

〈論文〉

〈Paper〉

## 日本：ポルノの社会

Japan : a “pornographic society”

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## **Abstract**

Japan has been dubbed a “pornographic society” attributable to the large-scale pornography industry in contemporary Japanese society. Furthermore, westerners who visit Japan are often struck by the ubiquity of sexually explicit material. While the pornography industry in the U.S., for example, is enormous, such material tends to be localized to certain corners of society, separate from the mainstream. However, in Japan, nudity and sexual images are regularly depicted in newspapers, magazines, and comic books, and are displayed in clear view of the general population. This essay addresses some prevalent attitudes toward sexuality which may contribute to the public display and massive consumption of pornography in Japan.

# Japan : a “pornographic society”

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Japan has been dubbed, by noted feminist Miya Yoshiko, a “pornographic society” (Buckley 1997:168) attributable to the large-scale pornography industry in contemporary Japanese society. What are some prevalent attitudes toward sexuality and erotic media which may account for the ubiquity of pornography and its high rate of consumption?

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## Introduction

Westerners who visit Japan are often struck by the ubiquity of sexually explicit material in convenience stores, train stations, and video rental shops. The pornography industry in Japan is estimated to be a \$10 billion-a-year operation. While pornography in the U.S., for example,

is also enormous, such material tends to be localized to certain corners of society, separate from the mainstream. However, in Japan, though hardcore pornography tends to be more out of reach, nudity and sexual images are regularly depicted in newspapers, magazines, and comic books, and are displayed in clear view of the general population.

Since the term “pornography” (hereafter referred to as “porn”) is the central topic of this essay a clear definition is necessary. Porn is defined by the Encarta World English Dictionary as “sexually explicit material: films, magazines, writings, photographs, or other materials that are sexually explicit and intended to cause sexual arousal” (Bready 2001:CD-ROM).

Obviously, a massive porn industry exists in Japan because there is a massive demand. Hane states “pornography and comic books have become the rage...Japan presents a dichotomy of Puritanism and the sordid: cleanliness and dirtiness exist side by side” (1996:200). A marked feature of the porn industry is that it seemingly stands in stark contrast to Japan’s moralistic values. Children undergo an education system which emphasizes social ethics, self-discipline and respect for human rights. Japanese society has a stringent system of law and order and enjoys a low crime rate. The Japanese are world renowned for their politeness, sophistication, and diligent work ethic. Thus, how does one reconcile this moral dissonance in regard to the public display of sexual material, which seems paradoxical to many westerners, yet tolerable and even normal to the Japanese?

This essay addresses some prevalent attitudes toward sexuality which may provide an explanation for this side by side existence of “cleanliness and dirtiness” and considers how these attitudes and predispositions may contribute to the massive demand for, and consumption of, porn in Japan.

## **1. Traditional attitudes toward sexuality and erotic media**

Some experts claim that the Japanese traditionally have a different general attitude toward sexuality than westerners. Erotic pleasures, for the Japanese, are an extension of nature and human experience that should be enjoyed. Erotic stories, and suggestive and explicit art, have long been enjoyed without guilt or shame and lack the sinful stigma attached to premarital and extramarital sexual activity associated with Judeo-Christian ethics. The Japanese view of

sex was "in keeping with cultural or Confucian themes [and] seen as a form of sex education and a way to enjoy the 'good life'" (Abramson & Hayashi 1984 cited in Diamond & Uchiyama 1999: Web). "Sex, like any other 'human feeling,' [is regarded as] thoroughly good in its minor place in life. There is nothing evil about 'human feelings' and therefore no need to be moralistic about sex pleasures" (Benedict 1946:183). Shame or remorse tends to be associated only with any public scrutiny or negative social consequences that may result from sexual behavior. As one twenty-year-old said, "As long as you keep quiet about yourself, it is fine to enjoy sex" (White 1993:189).

Allison found that mothers with whom she discussed sexually oriented comics (*manga*) say that it provides relief and a diversion in their child's life that will be increasingly filled with study. The mothers dismissed the images of naked breasts in a sexual context as harmless saying "they are a treat that boys digest as they study just as grown men read erotic comic books as they commute to work or visit a hostess club after work is finished" (1996:48). Allison found that both males and females consider males viewing female nudity as fun (*tanoshi*). Furthermore, a substantial number of males "equated looking at naked females — whether they are on a screen, in a magazine, or stripping on stage — with other relaxing or idle pursuits" such as watching sports (1996:44). It's not uncommon to find a news magazine with a section featuring the fully nude model of the week interspersed with the current sport, business, and political events. Such media provides a moment of relaxation and a brief respite of *tanoshi* from the stress of the daily grind.

While these traditional views imply a rather liberal and permissive attitude toward the enjoyment of erotic pleasures, the next section considers the delicate balance of social parameters which permit and prohibit the expression of such behavior.

## **2. *Tatemaie* and *Honne***

An understanding of the concepts of *tatemaie* and *honne*, meaning respectively, public and private face, is crucial to reconciling this side-by-side existence of 'cleanliness and dirtiness.' In Japan, moral standards can be subject to change based on the situation and *tatemaie* and *honne* allow for different interpretations of right and wrong depending on the circumstances (Greenfeld 1995). Whereas *honne* implies one's "true feelings as an individual, mysterious

sensations and impulses and desires that are reserved for private domains,” the strength of *tatemaie* limits the public expression of these desires (Kelts 2000: Web). In the context of *tatemaie* there is some level of shame or indecency associated with porn indicated by state censorship, which bans the actual display of genitalia. In the realm of *honne*, however, “there is no absolute moral code. Confucian ethics, adapted from China, encourage an intricate but subjective morality... There is no one reality. Instead, you take your choice of what reality suits you” (Greenfeld 1995:271).

Another contrasting pair is *omote* (face) and *ura* (back). “*Omote* represents the correct surface or front which is openly permissible, and *ura* connotes the wrong, dark, concealed side which is publicly unacceptable or even illegal” (Sugimoto 1997:26). An example of *omote* would be the censorship laws mentioned above, while *ura* may be exemplified by the fact that more than half of the nation’s porn industry operates underground, outside of those censorship laws (Greenfeld 1997). A book and media chain store in Japan known as *Family Book* (see photo 1) might imply that it carries items which promote a wholesome contribution to the family and society(*omote*). However, the adult video section, which offers every porn genre imaginable, comprises approximately 2/3 of the store’s video rental floor space (*ura*). Other used book/video stores representing *ura* would be the large warehouse-like variety which deal in used and discounted items and carry primarily porn and erotic comics. These stores normally euphemize their contents as simply “Book-Video-DVD” (本・ビデオ・DVD) (see photo 2)). However, considering that 80% of the material that most of these operations deal in is porn, the words “本・ビデオ・DVD” on a billboard or storefront have come to be virtually synonymous with porn.

### **3. The “male gaze”: attitudes encoded in *Manga***

*Manga* is Japan’s national language of mass culture and in 1993 accounted for 39% of all printed media in Japan (Allison 1996). Since *manga* are so openly sold and read, and considering that many of their stories that target teens and adults are clearly sexual, popular *manga* themes may reflect common attitudes toward sexuality and gender roles. A common feature of many *manga*, which target children and adults, is what Allison (1996) refers to as the “male gaze”. A common narrative involves a female who, upon acknowledging that she is being looked at by someone such as a Peeping Tom, reacts with embarrassment. However, the male’s reaction, which receives almost as much attention as the female, is typically “one

of transfixion and immobilization; sweat pours down his face and he rarely does more than just stare. The scene usually ends here, crystallized into a still shot of male looking and female being looked at that may never develop into further action or bodily contact" (Allison 1996:29). The message here is that males look and females are looked at. Males assume the role of "voyeur and consumer" objectifying the female as a source of recreation or erotic pleasure (Allison 1996). Since this type of scenario is common in adolescent *manga* it may set the stage for escalation, and habitual consumption of more sexually explicit erotic comics (*ero manga*) and realistic porn. Next, let us examine what fuels the demand for *ero manga*, and what attitudes may be suggested by this cultural phenomenon.

### **3.1 *Ero manga*: background and statistics**

During the Tokugawa period (1603-1868) *ero manga* was used to portray women and men at play in the pleasure quarters and a form of play, escape, and sexuality were expressed in this art (Allison 1996). Erotic woodblock prints known as *shunga* was another art form connected to these pleasures and the newer tradition of *ero manga* is likely a continuation of this kind of art (White 1993).

Today, *ero manga* are consumed at a rate of 10 million issues per month with 180 such publications in circulation. Roughly 2,000 pornographic animation titles — videos, DVDs and computer games — are distributed in Japan annually (Buckley 1991 in Allison 1996; Greenfeld 1994).

### **3.2 *Ero manga* vs. photo erotica**

*Ero manga* is a volatile mixture of "cuteness, eroticism, and violence" (McNicol 2004: Web) and their stories can quickly escalate from images of child-like innocence to domination themes of "male conquest, rape, and female victimization" (Allison 1996:54). *Ero manga* are cheap and as a medium graphic and easy-to-read and they are quickly sold, consumed, and discarded. Allison states "the very pattern of buying an *ero manga* before a commute and throwing it away at the end signifies how common a product it is and how commonplace its stories are" (1996:54). *Ero manga* are unique in that they are read openly in everyday life. It is a much more public form of porn compared to photo erotica as they are openly sold on street corners and read on trains. Realistic porn distribution is slightly more obscured and it is

not perused as openly as *ero manga*.

This openness in which *ero manga* is consumed implies that it may serve as a buffer between public and private consumption of porn, providing a mental foreplay in the public arena when video porn is not accessible and photographic erotica not acceptable. This “buffer zone” may be a point where the principles of *honne* and *tatemaie* converge. It satisfies one’s *honne* desires while he is in the social context of, and under the restriction of, *tatemaie*. Ishikawa found that 100 percent of 1,767 adolescents who purchased photographic porn at vending machines intended to use it for masturbation (1993:232-233 cited in Allison 1996:60). However, the widely circulated *ero manga* does not enjoy the same kind of appeal. Whereas genital release in public places must be deferred, *ero manga* provides a publicly acceptable means of voyeuristic behavior (Allison 1996), providing the user with an erotic “charge” as he, perhaps, anticipates a private session with realistic porn.

### **3.3 Reality, fantasy and censorship**

*Ero manga* provides the perfect vehicle for every imaginable fetish and sexual scenario. What’s more, it is the fantastical nature of this type of porn, and the public manner by which it is marketed and consumed, that suggests a general attitude of tolerance by the public compared to photo erotica. *Ero manga* is “transgressive” in that it depicts rape and violence and while its stories violate the *principles* of what is publicly acceptable to *tatemaie*, it is still allowed to be printed and consumed in the popular medium of a comic book (Allison 1996). Its motifs of rape, sadomasochism, voyeurism, and pedophilia are tolerated in the name of fantasy. While government censorship forbids the showing of genitalia, this prohibition has inspired the *ero manga* market to construct the stimulation and simulation of sexuality as a fantasy nondependent on the graphic visual display of genitalia (Allison 1996). Artistic techniques which depict the most sadistic sexual acts, and which take the viewer into close proximity to genitalia, but obstruct it or place it just out of reach, is not only big business but also seems to be publicly condoned.

Governmental tolerance of *ero manga* may be reflected by a recent law passed in 1999 which aimed to more tightly control child prostitution and pornography. However, fantastical varieties of child pornography were not covered by the new law and it is believed that many

child pornographers have simply turned to animation or films using adults dressed as children (McNicol 2004).

#### **4. Notions of compartmentalization**

Males have a greater tendency to be sexually aroused by visual stimuli than females and are, therefore, more likely to compartmentalize sex by isolating the sexual act from relationship, and to fetishize body parts, undergarments, etc. This may be a reason why men are the chief consumers of porn and tend to become visually obsessed in a way that is foreign to most women. While this compartmentalization mentality is more a male phenomenon than a distinctly Japanese male phenomenon, cultural influences on different notions of compartmentalization may be a significant contributor to the high rate of porn consumption as well as a high public tolerance for porn.

##### **4.1 Compartmentalization taught early**

Compartmentalization of sex may be reinforced in adolescence by traditional views of sexuality. White claims that "children are never taught that sex is intrinsically immoral or dirty, only that it needs to be in its proper place" implying that sexual activity is rather insignificant as long it does not interfere with one's social position and obligations (1993:175). There are also indications that sexual activity is not necessarily strongly connected to a relationship to the extent that it is in Europe and North America.

In Japan, the social dynamic is such that secondary students spend relatively little time with the opposite sex and for a boy to be at ease with girls can be socially frowned on. It is normal, and probably admirable, for boys to be shy and awkward around girls. Thus, when adolescent boys are maturing, the ideal time for them to develop healthy relationships with girls, social pressures and academic demands tend to keep them apart. While a sexual encounter with the opposite sex is desirable, the act tends to be compartmentalized as another experience to check off a list, not as a part of a shared relationship. At the arrival of adulthood, experience relating to the opposite sex as individuals may be in short supply. This lack of healthy relationship combined with a constant media bombardment of the sex-minus-relationship formula contributes to the desensitization of males to the humanity and individuality of

females. If a young male, during this period, begins experimenting with pornography and achieving a type of perceived intimacy through fantasy, he may begin to see women more as sexual objects than as individuals.

## **4.2 Compartmentalization of convenience**

Porn tends to be compartmentalized as a convenient means by which a man can relieve stress and satisfy sexual desires. While the sex industry consists of hostess clubs and soaplands, porn may serve as a prelude to, or a cheaper and more convenient substitute for, paid sexual encounters. In Japanese society, where men work long hours with limited time to relax and unwind, *ero manga* may allow him to release pent up sexual desires and give him an outlet from the social pressure of *tatemae*.

Photo and video erotica are convenient aids to sexual arousal, self stimulation and climax and may provide an illusory sense of intimacy. In a culture of convenience and efficiency porn is an accessible — packaged and ready to serve — form of erotica that allows the user to skip all of the demands involved in a mature relationship. As one young porn user stated, “I watch a lot of videos and read comic books so I know the mechanics of it, but I guess I’m frightened of it. I love to watch sex — and I love to masturbate. Masturbation is really much better than sex. It’s so much more ... efficient” (Greenfeld 1994:282). Porn is a convenient form of voyeurism. The viewer has control over the subject who helps him indulge his fantasies without demanding any kind of real-world commitment. This commodified form of recreation may be exemplified by business hotels, virtually all of which are equipped with a wide selection of adult video programs. This has become a cheap, convenient and efficient way for the tired business man to relax, release tension, and experience sexual intimacy.

## **4.3 Compartmentalization of sex: procreative vs. recreative**

A pronounced cultural distinction between recreative sex and procreative/marital sex may also encourage porn use. The very nature of the Japanese family dynamic contributes directly to the existence and vastness of the sex industry. Traditional attitudes toward marriage place a wide gap between recreational sex and procreative sex compared to sexuality in North America and Europe, where sex is primarily focused on the marital relationship (Buckley 1991). White found that “boys fifteen to eighteen, when interviewed about sex and marriage,

consistently say that they look forward to marriage, but that sex is quite a separate thing. Marriage is to them being taken care of, by a motherlike wife" (1993:193). Allison points out that there is a "cultural and ideological distinction between procreative sexuality (conducted at home, with a spouse, in the context of family, and with an association more female than male) and recreative sexuality (conducted away from home, apart from responsibilities, and with an association more male than female). When men want recreational sex, they tend to look for it apart from their spouse" (1996:46). Thus, it would not be uncommon for one's recreative sex life (fantasy) and one's procreative sex life (reality) to remain mutually exclusive.

## **5. The habitual use factor**

While there are many reasons why men choose to use porn, a common thread shared by all consumers is the addictive tendency of erotic media that leads to habitual use. This is the most significant factor influencing the consistent high rate of porn consumption. Considering the massive amounts sold, rented and recycled, not to mention internet porn, which offers the most unlimited, affordable, and accessible source, it is the addictive cycle that sustains the industry, placing demands on pornographers to constantly produce new material to maintain interest.

There is no consensus among mental health professionals about the use of the term "pornography addiction". However, some experts claim that dependency on porn is similar to drug addiction, only the drug exists within the body's own chemistry. In fact, many therapists refer to pornography as "visual crack cocaine" (Kastleman 2005:29). Kastleman, who refers to internet porn as the "drug of the new millennium," argues that as the user repeatedly chooses porn as a source of arousal and climax, a mental model develops, and the choice of using porn for entertainment, pleasure, escape and self-medication eventually becomes automatic: a habit (2005:cover). Porn becomes a form of self-nurture – a response to dealing with the traumas of life.

In Japan, the prevalent attitudes and dispositions toward sex that have been considered above and the high public tolerance for porn, combined with a man's natural attraction to visual stimuli, provide fertile ground for a thriving porn industry that is sustained by habitual use.

However, the pervasive public attitude seems to be that habitual use, or addiction, is not considered to be a serious medical or social concern in Japanese society. Hence, a vicious circle: if the general view of porn use is that it is not harmful or wrong, just a part of nature and something males do for recreation, then it is not likely to have an addiction stigma attached to it. Prevalent attitudes imply that periodic porn consumption is a legitimate form of recreation as long as the participant conducts himself within the limits of *tatema*. What goes on in the private compartment of *honne* is irrelevant as long as it does not interfere with one's public face and social obligations.

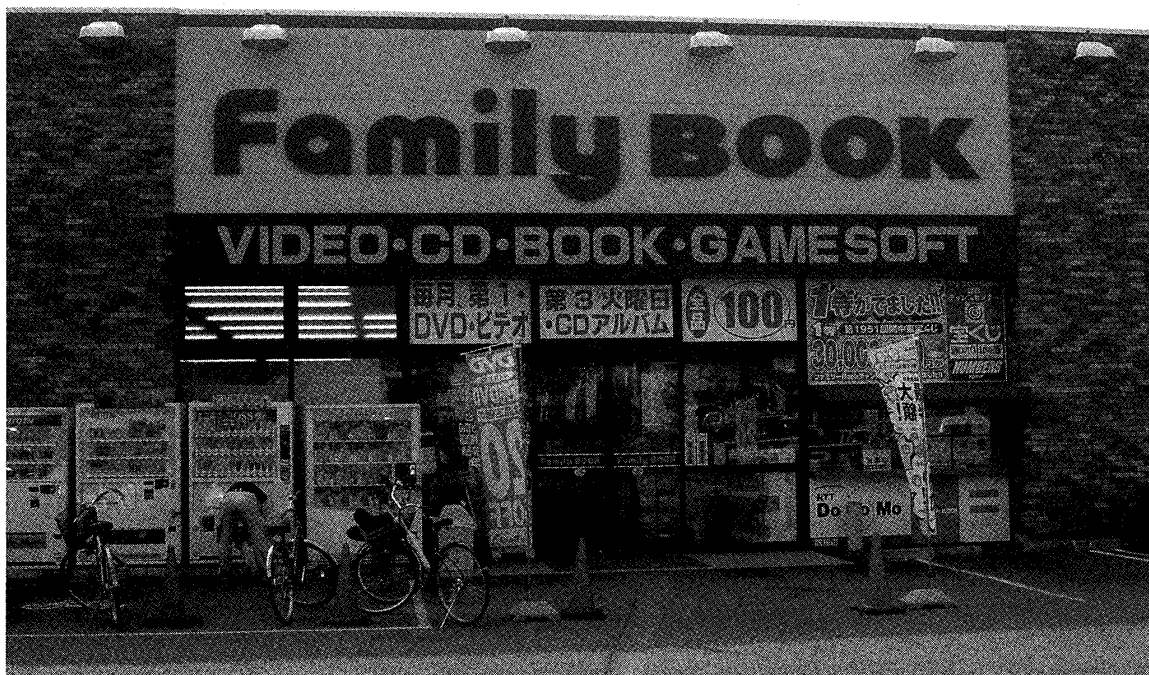
## Conclusion

Japan is a "pornographic society" based on the ubiquity and massive consumption of such media. This essay has examined some prevalent attitudes toward sexuality and porn which may predispose many individuals to use erotic mediums and which may promote a high public tolerance for sexually explicit material.

Firstly, the implications of a view of sex based on Confucian ethics were considered, which distinguishes eroticism as a part of nature and something to be enjoyed. From a moral point of view this perception would likely condone porn use and self-stimulation. Secondly, the principles of public face (*tatema*) and private face (*honne*) were addressed, which are crucial to reconciling the side by side existence of "cleanliness and dirtiness" that pervades society. Next, key features of *manga*, and gender roles which may be encoded in this medium, were examined, as well as how the public nature of *ero manga* consumption may imply a particularly high level of social acceptance of fantastical sexual images. Fourthly, various notions of compartmentalization were considered. It was argued that porn serves as a convenient reliever of stress and sexual desire as it skips the real-life demands of a true relationship. Also, a distinction was made between recreational sex and pro-creational/marital sex, and it was argued that the juxtaposition of these may contribute to porn consumption. And finally, it was suggested that habitual use of porn sustains a thriving industry creating a vicious circle as porn does not seem to be socially condemned as immoral or harmful to individuals or to society as a whole. Rather, predominant attitudes suggest that porn is an acceptable sexual outlet and form of recreation as long as it remains within *honne* and does not interfere with one's social obligations or bring about negative consequences.

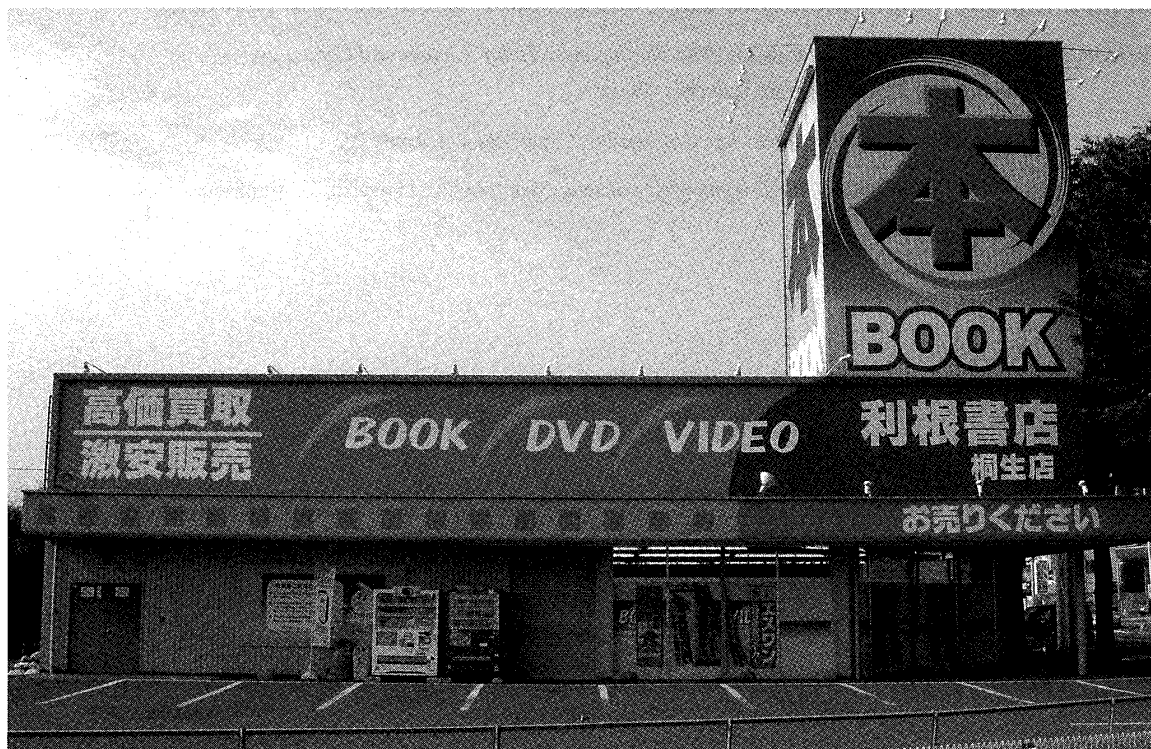
Photos

Photo 1



Family Book

Photo 2



Warehouse-like Book, Video, Comic Discount/Recycle Store (kaitori senta)

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