pore over the full schedule of events and chat with the other people in line about which screenings or panels seem interesting

---

[115] Attendees may pre-register for one, two or three-day passes online or purchase one-day passes at the event.
[116] "Otakon Data by Year", http://otakon.com/history_stats.asp. Accessed March 11, 2015.

or which autograph session is particularly appealing. In 2014, the pre-registration line was particularly slow, due to network problems hampering the registration process, causing those stuck in line to bond over their mutual frustration and not-so-affectionately dub the experience "LineCon".

Once the convention proper starts on Friday, attendees have free reign to go to any event they please. There are plenty of activities for fans of all ages, ranging from Ota-chan, the convention's programming designed for young children and their parents, to panels and screenings reserved exclusively for adults. Options available to everyone include autograph signings, industry panels, fan-produced trivia games with prizes, craft workshops, and many more. Many of these events, particularly the autograph sessions tend to have long lines, which provides a perfect environment for fans of the same show, voice actor/actress or director to socialize and make friends. Other chances to socialize include the nightly ballroom dances and raves.

Conventions like Otakon also serve as a means of introducing fans to the works of other fans. In the artist alley, one can buy shirts, buttons, drawings and other handicrafts, meet the people who made them, and exchange contact information if they are interested in each other's works. Similarly, some attendees use the convention to promote their podcasts, abridged series, or websites. This form of advertising helped me to discover Mouthful of Toast, a biweekly podcast that offers reviews of new and old *anime* series, news on upcoming releases and a segment in which listeners can send in questions for the hosts to answer.

Anime conventions are proof the *otaku* are not the antisocial closet dwellers that critics make them out to be, for conventions have the potential to gather thousands or even hundreds of thousands of *anime* and *manga* fans, from the casual viewer to the hardcore *otaku*, and bring

43

them together in a public setting. At these conventions, *otaku* are free to discuss their favorite

shows with each other, compete face-to-face in video game tournaments, and meet their favorite

celebrities in person. These events demonstrate that *otaku* are not only willing to leave the

comfort of their homes to socialize, but that they are also finding creative ways to do so, such as

cosplaying as their favorite characters to more honestly and openly communicate with other fans

without having to restrain their enthusiasm for their hobbies.

Overall, *otaku* exert a positive influence on Japanese society by benefitting the country

culturally, technologically and economically. Through the mediums of *anime* and *manga*, *otaku*

have proven that they are capable ambassadors of Japanese culture, and they have successfully

generated interest in Japan all around the world. Through their own personal interest and the

fandom of *anime*, *manga*, and Japanese popular culture that they have spread abroad, they have

generated a steady stream of revenue for a Japanese economy that is dire need of a boost. The

relentless spending of *otaku* in pursuit of their hobbies has led to repeated technological

advances and innovations in consumer electronics. Furthermore, the criticisms levied against

otaku are largely unfounded, as much of the content they consume is no more violent or

explicitly sexual in nature than mainstream entertainment, making it unlikely that *otaku* culture

has a negative impact on the morality of its members. Also, through social gatherings such as

anime conventions and the mainstream success of the purportedly true story of *Densha Otoko*,

otaku have demonstrated that they are not socially withdrawn to any significant degree. Given

this evidence, I conclude that *otaku* are undeserving of the negative stereotypes that befall them

and that their existence is a net positive for Japanese society as a whole.

Conclusion

Throughout the course of its history, the term "*otaku*" has always had some air of negativity to it, beginning with the essay by Akio Nakamori that first popularized the term in 1983. Over the course of the next twelve years, the label devolved from simply connoting weirdness and poor social skills to implying sexual deviance and social withdrawal among an almost entirely male community. The rise of *otaku* as ambassadors of Japanese culture in the 2000s and the success of *Densha Otoko* has had a positive effect on the way that *otaku* are perceived. Prejudice still exists, however, as older generations still associate *otaku* with violent crime, though this notion is much weaker in society as a whole than it used to be. Therefore, while the public impression of *otaku* is improving, it is still negative overall.

The rationale for disparaging *otaku* lies in connecting *otaku* with social concerns. In the case of violent crime and sexual deviance, *otaku* are often compared to Tsutomu Miyazaki, who served a representative rather than an outlier. The evidence linking him to *otaku* culture is tenuous at best, however, as the most violent media found in his room were live action films rather than *manga*, pornographic or otherwise. Furthermore, most popular *manga* series are not particularly violent or gory, nor do they contain explicit or violent sexual content. It is therefore unlikely that Miyazaki's collection of *anime* and *manga* played a significant role in his decision to carry out his murders. Plus, even if he was an *otaku*, as the media portrayed him to be, he was not the norm. The stereotype of *otaku* being antisocial shut-ins is also ill-founded, as *anime* and *manga* conventions are very well-attended, with larger conventions attracting tens or hundreds of thousands of people. Lastly, the notion that *otaku* are all men is false, as the majority of amateur *manga* artists and convention-goers are actually women. Based on this evidence, I do not observe a strong correlation between *otaku* and the problems they are blamed for.

45

In fact, *otaku* have proven to be an invaluable vectors of Japanese culture throughout the world. By facilitating the rise in popularity of *anime* and *manga* as cultural exports, international interest in learning about Japan, as well as Japanese language and culture, increased, resulting in greater awareness and appreciation for Japan all around the world. The dedication *otaku* show for their hobbies has also led to product innovation in the computer and consumer electronics markets, and the amount of money that *otaku* spend on these products, as well as *anime* and *manga*, provides a steady flow of revenue into a Japanese economy that has been stagnant for over two decades.

Considering the significance and variety of the benefits *otaku* and *otaku* culture provide, I have come to the conclusion that *otaku* do indeed have a positive influence on Japanese society. Further, given that the negative effects that *otaku* are accused of have been determined to be largely misguided, I find that *otaku* are overall beneficial to Japanese society. Thus, the unfavorable image that defines them now is unwarranted. That said, the improvement of the perception of *otaku* in the 2000s, combined with the increasing acceptance of *anime* fandom abroad forecasts a brighter future for the public image of *otaku* in the years to come.

Sources

Primary

Alt, Matthew. "What Kind of Otaku Are You?" Last updated April 2, 2008. Accessed October 20, 2014. http://neojaponisme.com/2008/04/02/what-kind-of-otaku-are-you/.

Ashcraft, Brian, "Insensitive Jerkwad Connects Stabbings with Japanese Geek Culture," June 12, 2012, accessed January 14, 2015. http://kotaku.com/5917663/insensitive-jerkwad-connects-stabbings-with-japanese-geek-culture.

Galbraith, Patrick. Skype Interview. June 26, 2014.

Galbraith, Patrick. Skype Interview. October 1, 2014.

Kitabayashi, Ken, "The *Otaku* Group from a Business Perspective: Revaluation of Enthusiastic Consumers," *NRI Papers* 81 (2004) 2-8.

Woznicki, Krystian, "Towards a cartography of Japanese anime – Anno Hideaki's Evangelion Interview with Azuma Hiroki," *BLIMP Filmmagazine*. February 20, 1998. Accessed January 28, 2015. http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9802/msg00101.html.

Comiket Chronology. Accessed October 20, 2014. http://www.comiket.co.jp/archives/Chronology.html

Know Your Meme. "Otaku." Accessed November 3, 2014. http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/subcultures/otaku

Lah, Kyung, "Japanese man marries video game character," CNN, December 17, 2009. Accessed January 28, 2015. http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/asiapcf/12/16/japan.virtual.wedding/.

Loo, Egan, "2013's Dragon Ball Z: Battle of the Gods Film Story Outlined (Updated)," last modified December 3, 2012. Accessed February 25, 2015. http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/interest/2012-12-03/2013-dragon-ball-z/battle-of-gods-film-story-outlined.

Nakamura, Toshi. "Japanese Media Seems to Want Otaku to be More "Otaku-ish"," Kotaku East, last modified May 24, 2013. Accessed November 10, 2014. http://kotaku.com/japanese-media-seems-to-want-otaku-to-be-more-otaku-is-509475256.

Nomura Research Institute, "New Market Scale Estimation for *Otaku*: Population of 1.72 Million with Market Scale of ¥411 Billion," https://www.nri.com/global/news/2005/051006.html. Published October 6, 2005. Accessed February 4, 2015.

"Otakon Data by Year," http://otakon.com/history_stats.asp. Accessed March 11, 2015.

Pink, Daniel H., "Japan, Ink: Inside the Manga Industrial Complex," Wired, October 22, 2007. Accessed February 18, 2015. http://archive.wired.com/techbiz/media/magazine/15-11/ff_manga?currentPage=5.

Ryall, Julian, "Nerd Cult Murderer Executed," June 17, 2008, accessed January 14, 2015. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/japan/2144503/Nerd-cult-murderer-executed.html.

Sangani, Kris, "Otaku World," November 5, 2008, accessed January 14, 2015. http://eandt.theiet.org/magazine/2008/19/otaku-world.cfm.

Sayle, Murray, "Nerve Gas and the Four Noble Truths," *New Yorker* April 1, 1996. Accessed January 28, 2015. http://www.culthelp.info/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=871&Itemid=11.

Williams, Maren, "Otaku: Japan's Favorite Scapegoat – and Tourist Draw," October 8, 2012, Accessed January 14, 2015. http://cbldf.org/2012/10/otaku-japans-favorite-scapegoat-and-tourist-draw/.

Yates, Ronald E. "Japan's Video Violence Called Spur to Crime," Chicago Tribune. August 27, 1989. Accessed November 17, 2014. http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1989-08-27/news/8901080148_1_mari-konno-tsutomu-miyazaki-violent-videos.

"The Cannibal Nerd: The Rise and Fall of Tsutomu Miyazaki," accessed January 14, 2015. http://www.drkiller.net/the-cannibal-nerd-the-rise-and-fall-of-tsutomu-miyazaki.html.

"Tokyo's Youth Healthy Development Council Looks at To Love-Ru Darkness," http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2012-06-02/tokyo-youth-healthy-development-council-looks-at-to-love-ru-darkness, Anime News Network, June 2, 2012. Accessed February 25, 2014.

"Top 10 Shonen Jump Manga by All-Time Volume Sales," http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2012-10-23/top-10-shonen-jump-manga-by-all-time-volume-sales, Anime News Network, October 23, 2010. Accessed February 25, 2015.

http://countryeconomy.com/gdp/japan?year=2004. Accessed February 18, 2015.

http://www.freecurrencyrates.com/exchange-rate-history/USD-JPY/2004. Accessed February 4, 2015.

http://www.freecurrencyrates.com/exchange-rate-history/USD-JPY/2005. Accessed February 4, 2015.

http://www.tradingeconomics.com/japan/population. Accessed February 11, 2015.

Secondary

Azuma, Hiroki. *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*. Translated by Jonathan E. Abel and Shion Kono. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

48

Bouissou, Jean-Marie. "Japan's growing cultural power. The example of manga in France." *Reading manga: Local and global perceptions of Japanese comics* (2006): 149-165. https://hal-sciencespo.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-00972716/document.

Brienza, Casey E., "Books, not Comics: Publishing Fields, Globalization, and Japanese Manga in the United States," *Publishing Research Quarterly* 25 (2009): 101-117.

Brown, Steven T., "Screening Anime," in *Cinema Anime*, edited by Steven T. Brown, 1-19. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006.

Cooper-Chen, Anne, ""Japan's Illustrated Storytelling": A thematic Analysis of Globalized Anime and Manga," *Keio Communication Review* 33 (2011): 85-98.

dela Pena, Joseph L. "Otaku: Images and Identity in Flux." *CUREJ-College Undergraduate Research Electronic Journal* 9 (2006): 1-38.

Doerr, Zephra C., "Abridged series and fandom remix culture," *Transfromative Works and Cultures* 9 (2012). Accessed February 18, 2015, doi:10.3983/twc.2012.0396.

Driscoll, Mark, "Debt and Denunciation in Post-Bubble Japan: On the Two Freeters," *Cultural Critique* 65 (2007): 164-187.

Eng, Lawrence, "The Politics of Otaku," Last updated September 1, 2001. Accessed November 10, 2014. http://www.cjas.org/~leng/otaku-p.htm.

Exner, Nina, "Anime-zing in North Carolina: Library Views of Anime Fans," *North Carolina Libraries* 70 (2012): 28-34.

Galbraith, Patrick, "Akihabara: Conditioning a Public "Otaku" Image," *Mechademia* 5 (2010): 210-230.

Galbraith, Patrick, "The *Misshitsu* Trial: Thinking Obscenity with Japanese Comics," *International Journal of Comic Art* 16 (2014): 125-146. https://www.academia.edu/7448982/The_Misshitsu_Trial_Thinking_Obscenity_with_Japanese_Comics.

Galbraith, Patrick. *The Otaku Encyclopedia: An insider's guide to the subculture of Cool Japan*. New York: Kodansha, 2009.

Hairston, Marc. "A Cocoon with a View: Hikikomori, Otaku, and Welcome to the NHK." *Mechademia* 5 (2010). Accessed February 25, 2015. http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/mechademia/v005/5.hairston.html.

Hicks, Jesse, "Otaku Anthropology: Exploring Japan's Unique Subculture," May 9, 2012, Accessed January 14, 2015. http://www.theverge.com/2012/5/9/3004622/otaku-spaces-patrick-galbraith-manga-anime-review.

Iida, Yumiko, "Between the Technique of Living an Endless Routine and the Madness of Absolute Degree Zero: Japanese Identity and the Crisis of Modernity in the 1990s," *Positions: East Asia Culture Critique* 8 (2000): 423-464.

Kelts, Roland. *Japanamerica: How Japanese Pop Culture Has Invaded the U.S.* New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006.

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

Ortabasi, Melek. "National History as Otaku Fantasy: Satoshi Kon's *Millenium Actress*" in Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime, edited by Mark W. MacWilliams, 274-294. Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 2008.

Pitcher, Tim. "The Manga Culture: Fantasy and reality in Japanese comic art," *Criminal Justice Matters* 11 (1993): 17. Accessed November 17, 2014. doi: 10.1080/09627259308553312.

Toivonen, Tuukka, and Yuki Imoto. "Transcending labels and panics: the logic of Japanese youth problems." *Contemporary Japan Journal of the German Institute for Japanese Studies Tokyo* 25 (2013): 61-86.

Vogel, Suzanne Hall, "Japanese Society Under Stress," *Asian Survey* 52 (2012): 687-713.

Walters, Kaylee, "Mature Cartoons: The Evolution of Subgenres in Adult Animation," 2008.

Wikipedia. "Otaku." Accessed November 3, 2014. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otaku.

 "The Otaku Murderer: Tsutomu Miyazaki (21 August 1962 to 17 June 2008) Part 1," June 17, 2013, accessed January 14, 2015. http://soldierexecutionerprolifer2008.blogspot.com/2013/06/the-otaku-murderer-tsutomu-miyazaki-21.html.

"The Otaku Murderer: Tsutomu Miyazaki (21 August 1962 to 17 June 2008) Part 2," June 17, 2013, accessed January 14, 2015. http://soldierexecutionerprolifer2008.blogspot.com.au/2013/06/the-otaku-murderer-tsutomu-miyazaki-21_17.html.