FROM SAMURAI TO *MANGA*:
THE FUNCTION OF *MANGA* TO SHAPE AND REFLECT JAPANESE IDENTITY

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Literature has various functions: to instruct, to entertain, to subvert, to inspire, to express creativity, to find commonality, to heal, to isolate, to exclude, and even to reflect and shape identity. The genre of *manga* – Japanese comics – has served many of these functions in Japanese society. Moreover, "Manga also depicts other social phenomena, such as social order and hierarchy, sexism, racism, ageism, classism, and so on."[1] Anyone familiar with *Bleach*, *Dragonball Z*, *Inuyasha*, *Full Metal Alchemist*, *Pokémon*, or *Sailor Moon*, can attest to manga's worldwide appeal and its ability to reflect societal values.

The $4.2 billion manga industry, which comprises nearly one quarter of Japan's printed material, cannot be ignored.[2] While comics in the West have been regarded, for many years, as light-hearted entertainment (*Archie* comics), or for political commentary (the *Doonesbury* series) the manga industry in Japan grew to encompass genres beyond what the West offers. These include: action, adventure, comedy, crime, detective, fantasy, harem, historical, horror, magic, martial arts, medical, mystery, occult, *pachinko* (gambling), romance, science fiction, supernatural, and suspense series, reaching a wider audience than that of Western comics. Even the daily news in manga form is now available.[3]

This development of manga as a significant part of Japanese society also illustrates the long history established by Eastern philosophy

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[1] Kinko Ito, "A History of *Manga* in the Context of Japanese Culture and Society," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 38/3 (2005): 456–475.

[2] Daniel H. Pink, "Japan, Ink: Inside the *Manga* Industrial Complex," Wired (accessed October 22, 2007, http://www.wired.com/techbiz/media/magazine/1511/ff_manga?currentPage=all).

[3] News Manga (accessed October 24, 2007, http://newsmanga.com).

and the blending of modern Western cultural ideals, which overall illustrates Japan's ability to co-opt outside influences, resulting in a product that is uniquely Japanese. This hybridization in the form of manga reflects the identity struggle that the Japanese face as they negotiate an ultra-modern world influenced by old-world traditions.

Like other literature, manga has been shaped by and reflects the historical, social, and cultural influences of its time. Early manga reflected ideals of early Japanese thinking, which evolved over time. Expressed simply, early Japanese philosophy and culture is a mix of Zen Buddhist principles and Shinto beliefs. Suzuki Daisetz defines Zen as "one of the products of the Chinese mind after its contact with Indian thought…a discipline in enlightenment."[4] This combination of Taoist and Zen Buddhist beliefs found its way to Japan from China and Korea, thereby influencing Japanese philosophy and way of life to embrace ascetic ideals.[5] As a complementary way of life in Japan, Shinto emphasizes the natural world as an influence in how the world functions. These two philosophies formed the early beliefs to which people adhered, and which later influenced the principles the samurai class adopted. This adaptation showed the Japanese ability, early in its history and culture, to co-opt and shape new ideas to suit the Japanese purposes and way of life.

From the time Japan established its samurai class in 1192, and later restricted access to its borders in the early 17th century to the mid-19th century when the U.S. Commodore Matthew Perry arrived in Japan, a collectivist, high-context society that respected power distances was developed.[6] A series of repressive and controlling shoguns and rulers – who employed the services of samurai warriors[7] – created the behavior and ideals that are still observed and enacted in Japanese society today, even

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[4] Daisetz T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (New York, NY: MFJ Books, 1959), pp. 3, 5.

[5] Ito, "A History of *Manga*."

[6] Richard H. P. Mason and John G. Caiger, *A History of Japan*, Revised ed. (Rutland, VT: Tuttle Publishing, 1997); Geert Hofstede (accessed October 24, 2007, http://www.geert-hofstede.com); and Boye Lafayett De Mente, *The Japanese Samurai Code: Classic Strategies for Success* (Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 2004), p. xiv.

[7] Stephen Turnbull, *Samurai: The World of the Warrior* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2003), p. 202; Mason and Caiger, *A History of Japan*, p. 282.

after the samurai lost power in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Although the behaviors of the "aristocrats" were originally mocked by early artists (such as Hokusai Katsushika), and manga's satiric function extended its popularity, the ideals eventually came to represent Japan to its own citizens and foreigners.[8] These ideals include the Japanese values of "restraint, conformity, and consent"[9] in behavior, and were in contrast to the values of the Western world it would eventually encounter. While "[Americans] prize self-assertion, individuality, and iconoclasm…Japan is an archipelago of confined spaces, and its strict social formalities have evolved to help millions survive in them."[10] The established rigid hierarchies often constrain behavior, displaying "high degrees of homogeneity…collectivity, and conservatism,"[11] which sometimes leads to the criticism that Japanese are too rigid and closed to outsiders. This behavior could be interpreted as such, but it also conveys what Japanese view about themselves.

For those of older generations, the Japanese strong sense of national identity is often inseparable from their individual identity due to thousands of years of collectivistic behavior. For many in Japan, the following principle applies: "There are no 'foreigners' in Japan, only 'outside persons,' or *gaijin*. This concept of the 'outside person' seems to encapsulate Japan's image as an exclusive, inward-looking, self-contained country, sealed off by blood and tradition."[12] This does not mean that "outsiders" are not appreciated; they are simply not part of the "in-group." From early times, Japanese mythology (commissioned by royalty) set up the idea of the Japanese as superior and separate. For hundreds of years, this assumption was not publicly questioned, especially when there was nothing with which to compare their identity due to limited outside interaction. This was instrumental in shaping a strong national identity for the Japanese, and individual identities were also tied to this national identity.

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[8] Ito, "A History of *Manga*."

[9] Roland Kelts, *Japanamerica* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), p. 23.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ray T. Donahue, *Japanese Culture and Communication: Critical Cultural Analysis* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1998), p. 235.

[12] Paul Gravett, *Manga: Sixty Years of Japanese Comics* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2004), p. 10.

In this society, the samurai class was most influential in shaping ideals. "What Japan was she owed to the samurai. They were not only the flower of the nation, but its root as well. All the gracious gifts of Heaven flowed through them. Though they kept themselves socially aloof from the populace, they set a moral standard for them and guided them by their example."[13]   This moral standard exists even today. The samurai, who "evolv[ed] from a courtly duelist to a professional soldier carrying a gun, and finally to a pampered ward of the state,"[14] lived by a code called *Bushido*, or the "Way of the Warrior." This is composed of eight virtues, all of which are still strong influences in today's Japanese society. These virtues, which encompass tenets and philosophies from Buddhism, Shinto, and Zen are: justice, courage, benevolence, politeness, sincerity, honor, loyalty, and self-control.[15] Lafayett De Mente writes, "The influence of the samurai code of ethics on Japan's arts, crafts, literature, poetry and other aesthetic and intellectual pursuits remained virtually intact […], continuing to imbue them with a distinctive character that is found only in Japan."[16] The image of a physically, intellectually, and morally superior being – in the form of a samurai warrior as a representative of Japanese identity – was strongly inculcated in not only Japanese culture and society, but in Western beliefs as well.

After Commodore Perry's arrival, and with increased interaction with other nations, the Japanese started to adopt Western ideals, which caused confusion among the people about their sense of national, and thereby, individual identity. The government became enamored with the West and implemented policies to adopt Western ideals, clothing, and even language, which led to even further confusion about a national identity. Moreover, the post-WWII generation had to deal with the U.S. government's overhaul and restructuring of Japanese society, education, and government. This complete shift led to a nation needing to establish a new identity for itself in an industrial, Western-dominated world, if it were

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[13] Inazo Nitobe, *Bushido: The Spirit of the Samurai* (Boston: Shambhala Library, rpt. 2005), p. 121.

[14] Tom O'Neill, "Japan's Way of the Warrior," *National Geographic* (December 2003): pp. 100, 107.

[15] Nitobe, *Bushido: The Spirit of the Samurai*, p. vii.

[16] Lafayette De Mente, *The Japanese Samurai Code: Classic Strategies for Success*, p. xvi.

to survive within the structure imposed on it. The idea of the chivalrous, strong, and cultured samurai warrior now no longer encapsulated Japan's identity. Manga artist Ishinomori Shotaro (as he is popularly known) once said, "Looking back connects us to the future. If the past is recorded inaccurately, how can we look the world in the face?"[17] He deemed it necessary for the current generation to understand the past in order to determine one's ideals and one's responsibilities. In a land where the ancient co-exists with the modern, this understanding of the past is integral if one is to understand one's place within both present and future spheres.

For a large portion of the post-WWII Japanese population, the search for a national identity has involved looking to the West to *embrace* ideals of the West. In some cases, this entailed, upon orders from General Douglas MacArthur's General Headquarters (GHQ), the change of school curriculum by banning the teaching of Japanese *shushin* (morals and ideals) and introducing the study of the English language.[18] Prior to WWII, Japan's education consisted of "ideas and problems of moral indoctrination,"[19] (which was based on the samurai Bushido Code). It also included changing the most basic of items linked to Japanese identity, such as clothing and food, from Japanese kimono and *obento*-style lunches of rice with fish to a lunch that included milk and canned fruit.[20] For others, it meant embracing technology and globalization. For some, such as famed author and political activist Yukio Mishima, this was expressed as the desire to reinstate the samurai *shushin* and ancient traditions to recapture a national identity. "The ongoing success of *jidaigeki manga* [historical dramas depicting chivalrous heroes dying glorious deaths in battle in pre-modern Japan] suggests that, while the samurai no longer have a place in the modern nation, their lives and legends answer a yearning for continuity with Japan's non-Westernized heritage."[21] An example of this is Sanpei Shirato's *Ninja Bugeicho* (Secret Martial Arts of the Ninja) [22] that "dealt with various social issues in a feudalistic setting and attracted many

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[17] Sharon Kinsella, *Adult Manga: Culture & Power in Contemporary Japanese Society* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000), p. 93.

[18] Yoko Rankin, Personal Interview (March 13, 2009).

[19] Mason and Caiger, *A History of Japan*, p. 249.

[20] Rankin, Personal Interview (March 13, 2009).

[21] Gravett, *Mang*, p. 98.

[22] Ito, "A History of *Manga*," p. 467.

university students and adults." Sociology professor Kinko Ito further writes, "The kind of manga that emerged after WWII reflected what was going on in Japanese society – politics, culture, economy, and race and ethnic relations – at the time of publication."[23]

This idea, embraced by many Japanese who yearn for a revival of old traditions, has often provided a romanticized vision of samurai ideals: "Perhaps the most romanticized element of the samurai in popular culture is their strict adherence to a code of morals rooted in principles of honor, loyalty, devotion, and martial arts practice."[24] A key reason for these romanticized stereotypes could be to render a sense of pride and nationalism to the current.[25] Believing that the ideals of one's country are based on honorable codes is key to establishing a positive national identity and, by extension in Japan, a personal identity. Manga plays a role in this.

Manga's Popularity and Function in Shaping Identity

One may wonder what makes manga so popular in Japan. At the heart of any item's popularity is the fulfillment that the purchase provides the consumer. With the manga reader in Japan, this could be the desire to avoid boredom while using public transportation (some 27 million people live within the Tokyo metropolis, almost all using public transportation), or to be entertained in a stressful world.[26] Moreover, living in crowded cities and working long hours, many Japanese seek relaxation. Because Japanese people needed some form of entertainment to escape the busy academic and work demands, casual reading – as a silent, solitary activity – became popular. "[This] allows [the reader] to leave behind daily formalities and experience, if only vicariously…the more liberated realms of the mind and the senses."[27] Manga are cheap enough in price for people to buy daily, if they choose to, and is an inexpensive form of entertainment and escape, which is integral to those who cannot escape the confines of the city for relaxation.

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[23] Ibid.

[24] Nino Moscardi, "The 'Badass' Samurai in Japanese Pop Culture," SamuraiArchives (accessed March 13, 2009, http://www.samurai-archives.com/bsj.html).

[25] Ibid.

[26] Gravett, *Manga*, p. 96.

[27] Gravett, *Manga*, p. 13.

Another function of manga may be to meet one's desire to maintain group consciousness and harmony (which is prominent in Japan) by participating in reading manga that one's peers are reading. Manga's popularity may also be because it was a genre introduced to children who simply continued reading until they were adults, thereby hooked on the tradition and ease of reading an entertaining pictorial adventure or romance. This relates to the role that manga plays to shape and reinforce Japanese identity.

Since manga is a literary art form that originated in Japan, reading it is a traditionally Japanese experience. "Graffiti" on temple walls dating back to the 6th and 7th centuries depicted animals and people. The first picture scrolls of the *Chojugiga* (The Animal Scrolls) in the 12th century are some of the oldest surviving depictions of narrative comic art, often attributed to the Bishop Toba.[28] These typically showed animals in priests' clothing (Buddha is often represented as a frog), reminding people of Buddhist precepts, which reflected the relatively "royal identity" of Japan as a Buddhist country. "When not constrained by religious themes, many of the old scrolls ran positively wild, with a robust, uninhibited sense of humor much like that of today's comics," meeting the entertainment needs of everyday people who could relate to them.[29] Zen Buddhist pictures were also drawn to remind viewers of Buddhist principles, but these pictures were generally restricted to clergy and aristocracy, or rich families who could afford to commission works. *Otsue* (amulets in picture form) became popular for common folk in the mid-17th century. This evolved to the development of secular art in the form of wood-block prints (*Ukiyoe*) depicting ordinary life (for entertainment purposes). Reading manga gives one a sense of something completely Japanese in that the Japanese have an "appetite for pictorial art."[30]

During the Edo Period (1600–1867), a rigid class system was implemented by the feudal dictatorship, which attempted to freeze social change.[31] Any form of political dissent (including art) was banned, and, as an extreme measure, Japanese were not allowed to communicate with

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[28] Frederik Schodt, *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1983), p. 28.

[29] Frederik Schodt, *Manga! Manga!*, p. 29.

[30] Gravett, *Manga*, p. 18.

[31] Schodt, *Manga! Manga!*, pp. 32–33.

foreign nations. *Ukiyoe* woodblock prints and religious works (such as ambiguous haiku) were the only acceptable forms of printed work, mainly attributed to Hokusai Katsushika (1760–1849), who was believed by some to be "the first person in Japan to coin the word manga."[32] By the 1850s, Japan had a tradition of "entertaining, sometimes irreverent, and often narrative art" which contributed to the overall acceptance of manga as a legitimate form of literary art.[33]

After Western influences arrived in Japan, European-style cartoons were introduced and emulated.[34] The Western cartoonists Wirgman and Bigot introduced two elements that would be important to the development of Japanese manga: (1) word bubbles; (2) arranging stories "in sequence, creating a narrative pattern."[35] This shift in cartoons also came with a rebirth of manga to act as a visual purveyor of Japanese ideals. The simplicity of the artwork contributes to the overall Japanese aesthetic. Manga images are drawn using bold, stark lines with very limited detail to develop the background. Historically-established Zen principles of simplicity govern the flow and development of the lines in the artwork. White space often predominates and simplistic lines often allude to ideas the reader must imagine. In the 21st century, this style continues to draw readers who can identify Japanese manga at a glance because of its unique character features and flowing lines accented with sound effects.

Effects of World War II

Literary journal editor and lecturer Roland Kelts makes mention of Japanese artist Takashi Murakami, who theorizes that "the dropping of the atomic bombs created a trauma in Japanese culture for which there was no precedent in world history. Publicly at least, and perhaps sensing no other option, the majority of Japanese wanted to forget their post-traumatic stresses and move forward quickly."[36] But the pain of rebuilding a broken nation would not be so easily forgotten. Manga artists used this medium as a way to make sense of injustice and inexplicable behavior. The manga *Barefoot Gen* addressed these feelings directly.[37] Other comics, such as

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[32] Schodt, *Manga! Manga!*, p. 35.

[33] Schodt, *Manga! Manga!*, p. 37.

[34] Schodt, *Manga! Manga!*, p. 38.

[35] Schodt, *Manga! Manga!*, p. 41.

[36] Kelts, *Japanamerica*, pp. 25–26.

[37] Gravett, *Manga*, p. 57.

Katsuichi Nagai's series *Garo*, addressed themes of injustice against lower classes in feudal Japan. Japan was not, however, only obsessed with WWII. Issues of social change were prevalent in other art. Frederik Schodt, leading authority on manga, claims, "I do think there was a creative exuberance created at the end of the war by the lifting of controls on speech and the fundamental realignment of [Japanese] society….But if artists had anything political to say, it was more related to a larger political struggle, between progressive leftist forces and those more conservative and traditional. In the '60s and '70s, far more manga artists were reacting to social change and Vietnam than to World War II or the bomb."[38] Themes of inequality and a loss of innocence crop up in many manga series, leading one to conclude that a strong sense of social justice prevails as part of the national identity of Japanese, despite not having a samurai class to carry out that justice. Manga at this time also reflected the clear-cut "good-versus-evil" themes created in a post-atomic society. As the world has become more globalized, however, changes in determining who is good and who is evil have led to changes in manga's function.

Roland Kelts comments, "The intensity with which we yearn for a lost world is frequently proportionate to the discomfort we feel in our own.[39] Manga is a necessary means of escape for many who are uncomfortable in the world they currently inhabit. This leads to manga and anime often showing the world as it used to be or as it could be from a utopic or dystopic perspective. It also means perhaps blurring the lines between good and evil, as evidenced by manga artist Shin Kibayashi comment: "…the world has changed. Nobody is sure who is good or who is evil….The whole world is becoming borderless and unstable. The manga world's ambiguity has become realistic."[40] This has resulted in the criticism that manga are only about over-exaggerated science fiction or sexual fantasy with women depicted in a degrading manner, or as "beautiful, innocent, quiet, obedient, kind, warm, and nurturing."[41] While there is an element of fantasy to some manga, others are gritty and all-too real, reflecting the harsh realities of a stressful world.

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[38] Kelts, *Japanamerica*, p. 27.

[39] Kelts, *Japanamerica*, p. 58.

[40] Amelia Newcomb, "Japan Cracking U.S. Pop Culture Hegemony," *The Christian Science Monitor* (December 15, 2008).

[41] Ito, "A History of *Manga*," p. 11.

Many manga, moreover, strive to capture lost innocence and confusion of traversing these unknown domains. Several modern series, such as *Inuyasha* and *Naruto*, express this theme of trying to find one's true identity through different quests and adventures through a world that has different rules (often magical) from the one we inhabit and thereby explore one's character and identity. Female manga artists also became popular, depicting struggles of gender identity that reflected the feminist movement of the time. *Shojo* (female) manga such as *The Rose of Versailles* in the 1970s dealt with identity issues particularly relevant to women. "[Manga artists'] exploration of the fluidity of gender boundaries and forbidden love, in particular, allowed them to address issues of identity of deep importance to them and their readers."[42] Series such as these also created a new audience for comics: independent females entering the workforce en masse, experiencing independence for the first time and thereby needing to establish a new modern identity.

Hayao Miyazaki, an artist famous for his anime movies – an extension of manga – deals with themes of desiring innocence and acceptance of characters as they struggle with their own identities. While his movies are known more for the commentary on ecological themes, the characters also struggle with their identities. His most recently depicted character, Ponyo, leaves her restrictive ocean home to seek happiness and acceptance from humans as she evolves from a fish into a human (a homage to *The Little Mermaid*). His characters, Kiki (*Kiki's Delivery Service*), Chihiro/Sen (*Spirited Away*) and Sophie (*Howl's Moving Castle*), seek truth about who they are and long for acceptance of their true selves while on a quest. This search often takes place by interacting with characters they did not expect to encounter. While this theme is sometimes found in literature – such as in the story of *Musashi*, one of Japan's most famous swordsmen, or in the travel narratives of haiku master Bashō – intimate interaction with strangers in daily Japanese life is not the norm. In this way, manga and anime break from conventions of Japanese behavior and show a need for a new exploration of Japanese identity independent of that proscribed by one's group.

Although Japan has adopted many outward Western characteristics, such as wearing blue jeans and t-shirts, much of society has retained its in-group/out-group structure to emphasize loyalty to those

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[42] Gravett, *Manga*, p. 79.

within their in-groups. People associate almost exclusively with those with whom they either grow up, with whom they go to school or with whom they work. Social groups, where one would typically expect to branch away from work colleagues, for example, such as sports clubs, are comprised of people from one company or school, so even social activities are completed within established groups, which are often separated along gender lines. There is not much spontaneous intermingling among those of differing socioeconomic status or from different neighborhoods, let alone with foreigners: "This loyalty to the group produces the feeling of solidarity, and the underlying concept of group consciousness is seen in diverse aspects of Japanese society."[43] As mentioned, this attitude is prevalent throughout society. Takeuchi writes:

> Japanese in groups are usually indifferent to outsiders. However, when outsiders are invited to come with appointments, they are treated courteously as formal guests. If they should try to join one's group without any contact, however, they would never have a warm welcome and might secretly become people who should be refused admittance and excluded from the group.[44]

This attitude is often adopted to protect the group from members who might cause a disruption in harmony. This also means there is potential for people to become ostracized should they not cooperate with a group. This behavioral expectation sometimes has negative outcomes for those excluded from groups.

Many of these out-of-mainstream individuals find solace in the world that manga offers. They spend hours browsing online manga websites and chatting with other manga fans. Many create alternate identities for themselves online, even living imaginary lives together. "I met my boyfriend in an online manga forum. We have a good relationship because we understand and accept each other for what we are," says Sayaka Sato, a

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[43] Roger J. Davies and Osamu Ikeno, eds. *The Japanese Mind: Understanding Contemporary Japanese Culture* (Rutland, VT: Tuttle Publishing, 2002), p. 195.

[44] Y. Takeuchi, *Nihonjin no kodo bumpo [Japanese Social Behavior]* (Tokyo: Toyo keizai shinposha, 1995), p. 213.

35-year-old woman who suffers from bi-polar disorder and has been unable to maintain a relationship with others because she is reluctant to reveal that she suffers from this disorder. She says that she does not want to play the role that her mother played in life: "staying home to raise us while my father went to work. I want to be my own person, but I don't know who that is yet," she admits. Sato and her boyfriend each have alternate identities online and met in person but prefer to maintain their relationship online to avoid awkward in-person interaction. "We are both only children. We don't really know how to relate to each other when we are together, and this is painful to admit because humans are social creatures. But although something is missing in me, my boyfriend is the same, so we accept each other. I feel sometimes I can be more honest through my manga identity," says Sato. Because Sato lives in a culture where manga is popular, she has a way to interact socially with others who also embrace the manga lifestyle. She is not alone, however, in her exploration of a new identity.

Journalists covering Japanese business news write about a growing trend of Japanese young men called *shōshoku danshi* (grass eaters) or *shōshoku kei* (herbivores), who are "named for their lack of interest in sex and their preference for quieter, less competitive lives" away from corporate Japan in contrast to *nikushoku kei* (carnivores) of the corporate world.[45] This indicates a generation of young men seeking an alternate identity than that which their parents established. Japanese editor and columnist Maki Fukasawa writes:

> [This] behavior reflects a rejection of both the traditional Japanese definition of masculinity and what [Fukasawa] calls the West's 'commercialization' of relationships under which men needed to be macho and purchase products to win a woman's affection. Some Western concepts, like going to dinner parties as a couple, never fit easily into Japanese culture….During Japan's bubble economy, Japanese people had to live according to both Western

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[45] Alexandra Harney, "The Herbivore's Dilemma," Slate [Foreigners Section] (July 15, 2009), http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/ foreigners/2009/06/the_herbivores_dilemma.2.html ; and Tomoko Otake, "Blurring the Boundaries," *The Japan Times* (May 10, 2009), http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/fl20090510x1.html.

standards and Japanese standards. That trend has run its course.[46]

This change in Japan's society has led to people needing a new way to view themselves in this evolving society. Some theorists estimate that "60 percent of today's men aged 20-34 fall somewhat into the [herbivore] category."[47] In addition, Harney introduces a 22-year-old college dropout named Yoto Hosho and explains that "many of Hosho's friends spend so much time playing computer games that they prefer the company of a cyber-woman to the real thing. The Internet, he says, has helped make alternative lifestyles more acceptable."[48] Hosho believes that the lines between men and women in his generation have blurred."[49] Fukasawa theorizes that "it may be that Japan's efforts to make the workplace more egalitarian planted the seeds for the grass-eating boys."[50] Others theorize that Japan's post-war peace for over six decades has led to less pressure for men to be the manly soldier. Moreover, Otake writes that "Japan has long had a tradition of men acting like women in public places, such as in kabuki" and in manga.[51] This act of seeking a new identity shows the struggle of Japanese youth to negotiate the realities of their world.

Along with these young men seeking a new identity comes a whole generation of women who also seek an identity other than that of the traditional homemaker. This struggle is often depicted by characters (usually teenage girls) in manga who defy established order and set themselves as renegades against society. Gender roles are often blurred and issues revolving around gender identity are also explored in the *manga* written for young women.

For others, the world of manga *kissa* (comics cafés), fanimation events, manga/anime conventions, a national museum, and "cosplay"

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[46] Maki Fukusawa, quoted in: Alexandra Harney, "The Herbivore's Dilemma," Slate [Foreigners Section] (June 15, 2009) http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/foreigners/2009/06/the_herbivores_dilemma.2.html.

[47] Tomoko Otake, "Blurring the Boundaries."

[48] Alexandra Harney, "The Herbivore's Dilemma."

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Tomoko Otake, "Blurring the Boundaries."

(costume play) offer legitimacy to the fans. "Cosplay" also entails gathering with other fans to recreate certain scenes from their favorite anime or manga (in the similar style of Civil War reenactments or Renaissance Fairs in the United States). Doing so allows manga fans to maintain an identity (that of their manga character) while not being rejected for their "real" identity. This allows people to often break the social boundaries and expectations that are set up by society by engaging in a common activity. Few other activities in Japan allow such a breach. "But, paradoxically, the strict codes of etiquette and behavior that govern daily life in Japan also allow for an extraordinary degree of creative and social permissiveness – the freedom to explore other identities, to test the limits of possibility;"[52] *manga kissa*, and cosplay events allow one to create an alternate identity to replace the staid, constricted day-time personality.

　　　　While not exactly common, some extreme fans (called *otaku*) even prefer relationships with manga characters and form new identities as partners of 2-D paper characters. Journalist Lisa Katayama writes of men who imagine that manga characters on body pillows are their partners. One such character, Nisan (not his real name), pretends his pillow is his real girlfriend: "He treats her the way any decent man would treat a girlfriend – he takes her out on the weekends to sing karaoke or take *purikura*, photo-booth pictures imprinted on a sheet of tiny stickers."[53] He claims that he wants to get married, but says, "Some [otaku] have so little confidence that they've just given up, but deep inside their souls, they want it just as much as anybody else."[54] For fans who do not find acceptance from live women, the manga characters take their place, solidifying their identity as both "losers" who cannot find a woman to love them, but also as people who find acceptance in the world of manga. This isolated individual is not absent in Japanese manga. Many characters are set apart from society, struggling to fit in. In the series *Absolute Boyfriend*, for example, the main character, still in high school, is bullied and does not fit in with schoolmates. She purposefully purchases a futuristic android boyfriend who is programmed to be devoted to her. She is the "renegade" character who acts outside of the societal norms while trying to fit in. While this loner or outsider is seen as an anomaly in society, there is one place where characters such as these are

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[52] Kelts, *Japanamerica*, p. 23.
[53] Lisa Katayama, "Love in 2-D," *The New York Times* (July 26, 2009).
[54] Ibid.

expected and romanticized: in Japanese manga. The lone renegade is often a hero in manga.

This idea not promoted within a polite society rife with bowing. The fantasy world of manga, as mentioned earlier, acts as both an individual act of escape into one's mind, as well as an overt physical refusal to interact with others in a polite manner (if one is reading, one is not interacting with others). Mitsuba Wajima, an amateur manga artist, says, "Shojo manga showed me people who were brave enough not to follow the same path everyone else does, people not fitting into the system. For me their stories were lessons that you can think of your life in another way."[55] For many, life in another way means rejecting the corporate tradition established after WWII and finding a new identity.

This struggle is often depicted by manga characters exhibiting behavior and characteristics of the romanticized samurai of old. Originally, manga was blamed by Americans for being overrun with "Bushido" type qualities, helping to fuel Japanese nationalism. Especially by targeting younger audiences such as teenage boys, pride in one's own history can be more easily instilled. This is not to say that these romanticizations were done to promote nationalistic rebellion, though that may be true in some cases, but are more so done in order to give the Japanese an international identity in a world in which defining oneself is extremely difficult.[56]

The samurai was an easily recognized character representing Japan's strengths with a firmly established identity: "The samurai is the cowboy, the knight, the gladiator, and the *Star Wars* Jedi rolled into one."[57] They were also members of Japan's highest class, and as such, "indulged in such refined cultural pursuits as flower arranging, composing poetry, attending performance of Noh drama and hosting tea ceremonies."[58] This Romantic/Byronic character is seen in manga characters as a mix of Japanese strength with Western physical features. This blend of Eastern tradition (samurai) with a Western archetypal character shows the Japanese penchant for taking principles from elsewhere and making them uniquely Japanese. The Byronic character shows up in popular manga, such as *Naruto* and *Fullmetal Alchemist*, but also shows up in female characters

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[55] Gravett, *Manga*, p. 81.

[56] Nino Moscardi, "The 'Badass' Samurai in Japanese Pop Culture."

[57] Tom O'Neill, "Japan's Way of the Warrior," p. 107.

[58] Ibid.

flouting convention. This familiar character allows Japanese to accept him as a credible visual representation based in Japanese tradition while searching for a new identity as a modern entity, thus providing the Japanese with a character that mirrors his or her own search for a modern identity.

The reading of manga acts to reinforce Japanese identity as a mix of varying principles and beliefs, but also strengthens one's sense of nationalism and patriotism. Since manga reflects Japanese ideals, the act of reading manga is a uniquely a Japanese experience for the Japanese reader. Manga perfectly encapsulates the struggle of the Japanese to find an identity that can fit within the modern world.

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