The Cultural Context and the Interpretation of Japanese 'Lolita Complex' Style Anime

Perry R. HINTON
Independent Academic Researcher, UK

Abstract: Japanese animated films or *anime* have been popular in the West since the early 1990s. However, media interest in anime (particularly in Britain) has tended to focus on negative representations of anime concerning violence, sexuality and young girls. The current paper undertakes an examination of the genre of 'Lolita complex' or *rorikon* anime, the focus of these concerns. It is argued that the term 'Lolita' has a culturally specific meaning and that it has a different meaning in Western culture to that in Japan. This has led to a misperception of aspects of Japanese society and its cultural products such as anime. Furthermore it is argued that rorikon anime reflects teenage anxieties about the adult world, and changes in society and gender roles rather than perverse male sexual desire. An examination of the elements of rorikon anime shows that, rather than the product of a cultural 'other', it reflects features common across Japanese and Western cultures.

Keywords: Japanese anime, Lolita complex, rorikon, shoujo, British media, cultural context, gender roles

1. Introduction

One of the key aspects of globalization is the ready availability of the cultural products of one country to other nations round the world. The development of the internet as a global marketplace and its social media role for creating communities of fans of these products has further enhanced this cross-cultural communication. This can be seen most clearly in the popularity of Japanese popular culture (in terms of a range of products such as animated films (*anime*), comic books (*manga*), video games and toys) in Western countries. During the last twenty-five years these products moved from a minority cult interest in the West to a hugely popular, multimillion dollar industry. The Western popular cultural image of Japan moved from the late twentieth century view of Japan as a dynamic commercial and industrial giant to the twenty-first century image of *Cool Japan*, the source of innovative and exciting popular culture including pop art, fashion and film (e.g. Condry and Fujita, 2011).

Yet despite its rich diversity of subject matter and widespread popularity there is also a Western view of Japanese popular culture, particularly anime, that presents it as a confusing and potentially dangerous, trangressive cultural 'other' (e.g. Izawa, 1997), and this has had an impact on the reception of manga and anime in Western countries, particularly Britain where, despite the initial interest in the mainstream media during the early 1990s, anime for adults disappeared from the main television channels (Spall, 2009).

In episode five of season nine of the American television comedy cartoon series *Family*

Guy, first shown on the Fox Network on 14ᵗʰ November 2010, and subsequently shown on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in Britain, the main character Peter Griffin, the family guy of the title, sits on his sofa to drink bourbon and watch anime on television. He exclaims rather drunkenly: "I can't understand any of this! Everybody in Japan is either a 10 year-old girl or a monster." Indeed, the utterance gains its humour by echoing a Western stereotypical representation of anime. Griffin's confusion reflects a cultural position about the 'otherness' of anime and manga, which became a British media issue when apparently young girls are depicted in sexual situations, described by the British Sunday Times newspaper in 1995 in a headline to an article on anime and manga as "under-age, over-sexed, over here" (Millar, 1995). This has led to varying degrees of Western cultural concern and censorship, especially about a genre called *rorikon* derived from the English phrase 'Lolita complex' (also abbreviated to *Lolicom*) from the title of Nabokov's eponymous book, about an older man's erotic interest in a young girl. This can be seen as a particular anxiety for Western commentators as, at the turn of the millennium, Kinsella noted that: "The genres of animation which have become popular within the new fan cultures in Britain and America, and which dominate video imports, are derived from *Lolicom* manga which arose out of the amateur manga medium during the 1980s" (Kinsella, 2000, p. 126).

   This paper will argue that a Western representation (as presented in the British media) of rorikon-style anime as a trangressive representation of perverse (adult) male sexuality, is a misrepresentation of such anime and that an exploration of the Japanese cultural context shows that teenage perceptions of adult life and changing gender relations underlie these anime, and that similar concerns and interests can be demonstrated in Western culture. It will further be argued that the Western representation reflects its own cultural anxieties rather than being contained within the Japanese cultural products. As a consequence, the rich range of anime for adults has been absent from mainstream British media in its focus on these concerns.

2. Girls, Monsters, Sex and Violence

Japanese anime entered the Western mainstream media in the early 1990s. In Britain, *Akira* 1988 was given a theatrical release in 1991 and an early dub of Miyazaki's *Laputa: Castles in the Sky* 1986 was aired on terrestrial British television. In 1994, the BBC produced an hour long introduction to anime (referred to in the program as 'manga films') called *Manga!*. However, the BBC announcer introducing the program set the cultural context by stating: "passionately admired by fans and reviled by critics".

   Controversy arose concerning adult anime in Western countries: in Britain the apocalyptic anime *Legend of the Overfiend* was severely cut on release in 1993, and in 1996 *LA Blue Girl* was given an outright ban by the British Board of Film Classification amid concerns about the importation of cartoon 'sex and tentacles' (McCarthy, 1996). This had two results: a focus on a particular type of anime in the popular press and the association of anime with sexual violence against women and girls. Yet as Izawa (1997) pointed out, this form of anime was a relatively small part of the Japanese anime output (compared to popular Japanese anime for adults on such topics as golf, baseball or mahjong) yet was chosen as a relatively large proportion of the anime imported by Western distributors at the time. Westerners viewing this content as

'typical' Japanese anime output were potentially misinterpreting a Western selective interest, and inappropriately attributing it to a misperceived prevalence of 'sex and tentacles' anime in the Japanese output, leading to the negative reputation of adult anime in Britain (Spall, 2009).

However, it should be noted that Anime18, the distributor of the *LA Blue Girl* series in the United States of America where it was released, had a disclaimer at the beginning of each video presentation that highlighted the cultural context of anime and also emphasized that the characters were over eighteen: thus, alerting the viewer to the apparently young schoolgirls (to Western eyes) being actually 18 or 19 year-old high school girls. Furthermore, it should be noted the characters in such anime were usually not 'real' girls at all but 'born from a line of demons' or having some alien association or powers that made them obviously characters of fantasy.

McCarthy expressed her frustration at the British media presentation of anime in a review of *Legend of the Overfiend*, of which she said: "gained an infamous reputation mostly from reviewers and moral commentators who, even if they have troubled to do more than read the sensationalist press releases, have no understanding of its source manga, background or context" (McCarthy, 1996, p. 66). After the initial interest in the 1990s when anime for adults, such as *Akira*, was shown on late-night television (particularly the BBC and Channel 4), anime more or less disappeared from mainstream television in Britain (Spall, 2009). Subsequently, the negative view of manga and anime for adults tended to reappear in the British media. For example, when an English woman was murdered in Japan in 2007, Beauman (2007) ironically commented on the British press reports: "Men don't kill women, manga does."

3. Oriental Lolitas?

The one area that has caused the greatest concern amongst the Western media has been around the depiction of 'underage' girls in sexual situations, as expressed in the Sunday Times article cited above, particularly in relation to images associated with *rorikon*. Whilst the Sunday Times did acknowledge the different cultural context of manga in Japan and Britain, the style of the article (including both the headline and the accompanying large image of a scantily-clad manga girl) focused the British reader on to the concerns about manga and anime. This anxiety was expressed most forcefully by Schodt (1996, p. 340): "The material foreigners prefer, moreover, may not be what is preferred in Japan, and it may be interpreted differently. In a worst-case scenario, the 'Lolita complex virus' might even be inadvertently exported." It should be noted that Schodt does put the phrase 'Lolita complex virus' in quotes, but it is indicative of a particular view of a cultural 'other': implying that Japan is a source of a danger, with certain Japanese people harbouring the 'Lolita complex virus' – which presumably makes them 'ill' – and that Westerners need to be protected from this 'virus' if it is not going to infect them too. By implication, censorship is simply a 'medical' protection to maintain Western 'good health'. This form of explanation appears to underlie a particular Western response to rorikon anime. However, this meaning will be questioned here and the cultural context of rorikon examined in detail, to offer an alternative interpretation of rorikon.

A key point in the examination of the Lolita complex is that the term 'Lolita' itself is not a fixed and unambiguous term. Different cultural representations of Lolita have emerged in

the West and Japan (Hinton, 2013a, Zank, 2010). The Lolita of the book, Dolores Haze, is a bright and resourceful twelve year-old girl, a tomboy, interested in celebrities and soda pop, attempting to survive as best she can with the death of her mother and a sexually abusive step-father. It is made very clear in the book that she is not in any way sexually interested in her step-father, Humbert Humbert, the narrator of the story. Yet in Western popular culture the representation of the term *Lolita* has been transformed to that of an older teenage vamp, using her precocious and 'knowing' sexual maturity to seduce an older man (Hinton, 2013a).

This transformed representation has been employed by the Western media in reporting the phenomenon of *enjo kousai* or compensated dating by Japanese school girls, first reported in the Japanese press in 1994 (Asahi Shimbun, 1998; Kinsella, 2012). High school girls received money from an older man (stereotypically a middle-aged salary man) to spend time with him, which might simply be sharing a meal or a karaoke session but might involve prostitution. Japanese 'schoolgirl prostitution' became the focus of the Western media attention with headlines such as 'Japan's dirty secret' and 'for sale: Japanese school girls', alongside photographs of school girls in uniform (Hinton, 2013b), leading to the presentation in the Western press of 'Oriental Lolitas', the headline in the British current affairs magazine *New Statesman* (Jones, 2003) with an implied dangerous otherness of Japanese culture. Yet enjo kousai turned out to be more media hype than reality, possibly due to the Japanese media's general fascination with high school girls' culture (Kinsella, 2012). Indeed, teenage prostitution may well be more of a problem in Britain than in Japan (Hinton, 2013b). The enjo kousai issue disappeared from the Japanese press by the turn of the century (Kinsella, 2012), along with the stricter anti-prostitution laws passed in 1999. Yet 'Oriental Lolita' stories continued to feature in the Western press well into the new century which not only misrepresented Japanese schoolgirls but appeared to indicate a Western media focus (Hinton, 2013b).

Japanese high school girls' culture became a topic of national interest during the later twentieth century (Kinsella, 1995). By the 1980s the huge economic success of Japan had been brought about by dedication and hard work (emphasizing the national characteristic of 'endurance') since the post-war reconstruction. This led to a perception of adulthood by Japanese teenagers as a time of responsibility, duty and hard work, in contrast to Western teenagers, who saw adulthood as a time of independence and personal freedom (White, 1993). There were also clear gender roles, with teenage boys seeking to achieve highly during 'examination hell' to go to the best colleges and join the best Japanese companies, with the expectation of a job for life. There was less academic pressure on teenage girls who were expected to work until marriage (preferably before the age of 25 years) and then work in the home as homemakers and childrearers. The stereotypical image of adulthood was of the hard-working salaryman rarely at home and the education-mama pushing her sons to academic success.

An outcome of this situation was that girls had a prospect before them of an unappealing adulthood and gender discrimination in the workplace. As a result, and with the affluence of the Japanese family, there was an awareness that high school girls *at the present time* had the greatest freedom within the society to engage with (and influence) popular culture. Music, fashion, toys, manga, anime, popular art and design, all were influenced by girls' culture. At the heart of the culture lay the concept of *kawaii* – opposing all that was harsh and adult – creating a style and objects that were cute, soft, smooth, bright, bold, and innocent and naïve.

To Western eyes unaware of the culture, these objects might appear the province of the preteen child. Japanese teenage girl culture was the antithesis of the Western representation of Lolita with her precocious adult behaviour. Culturally, Japanese girls' culture sought an escape from adulthood and, whilst the average Japanese high school girl has the same sexual development and interests of any Western teenage girl, Japanese teenage girls presented themselves as cute but certainly not vampish (see Kinsella, 1995).

Girls' culture had an impact on the wider society, with kawaii objects entering adult culture (McVeigh, 2000). There was a general awareness at this time that affluence had not necessarily brought happiness, and the bursting of the economic bubble in the early 1990s led to a questioning of the nature of adult life as one of endless work at the expense of pleasure and free time. Girls' culture offered an escape from the tribulations of adulthood for men and women, as a vehicle for engaging with a fantasy (pre-adult) world which symbolised both leisure and an uncomplicated child-like enjoyment of the world (e.g. Miller, 2004). Girls' culture impacted on the cultural products for young men and teenage boys. Male manga and anime characters became less macho, more passive and more feminine (Schodt, 1983). The female characters tended to become more active and dynamic. Changes in society, such as the loss of jobs for life and the threat to traditional gender roles, led to a questioning of a life of academic struggle faced by the teenage boy, followed by an adult life of responsibility and hard work. Furthermore, as an outcome of the limitations on their career development, young women could use their personal income for leisure activities such as travelling, and other cultural pursuits. For some boys and young men the appeal of girls' culture was accompanied by an anxiety about the dynamism and perceived greater sophistication of teenage girls and young women. Manga and anime provided an outlet for young males both for a leisure and pleasure activity but also as a vehicle for playing out their concerns and anxieties in a changing cultural setting. During the 1980s there was a huge growth in manga but particularly in amateur produced manga – created by fans for fans - where male fears and desires could be explored in a fantasy world (Kinsella, 2000).Within this context was the Lolita complex manga or *rorikon*.

4. The Lolita Complex

'Lolita' may ironically be an inappropriate English 'translation' of rorikon for Western audiences. The Nabokov book *Lolita* was viewed differently in Japan to the West (Zank, 2010). (The book was first published in Japanese in 1959 by Kawade Shobo Shinsha, translated by Yasuo Ookubo.) The premarital girl is termed *shoujo* in Japanese, with her own cultural representations and references. One is the stereotype of the charming, hard-working and obedient 'ideal' shoujo, characterised by the young Tokiko in the film *The Geisha House* 1999, and eulogised by Western male visitors to Japan such as Holland (1907) and in Puccini's 1904 opera *Madame Butterfly*. In addition, there is the historical representation of the shoujo as a proto-wife, upon which male desire can be written, as in Prince Genji taking the young Murasaki no Ue to train as his perfect companion in the 11th century *Tale of Genji* by Shikibu Murasaki (Tyler, 2009). The Japanese representation of the attractive shoujo with her blossoming and fragile beauty allied to the cherry blossom, is not a symbol of transgressive 'underage' sexuality, but is much closer to the Western romantic cultural concept of the 'maiden' (the familiar 'fair maid' of British romantic

poetry, e.g. Ferber, 2012), with a similarity in the imagery of the young maiden in both Japan, such as the *bejinga* artists of the twentieth century (Cabañas, 1997), and, in the West, with Victorian artists such as J.W. Waterhouse (Marvick, 1996). More recently photographers such as Araki, Sawatari and Shinoyama in Japan have depicted the romantic shoujo. In the West, in the 1970s British photographer David Hamilton sold millions of photo books worldwide, of sunlit soft-focus romantic images of the 'jeune fille en fleur' relaxing in the countryside of the south of France (Baetens, 1995; Verwoert, 2001). He was also very popular in Japan, where during the 1980s and 1990s he also produced photo books in his characteristic style of Japanese actresses specifically for the Japanese market.

It is the idealized maiden may not be what she seems, thwarting (naïve) male desire. In Keats' 1819 poem *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* she is a 'faery's child' in her 'elfin grot' and enthrals the passing knight, his enslavement to her beauty shown in a painting by Waterhouse in 1893. The maid is in this sense a character of myth - not a real young woman at all. Even through the 'male gaze' (Allison, 1996) there is an awareness that this ideal shoujo is a creature of fantasy - as indicated in title of the bestselling Japanese photo book *Shinwa Shoujo* (essentially 'mythical maiden') 1997, Kishin Shinoyama's work featuring young actress and model Chiaki Kuriyama (Kuriyama would later appear to Western audiences as a violent Japanese school girl in the Quentin Tarantino film *Kill Bill*, 2003).

It is argued here that representations of the shoujo are employed within a fantasy or mythical space within anime, and as such 'maiden complex' may capture the Japanese meaning of rorikon better than 'Lolita complex' but sounds archaic, so simply 'shoujo complex' might be the most suitable term to use in English. For some Japanese young men and teenage boys, it is the idea of an unthreatening attractive and romantic young shoujo – a culturally constructed fantasy image of the teenage girl – that offers a respite from, and an alternative to, the anxiety of engaging with actual girls at a time of changing gender roles and the emancipation of women (Kinsella, 2000).

The term Lolita becomes even more inappropriate when the range of subject matter of rorikon manga and anime is considered. A rorikon shoujo character may appear to be a very cute teenage school girl – and hence potentially a Lolita-esque character – yet the meaning of Lolita (a young girl associated with sexuality and an older man) becomes problematic if the key feature of the story is that the shoujo character is in reality a 200 year-old demon princess, an alien creature of indeterminate age and gender, or a robot just created in a laboratory. Also, in rorikon manga, the male characters are not usually middle-aged Humbert Humbert characters seeking to seduce young girls (who, if they do appear, tend to be presented as unappealing *ecchi* characters, meaning lewd and perverted), but are much more likely to be gauche schoolboys, power-hungry despots, warriors or aliens.

5. Rorikon Manga and Anime

In the later twentieth century the relatively stricter social conventions discouraging dating between teenage schoolboys and girls in Japan compared to the West meant their sexual interest tended to be focused more on erotic material in magazines and manga. Indeed, some such manga contained "material that would be considered pornographic in other countries"

(Fukuzawa & LeTendre, 2001, p. 60). Allison (1996) argued that boys' erotic manga could be seen as providing a brief respite from hard studying without the distraction of a dating relationship, thus maintaining the boy's focus on his social role of preparing for the workplace.

During the 1980s erotic manga featuring young female characters began to appear in adult manga magazines such as *Manga Burikko*. It was also at this time that there was a major growth in the amateur manga movement, allowing fans to produce their own manga stories. Rorikon manga featured strongly in this development (Kinsella, 2000). The consumers of rorikon manga tended to be young men. In 1983 Manga Burikko featured an article by Akio Nakamori about a new subculture called *otaku* (Kam, 2013). At a simple level an otaku can be viewed as a dedicated, usually male, fan of manga and anime. However, it also contains the idea of geek or nerd within it. These young men were seen as rejecting a conventional male role within society, focusing their interests within the comic fan culture. They gained a stereotype of being socially inadequate with respect to girls and focusing their erotic interest on the characters within manga and anime, particularly rorikon. Cultural critic Hiroki Azuma argued that the interest in rorikon was a form of rebellion for the otaku, emphasizing an opposition to conventional society (McNicol, 2004). Rorikon manga therefore was a key element in the social context of young men finding ways of dealing with their disillusionment and discontent with the traditional male adult lifestyle, and with their erotic desires and anxieties with respect to young women who were gaining a greater degree of autonomy and power within society.

A typical example of male fantasy is Ken Akamatsu's *Love Hina*. Produced between 1998 and 2001, and aired on Japanese television in 2000, Love Hina is a classic example of a particular type of manga and anime appealing to teenage boys in Japan, called *Harem Manga* where a male character is surrounded by girls (Brenner, 2007). The central character is 19 year-old Keitaro Urashima constantly failing to get into the University of Tokyo. He is portrayed as shy and gauche with respect to girls, allowing juvenile Japanese male readers to identify with him. The story involves him living in his aunt's boarding house with a range of teenage girl characters, presenting many opportunities for his embarrassment and accidental encounters with the girls in states of undress. The storyline revolves around him attempting to impress a cute, successful 17 year-old girl boarder whom he fancies and (initially) miserably fails to impress. However, like many Japanese anime of this type the characters are endearing and the embarrassments reminiscent of all teenage angst – and it all ends happily. The manga sold over six million copies and the anime DVDs over one million copies in Japan. A DVD was released in Britain in 2005, but was not shown on television.

However, like many Japanese stories of this kind, fan-generated parallel stories have been created, called *parody doujinshi* (Galbraith, 2009; Kinsella, 2000). Whereas the original deals with the embarrassment and angst of the teenage boy, the parody provides a fantasy version of events – essentially an eroticised adaptation of the storyline for the male reader. No longer is the hero a failure in all aspects of life: now he is a sexual athlete, passionately seducing all the girls in the boarding house in line with a teenage boy's imagination. Whilst the parody doujinshi might provide a degree of immediate erotic satisfaction, in the original version it is the hero's dealing with his inadequacies that makes him endearing and a more rounded character. Given the sales figures, many male fans may well empathise more with the character in the original version who despite being an apparently inadequate young man, still gets the girl of his dreams.

Not surprisingly, such doujinshi are not available in the West.

The key element of erotic rorikon manga and anime is fantasy: there is a complex interaction of purity and innocence and their destruction in a cycle of fantasy production (Marcias & Machiyama, 2004). For the otaku, real life cannot produce the perfect object of desire so it must be found in the virtual world. The term *moe* is used to describe characters that approach this perfection. Moe characters appear extremely *kawaii*, but the term is more specific as an expression of male (otaku) desire. Moe characters offer a level of unthreatening 'perfect' cuteness absent in the real world and, as they are fantasy characters, they are unconstrained by human nature. Whilst they contain elements of the cute shoujo, they may have cat ears and a tail, they may be a humanoid robot or a distinctly non-human alien creature. A moe character can even have the characteristics of pet, such as a cat or a dog, rather than engaging at the human level. Presenting a moe character in a sexual situation provides a moment of virtual release but also destroys the innocence that is prized (see Galbraith, 2009). Thus, sexually explicit doujinshi can be viewed as a self-defeating representation of otaku desire and hence offers only a limited expression of fantasy production for the otaku fans. It is likely that it is the available innovative and creative rorikon-style manga and anime that offer a better allegorical examination of otaku life (see the discussion of *Elfin Lied* below).

The Japanese commentator Hiroki Azuma argued that it is wrong to link rorikon with crimes against children and that otaku readers of rorikon are expressing rebellion against society rather than paedophilia (McNicol, 2004). However, a number of English-speaking Western countries have introduced new laws banning explicit cartoon depictions of underage sexuality since the turn of the twenty-first century. Whilst it can be argued that rorikon characters are pure fantasy and hence are not children or even the representation of children (often with distinctly non-human characteristics) it is unlikely this would be accepted as a defence in Western law (such as a UK law introduced in 2010), where the appearance of being a child in a sexual situation would almost certainly be enough evidence to lead to a prosecution.

There are many elements that could be termed 'rorikon' in popular mainstream manga and anime, where shoujo are the objects of male desire, both within the story and, potentially, by the male viewer. Shoujo characters tend to be kawaii and are often moe. They are very likely to wear short skirts, particularly when dressed in *seifuku*, the characteristic Japanese girl's sailor-style school uniform, which allows for occasional panty flashes (Allison, 1996). Male characters may accidentally come across a kawaii shoujo character in a state of undress (as in *Love Hina*) or actively engage in *tosatsu*, voyeurism or peeking (as in *Great Teacher Onizuka*, 1997-2002). It should be noted, however, that these features are not elements of a 'Lolita' focus, but are targeted at an audience of teenage boys (and girls). In Japan teenage boys and girls have the same youthful interests in each other as do other teenagers around the world. Indeed, similar elements can be seen in US television programmes targeted at teenagers (and popular in Britain), with sexual references and attractive teenage girls in short skirts, such as the 'shoujo' character Buffy in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, or the cheerleaders in the popular US programme *Glee*.

In some cases of anime, the US distributors have targeted Japanese teenage products at a preteen market. This may be partly due to the continuing Western belief that comics and animation are for young children, or the apparent child-like kawaii style and behaviour of the

characters and the colourful style of anime. Mild sexual references that appeal to the teenage boy (and girl) become problematized when targeted at this younger audience – which is then misinterpreted as the Japanese producing inappropriate sexual imagery for young children and is subsequently censored in the West for a preteen audience (Hinton, 2013b).

Humbert Humbert in the novel *Lolita* is dismayed and frustrated by Lolita's ordinary teenage interests in popular culture (popular music, celebrities, bubble gum, soda fountains and so forth) which are very different to his own cultural interests. Even the transformed Western representation of a teenage vamp has her seducing a clearly mature man (such as in the American film *Poison Ivy*, 1992). This is obviously distinct to the otaku, whose pursuits, in manga, anime, computer games, figurines, and J-pop idols, clearly position him as having the interests of a teenage boy, even if he is no longer one. Indeed, these interests locate the otaku outside of adult life, within the realm of a 'pre-adult' subculture. As noted above, adult life has been viewed negatively by Japanese teenagers as a time of duty and responsibility compared to teenage life (White, 1993). Whilst changing gender roles have improved the adult opportunities for young women, they have added greater uncertainty to the lives of young men. One group of these young men, termed *hikikomori* (Horiguchi, 2012) have become so alienated from society that they stereotypically lock themselves in their rooms with their otaku paraphernalia, rarely emerging; and when they do it is with an inability to interact socially.

The hikikomori lie at the extreme end of the otaku spectrum, and it should be noted that at the other end otaku culture has had an intriguing and dynamic impact on Japanese art and other cultural products (Favell, 2011). However, the unifying feature of the otaku is the viewpoint of the teenage boy and his interests as the positively viewed subculture of which he is a part. As such the otaku is psychologically rejecting traditional adult (male) life. This is not unique to Japan, as the term 'adultescent' (combining the word 'adult' with the word 'adolescent') has been coined to label young adults in Britain who wish to retain their teenage interests (such as in computer gaming) and eschew adult responsibilities despite being in their 20s or 30s (Ray, 2001). So, it is argued here that the erotic interests of the otaku are allied to those of the teenage boy and not to Humbert Humbert, despite the superficial similarity that they both are attracted to the young shoujo. The otaku has a Peter Pan complex rather than a Lolita complex.

The issue of otaku alienation from adult culture can be examined through anime, as in *Elfin Lied* 2004, which contains elements of rorikon anime that cause Western anxieties: a naked young girl and extreme cartoon violence. These elements may offer an initial appeal to the teenage boy (Barber, 2008) but the anime involves a more complex story of alienation. The 'young girl' actually has horns on her head and is a young adult 'diclonius', a newly evolved powerful mutant with telekinetic powers, imprisoned in a strange laboratory for experimentation by human scientists. Her nudity is indicative of the lack of care in the institution, visible when she throws off her bonds, and the violence is necessary for her successful bid to escape against well-armed guards. Once free she alternates between being an extremely violent and powerful alien seeking revenge on her human tormentors and a charming naïve child-like moe character. The human adults are represented as uncaring and abusive, and the diclonius only finds warmth and affection from a young couple. Thus, the text of the story is about dealing with discrimination, alienation and the meaning of family in a harsh world of cold-hearted human adults. The subtext involves the position of the alienated person – such as the otaku – in society (Barber, 2008).

6. The Shoujo in Anime

As Allison points out, in Japanese popular culture shoujo characters are often subjects of the erotic 'male gaze' (Allison, 1996). Yet, despite this, shoujo characters are rarely passive victims of male desire, but are active and resourceful: from schoolgirls yelling *baka* (meaning 'fool' or 'idiot') to a boy encroaching into their changing room, to murderous revenge. Indeed, the female characters in manga and anime frequently contravene traditional gender roles. In *Love Hina*, Keitaro fails his examinations, is weaker and more passive than the female characters, who are clever and more active and dynamic. This can also be seen in one of the most successful anime of all time, Hideaki Anno's *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, 1995-1996 and released on video in the West in 1997-1998, but again not shown on mainstream British television.

The central character is a 14 year-old boy, Shinji Ikari, in a post-apocalyptic Japan. A strange organization NERV creates giant android Evangelion units to fight strange giant monsters called Angels. Shinji is one of the teenagers recruited to pilot the EVA units. He has two female fellow pilots Rei Ayanami and Asuka Langley Soryu. Misato Katsuragi, a 29 year-old officer of NERV supervises the pilots as well as providing a home for Shinji. This emphasizes Shinji's estrangement from his father who runs NERV. In terms of the 'male gaze' the story presents a number of attractive female characters: the teenage pilots - the extravert Asuka and the quiet Rei, often shown wearing seifuku – and the more voluptuous Misato who is seen relaxed and untidy at home in contrast to her decisive and controlled behaviour in her military role. Thus, for the male (teenage) viewer there is a central character to identify with, undertaking dangerous and exciting duties controlling a huge robot creature, a world in upheaval where the adults who have some responsibility for the madness require teenagers to help them, and a group of kawaii female characters.

Yet the story is much more complex than this. Firstly, Shinji is not a traditional male hero. He has no macho desire to fight and is often overtaken by self-doubt and uncertainty. Rei is a clone based on Shinji's dead mother. Her apparent lack of emotional expression appears to disguise sadness at the awareness of her own condition. Asuka, a more dynamic and active character, has a mental breakdown when forced to face the childhood memory of seeing her mother kill herself. As such the storyline contains many elements of tragedy and psychological dysfunction. The young teenagers are forced to deal with the vagaries of the adult world with varying degrees of success. The subtext of many such apocalyptic stories is clear: what is the sane way (for young people) to behave in a mad (adult) world? The storyline and characters offer opportunities for various interpretations (demonstrated by the web fansite discussions). The blue-haired, slight Rei is an 'outsider' character: she is distant and appears not to be able to interact easily with others. She appears human but is an expendable clone with an alien soul, and as such is a fantasy creation. Yet she is characteristically moe, appealing to the otaku, featuring in fan stories as an object of erotic desire (Galbraith, 2009).

In a mad, fantasy or apocalyptic world there is also the opportunity for a breakdown of traditional gender roles. In a world of (adult) male failure the cute shoujo can be a powerful heroine. Like Joan of Arc, the maid of Orleans, a young girl can lead an army to victory when a king had failed. In Western popular culture the plucky young girl dealing with a mad world is

characterised by Alice in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Carroll, 1865). She does not fulfil the stereotypical Victorian image of a passive young girl. Alice is bold and resourceful, using her intelligence to deal with the illogical and unusual fantasy characters. *Alice in Wonderland* – and many anime – can be taken as allegory and viewed as a commentary on contemporary society (Hollingsworth, 2009). Alice becomes the naïve but intelligent 'everyman' figure, using her ingenuity to deal with an odd 'adult' world that appears to make little sense, unconstrained by traditional gender roles and adult conventions.

Yet, in the current British cultural context, when Lewis Carroll is discussed, the focus tends to reflect current cultural anxieties. As British academic Jaques (2010) observed from her teaching: the question of "Was Dodgson dodgy?" (p.364) tends to arise from students, asking about the view of Charles Dodgson (the real name of Lewis Carroll) circulating in the culture that nefarious reasons underlie his interest in young girls such as Alice Liddell, the girl he wrote the story for. Yet, as Jaques also points out, the work of Karoline Leach shows that this representation is as much a myth about Lewis Carroll as the alternative earlier view that he was a shy and unworldly clergyman (e.g. Leach, 2009). This mythologizing of Carroll, either as saint or sinner, tends to cloud the popular perception of the book, withdrawing the focus of interest from the active and intelligent 'modern' young Alice using her ingenuity to negotiate a strange world.

Yet, it is argued that the original text is 'subversive' rather than 'nonsense' for children (as it tends to be viewed) as it undermines assumptions about communication and interaction (Lakoff, 1993). Thus it both challenges convention and contains a depth beyond its 'superficial' story for children. Alice is a popular character in Japan, particularly in the relatively recent translation *Fushigi no Kuni no Arisu* by Sumiko Yagawa 1994**.** Anime, like Alice in Wonderland, positions the shoujo as a subversive in a mad world; to explore issues of gender and society, as is particularly seen in the works of Hayao Miyazaki, whose characters have often been associated with Alice (for example, Ando, 2008).The plucky and resourceful shoujo that feature in Miyazaki's hugely popular anime have the qualities of Alice: such as Nausicaä (*Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* 1984), Sheeta (*Laputa: Castle in the Sky* 1986), Kiki (*Kiki's Delivery Service* 1989), Mononoke (*Princess Mononoke* 1997) , and Chihiro (*Spirited Away* 2001),who are all cute shoujo but must use their intelligence and ingenuity to overcome trials and tribulations in a world thrown out of balance.

In 1996 Disney signed an agreement to dub Miyazaki's anime into English. These versions appear frequently on British mainstream television (as well as the subtitled original versions) and are often the only anime shown. Whilst the worldwide appeal of Miyazaki's anime is undeniable, it may be that the reputation of Disney entertainment as 'safe' entertainment for children enhances its acceptability in British mainstream media, where they are scheduled at times allocated to children's programmes. Yet Miyazaki rejects the appellation of the 'Japanese Disney' (Ross, 2011) and these anime often have deep and complex underlying themes that are absent from many Disney movies, such as strong ecological messages and the loss of the connection with nature (Napier, 2006). Indeed, the Welsh mining village present in *Laputa: Castles in the Sky* recalls a community that was destroyed with the closure of the Welsh coal mines in the bitter political and industrial battle in Britain during the 1980s.

Shoujo characters in anime often appear to be 'normal' young girls yet have secret

powers or knowledge. In Miyazaki's *Kiki's Delivery Service* Kiki is a witch who can fly and in *Laputa:Castle in the Sky* Sheeta is a descendant of the royal line of Laputa and the owner of a levitation stone. Indeed, there is a manga and anime genre called 'magical girl' of such stories. *Sailor Moon* 1991-1997, is the most famous teenage magical girl manga and anime, and was adapted for American television yet targeted at a pre-teen audience. It was this version that was shown in Britain. The main character is represented as a typical 14 year-old girl with typical teenage interests, but when called upon must use her secret powers to fight evil. The basic premise is not dissimilar to the American television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* 1997-2003, which was popular in Britain, where the heroine, 15 year old Buffy, also hides her powers behind a surface ordinariness. As an attractive 'shoujo' character Buffy is appealing to teenage male viewers, but as Early (2001) argues the narrative challenges traditional gender role expectations, presenting the female character as active and rebellious. Indeed, as Hurford (2009) shows, magical girl anime too presents shoujo characters who disrupt traditional expectations about gender and sexuality.

7. Conclusion

The genres of anime selected by Western distributors, along with media reports based on Western cultural anxieties, may have given the illusion that anime is all about young girls and monsters. Viewed through the lens of British cultural concerns, anime and specifically rorikon-style anime has been interpreted as representing a dangerous (potentially paedophilic) 'other' to be censored or avoided. As a result anime in Britain remains outside the mainstream, except for the work of Miyazaki, which is contained and sanctioned within the Disney franchise. This interpretation has been shown to be a misrepresentation of rorikon-style anime and the cultural context of its production.

    As has been argued in the current paper, the term 'Lolita complex' is an inappropriate English rendering of rorikon given the Western popular representation of Lolita. The Japanese context of cultural change and developing gender roles provides a more meaningful explanation rather than an appeal to perverse male sexuality. Rorikon anime is a feature of young men dealing with social change and identity formation. An interrogation of the various elements within rorikon shows them not to be features of a perverse cultural 'other' but to contain commonalities across Japanese and Western culture. Also, as has been argued, the shoujo in anime, including rorikon, is not a victim of male desire, but features as a character in the developing narratives about changing gender roles and teenage male and female identity. As such, she is not constrained by traditional gender relations but is active and resourceful in her behaviour.

References

Allison, Anne. (1996). *Permitted and prohibited desires: Mothers, comics and censorship in Japa*n. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Asahi Shimbun. (1998). Survey disputes 'enjo-kosai' hype. *Asahi Shimbun*, 28th April. Retrieved on February 2, 2011from http://www.anusha.com/enjoko-2.htm.

Baetens, Pascal. (1995). David Hamilton. *Amateur Photographer Yearbook* (pp.110-115).

Barber, Christie Lee. (2008). The displaced self in "Elfen Lied". *International Journal of the Humanities*, *6*(11), 1-8.

Beauman, Ned. (2007). *Men don't kill women, manga does*, 5th April. Retrieved on August 2, 2013 from http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2007/apr/05/mendontkillwom-enmangadoes

Brenner, Robin E. (2007). *Understanding manga and anime*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.

Cabañas, Pilar. (1997). Bijinga and nature; A single beauty. In P.J. Asquith & A. Kalland (Eds.) *Japanese Images of Nature: Cultural Perspectives* (pp. 68-82). Richmond, Surrey: Curzon.

Carroll, Lewis. (1865). *Alice's adventures in wonderland*. London: MacMillan & Co.

Condry, Ian & Fujita, Yuiko. (2011). Introduction to 'special issue – Cool Japan', *International Journal of Japanese Sociology, 20*(1), 2-3.

Early, Frances H. (2001). Staking her claim: Buffy the vampire slayer as transgressive woman Warrior. *Journal of Popular Culture, 35*(3), 11-28.

Favell, Adrian. (2011). *Before and after superflat: A short history of Japanese contemporary art 1990-2011*. Hong Kong: Blue Kingfisher.

Ferber, Michael. (2012). *The Cambridge introduction to British Romantic poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fukuzawa, Rebecca Erwin & Le Tendre,Gerald K. (2001). *Intense years*. London: Routledge.

Galbraith, Patrick W. (2009). Moe: Exploring virtual phenomenon in post-millenium Japan. *Electronic Journal of Contemporary Japanese Studies*, article 5, 31 October.

Hinton, Perry R. (2013a). Returning in a different fashion: Culture, communication, and changing representations of Lolita in Japan and the West. *International Journal of Communication, 7*, 1-20.

Hinton, Perry R. (2013b). The cultural context and social representation: The Japanese schoolgirl in British popular culture. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, *31* .Retrieved on August 10, 2013 from http://immi.se/intercultural

Holland, Clive. (1907). *Things seen in Japan* (2nd Edition). London: Seeley & Co.

Hollingsworth, Cristopher. (Ed.) (2009). *Alice beyond wonderland: Essays for the 21st Century*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.

Horiguchi, Sachiko. (2012). *Hikikomori*: How private isolation caught the public eye. In R. Goodman, Y. Imoto & T. Toivoneneds (Eds), *A sociology of Japanese youth* (pp. 122-138). London: Routledge.

Hurford, Emily M. (2009). Gender and sexuality in shoujomanga: Undoing heterenormative expectations in Utena, Pet Shop of Horrors and Angel Sanctuary. MA Thesis. Bowling Green State University. Retrieved on May 21, 2011 from http://etd.ohiolink.edu/send-pdf.cgi/Hurford%20Emily%20M.pdf?bgsu1250882984&dl=y

Izawa, Eri. (1997). *The new stereotypes of anime and manga*. EX, vol. 2, No. 8. Retrieved on July 6, 2010 from http://www.ex.org/2.8/45-essay_stereotypes.html

Jaques, Zoe. (2010). Alice beyond wonderland: Essays for the twenty-first century (review), *The Lion and the Unicorn, 34*(3), 364-368. Jones, Susanna. (2003). Oriental Lolitas. *New Statesman*, 3rd February.

Kam, Thiam Huat. (2013). The common sense that makes the 'otaku': Rules for consuming popular culture in contemporary Japan. *Japan Forum, 25*(2), 151-173.

Kinsella, Sharon. (1995). Cuties in Japan. In L. Skov and B. Moeraneds (Eds.), *Women, media and consumption in Japan* (pp. 220-254). Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press.

Kinsella, Sharon. (2000). *Adult manga: Culture and power in contemporary Japanese society*. Richmond, Surrey, UK: Curzon Press.

Kinsella, Sharon. (2012). Narratives and statistics: How compensated dating (*enjokōsai*) was sold. In R.Goodman, Y. Imoto & T.Toivoneneds (Eds.), *A sociology of Japanese youth*. London: Routledge.

Lakoff, Robin Tolmach. (1993). Lewis Carroll: Subversive pragmaticist. *Pragmatics*, *3*(4), 367–85

Leach, Karoline. (2009). Foreword. In C. Hollingsworth, C. (Ed.), *Alice beyond wonderland: Essays for the 21st Century*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.

Marcias, Patrick & Machiyama, Tomohiro. (2004). *Cruising the anime city: An otako guide to neo Tokyo*. Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press.

Marvick, Andrew Bolton. (1996). 'Herself a Psyche': Feminine identities in the art of John William Waterhouse. *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies-New Series*, *5*, 81-93.

McCarthy, Helen. (1996). *The anime! movie guide*. London: Titan Books.

McNicol, Tony. (2004). Does comic relief hurt kids? Japan Times, April 27th. http://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2004/04/27/community/does-comic-relief-hurt-kids/#.Um-7QhlCzvc [Accessed 14 August 2013]

McVeigh, Brian J. (2000). *Wearing ideology: State, schooling and self-presentation in Japan*. Oxford: Berg.

Millar, Peter. (1995). Titillation in virgin territory. *Sunday Times Culture Magazine*, 3rd December.

Miller, Laura. (2004). You are doing *burikko*!: Censoring/scrutinizing artificers of cute femininity in Japanese. In S. Okamoto & J. S. Shibamoto Smith (Eds.), *Japanese Language,Gender, and Ideology* (pp. 148-165). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Napier, Susan J. (2006). *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan

Ray, Alistair. (2001). What are you like? Adultescents. *The Guardian*, 3rd September. Retrieved on February 10, 2013 from http://www.theguardian.com/media/2001/sep/03/mondaymediasection4

Schodt, Frederik L.(1983). *Manga! manga! The world of Japanese comics*. New York: Kodansha International Ltd.

Schodt, Frederik L. (1996). *Dreamland Japan: Writings on modern manga*. Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press.

Satoshi, Ando. (2008). Regaining continuity with the past: 'Spirited Away' and 'Alice's

Adventures in Wonderland'. *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature*, *46*, 1, 23-29.

Spall, Owen Van. (2009). Why is anime invisible on British TV? *The Guardian TV & Radio blog*. 9 June. Retrieved on February 2, 2013 from http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/tvandradioblog/2009/jun09/anime-japan-tv

Tyler, Royall. (2009). *Disaster of the third princess: Essays on the tale of Genji.* Canberra, Australia: ANU E Press.

Verwoert, Jan. (2001). Sirens, *Frieze*, *6*, 84-89.

White, Merry Isaacs. (1993). *The material child: Coming of age in Japan and America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Zank, Dinah. (2010). Kawaii vs. rorikon: The reinvention of the term Lolita in modern Japanese manga. In M. Berninger, J. Ecke, & G. Haberkorneds (Eds.), *Comics as a nexus of cultures: Essays on the interplay of media, disciplines and international perspectives* (pp. 211-222). Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Author Note

Perry Hinton is a cultural psychologist. Since receiving his doctorate from the University of Oxford he has worked as an academic in four British Universities teaching within the fields of Psychology and Communication, Culture and Media. He is currently working as a freelance academic author and researcher, living near Oxford, England. His research is on the relationship between cognition and culture, particularly the cultural context of media interpretation. His current research project is on the representation (or misrepresentation) of Japanese popular culture in the West (especially Britain).