Protecting Young Eyes: Censorship and Moral Standards of Decency in Japan and the United States as Reflected in Children's Media

by

Dorothy Ann Phoenix

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Signature of Author:_____
Department of Humanities, June 1 2006.

Certified by:_____
Assistant Professor of Japanese Cultural Studies

Accepted by:_____
S.C. Fang Professor of Chinese Language and Culture
Section Head

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I. Introduction

Anime (Japanese animation) and manga (Japanese comic books) are extremely popular in Japan amongst consumers of all ages. In America and other non-Japanese countries, the international anime and manga fanbase is rapidly expanding. Yet, in some Western countries such as the United States, comic books and cartoons have traditionally been relegated to the realm of childhood, while in Japan, some anime and manga are targeted at child and adult audiences. Of course, these titles usually deal with issues that are not generally considered (in Japan and elsewhere) appropriate for children. However, even in some manga and anime targeted at children and teenagers, there are issues of sexuality and violence that the general Japanese public considers acceptable for younger audiences, while most American consumers probably believe that such content does not belong in children's media. How, then, does the American publishing and media industry reconcile these ideological disparities when importing and localizing Japanese anime and manga? In this paper, I wish to explore this conundrum in further detail. In order to systematically address this issue, I pose four main questions:

1. What do Japanese and American mainstream cultures consider appropriate material for children and teenagers?

2. How are these values determined, and what are some of the possible explanations for differences in the two countries' opinions?

3. How and to what extent are these values enforced? Are they enforced consistently?

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4. Who determines these standards, and how do they change over time?

One key point to keep in mind is that different people in both countries most likely have widely varying opinions on this topic, so I will attempt to first focus my discussion on mainstream cultures, and any discussion of more subcultural, differing stances will be discussed in contrast with the mainstream. I use the term "subculture" loosely, realizing that although "subculture" usually connotes a minority group or opinion, there may in fact be a significant and sizeable segment of the population that disagrees with the mainstream. I take this approach because it is the mainstream values of one country that are usually most readily apparent to a foreign viewer, so it makes sense to first set up the mainstream (and perhaps stereotypical) persona of a nation as a common point of reference for the reader, and then to subsequently explore divergent avenues with which the casual reader may not be so familiar. I would also like to point out that in many cases, what may superficially appear to be "mainstream" may not be so at all, as mass media what mass media dictates as socially acceptable may not always be what the mainstream actually believes, which is unfortunate as media usually provides our glimpses into other cultures, and we may therefore come away with a distorted lense. For example, many Americans think of "hentai" (pornographic anime) when discussing anime, believing that pornography is found in all anime and manga. In fact, hentai is a subculture of anime, and many Japanese mainstream critics and consumers do not believe that hentai is socially acceptable. Unfortunately, many Americans prematurely label anime and manga as invariably violent and perverted, but they are often basing these assumptions on a subculture of Japanese animation, and they ignore both the positive themes in anime as well as the inherent violence in many American cartoons and comics.

Another consideration for the reader to bear in mind is that cultural values are rarely static; this point warrants an initial historical examination of children's media both in Japan and the United States to fully grasp the ways in which moral standards for children's commodities has

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changed through the years, due to both external and internal pressures. I also hope that viewing the issue over a span of time rather than just as a snapshot of current values in Japan and the United States will allow the reader to develop an appreciation of how cultural values change over time, and to better understand that there is not just one accepted set of standards in each country.

In examining Japanese and American standards of decency and what is appropriate for children, the reader should realize that the two countries have been engaged in cultural exchange since the nineteenth century, and thus the two countries have influenced each others values. Until recently, the United States has mostly exerted influence on Japan, rather than the other way around. James R. Alexander notes that in the mid-nineteenth century, during the Meiji era, Japan sought to protect itself from Western imperialism, preserve its sovereignty, and become a suitable trading partner for the industrialized Western countries, and thus Japan looked to Western nations for a new model of government that ensured public welfare by "enforcing a common sense of public decorum covering everything from individual manners and morals to public dignity and respect for national institutions and customs" (Alexander 2003: 153). Alexander goes on to discuss how Japan's first obscenity cases in the 1950's closely mirrored American and British standards of obscenity; in fact, the book in question was D.H. Lawrence's controversial *Lady Chatterly's Lover*, a book that had been declared obscene in the United States (Alexander 2003: 155). In his examination of the postwar manga industry, Frederik L. Schodt points out that the first (though unsuccessful) movement in Japan to ban explicit children's manga was contemporary to the American anti-comic movement and the resultant Comic Code Authority, which led to an institutional standard of sterile, moralistic comic books intended for children.

While cultural exchange formerly mostly flowed from the United States to Japan, today Japanese commodities and culture are exerting their influence on America, starting from the 1960's when popular children's cartoons such as *Speed Racer* and *Astroboy* hit American television and

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captivated young American audiences, most of whom did not even realize that these new cartoons were in fact Japanese. Annalee Newitz argues that American anime fans "are, in many ways, the first generation of United States citizens to experience cultural imperialism in reverse: that is, they are being colonized by Japanese popular culture, rather than the other way around" (Newitz 1995:11). She cites Disney's *The Lion King*, which supposedly borrows heavily from Osamu Tezuka's *Kimba the White Lion* animated series, as an example (the series was aired in the United States in the 1960's; Disney claims that its animators did not copy from Tezuka's series, so the matter is very much in debate). Susan Napier has a different stance on the issue, however; in her book *Anime: From Akira to Princess Mononoke*, she suggests that rather than American anime fans being colonized and subordinated to Japan, they are part of an "interaction with the cultural object [anime]....deeply engaged , transcending issues of national boundaries, content, style, or ideology" (Napier 2000: 242). Napier disagrees with Newitz's assertion that anime is "so heavily influenced by Hollywood that it is itself already 'stolen' from American culture", and instead posits that many themes found in anime and manga are universal rather than a strict Hollywood monopoly (Napier 2000: 242). Anne Allison cites an incident that further contradicts Newitz's argument that anime is a product stolen from American ideas. During a stay in Japan, Allison was surprised to see a pair of naked, animated breasts bouncing on television during a children's morning program. Accompanying the breasts was a song about mothers ("Prohibited Desires" 1996: 1), suggesting that the breasts were not sexualized, but rather a natural symbol of motherhood. Contrast this image with children's programming in the United States, which would not have used such this visual device, but perhaps rather a different image, such as a mother baking cookies or hugging her children. Sharon Kinsella comments on the fact that recent Japanese censorship laws tend to be more lenient about animated sex if it depicted in an artistic or serious manner, rather than in a flippant or caricatured fashion (Kinsella 141). These examples suggest that anime and manga are

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not merely 'stolen' from American culture, as certain specimens are, for many American consumers, decidedly outside of the American cultural norms.

In either case, there is now a growing American consumer base of fans, including children and teenagers, that are being exposed to themes American children's and teenager's media hesitate to portray, and as such, these readers and viewers now have an opportunity to reevaluate what content they think is appropriate for themselves and others in their age groups. As an example, consider the reaction of many manga fans when they learn that an Americanized series has been censored and drastically altered; these fans want to choose for themselves what content they are allowed to read. This is exactly what happened in the case of the sexually explicit *Tenjho Tenge* (which I will discuss further in a later section). The Americanization of anime and manga has led many American fans to question American moral standards in contrast to Japanese standards. Even though manga and anime are quickly becoming more popular in America, the American fans who want unedited, uncensored manga still seem to be part of a subculture rather than mainstream.

There are many different perspectives from which we can examine American and Japanese popular culture and its implications for (and reflections of) contemporary moral standards. First, Sharon Kinsella examines Japanese censorship law, exploring the intricate and dynamic relationship between government, law-making, and morality. Does public sentiment shape morality laws, or is a government that practices censorship unsuccessfully imposing an unpopular moral standard on consumers? Kinsella argues that in Japan, censorship is highly politicized and closely tied to preserving a proper public image of the Japanese state ("Pro-Establishment Manga" 1999: 569).

Susan Napier, an anthropologist, takes a different approach to understanding popular culture. Rather than focusing on legal issues, Napier draws on literary, artistic, and cinematic history to examine the differences between American cartoons and anime. She shows how

Japanese art and literature as far back as the Heian period laid the foundation for more episodic plot lines and mature content in anime and manga. She also discusses the relationship between Hollywood and Japanese cinema, asserting that Hollywood's stranglehold on the Japanese market forced many would-be Japanese directors and writers to try their hand instead at animation; this is part of Napier's explanation for why anime and manga tend to be more cinematic and complex than their American counterparts.

Understanding attitudes towards sexuality in Japan is critical to discussing children's manga and anime. Anne Allison examines this dimension through psychology. I previously mentioned an anecdote that Allison relates in her book, in which she sees naked cartoon breasts on an early-morning children's program in Japan. As the breasts were shown during a song about mothers, it is clear that the breasts were not sexualized, but symbols of motherhood, and that Japanese children watching the program are more likely to perceive them as such. Allison goes on to explore the dichotomy between sexualized and nurturing, motherly views of the female body in Japan. What role does gender psychology play in children's anime and manga? I will discuss Allison's insights into the subject in a later section.

A final perspective through which I will guide my discussion is the lens of race and racism. Often called a "racial melting pot" America has long battled with stereotypical, degrading portrayals of ethnic minorities throughout its media history. However, while in the United States, a negative caricature of an ethnic group in a cartoon will almost certainly draw the ire of many Americans, this is not necessarily the case in Japan, almost everyone is ethnically Japanese. Most viewers in Japan would probably not recognize that such a portrayal is negative because the Black/White race conflict is largely a non-issue. In a 1991 paper, John Russell examines Japanese reactions to black stereotypes, pointing out that most Japanese people have no personal experience with Black people that would enable them to differentiate between the stereotypes and more

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realistic images of Black people. As such, it is not surprising that a Japanese viewer may not realize that a certain caricature is negative or insulting, as the viewer has no point of reference. This can be problematic when certain manga and anime are imported to the United States and edited for mass American consumption.

I will explore all of these dimensions in this paper. My view on children's manga and anime is a blend of the views that Kinsella, Russell, Napier, and Allison have presented, with some variations. First, since the Russell article that I cite in this introduction was written, there have been important developments in Japan regarding race, namely, a Brazilian woman in Japan sued a Japanese store owner for racial discrimination, which was unprecedented. I argue that while as a whole, Japanese society is still relatively unaware of how offensive many its ethnic and racial portrayals really are, there are segments of the Japanese popularity that are becoming increasingly aware of and active in racial issues. I also hope to explore pre-manga history of Japanese art to more make a connection between the history of thematic content in manga and traditional Japanese art. I will further Anne Allison's argument that breasts are desexualized to Japanese children and argue that it is only recently that breasts have become as sexualized in Japanese culture as they are today.

I begin by examining briefly some of the artistic history behind manga and anime in Japan, followed by a detailed history of censorship in Japan and America. Next, I will discuss violence and sexuality in both countries. I then study racist images in Japan, the Western origins of certain stereotypes, and native Japanese racism in Asia. Of course, I will also discuss racism in American cartoons, and whether or not American media has yet "overcome" racism. While this paper explores history as well as the present, it is not a chronological treatment; such an organization would be confusing and less effective.

II. Manga's Artistic Heritage

As has been discussed, anime storylines are generally more episodic and thematically complex than the plots of American cartoons, encompassing the many issues that Allison, Russell, and Kinsella have examined. In fact, some American cartoons, such as *Tom and Jerry*, do not seem to have much of a plot, and instead rely on reformulating a single gimmick repeatedly. For instance, American viewers know that most *Tom and Jerry* cartoons focus on Tom's never-ending quest to catch pesky Jerry, who will inevitably outsmart his long-suffering feline adversary; the variation in each episode is how Jerry will inflict slapstick punishment on Tom, but the underlying premise is always the same. Anime generally deals with more sophisticated themes. Susan Napier attributes this trend to several factors. First, she suggests that most anime series have a weekly television format that lends itself well to weekly episodic storylines (Napier 2000: 17). Napier also points out that many anime series are based on manga, which can vary in length from a few to a few thousand pages. Napier then cites the relationship between Hollywood and the Japanese film industry. In particular, Hollywood films have dominated the Japanese market for several decades, so many artists and producers who might have gone into cinema decided to "play it safe" and move into animation (Napier 2000: 17). Therefore, anime began to incorporate more cinematic, complex plots that would not be out of place in a live action film. Susan Napier has also noted that historically, Japan has "long possessed a pictoral narrative tradition", citing such examples as wood-block prints and picture scrolls ("The Problem of Existence" 2005: 73), while in American society, print media has historically been considered a more adult, serious medium. Even as far back as the Heian period, adult courtiers circulated lavish picture scrolls depicting *The Tale of Genji*, in which text was painted on detailed illustrations; some American adults may consider this practice as akin to reading children's picture books. Napier goes on to examine East Asian

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Daoism and literary history. In Daoism and other East Asian philosophies and religions, the boundaries between dream and reality are often indistinct, and this is reflected in traditional East Asian folk tales, which often show the protagonist "existing in a world in which reality and fantasy blended together" ("The Problem of Existence" 2005: 74). American adults may not be as comfortable with these indistinct boundaries. Napier suggests that American adults prefer live action films because they expect the storylines to progress in a "normal fashion" that obeys laws of physics, logic and rationality; in their predilection for more realistic, predictable plots, American adults may cast aside fantastical animation as childish ("The Problem of Existence" 2005: 74). Therefore, it is reasonable for American adults to feel that animation should not depict excessively violent or sexual themes, as animation has been relegated to a childhood experience.

III. American Cartoons and the Controversial Past

American cartoons have not always been the sanitized, child-friendly fantasy worlds that most Americans believe their children are watching today. While many Westerners are quick to categorically stigmatize anime and manga as excessively violent and sexual, most tend to forget, ignore, or be ignorant of some of the more controversial episodes in the history of American animation, long before *The Simpsons* or *South Park* ever "menaced" the airwaves. In the 1930's, before television, cartoons were shown in theaters, along with newsreels, prior to movies, so they were more oriented towards adult audiences rather than children. Thus, early cartoons contained behaviors and situations that today's parents would not at all consider appropriate for Saturday morning television. Old episodes of even some of today's most beloved classic cartoons would raise many eyebrows if they were broadcast for children. For example, one episode of *Popeye* depicts a child attempting to commit suicide, Bugs Bunny and Yosemite Sam play Russian Roulette (Turner 1992), and Disney character Pecos Bill was fond of rolling and smoking cigarettes (Leland 2001). Gun-toting characters such as Yosemite Sam and Elmer Fudd and sexualized characters like Betty Boop are remnants of this era, as it is easy to imagine that if such new characters were created now, parents and educators would quickly protest.

One of the most disturbing anti-social aspects of these older cartoons was the portrayal of ethnic characters. A 1943 Warner Brothers cartoon called "Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs" was a Snow White story done in blackface, and it was full of references to sex and drugs (Tefertillar 2000). Cartoon Network refused to air several Bugs Bunny cartoons because of offensive portrayals of minorities, including African-Americans and Native Americans (Leland 2001). A World War II era *Popeye* episode featured buck-toothed, apish, myopic, and apologetic/backstabbing Japanese sailors, who, when confronted by Popeye for their "yellow"

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ways, stereotypically stammered "Me so sorry", but seized the opportunity to attack Popeye's ship when he let down his guard.

In 1934, when the Production Code was passed, cartoons were subject to censorship, and animators toned down the raunchiness (Tefertillar 2000). The Code was self-imposed by studios to prevent government regulation and thus was not enforced by the government. Sadly enough, offensive racial portrayals were still permissible under the Code, and as such racist stereotypes were more widely accepted at the time, there was not much public action against it. The Motion Picture Association's rating system followed up the Code in 1968. Now cartoonists had to be more aware of their young audience, and cartoons were held to the standards that Americans are more familiar with today. Many of the older cartoons are currently aired in edited form, while some are not aired at all. However, when editing the old cartoons for offensive content, there is not always widespread consensus on what should and should not be aired. Some networks may remove a racially offensive character from a cartoon while others leave the character untouched. Also, some may wonder why it is not okay to show Elmer Fudd blasting Daffy Duck's beak off of his face with gun (the gunshots are usually edited out), but it is okay to show Wile E. Coyote getting smashed by a boulder or blown up when his plan to catch the Road Runner backfires; the editing tends to be arbitrary at times. One might argue that young viewers who have access to guns (for instance, if their parents own firearms) can more easily imitate Elmer Fudd's gun violence, but there are other cartoons that prominently feature violence involving common household items such as knives and electrical outlets.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) states that any "material that fails to conform to 'accepted standards of morality'" is indecent and subject to regulation, but this definition is vague and open-ended (Hendershot 1998: 16). In an attempt to reach a consensus on acceptable children's programming, many cartoon studios impose their own guidelines for their

product.   In 1994, for example, major cartoon producer DIC Entertainment developed voluntary guidelines for cartoon storylines. The code states that cartoons should, among other things, "foster cooperative behavior,....avoid dangerous stunts that can be imitated by children, show antisocial behavior as unacceptable,.....avoid gratuitous, graphic, and excessive violence,....avoid vulgarity" (Weiss 1994). Clearly, many of the classic Looney Tunes and other cartoons would not fit in with DIC's standards.

IV. Comics, Manga and Censorship

The average comic book hero that comes to many American minds is a clean-cut, character such as Superman, whereas Japanese manga usually have more multi-dimensional characters and deal with more diverse issues other than saving the world from the arch-villain. In many manga there is plenty of sex and violence, a far cry from classic Marvel and DC comics However, of course, Spiderman, Batman, and other American superheroes do not usually settle their disputes with villains through peaceful negotiation and compromise either (but apparently bloodless violence in the name of "justice" is acceptable for young readers), and in more recent years newer comic series such as *Evil Ernie* and other Chaos Comics creations have rejected the old comic book standards of decency. Why are American comics, in contrast to manga, so clean?

In the 1950's, in America local parents, educators, PTA's, and other committees were alarmed at the amount of violence in their children's comic books. In protest, they burned many books and lobbied authorities for support against comic book manufacturers (Schodt 1983: 127). The comic book manufacturers realized that their industry was in danger, so in response, they adopted the stringent, self-imposed Comics Code Authority. The new rules stated that comic books must explicitly show that crime and other antisocial behavior are evil, and the American government and other authorities are good, thus setting up the black-and-white, good versus evil paradigm that is almost synonymous with American comic book heroes. In addition, there was to be no sex, bad language, or excessive violence in comic books. These new guidelines severely restricted creativity and more mature development of the comic book industry, and created storylines that were sterile and shallow. Comic books were now derided as childish moralistic plays, which is why for so long the market was aimed at children; consider the way in which American mainstream society tends to label teenagers and adults who read and collect comics as

nerdy and socially undeveloped (in other words, childish), and it is clear that American comics have historically been situated in the childhood realm.

This is not to say that Japanese parents eagerly allow their children to view violent and sexually explicit manga. Around the same time as the American comic book manufacturers were facing angry parents, many Japanese parents expressed similar concerns, but this contemporary movement was also temporary and ineffective (Schodt 1983: 128). Manga's popularity did not wane, and storylines in children's manga continued to become more risque. Especially in the 1960's, children's manga became was more violent and gruesome. Series such as *Baby Ashura*, which ran in Shonen Magazine, and *Miyamoto Musashi* regularly featured cannibalism and severed body parts (Schodt 1983: 124). Cartoonist Go Nagai garnered his share of controversy and criticism in 1968 with *Harenchi Gakuen (Shameless School)*, which followed students in a school where nudity, sexual innuendo, and alcohol consumption were daily occurrences. Understandably, parents did not appreciate the fact that these manga were appearing in children's magazines.

In the absence of a code in Japan analogous to the Comic Code Authority, Japanese authorities had to find another way to address growing concerns, and they found it in the Japanese National Penal Code's Article 175 (the Indecency Act), which states that indecent materials cannot be sold to people younger than 18 years old (Kinsella 2000: 140). The law is ambiguously worded, because it does not explicitly state guidelines for what is considered indecent (similar to the FCC's nebulous guidelines), and so the standards have changed over the years. Until recently, it was inappropriate to draw adult private parts and pubic hairs (Schodt 1983: 133). Interestingly enough, children's bodies did not fall into this forbidden category, which may explain why in many manga and anime, seemingly prepubescent girls are heavily sexualized. Still, the significance of this interpretation was that it was technically acceptable for sex scenes to be in manga and anime, as long as certain body parts were not shown. Artists quickly developed various

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stylistic devices, such as strategically placed pieces of fruit or other objects, while others just covered bodies up with black boxes, to adapt to this code. In more recent years, the definition of decency has become somewhat more relaxed. Censors are more lenient with more serious, artistic or stylish depictions of sex between long-term partners, whereas there is stricter censorship for erotic scenes that are frivolous, absurd, or cartoonish (Kinsella 2000: 141).

While the Indecency Act is a national law, it is mostly local groups that attempt to control indecent manga. Two local laws, the Youth Ordinance and Ordinance 94, are enacted to facilitate this task. The Youth Ordinance is a restatement of the Indecency Act at a local level, and Ordinance 94 enables local councils to pass laws that follow "the general direction of national law"; most city councils adopted these two laws in the mid- to late 1960's (Kinsella 2000: 142). With these legal tools in hand, local committees have been able to more specifically decide what constitutes "harmful" manga, and most definitions include excessive violence as well as sex. The national government provides a helping hand by releasing a quarterly report, the "Harmful Designation List", that specifies which manga are considered harmful in each prefecture (Kinsella 2000: 142).

One might think that with such laws and watchdog groups in place, manga would have "cleaned up its act" since the 1960's, but controversy still resurfaces in periodic spurts. One example is the regulation movement of 1990-1992 (Kinsella 2000: 145). This time, it was not just parents that were complaining; feminist groups got involved as well. These groups contended that pornographic manga promoted violence against women and demeaned them. Other citizens' groups claimed that manga was harmful to children because it taught them violence and stunted academic and intellectual development. Even local police groups joined the protest. Manga blacklisting committees began meeting more often, churning out longer lists of offensive manga (Kinsella 2000: 147). Clearly, the manga problem had not been solved.

There was another group in addition to concerned parents and teachers that had a vested interest in censoring manga: the Japanese government. Sharon Kinsella argues that the process of censorship is highly political, stating that in the late 1980's and early 1990's, there was a political shift from "old politics", which was inflexible in dealing with issues such as the Emperor system, and "sub-politics", which dealt with "gender, personality and sexuality" ("Pro-establishment Manga 1999: 568). She cites a statement from manga artist Morizono Milk, who stated that "Before 1990 none of the companies censored sexual imagery, there was just a big taboo against things about politics and gossip about the Emperor" ("Pro-establishment Manga 1999: 568). Kinsella also notes that the state and large businesses recognized the anime's and manga's burgeoning popularity, and thus began using it as a means to communicate with society ("Pro-establishment Manga 1999: 569); accordingly, manga and anime now had to be sanitized to ensure that the Japanese state was "properly" and "respectably" represented: "manga which did not fit the criterion of 'national culture' was criticized, blacklisted, excluded and eliminated" ("Pro-establishment Manga 1999: 568).

The manga industry responded with self-regulation. Publishers began encouraging artists and authors to monitor their own work, and the Publishing Ethics Committee recommended that manga with mature themes should be properly labeled as such (Kinsella 2000: 148). The labels were a risky venture, as after the labels were introduced, many retailers stopped stocking adult manga. Also, many artists were not willing to regulate their own work, as they felt they had the creative and legal right to leave their work uncensored. At the same time, the artists had to face the possibility that magazines would stop publishing their creations if they did not comply, so some artists did end up altering their manga. Artist Yamamoto Naoki learned this painful lesson the hard way when her series BLUE was discontinued in 1992; subsequently, she commented that "...I notice that I am subconsciously controlling my expression" (Kinsella 2000: 150).

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Thus we see that many Japanese animators and parents feel the same frustrations and concerns as their American counterparts. Artists and animators feel that censorship stifles their creativity, while parents and other concerned adults worry about the impact that depictions of sexuality and violence have on impressionable children. We can now begin to see some commonality between the issues surrounding American and Japanese children's media, whereas previously readers may have believed that there is no such common ground, and that perhaps Japanese (or American) culture is uniquely "absurd" or perverted.

V. Violence

In a 1939 interview, Warner Brothers cartoon producer Leon Schlesinger stated that "We cannot forget that while the cartoon today is an excellent entertainment for young and old, it is primarily the favorite motion picture fare of children. Hence, we always must keep their best interests at heart by making our product proper for their impressionable minds" (Cohen 1997: 28). Schlesinger's statement implies that animators should be careful to not portray imitable, unhealthy behavior in cartoons. In cartoons, behaviors such as violence and drug use are divorced from reality, so all too-real consequences of such behavior are either not shown or rather misconstrued as funny and non-problematic. For instance, a child viewing *Tom and Jerry* sees Tom get hit in the head with a bowling ball. What does the child learn about this behavior? Tom does not seem to suffer a concussion, any brain damage, or any other of the trauma that would undoubtedly accompany such an injury in real life. Instead, a comically-exaggerated bump protrudes from Tom's battered head, and perhaps Tom attempts to push the bump back down with his finger. Tom's efforts inevitably fail, as the persistent bump then protrudes from another area of his body instead. Thirty seconds later, in the next scene, the feline antagonist's bruise is miraculously healed; there seems to be no visible consequence of the injury (except, of course, that now Tom is more angry at Jerry), and the action continues, usually with Tom again being struck, blown up, or maimed in some other fashion. Any child viewing this cartoon may assume that if she strikes a sibling in the head with a hammer, there will be no serious, lasting consequences, but there might instead be some sort of humorous, inconsequential injury.

This unrealistic perception of dangerous behavior is certainly problematic. In 1994, after an American child set bed on fire, burning down his house and killing his baby sister, the boy's mother claimed that the boy had seen such a stunt on the cartoon *Beavis and Butthead* (Hendershot 1998: 14). Whether or not *Beavis and Butthead* actually influenced the child to attempt this

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dangerous stunt is doubtful (one might also wonder why five-year-old was watching a cartoon aimed at older teenage audiences in the first place), but the example is illustrative. To address this problem, many American television networks try not to depict imitable behavior in cartoons. For instance, a note from a censor regarding a cartoon called *Eek! the Cat* (a Saturday morning carton that ran from 1992 to 1997) says that "It will not be acceptable for Jed and Ned to pull out shotguns and shoot at the Sticky Bears. Perhaps they would use something not-replicable, like shooting guitars or banjos" (Hendershot 1998: 51). In some households with guns, children may be able to access the weapons (perhaps due to parental negligence to safely store the gun, for instance), and thus a child shooting a gun at someone is a real possibility. A more questionable note reads "Please don't show Cupid using a switchblade knife, an illegal weapon. How about an ax or a chainsaw?" (Hendershot 1998: 51). Presumably, a chainsaw might be too heavy and difficult for a child to operate, but many households have axes that children can easily access.
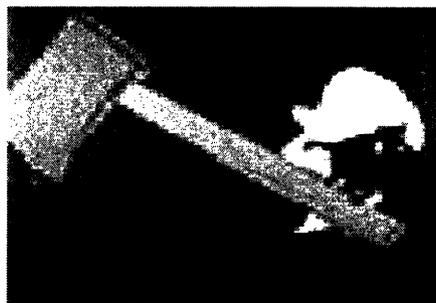
Axes such as this one are common and accessible in many households.
(http://looney.goldenagecartoons.com)

In contrast to Japanese animation, in American cartoons blood and death are usually censored. For example, a Fox censor wrote, "I found the shot of Rambo blowing Santa Claus to bloody smithereens excessively violent. We would like to edit this so we don't see Santa exploding" (Hendershot 1998: 50). Of course, the image of Rambo brutalizing Santa Claus would probably distress many children regardless of whether or not blood was shown. Censoring blood

in America seems analogous to censoring pubic hairs in Japan; both restrictions seem to be mere tokens that do not address the larger issues of violence and sexuality. When children's manga and anime are imported and localized to the United States, scenes depicting death and blood are usually altered. The wildly popular *Power Rangers* series (not animation, but still directed at children) garnered parental protest because of its violence, and this was even after editing. In the original Japanese version (entitled *Go Rangers*), a main character died, which is usually considered too intense for young American audiences (Allison 2000: 266). Cartoon Network and other stations included *Dragonball* and *Dragonball Z* in their afternoon kid's lineups, but there is a marked difference between what airs on these stations and what aired in Japan. The original versions showed much more blood and violence, and entire scenes were deleted from earlier episodes in which a depressed female character gets drunk at a bar (of course, drugs and alcohol are a harmful imitable behavior). A more obvious change is the word "Hell", which on American stations was changed to the nonsensical HFIL, short for "Home for Infinite Losers". On a side note, Cartoon Network is now airing unedited versions of *DBZ*, but at a later timeslot, when most children are presumably asleep (thus, deciding when to air certain content can be another form of censorship). The popular series *Robotech* had several violent scenes edited when it was aired in the United States, including exploding body parts and an atomic bomb scene (Cohen 1997: 136). Even the seemingly innocent *Pokemon* has not escaped the editor's cut. I previously discussed the way in which American comics have a more definite distinction between good and bad than manga; the same holds true for American cartoons. Thus, in the Americanized *Pokemon*, each episode ends with an examination of the hero Ash's heroism and virtue, whereas in Japan, there was more focus on his relationship with Pikachu (Katsuno 2004: 84). Violence has also been an issue. In fact, one episode featuring a gun-slinging park ranger was not aired in the United States; at one point, the ranger threatens Ash with the gun (Katsuno 2004: 90).

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Some people assume that in contrast to American cartoons and comics, Japanese animation is has a free license to indulge in excessive violence. There are several important points to note about this assumption.

First, as has been noted, anime and manga tend to focus much less on the slapstick violence formula that characterizes many American cartoons such as *Tom and Jerry*. Violence in anime and manga are often somehow related to character development. For instance, in *Trigun*, an anime aimed at teenagers, the protagonist Vash the Stampede detests violence. Vash is a skillful gun slinger, but he only resorts to violence when the lives of other characters are in danger. Vash admittedly is interested only in "love and peace", and thus his prodigious skill with weapons and his reluctantly violent history present him with a moral dilemma. Throughout the series, he struggles to reconcile his past actions with his own moral code, which values life above all else. Vash wonders, is it truly inevitable that one must kill in order to protect others? Similarly, Goku, *Dragonball Z*'s super-strong hero, is the strongest fighter in the universe, yet his compassion is often his undoing. Just as he is about to defeat the evil Frieza, Goku declines the opportunity to kill the badly beaten villain, instead offering him the opportunity to leave and promise to never again harm a living creature. In a different episode, Goku admonishes his rival Vegeta after Vegeta brutally kills a weaker opponent, telling Vegeta that "we don't need that kind of violence". These two series show viewers that there are emotional as well as physical consequences to violence.

Compare Vash and Goku to a comic book hero such as Superman. Superman is packaged to children as a paragon of justice, moral virtue, and the American way. However, while Superman fights crime, like Vash, he uses violence. The difference is that Superman is praised for his actions. Comic critic Gershon Legman raises an interesting point: rather than subjecting criminals to a court of law (as is the "American way" as promised in the Constitution), Superman

himself becomes judge and jury. Legman says that "In the hands of the Supermen, private justice takes over. Legal process is completely discounted and contemptuously by-passed. No trial is necessary, no stupid policemen hog all the fun. Fists crashing into faces become the court of highest appeal...The question is, what has become of the law and order that all the Supermen are supposedly upholding?" (Legman 2004: 117). Legman further posits that Superman's vigilantism "is really peddling a philosophy of 'hooded justice' in no way distinguishable from that of Hitler and the Ku Klux Klan" (Legman 2004: 118). While I would argue that Superman is not quite the hate-monger that Hitler and the Ku Klux Klan are, Legman does have a valid point. I assume that the Ku Klux Klan genuinely felt justified in lynching African Americans, as Superman no doubt does in his fight against crime. More importantly, while many Americans are quick to label anime and manga as violent and antisocial, they tend to ignore the morality of characters such as Goku and Vash, while at the same time glorifying Superman's vigilante violence.

A second point is that, as illustrated by the Superman example, violence is not absent from American cartoons. Older cartoons often need to be edited for violent content. Even Mickey Mouse was originally violent, despite his modern, squeaky-clean image; in *Steamboat Willy*, he swings a cat around by the tail, grinning sadistically (Cohen 1997: 14). I previously mentioned *Looney Tunes* and other Warner Brothers cartoons that portrayed violence, as well as *Tom and Jerry*. Even more recent cartoons such as *Teen Titans, Gargoyles, The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, and others depict violence. There is no blood, but just because someone does not bleed after being punched and kicked does not mean that no physical harm was done. Even worse, the fact that there is no blood may signify to children that emulating their Saturday morning cartoon heroes is safe. My intent is not to vilify any Japanese or American cartoons; in fact, I was and still am an avid fan of many of the cartoons and anime I have mentioned. I merely suggest that it is unfair for American critics of Japanese animation to blast violence in anime without presenting a

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fair and balanced analysis of American children's programming. Perhaps since censorship is such a publicized and heated issue in America, and because many Americans have grown up with a particular standard of censorship, initial exposure to Japanese children's media and the different censorship standards elicits a shocked and offended response from American viewers. Japanese viewers may in turn be appalled at the unremorseful household antics of a *Tom and Jerry* cartoon.

A third point is that in Japan, much of the violence portrayed in anime is strictly in the fantasy realm. Schodt points out that during the manga and anime boom periods in Japan, the crime rate actually dropped, and that the crime rate in Japan is much lower than in the United States ("Dreamland Japan" 1996: 50). Guns and other weapons are much more accessible in the United States. Violence in anime and manga are not as much of a real, accessible experience to consumers in Japan, whereas American news is full of stories about the latest murders, violence, and sex crimes that happen close to home. Thus cartoon violence would be simulating a very real problem in America.

VI. Sexuality

Sexuality is another controversial theme that appears in children's manga and anime, and one that Anne Allison has examined extensively. I previously mentioned an anecdote that Allison relates in her book, in which she sees naked cartoon breasts on an early-morning children's program in Japan. As the breasts were shown during a song about mothers, it is clear that the breasts were not sexualized, but symbols of motherhood, and that Japanese children watching the program are more likely to perceive them as such. In the United States, where breasts are most often sexual symbols (despite the fact that their purpose is to nourish babies), children's media takes care to shield young viewers from the eroticized female body. Allison hypothesizes that if an American program such as *Sesame Street* were to depict a nursing mother, the mother's breasts would be discreetly hidden from view ("Prohibited Desires" 1996: 1). Therefore when breasts appear in children's anime and manga, we might assume that sexuality is not a relevant issue, as the breasts are not erotic.

However, Allison does not suggest that in Japan, female breasts are completely devoid of eroticism; in fact, she proposes the opposite. Allison goes on to examine the voyeuristic role that males play in children's manga and anime: for instance, in a series called *Machiko-sensei*, a young female teacher accidentally has her breasts repeatedly exposed in a public wrestling match, and all of the males in the audience are transfixed, staring motionless at the embarrassed teacher's breasts. In such scenes children's anime, the males assume the role of viewer, while the females are the mortified spectacles, but the males never touch the females or initiate any sort of sexual contact ("Prohibited Desires" 1996: 43). After interviewing Japanese male informants, Allison reports that many of these males described viewing the female body as "tanoshi" (fun or leisurely) just as if they were describing "reading a book, watching TV, listening to the news, or getting drunk with a friend", and she suggests that looking at the female body is both "diversionary and recreative for

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males...[as well as] sexual, though these two constructs are not always conjoined", as evidenced by the fact that in children's manga and anime voyeurism is never followed by any sexual activity ("Prohibited Desires" 1996: 44). Allison then explores the white-collar Japanese practice in which companies treat their male employees to hostess clubs, where the males engage in flirty conversation with female waitresses, often commenting on their breasts and bodies ("Prohibited Desires" 1996: 44). Again, actual sex very rarely takes place, and activity is limited to flirting and talking. It is also important to note that the wives of these white-collar males expect this behavior and view it as recreation separate from the marriage and home sphere. One would be hard-pressed to imagine an American wife taking a similar view if her husband flirted with another woman. In a sense, the opportunity of having a company foot the bill for such flirtatious outings is seen as a reward that young males should strive towards (as only companies that are financially secure can afford these expensive evenings), and Allison argues that by portraying a standard of male voyeurs (analogous to the white-collar workers) and females on displays (the waitresses in the hostess clubs), children's anime and manga are ingraining in young viewers these accepted gender roles. Allison notes that this construction is considered appropriate for children in Japan because "sexuality...does not radically change its form or meaning at puberty" ("Prohibited Desires" 1996: 43). While the sexual act may not be appropriate for children to view, the idea of gender roles is applicable to both children and adults.

The sexualization of breasts in Japan seems to be a relatively recent development. While Anne Allison begins her book with an anecdote about the innocence of female breasts, Laura Miller recalls finding in a Japanese women's magazine an advertisement for "Angel Wings", an electronic device that supposedly increases a woman's breast size. The advertisement was captioned, "I stopped being an A cup the day I got a present from an angel" (Miller 2003: 271). Miller recalls that "During my stay in Japan in the late 1970s, I was impressed by a generally

nonjudgmental attitude about female breasts. In the public bath, coworkers, friends, and even strangers might occasionally comment on someone's chest, but overall the breasts were not the intense focus of anxiety I saw among American women" (Miller 2003: 273). Prior to World War II, nudity was more socially acceptable in Japan: mothers in the countryside often publicly breast-fed their babies, and public bathing was common (Miller 2003: 275). Beginning with Japan's Westernization in the nineteenth century, nudity became less socially acceptable, and later, American GI's stationed in Japan during the post-WWII occupation brought with them raunchy magazines and the standard of large, firm breasts as the ideal notion of beauty. In 1955, about 70 percent of Japanese women breast-fed, but today this figure has been reduced to less than half; Miller states that many Japanese writers feel this change is due to the eroticization of the breasts that were once nurturing, emotional symbols of motherhood (Miller 2003: 276).

In contrast, breasts, nudity and sexuality are usually taboo in American cartoons. Prior to the Production Code, Betty Boop wore a low-cut, extremely short dress that showed off her garter and emphasized her figure. After censorship, Betty wore more demure, modest attire (Cohen 1997: 20). In 1930, the state of Ohio banned a Disney cartoon that showed a naked Clarabell Cow's udders (Cohen 1997: 24). In other Disney cartoons such as *Fantasia*, naked breasts were covered up or redrawn. However, many might wonder why characters such as Donald Duck and Porky Pig wear a shirt but no pants. Does that constitute nudity? This question may sound absurd, but it was clearly an issue with Clarabell Cow.

More recently, American publisher DC Comics tested its standards of censorship when it recently imported and distributed the manga *Tenjho Tenge*. While the series is marketed to teenagers in Japan, the DC's Mature rating was more appropriate based on the content. The series follows the happenings in a Japanese martial arts high school that is divided into warring "clubs", so naturally there is a lot of violence, but the healthy dose of explicit sex were what really caused

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problems for DC Comics, as the company insisted on marketing the translated series to teenagers. The first volume contained at least 28 edits, including the cover, which had originally featured a panty shot of one the main female characters (Dean 2005: 11). Angry fans have set up a website detailing the edits and changes that DC Comics made, comparing them with side-by-side shots from the original manga (http://digitalsin.bebopboard.net/index2.html). A perusal of the site reveals that the original manga was full of female nudity, references to sexual activity, sexual violence, and obscene gestures (particularly the middle finger), all of

CMX VERSION   ORIGINAL
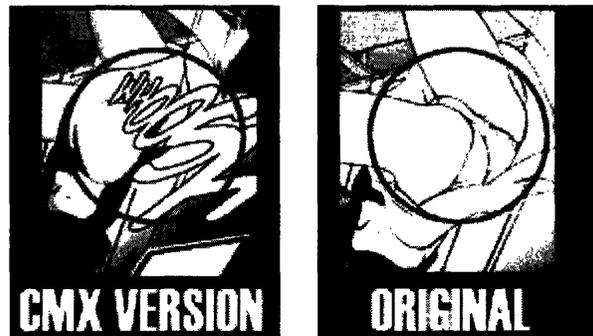
The original comic featured many panty shots and lots of nudity.

which DC edited. Given the heavy changes, one must wonder whether DC knew much about the original manga when it decided that the series should be marketed to American teens; after all, the company promised that the series would be "100% the way the original Japanese creators want you to see it" (Dean 2005: 9). The anger that DC's censorship incited highlights the conflict in society about whether censorship is justified. Clearly the *Tenjho Tenge* fans felt that they are intelligent enough to make their own decisions about what is the best reading material for themselves, while DC Comics had to appease the more mainstream media and critics who would have taken exception to the manga's content.

CMX VERSION   ORIGINAL

DC Comics edited the cover of this volume of *Tenjho Tenge*.

Child sexuality is not acceptable in American cartoons. A heavily edited *Pokemon* episode featured a 12 year old female character named Kasumi in a bathing suit. An old man leers at her, muttering about how he wants to see how she looked in a few years. In the same episode, Kasumi enters a swimsuit competition, and she loses to a man in drag. The man has outrageously large, fake breasts that he proudly flaunts, much to Kasumi's chagrin and disappointment.. Clearly, in the United States most parents feel that children should not be watching a child sexualized in such a way. This is not to say that the in Japan it is acceptable to look at children as sexual objects. This particular *Pokemon* episode addresses the natural feelings about body image that many young girls experience as a part of growing up and is not advocating that young girls should be sex objects. There is a subset of Japanese adults who probably do lust after young girls, and many Americans assume that most Japanese men have a "schoolgirl fetish." Again, this group is not representative of Japanese men anymore than collectors of child pornography are of American

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males. Indeed, most Japanese would probably be embarrassed and appalled at child pornography and child fetishes.

Many American viewers also probably notice that sexual innuendo is still shown when some networks air older cartoons. For instance, an old Tex Avery cartoon features a wolf and a voluptuous female singer named Red. The characters are loosely based on "Little Red Riding Hood". When Red performs at a night club, the wolf is clearly aroused and begins whistling and cat-calling like a sex-starved maniac. In a Bugs Bunny cartoon, Porky Pig and his dog are hunting for rabbits, and of course, Bugs Bunny is leads the befuddled pair on a wild goose chase, as usual. At the end of the episode, Porky finally shoots at Bugs. Bugs clutches his chest as he falls to the ground, and a contrite Porky moves Bugs' hands to inspect the wound, but Porky gets quite a surprise. Instead of seeing a shotgun wound, Porky is shocked and embarrassed to see that Bugs is wearing a bra. Bugs screams and slaps Porky and his dog, then slaps the bra over the duo's heads, traipsing off as the episode ends. This gag is reminiscent of the voyeurism model discussed in Japanese manga. There are also newer cartoons in which animators attempt to test their censorship limits. A censor's note regarding *Eek! The Cat* requests that the animators remove a line in which one character says "I wear protection", to which another character responds "That's very nineties of you" (Hendershot 1998: 53). The 1985 live action movie *Pee-wee's Big Adventure*, which was aimed at children as well as older audiences, featured a scene in which Pee-wee was conversing with a waitress about her dreams to visit Paris. Unbeknownst to the pair, the waitress's boyfriend is eavesdropping on the conversation, he starts listening at an unfortunate juncture; when Pee-wee asks the waitress what is stopping her from going to Paris, he tells her "Everyone I know has a big 'but'. Come on, Simone, let's talk about your big 'but'". Clearly, Pee-wee meant 'but' as in excuse, but Simone's suspicious boyfriend suspects the worst. In a recent episode of the Cartoon Network series *Mrs. Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends*, a group of characters goes on a

camping trip. The elderly Mrs. Foster, so excited about being in nature, gets in touch with her "wild side", immediately disrobing in front of her companions. She spends the rest of the episode naked, but with strategically placed props to retain her modesty. It is important, however, to note that Cartoon Network is not subject to the same censorship standards as other channels, since it is a cable network.

Why would animators put such innuendo in cartoons for kids, when the young viewers might not even understand the joke? Hendershot suggests that animators are aware that they are addressing an intergenerational audience (Hendershot 1998: 52). For instance, yet another *Eek! The Cat* censor memo reads "It will not be acceptable to show an irate ex-postal employee murder his coworkers. Perhaps we could see the man entering the post office with a stylized automatic weapon as Eek is leaving, so adults will be able to imagine what comes next, but children won't be witness to the violence" (Hendershot 1998: 52). This wide appeal is also more obvious in cartoons such as *The Simpsons*, which many children watch (whether or not it is suitable for them depends on who you ask, but certain networks rerun it as early as 6:00 in the evening, when many children are still awake, rather than at a later slot). Considering this demographic, American cartoons seem to not be as different from the widely appealing Japanese anime and manga as one might initially think.

A last issue to consider is homosexuality in manga and anime. In Japan, many young girls eagerly read manga about romantic relationships between young boys and men. Schodt discusses a manga magazine called *June*, which features "mainly stories of love between beautiful teenage boys overseas, drawn by women artists. The target readership is junior and senior high school girls" (Schodt 1983: 137). Gender-bending (which may not always necessarily indicate homosexuality) is also a common theme in manga and anime. The popular series *Ranma 1/2* features as its protagonist Ranma, a young martial artist who travels to China with his father. The

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two fall into a cursed pool, and as a result, whenever Ranma is splashed with cold water, he turns into a girl (his father has a similar curse: he turns into a panda). At home, Ranma's fiance is shocked to hear the news. In *Rose of the Versailles*, Oscar is a beautiful female castle guard who has been raised as male. Many female visitors, besotted with her beauty and believing her to be a man, fall in love with her. It is difficult to imagine such implied homosexual relationships in American cartoons, and in fact, anime and manga imported from Japan are often censored to remove homosexuality. For instance, in the *Sailor Moon* series, male characters who were gay in the Japanese series are not homosexual on American television (one of the characters was actually changed to a female character). Two of the Sailor Scouts were originally lesbian lovers, but in the American version they are cousins, which explains their close relationship.

However, gender-bending is not a foreign concept to American animators. I return here to the Bugs Bunny example in which Porky caught him wearing a bra, but this example is no isolated incident. In many cartoons, Bugs often masquerades as an attractive female in order to dupe his dopey adversaries, and he plays the part rather convincingly. In one episode, a hairy monster is chasing Bugs through a deserted castle. In typical fashion, Bugs befuddles his enemy by producing from thin air a table, a bowl of water, and a nail file, and he then proceeds to give the monster a manicure. Bugs takes the role of a stereotypical gay beautician, gossiping in almost a lisp about how "monsters are such interesting people and lead such interesting lives", and then in a sing-songy voice he says to the confused monster "now let's dip our patties in the water" (which of course is booby-trapped with mouse traps). Rarely do newer American cartoons include such stereotypes, because studios are fearful of backlash from gay political groups (Hendershot 1998: 54). However, on the other side, networks feel they cannot portray positive gay stereotypes because of protests from Christian groups such as Dr. James Dobson's Focus on Family organization. The networks have history to back up their stance; controversy ensued when

Reverend Jerry Falwell accused a *Teletubby* of being gay. More recently, Dr. Dobson accused a tolerance group called the We Are Family Foundation of "using SpongeBob and company to promote the theme of 'tolerance and diversity,' which are almost always buzzwords for homosexual advocacy" (www.family.org/docstudy/newsletters/a0035339.cfm). The incident in question was a video tape that used cartoon characters to teach tolerance to school children. Supposedly, many people believe that a character on *SpongeBob SquarePants* named Squidward is gay, as he is slightly effeminate and apparently listens to show tunes. As cartoon studios and networks face fire from both sides of the fence concerning the portrayal of homosexuals, they tend to avoid the issue altogether.

VII. Racism

I previously discussed two episodes of *Pokemon* that met with controversy in the United States. A third controversial Christmas episode contains what some Americans consider a racially insensitive character named Jynx. Jynx is a short, curvaceuous, heavy-set female character with large red lips, long white-blond hair, and dark hair. She has magical powers and an attack called "the devil kiss" which seems reminiscent of voodoo ritualism (Katsuno 2004: 101). As drawn, Jynx bears a strong resemblance to the blackface characters of older American cartoons (many of which, of course, have been edited out in recent years). Jynx and the rest of

Pokemon's Jynx. www.ktf-split.hr

her tribe serve a white Santa Claus, which seems to imply a relationship of master and native slaves. One might think that as popular as the *Pokemon* franchise is in the United States and other non-Japanese countries, its creators might have taken extra care not to portray characters that could offend ethnic groups. Why, then, would a character such as Jynx be in a modern children's cartoon?

The important point to note in this case is that the concepts of racial discrimination and ethnic diversity as they exist in the United States are not prevalent issues in Japan. Japan is much less diverse than the United States, and according to the CIA World Factbook, ethnic minorities

(non-Japanese) comprise only one percent of Japan's population. While the Japanese government does not track statistics about minorities in its population count, some organizations estimated that in 1993, there were only between 5,000 and 7,000 black people in Japan (Cottman 1993). Consequently, whereas most Americans consider the United States a "melting pot" of cultures and races, there is no such notion in Japan. In fact, Japan's civil codes contain no provisions or laws regarding racism and civil rights; indeed, a civil rights movement in Japan analogous to America's Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's would likely be unfeasible (Watts 1999). Sadako Ogata, a U.N. Commissioner, stated that "We [the Japanese] live under the illusion of one ethnic race, one culture" (Watts 1999).

This lack of racial awareness (or rather, lack of racial difference within Japan) is readily obvious in some aspects of Japanese popular culture. Consider the example of a popular children's storybook called *Chibikuro Sambo* (*Little Black Sambo*), a story about a little black boy who outsmarts a tiger. In the United States, "sambo" is a highly derogatory name for African-Americans, and today, it is very unlikely that such a title would appear in a bookstore (if it did, the bookstore that stocked the offending title could certainly expect a vehement opposition campaign, boycotts, and other corrective measures). The child protaganist is drawn in typical "pickaniny" fashion, not unlike Jynx. Yet in Japan, it was not until 1988, after over thirty-five years of popularity, that the book was pulled from shelves, and even then it was the result of an American-led campaign and not internal Japanese pressure (Wallace 2005). Japanese psychologist Kazuo Mori suggested that "it never occurred to us [the Japanese]" that the book had racist overtones, stating that the Japanese have very little daily experience with black people: "Where would we get it [racism against black people] from?" (Wallace 2005). When the book was re-released in Japan in 2005, publisher Tomio Inoue said "Many readers didn't know why it was out of print" (Wallace 2005), further suggesting that the Japanese public was on the whole unaware of the book's racist

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implications. *Little Black Sambo* is not the only cultural product in Japan that is drawn in "blackface" style; even the famed manga artist Osamu Tezuka black characters in the exaggerated style (Katsuno 2004: 102). In his *Jungle Taitei*, which is a Tarzanesque story set in an African jungle, Tezuka depicts spear-wielding, inky skinned, grass-skirt wearing Africans who worship a white girl as a Goddess (Russell 1991: 12). Black people are often depicted as ape-like and subhuman, with grossly exaggerated lips and hair, and their personalities are usually one-dimensional and unsophisticated, ranging from childish to savage and brutish.

Kazuo Mori posed a valid question: if most Japanese people do not interact with black people on a regular basis, where do these stereotypes and caricatures come from? American newspapers have claimed that Japanese believe that "black people are violent, that [they] are lazy and that [they] are thieves" (Cottman 1993). But where do the Japanese get these ideas? They come from the United States and other Western countries. For example, Osamu Tezaku's depiction of Africa and people of color is reminiscent of the story of Tarzan. The blackface images in some manga and anime are not far from depictions in American cartoons such as *Tom and Jerry*, as well as the minstrel shows that were common in America in the early twentieth century. The Japanese also borrow more modern stereotypes of black people. For instance, many Japanese youths idolize black athletes and entertainers; while this adulation may not seem so sinister, some of these Japanese fans may have unknowingly internalized the stereotype that all blacks are superior in sports and certain entertainment such as rapping. In the hit anime series *Cowboy Bebop,* there is an episode entitled "Mushroom Samba". "Mushroom Samba" has two black characters that look like they were taken directly from a 1970's American blaxploitation film. The male calls himself Shaft, and the female bears a striking resemblance to African-American actress Pam Grier, complete with a huge afro. Furthermore, this female is named Coffee, presumably after a Pam Grier film called *Coffy*. While *Cowboy Bebop*'s creators may have been merely paying tribute to

the blaxploitation genre (much in the same way that director Quentin Tarantino pays homage to kung fu films in his movies), for many Japanese who have no real-life experience with blacks, this episode may serve as less of a tribute to a limited segment of African-American culture and more of a definitive example of how all blacks look and act.

The color black itself has an interesting aesthetic background in Japan. Historically, the Japanese "cult of beauty" has dictated that pale skin is beautiful and high class, while dark skin represents low class. Peasants in ancient Japan worked outside in the sun, and as a consequence, they had darker tanned skin than the aristocrats who lived at the imperial court. It was common for elite women to apply makeup to make their skin look whiter. At the same time, it was fashionable for these elite women to apply lacquer to their teeth to blacken them, and of course the contrast of raven black hair against snow white skin was considered beautiful. An Englishman visiting Japan in 1683 noted that

> Whereas other Nations think fair hair, and white teeth great Ornaments,
>
> these [Japanese] are of a quite different opinion, and think none agreeable,
>
> but those who have the Blackest hair and Teeth, and they use all the Art
>
> they can to make them so; their notion in this being directly opposite to
>
> ours, taking Black to be the Livery of Mirth and Pleasantness, and white
>
> of Grief and Mourning. (Leupp 1995: 4)

Dark skin was not always looked down upon: in Japanese art, Buddha is often portrayed as black, as Buddhism originated in India.

Historical records show that when Africans first came to Japan in the sixteenth century, the Japanese viewed them with curiosity and admiration rather than disdain. One Portugese merchant wrote that "they [the Japanese] will come 15 leagues just to see them [African crew members] and entertain them for three or four days", while a Spanish sea captain remarked on how fascinated the

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Japanese became with an African drummer and his musical art (Leupp 1995: 2). Other records noted that many blacks served as Japanese translators, engaged in business relationships with the Japanese, and even engaged in more mundane activities such as playing chess with the Japanese (Leupp 1995: 3).

African slavery probably contributed to negative images of black people. Whereas in earlier years, Japanese interacted with blacks in various roles, in the seventeenth century, the Japanese only saw black slaves who were brutalized by their European masters (Leupp 1995: 6). Thus the Japanese began to see blacks treated as inferiors. In 1853, American Commodore Matthew C. Perry sailed to Japan with gunboats, demanding that the isolated island nation open up to trade with the United States. When he returned one year later to conclude the deal, he celebrated by having white members of his crew dress up in blackface and perform a minstrel show for the Japanese. The show was such a success that some of the crew members toured Japan with their performance. Such racist portrayals, as well as comments from other white people, had an impact on Japanese delegates who traveled to the Congo in 1860; they considered the Africans to be very apish and childish ("Narratives of Denial" 1991: 418). The Japanese also were impressed by the white's technological and military prowess, while at the same time noting that the black people did not seem to possess any such expertise; they deduced that clearly, the blacks must be inferior (Leupp 1995: 7). In a diary entry, A Japanese attendant to an ambassador to America that "The whites are of course intelligent, and the blacks stupid. Thus the seeds of intelligence and unintelligence are not allowed to mix together" (Leupp 1995: 7). Again, Tezuka's *Jungle Taitei* seems to have internalized and perpetuated these stereotypes by placing a white female as a "goddess queen" over exaggerated, savage Africans.

If white Americans and Europeans were an intelligent, advanced race, and black people stupid, animalistic, and inferior, where did the Japanese fit into this color rubric?

The Japanese recognized that in order to protect itself from succumbing to Western colonialism, it had to absorb modern technology and "Westernize". In this sense, Japan began to distance itself from other Asian countries (particularly China; the once-respected source of much Japanese culture was now being carved into "spheres of influence" by America and European imperialists), and to adopt Western science, thought, and culture. Japan took lessons in science, government, and technology from the West, but it also imbibed ideas about race, including Social Darwinism. Despite Japan's rapid modernization, in 1876 a Japanese journalist wrote that "the highest race is that of the whites (Europeans and Americans). In the middle is the yellow race (Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Ryukyuans, and other Asians), and lowest are the black and red races (aboriginal peoples of Africa, Australia, and South America" (Leupp 1995: 9). A Tokyo University professor stated that the Japanese "stand before Westerners exposing our weak and inferior civilization; it is rare that we can hold our heads high and peer down on other races as they do" (Leupp 1995: 10).

Popular Japanese art work dating from the Sino-Japanese War demonstrate this inferiority complex. Japanese soldiers and officers "were portrayed as essentially Caucasian figures: tall and fair-complexioned, with long, almost rectangular faces, and invariably dressed in Western garb", while the Chinese were portrayed as "short, round-faced, yellow-skinned figures – bearing considerable resemblance, in fact, to the stereotyped caricature of the Oriental that Westerners loved to draw" (Dower 1986: 209). These pictures show that Japan was attempting to distance itself from other colored races and associate itself with the white race, at the same time, significantly, rejecting its own Asian identity. During World War II, finally growing impatient with American and European resistance to its expansion into East Asia, the Japanese government touted "Pan-Asianism" and urged other Asian nations to oust the Western imperialists out of Asia. Japan still prided itself on its mastery of Western technology, but declared Westerners to be

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fundamentally immoral. Japan's focus on its own superior morality as a race was significant, as the Japanese still did not feel that they could claim physical or intellectual superiority over the West. This self-obsessed moralism also meant that non-Japanese colored races, including Chinese, but especially the darker-skinned races, were morally inferior to Japan. This emphasis on "Yamato *damashii*", or "Yamato soul"and talk of superiority ("Race, Language, and War" 1993: 272) was largely government propaganda; many Japanese still felt inferior to the West, as one Japanese machinist remembers: "I guess we had a kind of inferiority complex toward the Westerners. We called them 'hairy ones', but we felt a kind of admiration turned to prejudice. We didn't want to lose the whites" (Cook 1992: 50). He also recalled that "We respected the white people who'd produced the advanced machinery we used and had an advanced culture as well, but we looked down on the Chinese, calling them *Chankoro,* and Koreans—they were just *Senjin* or *Choukou*" (Cook 1992: 48). After the war, writer Endo Shuusaku wrote a book called *Up to Aden.* In one scene, the narrator is on a ship sharing a cabin with an African woman:

> Lying down in the fourth class cabin, I stare at the feverish brown body
>
> of the sick woman before me. I truly feel her skin is ugly. The color black
>
> is ugly, yellow even more so. This black woman and I both belong eternally
>
> to ugly races...those like myself and this black woman can never forget the miserable
>
> feelings of inferiority in front of white people... (Russell 1991: 14).

This rather depressing passage suggests Japanese denigration of other races can be viewed as an attempt to alleviate insecurity about Japan's own racial status vis-a-vis the West.

Some critics have suggested that this racial inferiority manifests itself in anime and manga, in which many of the characters appear to be wide-eyed Caucasians. This criticism must be discussed in a sensitive way, because it suggests the extreme possibility that Japanese disparage their own racial features and would rather instead consume a Western standard of beauty. I would

suggest instead that this trend is more related to artistic techniques. For instance, it may be easier for an artist to express certain emotions and qualities, such as surprise and innocence, through wider eyes or eyes that can change shape. Hair color is another issue; many American consumers may wonder why anime characters have blonde, red, or any hair colors than the black typically associated with Asians. When manga is drawn in black and white, it is repetitive (and perhaps confusing for the reader) if every character has black hair and almond-shaped eyes. Thus, various hair colors, eye shapes, heights, and body types are used to provide character distinction and dimension. Also, many Americans also ignore or do not realize the fact that not all Japanese people have black hair and tiny frames. Some do have black hair, but others have light brown or even reddish-brown hair.

By no means is racial stereotyping limited to black people. Caucasians are often depicted in manga and anime as boorish, hairy, and impolite; this stereotype most likely hearkens back to the nineteenth century, when the "red-headed devil" Europeans forcibly opened Japan up to trade. Chinese are usually slightly arrogant and self-absorbed, while Native Americans, when they apppear, are almost always some sort of spiritual guru or guide who is very much in touch with nature. Japan is notorious for its prejudice against Koreans, who are almost never depicted in anime or manga. While skin color and ethnicity may be a part of this ethnic stereotyping, the overriding notion is that all of these stereotyped ethnicities are not Japanese; that is, they are gaijin (literally, "outside people"). Karen Hill Anton, a black woman who has lived in Japan for over twenty years, states that blacks in Japan "recognize that they are first and foremost part of that larger group called gaijin" (De Witt 1995). Even white businessmen feel that they are treated as outsiders. The Japanese group commonality seems to be based less on skin color and more on national origin.

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However, while the Japanese may think of Japan as a homogenous society, there are significant minority presences in Japan. The *burakumin*, an outcast caste of ethnic Japanese, is a group that has been discriminated against for generations. In the feudal era, the *burakumin* were Japanese who did work that was considered dirty and unpure; butchers, tanners, and people who handled dead bodies were included in this group. Even today, the descendants of the *burakumin* face discrimination and economic and social disparity. Though the *burakumin*, visibly no different from other Japanese, there are professional services that investigate family backgrounds which can reveal a *burakumin*'s family secret. Koreans in Japan generally have higher unemployment rates than the general population, and many find limited professional and educational opportunities (Weiner 1997: 83). Chinese, Ainu, and Okinawans also constitute minority populations in Japan. Koreans and Chinese may legally become Japanese citizens, but in the process, they must take Japanese names and give up all traces of their ethnicity (Weiner 1997: 231). Thus, they are forced to either fit in with a homogenous image, or be labeled as foreigners, despite the fact that many Chinese and Korean families have lived in Japan for generations. Yet still, when the United Nations called for nations to end discrimination against minorities, Japan's official position was that there are no minorities in Japan, and thus no discrimination (Weiner 1997: 227).

Despite a general unwillingness to confront race, there are groups and people in Japan that are fighting against discrimination. In 1990, a Japanese human rights group allied with blacks to demonstrate in Tokyo against social discrimination ("Narratives of Denial" 1991: 426). Groups such as the Japan Afro-American Friendship Association seek to foster better relationships between black and Japanese people ("Narratives of Denial" 1991: 427). There have also been legal efforts. When Brazilian Ana Bortz took legal action against a shop owner who discriminated against her in 1999, the case became the first racial discrimination case recognized by a Japanese court when the court ruled in Bortz's favor (Watts 1999). Korean groups are lobbying for voting

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rights, and groups such as the Buraku Liberation League (BLL) seek domestic laws that will respect human rights for all ethnic groups in Japan (Weiner 1997: 74). There are anime that seem to be more accepting of different cultures. For instance, the series *Samurai Champloo* uses hip-hop music as its backdrop. One of the main characters, Mugen, is a free-spirited, fiery-tempered, rebellious Okinawan, who, despite his penchant for getting into trouble, is likeable and seems very loyal to friends. Viewers might infer that much of his anger towards authority stems from past mistreatment and prejudice, and in one episode, Mugen intercedes on behalf of an Ainu who is being mistreated by police.

At the same time, we must consider American racism in cartoons. American cartoonists may claim that Americans have "matured" beyond racism, but such statements do not erase the problem. Remarkably similar to Japan, many older animators claimed ignorance of racial stereotypes and racism. Walter Lantz, whose cartoons included caricatures of African-Americans, felt that his depictions were not racist and were not meant to offend any viewers (Cohen 1997: 50), yet his cartoons garnered several complaints from the NAACP. A Universal Studios representative explained to a concerned NAACP spokesman that "when he got into an argument with his co-workers he did not hesitate to use words such as 'sheenie' or 'kike' and that they referred to him as 'thick headed Mick'" (Cohen 1997: 52).
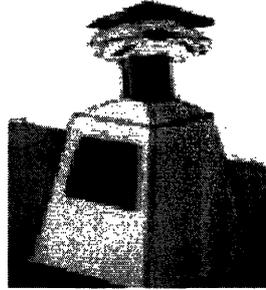
A Tom and Jerry
cartoon caricatures
Chinese people.
http://looney.goldenag
ecartoons.com

Of course, today racial caricatures and slurs have virtually disappeared from American cartoons, and in many cases, so has race. For example, the eighties cartoon *Thundercats* feature a catlike race of human-like characters who closely resemble animals. For instance, Cheetara has yellow skin and hair with black spots, like a cheetah, while Tigra has orange skin and black stripes. Such characters are hard to characterize as any particular ethnicity, but most of the characters seem to have Caucasian features, the mechanic Panthro seems to be African-American (Hendershot 1998: 104). He has a broad, flattened nose and his voice sounds African-American. He is the only Thundercat to wear spikes on his outfit, which Hendershot contends makes him the most violent, scary-looking Thundercat. *Transformers* has similarly ethnically-coded characters, except that they are robots rather than feline-humanoids. This question of representation is difficult. Is it racist to have an ethnically-coded character? Is it better to have a uniform, Caucasian-coded cast? Perhaps the animators were not even considering race when they created these fantasy characters, or they were hoping to avoid questions of racism by attempting to obliterate race altogether, while at the same time feeling an obligation to create diverse characters. The intentions may have been innocent, but considering America's turbulent racial history, we are not approaching this question with a "clean slate"; race seems to be in the back of America's mind at most times.

The previous examples necessitate that we ponder what kinds of representations are actually racist. I assume that the creators of *Thundercats* and *Transformers* had no racist or mean-spirited intentions, but some may argue that they create token minority characters. In other words, Panthro and Jazz (a presumably "African-American" Transformer) are present merely to prevent protests that minority characters are not represented. One might imagine that the Thundercats' varied skin tones would be enough diversity, but was it necessary to make the panther-based character (which brings to mind for many Americans the Black Panthers) a mechanic that sounds and looks African-American? At the same time, it might have been racist to deny Panthro's voice actor, an African-American, the role because his natural voice sounds "too black", and the Thundercats logically need a mechanic to maintain and invent their high-maintenance equipment and machinery. But quite often token characters are cut from the same stereotypical mold to emphasize that "yes, this cartoon has a black character". Thus, these characters tend to have little depth.

While Panthro's offensiveness may be debateable, cartoons such as *The Simpsons* and *South Park* are more blatant in their racist representations. In one episode of *South Park*, a Japanese toy company brainwashes American children with the Pokemon rip-off, Chinpokomon. The toy teaches children that America is evil, and that Japan is good and destined to take over the world (the plot implies that Japan, not satisfied with losing World War II, is now recruiting American children to pick up where the Japanese military left off in 1945). When a concerned local toy store owner visits Japan to question the Chinpokomon manufacturers, the Japanese businessmen fawningly reassure him that they are merely humble Japanese men who are in awe of the large size of American men's genitals. Of course, this flattery and self-deprecation distracts the American store owner from the issue at hand, and the American, quite pleased with himself and his "endowment", concludes that the Japanese men are actually all right after all, and then departs the

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toy company with satisfaction. This episode is reminiscent of World War II American propaganda that portrayed the Japanese as apologetic smooth-talkers on the surface, but always waiting with hidden cloak and dagger to betray Americans' trust. True to form, after the American leaves, the president of the Japanese toy company berates his subordinate for not properly concealing "the plan", and then announces that it is time to finally mobilize the brainwashed American children. The Japanese are not the only caricatured race. In the mostly-white community of South Park, the lone black child is named Token. Regular *South Park* viewers realize that the show's goal is to make fun of everyone and everything. Nothing is exempt; all religions and races are ridiculed. Even the white town residents are depicted as drunken red-neck "crackers". Eric Cartman, one of the main characters, insults his friend Kyle on a regular basis because Kyle is Jewish (one of the show's creators is also Jewish). Cartman is a notorious bigot against almost everything, but he is the dumb group member, and many episodes revolve around Cartman being humiliated or taught some sort of lesson by his classmates. *The Simpsons* has similar Asian caricatures, including the Hindu Apu (the stereotypical "thank you, come again" convenience store owner), Chinese real estate agent Cookie Kwan, and even a "guest appearance" from the Yakuza. These shows poke fun at racial stereotypes, but does that make it right just because it is tongue-in-cheek jest aimed targeting everyone? Is it alright for two friends of different races to privately joke about each other's ethnicity, with the understanding that the joking is just harmless fun? The animator who claimed his friends called him "thick headed Mick" would probably have applauded the humor. While some viewers laugh at how inane the lampooned stereotypes are, others feel that racism is too serious an issue to be joking about.

VIII. Conclusion

American society is rife with crime and violence. Some citizens feel the problem is that children see violence and sex on television, in movies, and in video games. There are two problems with this idea. First, before television was censored, the cartoons that children watched had more gun violence than now, as I have described. So would that not mean that crime should have been worse before cartoons were censored, and that the crime rate should have dropped by now? We can see that this conclusion is not the reality. Second, I again point out the remarkably low crime rate in Japan as opposed to the United States. So many Americans complain that Japanese anime, manga and video games are a bad influence on American children, yet in Japan, where consumers view and play the same products (except that they have the uncensored versions), there are no grim outlooks such about crime and violence like in America. I am not necessarily arguing against censorship, but I assert that it does not solve societal problems. As one American television producer said, "Television alone isn't responsible for teaching violence. [Vice President Spirow] Agnew recommends violence by supporting the shooting in Cambodia. Television and movies are fall guys for a sick society. It's easier to point the finger at them than look at Agnew, and Vietnam, and poverty" Hendershot 1998: 32). Improved education and a remedy for American poverty would probably do a great deal more towards lowering the crime rate than censorship. As the producer mentioned, even the American government sponsors violent resolutions to international conflicts. Perhaps here it is significant to note that Japan is demilitarized and therefore probably has a different attitude about conflict resolution than many Americans.

There is also the question of whose interests censorship benefits. I have already

discussed the arbitrary nature of censorship. One censor may decide that he does not have a particular problem with milder words such as "crap", while other censors may feel the word is completely inappropriate for children. Thus at times censorship may be left more to personal preference rather than a solid idea of what is best for young viewers. We must also remember that network television is a business, and if a network feels that certain violent or sexual content will be bad for business, then those scenes will be censored. A look at network fines gives us a further idea about where censorship lies in the list of priorities: in August 1991, the FCC fine for violating children's television rules was $10,000, while the fine for "inadequate tower lighting and marking" was $20,000 (Hendershot 1998: 15).

Lastly, I would like to conclude that childhood values in Japan and the United States are more similar than most Americans believe. I have already shown that many American animators are aware of their older audiences and that they often slip in jokes that younger viewers will not understand. This knowledge is closer to the Japanese idea adults as well as children enjoy anime and manga. I have also discussed cartoons such as *South Park* and *The Simpsons*, which are geared towards older audiences, much the same way that certain anime and manga are targeted to older consumers in Japan. I have also shown American cartoons have a large amount of imitable violence, though usually without the blood of some anime and manga. As well, until recently sexuality was a lot more common in cartoons. I established that not all parents in Japan happily allow their children to consume violent and sexual manga and anime as many Americans would believe, as is clear from the anti-manga movements. Opinions about such subject matter are varied in both countries. I hope this paper has cleared up some of the misconceptions that Americans have about Japanese children's media, and that it has provided a better understanding of America's own struggle with morality and decency.

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