# ISLANDS OF EIGHT-MILLION SMILES:
# POP-IDOL PERFORMANCES AND THE FIELD OF SYMBOLIC PRODUCTION

by

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on the production and development of a conspicuous, widespread culture phenomenon in contemporary Japan, which is characterized by numerous young, media-promoted personalities, or pop-idols, who are groomed for public consumption. The research, based on eighteen months of in-depth fieldwork in the Japanese entertainment industry, aims to contribute to the understanding of the allegorical role played by pop-idols in the creation of youth culture. Pop-idols are analyzed as personified symbols that function as vehicles of cultural production. The principal issues suggested in this research include: the criteria of pop-idol production; the ways in which pop-idols are produced; the perceptions of pop-idol performances by producers, performers, and consumers; the ways in which idol personalities are differentiated from each other; the ways in which pop-idol performances are distinguished from other styles or genres; and the social, cultural, political, economic, and historical roots as well as consequences of pop-idols' popularity. These issues are explored through the examination of female pop-idols.

The single, most important function of pop-idols is to represent young people's fashions, customs, and lifestyles. To this end, the pop-idol industry generates a variety of styles that can provide the young audience with pathways toward appropriate adulthood. They do this within their power structure as well as their commercial interest to capitalize on adolescence – which in Japan is considered the period in which individuals are expected to explore themselves in the adult social world. The stylized promotion, practiced differently by promotion agencies that strive to merchandise pop-idol images and win public recognition, constitutes a field of symbolic contestation. The stage is thus set for an investigation of the strategies, techniques, and processes of adolescent identity formation as reified in the construction of idol personalities.

This dissertation offers a contextualized account of dialogue that occurs between capitalism, particular rhetoric of self-making, and the lifestyle of consumers, mediated by pop-idols and their manufacturing agencies that function together as the cultural apparatus. The analysis developed in this dissertation hopes to provide theoretical and methodological contributions to the study of celebrities in other social, cultural, and historical settings.

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# CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

## Idol Performances: Research Goals and Problems

In myth, Japan has been characterized as islands inherited by the so-called *yaoyorozu no kami* or "eight-million gods." Each of these gods has a name, gender, and personal quality. Each performs a role, interacts with other gods, and uses divine powers to bring forth various earthly effects. Indeed, each god is considered an architect of the Japanese landscape and a protector of a local community. In the religious tradition of *shintō* or the "way of the gods," Japanese people look up to these gods as sacred figures. Seasonal rituals are held to honor these gods, and people make visits to local shrines and worship them.

In this anthropological study, I intend to characterize the present-day Japanese consumer society as "islands of eight-million smiles" in reference to numerous images of young, media-promoted personalities who are known as *aidoru* or "pop-idols." Like *yaoyorozu no kami*, pop-idols are projected as public personae, and they are adored by many of their followers. Yet, these personalities and their images are produced and used by their manufacturing agencies for commercial profit. Pop-idols are created and groomed for public consumption, especially consumption by Japanese adolescents for whom they are designed to perform as role models in fashions and lifestyles.

This thesis will focus on the process in which young women are transformed by the entertainment industry into pop-idols. The principal issues suggested in this research include: the characteristics of pop-idols; the ways in which pop-idols are produced; the perceptions of pop-idol performances by producers, performers, and consumers; the ways in which idol personalities are differentiated from each other; the ways in which pop-idol performances are distinguished from other styles or genres; the social, cultural, political, economic, and historical roots as well as the consequences of the popularity of pop-idols; and the ways in which pop-idols influence their fans. These issues will be explored through the venue in which female pop-

idols are produced for public consumption, particularly for male fans. The theme of this thesis contributes to the understanding of a social institution that mass produces prefabricated fantasies, customs and trends as a form of contemporary folklore.

Over the last three decades, the pop-idol industry has been a vital domain of popular culture production in Japan. As entertainers who sing, dance, and act, pop-idols commonly appear in television programs, release CDs, and strike shapely poses in fashion magazines, posters and billboards. Hundreds of teenagers, female and male, are recruited every year, each hoping to become one of the adorable public figures who represent youth in Japanese society through stylized performances. Many independent support groups develop when hopeful candidates make their debut. The entertainment industry responsible for the creation and promotion of these performers organizes advertising campaigns and official fan clubs to capture public attention, enhance imagination, manipulate the desire of love-struck fans, and absorb young people into the system of capitalist production. This study will investigate how these activities and events are organized in reference to the idea of marketing of female pop-idols particularly for male audiences.

Images of pop-idols are commoditized in a variety of so-called "idol goods" or *aidoru guzzu*, including photo albums, promotion videos, and calendars. Pop-idol images also appear on stationery, with their smiling faces printed on notebook covers, note pads, pencil cases, and numerous accessories. They are also represented in mass market print media. Hundreds of books and articles on pop-idols can be classified into popular, semi-academic, and academic genres -- some of which are written by journalists, while others are written by cultural critics and researchers (see appendix A). Many essays, purportedly written by pop-idols and presented as first-person accounts, are published and sold each year. In addition, there are university idol fan-clubs and support-groups that publish their own magazines, otherwise known as *aidoru mini-komi shi* or "idol mini-communication magazines," which contain heated discussions

about adorable idol personalities as well as idol pop-song ranking charts based on fan evaluations (appendix I, section 3). Together these events and commodities constitute the so-called, *aidoru būmu* or "pop-idol fad."

The pop-idol phenomenon is anthropologically significant because it demonstrates how the commercial industry operates as an institution that creates and reproduces substantiating symbols and rituals in a form of popular art. This system of production utilizes its human resources as capital, packaging young performers as pop-idol commodities. Packaging involves stylizing performers into personalities who can represent both prominent cultural values as well as innovative social and commercial trends. To be an adorable idol is to become a "true representative of the Japanese youth of this time." Thus, pop-idol production, the goal of which is to influence the public, is exercised in social, cultural and historical contexts. The pop-idol industry can be perceived as a terrain in which cultural symbols and their images are constantly generated, contested, and refined. In this sense, I use Bourdieu's (1993) "field of cultural production" as a working framework for subsequent analyses in this thesis. This will allow me to examine the process of cultural construction by focusing on an arena in which symbolic images and art-forms are produced, contested, and changed through the interactions of individuals who occupy different positions in a society. This bares similarity to Robertson's (1998) concept of "encompassing cultural matrix" that focuses on popular culture as a site in which certain art-forms are selected and appropriated by actors who make various assumptions about culture, history, society, ideology, identity, gender, race, class, and so forth. In popular culture, one can examine the particular configuration of these assumptions at particular times and in specific places. As Robertson elaborates:

> I locate popular culture in an encompassing cultural matrix... in which sociohistorical forces and relations are generated and reproduced, stimulated by encounters with ideas, things, and peoples both within and outside the matrix as a whole or any area in particular... The figure-ground relationship between popular culture and culture emerges and develops continuously as a complex

> series of communications technologies, increased literacy, a market economy (nominally) premised on choice and competition, and other factors; these factors, moreover, appear in different combinations at different historical moments (Robertson 1998:35).

Anthropological analysis of popular culture itself, therefore, contributes to the understanding of a process in which the ideas, images, worldviews and practices of a segment of society are framed to become part of cultural competence. While Robertson's indication is made in reference to a specific genre of all-female popular theatre, *takarazuka* revue, that has existed in Japan since 1914, I will investigate the more recent and widespread popular cultural phenomenon that constitutes Japan's entertainment industry as well as commercial network.

I take the female pop-idol industry as a socializing agent, or agent of public education in the broad sense of the term (see, for example, Mukerji and Schudson 1991; Barnouw and Kirkland 1992; Creighton 1994a). Just as the Hollywood system of production socializes American adults into the values and dreams of their society through representations of glamorous movie stars in films, Japanese pop-idol performances educate the public by means of patterns that appear through such forms of mass communications as human relations and attitudes. Unlike school education, the entertainment function of female pop-idol performances appeals to the emotions and desires rather than to the intellect (see Powdermaker 1950:14).

There is a great deal of discussion in the social sciences about celebrities, especially regarding issues such as how popular personalities represent social values and affect the way people view their world. While some of these studies describe how pop-star texts can be read and interpreted sociologically, the vast majority tends to theorize about consumption in discussions of fan attitudes and activities. The current research concentrates on an area that has not previously been well investigated: that is, the selection and production of pop-idols themselves, and constellation of in the probable meanings attached to these young personalities by their producers in the entertainment industry. There are numerous published sources on the

idol-boom phenomenon in the Japanese language, including academic, semi-academic, and popular references. Provocative but somewhat underdeveloped discussions of pop-idols by Japanese academics include case studies by Ogawa (1988) from the standpoint of ethnomusicology (i.e., pop-idols as personal constituents of urban sound-production in present-day Japan), Inamasu (1989) using media theory (pop-idols as signifiers of young people's lifestyles and modes of communication in the age of television), and Ogura (1989,1990,1991) taking a feminist perspective (pop-idols as objects of sexual fantasies and gender identities)(appendix I). Arguments presented in these works, however, are often anecdotal, and analyses rarely go beyond the authors' own interpretations of selective idol-texts. In recent years, more theoretical and ethnographic work has been done on Japanese popular culture in English, some of which include studies of the pop-idol phenomenon as part of analyses of popular expressions of gender, adolescent imagery, and commodity forms (Skov and Moeran 1995; Allison 1996; Robertson 1998). Yet, the system of pop-idol production and its commercial basis have not been investigated.

This thesis is based on 18-months of ethnographic fieldwork in the Japanese entertainment industry, with a focus on celebrities as sites where culture is embodied in forms of the collective representations of idolized "selves." This thesis will demonstrate how performers, producers, and the managers who participate in pop-idol promotion manipulate and are manipulated by the system of commercial production as well as the industrial ideology which reinforces this system. The consumption of idol images and interpretation by fans will not be examined, except as an integral part of the process of constructing and distributing pop-idols as cultural commodities. I will suggest ways that images produced by the entertainment industry may be read by consumers, but I did not canvas the consumers or their literature to discover how they understand these images or what they actually do with them in present-day Japanese society. On the other hand, I will illustrate the opinions and activities of the people who

produce and embody pop-idol performances in order to reveal what cultural meanings these producers and actors use in framing the images they try to produce.

Relevant to this investigation is a series of guiding concepts that generate the theoretical understanding of identity formation in the Japanese entertainment industry, such as idol, celebrity, and performance. This will be elaborated in subsequent discussion. I will use these concepts to examine how young performers craft their selves into popular personalities as they interact with their producers and fans. Since their emergence in Japan as a commercial genre during the late 1960s, pop-idol performances have become a nationwide phenomenon: a whole domain of popular culture, built around youth and heavily sponsored by the mass media, the advertising business, and corporations specializing in the creation of profit-generating teen-oriented fashions. Promotion agencies orchestrate the development and marketing of pop-idols and idol-groups, attracting hundreds of young men and women each year who hope to become stars, if not members of the adoring audience who consume their performances. Yet, many "wanna-be" novices who eagerly join the pop-idol industry themselves find that there is more to the crafting of their images than just presenting themselves before the public. They are subjected to overt forms of cultural and commercial discipline that transform them into popular and marketable personalities. Many idol candidates were made to perform in ways their producers want them to perform, and they are scorned and even yelled at by the producers if they cannot perform well. Each day, these novices were put through many hours of voice training and choreography lessons. For some of these performers, the industry provided nothing but competitions and hardships. Subsequent chapters will investigate specific ways in which the performers' self is transformed, capitalized and exploited in order to uncover the ideological mechanism of the pop-idol industry.

Pop-idols, referred to in Japan as *aidoru* from the English "idols," is a derivation of a term that originally referred to an image of a person or thing used as an object of devoted worship, or

something visible but without substance.[1] As such, this word connotes what Bacon once defined in the following philosophical terms:

> The idols imposed by words on the understanding are of two kinds. They are either names of things which do not exist..., or they are names of things which exist, but yet confused and ill-defined, and hastily and irregularly derived from realities... The [latter] class, which springs out of a faulty and unskillful abstraction, is intricate and deeply rooted... For it both signifies that which easily spreads itself round any other body; and that which in itself is indeterminate and cannot solidize; and that which readily yields in every direction; and that which easily divides and scatters itself; and that which easily unites and collects itself; and that which readily flows and is put in motion; and that which readily clings to another body and wets it; and that which is easily reduced to a liquid, or being solid easily melts (Bacon 1985[1625]:284).

As this statement shows, idols, or idolized things, are subject to meaningful representation and transformation. One of the tasks of the social sciences and humanities, as proposed by Bacon, is to uncover through an inductive method of analysis the social function of idols in specific cultural contexts. Such a task must focus on the process in which particular individuals, groups and institutions, in their attempts to create a meaningful lifestyle, idolize things in the world. With this in mind, the skillful use of the modern Japanese mass media and marketing techniques by actors, board of directors, stockholders, advertisers, and distributors to assure the place of pop-idols in popular culture and consumer society will be specified in concrete instances and cultural settings. Labor relations between these actors and their cultural significance will be shown ethnographically.

Pop-idols include young female and male personalities who are considered to be "the girls and boys next door." As such, pop-idol production presumes the construction of gender ideals and sexual stereotypes. Male and female pop-idols reflect two gender categories: maleness and femaleness. There are also some individuals and groups whose performances represent androgyny by challenging the stability of sex-gender representation premised on a male versus female dichotomy. My focus in this thesis will be on the production of female pop-idols as representatives of Japanese adolescent femaleness, particularly for male fans. This focus is

determined by my theoretical interest and by practical limitations. On the one hand, I became interested in understanding how women are the focus of representation in popular culture in a society that has been characterized as "male dominated." As I stepped into the Japanese entertainment industry, I immediately became aware that pop-idol producers were nearly exclusively men, although the number of female pop-idols surpassed that of male pop-idols. Images of adolescent femaleness became the subject of constant contestation, differentiation, and reformation among these male producers. Thus, I wanted to examine the ideological implications of femininity represented by female pop-idols in the Japanese commercial industry.

On the other hand, I had limited access to the small number of producers and performers who controlled the production of masculinity through the performances of male pop-idols. In the end, I could not gather sufficient data for my thesis from these people.

### *A Vignette of an Emerging Pop-Idol*

In the spring of 1996, Japan's mega telecommunications corporation, Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corporation (NTT), posted a large billboard amidst a busy street in the Shibuya district of Tōkyō. On this billboard was the image of Ryōko Hirosue, a slender 16 year-old who made her way into the Tōkyō-based entertainment world from the local prefecture of Kōchi to join approximately 1,100 of the so-called female pop-idols (*josei aidoru*).[2] Hirosue acquired her chance to pursue a career in Japanese show business by entering an audition, known as the *Clearasil Shiny Face Contest*, and winning its grand prize.

On the billboard, Hirosue appeared in short black hair, a clean white shirt and short brown skirt. She was crouching down to making direct eye contact with the viewer. In her hand was *DoCoMo*, a miniature paging machine that NTT had invented. Toward her right was a catch phrase, "[I] will start improving. Ryōko Hirosue" (*yoku naru, o hajimemasu. Hirosue Ryōko*),

that complemented another statement toward her left, "Improving. *DoCoMo*" (*yoku naru. DoCoMo*). Identical billboards and posters appeared in various other locations throughout Japan, along with the airing of television commercials that advertised *DoCoMo* and featured Hirosue in action (figure 1).

The Japanese advertising industry often uses puns to make an impression on the public. The word *DoCoMo* can be a pun that stands for *dokomo*, which means "every part" or "all aspects." This helps the industry to signify the paging machine as something that is improving in all aspects of technology. At the same time, it signified Hirosue as someone who can improve herself in all aspects of personal quality. On the other hand, *DoCoMo* can stand for another Japanese word *dokodemo*, which means "anywhere" or "everywhere." This represents the paging machine as something that can accompany its users wherever they go, and Hirosue as someone whose name and face can be known everywhere. Whichever is the case, the paging machine and Hirosue are marked as "valuable."

It did not take long for Hirosue to attract public attention and become one of the celebrated public personalities of the year. Considered by many people as cute-looking, bright, and healthy, Hirosue appeared in numerous magazines, television shows, and radio programs. Her photo album was published in September, 1996, followed by the release of her debut single in April, 1997, with a song composed by Maria Takeuchi, a well-known singer and a song writer. Sources report that more than 360 thousand copies of the photo album (*SPA!* 10/23/1996:11), and 600 thousand copies of the CD (*Josei Jishin* 6/17/1997:10) were sold. These figures signify smash hits according to Japanese standards.

In spite of growing popularity, Hirosue down-played her celebrity status. In a column, *People This Week*, that appears in one of Japan's most widely read Japanese weekly magazines,

**Figure 1. An NTT *DoCoMo* advertisement poster featuring Ryōko Hirosue.**

for instance, the editor characterized Hirosue's talent as marvelous, to which Hirosue responded that she was "just ordinary." Hirosue argues:

> It's amazing for me to receive such a comment, but there is nothing unusual about me. I am told that to be nothing unusual is my charm. ...I mean I am just an average person. I get many fan letters from young women these days, and they say they want to "enter show business, too." When I told the members of my staff about it, they said "Doesn't it mean that if little Ryōko can do it, I can do it, too?" I wonder if this is a compliment or not (*SPA!* 10/23/1996:11).

Rather than confirming her uniqueness and accepting her celebrity status as many Western personalities might do, Hirosue presented herself as remarkably ordinary, leading the editor to comment that "her unaffected purity is the source of her cuteness and popularity" (1996:11).

This is only one of many cases that demonstrates not only the way in which an idol personality is produced and packaged by marketing corporations and popularized by the mass media, but also how appearances and attitudes qualify as an adorable personality. Hirosue's success story addresses the problem of socialization and in particular the formation of pop-idol identity through the interaction between 1) the performer and the industry, and 2) the industry and the public. It is a symbolic process whereby Hirosue frames her personality in a publicly adorable way and transforms herself from an ordinary young woman to a renowned public figure in Japanese popular culture and consumer society. This packaging of self, in which an adolescent persona is signified as "cute," "pure," "modest," and "full of promise," is, then, a cultural practice that aims to collectivize public imagination, taste, desire, or consciousness.

Many anthropological studies have previously demonstrated the significance of symbols in cultural performances and folk rituals to heighten the intensity of communication and thereby enhance the experience of those who are in need of transforming themselves. For example, among the Cuna of Panama, sacred wooden figures called *nuchu* that represent tutelary spirits are used by shamans to encourage women during difficult childbirth (Levi-Strauss 1963). In central Africa, when a Ndembu boy is initiated into the moral community of matured tribesmen,

blood of circumcision marks his passage into adulthood (Turner 1969,1974). Ritual flutes serve as funnels between the two sexual poles in the Sambia male-initiation ceremony of Papua New Guinea (Herdt 1982). Lenin became the charismatic symbol of the Russian revolution, leading people to transform their socio-political state of being. In France, the red and black banner became a politically meaningful symbol that heightened the spirits of French people to act against their social crisis in an event known in history as the Commune of 1871 (e.g., Moore and Myerhoff 1974; Schechner and Appel 1990; Laderman and Roseman 1996; Goody 1997).

Subsequent chapters will elaborate on scenes in which female pop-idols are employed as an allegorical means to achieve utilitarian ends, namely to create trends, merchandise commodities, and obtain commercial profits. The public celebration of pop-idols such as Hirosue in highly-industrialized present-day Japanese society demonstrates how traditional anthropological theories on symbolic ritual can be applied to the analysis of contemporary complex organizations that are attributed to capitalism.[3]

Given this approach, I will attempt to illustrate different aspects of pop-idol transformation in the Japanese entertainment industry and in particular the industry's attempt to capitalize on the transformation of adolescent female selves as they use pop-idols as the symbolic tool to organize youthful fashions and lifestyles. This will add a new dimension to the growing body of anthropological literature on adolescence and socialization. It will emphasize youth as a process wherein culture, including gender, ethnicity and class-values, is negotiated (or contested) and transmitted between adults and young people, as well as between peers (e.g., Davis and Davis 1988; Satō 1991a; White 1993; Pilkington 1994; Wulff 1995a).

### *Research Rationale*

Pop-idol performances, known collectively as *aidoru poppusu* or the "idol-pop," emerged in Japan in the late 1960s in the general category of popular music, or *kayōkyoku*. Unlike many of

its predecessors in popular performance that touched on more mature subjects and were targeted mainly at adults, pop-idols came to represent adolescence. In some aspects, they are roughly equivalent to performances of young idol pop-stars in other countries: the young Frank Sinatra and early Tony Bennett, the *Shirelles*, the *Shangri-Las*, Debbie Gibson, Candi, the *New Kids On The Block*, and the *Back Street Boys* of the United States; the *Beastie Boys*, *Shampoo*, and the *Spice Girls* of the United Kingdom; Paul Anka of Canada; *Menudo* of Mexico; and *2 be 3* of France.

Although they are employed in various settings, pop-idols are enmeshed in the rise and popularity of a particular media: television. In Japan, television ownership became a mark of the nation's socioeconomic well-being, or the primary means for codifying the middle class as a consumption category (e.g., Ivy 1993:248,249). Although their apparent crudeness was ridiculed by many Japanese adults at the time, idol performances developed into a nationwide phenomenon, triggering a teen-craze and producing a domain of popular culture sponsored by media institutions, advertising agencies and retail corporations that specialize in the creation of trends and customs. Contests were held each year in which hundreds of young women and men participated, hoping to become teen-idols. Many support groups and official fan clubs developed as idol candidates strove to make a career that could be traced through numerous media programmes, events, and publications. Together, these practices constituted the so-called "idol boom" (*aidoru būmu*) of the 1970s and 1980s. These practices not only continue today but are becoming widespread in other Asian countries as well.

Much has been written recently on the subject of popular performances, such as film, pop and rock music, fashion, and adverting. Many of case studies have used theories and methods that are derived from sociology, communications, business, economics, and history, contributing to the development of the hybrid discipline called cultural studies (e.g., Ewen 1976; Williamson 1980; Frith 1983,1988; Fiske 1989a,b; Ewen and Ewen 1992; see also

Grossberg *et al.* 1992; During 1993).[4] Most of these studies analyzed meanings of popular art-forms in modern Europe and North America based on assumptions about the world or social reality that are part of the researchers' own upbringing in these cultures. Others provide broad descriptions of popular arts and performances around the world or in certain regions of the world they call "non-Western," such as Asia, Africa, South America, and Polynesia (e.g., Lull 1987; Manuel 1988; Tomlinson 1991; Stokes 1994).

The present case study in anthropology is distinguished from these works in cultural studies by its ethnographic orientation. I approach idol performances as a field of cultural production rather than some meaningful social product – that is, a site where I can observe particular individuals, groups, and institutions interact with each other according to conventional norms, goals and interests. What these individuals, groups, and institutions do, how they do it, and how they account for what they do are all part of the empirically-based field research upon which this dissertation is founded. The analysis presented in this study could be used as a framework for understanding commercial organizations involving symbolic performances and interactive rituals elsewhere.

Primary data for this study was gathered during eighteen months of in-depth field research in Tōkyō, Japan, between the fall of 1994 and the summer of 1996, followed by supplementary fieldwork conducted intermittently until the summer of 1997. Although comparative cases are drawn in places from the popular performances of North America, Europe, and Asian countries outside Japan, the main objective of this study is not to be comparative. This study is intended to grasp the development of symbols as they are played out in the lives of Japanese people from their perspectives. Along with the discussion of physical and emotional concerns that may beset researchers undertaking fieldwork in a highly impersonal field of corporate institutions, this study provides a theoretical and methodological contribution to the anthropological literature on socialization and identity formation.

## Theoretical Orientations

The self is a work of art rather than given to us (Foucault 1984:350,351). It is a fluid category that is incessantly constructed and reorganized in the course of culturally patterned interactions (especially as it is brought to different forms of imaginary order), rather than a prefixed personal category that essentially characterizes an individual (Battaglia 1995:2; see also Schweder and Bourne 1984:194; Crapanzano 1990:403). With this in mind, a theoretical framework will be proposed in reference to comparative symbology and its applied significance to contemporary complex organizations. This framework will be used in the subsequent analysis of socialization as manifested in celebrities and their image-making agencies. The analysis will concentrate on the production of adolescent role models that provide the public with sources for experiencing selfhood in youth as fashioned, and therefore enhancing the creation of organizational reality in the context of popular culture and mass society.

### *Basic Terms and Theoretical Definitions*

Before developing a research framework, some key terms or concepts that appear throughout this thesis require definition. These include self, identity, performance, performing identity, celebrity, and idol. Rather than simply provide their dictionary definitions, I will try to contextualize each of these concepts in the light of existing anthropological literature. Theory, as Giddens notes, provides useful schemes to order and inform processes of inquiry into concrete aspects of social life (Giddens 1984:ix; see also Ortner 1984; Duranti 1988).

### *Selfhood and Identity*

By self, I mean the fundamental qualities that distinguish one person from another. An individual's consciousness of her or his own being in the world, or in relation to the society to which she or he belongs, will be referred to as identity. While the self will be treated as the

individual quality, identity will be used to mean the set of personal and behavioral characteristics by which this individual is recognizable as a member of a group.

In the recent discourse of anthropologists and other social scientists, the self is regarded as essentially entwined with the nexus of social interaction. The self is continually created and recreated under the influence of ideological forces. It is also affected by other subjects' histories, experiences, and representations (Battaglia 1995:1,2; see also Merleau-Ponty 1960; Mead 1962[1934]; Strathern 1979; Rosaldo 1984; Schweder and Bourne 1984; Crapanzano 1990; Ewing 1990). This understanding of selfhood -- as multifaceted and socially involved -- in the phenomenological and poststructural discourses of European and American social sciences has much to share with anthropological literature on Japan. For example, Doi's (1973) classic analysis of the popular Japanese concept *amae* or "indulgence" shows that selfhood is structured on the empathetic relationship between the one who seeks indulgence (*amaeru*) and the one who provides that indulgence (*amayakasu*). The most fundamental form of relationship based on indulgence is seen in the bond between Japanese children and their mothers. Hamaguchi (1977) theorizes the idea of a "contextualized human-being" (*kanjin*) *a la* Watsuji's (1935) discussion of *aidagara* or "interpersonal relationship," emphasizing the Japanese focus on the interconnected self vis-a-vis what Japanese researchers consider to be "Western" individualism (see also Nakane 1970; Makino 1978).

Moeran's (1986[1984]) study of the development of Japanese advertisements demonstrates that the strong cultural emphasis on the group prevents a strong form of individualism from developing in Japan, despite an increasingly occidental lifestyle accompanied by forms of consumerism in Japanese life. The extreme suspicion of individualism, considered as negatively ego-centric by the Japanese people, led advertisers to utilize the concept of *kosei* or "individuality" to imply personal creativity that does not lack the actor's concern for the good of

the group. *Kosei* is a term that neatly adopts the advantages of "Western-style" individualism without disrupting the spiritual unity felt by the Japanese public (1986:75).

Some of these concepts and model-oriented studies are part of a whole literature known as *nihonjinron* or "theory on Japanese" that is concerned with differentiating Japanese national identity from other, especially European and American, countries by pointing out aspects of Japan's cultural uniqueness (e.g., Mouer and Sugimoto 1986; Clammer 1997). What one sees in these theories is an effort to withstand reification of person, self, or identity as concepts rooted in ego-centrism by means of analyzing and developing folk models of self as embedded in interpersonal relationships. Of course, these alternative models of selfhood devote to the reinforcement, in academic language, of ideological and even racist cultural discourse (cf. Rosaldo 1984; Shweder and Bourne 1984).[5]

The reified Western notion of self is not adequate as an analytical construct for cross-cultural analysis. Therefore, Dumont (1986:9) calls for a liberation from modern individualistic preoccupations thereby allowing a more meaningful understanding of societies. For instance, Bharati (1985) has shown that the self is considered actionless and always attained in India. Building on these views, Whittaker holds that the idea of selfhood needs fundamental redefinition with respect to its perceptive difference between cultures. Whittaker writes:

> The work of ethnography knits together the social ambience created by people talking about their experiences and their beliefs, and this talk falls readily into the coffers of that particular Western metaphor. Discourses about the self serve cultural proclamations about persons and individuals, as we know them, and as we believe them to rightfully exist. In other cultures, however, research interests that focus on self could well be embarrassing, ethically questionable, and often a matter of some discomfort for those individuals invited by the anthropologist to conspire in the constructing of selves. ...The idea of self may mean very little, indeed, in the face of ascribed, prescribed, and even inscribed statuses and identities (Whittaker 1992:209).

Following this view, Whittaker contends that the study of selfhood and identity must be situated within the context-sensitive task of ethnography. As she continues:

> Reification of a concept, as in the case of the self, involves epistemological blunders anthropologists usually avoid. Imposing the concept uncritically puts into question the practice of grounded theory, where concepts are expected to emerge from the field. The concept cannot be assumed to be viable cross-culturally, despite the universalism implied in the notion of self and often revered as unquestioned truth. It will need careful examination in the light of comparative data (1992:209).

Thus, the meaning of concepts such as the self must be examined in accordance with the different cultural contexts in which the concept is used.

Such an attempt to move away from the presumed dichotomy between Western and non-Western selves, or between the self and the group, in the case of Japanese studies, is demonstrated by those who focus on the crafting of selves as embedded in reciprocal relationships. Kondō (1990), for instance, illustrates how the self and the social constitute one another in a small family business, or a training center for businessmen, where Kondō analyzed her own identity as a Japanese-American researcher through her participation in daily work and training programs. Based on her observations, Kondō (1990:48) postulates four analytical aspects of Japanese selfhood. These are:

1) Personhood and work are inextricable from each other, and people transform themselves as they transform the material world around them while engaged in their work or activities.

2) Identity is not a static object, but a creative process. Thus, the construction of self is a life-long occupation.

3) The crafting of self implies a concept of agency: that human beings create, work on, and enact their identities, sometimes by challenging the limits of the cultural constraints which constitute both selves and the ways these selves can be crafted.

4) One should speak of selves in the plural form, rather than the self as a global entity.

Kondō's more recent work applies this notion of the multiplicity of the self to the analysis of Japanese fashion designers. She shows how identities of these designers shift between Japan and Europe as they acquire the skill, master the know-how of Western fashion designs, and create their own work of art in which Japaneseness mingles with Western styles (Kondō 1992).

Bachnik (1989,1992,1994), using Peirce's semiotic *index* as a guiding concept, theorizes that the interdependence of the self is situated in context. Her approach concentrates on:

> the process by which participants constitute social situations, and thereby participate in a dynamic that includes the mutual process of their constituting and being constituted by social order. This process is the order, and this order includes the organization of self and society, since it is mutually constitutive of both (1994:5).

Thus, her study of interpersonal communication in a Japanese household shows how each member of the household indexes her or his mode of communicating with other members as well as outsiders. Each member expresses her or his emotion, use customary behaviors such as bowing, and selects speech according to different positions she or he takes within an axis of formality versus informality, or outside versus inside. This axis is regarded as having been established as prominent categorical contrasts in Japanese culture (1994:143-166).

In concurrence with this view, Kuwayama (1992) proposes a continuum between two polar extremes of the self and *seken*, or "public opinion," which serves as a measure for individuals to adjust their behaviors according to different interactive situations. Tobin's (1992a) study of the pedagogy of selfhood in a kindergarten demonstrates how Japanese preschools transform indulged toddlers into socially desirable students by teaching them how to make *kejime* or "distinctions" in their behaviors between relatively formal situations versus more casual ones, and move smoothly between them. Thus, *kejime* provides a way of defining shifting selves.

Kelsky's (1996) investigation of Japanese women's movements toward internationalism emphasizes the incomplete aspect of selfhood. She discusses how young Japanese women who are not satisfied with their current status in what they consider to be a male-dominant society seek to work abroad, have affairs with Caucasian men, and reify modern Western culture as a means to discover new selves and new lifestyles (*ikikata*). For these subjects, the West, and in particular the United States, is imagined as a kind of "promised land," the source of freedom, opportunity, and a new *ikikata*. The study further demonstrates cases where some of these

internationalist women come to realize the gap between their original ideals and empirical realities about the life in the West. In this study, Kelsky incorporates the notion of *akogare* or "unrealistic longing," and, in effect, explains how the practices of these internationalist Japanese women construct a continuum between "backward Japan" and "progressive modern West," along which they locate their own identities. *Akogare* signifies a desire to transform one's self, at least partially, in the other's image.[6]

Finally, Yano's (1997) case study is noteworthy in that it develops the notion of *amae* within the context of Japanese an examination of Japanese performers and fans. The study explores the relationship between the performer and audience, which is cultivated on stage and screen, or ritualized in fan clubs. Yano indicates as a point of interest how fans' attitudes about engaging in various activities to support their idols go with their admitting that these activities are manipulated by the big industry that tries to take advantage of their empathy. Based on a thorough investigation of these supporting activities, Yano concludes that the mutual dependency of pop stars and fans becomes a ritualized reciprocity, in which pop stars generate maternal and sexual emotions that impel their fans to support and do whatever they can to help. At the same time, the activities of pop stars support their emotional needs and form the basis of a relationship generated by a commercial organization (1997:346).

All in all, these case studies effectively show that while the ideas of selfhood and identity clearly exist in Japan, they are considered as relational, incomplete and constituted through multiple and changing positions of agencies within an interactive space-time. These terms will be used in the same sense throughout the present study.

### *Performance*

As the discussion of Yano's study has partially demonstrated, performance within the field of anthropology is theoretically oriented toward the problem of identity and representation --

that is, how the self is *presented* and *identified* in socially, culturally, and historically specified contexts. Goffman's (1959) classic work is notable here in the sense that it indicates self as a performer, motivated by impression management, who is dialectically poised in a world of others where the presentation of self becomes the single, most important reason to exist. His notion of self as existing alone in this social world, however, still echoes the Western individualist (or essentialist) notion of selfhood (Whittaker 1992:200).

Suggestive recent theories on performing identities by Epstein (1987), Fuss (1991), and Marcuse (1995) among others point out that identities such as gender, class, and ethnicity are less a function of knowledge than performance, or less a matter of final discovery than perpetual reinvention (Fuss 1991:7). Epstein (1987) argues that identity is neither a determinative characteristic of a person which unwinds from within nor a serial enactment of socially imposed roles that can vary considerably over the course of one's life, but an intermediate position between these two extremes (cf. Ganon and Simon 1973; Weeks 1991). For Epstein, as with Berger and Luckman (1967:174), identity emerges from the dialectic between the individual and society. Identity, at its core, is constituted relationally through one's involvement with (and incorporation of) significant others and her or his integration into communities (Epstein 1987:29). Thus, to the extent that identity is socially rooted, it is inescapable, and to the extent that it is selectively acquired, it is transformable. In this way, identity functions as the locus of both cultural continuity and change.

The notion of performing identities refers to performance as an act of identity-formation. Epstein notes:

> people make their own identities, but they do not make them just as they please. Identities are phenomena that permit people to become acting "subjects" who define who they are in the world, but at the same time identities "subject" those people to the controlling power of external categorization (1987:30).

In a similar vein, Judith Butler observes in her reference to gender identity. She writes:

> There is no volitional subject behind the mime who decides, as it were, which gender it will be today. On the contrary, the very possibility of becoming a viable subject requires that a certain gender mime be already underway. The "being" of the subject is no more self-identical than the "being" of any gender; in fact, coherent gender, achieved through an apparent repetition of the same, produces as its *effect* the illusion of a prior and volitional subject. In this sense, gender is not a performance that a prior subject elects to do, but gender is *performative* in the sense that it constitutes as an effect the very subject it appears to express (Butler 1991:24, emphasis original).

These statements present the view that identity and subjectivity are created through the practice of performance.

In concurrence with these theorists, Marcuse demonstrates in his study of eccentrics that the eccentric self of those who are considered to express personality disorder in terms of formal pathological protocols can be reconsidered in terms of rhetorical construction. He contends that eccentricity is "a thoroughly performative, sensorial, and unself-conscious response to the social conditions that define one's selfhood" and "conditions that involve hidden or only partially understood parallel worlds of agency" (Marcuse 1995:52). Thus, eccentricity is a form of becoming a personality through performance.

Elsewhere, the manifestation of performing identity in the process of becoming is well illustrated in reference to performing arts. Examples of this include Bethe and Brazell (1990) in their discussion of Japan's six-century-old *nōh* theater, and Zarrilli's (1990) examination of Indian *kathakali* acting in comparison to other genres of traditional Asian performances, among others. Both of these studies show how actors acquire performative skills through a long-term process that consists of the constant repetition of set exercises. Zarrilli calls such an extensive process of performative apprenticeship "in-body disciplines" due to the fact that:

> daily repetition of physical exercises and performance techniques [as commonly observed in traditional Asian performances] encodes the techniques *in the body*. By daily practice all physical and mental obstacles in the way of correct practice are gradually eliminated. The goal of such virtuosic systems is reaching a state of "accomplishment" ...in which the doer and done are one. Through such actualized practice comes both control and transcendence of "self" (Zarrilli 1990:131, emphasis original).

In a similar tone, Bethe and Brazell contend that:

> a knowledge of *nōh* is only possible through somatic, oral, and psychic immersion in the art. To practice *nōh*, to know *nōh*, is to have it ingrained in body and psyche. ...Mind and body function as one [in such a state]; intellectual understanding is fused with visceral knowledge (Bethe and Brazell 1990:186).

For the actors, the processes in which these established styles are acquired become consistent with a way of life toward the perfection of selfhood.[7]

Stylized promotion is a common feature of pop-idol performances. Idol candidates, like students of martial arts and other performing arts, are encouraged to transform themselves from a raw, unknowledgeable, inexperienced, and unskilled youth to seasoned, knowledgeable, experienced, integrated, and skilled actors as they master the art which is specific to the genre and thereafter establishing their own style. Here, genre is understood in light of folklore studies: as a set of cultural expressions characterized by formal features, thematic domains, and potential social uses. As the grammar of each language is unique and has its own logical consistency, so the native classification of oral (or performative) literature has its own structural unity. In this sense, genre is considered as part of the ethnic system that constitutes a grammar of literary art-forms that affirms the communication rules which govern the expression of complex messages within the cultural context (Ben-Amos 1969:285). Performers develop individual styles within a genre in order to affect the audience, and in doing so they organize relationships among the particular components of the genre (see also Bakhtin 1986:60). Style, therefore, is a personal articulation of a genre, and any style is inseparably related to typical forms of communicative genres. Thus, various genres can reveal various facets of the individual personality, and individual style can be found in various interrelations with the language of the nation, culture, or community that produces these genres (1986:63). The names of genres are indicative of the attributes people perceive in their verbal art-forms (Ben-Amos 1969:286).

Pop-idol performances developed as a commercial genre in the category of popular music. Their form is distinguished from other genres in the same musical category, such as new music, rock'n roll, and folk ballads known as *enka*, by what has been termed "fancy soft-core performances for middle-class teenagers." The softness of pop-idols is represented by the combination of fancy costumes, romantic messages, and friendly attitudes, which constitute pop-idols as non-threatening, non-controversial figures that are useful in maintaining social harmony. This form is distinguished from the "hard core" stoicism represented by rock performers, who typically wear leather jackets, put on ready-to-fight attitudes, and sing songs that depict a fondness for anarchy, violence, and a fierce temper. The soft-core image of pop-idols is also different from the working-class identity represented by the ballads of so-called *enka* performers, the contents of which focus on the hardships of life in a contemporary world or longing for the lost traditions of the past. The main goal of pop-idol performances is to provide the public with a series of fancy, bright, and healthy-looking role models for younger adolescents. As a genre, pop-idol performances concentrate on what it means to be appropriate Japanese boys and girls in the age of economic affluence.

Of particular interest for the purpose of this research is the idea of *kata*, a term in Japanese that can be translated as "form," "style," or "module." Zarrili introduces *kata* in his article to refer to the set form whose constant repetition "leads to a level of ability beyond empty, vacuous, presence-less, and powerless mimicry" (Zarrilli 1990:133). Although Bethe and Brazell do not explicate this Japanese performative concept, they imply the significance of this idea in the apprenticeship of *nōh* theatre. They argue:

> At every level of training, teaching concentrates on form, even though the art of a performer is judged by his expressive intensity. While learning the form, the young performer is expected to make it his own and fill it with meaning. This process is regarded as too personal, too individualized to teach overtly. Yet it is exactly this which constitutes the secret art and which the observant student hopes to gain from a master (Bethe and Brazell 1990:174).

This idea of *kata* is similar to the notion of "frame" discussed by Goffman (1974), as a way of organizing one's selfhood and experience in a specified context of action or interaction . It is also akin to "casting" as discussed by Crapanzano (1990) which involves the arrest of the dialectical process through desired characterizations and typifications of the self vis-a-vis the other (see also Bateson 1978). It is a way of acquiring one's social role by submerging oneself into the socially-constructed model. It is also a way of transforming the self into a personality whose name, role, or label is signified by the conventions of meaning that permits the play of desire within their limits (Clammer 1997:120; Crapanzano 1990:403,404). Thus, mastery of performance, in the case of Asian performances at least, can be understood as a framing process in which actors embody a convention of style and make their performance (or style) a part of their selves.[8] Indeed, it is the process of becoming a personality by unifying the dichotomy between the internal self and the external structure, or mind and body, through the integration of meaning and form (Yasuda 1984; Singleton 1989). Performing identity, in this sense, is a process of framing oneself.

The framing of self, of course, is not limited to traditional Asian performances. Buruma (1984), a journalist and a cultural critic, provides a provocative discussion of such a styling practice as exercised in all areas of present-day Japanese popular culture and mass society. He observed that aristocratic art (such as *nōh*) and popular play influence the stylization of self equally, although there is obviously a difference between the two traditions in terms of their forms and contents (1984:71). To exemplify his point, Buruma discusses the way in which an ideal image of Japanese femaleness is reified (by men or male-dominated social institutions) in popular arts and performances. In literature, for example, a renowned writer Jun'ichiro Tanizaki writes in a 1928 novel *Tade O Kuu Mushi* (*Some Prefer Nettles*):

> The real O-Haru [name of a courtesan and character in the puppet play] who lived in the seventeenth century, would have been just like a doll; and even if she wasn't really, that is the way people would have imagined her to be in the

> theatre. The ideal beauty in those days was far too modest to show her individuality. This doll is more than enough, for anything distinguishing her from others would be too much. In short, this puppet version of O-Haru is the perfect image of the "eternal woman" of Japanese tradition (quoted in Buruma 1984:65,66).

The identical image of doll-woman can be seen manifested elsewhere, such as the main female personalities in other famous novels, the elevator girls (who commonly appear in department stores, dressed smartly in uniforms and white gloves, and greet the customers in artificial falsetto voices followed by ritual bows), mascot girls (whose main function of appearance in television shows is to sit in a chair and blink provocatively at the camera without a word), and teenage talents (who are highly choreographed, directed, and drilled)(1984:66-68).

Buruma contends that human nature, particularly the nature of women, is redecorated, ritualized, and turned into a work of art, just as natural environments are reshaped carefully by human hands -- the effects of which can be seen in Japanese gardens and the art of *bonsai* or "tree-trimming." This is based on Japanese attitude toward nature that is tinged with a deep fear of the unpredictable forces it can unleash, and to the belief that it is to be worshipped but only after it has been reshaped carefully by human hands (1984:65). Moreover, he argues that Japanese are not interested so much in selves behind their masks so that no attempts are made to hide the fake. He states:

> On the contrary, artificiality is often appreciated for its own sake. Performers do not try to seem informal or real, for it is the form, the art of faking, if you like, that is the whole point of the exercise. ...The same principle applies to social life. The more formal a society, the more obvious the roles people play. In this respect the Japanese are quite scrutable. Acting, that is, presenting oneself consciously in a certain prescribed way, is part of social life everywhere (1984:69).

This emphasis on the molding of self assumes consistency between outward expressions (*tatemae* in Japanese), on one hand, and hidden nature or true feeling behind the mask (*honne* in Japanese), on the other hand. It may neglect the sense of conflict or contradiction that is experienced or expressed by individuals who undergo disciplinary practices (cf. Hochschild

1983).[9] Thus, in order to understand the process in which the self is characterized, one must examine critically the interplay of desire, resistance, and symbolic (linguistic) constraints (see Crapanzano 1990:419).

Hendry's *Wrapping Culture* (1993) ties in the notion of performing identity as the art of presenting onself with the common practice of wrapping in Japan. She shows how gifts, for example, are carefully wrapped and treated as they are frequently exchanged between people as part of Japanese customary practices. Elaborately decorated and layered, wrapped gifts have developed aesthetic, religious, and magical qualities over and above the functional values of their contents (see also Nukada 1977). In fact, gift-wrapping is only one of many kinds of wrapping-practices in Japan. Others include an extensive system of polite language that wraps speakers' thoughts and emotions, elaborate styles of garments and body wrappings, gardens as the wrapping of space, and behavioral rituals that wrap up personal actions and interactions. All of these are symbolic forms that serve people to protect their faces and places in public communication, or impress and manipulate each other.

Hendry further suggests that the notion of wrapping as a measure of refinement in Japanese society is constrained by obligatory motives among the people who put it to practice, rather than motives related to personal sentiment. People express themselves through wrapping because it is the appropriate way to present oneself in a society. Without wrapping, things presented and individuals who present them fail to display the message as properly intended. Thus, wrapping is a non-verbal means of communication in which people articulate themselves formally, socially, culturally, and politically.

In sum, the perspectives presented above explicate how performance can function as a behavioral strategy to establish linkage between the self and society. It is a formal means to present self in public, manage impressions, and appropriate position within the society to which one belongs (Goffman 1959). Following these views, the term "pop-idol performances" will be

used in subsequent chapters to imply a form of symbolic presentation that encompasses the molding, packaging, characterizing, stylizing, or modeling of self as practiced by young performers and their promotion agencies in the realm of Japanese popular culture and mass society. Pop-idols will be treated in this setting as a guarantor of meaning for Japanese consumers.

While the use of the concept of style is by no means unique to pop-idol performances, what specifies pop-idol style as distinct from other styles of performance is its youth-market orientation. In a society where a significant portion of the consumer market is considered to be comprised of children and young adults, becoming a popular adolescent role model means making a considerable amount of profit. This is the single most important driving force for pop-idols and their promotion agencies to activate themselves in the field of symbolic production.[10]

### *Celebrity*

Pop-idols are celebrities in the sense that they signify a special quality of personal magnetism that is attributed to high-profile individuals who presume audience appeal. An ethnographic study of celebrity is the study of this quality of an individual, perceived by her or himself as well as others, as manifested in the culturally and historically specific relationship. Indeed, celebrity is approached as a historical symbol that represents the collective self of a particular period in time (Yano 1997:335).

Thanks to the growing literature in sociology and in particular the area of cultural studies, there are countless studies that exemplify the symbolic function of celebrities in Europe and North America. Mills (1956), for example, looks at professional celebrities including personalities of national glamour who collectively constitute the entertainment world known as "café society." This developed in the United States along with the elaboration of the national means of mass communication. Mills shows how café society was supported by nation-wide

hierarchies of power and wealth. Eckert's (1991) case study analyzes the mechanism of popularity that led Shirley Temple to become "America's little darling" in an era of economic depression. He uncovers how Temple presented herself in many films as poor but optimistic, or rich but sympathetic. Whichever the case, she is presented as a lovable personality that became an ideological locus at which government officials and middle-class industrialists mitigated the reality of the poor through the charity of fantasy. Temple's burden of love, her exacerbated emotions relating to insufficiently cared for children, and her commonly stated philosophy of pulling together to whip the depression appeared at a moment when the official ideology had reached a final and unyielding form. This was also a moment when the public sense of charitable support was drying up (1991:68).

Many case studies on American pop-diva Madonna approach the mechanism of popularity that characterizes this world-renowned phenomenon. A collection of essays edited by Schwichtenberg (1993) illuminate how Madonna skillfully deploys social and cultural themes such as gender, sex, class, generation, race and ethnicity to insinuate herself into various problems of people's daily lives in America and elsewhere. Madonna provides connections between people's lived experiences and the various discourses in circulation (Schwichtenberg 1993:10; see also Hooks 1992a; Frank and Smith 1993; Lloyd 1993). In a similar vein, Simpson (1993) examines the popularity of Brazil's pop-diva Xuxa and the cultural strategy of mega-market industry that promotes her public image. Xuxa's child-friendly image on television shows inform viewers, especially young audiences, about the meaning of beauty, power, success and happiness which privileges the white race and submissive femininity in a society structured on ethnic and gender inequalities.

Materials related to the study of Japanese pop stars in English have been scarce until recently. Herd's (1984) introductory article on pop-singers is the only one of its kind written in English. Although pop stars appear as examples in sections of Japanology literature,

ethnographic study on the subject was virtually nonexistent (e.g., Skov and Moeran 1995; Allison 1996). Yano's (1997) study on Japanese fandom was the first to provide a contextualized, theoretically framed account of the symbolic qualities of Japanese pop stars. She concentrates on the emotional ties that evolve around a male *enka* star and his middle-aged female fans. The present study intends to provide an anthropological investigation that concentrates on the performing identities of young, media-promoted personalities in contemporary Japan called *aidoru*. The analysis of this study attempts to explore not only ways young actors facilitate identity formation among adolescents as they merchandise their popular images and performances, but also ways the stylized promotion of pop-idols reveals the mechanisms of the reproduction of middle-class identity in a capitalist social environment. With this in mind, the following section will propose a theoretical framework that will be used in the ensuing analysis.

**Analytical Framework: Idol-Performances and the Formation of Adolescent Identity in Japan's Postwar Consumer Society**

Postwar Japan and in particular Japanese society today is characterized by a large population (123 million), heavily concentrated in large cities, for whom consumption is a way of life. The urban, consumer lifestyle of the contemporary Japanese is reinforced by media saturation and an intensity of advertising and information that perhaps has no equivalent in the rest of the world. As Clammer (1997) writes:

> Japan is now the world's second biggest economy [after the United States] and one of its most populous states. Famous for its achievement of a highly efficient export-oriented capitalist industrial system and the creation of a mass consumer society at home characterized by its scale and intensity, and equally for the quality of its products and services, Japan cries out for analysis as the most conspicuous example of mass consumption in Asia (1997:2).

Thus, present-day Japanese society is characterized as a consumer society.

According to Kelly (1993:192), an ethnography of this socieconomic and cultural condition of postwar Japan must take into account the relationship between ideological processes, institutional patterning, and everyday routines of individuals. Following this view, and with the discussion of performing identities in the previous section in mind, a theoretical framework of this study will now be proposed. This framework will be used in the ensuing analysis of pop-idol production in an attempt to unravel the ideological formation of youth culture by the Japanese entertainment industry.

### *Pop-Idol Performances and Adolescent Socialization*

Adolescence has been recognized in present-day Japan, as elsewhere, as a life-stage in which the ground for adult social relations is prepared for a child who undergoes physiological change and corresponding development of personality. It is the time in which individuals who become awakened to the adult world, life, and sex, learn how to interact with each other in the name of future prospects.

Adolescence in the contemporary social setting is also a consumption category. As White notes:

> [Adolescence] implies style, aspirations, a way of thinking and behaving. To some it may imply the older notion of "neither here nor there," the *chūto hanpa* limbo of "betweenness," but the consumer industries have targeted these young people in a more specific way. The "naming" of this "stage" has thus outlined a category permitting, and indeed demanding diversity and slippage. Because of the speed of marketing, the case of Japan reveals the market-driven aspects of coming of age as well as the active involvement of teens [mainly but also others who are the members of this category] themselves in creating new cultures and practices that then feed back into market definitions of adolescence (White 1995:256,257).

While this relationship between the mass media and young consumers is found elsewhere in the modern world, the case in Japan is culturally conspicuous. This is due to the relatively high

affluence of young people and a highly interactive relationship between these young people and consumer industries (including the mass media), among other reasons (1995:257).

Given this cultural setting, the ideology of youth culture as implicated in pop-idol performances is essentially what the consumer industries, and in particular middle-aged male producers, lay out as the "appropriate lifestyle" for female adolescents. Pop-idols function as adolescent role models, acting in concert with the market-driven aspects of coming of age by encouraging the active involvement of their young audiences in creating and recreating trendy customs and lifestyles -- as they perform as pop-singers, fashion models, stage actors, as well as television and radio personalities. Their manufacturing agencies, on the other hand, use pop-idol images to develop commercial activities that would allow them to establish their own place in a society.

Socialization as practiced in the form of curricular activities has long been a subject of interest to researchers who emphasize formal educational systems. Recent studies on socialization have begun to focus more on what Beauchamp (1991) calls "institutions of informal schooling," which include the realm of popular culture (e.g., Williams 1982; Giroux, Simon et al. 1989; Brannen 1992; Creighton 1991,1992,1994a; White 1995). These studies show how commercial institutions draw on various worldly sources to explore certain themes that can capture people's attention, interweave narratives that are both public and private (or social and personal), and substantiate meanings that can become part of cultural competence within their power structure.

Curricula of identity-formation that both complement and contradict the program for youth established in formal education and family are seen in the media; and such media curricula provide the public with portraits of both imaged and actual young people (White 1995:261; cf. Rosenberger 1996).[11] Yet, the media-constructed images of youth are often gauged, challenged, contradicted, contested, and even rejected by the very people who buy into them. Retaining

their individual agency, these buyers act on the basis of a common-sense view of the everyday world, and use it to appropriate and integrate what they want (Rosenberger 1995:145). Such a situation leads to the production of conflicting images of youth within the curriculum itself which, for efficacy and profit, favors a homogeneous and coherent view of its audience (White 1995:261). Thus, the ideological formation of adolescent identity is manifested in strategic, complex, and multifaceted portrayals of youthful images and lifestyles.

The question, then, becomes the kind of adolescent images that are portrayed by the consumer

industry and in particular agents of pop-idol production. Based on the study of adolescent images in popular magazines, White (1995:261) summarizes four stereotypes in the formation of adolescent identity: the apprentice, the dreamer, the sexual being, and the buyer. These images operate as symbolic vehicles that generate youth as a classified age-group, generation, or social category, indeed a class, by facilitating both consensus and conflict within its boundary. Based on my own research, I concur with White's observation.

### *The Question of Class*

The problem of social class requires some theoretical elaboration. In analyzing contemporary consumer cultures such as Japan, Clammer (1997), *a la* Bourdieu (1984), stresses that standard concepts of class and class identity need fundamental redefinition.[12] In Japan, the emergence of the consumer-oriented, white-collar lifestyle in the late 1950s and early 1960s normalized a view that the country had become a middle-class society. However, the application of standard, quasi-Marxist notions of economic-class simply imposes on Japanese society a sociological category derived from very different social contexts (1997:101; cf. Vogel 1963; Steven 1983).

A consumption class implies that differentiation through acts of consumption -- a continuous activity of constructing the self, of relationship maintenance and symbolic competition through commodity purchasing -- has become the primary means of locating and distinguishing oneself in a society (Clammer 1997:102; also Sahlins 1976). Thus, the tendency for consumption decisions to concentrate around a middle-class identity in Japan today can be understood as an indication that social reality is recognized on the basis of a large but nevertheless surprisingly structured range of consumption choices (i.e., things that are made available in the market). This is linked to similarity in income and the desire for homogeneity, a powerful cultural force in Japan. Moreover, the middle-class orientation of consumer behavior can be realized in terms of an act of differentiation within an actually homogeneous social category, which empirically takes the form of symbolic competition over details of things purchased and styles that these things signify (Clammer 1997:102). I argue that pop-idol performances act as commercialized rituals that facilitate the habituation of symbolic class-differentiation among adolescents. That is, pop-idol performances initiate adolescents into the value system of the Japanese middle-class in the name of adolescent socialization.

### *Gender Identities*

Another dimension of this problem of symbolic classification is that of gender, namely the social construction of femininity and masculinity, which have become one of the main themes in anthropology. Case studies demonstrate how the distinction between male and female in ideas, expressions and practices are socially and culturally constructed, rather than given or innate in nature (e.g., Mead 1935; Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974; di Leonardo 1991; Lancaster and di Leonardo 1997).

Butler (1990) presents a constructivist view of gender identity in which gender is seen as acquired through compulsory performance, or regulatory enactment of socially expected sexual roles. She writes:

> Gender ought not to be constructed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. This formulation moves the conception of gender off the ground of a substantial model of identity to one that requires a conception of gender as a constituted *social temporality* (1990:140, emphasis original).

By repetitively acting out one's expected gender role over time, driven by the need or social pressure to do so, her or his self becomes suitable for performing that role (see also Kolenda 1988; Bonvillain 1995; Super and Sverko 1995).

On the other hand, Smith's (1990a) study focuses on how gender identities are inscribed as texts, or "local historical organizations of intersubjectivity" that passes beyond the immediate moment of their co-presence. In conceptualizing text, Smith argues:

> Texts enter into and order courses of action and relations among individuals. The texts themselves have a material presence and are produced in an economic and social process which is part of a political economy. Textually mediated discourse is a distinctive feature of contemporary society existing as socially organized communicative and interpretive practices intersecting with and structuring people's everyday worlds and contributing thereby to the organization of the social relations of the economy and of the political process (1990a:162,163).

In this view, femininity and masculinity are parts of a complex of actual relations vested in texts, rather than parts of a normative order, reproduced through socialization, to which somehow women and men are subordinated (1990a:163).

Pop-idol performances are manifested in various gendered audio-visual texts, such as magazines, posters, billboards, CDs, television commercials, dramas, cinemas, and stage-performances where female and male pop-idols strike feminine and masculine poses. The process in which these stylized textual forms are produced, distributed, and consumed as

commodified objects marks the reification of the gender-identity of adolescents in three main ways: 1) through repeated enactment of assigned gender roles, or articulation of sexualized images, as part of the preparation of texts by the performer; 2) repeated purchasing and appreciation (i.e., celebration -- including both positive and negative evaluations) of gender roles and images as represented in the texts by the consumer; and 3) continuous reproduction of the gendered texts in renewed forms by the producer or the industry as a whole.

### *The Social Construction of Ethnicity*

Following Barth (1969), recent studies of ethnicity employ cultural categories to create ethnic identities in social interactions. Whittaker (1986), concentrating on the aspect of subjectivity and interaction, considers ethnicity to be a social construct. Ethnicity, she argues:

> is not a physical fact but rather is the product of consciousness shaped to see it. It exists as a tradition of cultural ideas mapped onto a population. These ideas assert certain kinds of agreed upon social facts which serve as a warrant for other things. Their use becomes routinized, repetitive and invariant (1986:165).

Thus, ethnicity can be perceived as a cultural concept rather than a physical reality. Elsewhere, Whittaker points out the often overlooked role played by images and stereotypes in the social construction (or facilitation to be more specific) of ethnic identities. She writes:

> Taxonomizing according to ethnic origin is obvious enough, but what is much less quickly discernible is the plethora of images distributed among the ethnic groups. These images come in the form of tacit knowledge built into each inter-ethnic encounter. More visible taxonomies are embedded in ethnic slurs and in a wide variety of ethnic jokes. The culture is particularly rich in such stereotypic knowledge and lore. It has been persuasively argued that one of the functions of stereotyping and joking is social control... While this is no doubt an apt analysis, I suggest that the *activity in itself posits a morally acceptable world by dwelling on the inappropriate*. Stereotypes and jokes carry a panorama of the culture's "oughts." (1986:175, italics mine).

Thus, imagination plays an important role in the construction of ethnic identity.

Numerous provocative ethnographies look at the formation of ethnic identities as manifested in an inter-ethnic encounter in the light of symbolic practice where the way of seeing plays a

significant role. Said's (1976) ethnohistoric account provides a rich view of the long-term process through which *Orientalism* developed as a result of European attempts to strengthen their ethnic identity against all cultures and societies that they classified as "non-European others." Taussig's (1987) analysis of terror and healing in southern Columbia shows that the residents of the Andes shape and reshape their culture in terms of multiple identities that they construct. They shift between traditional beliefs and folk rituals that have survived from the precolonial past on one hand, and modern, capitalist-oriented ideas and values of the neocolonial present on the other. Kachuk (1993) discusses how three distinct ethnic groups evolved around language activism in Northern Ireland: those who categorize themselves as both politically and culturally Irish; those who see themselves as culturally Irish but politically British; and those who consider themselves as culturally and politically British. An edited volume by Stokes (1994) provides a collection of articles demonstrating how music, as an ethnic sound, is used by the people of different cultures as a symbolic instrument to identify themselves vis-a-vis others. Friedman (1990) discusses how ethnicity is manifested in tourist encounters and cultural commodifications in the age of ever-global capitalism. The process in which *Les Sapeurs* of Congo, Ainu of northern Japan, and native Hawaiians perform folk-like for tourists and invent folk commodities is perceived as a presentation of the collective self in the international socioeconomic arena. In activating this process, native performers and artists recreate their ethnic identities and reinvent their traditions (see also Graburn 1984; van der Berghe and Keyes 1984).

In her studies, Ohnuki-Tierney (1987,1990) shows that the Japanese have defined themselves as a collective category through a series of contacts with the outside world. Especially, their encounter with the "superior" civilization of the West in the late 19th century provided a profound, lasting impact upon the people's social life. With regards to the economic development of the country in modern times, she comments that:

> Japan's economic success in fact derives not from a predominant "economic mentality," [a characterization seen in the predominant attitude in the West toward the Japanese,] but rather from the "symbolic" value assigned in Japanese culture to science and technology -- that is, the embodiment of the transcendental other (Ohnuki-Tierney 1990:199).

This emphasizes the significance of symbolism and in particular the value assigned to the Western science and technology in the construction of modern Japanese identity.

Ohnuki-Tierney's and other studies (e.g., Russell 1991; Rosenberger 1992a; Creighton 1997) are helpful in understanding how Japanese create varying racial categories and stereotypes. Manifestations include forms such as images of white fashion models on magazine covers, and a jet-black vinyl pet-doll with big eyes and huge lips, known as *dakko-chan*, which became a top-selling toy for children at the end of the 1950s. These studies present a dual meaning accorded to foreign others in Japanese cultural history: that is, as bearers of highly valued innovation and lifestyle and an intrusive threat. They also expose the role played by symbols, including popular art-forms, in mediating (and reinforcing) the boundary between the Japanese self and the foreign other. Thus, monkeys, entertainers, movies such as Juzo Itami's *Tanpopo*, Tōkyō Disneyland, and loan words function as marginal things or beings, or "ambivalent symbols," to borrow from Douglas (1966), that allegorically purify any material, idea, custom, fashion, and lifestyle that passes through the permeable national boundary to become part of Japanese culture (Rosenberger 1992b:11,12).

The ways in which pop-idols domesticate foreign fashions and lifestyles is an important component of my analysis. Indeed, pop-idols and their promotion agencies constitute themselves as agents of public socialization by virtue of their mediating function. They function as mediators between class and generation in terms of conforming young people of various social statuses and backgrounds to a unified value of middle-class consumption. Pop-idols also perform as mediators of gender in terms of providing role models for young men and women in

reference to which they can practice partnership between the two sexes, and mediators of ethnicity in terms of bridging the symbolic gap between Japanese and outside cultures.

**In Search of Pop-Idols: Thesis Outlines**

One of the first things I tried to do in my fieldwork was to find out who pop-idols were, or how people defined them. It soon became apparent that this was a difficult task. As one idol-fan turned manager concisely summarized, "In Japan, we all know who pop-idols are, but when you ask us to define them, we find it very difficult. We take them for granted, and do not think about it so deeply. They can be defined in many ways." A general definition would be: young, media-promoted personalities. Going beyond this required further examinations of perceptions and behaviors of those who were involved in idol-related activities.

In chapter two, I explicate my approach to the phenomenon in question, and conditions besetting this research. I will discuss the nature of the Japanese entertainment industry in which I was situated, the kinds of people that I approached and with whom I interacted, the ways in which I interacted with my informants and gathered relevant data, and the obstacles that I encountered. I intend to elaborate on ethnographic methods and ethical concerns through these points of discussion.

The purpose of pop-idol performances is to provide the public with a series of role models for younger adolescents. While these are variably constructed, they commonly deploy gender, sex, class, and ethnicity, which are all considered as significant themes of personality-formation (*jinkaku-keisei*) during adolescence. The relationship between pop-idol performances and the formation of adolescent identities is discussed in two subsequent chapters of this thesis. Chapter three delves into adolescent themes that are perceived and dramatized by pop-idols and their producers; chapter four elaborates on how two of these themes, gender and sexuality, are manifested in the process of pop-idol production -- particularly in the way idol candidates are

packaged into desirable personalities. Ways in which young women are subjected to the overt forms of male discipline will be investigated, and mixed feelings that these young women have about conforming themselves to gender ideals, which are designed and enforced by the system will be examined. Parameters of what counts as acceptable and unacceptable imagery for female pop-idols vary from one culture to another, or between individuals with different social backgrounds within a culture. I will investigate these parameters and their influences on ways adolescent femaleness is contested by producers and performers of the pop-idol industry. Adolescence is a culturally marked period in Japan, and Japanese people consider this to be the period in which individuals enter adulthood. However, as recent debates on gender in Japan demonstrate, adulthood is a shaky concept in and of itself. Different interpretations of the meaning of adulthood, thus, lead to different ways in which adolescent personalities are crafted.

Chapters five and six will concentrate on practices and processes of promotion. Using style as a guiding concept, activities, events, and relationships that evolve around pop-idols' performing identities will be investigated by shifting the locus of analysis from a specific pop-idol (in chapter five) to the field of idol production as a whole (chapter six). Tracing the trajectory of a pop-diva, Seiko Matsuda, in chapter five, delineates the nature of conflict between the performer's intentions and society's evaluations and expectations. It also reveals how a performer deals with challenging situations as part of the mission to publicly establish oneself -- that is, the process that can be characterized as social drama (Turner 1982). Chapter six illuminates how this dramatized process is taken by different pop-idols and promotion agencies to distinguish themselves from each other. The symbolic competition over individualized pop-idol styles constitutes the field of pop-idol production, which, from the standpoint of outsiders, is a differentiation within an actually very homogeneous social category of commercialized middle-class performance called idol-pop. Observations of fans and their supporting activities also suggest that idols encourage a sense of unity among its consumers.

As studies of cultural globalization (e.g., Friedman 1990; Appadurai 1991; and Miller 1997) show, consumption in the context of capitalist globalization is an act of widespread formation of class identity. With this in mind, chapter seven tackles the problem of performing-identities in Asia, considering the recent pop-idol boom in many parts of this area. Consumerism is encouraged in many rapidly developing Asian countries such as China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, and Vietnam, and there is a growing popularity of Japanese pop-idols in these countries as well as the production of young local personalities who are called "idols." Idol-symbolism in these places is evocative of socioeconomic progress for an emerging middle-class identity, and this sense of progress is meaningfully associated with youth -- the future labor force of national and regional development.

Analysis in this chapter demonstrates two perspectives that are inherent in the cultural hegemony of idol-production: from the standpoint of Japanese promotion agencies, the emergent popularity of Japanese and Japanese-style pop-idols in Asia reflects the expansion of the pop-idol market overseas, suggesting Japan's leading symbolic role in the world economy; from the perspectives of non-Japanese Asians, this process implies the local formation of modern identities (ethnic or national) as signified by homegrown pop-idols representing socioeconomic affluence.

Finally, chapter eight summarizes the implications of the idol-pop in understanding the relationship between popular performance, identity formation, and the process of constructing selves. Some suggestions for possible future research are also given.

**Notes:**

1. The Japanese equivalent of the original meaning of "idol" in English is *gūzō*, which is a combination of two words: *gū* which means "fabrication," and *zō* which means "image" or "statue."

2. In Japan, the family name is written before the given name so that Ryōko Hirosue, for example, would be written as Hirosue Ryōko. In this thesis, however, I will apply the English name order to all Japanese names.

3. Here, I have in mind Turner's (1982:23) concept of "comparative symbology," the goal of which is to "catch symbols in their movement" by contextualizing them in the concrete, historical fields of their use by people (including those of the complex, large-scale industrial societies), acting, reacting, transacting, and interacting socially.

4. There are also articles in academic journals such as *Journal of Popular Culture*, *Popular Music*, and *Popular Music and Society*.

5. In her cross-cultural analysis of self and emotion, Rosaldo (1984:148,149) argues that Western scholars tend to universalize their view of a desiring inner self, as separated from social control, without realizing that such selves are themselves social creations. She discusses the case of the Phillippine's Ilongots who do not distinguish private selves from social persons, and suggests the need for researchers to focus more on the contextualized aspect of selfhood: that is, a sense of the engagement of the actor's self (1984:143). In a similar tone, Shweder and Bourne suggests that the tendency to abstract out a concept of the inviolate personality free of social role and social relationship (or a tendency to distinguish the individual from the social), is a Western conception that is not shared cross-culturally. In many non-Western societies, self is often imagined as concrete, contextualized, non-abstractive, and apparently undifferentiated (1984:167,191,194).

6. See also Edwards' (1989) study of Japanese weddings which led him to postulate that people's unions are based on the idea of the incompleteness of self.

7. Singleton (1989) also discusses how parents demand the kind of disciplined concentration from their children as pottery apprentices in Japanese folkcraft tradition. Another well-known example of apprenticeship as the construction of self involving body techniques is Zen (e.g., Suzuki 1964,1965; Suzuki 1970; Grimes 1982; Preston 1988).

8. Scott (1955) provides a similar argument in reference to Kabuki. *Kata*, in his view, is specified as the actor's speech and movements on the stage, although the term's meaning extends to stage properties, costumes, and make-ups, which are not simply decorative accessories but are also necessary aids to the technique of the actor. These ornaments frame the actor into an established style (1955:105).

9. Hochschild (1983) highlights the issue of jobs that require employees to project emotional sentiments as part of the work expectations, where individuals put on a stylized performance against their will, or in contrast to their real feelings as a person. For instance, airline stewardesses make themselves look nice all the time. Bill collectors, as another example, pretend that they are angry. Both cases do not reflect the actors' essential characteristics.

10. Yoshida's (1984) study, for example, reports that Japan's *kodomo shijō* or "children's market" constituted the gross product of 10 trillion yen (estimate) in the fiscal year of 1983. According to one of my informants, an advertising agent, this particular article inspired many people in the trend industry.

11. White (1995:261-262) further notes that the mass media reflect the social learning the young person experiences more directly in family, friendships and school. Yet, instead of demanding the wholehearted acceptance of the responsibilities and behaviors that adulthood will exact, the media keep alive the notion that a young person can have a variety of personalities, even a dream.

12. For critiques against the economic reductionism as reflected in the standard, quasi-Marxist analysis of social class, see also Hall (1981) and Laclau and Mouffe (1985).

## CHAPTER II – METHODS OF DOING FIELDWORK

A field of production, as defined by Bourdieu (1993), refers to a social space in which agents occupying diverse positions engage in competition for control of the interests and resources which are specific to it. These agents strive to win certain recognition and prestige in the field by means of various investment strategies (1993:6). In the field of arts, for instance, each artist who occupies a position in the power structure promotes certain genres or styles as a means to distinguish, defend, and improve her or his work against coexistent works of other artists. Bourdieu contends that:

> the structure of the field, i.e. of the space of positions, is nothing other than the structure of the distribution of the capital of specific properties which governs success in the field and the winning of the external or specific profits (such as literary prestige) which are at stake in the field (Bourdieu 1993:30).

Pop-idols and their promotion agencies themselves in economic and symbolic capital in order to compete with each other for greater public recognition or fame, and as such they can be said to constituting a field of production.

With the discussion of performing identities in chapter one in mind, and in concurrence with Bourdieu's definition of a field, this study will provide a detailed account of the field of pop-idol production. In this field, ordinary young people construct their identities as they act out adolescent role models and commodify themselves in modern Japanese mass media and consumer society. These people and their promotion agencies attempt to secure their positions in the market (as well as society at large) and maximize the commercial profit. Thus, the ways in which this is negotiated between performers and their promotion agencies constitute the core of idol-based transaction and resultant social organization.

This chapter will discuss the methods used to study the nature of pop-idol performances and the formation of cultural identities in the Japanese entertainment industry. Its first section will

introduce the main actors in the field, and elucidate the kind of relationship that characterizes present-day Japanese mass culture and consumer society. My stance as an ethnographer, and my interaction with participants in an often indifferent, competitive, sometimes hostile, and always enigmatic world of Japanese show business will be considered.

Ivy (1993) notes that in order to understand the development of an increasingly comprehensive mass culture in postwar Japan, one must attend to the discourse on the masses. Such a discourse is created by the culture industry and enhanced by the actual objects and forms of consumption (Ivy 1993:242). Seen in this light, the final section of this chapter will explicate the methods used to investigate how people perceive pop-idol performances and participate in their making.

## Idology: The Study of Performing Identities in the Japanese Entertainment Industry

### *The Actors*

The entertainment industry in Japan consists of large and small promotion agencies, media institutions, and a corporate network of manufacturers, distributors, and retailers. Like other commercial organizations in Japan, some of these firms consolidate into large industrial families, known as *keiretsu*, while others remain relatively small and independent ventures. *Keiretsu* usually include one large manufacturing company and a constellation of its subsidiaries, affiliates, and subcontractors (Clark 1988[1979]:75). The human resources in each of these institutions are divided into separate departments or sections whose roles include planning, production, marketing, management, and advertising. Positions within each of these areas are hierarchically arranged. Various marketing programs and public events are proposed by producers, authorized by administrators, and put to practice by directors, performers and staff members.

Promotion agencies specialize in nurturing the careers of potential stars. These agencies hold auditions every year through which prospective individuals are scouted, trained, and crafted into marketable commodities. Some lucky candidates are personally recruited into the manufacturing system, while hundreds of other candidates struggle through a series of contests. There are over 1,600 promotion agencies striving to promote approximately 6,800 young and old personalities of both sexes, in addition to 300 duet- and group performers (Rengō Tsūshinsha 1995). These agencies also institute fan clubs, publish newsletters, and produce a wide variety of idol-related products, otherwise known as "idol-goods" (*aidoru guzzu*) -- posters, calendars, postcards, key holders, breast-pins and stationery products (figure 2).

Personal image is the single, most important commodity of performers, which is translated into a fee known as a "guarantee" (*gyara*), and the marketing of this image is the *raison d'être* of promotion agencies. Performers' images are subject to copyright, otherwise known as *shōzo-ken* (lit. "portrait rights"), whose misuse can lead to law suits by the protecting agencies. Unlike American Hollywood where performers in show business act individually and make deals with agents for jobs on a one-to-one basis, the majority of Japanese performers are employed by promotion agencies through contracts.

Contracts between Japanese performers and promotion agencies are called *tarento keyaku*, or "talent contracts." These include two categories: part time contracts (*teiki keiyaku*) that normally cover a period of two years, subject to renewal; and full time contracts (*senzoku keiyaku*) that guarantee the performers' permanent employment status. The latter is usually not established unless the agency and the performer are confident with each others' abilities. While performers' abilities are measured based on how well they can perform and attract viewers, agencies' abilities are demonstrated in terms of how well they can nurture their performers and

**Figure 2. A scene from a Tōkyō kiosk where young people gather to buy idol goods, including photos, fans, and stationeries**

acquire quality jobs. Unsatisfied performers may shift from one agency to another as long as they are marketable. In such a case, performers tend to adopt a new name. The business version of head hunting is a common practice for prospective performers, although restrictions and penalties, such as suspension and compensation, apply to headhunters. Together these aspects contribute to the competitive nature of the entertainment field.

Media institutions portray themselves as mediating agents between the two domains of production and consumption. In Japan, these institutions include more than 180 advertising agencies, 860 magazine publishers, 380 broadcasting corporations (of which 70 are local branches of Japan's national broadcasting corporation, the NHK), and 36 record companies.[1] These institutions focus on selecting, signifying, amplifying, and distributing what they consider marketable commodities.

Media institutions create a social space for participants to interact with a common goal or shared interest. As one advertising agent told me in an interview, these institutions provide a frame for performers and their agencies to advertise themselves, sponsors to advertise their products, and members of the audience to tune in and buy what they like. Nakane (1970) defines a frame (*ba*) as "a locality, an institution, or a particular relationship" that "binds a set of individuals into one group." It "sets a boundary and gives a common basis to a set of individuals who are located or involved in it" (Nakane 1970:1). The frame offered by Japanese mass media is considered to collectivize producers, performers, staff members and consumers in the name of entertainment.

Another function of mass media is to provide the public with stories (*neta*) that cultivate conventional themes, outlooks, and perspectives (Barnouw 1956; Barnouw and Kirkland 1992). In such a setting, pop-idols and other personalities become the topic (*wadai*) of media-constructed narratives. Performers and their promotion agencies may engage in a love-hate

relationship with the agents of the mass media, especially tabloid publishers. The sole interest of tabloids is to cover any story there is about the lives and activities of celebrities that may interest the audience (whether it may praise or scandalize those who are covered). For well-known performers and promotion agencies, reporters are sometimes strong allies that reassure their prestige, and at other times unpleasant abusers of public images. For unknown performers and agencies that are struggling to become popular, these reporters are attractive promoters who hold the key to their success, but they are also difficult to convince.[2]

Corporate institutions, which include the manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers of material products, sponsor public events and media programs, such as advertising campaigns, television shows and commercials. In exchange, they use these events and programs as a place to advertise themselves and products they wish to sell. In these settings, idol personalities are hired as an allegorical means to impress the audience, attract a greater number of people, and thereby magnify the commercial impact. The willingness of corporate institutions to sponsor an event or a program is measured in terms of audience rating (or turnout) which motivates media institutions to produce publicly appealing programs, and promotion agencies to produce popular personalities.

In producing popular personalities, corporate institutions ask advertisers to call for applications from promotion agencies. Then, an audition, or the so-called *konpe* (an abbreviation of the English word "competition"), is held in which the most suitable applicant is chosen and the guarantee is negotiated. The campaign period for a specific new product is usually one year. The guarantee paid to a promotion agency for hiring its performer during this period can range somewhere between 3 to 100 million Japanese yen, depending on the popularity and potentiality of the performer. The rule holds that one and the same performer cannot be hired by more than one company in the same industrial classification during the same

campaign period. Whether or not corporate institutions will continue to campaign for the same product, or hire the same performer, will depend upon the judgment it makes based on the product's sales.

Although it is generally agreed that a currently popular performer can influence productivity through advertisement, this does not always turn out to be the case. There are cases in which unknown performers became suddenly well known through advertising campaigns. These cases characterize campaign events and programs as an evermore incalculable but attractive arena of opportunities for promotion agencies. Among hundreds of corporate institutions that offer sponsorships, manufacturers of confectionery, toiletry, and electronic products are the foremost employers of young pop-idols. In a round table conversation with agents from a large confectionery company and a vice-president of a large promotion agency, I was told that this was the case because "these products and personalities commonly appeal to young consumers." Indeed, eating candies (and other fast foods), keeping oneself clean and beautiful, and possessing all kinds of digitized machines constitute a consumer lifestyle for young people in contemporary Japan.

### *The Environment: Japanese Mass Culture and Consumer Society*

Pop-idol production and marketing are part of the commercial practices that characterize Japan's present-day consumer society. One may understand consumer society, for example, as a society where the consumption of material objects, rather than their production, became the basis of the social order. One may alternatively provide a semiotic definition of consumer society: a world imbued with a system of codes in which objects' functional values are lost to their symbolic exchange values (e.g., Baudrillard 1981,1988[1968]). Neither of these characterizations allow researchers to distinguish the current capitalist society from any other

society (including that classified as traditional, non-industrial, or premodern) in which the practices of material consumption and symbolic exchange are (or were) also present.

In this study, the term "consumer society" will be used as it is most widely understood by agents of capitalist institutions: a society in which the act of material consumption is equated with the consumption of fictions about one's socioeconomic status or well-being. Such a society is identical to what Haug (1986) calls "a commodity world of attractive and seductive illusion." In such a world, a plethora of commodified images and illusions shackle human desire for satisfaction, enjoyment, and happiness in life to a drive towards certain styles of conformity. Haug writes:

> An innumerable series of images are forced upon the individual, like mirrors, seemingly empathetic and totally credible, which bring their secrets to the surface and display them there. In these images, people are continually shown the unfulfilled aspects of their existence. The illusion integrates itself, promising satisfaction: it reads desires in one's eyes, and brings them to the surface of the commodity. While the illusion with which commodities present themselves to the gaze gives people a sense of meaningfulness, it provides them with a language to interpret their existence and the world. Any other world, different from that provided by the commodities, is almost no longer accessible to them (1986:52).

Thus, images become an important aspect of social order in consumer society.

Fiction or illusion is used in its pragmatic sense: a socially constructed and publicly shared story that provides consumers with a meaningful repertoire of characters, relationships and outcomes that represent their present life-world (Barnouw and Kirkland 1992:52). This fiction is not a fabrication as such. As Miyadai (1994) argues:

> By fiction [of a consumer society] it is not meant a 'falsehood that does not match with the fact'. Regardless of its consistency with the fact, it makes possible for one to feel 'Oh, my household is as good as everyone else's'. The reality of fiction is not a matter of whether or not this fiction matches the fact, but rather the fact that everyone who shares it believes in what it stands for. In this sense, a fiction accompanying the consumption of commodities is a story lived by the contemporaries [who consume these commodities] (Miyadai 1994:143, brackets mine).

Through the consumption of fictions imbued in commodities, Japanese consumers link themselves to other members of the society, creating personal linkages or a network of solidarity (see also Creighton 1994b:94).

From the perspective of the Japanese trend industry, a consumer society consists of the masses (*taishū*), or the aggregate of consumers to which their marketing strategies are targeted. Some of my informants in the industry referred to their marketing activities as mass-control or *taishū-sōsa*, whose goal is to standardize consumer tastes and lifestyles through fictitious narratives and image-making processes. Indeed, the incorporation of population into a series of uniformed taste-groups is very much apparent in postwar Japan. According to Ivy (1993), these groups were:

> appropriately differentiated in terms of gender and generation but much less so in terms of class or regional affiliation: company president, company janitor, and farmer alike came to read the same magazines, watch the same television shows, and own the same basic array of electric appliances (Ivy 1993:241).

Moreover, as Yano indicates, the molding of desire by the mass media is more easily accepted in Japan than elsewhere, such as the United States where the influence of the mass media is often regarded negatively. Just as shaping a tree by pruning is considered to be a traditional practice by which a greater harmony is acquired with one's surroundings, the molding of desire by the mass media is accepted by the majority of consumers in contemporary Japan to be the purported teachings through which one presumably acquires information on the needs, wants, and pleasures of the greatest number of people (or at least on what these should be). Thus, the media promotes greater harmony with one's social surroundings. The acceptance of this molding or manipulation process is "a matter of course and even part of a cultural definition of maturity" (Yano 1997:337).

In this social context, adolescents emerged as a population segment whose active involvement in the creation and recreation of customs and practices contributed to the market-driven aspects of coming of age (White 1995:256). Adolescence is a marked stage in the cultural conception of the Japanese life course. Both Japanese adults and young people find adolescence to be the transitional period between childhood and adulthood in which the ground is prepared for adult social relations with the same people who are currently one's peers. Commercial institutions skillfully manipulate the need for adolescents to socialize during this life stage as they facilitate the creation and recreation of an adolescent lifestyle or youth culture.

### *Young Pop-Idols*

According to *The American Heritage Dictionary* (1982:640), an idol refers to 1) an image used as an object of worship, 2) a person or thing that is blindly or excessively adored, and 3) something that is visible but without substance. Throughout this study, pop-idols will be used to represent a specific group of adolescent personalities in Japanese show business to whom these aspects are attributed. The ways in which ordinary young people invest themselves with material support and symbolic power in order to become a marketable persona in Japanese mass culture and consumer society constitute the foundation of idol-based transactions and the resultant social organization.

Pop-idols are young media-promoted personalities who sing, dance, and act in the theater or on stage, appear on television shows, and strike poses in fashion magazines and advertisements. They are distinguished from religious icons, cult leaders, and political authorities, although they share a similar charismatic function: a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he or she is considered extraordinary. Charismatic individuals are endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities, based on

which they are treated as a leader (Weber 1978b:241). Living human beings whose excessively adorable personalities are manipulated for commercial purposes, pop-idols are "living character-commodities" (*ikeru kyarakutaa shōhin*) -- subjective objects that feel, think, speak, act, and choose to conform or resist (Ogawa 1988:121). Pop-idols bestow their willpower and effort on the creation of the adolescent lifestyle through images of becoming. They enact the role of adorable innocent novices that gradually transform into mature personalities.

Given this context, the central concern of my ethnographic fieldwork, the main part of which took place in Tōkyō between the fall of 1994 and the summer of 1996, was to situate myself in the Japanese entertainment industry. I wanted to explore various strategies that individuals use to participate in the field of pop-idol production, and trace this field's trajectory toward the mass culture formation in contemporary Japanese society.

### *Other Genres of Popular Performances*

Perhaps it is appropriate to compare the idol-pop with other genres of popular performance in present-day Japan to better understand its place in show business. To be sure, to say that idol-pop became a nation-wide phenomenon since the 1970s is by no means to claim it as an exclusive or dominant genre in present-day Japanese popular culture. In popular music targeted for young people, for example, idol-pop coexists with other celebrated genres such as folk, pop, new music, and rock'n roll. One may try to differentiate between these genres by making statements such as: "Folk and rock tend to be anti-commercial, whereas pop and new music are pro-commercial," "Folk is soft, whereas rock is hard," "Rock powerful, whereas pop tends to be weak," "New music is more artistic than folk," or "New music is digital, rock is metallic, folk is analogue, and pop is vocal." These comments often encouraged debate without becoming points of agreeable knowledge among my informants -- especially in a climate in which the emergent

idea of sound-fusion lead many musicians to commercialize hybrid musical products whose orientations are unclear.[3]

An alternative illustration, Miyadai *et al* (1993) classify the genres of Japanese pop-music based on the different types of communication generated between performers and their audience. This study, based on empirical research, examines how performers relate themselves to the music represented by the genre. Pop, folk, and new music, for instance, are shown here as melodic narratives which portray certain aspects of social realities, whereas rock'n roll tends to invoke among its listeners a sense of escape from these realities. Furthermore, pop and new music are seen as a musical vehicle for "romanticizing realities" in a fancy way, whereas folk music tends to focus on ballads of sadness and solitude. Pop music is generally considered shallow vis-a-vis a more sophisticated form of new music in the sense that the listeners do not immerse themselves as much into the contents of songs. This is to say that pop listeners tend to appreciate melodies more than lyrics, while new music listeners value lyrics as much as melodies.[4]

Of particular interest for the purpose of this research is the suggestion that idol-pop involves a kind of meta-consumption. That is, pop-idol fans are more interested in the way they relate to their favorite personalities through the act of consumption, rather than the essential qualities of pop-idols that they are consuming. Whether pop-idols can sing well, or whether their songs are masterpieces, is not so much a concern for these idol fans as how they can become part of the system of production, or how they can participate in the socializing process of young personalities. These fans engage in pop-idol consumption knowing that they are consuming young, amateurish, and commercially fabricated personalities (1993:75). This has a significant implication for the present study in terms of the investigation's focus: that is, on the cultural

process as manifested in pop-idol performances. Determining whether pop-idols are artistic or not, for instance, is therefore beyond the scope of this research.

## Fieldwork in an Arena of Idol-Production

### *The Research Setting*

It would not take long for any visitor to Japan to realize that its crowded city streets are bedecked with advertisement billboards and posters representing young personalities that either smile coquettishly or strike shapely poses. Numerous identical images appear on the covers of popular magazines and comic books at which many businessmen gaze intently on their way to work, or children on their way to school. Television shows are full of similar adolescent personalities. Some lucky chance encounters, public events, or concerts would reveal many of these performers on stage trying to attract a large number of adoring fans who scream and cheer at them -- however artless these performers may appear to act. There are even shops where young people and their parents can buy photos, T-shirts and other consumable items featuring their favorite pop-idols. My primary goal in the field was to specify the cultural implications of this popular phenomenon.

My first glimpse of these scenes as a fieldworker in Tōkyō (the city that was to be my home for eighteen months) led me to feel that youthful liveliness counter-balanced my general impression of urban Japan: a highly-industrial and highly-digitized space where workaholic clones run around like ants (not much more than functioning as cogs in an economic machine). Japanese people are often characterized as economic animals, but observing these textualized personal images of adolescents in Tōkyō and other Japanese towns led me to believe that there are human orientations to this socioeconomic mechanism. One of my first journal entries reads:

> The whole city is lit up by countless number of young celebrities whose images emerge everywhere -- smiling at times, crying at other times, and showing anger at yet other times. However artificial they seem, these media-crafted images of young pop-idols supplement the impersonal atmosphere created by busy people rushing on the street. Each of these pop-idols has a name recognized by many people whether or not they are willing to adore them. The city itself becomes a festival ground where life is being celebrated, but celebrated through commercially produced images, fantasies and products. It reminds me of a local shrine where visitors and local people mingle together to worship one of their so-called 'eight million gods' [*yao yorozu no kami*] who are supposed to bless their lives. In the shrine, visitors draw oracles that are supposed to tell fortunes. They purchase various charms, icons and souvenirs from the precinct gift shops. Undoubtedly, these lively images of pop-idols and the luxurious image of the city they fantasize constitute one divine phase of the present-day consumer culture in Japan. This culture emerged out of the nation's postwar socioeconomic struggle like a shrine of sacred gods (October 28, 1994).

I thought, in this sense, that pop-idols create a symbolic landscape that might be called the "islands of eight million smiles" -- the landscape that complements the "islands of eight-million gods," which is the religious (*Shintō*) characterization of the Japanese archipelago.

Tōkyō, like other large cities in Japan, is a vast array of concrete houses, office blocks, small shops, restaurants, and supermarkets, traversed by streets crowded with people and roads filled with traffic. The frantic rhythms of late 20th century consumer culture mingle with the tranquil scenes of the traditional past, creating a sociohistorical enigma. Business districts and commercial centers stand side by side with places that are ready to provide businessmen with an exhilarating escape from the so-called 12 hours per day working regimen, such as *pachinko* game parlors, night clubs, dance halls, cinemas, and other entertainment plazas.

Tōkyō is where most image-related commodities are made, sold, and dispersed. Most performers, producers, writers and copywriters seek their jobs in this capital city, contributing to the city's reputation as the powerhouse of the modern economy and popular culture. As I was informed by a friend, "New trends, new brands and new customs all flow out of Tōkyō, and they never end. Everyone everywhere tries to follow up on what goes on in this city. Even if

anything new and exciting originates elsewhere, it is only when it goes through Tōkyō that it becomes magnified as a nation-wide phenomenon."

### *Developing Relationships in the Field*

According to Olesen and Whittaker (1967), participant observation is "a mutual venture in which reciprocal interpersonal exchanges between the research investigator and the actor result in more or less mutually meaningful, well-understood, viable social roles" (Olesen and Whittaker 1967:274). Ways in which the investigator and the actors define themselves around the research roles and life roles (such as age, sex, social class and other non-occupational roles) influence the nature of interaction as well as the quality of data gathered. I repeatedly reminded myself of this view as I was developing my relations with informants in the field.

A Japanese graduate student who has been interested in symbolic anthropology, I first became interested in pop-idol phenomena in 1988. I selected this topic for a term paper in a class I took as part of my Master's degree coursework at the University of Arizona. A former fan of Seiko Matsuda, one of the best-selling idol-pop singers in Japanese pop-music history, and a participant of pop-idol concerts and fan-club events as a high-school student in Japan, I had some consumer background in Japanese idol-pop.[5] Yet, my knowledge of what went on behind the scene was minimal, and therefore I began thinking about approaching this theme ethnographically. Nevertheless, I was interested in the strategies employed by commercially motivated individuals, groups and institutions to promote themselves in the field of idol-production and more generally in the field of Japanese popular culture.

To get a sense of what goes on in the Japanese entertainment industry, I made frequent trips back to Japan between 1988 and 1992 to observe idol-related events and collect idol-related materials. A few brief and informal contacts were made with writers and members of promotion

agencies, to whom I proposed the possibility of conducting academic field research on pop-idol performances. I was generally met with indifference. One informant said that such research would be very difficult because everyone in show business is extremely busy. He believed that nobody in the industry would intend to give a free interview to some academic who wants to reveal the inside story. I was also warned that some performers and agencies might be acquainted with the underworld. One informant suggested that it was best to stay out of trouble, as it is said in a Japanese proverb, "If you don't lay your hands on gods, there will be no curse" (*Sawaranu kami ni tatari nashi*).[6] Judging that I was not ready as of yet, I decided to pursue this topic at a Ph.D. level when I would be better equipped with ethnographic methods and research techniques. I thought that I also would have a better chance of being perceived by my informants as a qualified research expert.

That day came in 1994 when I completed my coursework. I was passed to doctoral candidacy, and I had managed to acquire some fellowship funds to fly back to Japan for long-term fieldwork. Soon after establishing a research base in Tōkyō, I wrote a project profile that explained my research rationale. I faxed copies to two dozens promotion agencies that were listed in a phone book. None of these agencies replied. I then decided to call these agencies by telephone to find out if they received my fax and if I could somehow get in touch with them. Some admitted that they received my fax and others did not, but all rejected my request on the basis that they did not wish to reveal any information related to their businesses to outsiders.

Neither were my previous contacts helpful at all. Those who I could contact agreed to help me and told me that they would get back to me, but they never did. Seeing me grow increasingly frustrated, my cousin who frequently visited my place said, "These agencies get thousands of weird calls from strangers everyday, so it's quite natural that you don't have any luck. Besides, you need a middle-person in this country who can understand you well, trust you

well, and is willing to help you well by introducing you to her or his acquaintances in the industry. Why don't you look for such a person?"

One person I failed to contact while doing my earlier surveys was Toshio Fujiwara (a pseudonym), a university student in Tōkyō who was an organizer of a pop-music research club. The club to which he belonged was one of many informal groups of friendly students, otherwise known as *saakuru* from the English "circle [of friends]", that developed in all Japanese universities. Fujiwara's home telephone number was given to me in 1990 by my friend who attended the same university, who asked the information center on my behalf thinking that the information might be helpful someday. After spending three months in the field without any contact, I pulled the number out of a file in my dusty notebook and made a call. His mother answered the telephone and instructed me to call back on a Sunday when he is usually at home. I also learned from her that this key informant-to-be is now a producer and a marketing agent who works at a large advertising company. His specialization was to produce a series of television commercials and hire suitable personalities for that purpose.

After a brief introduction over the telephone, an appointment was set on the first day of February 1995, at Fujiwara's office. He told me that something might come up all of a sudden, in which case he would not be able to see me and would like to apologize. I remember being aware at this moment as to how dynamic and unpredictable life in the corporate world could be.

After learning that I was trying to conduct serious research at the doctorate level that would introduce Japanese pop-idols to the academic community of North America, Fujiwara indicated that he would help me in any way he could. He made a copy of his notebook where he kept name cards of his close acquaintances in the industry. He circled the names of seven individuals whom he would be able to contact without much difficulty, and handed me the copy promising that he would try to contact these people and inform them about me as soon as possible.

Accepting his offer, I spoke to three of these individuals during the following week, and through them further contacts with many people in the industry were subsequently developed. They were freelance writers on pop-idols, and a sociologist who is also a pioneer in Japanese pop-idol research. These individuals provided me with a weighty introduction to what it is like to work with or around pop-idols in the world of Japanese show business.

When I was not seeking contacts and interviews, I attended concerts and public events, whose schedules could be acquired from monthly magazines such as Gakken's *Bomb!* and Ticket Saison's *Ticket Jack* (more popularly known as *tj*). I also visited stores where idol goods were being sold, and frequently kept track of television and radio programs in which pop-idols performed. Given a chance, I developed spontaneous conversations with people in the audience, staff members, and clerks. All of this helped me reconfirm and visualize many of the things that I was told from my informants during the interview.

From April 1995, my relationship with people in the industry evolved dramatically, thanks to the connection of helpful individuals offered by Fujiwara, and with a few lucky breakthroughs in my own attempts to contact agencies directly. My interview list totaled over 150 individuals including producers, performers, staff members, fan-club organizers, and advertising and publishing agents from large and small companies. Many of these people provided me with materials they thought would be helpful for my research. They also invited me to concerts, and gave me access to back stage areas. Some producers and managers took me to their meetings and get-togethers to show me what went on in these settings, while others took me to restaurants, bars, and coffee shops for informal conversations (figure 3).

I attended and tape-recorded much of what went on in concerts and public events without any difficulty. As for meetings and get-togethers that were more private, my chance of tape-recording was limited because they revealed confidential business information and bad rumors

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**お知らせ**

ブリティッシュ･コロンビア大学の日本のアイドルに関する学術的研究調査の対象に
“制服向上委員会”が選ばれましたので、ここにお知らせ致します。
（調査期間）　１９９５年6月 ～ １９９６年5月

いつも『清く正しく美しく』をモットーに活動している“制服向上委員会”の活動にご理解、ご協力を頂き、ありがとうございます。

早速ですが、この度ブリティッシュ･コロンビア大学の人類学部大学院より“制服向上委員会”に、日本の文化人類学の研究調査に対する協力依頼を受けました。

欧米で日本文化への関心が高まる中、日本のポップ文化や若者文化を様々な角度から調査し、学会での論文発表や出版をするそうです。

『清く正しく美しく』をモットーに、メッセージを歌うアイドルとして、毎月開催の「制服ファッションショー」を始め、様々な活動にチャレンジして来た事が認められた事について、メンバー及びスタッフも大変光栄な事と考えております。

これを機会に、日本の文化を代表する一員として、より一層の努力に励みたいと思っております。今後共、宜しくお願い致します。

**Figure 3. A sample memorandum produced by an idol promotion agency, PTA Committee, inviting the media to attend a press conference where their collaboration with my fieldwork was announced (June, 1995).**

that my informants did not want me to put on record. Taking photos proved to be a much more sensitive issue. Most of my informants did not want me to bring my camera anywhere except events where taking pictures was allowed for the public. When I was permitted to take it elsewhere, I was requested to show the photos before I published them. Some informants requested me to credit their agencies if I were to use a photo or any material related to them.

On one privileged occasion in August 1995, I participated in an audition as one of seven sectional judges. There, I met Akio Nakamori, a distinguished columnist and a writer on the subject of Japanese popular culture as well as a well-known promoter of pop-idols. After two months of occasional long conversations and rapport building, Nakamori offered me his media backup for my research. He indicated his wish to "produce me as an idol-like personality" in his magazine columns, which according to him would make access to people in the industry much easier because everyone would know about me. His plan turned out to be a four-part series in *SPA!*, Japan's major business, culture and entertainment weekly. I first struck a pose with pop-idols next to his column (44/43 [11/15/1995]: front page). I then wrote a column on the nature of my research (44/46 [12/6/1995]:150,152). I wrote another column demonstrating my case analysis (44/19 [12/20/1995]:140). Finally, I wrote a column toward the end of my fieldwork that looked back to my experiences in the field (45/26 [7/3/1996]:164,165). As Nakamori predicted, my subsequent contacts became much easier as I referred to my appearance in *SPA!* when I introduced myself. I was nicknamed in the industry as an "idol professor." I even began to receive telephone calls from the media that either wanted to seek my advice on some promotional projects or write comments on the subject of Japanese pop-idols in their periodicals (figure 4).

While all of this was pivotal to my fieldwork, it changed the nature of my interaction with informants substantially. I was no longer received as a curious researcher from abroad, who

The Dictionary of IDOL '96

# アイドルを通して見る日本の新時代

●文化アイドロジスト
青柳寛

アイドルは世につれ、世はアイドルにつれ……。ちょうどハリウッドスタアの様子からアメリカという国が見えてくるように、アイドルを通して日本社会の現状もよく理解する事ができます。最近では、「国民的」なアイドルは姿を消し、デビュー当時の松田聖子のように誰にでも愛されようと笑顔をふりまく「フリッコ」の可愛いコちゃんはすっかりいなくなってしまいました。それに代わって話題になっているのは、例えば森高千里に代表されるアーチスト系のガールポッパーや、吉川ひなののようなモデルタイプ、そして安達祐実や瀬戸朝香のような女優派です。どれも清潔感がありながら芯も強そうで、個性的なタレントたちばかりです。こうした今のアイドル事情は、日本文化がこれまで以上にアメリカやヨーロッパのような近代的な個性主義社会の文化に近付いて来た事を物語っているようです。

## ニコパチアイドル全盛から個性派タレント時代へ

確かに日本は、これまでも明治維新や戦後の民主政治等を通して近代化の道を押し進んで来たように見えます。しかしそれは、西洋を真似た少数の政治家や知識人たちによって上から押しつけられて行われたもので、決して民衆が自らやろうとした近代化ではなかったように思います。庶民による文化の近代化は今、まさに始まったばかりで、次から次へと出てくる個性派アイドルたちは、庶民のロール・モデルとしてそんな今の時代をリードしつつあるように思われてなりません。この意味で、アイドルポップの世界ももはや天使たちの集う夢のような天国の楽園ではなくなったような気がします。

今後、歌手のマドンナやセリーヌ・ディオン、または女優のオードリー・ヘップバーンやジョディー・フォスターに匹敵するような国際的なアイドルスタアが現れるという確信はありません。しかし、その可能性も大いに考えられます。安易な流行に流される事なく、未来への明確な目標と計画性を持ち、豊富な演技力で自分の道をしっかりと開拓していく事こそが、これからのアイドルたちに求められる条件だと思います。

あおやぎひろし●文化アイドロジスト　1963年生まれ、カナダのフリティッシュ・コロンビア大学大学院でアイドルをテーマに研究中。専門分野は文化解釈学と現象人類学。出版論文に「遊学と性概念」などがある



**Figure 4. A sample column by the author: *Aidoru o tōshite miru Nihon no shin-jidai* (*A look at the new era of Japan through pop-idols*), in Scholar's 1996 issue of *Chūmoku Aidoru Kanzen Data Book* (*The Dictionary of IDOL '96*)(p.57).**

wanted to learn about Japanese pop-idols as such, but a commentator and an expert on the subject as well. Frequent invitations to auditions and stage performances led me to question my own authority. Did I know enough to proclaim my expertise? People in the industry did not seem to mind as long as they could use me as part of their story making (*neta zukuri*). Yet, some idol-fans began to indicate problems they had with what they considered to be my authority. Even Fujiwara, who assisted me throughout the fieldwork, asked me what qualification I had to comment on pop-idols without a long-term commitment and real-time experience in the Japanese entertainment industry. In response, I published an article titled *What anthropology can understand about pop-idols* (*Jinruigaku wa aidoru ni tsuite nani o shiri-eru ka*) in the 1997 edition of Takarajimasha's annual book called *Aidoru Tanteidan* (*Pop-Idol Detectives*, p.156). I explained the difference between the emotional involvement of pop-idol fans with a particular idol who they admired and my research interest in the cultural aspects of the idol phenomena.

My primary concern in the field was the possibility that my informants would consider me a spy-like journalist who wanted to reveal their secrets to a curious crowd. I traveled freely across the boundaries of mutually competing institutions as I collected a variety of data that no journalist or consumer had ever collected before. Indeed, I was boldly travelling across the media and business universe to reach the stars in the name of social scientific discovery! That I could be a corporate spy was a difficult accusation to rebut, but to avoid such an accusation I presented a copy of my research proposal to all corporate representatives who I contacted. In this I explained that my interest was academic, not commercially oriented, and that my research would not jeopardize any agency or its members. I also indicated that the anthropological study

of pop-idol performances would benefit the industry by providing a critical understanding of the symbolic significance of pop-idols as well as the cultural significance of pop-idol production.

From time to time, some of my informants asked me what my conclusions were or how I was going to present the data I had acquired. I took these inquiries as a significant part of my interaction with informants, and gave them my thoughts about how I might summarize them. Conversations that developed on these occasions provided me with a chance to get important feedback from my informants. In the end, the majority of people with whom I interacted accepted me as an academic who had a genuine interest in the study of Japanese popular culture. Many of them gave their precious time, energy, and sometimes even money, on behalf of my research. As for my part, trying to win understanding, trust, and support from my informants was a non-stop effort. The tension of maintaining a good image contributed to my daily exhaustion, along with the need to catch up with various events in a highly competitive and unpredictable environment where things could come and go very quickly and often without notice.

### *Ethical Concerns*

To fulfil ethical requirements in the field, I followed the human-subject guidelines issued by the Behavioral Science Screening Committee of the University of British Columbia. I prepared consent forms for all of my informants guaranteeing protection of their privacy, autonomy and confidentiality. While this placed the burden on the researcher in the field, many difficulties emerged in relation to the principle of informant protection. For example, I could not precisely define what privacy (confidentiality) and publicity meant. I was often confused as to where autonomy began and ended. There was no exact way of knowing whether my research was representing or harming the people being studied. I was not sure whether the research ends

justified the means. I could not foresee whether there is a subject or an area that should not be touched in the first place.

For instance, my fieldwork on the Japanese entertainment industry included the investigation of public perceptions of events that were considered scandalous: questionable sexual conduct, illegal drug use, underworld connections, mysterious accidents, death and so on. I neither sought nor was I informed about the authenticity of these scandals, as they were not part of my research interest. On the other hand, investigating the practices of pop-idol marketing in the field's economic and symbolic power structures (i.e., the dimension of completion, domination, conflict, conformity, and resistance) was a necessary step toward the understanding of cultural production, not only in present-day Japan but also in the similar venues of consumer society throughout the world.

The experts in managing images, impressions, and publications I approached in the entertainment industry were aware that they were risking a permanent recording of their accounts, and those who participated in my research project were willing to take that risk. I used special codes in my fieldnotes and journal entries to exclude all names and identifying features. All audiotaped materials were destroyed after transcriptions were made, and all identifying features in these transcriptions were codified.

Protecting the privacy and confidentiality of my informants in the data presentation required some caution during the organization of this thesis. While much of the information given to me during my interaction with informants in the field was considered publishable, there was background information that was not to be released, and much fell in between. Regarding certain information, my informants *wanted* me to reveal and acknowledge their identities. Any information that clearly needed to go off record was indicated by informants during my interaction with them in the field. I took ethical ethnography to be contingent upon the ongoing

dialectic of negotiation where what can and cannot be presented is discussed between the researcher and the people being studied at every step including the writing. I contacted my informants whenever I could not determine the propriety of publishing the given data.[7]

**Research Methods**

Participant observation, as canonized by Malinowski's pioneering works in the Trobriand Islands, is the predominant means by which anthropologists acquire their knowledge about people and their cultures.[8] Observation grounded in participation allows researchers to rise out of their armchairs, experience the social world, and investigate why and how members of a society construct certain social realities. There is more to the practice of fieldwork, however, than taking part in what people do. A simple premise that sharing ideas, emotions and experiences with informants in certain sociocultural contexts is synonymous with achieving a greater understanding of their culture or society is always contestable. Yet, given the critical eye of a researcher, contextual analyses can reveal things that people might not either realize or enunciate as a part of their culture themselves. Ethnographic field research, in this sense, is a way of understanding certain aspects of culture that might not be recognizable to the participants.

To analyze cultural organizations and social relationships that evolve around the symbolic practices of pop-idol production critically, my fieldwork subsumed three major methodological approaches: observation, conversation, and participation. The distinction between these three research aspects is technical (or analytical) rather than actual. It helped me differentiate the kinds of information I could generate in the field. In reality, I did not sequentially organize my fieldwork into the three stages of observation, conversation, and participation, but rather amalgamated these into a dynamic, unified, and mutually interactive approach.

### *Observation*

Observation is a primary means by which the researcher can acquire knowledge about the people being studied. It is a subjective endeavor that depends upon the researcher's impressions and perspectives about observed phenomena, as well as her or his way of approaching the phenomena. A wide range of information can be generated through observation, from activities that take place in a confined setting to general features of culture or society, or qualitative details and quantitative delineation. Every observation contains research issues that require some form of answer. One observation might lead to another and yet another, exposing the researcher to an infinite process of investigation.

I spent most of my time in the field attending concerts, public events, media programs, press conferences, official meetings and informal get-togethers. I used these places as primary sites to observe how my informants acted, or to confirm (or contest) what my informants told me during our conversations. My observations were not limited to these sites of interaction. A simple walk along the street was a serious observational activity on my part. For example, I could direct my attention to the ways idol posters and billboards were set up, and the ways people reacted to these signs. I also made frequent visits to retail outlets where idol-related products were sold in order to check out trends in consumer items. This, too, was part of my routine observation.

### *Conversation*

By conversation, I mean a dialogue between the researcher and her or his informants that generates information beyond the limits of subjectivity. Through a series of conversations, the researcher can clarify problems that emerge in the field and develop further observational

possibilities in the light of the informants' own words. Conversation evokes ideas, opinions and emotions that the researcher and informants have about themselves, their lives, their experiences, and each other. As such, it is a technique to facilitate a mutual search for self-understanding. It includes ethnographic interviews, but is not limited to any direct sequence of questions and answers. My informants often provided me with invaluable information informally rather than through a formal interview.

During my eighteen-month fieldwork, I tape-recorded 172 hours of interviews with 84 individuals, and hundreds of more hours were spent talking with these and another 80 individuals. Of these informants, 68 were producers and promoters, 49 were pop-idol performers, and 47 were fans and general members of the audience. Conversations with these people ranged anywhere from a 30 minute, one-time interview to repeated get-togethers of many hours. With my native competence in Japanese and my experience growing up in Japan, I encountered no language-related problem communicating with my informants. Yet, there were several apparent problems with communication at a sociolinguistic level.

A typical Japanese attitude, taken by the majority of my informants, was for one to act either with ambiguity, reservation, indifference, or what Japanese would more precisely call "professed intention" (*tatemae*), that cloaked one's "true intention" or "real feeling" (*honne*). Japan is considered to be a society whose members tend to surrender (or at least tone down) their individual opinions and interests in deference to those of the group or the social norm. This tendency is represented by the classic proverb, "The capable hawk would hide its claws" or *nō aru taka wa tsume o kakusu.* In such a social environment, it was difficult for me to develop a conversation at all with many of my informants.[9] Even if a conversation was manageable, I could not confirm whether my informants meant what they said unless I became close enough

for them to eventually reveal their feelings. There were cases in which my informants told me, "I said [such and such 1] before, but what I meant by that was [such and such 2]."

To compensate for this problem, I tried to contact the same informant more than once, and I repeatedly checked the points that were previously made. I also raised the same research problem or topic in different conversational contexts so that I could compare the information between these cases. For each informant I met, I tried to build as much rapport as possible so that she or he could feel at ease when they spoke to me. It was also important to use observation and participation to examine the points made by my informants during the conversation.

Typical questions asked of all informants during an ethnographic interview were: 1) how deeply they are involved in idol-pop production or consumption; 2) their reasons for the involvement; and 3) the effects of the involvement upon their lives and their world. These questions generated official and personal information that contributed to my research goal, which was to understand the process of symbolic construction in a commercial field. In many cases, simply asking my informants to describe their backgrounds or explain their relationship with pop-idols elicited greater levels of comfort on their part. This allowed them greater freedom to express opinions than when I asked questions about specific issues directly.

### *Participation*

Participation has many dimensions other than simply taking part in the native world. Participation is a method used to enrich ethnographic knowledge. It enables the researcher to seek and experience the local way of life, determine her or his distance with the people being studied, and evaluate the significance of activities and relationships on the basis of information that could and could not be acquired. Yet, several problems regarding the manner of participation arose during my fieldwork. For instance, I had to think whether I as a researcher

could adopt an existing native role, or exploit different roles. I also had to decide whether I should falsify my identity or go honest, and question myself "to whom and why?" The more I managed to participate, the more I was able to adopt the insiders' points of view. Still, there was a danger of developing a bias and sacrificing critical analysis. After having had a chance to experience media attention, and as my identity as an outsider became evermore blurred, it was difficult for me to determine how much participation was enough.

Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) warn that participation is not to be confused with going native. Ethnography by definition requires the researcher to maintain a social and intellectual distance with her or his informants, however he or she may engage in their way of life. They write:

> There is a sense... that the disengaged/engaged ethnographer may suffer. But this feeling, or equivalent feelings, should be managed for what they are. They are not necessarily something to be avoided, or to be replaced by more congenial sensations of comfort. The comfort sense of being 'at home' is a danger signal. From the perspective of the 'marginal' reflexive ethnographer, there can thus be no question of total commitment, 'surrender', or 'becoming'. There must always remain some part held back, some social and intellectual 'distance'. For it is in the 'space' created by this distance that the analytic work of the ethnographer gets done (Hammerseley and Atkinson 1983:102).

This shows the importance of maintaining a certain distance between the researcher and the people being studied.

Guided by this stance, I kept myself away from the informants for several hours everyday (usually at the end of the day) to reflect on my experiences, organize the data, and write up my fieldnotes and diaries. I also informed my informants of my objectives for participation whenever I adopted the insider's role. My right to participate was sometimes questioned by those who could not accept any participation by an outsider. When this happened, I did not hesitate to investigate their motives.

Existing native roles that I adopted include a judge, an adviser, a commentator, a writer, and an idol-like personality. I published my thoughts in popular magazines and examined audience reactions with the help of five publishers, participated in two talk shows, and experienced what it was like to be a popular personality for two sponsoring agencies. Both my informants and myself knew all along that these roles were not intended to be permanent.

### *Other Research Methods*

The study of pop-idol performances in Japan also involved archival research. Many hours were spent at Ōya Sōichi Bunko Library that held one of the largest collections of popular magazines and periodicals in Japan. Other sources included the archives of Gakushū Kenkyūsha (Gakken), Shōgakkan, Fusōsha, Kodansha, Kadokawa Shoten, and Sun Music Productions. Since one of my research goals was to understand the relationship between idol-pop and a wider context of Japanese society and economy, I had to obtain relative source materials that included demographic information and socioeconomic analyses. The National Diet Library of Japan, or Kokkai Toshokan (the Japanese equivalent of the United States Library of Congress) offered a large inventory of these necessary materials. Various bookstores in Tōkyō carried materials that I found useful in this task as well.

I made audio and video recordings of various television and radio programs, and live events on topics that were relevant to my research. Also collected were promotion videos that included a series of 15 to 30 minute clips introducing pop-idol profiles, songs, and advertisements. These recordings amounted to approximately 400 hours. Other data sources included national and local daily newspapers, such as *Asahi Shinbun*, *Mainichi Shinbun*, *Yomiuri Shinbun*, *Hōchi Shinbun*, *Sankei Shinbun*, *Nikkan Sports*, and *Tōkyō Chūnichi Sports*, from which I cut out

useful articles. I obtained fan club newsletters from three promotion agencies periodically, which helped me keep track of pop-idol activities and fan reactions in significant details. From time to time, I invited my informants to my place, in which case I asked them to bring their own collection of pop-idol related materials, provided they had these materials.

All of these approaches and techniques contributed to the overall aim of my fieldwork: to immerse myself in the field of pop-idol production, and gather as much spoken and written data as possible on the subject of symbolic commodification. Much of the analyses of these data under an organizational framework owed to months following my return to the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at the University of British Columbia. I have subsequently kept in touch with key informants who continued to enrich me with information and source materials that they thought would advance my research. Thus, the analysis presented in this study testifies to a collaborative effort made between my informants and myself to explain idol performances and the culture in which they are enmeshed.

**Notes:**

1. These numbers were taken from *Masukomi Denwachō* (*Mass Communication Telephone Book*)(Senden Kaigi Shinsha 1995).

2. During my fieldwork in Tōkyō, I came across two settings in which the media treatment of public persona could be compared. The first was a press conference held by a relatively small promotion agency, whose pop-idols were treated by a group of dozen media reporters with a constant silence. To my surprise, no reporter brought a camera, and whatever statement the clients made during the conference did not seem to interest any of the reporters. Only a few questions were raised during the entire hour in which the conference took place. The second was a press conference of a well-known pop-idol, who was met with many camera flashes, favorable greetings, and a number of questions from the reporting audience.

3. McClure (1998), for example, tries to look at an ever-evolving aspect of Japanese pop-music. In this book, he identifies indies, metal rock, idol race, dance music, club mix, pure pop, rap and hip-hop, jam and reggae, ethnic pop, Ōsakan pop, as well as rhythm and blues as the representative genres of the contemporary Japanese pop music.

4. See Miyadai *et al* (1993), chapter two.

5. Matsuda produced 16 number-one albums, 25 top singles, and more than $500 million (U.S.D.) in sales by 1993 (Kōdansha 1993:1286).

6. The English equivalent of this would be "Far from Jove, far from thunder" or "It is ill jesting with edged tools."

7. This aspect of the ongoing dialectic of negotiation in ethnographic fieldwork is discussed by Whittaker (1981:445).

8. See, for instance, Malinowski (1922).

9. In relation to this cultural trend, there is a strong emphasis on protecting everyone's face in public interactions. See, for instance, Lebra (1976: 110-136).

## CHAPTER III – THE MAKING OF ADOLESCENT ROLE MODELS

Symbols serve both existential and political ends. Though manifested in overtly nonpolitical institutions, and regardless of their ambiguous configurations, symbols legitimate the distribution of power within a social unit. At the same time, symbols integrate individuals into this power structure by cultivating selfhood (Cohen 1990[1979]:29). In this sense, symbolic beliefs are collective, and loaded with meanings and functions. They develop and maintain the interests of the group (1990[1979]:34,35).

In the light of Cohen's definition of symbols, this chapter explores the relationship between pop-idol performances, culture, and power. The power structure in question here is exercised by the idol manufacturing industry as well as its associates. The group represented by young pop-idols, the prominent symbols of contemporary Japanese popular culture, consists of adolescents. Two problems are relevant to this discussion: 1) the problem of adolescence and how this life stage is perceived in Japan as a notable state of personal transformation toward appropriate adulthood; and 2) how members of the idol-manufacturing industry manipulate this social condition and institute themselves as agents of adolescent socialization signifying the needs and outlooks of young consumers.

This study of the role the entertainment industry plays as a symbolic institution for adolescent socialization ties in with the anthropological understanding of *rites de passage*, or rites associated with various stages of the life cycle. In Van Gennep (1960), rites that organize the passage of individuals in accordance with the underlying system of social classification are shown to exist in many cultures and share common sequential features. These rites of passage mark individuals' separation from a previous stage, appropriate the behaviors of those who undergo transition, and incorporate individuals into the new stage. These ritual processes bridges the self and the society by ascribing individuals who undergo transition from one stage

of life to another to socially-appropriate behaviors and personal qualities. The socializing function of the Japanese pop-idol industry is consistent with the role they play in constructing rituals that would coordinate the passage of Japanese adolescents toward appropriate adult consumers (cf. Ōtsuka 1989).

During an interview I was told, "Make no fire, raise no smoke, and our job [as producers] in the [entertainment] industry is to create 'the fire of trend' (so to speak) that can inflame public consciousness." This statement highlights a significant issue: the textual strategies employed by the industry to construct adolescent role models, and their concomitant impact upon adolescent lifestyles. The discussion in this chapter will attempt to detail the ways in which pop-idol texts are created and marketed in the name of public socialization.

## Adolescence and Socialization

### *Theorizing Adolescence: Betwixt and Between Childhood and Adulthood*

Adolescence, or the period of transition from childhood to adulthood, has been widely studied in social sciences. In anthropology, a growing number of studies on conditions and experiences of youth in different cultural contexts have been followed on the heels of Mead's (1928) pioneering work, *Coming of Age in Samoa.* These studies focus on social and cultural reactions to physiological changes that occur in individuals at the onset of puberty. They illustrate how these individuals acquire social, economic, and sexual behaviors through parent-child interactions, peer group relations, schools and other institutional means as they are initiated into adult society (e.g., Van Gennep 1960; Leemon 1972; Schlegel 1973; Condon 1987; Burbank 1988; Davis and Davis 1989; Hollos and Leis 1989).[1]

Researchers such as Wulff (1995b) recently began to focus more on youth culture in its own right by asserting the need to reconsider adolescents as creative agents. In this view, adolescents

are "producing something on their own which might not last in the long run but could still be significant for them at the time" (Wulff 1995b:1,3). While this may free adolescents from being seen merely as the institutional objects of adult society, other studies warn against overemphasizing adolescent subjectivity. Any youth culture that may appear to emerge in and of itself often tends to be largely manipulated by adults who provide what they believe would appeal to adolescents (Schlegel and Barry 1991:202). Following Jourdan (1995), this study will proceed with the analysis of idol symbolism based on the view that the adolescent life-world is most adequately perceived as situated within the dialogue between adolescent subjects and the social structure. Influencing and influenced by the instrumental forces of adult society, adolescents establish their positions, enact their roles, and fulfil their lives by "putting new meanings into the old shells" (Jourdan 1995:205).

The prominent characteristics of adolescents, as demonstrated by researches in the developmental psychology of Europe and North America, include hormonal changes and the corresponding adjustments of self-images and emotions. The ability to objectify oneself intensifies during youth, facilitating self-reflection, criticism, cognitive discrepancies, emotional discomforts, and behavioral disorders (e.g., Dusek and Flaherty 1981; Leahy 1985; Higgins 1987; Damon and Hart 1988). This characterization of adolescence as a "dis-eased" state of being, due to its ambivalent positioning between autonomous childhood and responsible adulthood, is carried on in anthropology by Schlegel and Barry (1991). Comparing data from 186 societies of non-industrial origin, Schlegel and Barry show that stressful experiences are common to adolescents everywhere. They argue:

> Although adolescence worldwide might not have the *Strum und Drang* quality attributed to it in some of the more florid 19th and 20th century literature, adolescence... displays points of stress that may be widely characteristic of this stage... In small closed societies, adolescence is not just a period of training for adult life; it is the time during which the ground is prepared for adult social

> relations with the same people who are currently one's peers... It is likely that adolescents are aware of this as they struggle to cope with the social pressures to conform and often to excel (1991:43).

This proclaims that some sense of social pressures and difficulties are felt by adolescents across cultures who undergo the process of transition from childhood to adulthood.

However, gross generalizations about youth utilizing psychological concepts developed in modern, industrial societies of 19th and 20th century Europe and North America, such as Hall's (1904) "emotional turbulence" (*Strum und Drang*) and Erikson's (1968) "identity crisis," are made untenable by ethnographic studies. For example, Mead (1928) shows that, adolescent sexuality is characterized by sexual freedom and experimentation in Samoa, whereas it is characterized by sexual repression in the United States. Some anthropologists would not see adolescence as a duration period between childhood and adulthood as existing everywhere or throughout history (e.g., Whiting *et al* 1986). The conceptualization of adolescent experience in terms of life crisis is challenged within the field of Euro-American psychology itself. For instance, Maslow (1962) considers the process of adolescent maturation as self-exploration rather than crisis (see also Marcia 1966,1967; Bocknek 1980). Above all, life itself might be stressful regardless of its stage, and identifying one particular stage with stress as defining is questionable, at least anthropologically. Certainly, the literature indicates more.

An essential task for the ethnographer of youth, then, is to examine how adolescents perceive and organize their world as they interact with each other as well as adults in a local context. It follows that the analysis of adolescent phenomena must operate largely in terms of the culturally defined concept of adolescence. As Whiting and Whiting (1988) contend, the study of youth must "remain as sensitive as possible to indigenous 'folk theories' of human maturation" (Whiting and Whiting 1988: xii). Thus, to investigate the particular manner in which conceptualizations of adolescents as a group affects the expectations and behavior of young

people in that group become an important point of analysis for the ethnographer (Burbank 1988:3,4). To this end, the remainder of this chapter examines how adolescence is conceptualized in Japanese society, and what role idol performances play in affecting the world organized around young people.

### *Adolescence in Japan*

A variety of traditional rituals associated with the life cycle are practiced in Japan, and some of these rituals are characterized by the most ancient and pervasive religious influence, *shintō*. A set of rituals related to a child's birth, for example, includes a naming ceremony in which the child's name will be written out and hung up in the prominent place of the house. The child's separation from the pre-birth state is marked by the careful preservation of the child's umbilical cord when it drops off (which will be kept in a box by the mother). Some families take the child to a local shrine to signify the child's incorporation into social life, while others hold a family gathering to celebrate the safe arrival of their new member (Hendry 1995:134,135).

There are rites that formally mark the progress of a child through various stages of maturation. On the so-called Girl's Day (March 3) and Boy's Day (May 5), many families set up tiers of shelves with various symbolic ornaments. These ornaments include splendid figures from the ancient imperial court for girls, accompanied by small but elaborate accessories including palanquins and tableware, and miniature warrior armor and helmets, arrows and dolls depicting fierce heroes for boys. By setting up these ornaments, the families pray for the child's protection and good fortune. For approximately one month before Boy's Day arrives, huge carp made of cloth are set up over households with young sons. On the 15th of November each year, children of three, five, and seven dress up in traditional garments and visit local shrines to pray for further protection and good fortune (1995:135,136). Those who have reached the age of 20

participate in a public event, known as *seijinshiki* or "coming of age ceremony" on January 15. They listen to speeches made by the officials about the upright citizens they are expected to become. They are then officially entitled to legal rights and responsibilities as adults (1995:138). Other occasions in which rituals take place include marriage, years of calamity (the major ages of which are 33 for women and 41 and 42 for men), retirement and old age, as well as death and memorial celebrations. In discussing these passage rites, Hendry (1995:145,146) points out that they are part of the Japanese cultural system which classifies the life cycle into a set of intervals. Each of these rites marks the transition of the participants from one stage of life to another within this socially recognized and culturally shared system (see also Sofue 1965).

"Adolescence," although a recognized life stage, is considered a relatively new concept in Japanese history -- perhaps adopted from the West in the process of modernization during the late 19th century.[2] Adolescence is considered in Japan today as marking the period in which individuals become awakened (*mezameru*) to the adult social reality. It is the stage of relational and affective reorganization -- what Coleman (1980) would describe as severance of early emotional ties to parents and experimentation with adult social (and sexual) roles. The Japanese word for adolescence, *seishun*, is literally translated as "green spring" -- a plant metaphor that signifies the outset of maturation toward a full-grown adult in terms of the sprouting of adult consciousness. Studies of Japanese youth show how this stage is understood by both Japanese adults and adolescents a life-stage in which prospective individuals are expected to progress into responsible adult social life (e.g., White 1993; Kawai 1994).

*Seishun* and its derivative term *seishun-jidai* (lit. "Youthful period") also represents a romanticized community of high-spirited young people who undergo physiological changes and corresponding development of self-awareness. In such a community, personal anxieties and stresses resulting from the need to manage one's relationship with other people are overcome by

mutual support among friends. A statement made by my informant, a university student in his mid-twenties, reflects this view. He argues:

> Youth symbolizes a 'contemporary rite of passage' in which one forms solidarity with peers, and shares various wonders, dreams, and tragicomedies of life with them. One can also overcome emotional difficulties that we all experience as 'under-developed adults', and appreciate what it means to coexist with other people in this unavoidable and otherwise ruthless environment we call society, which is full of hardship and loneliness.

This indicates the value of peer solidarity, or having a sense of mutual-support or fraternity of belonging, as part of adolescents' initiation into appropriate adulthood.[3] *Seishun-jidai* is also known as *shishunki*, or the period in which interactive young individuals become aware of their gender roles and expectations. Exploring sexual relationships through love affairs, or having mating-practices with one's peers, becomes one of the main themes of this life-stage.

Part of becoming an adult is to acquire the distinction between prominent cultural categories, such as professed intention (*tatemae*) and true intention (*honne*), front (*omote*) and back (*ura*), or outside (*soto*) and inside (*uchi*). This enables the actor to adjust her or his behavior differently between the outward-public and inward-private realms of life. Both Japanese adolescents and adults share an understanding that the gap between these two realms of life is an acceptable area of freedom for adolescents to explore themselves.

Maturation in Japan means becoming publicly more responsible, but as long as one performs social duties well, private activities and dreams (such as engaging in hobbies and sexual pleasures) can deviate to some extent (White 1993:20). White refers to this ambivalence as complementary conflict, distinguishing it from the American perception of personal development which stresses consistent behavior and a single, integrated as the outward evidence of good quality. Thus, behaving differently in different situations may be considered hypocrisy for Americans, and many adolescents who tend to demonstrate this trait in the U.S. are treated

as deviant, monstrous, or teen-problematic. Yet, such a behavior is more easily accepted in Japan (1993:20,21).

For most adolescents, family and classroom contexts are considered sites where socializing skills are taught. Japanese parents and teachers place strong emphasis on perseverance, diligence, patience, cooperation, and group conformity to reinforce the sense of self-discipline. Adolescents are required to undergo intense competition in which their academic and career paths are determined on the basis of how well they perform overall in exams, whose scores are measured in terms of a grade-point-average. These conditions constitute family and school as part of the formal education system that beset adolescents with constant pressures (e.g., Lanham 1979; Rohlen 1988; Dore and Sako 1989).

In contrast, friendship provides a context where adolescents can seek refuge from the shared pressures of the education system, engage in private, non-institutionalized togetherness, and freely acquire skills to negotiate the hierarchical necessities of society (White 1993:17). Friendship, in this sense, becomes a significant training ground for adolescents to socialize informally.

In friendship grounded in mass culture, adolescents are referred to as "infomaniacs" (*infomaniakku*), which implies that an intense focus is placed on adolescents to negotiate an appropriate lifestyle through their interaction and the exchange of information. As White writes,

> Young teens in Japan are *infomaniakku*, 'informaniacs.' When they get together, it is to share the latest on their favorite pop-music stars, news on where to buy that great shirt, or what CD rental shop has a special offer this week. The young teen is intensely focused on being appropriate, and she negotiates the path by testing on friends what's learned in the media -- discovering who she is by what her friends like -- to wear, to hear, to buy (1993:14).

Elsewhere, White (1995) indicates that the trend industry is well aware of this adolescent tendency to share information between peers, and is prepared to manipulate it. She states:

> [Adolescence in Japan] implies style, aspirations, a way of thinking and behaving. To some it may imply the older notion of 'neither here nor there', the *chūto hanpa* limbo of 'betweenness', but the consumer industries have targeted these young people in a more specific way. The 'naming' of this 'stage' has thus outlined a category permitting, and indeed demanding, diversity and slippage. Because of the speed of marketing, the case of Japan reveals the market-driven aspects of coming of age as well as the active involvement of teens themselves in creating new cultures and practices that then feed back into the market definition of adolescence (1995:255,256).

Thus, teens become an important consumer category in contemporary Japanese society.

The outcomes of this were clearly observed during my fieldwork in Tōkyō. Taking public transportation with groups of high-school students, for example, I noticed that information acquired in the media about "what's pop these days" was one of the three most frequently discussed issues of their conversations.[4] Simply walking down the street revealed the majority of young people dressed in a similar fashion. Most of the garment designs and hair styles resembled those appearing in some of the latest issues of widely distributed fashion magazines, such as *Non-No*, *An-An*, *Junon*, *Popolo*, *Can Cam*, *McSister*, and *Cutie* for young women, or *Men's Non-No* and *Popeye* for young men (figure 5).

A survey amongst a group of 10 informants between the ages of 18 and 25 confirmed that they use magazines and television programs as the primary sources of information. It was also revealed that these informants often discussed the details of what they learned in these media sources with close friends. All 10 of them also indicated that they frequently handed on to each other the latest fashion magazines and pop-music CDs that they could get as part of their information exchange. When asked whether they were aware of the fact that they were being created by the media, answers were commonly "Yes." Answers to my subsequent question "Why are you so concerned about conforming yourself to media-created trends?" included the following:

"Good fashion develops one's individuality out of a conventional style!" (25 year old female)

**Figure 5. In a typical cover page of one of the most widely distributed fashion magazines, *An-An*, idol pop-stars strike fashionable poses (January 13, 1995).**

"Good lifestyle is socially appropriate." (22 year old male)

"I wanted to do things right." (24 year old female)

"I want to make sure that I'm not sticking out, even though I want to look cool." (22 year old male)

"It's embarrassing to stay behind other people." (18 year old female)

These answers indicated that propriety and conventionality were important reasons for adolescent consumers to socialize, even in the informal domain such as fashion and personal lifestyle.

Thus, the introduction of adolescence as a life-stage in Japan's modern era provided a ground for new institutions (such as the family, school, and mass media) to develop and capitalize on the codification of norms that can become part of the system of cultural classification.[5] It is in this spectrum that pop-idols and their manufacturing agencies can be examined -- as a cultural apparatus that constructs adolescent symbols and rituals. The pop-idol industry employs cultural strategies that can create marketable images and styles of performance that appeal to adolescent tastes and represent their lifestyles. The next section will attempt to detail these textual characteristics and strategies.

## Pop-Idol Performances as the Embodiment of Youth Culture

### *Pop-Idols: Marketing Life-Sized Adolescent Companions*

In Western societies, the possession and enhancement of high self-esteem is strongly emphasized via such notions as individualism and self-reliance (e.g., Hsu 1953). "The squeaky wheel," as the English saying goes, "gets the grease." In contrast, Japanese expect their members to surrender, or at least tone down, their individual opinions and interests in deference to those of the group or social norm, and discourage the practice of thinking too highly of

oneself. "The nail that sticks out," the Japanese say, "gets hammered down" (*deru kugi wa utareru*). Essentializing these cultural highlights, of course, dangerously misrepresents existing individual and group diversities within each culture.[6] Yet, studies in cross-cultural communications show that different sociocultural groups develop different communicative protocols that reinforce these behavioral highlights (e.g., Kondō 1990; Yamada 1990).[7]

Popular celebrities embody this cross-cultural difference. In her study of Japanese pop music, Herd (1984) points out that most stars in Western countries are popular because of their outstanding physical or personal attributes. Japanese pop-idols, on the other hand, typically depict images that are fairly standard: appearance, ability and charm that are above average, but not so much as to alienate or offend the audience. Pop idol images are "just enough to provide their fans with the sense that they too can be stars if they try hard enough" (Herd 1984:77,78). Japanese allude to this characteristic as *tōshindai*, or "life-sized." An idol producer explained that the life-sized image of pop-idols helps produce feelings of solidarity and reciprocity. He said:

> By being 'life-sized,' pop-idols can harmonize with the audience, especially young fans. Also, to be 'life-sized' is to publicly confirm that pop-idols are not living in this world on their own, but together with people who are there to support them and whom they are expected to support. I mean... everyone who is interested. Human relationships are what hold pop-idols in their place and enable idol businesses to function. Although idols are expected to become role models of some kind, and to represent the public in certain ways, this role cannot be accomplished unless they keep pace with the people all around them... To be 'life-sized', that is. They cannot run ahead too fast, or lag too far behind.

Thus, pop-idols become trendsetters for adolescents. Through entertainment offerings, they continuously invoke in the minds of young audiences the sense of doing things and growing up together.

Playing on the needs of young people to socialize, life-sized pop-idols are marketed as the "personifiers" (so to speak) of an ideal girl or boy next door (*tonari no onna no ko* or *tonari no*

*otoko no ko*). They are chosen for their potential to become lucky stars representing their generation. Ogawa (1988) calls them "quasi-companions" (*gijiteki nakama*) who provide their teenage followers with a virtual sense of intimacy -- the feeling that affirms cultural emphasis on interconnectedness in Japan. This form of companionship, which signifies the position of each individual as part of a unified group, is also emphasized by popular personalities for earlier age groups. These include Power Rangers and Sailor Moon, who tend to come in groups (of five), which contrasts with the North American television stars, such as He-Man or Batman and Robin, who are solo or in pairs, emphasizing individuality and coupling. In this sense, the companionship in pop-idol performances can be seen as style one transfers from the earlier age groups on up.

Ogawa contends that although the companionship which Japanese pop-idols emphasize is understood as artificial, impervious, and thereby realized only in fantasy, the intimacy it evokes can be as strong as, or even stronger than, that shared among school friends (1988:122,123). This is due to the fact that unlike real-life companions, with whom there is always the potential for conflict and loss of friendship, pop-idols smile and appear to be friendly all the time. Unlike real people, idols never reject those who wish to approach them -- provided, of course, that the relationship is professional in nature. In short, idols never say "No" to their customers (1988:123).

The performer's own inclination toward sustaining the image of the life-sized adolescent companion is revealed in an essay by Rie Tomosaka (who debuted in 1992). A pop-idol who has been characterized in the media as "genius" (*tensai*), Tomosaka downplays her celebrity status and proclaims that she is, before anything else, an ordinary teenage girl.[8] For example, in the essay published as part of a book on pop-idols, Tomosaka states:

> I am ordinary. I may be much plainer than ordinary people. I am a high-school student who goes to classes when I don't have any work to do... I also shop and play with my friends. I think that each person is different [in terms of his or her personal identity], but in my case, I don't seem to be much aware of the fact that I am an entertainer or a pop-idol... Yet, I have many friends who work in show business, and they are all girls, unfortunately... Perhaps, the sad thing is that ordinary people do not treat us in an ordinary way. We, too, want an ordinary life and an ordinary romance, but we are not considered ordinary [by other people]... That's about all, I think, that is not ordinary... (Tomosaka 1997:118,119).

Like Ryoko Hirosue (whose commentary was introduced in chapter one), Tomosaka modifies the fame that puts her in an uncomfortably higher position by attaching herself to peer solidarity.

According to Masahisa Aizawa, the vice-president of Sun Music Productions, the image of the life-sized adolescent companion enables pop-idols and their manufacturers to "create and maintain an interactive space." Within this social space, adolescent consumers can "continuously empathize in their sense of maturation with idols who undergo growth from inexperienced novices to experienced actors." Makoto Yasui, a former editor in chief of Gakken's monthly pop-idol magazines, *Bomb!* (1979-present) and *Momoco* (1983-1994), elaborated on this point and said that one of the primary functions of pop-idols is to sympathize with the experiences and emotions of those who are passing through *seishun no mon*, or "gateway to youth," by means of encouraging messages and performances. According to Yasui, pop-idols

> enact the role of compassionate partners who are capable of comforting that particular age group [of adolescents] . Wonders, tensions, emotional ambiguities, curiosities toward the opposite sex, a sense of conflict with society, search for the meaning of existence, problems associated with romance... Pop-idols can share these issues with their teen audiences by expressing their own ideas and opinions about youthful experiences, thus providing their fans with a sense of communal ties, or... skinships [if you will]. In the process of growing up with these fans, idol talents themselves can attain skills and confidence.

"Skinship" is a clever combination of "closeness" (symbolized by skin) and "kinship." This implies that the concept of the family tie is used as a metaphor signifying intimacy. By using this term directly from English, Yasui tried to indicate how intimate and empathetic the relationship between pop-idols and their fans can ideally be.

The following excerpt from an essay written by Seiko Matsuda (figure 6) provides an example of the empathetic message offered by a pop-idol to her fans:

> Seiko is so happy to meet you! As a singer and an 18-year old girl, I feel for the first time that I can become independent. Please watch over me warmly forever! (Matsuda 1980: cover page).

Similarly, Atsuhiro Satō, a former member of a popular male idol group, *Hikaru Genji* (1987-1994), writes in his published essay:

> I want to establish a personal position as a singer, actor and all else put together! Yet, this may still be too vague to be called a dream... Although I am still at a stage where I am working hard, please keep your watch over me. Let's continue with our spending of time together (Satō 1991b:215).

Both Matsuda and Satō build on their companion statuses and call upon the readers to empathize with their will to maturate. These short statements explicate the intention of performers to share their youthful visions and efforts, and thereby grow up together with the audience. Statements such as these that collectivize the maturation process are observed throughout many commentaries made by idols. These statements contribute to the production of peer-solidarity that can facilitate communal progress.

Activities designed to build and maintain intimacy between pop-idols and their audience are carried out to a degree and uniformity that has no apparent equivalent on the American pop-star scene. Japanese idol duties include handshaking ceremonies (*akushu kai*) that accompany stage performances, get-togethers with fans (*fan no tsudoi*) where fans can talk and play games with their favorite idol, public photo shoots (*satsuei kai*) where idols strike poses for amateur

**Figure 6. The front cover of Seiko Matsuda's essay-book, *Mō Ichido Anata* (*You Once Again*) (Wani Books, 1981), subtitled "I want to walk along with you," where Matsuda appears to be meek and even coy.**

photographers, known as "camera kids" (*kamera kozō*), and periodic correspondences with fans by letter (figure 7). When idols release CDs and promotional videos or publish photo-albums or essays, autograph ceremonies (*sign kai*) are held for buyers at retail outlets. There are also idol hot-lines for fans wishing to hear recorded idol messages or learn about upcoming idol events. There are web pages where one can find out about an idol's place and date of birth, blood type, hobbies, and thoughts.

Popular idol magazines, such as Gakken's *Bomb!* and *Momoco*, contain idol photos, featured interviews and commentaries, followed by the reader's columns that consist of letters and home-made idol-cartoons. These sections together constitute a two-way communication between idols and their fans, in which the editors (or interviewers) act as a stand-in for the readers. These magazines contextualize an interactive space wherein idols can speak to the readers with solidly predictable advice about being loyal in friendships, hardworking at school, and holding on to the dream about a special someone (see also White 1993: 123, 1995: 266).

Enthusiastic fans, known as "idol chasers" (*aidoru okkake*), follow their idols almost everywhere, awaiting the chance to have a close encounter. Those who prefer to be more organized team up as "cheering squads" (*ouen-dan*) in order to encourage their idol on the stage with choreographed cheers. Others create voluntary support groups, known as "supporting squads" (*shin'eitai*), in the spirit of what one former member described as "protecting idols from possible dangers."[9] Many of these fans are also critics, who, to borrow Kelly's (1997:77) expression, are ever vigilant for any slip or mistake by the objects of their adulation. They often send critiques to promotion agencies and publishers, or make cynical remarks in the letters addressed to their idols. Indeed, fandom is a peculiar combination of attachment and fickleness, of long-suffering patience and a demand for instant gratification: a schizoid condition that makes one wonder whose side fans are on (1997:77). Yet, all of these practices are part of

**Figure 7. Fans and amateur photographers gather around their idol and feel the togetherness in an event held on the rooftop of a Tōkyō department store.**

producing an interactive space, materializing the imagined companionship, and thereby facilitating collectivity between idols and their audience within a controlled environment.

The image of adolescent companion is manipulated by government institutions and private corporations in order to attract public attention. As already mentioned, pop-idols appear in cover pages of numerous fashion and lifestyle magazines, facilitating the desire of young consumers to imitate, and thus consume, the style adopted by their favorite pop stars (figure 8). Idols invite the public to buy certain products in television commercials and advertisement posters, as in the case of the NTT advertisement featuring Ryōko Hirosue mentioned in chapter one. From season to season, some selected pop-idols perform as "one-day police officers" in public safety campaigns organized by the National Police Agency, calling the public and in particular young people to follow traffic rules. Others partake in campaigns designed to promote public transportation. Still others participate in baseball games, and take part in throwing the first ball. The list of such campaign rituals is endless.

On November 10, 1995, I joined over 2,000 members of the audience in Saitama's Ōmiya Sonic City Hall, where the Drug Abuse Prevention Center of the Ministry of Public Welfare held an anti-drug campaign. The "loss leaders" (so to speak) of this 3 hour convention were pop-idol Tomomi Nishimura (who debuted in 1986), idol duo *Wink* (1988-1995), and two other idol groups. These personalities sang and performed on stage after speeches addressing the audience to "say no to drugs" were made by national and local administrators. A companion to this particular campaign under exclusive contract, Nishimura appeared in campaign posters and visited many conventions, including the United Nations, as "the young citizen's representative" (*wakamono shimin daihyō*). Nishimura's activities were documented and shown on screen as part of the event, between speeches and stage performances. All this points to the fact that life-

**Figure 8. In this particular cover page from the October 1, 1997 issue of *An-An*, the catch phrase to the left of two pop-idols, Kyōko Koizumi and Gō Kusanagi, reads "Want to see, Want to know, Want to imitate: Everything About Pop-Star Fashions."**

sized public images of pop-idols are used as a symbolic means to direct the public consciousness to certain socioeconomic and political goals (figure 9).

### *The Fantastic World of Cute Idols*

Often associated with the life-sized image of pop-idols is another fundamental idol characteristic: cuteness. The "cute style," as it is called, encompasses pretty looks, heartwarming verbal expressions, and singing, dancing, acting, and speaking in a sweet, meek, and adorable way. The cute style is also expressed by a form of handwriting that consists of chubby rounded characters. These characters are written laterally and in contrast to normal Japanese script, which are written vertically using strokes. They are generally considered by adults as a deformation or lack of discipline. Nonetheless, these characters appear in many texts with cartoon figures such as hearts, flowers, stars, animals, and faces that resemble childish drawings (e.g., Yamane 1986; Ōtsuka 1989; Kinsella 1995:222). *Kawaiko-chan*, or cute girls and boys, has become a synonym for pop-idols in Japanese, representing carefully crafted public personae that try to appeal to the viewers' compassion. According to Tetsuko Kuroyanagi, the former host of the prestigious Japanese music countdown program, *The Best Ten*, people adore cute idols for their sweetness and purity, which evoke the sense that "they should be protected carefully" (quoted in Herd 1984:77,78). Cuteness can be overdone, however, even in Japan. Young women who carry the cute style too far are called *burikko* (lit. "childish girl"), a mildly derogatory term that was first used to describe pop-idol Seiko Matsuda. *Burikko* can also refer to the perception that young women often adopted cute behavior strategically to attract personal attention.

The cute style is by no means a recent Japanese invention, but has clear historical roots. The Japanese word for cute, *kawaii*, can be traced back to its classical form, *kawayushi* or

**Figure 9. A cover of an anti-drug campaign brochure featuring Tomomi Nishimura (1995).**

*kawayurashi*, which appears in poetry and stories from the premodern era. This term is also a derivation of *kawaiso* or pitiable, a term that implies the vulnerability of the subject. The cuteness observed today in pop-idols closely resembles "sweet little girls" (*otome*), or "cute Japanese women" (*yamato nadeshiko*) images found in books, magazines, advertising, and motion pictures from the late 19th century and early 20th century (figure 10).[10] In fact, cuteness was considered the main feature of *shōjo*, the term coined at the turn of the century to signify the not-quite-adult femaleness of unmarried girls. This contributed to the socializing policy of the modernizing state by affecting an increase in the number of years between puberty and marriage as a period of preparation for marriage (Robertson 1998:63,65; also Murakami 1983; Ōtsuka 1989). The young Shirley Temple may provide an American example of the cute style as expressed in her nickname, "America's little darling." Yet, she was also recognized from the outset as an incredibly talented actor who could project a persona in her work. By the time she reached her teens, her cute feature no longer worked for her, it being considered inappropriate above the age of ten or twelve, according to my American informants. The difference in Japan is that cutesy is considered acceptable and even attractive in older teens as well as in children.

To express cuteness, pop-idols generally smile with bared (though often crooked) teeth and clear, sparkly eyes. Female idols tend to strike coy poses, while male idols adopt a more stylish or cool appearance (figure 11). Female fans generally agreed that to appear stylish is what makes male idols cute; one female university student remarked that "the earnest attempts of young and innocent-looking boys to act stylish make them somewhat pitiful, and therefore very sweet." The autographs and hand-written letters of female idols often accompany cute animated figures including kittens and rabbits (figure 12). In order to emphasize cuteness, many pop-idols have dressed up in so-called "fake-child costumes" (*buri-buri ishō*), resembling European dolls.

**Figure 10. An example of cute representation from the prewar period: Takarazuka opera-star photo.**

**Figure 11. Maruberudō's star-photos, featuring a typically cute female pop-idol, Saori Minami (left, debuted in 1971), and a stylish male pop-idol, Hideki Saijō (right, debuted in 1972).**

**Figure 12. Pop-idol Noriko Sakai, nicknamed "Nori-P," and the animated character she created, Nori-P chan ("cutie Nori-P kid"), together make up part of the cute, fantasy world (from fan-club newsletter).**

Although this fashion is considered to be outdated, female pop-idols still dress in a style that Japanese call the "fancy looks" (*fanshii*), one which imitates Western fashions. Male idols also appear in "hip," cosmopolitan styles that, in the words of one idol costume designer, "heighten their attraction."

Another way in which idols communicate with their audience is through the lyrics of their songs. Idol songs are typically romantic fantasies, which dwell on the well-worn themes of being in love, hoping to win the heart of another, or physical desire, as demonstrated by the excerpts (translations) below:

I will give you the most important thing of a girl,
I will give you the important thing that she treasures in her little heart,
She has been protecting it so that she can devote it to someone she loves.
It's okay to be filthy; it's okay to cry, for love is so precious.
Everyone will experience it once: this sweet and bewitching trap
(from Momoe Yamaguchi, *Hito-Natsu No Keiken* [*One Summer Experience*], CBS/Sony, 1974)

I want you to believe in my love more tamely,
I want to live with you, if I can...
The time we are apart will raise our mutual attraction.
When I close my eyes, you are always there for me.
(from Hiromi Go, *Yoroshiku Aishū* [*Sorrow, With Regards*], CBS/Sony, 1974)

Oh, milky smile, I am taking a journey in your arms,
Oh, milky smile, please hold me tight with your tender love.
(from Seiko Matsuda, *Kaze Wa Aki-Iro* [*The Wind is Autumn Color*], CBS/Sony, 1980)

I wanna do! I wanna do! I want your shy heart.
I wanna do! I wanna do! Isn't it okay to love you more?
Let's dance in a party -- party for the two of us.
Why are you crying, facing the window?
We can't understand each other if we fear the anguish of love.
(from Toshihiko Tahara, *Koi=Do!* [*Love=Do!*], Canyon Records Inc., 1981)

GO, GO, GO! When the sun nears by, that girl and this girl will rush around.
They are trying to win the hearts of their favorite boys.
Wrapped in bold swimsuits... we are all eager to do something before this summer is over.
That girl and this girl, they are all our rivals
(from *Onyanko Kurabu* [*The Kitten Club*], *Osaki Ni Shitsurei* [*Excuse Me*], Canyon Records Inc. 1986)

My love, let's get together with our usual friends,
My love, we are all concerned about you.
I am also lost in a labyrinth, running around with my anxious heart.
(from *Hikaru Genji, Dream*, Pony Canyon Inc., 1988)

Dropping one's eyes, cafe in the dream, it's a seduction of dry martini.
Even my lips are hot now, because of you...
Sexy music, in my heart,
Sexy music, please ring,
Sexy music, the sweet,
Sexy music, melody.
This mysterious feeling that is like an ardent love,
Please change it to love in your arms.
(from *Wink, Sexy Music*, Polystar Records Inc., 1990)

On the other side of my telephone receiver is your voice, and my heart is hot.
Don't grieve over your romance with her that you had lost.
The bravery to open the door into the new world,
I want to send it to you faster than anyone does else does.
That's right, try me, and there is a love waiting to wrap you up.
Now, try me, although you can't wipe away the sadness.
That's right! Try me, and believe me, who is looking at you.
Try me more! I will give you a different dream for tomorrow
(from Namie Amuro with *Super Monkeys*, *Try Me*, Toshiba EMI, 1995)

These lyrical excerpts from smash hits, arranged chronologically, are a small portion of a great many narratives epitomized by cute idols that provide adolescent consumers with romantic fantasies. Lindholm (1995:57) contends in his discourse on romantic passion that romance can be understood as a creative act of human imagination, and more specifically a cultural expression of deep existential longings for an escape from the prison of the self. If this is the case, the narratives of cute pop-idols presented in songs cultivate the exotic and fairy world of imagination to which Japanese consumers who fantasize romance can continuously escape through their practices of idol consumption.

It should be mentioned that these singers do not appeal only to love-struck adolescents. Many pop-idols include among their fans people from various backgrounds and generations. Interviews I conducted have shown that many adult men like cute female idols because they see

in them their idea of the ideal woman: a sweet, young girl who would make a good future wife and mother. For many young women, on the other hand, pop-idols serve to lead the way in terms of contemporary fashion and lifestyle, and to help foster feelings of peer solidarity. Many older Japanese favor cute idols -- female and male alike -- due to their fascination with youth and because pop-idols bring back nostalgic memories of their own younger days, when life was yet full of wonders and possibilities.

### *Pop-Idols, Youth Culture, and Postwar Socioeconomy*

In her extensive study of women, media and consumption in Japan, Kinsella (1995) shows that the cute style pop-idols embody is part of a broader popular-cultural movement that emerged in Japan in the mid-1960s. This movement expanded over the subsequent three decades, and reached a peak of saccharine intensity in the early 1980s. This was a period of economic growth in which the Japanese government made an effort to transform the nation into an international economic superpower as well as an information society (*jōho shakai*). This is done by liberalizing financial markets, developing a variety of ambitious technological projects, and creating a consumer boom which has been dubbed the "bubble period" (*bubble jidai*). Many Japanese female consumers, with their taste for Western brand-name products and international travel, were among the first to take advantage of this era (Moeran 1995:11). In this historical context, young women developed their own culture, marked by the cute style that, according to Kinsella, refused to cooperate with the established norms or values of adult society.

To be cute was to celebrate physical appearance and a social attitude that is "infantile and delicate at the same time as being pretty" (Yamane 1990:35, quoted in Kinsella 1995:220). It was a way of participating in the creation of an adolescent utopia in an affluent socioeconomic environment where people can be forever young, playful, child-like, and thus liberated from the

filthy world of adult politics. The cute style also generated a sense of nostalgia in urban dwellers, which harked back to an imagined rural past associated with childish simplicity and spiritual unity, in opposition to the alienating forces of city life. Kinsella argues:

> As [Walt] Disney romanticized nature in relation to industrial society, so Japanese cuteness romanticized childhood in relation to adulthood. By idolizing their childhood and remnant childishness, young Japanese people implicitly damned their individual futures as adults in society. Condemning adulthood was an individualized and limited way of condemning society generally (Kinsella 1995:241).

Thus, young people in Japan use the cute style to signal their resistance against adult culture. This aspect of resistance may not be stressed too far, however, when one takes into account that the female-led youth culture is directed by adults toward young women, or that material and social bases for the development of such a culture (e.g., Disney Land) are prepared by the industry people. What emerges as an anti-establishment in youth culture is co-opted or reintegrated into adult society.

In any case, it may not be coincidental that youth-oriented movements like the idol boom appeared when it did in Japan -- at the height of Japan's postwar economic miracle. This was a time when years of hard work and sacrifice produced rapid economic growth, marked by the rise of the Gross National Product up to the second highest in the world after the United States. This economic growth gave birth to a new consumer culture fed by rising incomes and enjoyed by a new generation intent on differentiating themselves from their elders by not simply working hard but also enjoying the fruits of their labor.[11]

This was also a period of rapid social change, with people moving from the countryside to the cities in search of jobs and excitement, and a tradition of three generations under one roof being replaced by the nuclear family. Add to this the stress and fast pace that accompany modern, industrial life and one has an adjustment period that resembles the growth years of

adolescent, or what may be called "youth of a nation." Many Japanese people, and not just teenagers, were required to make the transition from older, established social boundaries and ways of life to an increasingly complex cosmopolitan world of contemporary urban life. Pop idols, themselves struggling to find their feet on the escalator of show business that packages their images of becoming, served as guiding angels for a population making a similar journey.

By the mid-1990s, or the era of the so-called "post-bubble recession," the star of the cute idols was burning less brightly than it had at any time over the three previous decades. In October of 1994, the leading daily newspaper, Asahi Shinbun, announced that "pop-idols have been in a so-called 'winter period' for some time now." Many producers and magazine editors, including those I interviewed, were saying that pop-idols were becoming passe. In an interview I conducted, Akio Nakamori attributed this to changed socioeconomic conditions. He argued:

> The times seek idols, and pop-idols lead the times. Since pop-idols symbolize the healthy growth of young people, and because they are personal manifestations of the shared public desire toward growth, they symbolize national growth itself. The fact that pop-idols are socially demanded implies that there is a shared national vision toward growth. Where there is such a vision, pop-idols will continue to appear. This mutual relationship is the key. The current disintegration of idol performances in Japan tells me that the Japanese have lost the vision of collective growth or the energy to move forward together, which reflects the current recession of Japan.

As symbolic products of consumer culture, cute pop-idols signify the national economy. Their popularity is a measure of economic prosperity.

Another explanation is found in the increasingly blurred boundaries between different genres of performance. While the first generation of pop-idols generally stuck to singing, in the 1980s and 1990s it has become common for idol singers to act, for actors to sing, and for both to do comedy and talk-show hosting. Adding to this was the appearance of a large number of pop-idols and idol-like personalities. Pop-idols became a rhetorical resource that can be applied to almost any genre or style of performances -- professional and amateur alike -- as long as

performers seemed cute. In the eyes of many, all this has diminished both the commercial value and the level of expertise among pop singers. This led to an increased demand for, and supply of, more powerful and artistic performers, including new music artists and rock stars, many of whom fall into a new and emerging category: the post-idol. Cute seems to be on the wane a bit as well, at least in pop music, as performers project a more mature and sensual image -- not unlike those of famous North American and European pop singers.

Many young performers themselves began to lose interest in the pop-idol label, as one of my informants, a 16 year old female actor, told me in an interview:

> People can call me a 'pop-idol' if they want, but I don't want to project myself in such a 'childish' fashion. My goal is to become a 'professional' singer like Mariah Carey or Janet Jackson.

A president from a pop-idol promotion agency, on the other hand, evaluated the pop-idol condition over the past three decades and said:

> Pop-idols were supposed to be professional novices, but now they seem to be a synonym for 'immature' or 'stupid' talents. I feel sad to see such a transition. From another standpoint, however, one can say that the level of Japanese idol-pop has improved, and no longer can pop-idols sell themselves by being simply cute. This might be good. Whatever the case, the fate of 'pop-idols' will depend partly upon how we the suppliers will present them [to the public], and partly upon whether the people will continue to buy these cute, fantastic personalities. It all comes down to the simple business law of supply and demand as applied to the young people of contemporary Japan.

His comment demonstrates the need for pop-idol suppliers to shape and reshape pop-idol forms and contents in accordance with shifting consumer tastes. Pop-idol performances, in this account, constitute an ongoing, dynamic process of symbolic production.

**Summary**

Scholars such as Barnouw and Kirkland (1992) argue that popular personalities and performances serve not merely to provide entertainment and earn money, but also to develop

and offer a repertoire of themes, perspectives, relationships, and outcomes. The public can use such a repertoire to make sense of the world. Japanese pop-idols certainly do this, and this relevance to the lives and new worlds of their audiences and in particular young fans is surely a key to their success.

Pop-idols may not be the most talented singers and actors on earth, but their images continue to reflect the concerns and dreams of their audience. They offer models of attractive lifestyles and friendship, make some sense out of how to bring together separate life forces such as age, class, gender, and sexuality, and substantiate adolescent identity as a socialization project. As long as pop-idols and their promotion agencies do that, they will continue to be a strong and profitable symbolic presence in Japanese popular culture and mass society.

With this observation in mind, the subsequent chapters will turn to the cases in which these social, cultural, and economic functions of idol performances are actualized.

**Notes:**

1. The study of adolescence and youth culture is abundant elsewhere. For detailed sociological studies, see Hall *et al.* (1976), Willis (1977), Hebdige (1979), Brake (1980) and Linden (1991) among others. In history, Ben-Amos (1994) offers an exquisite case study of the adolescent life-world in early Modern England.

2. Ōtsuka (1989) shows, for example, that this stage was constructed as a social category under the impact of modernization (or Westernization) and in particular the universalized education system, led by Japan's Ministry of Education, during the late 19th century. According to Ōtsuka, coming of age was once a simple and quick process of transition from childhood to adulthood in Japan's traditional folk society. However, this was reformed into a spacious period of pre-adulthood in which children were prepared for adult social relations through formal schooling.

3. The idea that entrance into a mutual-support group or fraternity is a significant part of initiation rites exists in other cultures, as in Africa, Melanesia, and Australia. There are variations between these cultures in the duration and elaboration of fraternity practices (Young 1965; Paige and Paige 1981).

4. The other two topics included 1) descriptions of what happened to and around them recently; and 2) gossips about someone that they knew in real life.

5. Ōtsuka (1989:105), for example, writes about the development of high schools for young women, known as *jogakkō* or "girls' schools," in early modern Japan. He argues that modern Japanese society created "girls' schools" in order to isolate female adolescents from the rest of the society. Girl's schools prevent their sexually maturating bodies from too free a contact with the opposite sex, improve their functions in accordance with guidelines set by the nation's administrative body, and prepare them for matrimony with appropriate husbands. Middle schools are shown here as a kind of institution established in the name of administering teenagers via curricular programs and activities.

6. See, for example, Mourer and Sugimoto's (1986) critique of Japanese group models.

7. Yamada's comparative study of conversational styles between American and Japanese businessmen shows different cultural expectations that Japanese and American businessmen develop toward talk influence the way they actually talk: On one hand, the Japanese -- for whom talk is considered to lead to unreliable or mistrustful interactions that jeopardize collectivity -- employ non-confrontational strategies in conversation that use the mistrusted medium of talk in a way that still allows for speakers and listeners to reach collective goals. On the other hand, Americans -- who try to express themselves and relate to one another through talk -- use conversational strategies that can enhance both individuality and collectivity (Yamada 1990:253).

8. The characterization of Rie Tomosaka as an ingenious idol-talent, is found, for instance, in the June 10th, 1997 issue of *Weekly Playboy* (p.61).

9. According to this informant, the number of *shineitai* reached its peak in the mid 1980's, paralleling the popularity of idol-pop singers at the height of Japan's bubble era. Though no longer active today, many of these groups were hierarchically organized with their own ranking of senior and junior officers. Some of these members were partially employed by promotion agencies as body guards and for other supportive activities.

10. Detailed historical studies on the image of cuteness in Japan have been conducted, for instance, by Ōtsuka (1989), Akiyama (1992), and Karasawa (1995).

11. For statistics regarding Japan's socioeconomic growth, I found, for example, PHP Kenkyu Jo (1995) helpful.

## CHAPTER IV – IN THE NAME OF SHOW BUSINESS: IDOL PERFROMANCES AND GENDER IDENTITIES

This chapter will move from text to context in order to investigate how gender construction is exercised in pop-idol performances as part of the industry's adolescent identity formation. It will examine the compulsory practices through which young female performers are subjected to very overt forms of male discipline as they are crafted into marketable personalities who represent ideal-types of adolescent femaleness.[1] The idea underlying the discussion presented in this chapter is that gender is crafted. Gender is an achievement, or a mode of enacting the received norms, which surface as the "styles of the flesh." Disciplinary practices produce a body, which in gesture and appearance is recognizably feminine or masculine (Bartky 1990:65).[2]

Becoming a pop-idol involves becoming an adored public persona who can win public admiration and thus be able to market the self in a commercial world where "the winner takes all" (*ureta mono no kachi*). The analysis of gender construction in this chapter will focus on ways in which gender norms and sexual values are reproduced and used to attain prestige. It will also examine how the system of pop-idol production exploits the labor of "wanna-be" girls in the process of appropriating contemporary gender ideals. For someone who is educated in a Judeo-Christian tradition of North-America, the pop-idol industry's subjugation of adolescent personalities to Japanese gender ideals may appear unhealthy, alienating, and even annoying. This impression is due at least in part to the different cultural assumptions that North Americans and Japanese have about gender and sexuality. With this in mind, part of this chapter will examine what counts as acceptable and non-acceptable imagery for adolescent femaleness for the participants of pop-idol production in Japan. Concentrating on how female pop-idols are constructed as a cultural institution provides a means to uncover how young Japanese women transform their selves as they are enmeshed in the ideological discourse on sexuality.

This ethnographic analysis includes delving into the meaningful construction of the "cute style" that became the hallmark of pop-idol performances and which made pop-idols the representatives of female-led youth culture (see the previous chapter). However, since cute pop-idol representations are overwhelmingly framed by men and imposed upon the young female performers to please the male audience, I question how female-led the culture represented by cute pop-idols truly is. Moreover, the current shift in the public preference from cute pop-idols to sensual post-idols reflects the era in which the male-dominated socioeconomic system is considered to be on the verge of a breakdown and restructuring. This is a phenomenon known in Japanese as *risutora* from the English "restoration." This is also the era in which women are becoming considerably more powerful and outspoken in the public sphere than ever before (*onna no jidai* or "the age of women"). My interest here is to investigate how these social changes and their perceptions are influenced and manifested in the way female pop-idols are packaged and sexualized as commodities to serve patriarchal interests.

This investigation of the stylized presentation of adolescent femaleness in pop-idol performances also attempts to reveal the parameters of acceptable and unacceptable imagery for adolescents in Japanese society. These manifestations of gender are different from other cultures such as North America. Content analyses of media-texts show not only that femaleness is portrayed differently across cultures but also that each culture has its own set of standards in portraying sexual images. For example, Japanese are shown to focus on "cuteness," represented by premature images of femaleness, as opposed to a North American emphasis on a more matured image of female sexuality, represented as "sexy" (e.g., Takayanagi 1995). Yet, cuteness and sexiness are arbitrary concepts that cannot be classified as essential categories (for instance, some individuals may find a cute person to be sexy), and a cultural distinction based on these concepts is perhaps too broad. There is a need to focus more on the ways in which sexualized

performances are perceived and enacted by their actors. Thus, the focus on female pop-idols offers insight into understanding the current relationship between identity formation and gender reproduction in Japanese society -- especially with regard to the struggle encountered by young Japanese women as they grow up in a society where male and female gender roles are traditionally differentiated. The subsequent analysis will emphasize: 1) the perceptions and expectations that male producers have about Japanese femaleness; 2) how their perceptions and expectations influence the ways female pop-idols are crafted; 3) how female performers feel about playing the role of female models; and 4) how their emotions influence the way they act.

Another relevant issue to be explicated in the current investigation of female pop-idol representation is the dialectical relationship between the pop-idol industry and contrasting grass-root movements of identity-construction led by young women in Japan. The realm of capitalist production in Japan has been dominated by a male, heterosexual episteme. However, there are sets of cultural configurations outside of this masculinist system that serve the needs and interests of women and in particular young girls. Examples of this include movements and genres that are characterized as "girls' literature" (*shōjo bungaku*), "grils' comic" (*shōjo manga*), "girls' handwriting" (*shōjo moji*), and more recently "gal culture" (*gyaru bunka*)(Yamane 1986,1990; Ōtsuka 1989; Miyadai 1994; Kinsella 1995; Rosenberger 1995; Robertson 1998; Tanaka 1998). While the formal organs of capitalism are built around a masculinist mode of production, Japanese girls develop informal arenas of production by and for themselves. Informal arenas are not confined to young girls. For example, there are male subcultures built around expressive behaviors such as Lolita porn, cross-dressing, and homosexual affairs which have been largely suppressed or marginalized (e.g., Buruma 1984; Bornoff 1991). These arenas, however, do not stand by themselves, but are constantly exposed to institutional forces which try to erode, manipulate, and appropriate them into the heterosexual, masculinist system of production. The

current chapter will investigate some of the ways in which the pop-idol industry operates as a hegemonic force as participants situate themselves in the ongoing dialogue with female-led youth subcultures and use these subcultures as sources for trend creation. I will demonstrate how young girls are transformed into personalities whose images are considered politically correct and stylish at the same time.

The emphasis on how *female* pop-idols are produced will not provide sufficient understanding of gender reproduction in pop-idol performances because there is also a construction of masculinity as manifested in the performances of *male* pop-idols. I planned to investigate how male performers understood the relationship between themselves as pop-idols and Japanese concept of masculinity, but lack of time and contact prevented me from systematically investigating these research areas. However, I include the discussion of masculinity to the extent that the construction of female pop-idols involves the production of both female and male gender ideals. A projection of female image encompasses visions of the relationship between women and men, or statements about maleness in terms of what kind of women men like and why. Thus, I will concentrate on ways female adolescents are projected by female pop-idol performances, rather than scattering my perspectives by trying to expand on both male and female pop-idols. In doing so, I will analyze the implications of these images in reference to the available data.

The first section of this chapter will compare two cases in which I followed idol candidates to training sessions and observed how they embodied two mutually distinct images of adolescent femaleness. Interview commentaries and conversational data that illuminate performers, producers, and audiences' thoughts on these distinct role models and their embodiments will be included. The second section situates these cases in a larger context: the social, economic, and ideological positions as well as the attempted positioning of women in Japanese society.

## Pop-Idol Performances and the Images of Adolescent Femaleness

### *Case 1: Contestations in the Production of Cute-Idols*

The group of female idol candidates I studied intensively for a period of four weeks in September 1995 included four individuals who had just been recruited. Their first names will be introduced here using pseudonyms: Eri (13 years old), Miharu (15), Yumie (15), and Mayuko (17). Eri and Miharu were recruited on the street -- the method of recruitment known as "street-corner scouts" (*machikado sukauto*). Yumie and Mayuko, on the other hand, entered the agency by winning audition contests.

All four of these individuals had dreamed about becoming celebrities since they were little, and like all other performers I interviewed, they perceived idol performances to be the first stage in their career-building process. Yumie's ambition was to become a "well-known idol-pop singer like Seiko Matsuda," while all others vaguely wanted to become professional actors. Eri and Miharu were less dedicated to work in show business because such work was something they were asked to do rather than what they wanted to do. In contrast, Yumie and Mayuko were fully dedicated to show business. This contrast had a crucial impact upon their attitudes toward idol performances. Playing the role of pop-idols provided Eri and Miharu with negative pressures that they were hesitant to take, while it provided Yumie and Mayuko with positive challenges that they were willing to face.

The promotion agency to which these four individuals belonged was a venture that had specialized in pop-idol manufacturing since the early 1990s. Their trademark was to promote typically cute pop-idols who are "pure, righteous, and pretty" (*kiyoku, tadashiku, utsukushii*). Eager to obtain greater public recognition, this relatively small-sized agency became one of the active collaborators of this research. Akihiko Nagabayashi (pseudonym) was a male producer and the main decision-maker in this agency. In his mid-40s, Nagabayashi has been in show

business for nearly half of his life. He previously worked as an idol manager and fan-club organizer. One of his assistants, Takeshi Komobuchi (pseudonym), specialized in voice training, while another assistant, Yoko Wakasugi (pseudonym), directed choreography. Both of these assistants were in their late-20s. The agency held concerts from time to time, where approximately 500 fans, mostly men who aged between 20 and 35, gathered.

I followed the four candidates to two to three hour training sessions that took place three times per week in the evenings. All four of these individuals underwent intensive voice training, followed by choreography lessons. These sessions took place in a studio that was located next to the agency's office space. While Komobuchi and Wakasugi instructed the trainees most of the time, Nagabayashi interrupted whenever he felt it was necessary. Nagabayashi called this interruption "quality control" to "make sure that performers can perform properly in the end" -- in the way he wanted them to perform. Buruma (1984:68) notes in his observation of pop-idol choreography that pop-idols are choreographed, directed and drilled to such a degree that any spontaneity that might have been there to begin with stood little chance of surviving. This was exactly what happened with the four individuals I followed.[3]

### *Embodying Adolescent Femininity*

In projecting his ideal image of adolescent femaleness onto pop-idol performances, Nagabayashi was specific about how performers should speak and act on stage. He described his ideal image of female pop-idols as "pure-hearted and lovable young girls who can attract young men." When I pursued him as to whether he had any interest in targeting female audiences, he did not deny it, but said that such a concern was secondary. He said,

> I specialize in producing female pop-idols who play a classically feminine character. However, I am a man and not a woman. I will not be able to understand how women themselves really think or feel about their ideal role models. Even if I

> could imagine that for a moment, my imagination would eventually deviate from what women actually think, like, want, and need. On the other hand, it is easy for me to imagine the kind of girls that young men prefer to go after, simply because I myself grew up as a man. Thus, my primary work is to concentrate on the production of female pop-idols who can be adored by male idol-fans. Of course, I do not intend to reject female idol-fans who are willing to come see our performances at all.

Thus, Nagabayashi focused on the production of adolescent femininity that can be marketed primarily to the male audience.

In a two-hour voice training session, Nagabayashi required the performers to repeatedly practice how to articulate their voice with child-like innocence and enthusiasm. This appeared to be difficult for all four trainees, because they were not used to singing and speaking in such a manner. With a guitar in his arms, Komobuchi played a tune and made each trainee sing a lyrical line over and over again until he thought it was enough, then asked the next trainee to do the same. Nagabayashi occasionally stepped in to push the trainees harder toward refining certain parts. The following excerpt is a typical example of how this interaction took place -- in this case between Yumie (Y), Komobuchi (K) and Nagabayashi (N) -- and how I observed each action in its immediate context (indicated in brackets):

The Setting: Y practices how to sing with a microphone in her hands, K coaches the practice, and N observes the two from his seat at the back of the studio.

Y: [sings a line] 'It's so wonderful to fall in love, but it's difficult to be loved...'

K: Stretch out this 'loved' part... Yes, that's good! Alright... Onto the next part...

Y: '...When one wants to capture the happiness, it's so difficult not to rush...'

K: Good! Okay, that's it. Good enough.

N: [looks frustrated] What do you mean good enough, Komobuchi! Can't you tell that the 'happiness' part is not articulated right!? Do it once more!

Y: *hai*! [a humble confirmation in Japanese] 'Happiness'...

N: [looking frustrated] The whole line, idiot!

Y: *hai*! 'When one wants to capture the happiness, it's so difficult not to rush...'

N: Put more heart into 'happiness', would you!? Like 'happiness'… [demonstrates a child-like articulation]

Y: *hai*! 'Happiness'... [tries her best to sound child-like]

N: It's 'happiness'... [demonstrates again]

Y: happiness... [repeats with a child-like smile on her face]

N: Try the whole line again.

Y: *hai*! 'When one wants to capture the happiness, it's so difficult not to rush...'

N: 'Difficult not to rush'... [demonstrates]

Y: *hai*! 'It's so difficult not to rush...'

N: Too strong! Why can't you get the cuteness!? It's 'difficult not to rush'... [demonstrates] Try to be even overactive about it!

Y: *hai*! [looking a bit tense, she pauses for two seconds to take a breath] 'When one wants to capture the happiness, it's so difficult not to rush...' [tries her best to sound child-like]

N: Next.

Y: *hai*! 'Let's have the courage to say I love you...'

N: 'I love you'... [he demonstrates]

Y: 'I love you'...

N: [3 second pause] Okay, go on to the next part... [looks unsatisfied but leaves it as it is for now; signals Komobuchi to take over]

Tensions filled the air during such an extensive drill, and although the trainees tried to keep themselves up all along, they could not prevent themselves from putting a weary expression on their face toward the end.

Choreography lessons centered on making predominantly feminine gestures. Rocking the body back and forth, turning the body left and right, moving the body in a bouncy way, and

waving hands were some of the most noticeable features. Pensive poses and melancholic expressions were made when ballads were sung. In these cases, the trainees held microphones in their hands and waved their bodies softly from left to right. In Nagabayashi's words, the bounciness signified youthfulness that bursts open (*hajikeru wakasa*) while the pensiveness stood for emotional instability (*jōcho fuantei*). These, according to Nagabayashi, were the two main characteristics of youthful femininity invoking empathy in the minds of the viewers (figure 13).

One of my informants, an editor of a pop-idol magazine, commented that the term "idol" could be interpreted as a combination of two English words, "I" and "doll." This, according to him, implies that the subject "I" becomes a doll-like object to be gazed at and adored by the viewer. Another informant created a pun associating the word "I" with *ai* that in Japanese means "love," thus equating pop-idols with "love-dolls." Yet, another informant thought that "-dol" part could be interpreted commercially as "dollars" in English, thus "I-dollars" or "love-dollars." To become a female pop-idol is, in this sense, to wrap oneself up in a bundle of toyed femininity designed by idol-manufacturing agencies to attract male consumers.

Over the course of the four-week training, Eri and Miharu became increasingly frustrated. One day, Miharu came out of the studio with tears in her eyes as she was scolded by Nagabayashi for not getting the style right in spite of the long hours of practice. She subsequently recalled this event as one of the most unpleasant experiences she had had in her life. Miharu said that the gestures required by Nagabayashi made her look excessively shy, coy and submissive, creating a fake personality that was no longer herself, and she felt extremely uncomfortable about it. Eri, on the other hand, got some sense of how to enact the cute character designed by Nagabayashi, but she also felt uneasy. She said,

> When I first came [to this agency], I thought that I could perform like those recent popular dancers who are more active and cool. I certainly don't want to do what I am doing now for the rest of my life!

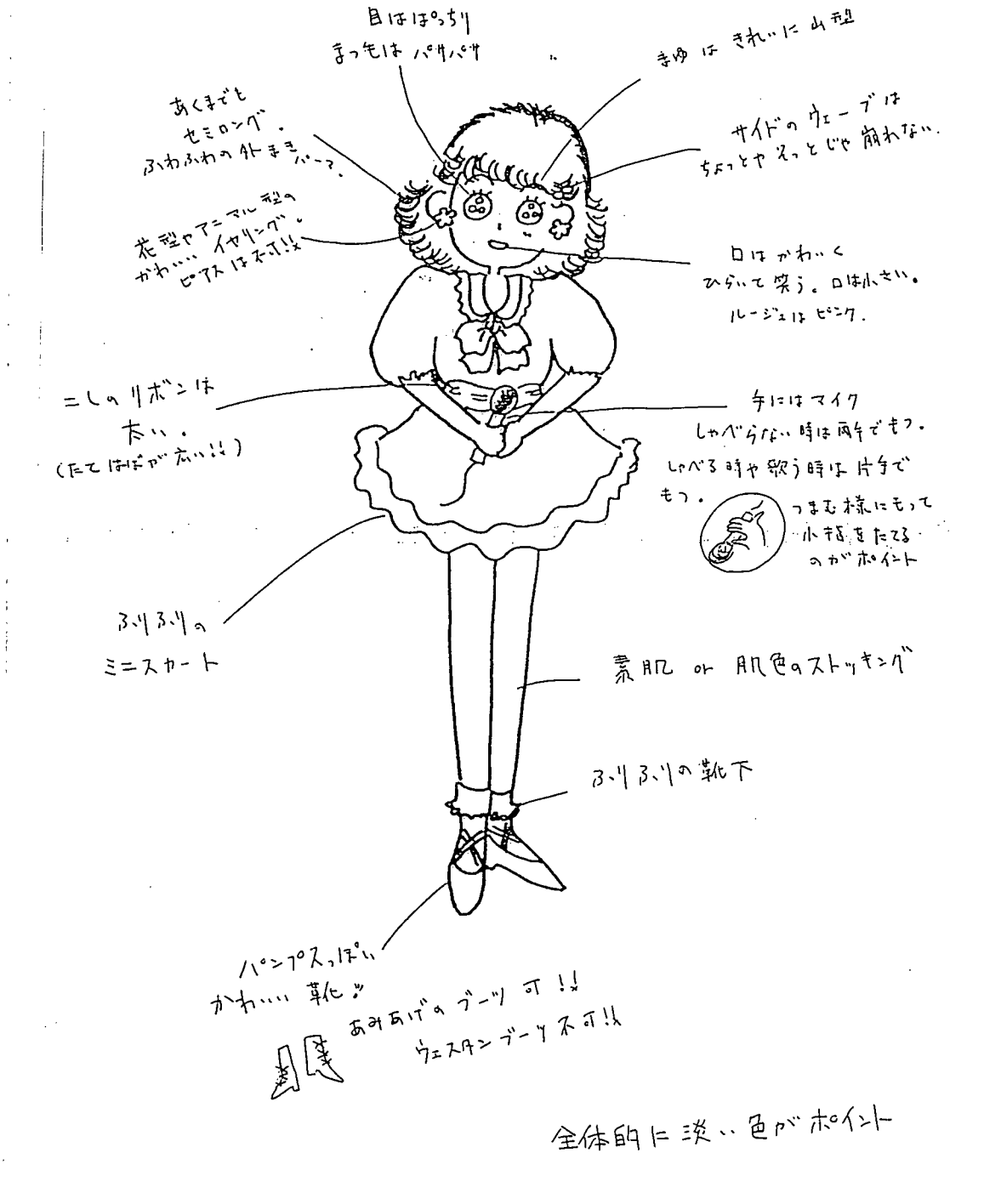


**Figure 13. A sketch by an informant representing typically cute pop-idol.**

The way in which Eri was trained to become an idol-personality did not meet her original expectation, and this reduced her sense of dedication to the construction of self. Both Miharu and Eri felt that their sexualized bodies and images were out of their control, but they could not do much about it because it was their job (*shigoto dakara shikata ga nai*).

Wakasugi, who had worked as a choreographer in the promotion agency for some time, was sympathetic to the sense of discomfort felt by many of her trainees. She argued:

> Sometimes I feel bad because they [i.e., the trainees] have to play the [feminine] character that they don't really want to play. All of them face a struggle at the outset [of their training period] as they try to become someone who they have never experienced before. For those who are willing to overcome that struggle, however, there is a point in which they embrace the cute character as part of themselves. That's when they really grow. They become apparently more enthusiastic and confident, and their skills improve dramatically.

This statement indicates that the candidates' willingness to compromise with the image of adolescent femaleness provided by their manufacturing industry influences the rate in which they acquire and develop skills. During the period of my observation, I failed to see Eri and Miharu grow in the way Wakasugi described that some willing performers would grow. These two students continued to look uncomfortable most of the time, and even pained at times. Their motivation to embody constructed gender roles and sexual stereotypes was apparently much lower than that of Yumie and Mayuko, for whom performance on stage was conceived of as a great pleasure in and of itself.

For Yumie, adopting an excessively cute and child-like character was simply one of many tasks she expected to fulfil in show business -- something she attended to seriously and energetically as a part of her expertise. When I asked her whether she ever felt uncomfortable about her performances, she replied:

> Not really. It's my job and its something I enjoy doing very much. I eventually want to become someone who is adored by anyone and everyone. Please provide me with your support, too, as I will do my best to keep it up!

This showed the association Yumie made between embodying the cute style and attaining prestige, which together constituted her identity as a performer. It also showed how motivated she was in partaking of this adolescent gender role -- she even tried to pull the researcher into buying her cute character!

The situation was quite similar with Mayuko, who was somewhat frustrated about her current status in the agency -- not because she had to enact an undesirable character, but because she felt that she was not enacting the character well enough to deserve public attention. She said,

> No matter how hard I try, I just can't get the details [of cute gestures] right, but I have to master them in order to become an adorable public figure and be successful in this world.

The question I had for Mayuko, too, was whether she had any sense of resistance against what appeared to me as the enforced enactment of adolescent femininity. As in the case of Yumie, Mayuko perceived it to be the necessary part of her expertise. She added that although she considered the constructed image of adolescent femaleness as somewhat exaggerated, it was not far off the track of her real-life qualities. She argued:

> I think there are many qualities in myself, and being cute or child-like is one of them. It's just a matter of how well I can pull it out of myself. I would certainly act in a very cute way if I really wanted to win the heart of a man that I love. That's how I try to feel when I play the cute character.

In sum, I found that performers had mixed feelings about embracing the crafted image of adolescent femininity. To the extent that these performers could accept the cute style as part of multiple identities that characterized their selfhood, and to the extent that they were willing to adopt it as part of their expertise, there was no reason to contest the image constructed by a male producer to serve the interests of male audiences. To the extent that the performers could not identify themselves with the sexist stereotypes of adolescent selfhood, the embodiment of the cute style was met with some degree of resistance. In the end, however, what held these

performers in their place were the sense of prestige and the accompanying sense of duty that characterized them as professional entertainers. They were aware that acting in whatever ways their producer told them to would lead to success. Indeed, for some of these performers who saw themselves as having a meaningful life (*ikigai*) in the entertainment industry, compulsory practices were the first and foremost significant step in the process of developing the self.

Is this what the motto "pure, righteous, and pretty" means? – that is, to mold oneself not only into a personality that does not truly stand for herself, but also into an artifice that covers up a capitalist intention to compete and succeed in the market? When I asked, Nagabayashi smiled ironically and said:

> You know, there is no such thing as purity, righteousness, and prettiness as such. Alternatively, you should ask yourself to whom you would appear to be pure, righteous, and pretty. These are like colors... you color them [i.e., the performers] that way to make them look provocative in the eyes of their viewers. Nothing can really be purely white, clean, or crystal clear.

For Nagabayashi, purity, cutesy, and the like are all instrumental concepts or images that are useful in achieving his single, most important reason to direct a promotion agency: that is, to nurture marketable personalities. In his commercially oriented world-view, beauty and ugliness (or pure and impure) are two parts of a ying/yang that do not conflict with each other. This inseparability is a theme that reiterates through Japanese culture, and is commonly observed in religious beliefs such as Shintō, Buddhism, and Taoism, as well as all sorts of craftsmanship (e.g., Suzuki 1970, Yanagi 1972).

**Case 2: Becoming Vibrantly Sexual**

The Okinawa Actor's School (O.A.S.), founded in 1983 by Masayuki Makino (born in 1941 as a son of the leading Japanese movie director, Masahiro Makino), became the power-house of the new and emergent pop-idol category, "idol dancers" (*dansu-kei aidoru*). Performers who

belong to this category are also referred to as "post-idols" (*posuto aidoru*) who mark the era in which pop-idols can no longer attract the public by being simply cute.

The O.A.S. gained nationwide recognition in 1995 with the successful debut of one of its former students, Namie Amuro, who became a leading figure in current adolescent fashion and lifestyle. Amuro was praised by the media as one of the most outstanding pop-divas of the 1990s, as the following example from the entertainment press shows:

> Looking around the [Japanese] entertainment world, one notices that it has been a while since pop-idols who could sing and dance [well enough] have disappeared. The rise of Amuro, the competent performer, would... certainly provide a new direction (*SPA!* 3/10/1995:14).

Many enthusiastic Amuro fans were referred to as "Amurors." The so-called "Amuro style," signified by wavy long hair, sharply colored and thinly trimmed eyebrows, tight short pants, an exposed belly-button, and long high-heeled boots, created a sensation in the fashion and cosmetic industries (figure 14).

As the result of Amuro's break in popularity, the O.A.S. started to attract hundreds of applicants.[4] Subsequent pop-idols from the O.A.S. included groups such as *MAX*, *SPEED*, and *B.B.Waves*, as well as individuals like Rina Chinen, who together constituted the so-called "Okinawa force" (*Okinawa-zei*)(figure 15).

In June 1996, I flew from Tōkyō to the city of Naha in Okinawa to visit the O.A.S. and observe how the students would perform. Japan is an insular country made up of many islands with the population predominantly on the four largest islands, Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu. Okinawa, in the Ryukyu-Island chain, is peripheral to these four main islands. Okinawans have also developed their own distinct dialect and cultural traditions. In this isolated but media-attended locale, I conducted two intensive days of fieldwork in which I observed 30 students, including Rina Chinen, the four members of *SPEED*, and six members from

歌とダンスで歌謡界を変える
アーチスト系アイドル

Namie Amuro
安室奈美恵 18歳
歌手
'77年、沖縄県生まれ。
'92年9月デビュー。現在、シングル
「Chase the Chance」(avex trax)が
大ヒット中。
'96年3月20日より、
初めての全国ツアーがスタートする。
5月3日大阪城ホール、5月6日
日本武道館ほか全国20か所で公演

もちろん歌はうまい。それに、小さい顔と長い手足。この抜群のスタイルで踊る、りりしいダンスは日本人離れしている。彼女の魅力はこの2つに集約されるのだ。

「沖縄空手を習っていたので、ダンスの途中に瞬間的に止まったりするキレ、美しさに役立ってます」

'95年に発表した5枚のシングルはすべて大ヒットし、初のチャートー位も獲得した。ファースト・アルバムは100万枚を超え、歌って踊れる安室ちゃんにとって、'95年は大ブレイクの年となった。

だが、ぽっと出のアイドルでも、コギャル風イマドキ娘でもない。

中学卒業と同時に上京。しかし、高校へ通いながら芸能活動をするタレントが多いのに、進学せずにあえて逃げ道を作らなかった。デビュー後、2年半は売れなかったが、それでも地道に、1日最低2時間のダンスの練習は欠かさなかったという。

「これからもずっと、歌とダンスを続けていきたい。歌とダンスで〝カッコいいアムロ〟を表現したい」

芸能界を見渡してみると、〝歌って踊る〟という当たり前で基本的なことができるアイドルがいなくなって久しい。実力派・安室の出現は、歌って踊れてこそ一人前、という〝新しい規格〟を作り出すだろう。

14

**Figure 14. Namie Amuro, considered stylish and powerful rather than simply cute (from the January 3/10, 1996 issue of *SPA!*, p.14).**

**Figure 15. Sample CD jackets featuring idol dancers who graduated from the O.A.S.: MAX (top) and SPEED (bottom).**

*B.B.Waves*, undergo singing and dancing practice. Approximately 200 students attended the school at the time of my visit, paying the annual fee of 210,000 yen. Students were mostly young girls, whose age ranged between eight and 22. These students were recruited through a series of auditions, to which they applied voluntarily, wishing to pursue their acting career. Makino's daughter and a former pop-idol, Anna (who debuted in 1987), coached the students with three other female instructors. Anna was also a former member of *Super Monkeys* (who debuted in 1992), the original group of performers that included Amuro. For students who attended the school, however, Anna was a big sister, with whom they could feel familiar, rather than an official instructor and a former pop star.

Dancing and singing practices took place in a relatively informal and friendly atmosphere, but all students were very serious about their practices. Once lessons began, their eyes turned sharp, their bodies were filled with energy, and their personalities transformed from shy teenage girls giggling during off-time conversations to confident dancers who concentrated on brushing up their skills (figure 16). All students performed in a local public hall once every three months to demonstrate the fruits of their practices, but I did not stay long enough to observe these events. An O.A.S. secretary kindly gave me a videotape of one of these events, which I observed after returning to my research base in Tōkyō. Actors in the recorded stage performance were as sharp looking as they appeared before my eyes during training sessions. Their performances were met with loud cheers from hundreds of people in the audience, who were mostly young men and women. According to Anna, these regularly held public performances were voluntarily organized by the O.A.S. students themselves.

Makino stayed in his office next to the studio most of the time, where he met with guests from big industries and local bureaus to discuss business. He came into the studio occasionally to observe how things were proceeding, but he did not interrupt at all. Small children who took

**Figure 16. A dancing practice scene from the Okinawa Actor's School (June, 1995).**

dancing lessons were accompanied by their parents, who sat at the back of the studio to observe how their little ones performed.

### *Empowering the Body through Dance*

The essential concept used by Makino to characterize his students was purity instead of cuteness. Yet, this was not often used in association with pop-idols. Standing in sharp contrast to the same word used by Nagabayashi, the Makino version of purity did not represent a form of adolescent femininity that was designed to primarily serve the interests of male audiences. For Makino, or Makino-*sensei* (Master Makino) as students called him, purity is the single, most important driving-force in performance.[5] He argues:

> To be pure is to enable one's energy to flow from within, without any external constraint. It enables the actor to act from the bottom of her heart and her soul. By being pure, she can open herself to anything and everything, and give the performance all that she can. It's the primary step in becoming a professional actor.

Thus, Makino's idea of purity is an active concept used to signify actors' subjectivity, or the sentiment of acting with all one's being, rather than the term used to represent an objectified self. When I asked Makino as to how this idea of purity compared to the image of the so-called cute idols, he said:

> In my opinion, the purity associated with the so-called 'cute-idols' is a made-up image. It's made for the actors to put on a childish act and fake themselves in order to attract boys' attention and be marketable to them. In my view, this is far from being 'pure'. To be 'pure' is to listen to your own heartbeat and your own rhythm of life. It has nothing to do with becoming someone else that you don't originally intend to become... Dancing and singing do not consist of techniques that you are, or ought to be, forced to memorize by someone else. Surely, you can acquire some of these acting skills through [compulsory] training, but your own beat is not something you can acquire from someone else. You have to be yourself, and you have to rely on your own senses and be able to develop the beat that is yours. That's why you need to be 'pure', that is to be honest to your senses.

This indicates Makino's distinction between the pure self which enables the actors to empty their mind in order to absorb the essentials of performance and that used more generally in the pop-idol industry to signify the pretense of innocence.

I then wondered about the role of dancing lessons at O.A.S.: whether these lessons were compulsory practices that molded students' personality into the Makino version of adolescent innocence, which, after all, was another constructed image. When I asked Makino about this point, he smiled grimly and replied:

> Dancing lessons are simply designed to facilitate the students' energies that flow from within. Acting school provides a space where these students can get together, encourage each other, and direct their own senses toward developing specific styles of performance within the context of mutual support and encouragement.

Apparently, Makino did not see dancing lessons as compulsory practice, but more as an instrument for the students to develop themselves in their own creative way. They provided a common ground for these students to stand together and dedicate their hearts, souls, and bodies to personal transformation -- toward becoming a talented performer.

Lessons were organized into five levels, of which the first level was designed for beginners. Members in each level met twice a week: Saturday for voice training, and Sunday to practice singing and dancing. In voice training, students lined up in the mirrored studio, put their strengths into their bellies, and sang sol-fa as loud as they could for about one hour. In dancing and singing practices, students spent the first thirty minutes repeating basic voice training, followed by one hour of moving and shaking their bodies rhythmically. Dancing could be practiced in a free style, so every student invented her own way of moving the body.

Anna and other instructors taught basic dancing skills, such as how to make steps or turn the body around, but there was no choreography in any strict sense as in the case of Nagabayashi's promotion agency. All students overwhelmed me with their enthusiasm, and the heat generating

from their bodies heightened the temperature of the studio that was already hot and steamy from Okinawa's more tropical climate. Because there was no air conditioner in the studio, students were dripping with sweat, but everyone thought that they were "having a good sweat" (*ii ase o kaite iru*).

Every student had a good reason to be there. A member of *B.B.Waves*, for instance, told me that she was a high-school drop out who had no idea what she wanted to do with her life until she came to the O.A.S. and gained her self-esteem via dancing. She continued:

> I could be wandering out on the street without anything to do if I wouldn't be here. I could have even died on the street. What I learned here gave me a lot of confidence. I learned how to believe in myself and my abilities. I can work hard now, and really enjoy what I am doing. I feel like I am ready to challenge whatever trial of life that comes ahead!

For this informant, the O.A.S. and its style provided a pathway toward maturity.

Another student felt that the spirit of dancing helped empower her academic life and improve her grades in high school: she could concentrate on homework and prepare for examinations with a greater sense of confidence. The mother of a 12 year-old student, wanting her daughter to acquire something meaningful in life, decided to take the daughter to the O.A.S. when she heard of its good reputation. She said that both she and her husband were very happy that their daughter could acquire dancing skills and confidence in an encouraging environment.

As part of the lesson, each student selected her favorite song from the list of choices (which consisted mostly of Amuro, *MAX*, and *B.B.Waves's* songs), and sang it in front of the group. Others chorused the selected song at the back. Every song in the list was up beat, and all students chorused each song as they raised their voices vigorously. The following lyrical excerpts are taken from two of the most favored, most frequently selected songs in the list. The following excerpts show the contents of these songs:

Hey Yo! Just chase the chance, the pathway that you believe in, chase chase the chance, let's proceed it straightforwardly.
Dream is not something that you [simply] envision; it's not something you [simply] talk about. It's something to accomplish.
Just chase the chance, nobody can stop, wild and tough, the desire that breaks out of you.
(from Namie Amuro, *Chase the Chance*, Avex Trax)

Body feels exit, I will definitely move out of this place someday.
Body feels excite, this hot and deep feeling that runs inside my entire body.
I will run, as I direct the wind that blows between city buildings toward tomorrow.
(from Namie Amuro, *Body Feels Exit*, Avex Trax)

Students liked these songs because their rhythms and messages were stimulating.

Each student sang for nearly two minutes and gave way to the next student in line. Anna stood at the back of the studio and played the role of disc jockey, changing the music every two minutes. She also danced when the music was playing. At the day's end, students formed a circle to reflect upon their performances and discuss some of the problems they found during their practices as a way of mutual encouragement. I was informed that Makino would occasionally step in at this stage to provide a comment that would heighten the spirit of the class, although this did not happen when I was there.

The kind of crafted femininity that I observed in Nagabayashi's promotion agency was absent from the O.A.S. What I encountered instead was an expression of vibrant sexuality that incorporated quick, sharp, powerful, and even aggressive body movements that mimicked the style represented by various black hip-hop artists, or pop-singers such as Janet Jackson and Madonna. All body parts waved dynamically with fast foot shuffles. Frequent fist making made little dancers appear evermore powerful. Students occasionally made crotch-grabbing gestures and touched under breasts when they danced, evoking to the observer's mind that they were preening for the audience in an overtly sexual way. Seeing young girls strike some of these poses was quite astonishing, and I even wondered if some of them really understood what they were doing. All of these gestures were nearly identical to those made by Amuro during her stage

performances which, combined with her fashion, constituted a style that many people in the media referred to as an expression of young girl's power. All O.A.S. students that I interviewed considered that this style was cool and sexy, and it symbolized *tsuyoi josei no jidai* or the "age of powerful femaleness" (figure 17).

In one of the discussion sessions, I asked the O.A.S. students to describe how they felt about enacting a vibrantly sexual performance. Some replied that they felt a bit ashamed but they generally considered it fun, liberating, and empowering. I asked Anna to tell me how she compared this overtly sexual style with the style she represented back in 1988 when she was enlisted as one of the 58 cute pop-idols who made their debut in the same year.[6] Anna's reply indicated a significant emotional and attitudinal contrast. She said,

> The cute character I played back then [in 1988] was a made-up image that oppressed my individuality, and I did not enjoy trying to live up to that image at all. The only thing that kept me going was my hunger for fame... I mean, my dream to be popular among many people. The kind of sexiness that I am expressing now through my dance comes from within myself. It's what I really am or what I can really be, and I don't have to fake myself or lose my control over it. It's really a great feeling... I don't have to feel bad any more about trying to satisfy people with an invented personality that is not really myself.

This confirmed the willingness of Anna and her colleagues to break away from the old image of adolescent femaleness through a new, self-affirmative style of sexualized performance. When I inquired of Makino as to how he felt about under-aged girls acting in such a vibrantly sexual manner, he said, looking a bit annoyed:

> Why can't girls be sexy, if sexuality is something essential to them!? Why can't they be pure about it, rather than trying to conceal it!? Why can't they express it to the best of their ability!? I think nobody has the right to tell them what they should do about their sexual energies, and much less how they should constrict them. They have to take sexuality in their own hands and express it in their own healthy, creative ways! It's all part of being yourself, and what's wrong with that?

These comments clearly mark the vibrantly sexual style as a means for young female performers to dignify themselves as persons with individual abilities. However erotic they may appear to be,

**Figure 17. An image of powerful femaleness represented by an idol-artist, Hitomi (from a poster advertising the 1996 Lady Aesthetic Contest [a talent audition contest], sponsored by TBC Tōkyō Beauty Center).**

performers who enact this new style of adolescent femaleness feel empowered -- unlike the falsely constructed and standardized image of sexual passivity that tends to constrict its actors' identities in the name of cuteness.

### *Audience Tastes and Reactions*

Audiences are the constituents of "taste" groups. Examining how a female pop-idol is received by her audiences would reveal gender biases and sexual stereotypes that exist in the public domain. As Finn (1990:170) contends, research into the mode of popular culture production must not forget to take into account how these cultural products are received by the consuming audiences who constitute cultural meaning in action and in relationships. To detail out how different audiences reacted to the two mutually-distinct images of adolescent femaleness, or the cute versus the vibrantly-sexual, I called upon those who attended pop-idol concerts to participate in a series of interviews. Eleven individuals who responded consisted of six regular attendants of concerts held by Nagabayashi's promotion agency, and five attendants of Namie Amuro's concert held near Tōkyō in the summer of 1995. I will hereafter refer to the former group of informants as "cute-idol fans," and the latter group as "Amuro fans."

All six cute-idol fans were men aged between 24 and 26, which was the average age for the audience who attended the concert.[7] The five Amuro fans consisted of three women and two men, and their age ranged between 16 and 21. Since 30,000 people who came to Amuro's concert, from which these five individuals were sampled, included adults and children of both sexes, I did not consider my informants to be the proper representatives of the Amuro-audience in terms of age. Since Amuro (born 1977) is considered by many of my informants in the entertainment industry as one of the most worshipped pop-idols among female high-school students, I suspected that Amuro's audience consisted largely of adolescents of both sexes.

All interviews were conducted in the form of free discussion. Questions I asked to my informants included: 1) What particular appeal does your idol have for you and why?; and 2) What do you think about the other pop-idol and why? Replies were dominated by themes related to ideal gender roles and sexual stereotypes.

For cute-idol fans, their idol was lovable because she idealized a submissive female personality that appeared to be non-threatening. For example, one informant said:

> She allows men to love her and cheer her with a great sense of comfort. As a man, I wouldn't have to worry about being criticized, rejected, or betrayed, as can be the case with a real-life girlfriend or sister.

This statement presumed that such an ideal-type of a woman is actually difficult to find. The very reason that many pop-idol fans become fans is due to their romantic desire to establish a partnership with a submissive and nonthreatening female personality that may not exist in reality.

This 26 year-old informant never experienced having a real-life female partner. When I asked him the reason, he explained that he was never interested in a real-life partner who can be potentially threatening. For him, going to concerts and cheering his favorite idol, or buying her CDs, videos, and photo albums, was a real-life experience that provided him with a sense of comfort. It was a way of expressing his affection to his current and most dedicated idol-partner.[8]

Another cute-idol fan indicated that the pure, righteous, and pretty appearance of his idol was a way of providing her fans with a guarantee that her empathetic relationship with them is based on fairness and equality. According to this fan:

> Pop-idol fans like us are always in a state of paradox. It is great to be able to love someone we all know, because it makes us feel privileged. It makes us feel proud. It's a great pleasure for each one of us to share this love and pride with other people in the audience. At the same time, we put ourselves in competition because each of us wants to see our idol as nobody else's [possession]. In effect, our idol is there for everybody and nobody. Every fan can love her, but no fan can possess her... By being pure, righteous, and pretty, she assures us that she is non-flirtatious, at least overtly, and that she is treating everyone fairly. By looking

> innocent, she makes us all feel secure... that she has no intention to betray us by, say, dating one of us and the sacrifice of everyone else.

This shows another important symbolic aspect of the non-threatening personality attributed to social solidarity. The idol has the power to relieve its followers from feeling that they are competing against each other.

All cute-idol fans agreed that they were indifferent about a girl like Amuro because she appeared to be too sexy. One informant indicated the suspicion he had about such a vibrantly sexual personality. He argued:

> That [i.e., Amuro] type of a girl can be a slut.[9] She can easily flirt with other guys, and you can never trust her. She won't stay with you, and it would take so much effort to even try to get close to a girl like that. She can easily slip out of your sight and put you in a competition with other guys.

Apparently, a celebrity such as Amuro who allowed sexual assertiveness for women was sexually threatening for cute-idol fans.

Different words used by cute-idol fans described personal and physical qualities that constituted the sexually innocuous image of pop-idols. For example, I pursued cute-idol fans as to what aspect of their idol made them feel that she was trustworthy and adorable vis-a-vis a more overtly sexual personality such as Amuro. Replies included: virginal, uncontaminated, shy, modest, no make-up, no pierced ears, no pigmented hair, no tight pants. Some fans even said that pop-idols are not supposed to evacuate their bowels, assuming that it was a filthy thing to do. These descriptions which signify the idea of purity were also used as criteria for cute-idol fans to evaluate likable and non-likable young performers in each case, reinforcing the ideal image of adolescent femaleness which these fans share.

A more elaborate question I had for cute-idol fans concerned their sexual motives: whether their affection toward a young, cute, and innocent personality had any erotic motive. There has been a trend in Japanese popular culture and mass media to set a value on youth in lower age

brackets, and to depict them as dependent, sexy, and an encouragement to adult men (Suzuki 1995:79). Anchored in this trend is an emergent genre of sexually oriented literature since the mid 1980s, known as "Lolita eros." This included comic books and adult videos featuring sex with young girls and boys. Sadistic scenes were portrayed in which these subjects were bound, stripped, raped, and beaten. Scenes in which these subjects appear in swimwear, semi-nude, or full-nude, striking various poses that are intended for visual rape, were also present (Funabashi 1995:257). I found many similar poses assumed by cute pop-idols in magazines and promotion videos, although in principle cute-idols as distinguished from young porn-stars and animated Lolita figures never appeared naked (figure 18). Some popular magazines for men combined pop-idol photos and articles with erotic themes and stories. In the end, I could not see a noteworthy difference between cute-idol performances and child pornography.[10]

The association between cute-idol fans and eroticism was also made by the Amuro fans, all of whom derided cute-idol fans as lunatics (*otaku*), or psychopaths who behave awkwardly due to their inability to control sexual desires. The following excerpt from a conversation between two 21 year-old female Amuro fans (K and S) makes this point clear:

K: Those people [i.e., cute-idol fans] have weird ideas about love affairs, and they are out of touch with reality. Don't you think?

S: I agree. Aren't they old enough to know better?

K: Yeah. Just imagine yourself being an innocent little girl, would you ever want to be loved by a man who is ten years or more older than you?

S: No way, I wouldn't stand being in such a position. Simply thinking about it makes me feel like throwing up.

K: Yeah. I think those lunatics who can be senseless enough to adore [cute-looking] idols who are much younger than they are having a serious Lolita complex. They live in their own indecent fantasies.

S: That's right. I bet they can't communicate properly with any woman of their age in real life, so they keep going after an imagined [female] personality.

**Figure 18. The resemblance in images of an animated Lolita figure (top), from the July 1996 issue of *Tōkō Shashin*, and a pop-idol (bottom) in a Lolita-like posture, from the February 1996 issue of *Bomb!***

K: That's sad.

S: It's really too bad.

This implies that cute-idol fans appeared considerably immoral and sexist in the eyes of those who favor more self-controlled image of adolescent sexuality.

Cute-idol fans I interviewed rejected any connection between their attraction toward a virginal figure and Lolita fetishism. However, they indicated a sexual drive toward the young female who was willing to sacrifice herself for the sake of her loving partner – which led them to adore their current pop-idol. Making a distinction between Lolita eros and cute-idol performances which I thought was somewhat ambiguous, one fan (M) explained in a conversation how he felt about seeing his idol strike erotic poses in popular magazines. As the following excerpt shows:

Researcher (R): Don't you ever find your idol strikes sexy, I mean visually very erotic, poses in the cover pages of some magazines?

M: Oh, yes. Quite often, in fact.

R: How do you feel about it?

M: Neither good nor bad.

R: What do you mean? Aren't you annoyed by the fact that someone you admire for her sweetness, purity and righteousness could strike such an erotic pose?

M: Well, yes. I am shocked in a way. For a dedicated fan, it's a matter of course to be annoyed. Nevertheless, I can forgive her, considering the fact that it's part of her job... I mean, to make a living or learn how to perform, you know. Maybe it's something she herself didn't want to do, but had to because her agency told her to do so. I wouldn't want to accuse her for that.

R: You mean you can dismiss the fact that she and her agency are taking part in reproducing a Lolita eros? You mean she is allowing herself to be a masochist who invites you and other men to imagine a scene where you all are raping her? How can this ever really be pure or righteous?

M: Well, I don't read into it so much. If someone wants to rape her [visually], let him go ahead and do so, and I do know that some idol-fans go after their idols for that particular reason... I mean, as part of their sexual satisfaction. As far as I am concerned, I try to trust in her good quality. As long as I can believe that she is by nature pure and righteous, I have no problem with other details. I only want to look at the bright side of her image, you know, and continue to cheer her sweetness that I adore. Besides, our idol will grow up to be sexually awakened eventually,

anyway. That's when she graduates from being a pop-idol, really, and all of her fans will have to accept that fact.

R: Will you and other fans continue to support her, when this happens?

M: Well, I would continue to support her as long as she wouldn't embarrass me by causing some serious sex scandals. Other fans may lose interest the moment they sense that she is no longer pure. I've seen this happen quite often actually.

R: What would they do after that?

M: Some of them may retire from being idol-fans altogether and others may find another pop-idol to go after.

R: Let me change the question. Do you ever become sexually motivated by your so-called pure and righteous idol?

M: Well, I wouldn't deny it as a man. If she were not sexually attractive at all, I wouldn't be going after her.

R: So, it is sexually motivating in a way.

M: Oh, yes. I feel like embracing her tightly in my arms because she is so cute.

R: See, what I don't understand is that if you are trying to fulfil your sexual fantasies after all, why not find your satisfaction in some young, cute-looking porn-stars? Why waste your time, your mind, and your money trying to go after such a child-like personality who conceals her sexuality with images of purity and righteousness... She may appear in swimwear and strike sexy poses, but we all know that she wouldn't strip herself before you?

M: I don't really consider admiring my idol to be a waste of time, mind, or money. Moreover, you can't compare porn-stars with pop-idols. In fact, if my idol will ever become a porn-star, as was the case with some unsuccessful pop-idols in the past, I will lose my interest in her. It's a very different kind of fantasy.

R: Well, how different is it?

M: Loving a porn-star is simply physical, and there isn't much human sentiment involved. It's an animal-like sex drive, you know. Adoring your pop-idol is much more romantic than that. You care about her a lot. Certainly, you wish you can make love to her, but having sex with your idol is one and the last reason of your engagement. I enjoy a greater sense of empathy, and I feel happy simply by imagining herself next to me.

R: Okay, so it's not necessarily about visually raping a Lolita, or something like that.

M: No way, it's nothing that violent, although some maniacs out there might fantasize that. You enjoy your approach toward an adorable personality who will always be there for you, but you

know will not be able to reach completely. You enjoy this sense of distance, and the fact that you can interact with your be-loved idol while maintaining this comfortable distance. If it's all about having sex, you don't need such a personality.

R: Interesting.

Although these discussions indicate male fantasies that are differentiated from visual rape, they shed light on concepts of masculinity being generated in female pop-idol construction. The cute-idol fans, who do not have any real-life female partner with whom they could sufficiently interact and engage in a love affair, sought their salvation in an innocent, sexually inactive personality. They preferred to remain in the unattainable relationship between themselves and their female objects, utilizing the relationship as a site to construct gender ideals. It was this unrealistic sense of escape from actual relationships between men and women, or performers and their audiences, that was questioned by Amuro fans in comparison to their taste for a more realistic image of adolescent sexuality.

One female Amuro-fan favored the image of vibrantly sexual femaleness as represented by Amuro because it satisfied her own interest as a woman rather than the interest of men. She said,

> I like this style [of femaleness represented by Amuro] because it gives a woman like myself a sense of control over her body... She can express herself in the way she wants to do it, without worrying about how to satisfy men's desire.

This point on the preference of a sexually assertive personality reminds the observer of a recent trend among high-school students in Tōkyō and its vicinity to engage in prostitution activities with adult men. Specifically referred to as *kogyaru* or "little gals," some of these students seek long-term affairs with businessmen who provide them with monetary support. This kind of relationship, termed *enjo-kōsai* or "financially aided affairs," has become a social problem and a focus of media attention since the early 1990s.[11]

According to Miyadai (1994) who conducted extensive ethnographic research among these students, the subjects who engage in prostitution activities are far from imprudently objectifying

themselves to their male patrons, as many (adult) moralists would argue. Instead, they have a clear sense of self-control, and are far more capable than their parents would assume in dealing with men's sexual desires. They are also capable of developing their own marketing techniques to earn a living in the filthy world of adult politics. From this standpoint, one may argue that the vibrantly-sexual style represented by Amuro signifies young girls' efforts to assert their self-control in the present-day adult society through the skillful use of sexual economy. Indeed, Amuro is considered as the representative of *kogyaru* by many of her audiences.

The new sexual assertiveness in Amuro may not be taken too far from the standpoint of her male fans. Although these informants agreed on their disinterest in childishly cute pop-idols and their dislike of lunatic idol-fans, they also agreed that Amuro is cute and her performance was an offshoot of pop-idol's male-attracting gestures. "She is just as lovable as any other pop-idol can be," said an 18 year-old male informant, "except that her impact [in singing and dancing] is greater than most performers of her age." Another informant paid attention to Amuro's appearance when she is not acting. According to her, Amuro:

> appears to be very feminine when she is not performing, and I love that gap between her acting and her personality by nature. She is cute when she doesn't perform, and powerfully sexy once she begins performing.

This indicates that in spite of the assertion that the so-called post-idols allow new sexual assertiveness for women, they back up existing expectations, such as making all men feel secure. Miyadai's interpretation of female subjectivity as manifested in the prostitution activities of young school-girls can be refuted on the basis that they are serving the interest of adult men after all. Likewise, the vibrant sexuality expressed by Amuro has not essentially altered the existing gender-role expectations and sexual stereotypes. Female subjects may continue to be sexually objectified by male audiences.[12]

In sum, the meaningful interpretation of Amuro's sexually oriented performance may vary from one group of fans to another. One may not be able to put an end to the question: How self-assertive can a vibrantly-sexual image be for women who live and act within the social system that is largely dominated by men? As far as Amuro herself was concerned, however, there was one clear goal in mind, as she commented in a television interview:

> I would be happy to be widely adored by anyone and everyone... not only by women of my age, or men, or something like that (from *Golden Disc Prize Special*, NHK, May 3, 1996).

What mattered for her was her popularity. The fact that her style was being discussed widely by many people was a sign that she was accomplishing the dream of establishing oneself in society.

## The Analysis: Gender Construction as Performative Expertise

### *Japanese Women: Gender Roles and Ideological Stereotypes*

Popular culture texts can inscribe ideological themes that nevertheless allow audiences to generate meanings from them that meet the needs of their own subculture identities (Mukerji and Schudson 1991:41). With this in mind, the following discussion investigates gender ideologies to which the commercialized images of the female pop-idols, their meaningful constructions, and their audience interpretations are attributed. Female pop-idol performances will be examined within a wider context of gender construction in modern Japan. The goal of this discussion is to understand the mechanism of gender-role reproduction, which enables the entertainment industry to benefit from an interplay between existing gender roles and constructed sexual stereotypes.

### *The Idea of Good Wife, Wise Mother*

Studies on Japanese women indicate an ideologically constructed gender stereotype for women in Japan, signified as "good wife, wise mother" (*ryōsai kenbo*). This was first

championed by officials in the Ministry of Education in the late 1890s and differentiated women from men as homebound wives and mothers. The history of women in modern Japan can be understood in terms of the struggle between the state and social movements initiated by women in the realm of civil society. While the state recurrently promoted this ideology in its welfare, education, employment, sexuality, and reproduction policies regulating women from going public, women's movements transmuted and opposed the state's ideological practices (Uno 1993:294,295; see also Kaneko 1995; Ohinata 1995; Creighton 1996).

The idea of "good wife, wise mother" emerged as the creation of the ideologues and bureaucrats whose goal was to transform Japan from a feudal state to the modern nation. This was meant to create a nation that was strong enough to stand up against the Western imperialist-superpowers. The government planned to institute a "family-state" (*kazoku kokka*) in which the emperor played the role of father. Under this policy, women were expected to contribute to the nation's welfare by serving the male family-head at home, and devoting themselves to the upbringing of children -- the nation's future work force (Ohinata 1995:200).

### *The Impact of Gender Ideology upon Women's Life in Modern Japan*

From the outset of Japan's modernization, women were marginalized from the political domain. Prewar laws prohibited women from participating in voting, organizing political associations, and, before 1925, attending political meetings (Sievers 1983:52,53; Uno 1993:299). The 1898 Civil Code placed women under the authority of the patriarchal head. The head could chose the family domicile, manage his wife's property, and make decisions on legal issues involving his family members (e.g., marriage and divorce)(Uno 1993:299; Kaneko 1995:4,5). Many women entered the job market from time to time, but their occupational types were limited to low-wage industrial workers, clerical attendants, teachers, nurses, domestic servants, and

home-based workers doing piece work. These occupational types were considered supplemental to those occupied by men (Kawashima 1995: 272-275). In education, the 1899 Girls' High School Law stated that the aim of the secondary education for girls is to provide women with a training to become good wives and wise mothers (Kaneko 1995:5). All these became part of the demarcation during the early modern era that the home, ideologically speaking, is expected to be the primary place for women in Japanese society.

The 1947 democratic Constitution forbade discrimination based on sex in political, economic, and social domains. Yet, evidence suggests that throughout the postwar period, Japanese bureaucrats and politicians, most of whom belonged to the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), continued to inform their state policies with the vision of women as domestic agents. Many other formal and informal institutions followed their lead. For instance, the provisions of the 1948 Eugenic Protection Law aimed at preserving the prewar role of women as mothers rather than their health as individuals. This involved laws prohibiting abortion or prescribing the birth control pill for contraceptive purposes. As Uno (1993:306) points out, reproductive policies served national needs rather than women's needs. This suggests that the postwar state still considered women as bearers of the nation's work force -- except that this time, their wombs were borrowed largely to meet the labor needs of industry rather than the needs of households for successors or the state's need for colonists and military conscripts.

The Ministry of Education continued to issue guidelines that recommended primary and secondary coeducational schools to organize different course-orientations for men and women. The outcomes of this included making homemaking courses mandatory for high-school girls (the practice followed by most high schools between 1969 and 1989), and placing female and male students in separate teams for sport-oriented activities (Hara 1995:104). In many primary and secondary schools, female and male students continue to wear differently-designed uniforms,

carry differently-colored school bags (red for girls and black for boys), and have separate classroom roll calls in which boys' roll is consistently called first (Kameda 1995:114). Of course, these practices are not specific to Japan. Mandatory homemaking courses and the separate sport teams existed in American high schools, for example. There are many schools in Britain and elsewhere where different uniforms are adopted for men and women. Since Japan copied British and American educational systems in modern times, these practices were likely to end up in Japan. Yet, these norms and customs reinforce gender differentiation in Japanese schools.

In the economic sector, various restrictions were imposed upon women's qualifications to work in companies, whereas men's pursuit of a career-path was often taken for granted. The 1986 Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOL) was implemented under the intention of the Japanese government to ratify the International Convention, the goal of which was to eliminate of all forms of discrimination against women. However, gender bias continued to exist in many Japanese companies, as was reflected in salaries and occupational types. For instance, as late as 1991, women's monthly contractual salary were, on average, 60.7 percent of that of men; and 50.8 percent on the basis of total monthly earnings that included overtime payments and bonuses. The data from the same year shows that nearly half of the 5.5 million women in the labor force were either part-time, temporary, or exempt from the benefits of full-time employment (Kawashima 1995:278). In many especially large companies, female employees, or office ladies, were also often regarded as the "flowers of the workplace" (*shokuba no hana*). Their function was little more than decorative: that is, to please the eyes of the male employers and employees, or to "brighten up" (*hanayaka ni suru*) the company atmosphere as assistants and extras.[13] The issue in all this is that women did not actually achieve the same level of work as men.

The typical career path of a permanent female employee, as envisioned by Japanese firms, was to be hired for a relatively low-skill or low-responsibility job out of high school. She would

work until she got married, retreat to her motherly duties, and, if possible, return to work after her child(ren) are grown (Ōuchi 1981). This scenario was part of the state's labor policy that tried to cope with a growing shortage of workers during the period of Japan's economic growth (during 1960s and 1970s). It kept encouraging women to enter the labor force without reducing their responsibilities for household management and child care (Uno 1993:305). In reality, opportunities for married women to re-enter the labor market on a full-time basis are extremely limited. Most large companies are still reluctant to hire women with outstanding skills or good educational backgrounds (Rohlen 1974; Lebra 1976; Robins-Mowry 1983; Yoshizumi 1995).

Finally, in the domain of popular culture and the mass media, gender bias influenced the ways in which women were selected and portrayed. As already discussed, the Japanese preoccupation with the characterization of young girls as sexual objects is a trend found in magazines, comics, and movies that are increasingly aimed at young audiences (Funabashi 1995; Clammer 1995; Allison 1996). The public inclination toward young, dependent, and adorable female personalities is apparent in television as well. The age range of most women who appear regularly in news programs, commercials, dramas, and variety shows is substantially lower and narrower than that of men -- most falling between the late teens and the early thirties (quoted in Suzuki 1995:78,79).[14] The typical image of these television personalities is middle-class, elegant, sensitive, average, or cute. This stands in contrast to the images of ugly-looking women (*busu*) and men (*gesu*), or older women (derogatorily referred to as *oban*, *babaa*, *obatarian*, or *kuso-babaa* that literally means "a filthy old woman") and men (*ojin*, *jijii*, or *kuso-jijii*). These images are frequently treated as the objects of public laughter and ridicule (1995:79; my observation). The image of an ideal female personality on television is also paired with that of her ideal partner: the stylish, handsome, firm, and independent man who has the same class background.

Women who appear on news programs and variety shows more often position themselves as assistants rather than main casters or hosts. Here, too, women are projected as accessories that can brighten up the studio atmosphere. In many Japanese television dramas that I observed, female actors who performed the role of the main character were, in the end, meek, feminine, and ideally obedient -- however strong, and independent they appear to be in the beginning.

All these cases support the fact that sexual politics in Japanese institutions, social relations, and the mass media are centered on the existing gender expectations that characterize women primarily as the dependent caretakers of the home. This characterization as represented in the idealized image of "good wife, wise mother" functioned as a recurrent metaphor that characterized Japanese femaleness as the object of societal domination. Since the dawn of Japan's modernization, it profoundly influenced the ways women were treated and portrayed in social, economic, and popular-cultural sectors throughout the nation's history. Speaking of the effectiveness of *ryōsai kenbo*, however, Uno (1993) comments:

> *ryōsai kenbo* failed to become a hegemonic ideology, partly because it did not match the life experiences of many women and partly because despite government repression, the critical voices of educators, leftists, and feminists spread dissonant visions of femaleness through their writings, protests, and alternative institutions (1993:294).

This gap between ideological expectations and life experiences necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the state's impact on the construction of Japanese femaleness. It equally required the understanding of women's reaction to the state's policies.

### *Elements of Transmutation, Resistance, and Conformity*

The history of Japan's sexual politics in the modern era encompasses a series of movements that represented women's civil rights against the state. In the 1880s and 1890s, activists such as Toshiko Kishida and Hideko Fukuda stressed women's right to participate in public affairs.

Labor strikes by women began as early as 1886. Groups such as Yūaikai (Friendship Society) and Sekirankai (Red Wave Society) sponsored mass rallies against the textile industry and other corporate establishments in order to protect female workers from being exploited. Japan's first feminist organization, Seitōsha (Bluestocking Society), founded by Raicho Hiratsuka in 1911, published periodicals in which female intellectuals discussed various social and legal issues concerning women. Shin Fujin Kyōkai (New Women's Association), founded in the 1920, succeeded in achieving the repeal of the law that barred women from political meetings. Women's right to vote was sought by another feminist organization, Fusen Katoku Dōmei (Women's Suffrage League) as well as other similar groups that developed during the 1920s and 1930s.[15]

In the realm of popular culture, the so-called "modern girls" (*moga*) epitomized the self-assertive attitudes of young, middle-class women who rejected the chaste and submissive domesticity of *ryōsai kenbo* by embodying cosmopolitan fashion and lifestyle. These women modeled themselves after their European and North American contemporaries, otherwise known as "modern women" or "flappers," who represented the carefree, cosmopolitan lifestyle of urban women who rebelled against the establishment (Silverberg 1991).

In postwar Japan, the principle of democracy led numerous movements and organizations to emerge within the context of civil society. In the 1970s and 1980s, feminists such as Mitsu Tanaka, Ikuko Atsumi, Chizuko Ueno, and members of Gurūpu Tatakau Onna (Fighting Women's Group, founded 1970) criticized the idea of *rōsai kenbo*. They questioned the inevitability of women's domestic destiny as they examined the mechanism of societal domination as manifested in social institutions such as the state, family, and corporations (Uno 1993:308).[16] Other activists, pressure groups, and conferences were organized around specific agenda, such as the elimination of sexism in law, politics, employment, and education (Tanaka

1975; Fujimura-Fanselow 1985; Joseigaku Kenkyūkai 1987; Sasakura and Nakajima 1990; Kameda 1995; Kaya 1995; Kinjo 1995; Satō 1995).

In the youth culture of the 1990s, a new image of adolescent femaleness, known as *gyaru* or "gals," began to replace the older *shōjo*. This image conjured up the figure of an assertive, self-centered young woman who is in no hurry to marry and who maintains a stable of boyfriends to serve her different needs (Robertson 1998:65; Tanaka 1995). Contemporary "gals" reflect the anti-social attitude of the modern girls of the 1920s and 1930s. In fact, *gyaru* can be read as a Japanese revival and abbreviation of the French *garçon* (*gyarusonnu*), one of the common terms used in the 1930s to denote a masculine female (Robertson 1998:65).

A closer look at women's reactions to the state's policies toward women during the postwar period, however, reveals women's multiple positioning on the subject of *ryōsai kenbo* that cannot be reduced to the simple pro-versus-con dichotomy. The trajectory of women's movements in history also shows that activists transmuted their goals and issues in order to adapt themselves to the surrounding environment or what may be called the appropriate sense of the time. For instance, the great surge of nationalist sentiment during the wartime in the 1930s and 1940s created an intellectual climate that denounced feminism as being unpatriotic or un-Japanese. During this period, leading female activists appealed to motherhood in order to raise public awareness of women's concerns and proclaim their public authority.

One implication of this positioning was that women could actively contribute to the imperial state, especially its two important sectors (the military and the bureaucracy) that became preoccupied with the reproduction of the nation's labor supply (Uno 1993:302; see also Kuninobu 1984; Mackie 1988). Most women's associations that became active during the early postwar period (the 1950s and 1960s) sought to protect working wives and mothers outside the

home by strengthening political and economic influences. Yet, they held the idea that women are primarily domestic agents, (Uno 1993:307).

In the realm of postwar education, a considerably high proportion of Japanese parents and teachers are still in favor of bringing up their children in conformity with what are viewed as gender-appropriate behaviors in children (Kameda 1995:108).[17] Many mothers, especially those with small children, continue to believe that motherly love and devotion are the keys to a child's development, and play the role of *kyōiku mama* or "educational mothers" (Ohinata 1995:207). Parental attitudes on child rearing constantly distinguish between boys and girls: boys are brought up with the expectation that they would become active, brave, and strong; girls are thought to be obedient, polite, and non-argumentative (Kashiwagi 1973, quoted in Kameda 1995:110).

Many students themselves actively reinforce their gender roles in classrooms. In a self-governed student council that is commonly found in primary and secondary schools, for example, a common understanding holds that girls run for vice-chair, treasurer, or secretary, but never the chair. A girl who seeks the top office is likely to be accused by her classmates of lacking in common sense. In most sport-related club activities where both sexes are involved, women continue to participate as managers, if not cheer leaders, whose role is to assist the male players. For example, women put away equipment, wash uniforms, and prepare meals (Kameda 1995:115).[18] Gender bias in schools can also influence the students' academic career-paths. More women enter post-secondary education than men do, but most enter two-year colleges, while men go to four-year universities in higher numbers (1995:110).

All these cases imply that while the traditional image of *ryōsai kenbo* may be refuted by the radical activists and movements representing women, the majority of Japanese find comfort in rendering themselves more or less to it. As much as *ryōsai kenbo* has failed to become

hegemonic, it also failed to become counter-hegemonic, and the ground for contesting the appropriate image of Japanese femaleness remains open.

### *The Idol-Manufacturing Industry: Contextualizing the Field of Gender Contestation*

It is in this dynamic sociohistorical setting that the entertainment industry, of which idol-promotion agencies are a part, and its image-making legacy can be situated. The two observed images of femaleness in pop-idol performances, the cutesy versus the sexy, are two optional images of sexuality according to which audiences of different genders and interests can choose and adore their ideal female personalities. These images also reflect the appropriate image of Japanese adolescent femaleness as differently envisioned and strategically manufactured by male idol-producers.

Cute pop-idols advocate the traditional adolescent femininity that idealizes the image of the future *ryōsai kenbo* for young girls. A derivation of the term *kawaisō* whose principle meanings include pathetic, poor, and pitiable, *kawaii* or "cute" articulates a vulnerable, subordinate, even disabled personality that deserves personal attention, care, or support (Kinsella 1995:221,222). When female pop-idols act cute and coy, they entitle their selves to this sexually subordinate and protected position -- just as those who conform to the *ryōsai kenbo* ideology would position themselves in a socially subordinated and domestically protected way.

A shift away from the cute-style toward a more vibrantly-sexual style in pop-idol performances appears to signify the fact that Japanese women are breaking away from the traditional gender ideology in order to become more self-assertive. Yet, the extent to which the vibrant sexual style contributes to the reification of female subjectivity in Japanese society is open to question -- at least from the perspective of male viewers who still considered post-idols as sexually objectified. Moreover, the current popularity of sexy pop-idols simply proves the

point that young girls continue to gain their agency in reference to the motif-forms that are given to them by the image-making industry. By contextualizing a contested terrain in which adolescent women can variably position and construct themselves, the burgeoning industry continues to capitalize on the manipulation of female sexuality.

The contestation between the two alternative images of femaleness as manifested in pop-idol performances, however, becomes more apparent when one looks closely to the pop-idol manufacturing process. Performers' willingness and attitudes count as important determinants of an agency's success, and their will to perform is closely tied with their choice of female identities. The compulsory practices of gender reproduction are self-enforced by those who can identify themselves with what their agencies perceive as appropriate role models for young girls (as in the case of the O.A.S. students' reproduction of the Namie Amuro style). However, they are resisted by those who see the gap between the assigned gender role and their images of selves (as in the case of performers who belong to Nagabayashi's promotion agency who had trouble accepting the cute style).[19]

Several people I interviewed outside of the two cases discussed above indicated that there were self-expressive and "punkish," if not necessarily vibrantly sexual, pop-idols back in the 1970s and the early 1980s when the cute style was in its heyday. Yet, they also said that these idol-styles were marginalized at the time. They either disappeared before long, or never won nationwide recognition as did some cute idols. Thus, the success of gender construction in idol performances depends on the sense of the time in which a particular gender stereotype is preferred to other options, as much as it depends on the performers' willingness to perform.

As a whole, idol-manufacturing agencies coordinate performers and their fans in space and time in order to provide them with role models -- in reference to which the appropriate image of adolescent femaleness can be evaluated, contested, and selected. In this sense, the field of idol

production itself functions as a mediator that bridges the sociocultural gap created between the existing ideological expectations of gender roles and the actual lives of the consumers.

**Summary**

Two mutually-distinct images of adolescent femaleness are identified in the above discussion: on one hand is the passive, submissive, and child-like femininity expressed by cute-idols; and on the other is the active, stylish, and vibrantly-sexual femaleness represented by idol-dancers. While both of these images are designed to be marketable, the cute style is disputed on the ground that it regulates female actors' control over their own bodies and personalities for the sake of male-attracting role-playing. Only when this sense of confinement is overcome because of the hunger for success or the pursuit of greater public recognition does the actor's attitude change, accepting the cute style as a necessity. On the contrary, the embodiment of the vibrantly-sexual personality is desired by young female performers and audiences who consider it to reassert their positive identities in the era when women are encouraged to be increasingly stronger and self-assertive. Yet, it is questionable as to how socially or culturally empowering this image really is. In either case, the field of idol production has become a site where appropriate forms of adolescent gender and sexuality are contested.

The ethnographic observations presented in this chapter can partake in the ongoing debate in gender studies and feminist literatures on how gender roles and sexual stereotypes ought to be evaluated (e.g., Shore 1981; Strathern 1981; Ueno 1987; Cooks 1989; MacKinnon 1989; Bartky 1989; Atkinson and Errington 1990; Lewis 1990; Smith 1990b; Haraway 1991; Hooks 1992b; Haddon 1992; McAslan 1992; Paglia 1992; Bordo 1993; Imamura 1996). In cultural studies, for example, McRobbie (1984) and Frith (1981) present different views on how fashion and dance engender young North Americans who practice them as part of their leisure activities. On one

hand, McRobbie (1984:145) contends that dance provides American girls with a positive sexual expressiveness that contributes to the creation of a distinct cultural form in its own right. On the other hand, Frith argues that the youthful cultural activities led by female teenagers, such as dancing and dressing up, can become instruments for female gender oppression. These activities reproduce the socially objectified position of young girls that serves the purpose of pleasing the men -- however fun, stylish, and artistic they may appear to be on the part of young girls who practice them as a collective occupation (Frith 1981:229).[20]

In the light of the two ethnographic cases presented above, one can argue that both McRobbie and Frith's ways of seeing are valid, or that neither of them can stand alone. They are two different aspects of the same phenomenon. The sexualizing practice of fashion, dance, or a pop-idol performance can be interpreted as subjectifying a female agent, objectifying her, subjectifying her into becoming objectified, or objectifying her by the token of becoming subjective. However, the fact remains that selfhood is shaped in terms of these symbolic forms that articulate the organizational needs of the group into which the subject is initiated. As Cohen (1990[1979]:46) rightly argues, normative symbols are ambiguous in their meaning, and it is this ambiguity that forges symbols into such powerful instruments in the hands of leaders in mystifying people for certain purposes.

Moreover, the very debate over which interpretation is appropriate can be manipulated by the industry as part of their strategies to provoke public interests as part of a spectacle and empower themselves symbolically as well as economically. In this way, the industry functions as a hegemonic institution. In the presence of this ideological apparatus, people are systematically but deliberately, instead of coercively, rendered into gender roles. Fashion and dance feminize American girls with a sense of pleasure rather than that of oppression. Likewise, post-idol performances direct Japanese girls to find female subjectivity and creativity within their social

roles, rather than outside them.[21] The style represented by Japanese post-idols becomes a symbolic force that moulds Japanese girls' selfhood.

The relationship between theatrical imageries and gender ideology can be seen elsewhere. For instance, Hatley (1990) shows that competing genres, such as the all-male *ludrug* versus the female-oriented *kethoprak*, exist in Javanese performances, providing sites for performers to enact, and for audiences to contest, female gender roles and sexual stereotypes. Female personalities are constructed in these performances on the basis of different attitudes that performers and audiences develop toward gender roles and sexual relationships -- in a society where women have ideologically ascribed characteristics judged as essentially inferior to those of men. The contemporary mass media promote a new model of middle-class women that, for all its surface attributes of modernity (e.g., Western-style fashion, jet-setting lifestyle, and educational achievement) is basically conservative in its ideological implication of the traditional wifely ideal.

All-male casts in *ludrug* reproduce this image in terms of an imaginary contrast between the domineering, nagging wife and the soft and sexy young wife played by transvestite singers. This implies male antagonism towards dominant women and corresponding fantasies of subservient femininity (1990:183-186; see also Peacock 1968:74-78). Conversely, the *branyak/kenes* style in *kethopiak* (a genre of popular theatrical performances that has specific appeals for lower-class women) portrays progressive female personalities. In this genre, women's frustration (or the sense of dissatisfaction that they cannot otherwise express) against the state's gender ideology that tends to confine women's freedom in everyday speech and activity are articulated (Hatley 1990:197-201).

On the subject of contemporary Japanese popular culture, Rosenberger (1995,1996), Clammer (1995), and Kinsella (1995) provide cases where specific styles of performance (e.g., the cute

style) or products (fashion magazines) are shown to provide points of contradiction in a contested sociocultural terrain. Upon these points, women can gain their agencies (both as women and as female consumers), sometimes through taking multiple positions (McNay 1992:42, quoted in Rosenberger 1995:144). In concurrence with these studies, this chapter has shown the specific ways in which female pop-idol performances become a site for epitomizing the ongoing symbolic contestation of adolescent femaleness, which nevertheless perpetuates the social domination of gender and sexuality.

There is an essential concept in Japan called *matori* or "space-taking," referring to an idea of positioning in society. If willing, one can open up her or his own space (or territory) within an existing sociocultural terrain and fill it up with images, events, or contents which are spawned out of creativity. Thus, social space (*ma*) is "taken" (*tori*). Bachnik (1986,1994) calls this "indexing one's place" in a social space, or "situating oneself" in a social relationship (see also Yasuda 1984). Many pop-idol producers that I interviewed, including Nagabayashi and Makino, used the word *matori* to explain their activities of pop-idol production. They confirmed that their activities constitute a form of social and institutional positioning -- within the existing terrain of gender construction in Japanese society.

**Notes:**

1. I use the term "femaleness," as distinguished from "womanhood," to suggest a stage in which female gender and sexuality is emerging but not fully developed as in the case of an adult woman.

2. Gender is also realized through creative cultural practices. See, for example, Babcock (1986). I believe that there is a fine line between discipline and creativity in artistic activities. See also, for example, Bethe and Brazell (1990).

3. This is true of other Japanese, especially traditional, forms of performance, such as *nōh* and *kabuki.*

4. An audition held in Okinawa in 1997, for example, counted 2,200 applicants in their early teens. This was an unusually high rate of applicants for a local actor's school.

5. The word *sensei* is used in Japan to address teachers, professors, or others performing in a teacher-like role.

6. This count is based on Matsuzaka Jazz Hihyō Sha's data book, *The Idolist Manual: Idol Pops 80-90: 80's Idol Singles Perfect Collection*, published in 1991.

7. My estimate based on observations and random audience sampling during interviews.

8. In her study of the role of young girl's magazines in Japanese consumer society, White (1995) indicates that purity and righteousness are also significant for male stars to market their images to the young female audience. White finds that revealing the star's sexual or love relationships are considered by magazine editors as a taboo because young girl readers would lose interest if their male idols were to be involved publicly with someone (1995:266).

9. This is my English translation of the original Japanese word, *shōfu*, which my informant used here. By *shōfu* this informant meant a sexually pernicious woman.

10. Not surprisingly, some pop-idols become porn stars when they cannot market themselves well enough. One can also find cute porn stars being advertised as idol-like, or as pure, righteous, and pretty, advocating the fantasized female sexual role: young, innocent, and vulnerable personalities who take pleasures in being raped by men. This also made the observer wonder as to how pure and righteous these personalities really were.

11. For an article written on this subject in English, see, for instance, the December 24, 1996 issue of *Newsweek* (pp.50-54).

12. For example, Ueno (1996:12) argues that young girls who engage in financially aided affairs are self-asserting to the extent that they are taking advantage of their youthful bodies (and sexuality) which are valued and demanded by middle-aged men. However, these young girls have done nothing to change this (male-dominating) value itself.

13. One in-company newsletter, published in 1977, that I found during my fieldwork had a column in which female employees were compared with flowers, and its title included the phrase, "Blossoms of Maidens in [the name of the company]."

14. This is based on a survey conducted in 1985 by the Forum for Citizens' Television in Tōkyō.

15. These data are taken from Kodansha (1993:1706). See also Sievers (1983), Kuninobu (1984), Bernstein (1991), and Fujieda (1995) for further details.

16. For writings by feminist intellectuals in Japanese, see, for example, Tanaka (1972), Ueno (1994), as well as Gakuyo Shobō's volumes, *New Feminism Review*.

17. This was taken from a 1982 survey conducted by the Prime Minister's Office.

18. Japanese sometimes refer to this as *otoko no kao o tateru*, meaning "save the boys' face" or "pay due respect to men."

19. It was revealed to me by several sources after I left Japan that most performers who belonged to Nagabayashi's promotion agencies left the agency for better image-making agencies. Apparently, Nagabayashi's focus on adolescent femaleness was too narrow and outdated so that these performers could not keep up with it. On the contrary, the OAS business continued to boom, as many of its students, including *SPEED* and *B.B.Waves*, succeeded in the entertainment industry.

20. This comparison is quoted in Lewis (1990:38).

21. This is similar to Allison's (1996) discussion of lunchbox (*obentō*) as an ideological apparatus that enforces Japanese mothers gender role. School lunchbox involves elaborate and cute aesthetics, which encourage children to eat everything. The aesthetic expectations inherent in the everyday practice of lunchbox making enable Japanese mothers to exercise creativity and playfulness. At the same time, these expectations reinforce ideologies of household obligation and motherly commitment (1996:96). Thus, Allison shows that cultural processes actively channel gender and sexuality in ways that maximize productive labor demands, rather than repress sexual impulses.

## CHAPTER V – IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF A POP-DIVA: LIFE STORIES AND STAGE PERFORMANCES

> "Seeing an average child grow into a big star is what makes idol performances all the more exciting."
>
> "If successful, a pop-idol will become an undisputed leader who can stand on the mountaintop of popularity. Climbing up this mountain is not easy, however. On the way, idols must face various obstacles. Only those who overcome these obstacles with their patience and charm can win the hearts of many people."
>
> "To be a star is to establish a personal style that can guide the public: that's what all pop-idols strive for."

These comments taken from interviews with pop-idol producers indicate how the idea of establishing the self (*jiko kakuristu*) is represented by producers as a significant goal for pop-idols. Whether they are the cute-idols that dominated the Japanese pop-music scene between the 1960s and 1980s, or the post-idols that became more pervasive in the 1990s, young personalities who are pop stars present highly stylized images.

As proposed in chapter four, spirited idol candidates attempt to take charge of their assigned roles and use them as instruments to develop their own style -- to prove to the public that they indeed managed to establish themselves. The industry takes advantage of such a spirit, exploiting the labor of willing candidates, in hopes of profiting from these individuals as they are marketed in commodity forms. However, producing a pop-idol is expensive and it involves cautious calculations on the side of producers. An interview with one of the record company directors revealed that the average cost for producing a pop-idol is 30 to 40 million yen, and very few pop-idols actually contribute greatly to the companies' profit-making. This director saw idol-production as an act of charity for girls and boys who want to chase their dreams to become famous. Expanding on this point, the current chapter will follow the trajectory of a successful pop-idol. It will demonstrate how her speeches and activities, motivated by her to

succeed, and how she was manipulated by promotion agencies, media institutions, and other business corporations that compose the entertainment industry.

The life of Seiko Matsuda, one of Japan's most celebrated pop-divas, illuminates this process of idol-packaging. A girl named Noriko Kamachi came to Tokyo to become a successful pop-idol, and against all odds was packaged by her promotion agency and its network and transformed into Seiko Matsuda. I have chosen Matsuda as the subject of this particular investigation because she has been one of the most frequently discussed pop-idols in the mass media.[1] Since her debut in 1980, the industry has been successfully marketing Matsuda's maturation process. Matsuda is considered to have developed the model (*otehon*) of transforming the self for many female pop-idols and young women. As I examine Matsuda's life-history, I will try to tackle the problems of how she was represented as someone who managed to earn her celebrity status with a tremendous amount of enthusiasm, patience, and cleverness to develop her own style. I will also examine what influence such a stylistic representation has had on those watching her or following her.

I do not intend to recount in detail the numerous events that occurred in Matsuda's life, or investigate who Matsuda really is. Rather, my intention here is to understand, through the analysis of a set of images and narratives, the cultural forms and processes by which this girl, who is now a pop-diva, is represented in space and time.[2] Observing the ways in which the public image of a star is portrayed visually, orally, and in print over time enables an understanding of how cultural values are generated through the entertainment indutsry's well-planned media curriculum. I became interested in Matsuda's success story because the various accounts associated with this pop-diva express collective dreams, desires, and myths about selfhood and identity in Japanese society. Her image is continuously situated in the flux of

changing values and lifestyles -- in the name of modernization, Westernization, or internationalization.

My ethnographic venture also involves putting in perspective the politics of representation as played out between the performer, the media, and the audience. Performers try to credit themselves by initiating activities that can inspire the public. As the provider of information as well as the coordinator of public opinion, members of the mass media try to produce sensational reports about performers and their activities. Members of the public shape and reshape performers' images based on what they see, hear, and read.

**Style as the Dramatization of Self**

Style is an individual manifestation of expressions that specify a genre. In discussing style, Bakhtin (1986) argues that any style is inseparably related to genres. Any utterance in any sphere of communication can reflect the individuality of the speaker (or writer) and therefore possesses individual style. However, each sphere of human activity and communication has its own genre that corresponds to conditions that are specific to that sphere. Bakhtin argues:

> A particular function (scientific, technical, commentarial, business, everyday) and the particular conditions of speech communication specific for each sphere give rise to particular genres, that is, certain relatively stable thematic, compositional, and stylistic types of utterances. Style is inseparably linked to particular thematic unities and... to particular compositional unities: to particular types of construction of the whole, types of its completion, and types of relations between the speaker and other participants in speech communication... (1986:64).

Thus, as a cultural strategy, style provides performers with a means to earn social recognition by signifying their selves in certain conventional ways. Through stylistic expressions, performers link their selves to an established social field.

At the same time, style, defined by Ewen as an "incongruous cacophony of images that are strewn across the social landscape," is a "visible reference point by which people come to understand life in progress" (Ewen 1988:14). In style, people discover pieces of themselves and that for which they strive. Through stylized promotion, celebrities and their manufacturing agencies invest the everyday lives of transformed individuals with a magical sense of value, or a secularized imprint of the sacred. This sense of value consists of dreams of identity and wholeness, which speak of possibilities that the underlying population, currently unnoticed and unimportant, can achieve the status of somebody at the top (1988:93-96). As Ewen elaborates:

> Celebrity forms a symbolic pathway, connecting each aspiring individual to a universal image of fulfillment: to be someone, when 'being no one' is the norm. Whereas the beginnings of celebrity often begin with a local, word-of-mouth following, invariably, becoming 'someone' is a gift bestowed upon people by the image machine. The myriad stories of chance meetings and lucky breaks fuel the belief, for many, that it 'may happen'. Each success feeds the hopes of millions who will never make it (1988:95,96).

This symbolic pathway, which translates into success stories, is embedded in a social drama. Aspiring heroic individuals, with their sensitivity to the factors of legitimacy, develop an art the rhetoric of persuasion and influence. This involves a three-stage process: 1) breaching an existing norm, 2) struggling against some redressing mechanisms that are brought into operation by the disturbed group (or society), and 3) becoming integrated into the group or the winner of social recognition by altering the scope and range of its relational field (Turner 1982:68-72). The life of a celebrity, then, becomes a style signifying personal willpower, effort, and achievement to be shared among the public.[3]

In Japan, the celebrated heroic personalities manifest ideal forms of selfhood using concepts such as disciplining the self (*jishukisei*), developing the self (*jiko-hatten*), discovering the self (*jiko-hakken*), renewing the self (*jiko-kaizō*), evaluating the self (*jiko-handan*), and recovering the self (*jiko-kaifuku*). Their lives are dramatized by the leadership campaigns of the Japanese

mass media in a form that might be termed *jinsei-gekijo* (lit. "life theatre"). Such a dramatization process involves standing up against various trials of life (*shiren*) imposed upon the self by other individuals, groups, or institutions; overcoming feelings of inferiority (*rettōkan*); and establishing one's self as *ichininmae*, or a creative, responsible person. Though co-dependent on others, the *ichininmae* acts in harmony with one's individuality. These are the things that not many people can or have the courage to do, given the cultural emphasis on social conformity. Viewers can acquire from courageous individuals a fuller sense of self-confidence (*jishin*) as well as the meaning of life (*ikigai*)(Mouer and Sugimoto 1986:195-200).

Some brief commentaries on Seiko Matsuda put her practices in this perspective, necessitating a more elaborated analysis of her life and her performances. The December 23, 1988 issue of *Asahi Journal* is one such example where a feminist critic Chikako Ogura evaluates Matsuda's defiant characteristic. Ogura writes:

> In the sentimentalism that lies at the core of the Japanese-style relationship between a mother and a daughter, the daughter cannot betray her mother. In the wet and sticky [i.e., benevolent] family organization of Japan, it is proven that the eros of a girl cannot be expressed freely... Seiko, on the other hand, does not [conform to this rule]. Even though she is told that it is a customary practice for a Japanese woman to give up what one has now [i.e., career] to acquire a new happiness [married life], or that she has to grin and bear many things [in life], Matsuda asks back 'Why?' and desires to have both [marriage and career]. She never lets go of something once attained: until now, such an attitude has been criticized as selfish and it has not been admissible for a woman in Japan. Yet, Matsuda does it without hesitation (Ogura 1988:1287, my translation).

The tension which Ogura sees in Matsuda, between female sexuality and the structure organizing the moral courses of action in families, is perhaps more cross-cultural than specifically Japanese (cf. Collier, Rosaldo, and Yanagisako 1997).[4] Nevertheless, Ogura provides a contextualized account regarding the fact that the very sexuality that creates the human need for families becomes a point of reference for the families to impede on human sexuality.

In agreement with other critics, Ogura describes such an attitude as heroic because it challenges the existing system, and facilitates a sociocultural change. She contends:

> [Matsuda] teaches a happy girl the concrete strategy of maintaining her happiness [without giving up anything]. Don't hand over to him the woman's ability to control her own sexuality. Dislike an old-fashioned man; there is no need [for a woman] to suffer [from limiting her activities to the home] by becoming a wife and a mother. Why not go into the system and break down those rules and codes about being a wife and a mother? ...One will have to make a great effort to get what she wants. She is demonstrating these things. She is telling young women to grow up just as happy as she was during her childhood or girlhood (1988:1287, my translation).

In detailing the process whereby Matsuda deploys cultural norms, social standards, and moral principles to establish her style, further forms and contents of her activities, performances, and public images will be examined. Printed articles and oral narratives about Matsuda as well as Matsuda's stage performance were crucial data-sources for this research purpose. As for printed materials, I used autobiographical essays written by Seiko Matsuda as well as other publications that discussed Matsuda. The former materials provided this idol's purported accounts of her dreams and desires, her public image, social relationships and institutional organizations in which she is situated, as well as experiences undergoing the process of establishing the self. The latter sources illustrated how these dreams, desires, images, and experiences were perceived and presented by the media.

There is a rhetorical problem with media sources, however: their contents are selectively organized, and the information they provide is often presented in a manner that satisfies the interests of the writers and publishers. To compensate for this problem, I employed oral narratives that include commentaries on Matsuda's performances and her public image provided by idol-producers, media agents, and fans. These comments offer insights into the ways Matsuda's style is adopted by her audiences as part of their own personality creation beyond the boundaries of the mass media.

Examining Matsuda's stage performance in concert reveals the technique in which she enacts her style before the audience, and how the audience reacts to this in an immediate context. Pop-idol concerts typically function as showcases for performers to demonstrate their achievements and popularity. Thus, the quality and the scale of the interaction that takes place in Matsuda's concerts provides the manner in which her life-history and her style is publicly shared.

## From Maiden to Villain, to Saint: The Biography of Seiko Matsuda

### *The Personal Background*

If genus *Idola japonicus* can be classified into two species, cute-idols and stylish post-idols, whose qualitative differences signify "genetic mutation" (so to speak) that occurred in the span of a decade or so, Seiko Matsuda is a personal manifestation of this chronological transformation. Matsuda is known to have marked the change in style from an innocent cute-idol who begged for public support to a confident pop star whose thoughts and activities are almost always the source of public inspiration.

Most importantly, Matsuda is considered by many people in Japan to be a symbol of accomplishment. Her life is a testimony to the fact that a woman can challenge the world in spite of many obstacles and establish herself as a successful entertainer, homemaker, mother, shop owner, seductress, and independent worker simultaneously. As Kawanobe *et al.* (1994) put it, what distinguishes her from many other pop-idols who simply market dreams is the demonstration that these dreams are there to be achieved via one's will to act. He writes:

> The very source of Seiko Matsuda's popularity is her way of life that puts dreams into practice. She gets everything she desires. Seiko's dream is not simply a dream. There are steps to [reach] it. And, it is her tenacity and enthusiasm to which many women [in particular] are attracted (1994:32, my translation).

This statement specifies the way in which a dream can shackle human desire. Allison (1996:xv) notes that desire in present-day Japanese society is actively produced in forms that coordinate with the habits demanded of productive subjects. The dullness and arduousness of the tasks Japanese must execute over a lifetime, starting in childhood (e.g., discipline and effort), are made acceptable by the internalization of a process that makes the habitual desirable, rather than by the mere force of an external structure (e.g., fear of failure in school). Making escape from the habits of labor seems possible through everyday practices of consumptive pleasure (1996:xv). The above statement implies that many Japanese women can attain a sense of subjectivity from Matsuda, who shows them the importance of having dreams in life, holding onto them, and working hard to achieve them. The internalization of Matsuda's lifestyle for these women, in turn, is made possible through the everyday consumption of Matsuda's performances.

Matsuda was born Noriko Kamachi in 1962, in Kurume City of Fukuoka Prefecture, which is located in the southern island of Kyushu. Like many young women of her generation, Matsuda yearned to become a *kashu* or pop singer when she was a high-school student. Rather than leaving it as a dream, however, Matsuda went to a series of contests. After several unsuccessful attempts, she caught the attention of a recording director from CBS/Sony who eventually brought her to Tōkyō to be produced. Strong objections from her parents prevented Matsuda from going to Tōkyō for almost a year and half, but she used this time to attend a local conservatoire of music with the director's support. Coming to Tōkyō in June 1980, Matsuda entered Sun Music Productions, and also transferred from high-school in Fukuoka to Tōkyō's Horikoshi Gakuen, the secondary school that many teenage performers attend. The professional name Seiko Matsuda was adopted from a character in a drama she performed during this period.

A personality projecting innocence, Matsuda quickly became one of the most well known pop-idols among those who made their debut in 1980. Like many other successful pop-idols, Matsuda performed in dramas, television commercials, and movies. She also became a member of *Sundays*, a group of young back-up personalities that regularly appeared on NHK's *Let's Go Young.* This program was one of the most popular weekly music shows on television at the time and undoubtedly the most prestigious place to perform for novice pop-idols. Since Matsuda's main goal was to establish herself as a professional pop-singer, she and her staff concentrated on producing records and CDs, participating in music programs, and holding concerts on a regular basis. Eventually, people of all ages became familiar with Matsuda's name, face, and songs. Her success in singing can be measured in part by the fact that between 1980 (the year she made her debut) and 1993, she released 25 number-one singles and 16 number-one albums, making more than the equivalent of 500 million U.S. dollars in sales.[5] These figures are considered extraordinary, given the average life expectancy for idol-pop singers which is said to be two to three years (contracts with agencies and record companies are normally two to three years). Most of these young singers are not expected to cover the high cost spent on their production.[6]

With her active and carefree characters, Matsuda led a dramatic life, thrilling the public, frequently making news headlines, and earning the nickname "newsy woman" (*nyūsu na onna*). Her romance with another pop-idol, Hiromi Go, was publicly announced at the end of 1983, but failed after two years in January 1985. Less than five months later she married an actor named Masaki Kanda, and became a mother in October 1986.[7] Returning to work not long after giving birth to her daughter, she was criticized for not fulfilling her role as a mother. Inspired by the American fashion industry that she observed during her first trip to New York, Matsuda opened her own boutique in Jiyūgaoka, Tōkyō in February 1988, which retailed clothes that she

designed. Becoming independent from Sun Music in the same year, Matsuda started to make frequent visits to New York to acquire some of the techniques of American pop-music production. She soon organized her own stage-performance team that hired American dancers, and came back to Japan with her agent. In the summer of 1988, they produced an innovative concert in Tōkyō's Budōkan, the concert hall where the most publicly recognized performers are invited to perform.[8]

In May, 1990, Matsuda announced a debut in the U.S. and released an English single whose song, *The Right Combination*, was a duet with Donnie Wahlberg, a former member of the American teen-idol group *New Kids on the Block.* Between 1989 and 1995, her intimate relationships with various male actors and dancers -- both Americans and Japanese -- were frequently reported by the media. Her divorce from Kanda was publicized in January 11, 1997. Matsuda remarried in May 26, 1998.

### *The Projection of Matsuda in Printed Materials*

The construction of Matsuda's popular image, as for other pop-divas, was through newspapers, magazines, and essays. These materials can be classified according to the kinds of knowledge (or imagination) they generate. Tabloids are full of cynical remarks that criticize and ridicule Matsuda on the bases of what she did and said. Idol-magazines and newsletters for fans try to promote Matsuda's image in a way that would satisfy her supporters. Autobiographical essays reveal Matsuda's reactions against the external characterizations in an attempt to modify her public image. There are also academic references that analyze Matsuda's personality and activities from psychological and sociological standpoints. In what follows I will elaborate upon the constructions that occur in each of these categories. Translations of all quotations and excerpts from Japanese sources are my own.

### *Tabloids*

Tabloids articulate whatever events might be of interest to the public and present them in their most immediately available details. Unusual events, calamities, and personal incidents are some of the major themes of materials in this genre of publications, and many of these stories are exaggerated or intentionally fabricated by promotion agencies or news outlets with only the slightest grain of truth behind them. Stories on celebrities are often aimed at scandalizing the subjects on the grounds of what they did or said.

Tabloid articles commonly appear in the so-called *jōhōshi* or literally "information magazines," such as *Shūkan Post*, *Shūkan Gendai*, *Shūkan Hōseki*, *Shūkan Asahi*, *Shūkan Yomiuri*, *Sunday Mainichi*, *Shūkan Taishū*, *Asahi Geinō*, *FOCUS*, *FLASH*, and *FRIDAY*. Some of these magazines focus more on political-economic information, while others emphasize manners, customs, leisure, and entertainment. Some magazines which include tabloid articles, such as *Josei Jishin*, *Shūkan Josei*, *Josei Seven*, *Bishō* and *Shūkan Myōjō* (ceased 1991), are particularly targeted to women. These are heavily loaded with information on entertainment, romance, food and fashion. Other magazines, such as *Playboy*, *Scholar*, *Takarajima*, are rich in information about female entertainers, sports, as well as love and sex -- issues that are presumed to be particularly attractive to a male readership. There are also a variety of tabloid newspapers, including *Hōchi Shinbun*, *Sankei Shinbun*, *Nikkan Sports*, and *Tōkyō Chūnichi Sports*.

One can also tune into the so-called "wide shows" on private-television channels that are tabloid in nature. Many of these programs are shown in the morning for businessmen or during the mid-day for housewives. As much as people criticize the intrusive quality of tabloids, or the tendency of these tabloids to "mess around with people's private lives in the name of freedom of speech" as one informant puts it, they enjoy them and buy in their stories. Many people I talked

to characterized Japan as a "gossip society" (*uwasa-shakai*) and considered tabloids to be one of the products as well as one of the "facilitators" (so to speak) of such a social environment.

Matsuda is undoubtedly one of the most frequently discussed subjects in tabloid news, as my survey at Ōoya Sōichi Bunko in Tōkyō, an archive that specializes in popular journals, revealed many more articles featuring her (and trying to create scandals) than any other celebrated pop-idol. Of course, I will not be able to discuss below details of Matsuda-related articles. Thus, I will select some examples and concentrate on the general style in which events were reported. I will also provide some accounts of the influence of these articles upon their readers.

One of the earliest articles that scandalized Matsuda appeared in November 1980, when Matsuda won a New Singer's Award (*shinjinshō*) at the FNS Music Festival, an annually held contest that tributes outstanding singers and musicians of the year (a Japanese equivalent of the Grammy Awards Festival). According to some headlines, Matsuda was touched when her name was called as the best new singer of the year and she started crying aloud, but she had no tears in her eyes! Labeling this phenomenon a "fake cry" (*usonaki*), these reports contributed to the media projection of Matsuda as *burikko* or a "fake child" who appeared to overact her cuteness and plea for sympathy. From this point, the term *burikko* became an idiom in the press, along with references to the frilly costumes she wore on stage, which became known as *buri-buri ishō* or "fake-child costume." I remember as a student back in the early 1980s that this term became very popular – in fact so popular that everyone used it at home and in school to derogate any young girl who was thought to be child-like.

Another series of headlines appeared in September 1983, arousing suspicions that Matsuda's upper eyelids had become double-edged all of a sudden. The implied suggestion was that Matsuda had undergone plastic surgery. According to one of my informants who wrote articles

in tabloids, there has been a tendency in Japan to condemn those who have plastic surgery due to the traditional idea that one should cherish the body given by one's parents (*oya ni moratta karada wa taisetsu ni shiro*). This, he said, was an immediate cause of scandal. There is more to this, however: the eye operation changes the appearance of the eye from the type identified as Asian (typically long, thin and so-called almond-shaped), to the type identified as Caucasians (a more roundish-appearing eye that is considered by hegemonic constructs to be more attractive and superior). Eyelid operations are among the most popular cosmetic treatments among entertainers, based on the common belief that the double-edged eyelid aesthetically enlarges the size of one's pupil and adds a brightness to it.[9] In any case, tabloids presented this as another instance of Matsuda being fake: that is, making herself attractive through artificial means. In other words, these articles seem to suggest that Matsuda's eyelid operation was part of her *burikko* strategy. One interviewee, a former fashion model, recalled to me a rumor that this event had triggered a plastic surgery boom (*seikei boom*). According to her account, many young women rushed to clinics to obtain the operation in hopes of becoming prettier, thinking that if Matsuda could do it, they could do it too.

While some articles refute the false nature of Matsuda's public-image creation, others try to expose the reality behind the robe of fakeness by focusing on Matsuda's private life. Her engagements in romance, marriage, motherhood, and sexual relations over time were all carefully followed up and covered under cynical headlines. For example, articles about her romance were introduced as:

> The crime and punishment of Hiromi Go who made "fake cry" Seiko really cry (*Shūkan Asahi* 2/8/1985)
>
> The catastrophic affair of Seiko and Hiromi, and four [of its] shocking reasons: Seiko's tearful press conference, four-year romance in treasured photos, the truth behind the sudden break up (*Shūkan Josei* 2/12/1985)

> Hiromi/Seiko break up: the complete story of their four-year romance (*Josei Jishin* 2/12/1985)

As for Matsuda's marital affair with Masaki Kanda, the tabloids wrote:

> The daughter of our family, Seiko Matsuda: "That cute girl who was crying on television visited Masaki's mansion" (comments by Teruko Asahi, Masaki Kanda's mother, in *Shūkan Bunshun* 6/20/1985)

> Masaki Kanda/Seiko Matsuda -- complete notes on their [luxurious] 200 million-yen wedding! Long carpet, curtain, hairstyle, make up, surprises, the map of the area in which their new home is located, the interior of their love nest, etc. -- complete coverage (*Josei Seven* 7/4/1985)

> Complete and detailed coverage! Seiko and Masaki's tearful wedding! (*Jesei Jishin* 7/9/1985)

> Masaki Kanda and Seiko Matsuda -- detailed coverage of their honeymoon in Hawaii: complete close-up coverage with 28 pages of color-graphic photos and articles (*Shūkan Myōjō* 7/11/1985)

> Seiko divorced: 12 years of masked marriage... comes to an end at last (*Hōchi Shinbun* 1/11/1997)

Apparent in all of these cases are the tabloids' intentions to turn Matsuda's private affairs into public spectacles as part of their mission to demystify a symbolic personality.

Other articles emphasize the idea of suffering, as in the following examples from Matsuda's delivery of a child. They wrote:

> Masaki's confession: Seiko's dramatic delivery of a female child!! Our publisher's exclusive coverage of a six-hour delivery that Masaki attended. Masaki described everything amidst the rumor that it was a Caesarian operation, saying, "It was a natural delivery. My wife's tears were beautiful..." (*Shūkan Josei* 10/21/1986)

> Seiko-san's experience of being a mother: she had a Caesarian operation due to a difficult delivery (*Bishō* 10/25/1986)

These examples are intended to the existing body of popular Japanese literature on suffering, especially maternal suffering, which is attributed to ostensible celebrations of the sacrificial in Japanese culture. In many novels, cinemas, and television dramas, heroes and heroines

surrender themselves up for the good of the others, delighting audiences with a sense of *anshin*, or peace in heart. It is wonderfully reassuring for these audiences to see that other people's problems, even in fantasy, are worse than their own. Maternal characters play a crucial role here as they enhance guilt sentiment and hidden aggression (Buruma 1984:24,25). In popular-cultural texts, mothers always appear as a kind of scapegoat who make every possible sacrifice for their sons and daughters with minimal or no return.[10] Nobody's fate can possibly be worse than theirs. Seen in this light, the media's exposition of Matsuda's delivery as difficult and her tears being beautiful is an appeal to the Japanese public ideal of motherhood.

Matsuda's willingness to follow her career path, rather than stay home and nurture her child, was reported as follows:

> TOP TONGUE [*sic*]: Seiko and Masaki are likely to separate either in February, May, or August!? The cause is Seiko's return to show business (*Scholar* 10/10/1987)
>
> A good business period for the shrewd Seiko Mama? This time she is running a boutique (*FLASH* 2/18/1988)
>
> From suits to panties, everything has a Seiko insignia: reaction from the local neighborhood to Seiko's sideline business that aims at a yearly turnover of [extraordinary] 1500 million-yen (*FRIDAY* 3/4/1988)
>
> These people's big business (2) Seiko Matsuda: the right way of reading the good business that reinforces divorce theory (*Shūkan Taishū* 3/14/1988)

These articles try to provoke collective resentment by jeopardizing Matsuda's qualification as mother. She is depicted as a villainous, self-centered woman who seeks a career at the sacrifice of her life and duty at home.

As for extramarital affairs, the tabloids wrote:

> Human stadium: it started a year ago -- Seiko and Matchy's immoral dating in New York (*Asahi Geinō* 2/23/1989)
>
> Rumored Seiko returns from New York after 65 days... and the industry is agitated! (*FLASH* 4/11/1989)

> What a surprise! Another man proposed to Seiko even though she hasn't let go of her previous affair!? (*Bishō* 5/13/1989)
>
> News spirits: a sensational extramarital affair between Seiko and a young American man that developed from an English conversation (*Shūkan Asahi* 11/9/1990)
>
> Newsjack [sic]: Seiko Matsuda did it again! An in-bed photo with a younger lover (*Asahi Geinō* 7/15/1993)
>
> A love scene from a witch-like woman: a treasured scoop of the moment in which she makes a man lose his heart: Seiko Matsuda's unbelievable extramarital affairs in everyday life (*FRIDAY* 8/27/1993)
>
> SUPERWIDE [sic]: The nation's big question: What will happen? What are they going to do? Masaki Kanda's patience reached its limits!? When will Seiko Matsuda's X-Day for divorce come? (*Shūkan Gendai* 9/4/1993)
>
> A wife with a free outlook on romance, Seiko Matsuda's lip expectation -- this quasi-kiss is suspicious! Can't stop keeping eyes on the future between her and Kevin who played her lover in the rumored commercial! (*Bishō* 9/10/1994)

Here, too, Matsuda is represented as an immoral person who could not care less about her husband and her child.

Tabloids also wrote about Matsuda's scandalous performances to project her as a sexual politician, as the following examples show:

> THAT'S POE STREET [sic]: Who comes after Jeff? Seiko's pheromone that attracts co-actors (*Shūkan Asahi* 3/18/1994)
>
> The rumored commercial is made public for the first time: Seiko got undressed at last! (*Josei Seven* 7/14/1994)
>
> Exclusive: magazines for men are very interested as well -- Seiko's 20 million-yen nude photo-album sensation!! (*Shūkan Josei* 4/18/1995)

Finally, some tabloids attribute to Matsuda a big ego, as follows:

> The monster with unlimited desire: an intensive study of the more-and-more woman *a la* Seiko Matsuda (*GORO* 5/11/1989)

> Remarkably selfish Seiko Matsuda! (*Bishō* 5/13/1989)
>
> Independence came prior to divorce: the loud laugh of the monster, Seiko Matsuda, who bit a chain in two and ran away (*FOCUS* 7/14/1989)
>
> Dream and hope for Seiko Matsuda, an isolated former pop-idol and a selfish mother idol in Japanese show business (*Shūkan Taishu* 9/4/1989)

These narratives together construct Matsuda's public image: a selfish personality who does anything to get what she wants, which is unconventional, controversial, or intolerable from the perspective of decent Japanese. As such, these catch phrases demonstrate how tabloid reporters observe Matsuda, react sensitively to her expressive behaviors, and present them critically. Partly descriptive and partly judgmental, informative here and exaggerated there, tabloids intend to demystify the symbolic qualities of pop-idols, make them accessible to the masses, and subordinate them to the power of the collective gaze.

Rumors, more recently known among young people as *kuchikomi* (an abbreviated form of *kuchi communication*, or literally "mouth communications," meaning "word of mouth"), play an important role in implementing the group control of the individual courses of action. Gossiping is a commonly practiced form of social control that reinforces such culturally emphasized ideas as *sekentei* (public appearances), *menboku* (face, honor, or reputation), and *tatemae* (a form of self-expression that conforms to public norms, standards and principles), let alone *haji* (shame) that has been elaborated by Benedict (1946). Gossip evokes in the minds of the Japanese a moral concern that they are being watched by others.[11] Tabloids operate as incessant watchdogs; they put celebrities on trial and thereby challenge their exercise of symbolic power.

While the manner of reporting in tabloids is itself ethically questionable at times (by intruding upon the performer's privacy, neglecting the confidentiality of some information), tabloids call upon their readers to evaluate who did what in the light of customary rules, ethical codes, and moral values. Tabloids reproduce what is considered appropriate in their society.

Thus, for example, Matsuda is accused of neglecting her husband and her child when she tries to continue with her pursuit of an entertainment career. The implication is that she is going against the traditional role of "good wife, wise mother." Likewise, she becomes prey to scandals when she appears to be overly child-like and therefore provokes in the minds of the viewers the sense that she is acting inappropriately for her age. She also makes many headlines when her extramarital affairs, considered by many as morally intolerable, are disclosed. In these ways, tabloids function as watchdogs that hammer down the subject who they see as standing out (or a "nail that sticks out" to use their phrase).

For Matsuda, as much as for any other well-known Japanese pop-idol, tabloids are elements of social pressure that interfere with her intention to keep the public-image clean. Being clean is crucial for maintaining one's popularity as a star -- especially in the Japanese entertainment industry where pop stars who soil their image by making bad impressions on people are likely to lose their jobs. There was a time when Matsuda was badly disturbed by the way tabloids represented her to the public. In one of her essays, she reveals her thoughts about being scandalized by tabloids. She writes:

> There are moments in your routine life [as a pop-singer] when scandals fall upon you like a bomb. As your songs become hits, and you become famous, people are happy to make scandals about your life -- as if they correspond to one's history. Some people say that scandals are medals of honor for entertainers, but I will never agree. Others say that they are taxes for fame, but I cannot bear the fact that they play with your mind and insult you with their deceptive language. It's too pitiful that being smeared with scandals is a compensation for being a star (Matsuda as quoted in Kanda 1986:134).

This shows that while Matsuda accepts scandals to be part of the celebrity's life, she cannot tolerate the way they scrutinize the public image.

In early 1988, Matsuda scolded some reporters who asked her rude questions in their attempts to scrutinize her family relations. This act simply aggravated the situation. The

February 4, 1988 issue of *Shūkan Myōjō* and several other publications pointed out the absurdity of a public role model revealing her anger, appealing to the norm that one should not publicly expose her or his anger in Japan.[12]

Matsuda, however, has been aware of the outcome of her reaction against tabloids, and it has been her policy to neglect them in most cases, as she reveals elsewhere in her essay:

> My life as Seiko Matsuda... can be said to have been full of struggle with part of the mass media [called tabloids]. I changed my way of thinking at a certain point, however. Although I was protesting in the beginning because I could not hold my anger, I started to ignore them from then on. This is partly because I could not afford to protest each time [a story about me was published], but more importantly because I thought protesting would only make me fall into the snare that they spread. I managed to become more cautious... I told myself that I would not act under the influence of their imagination. I started to play innocent so that I could keep myself aloof from the imagination and artifice of those who make big fusses about scandals (1986:141,142).

This indicates how Matsuda shifted from the prey to the predator of Japanese mass media by developing a technique to take advantage of her celebrity status.

The interaction between a pop-diva who tries to construct her public image and the tabloids that try to deconstruct it invites consumers to participate by developing their own interaction in which they contest and negotiate these interpretations. For example, on May 26, 1998 when Matsuda's marriage with a dentist received extensive news coverage, I received a telephone call from my former high-school classmate (indicated as "T" below) in Japan. The way in which our line-by-line conversation proceeded demonstrates how we evaluated Matsuda's personality in our dialogue -- as the following excerpt show:

T: Hey, did you know that Seiko Matsuda got remarried?

Researcher (R): Is it publicized now?

T: It sure is! It's making headlines all over the morning news!

R: Really!? Well, she did it again, didn't she? I knew that it was just a matter of time!

T: I heard that her new husband is a rich doctor. Quite a gentleman, I heard.

R: What a smart woman. She really knows how to choose the right man for herself, doesn't she?

T: She's amazing, but I feel bad about her daughter.

R: How do you know? Maybe her daughter will be happy to have a father and a stepfather.

T: I doubt it. If I was the daughter, I would think that my mom is really selfish!

R: Maybe so, we'll see. In any case, she's really a newsmaker, isn't she?

T: She really is. She never stops surprising us with the way she leads her life.

R: Really. I wonder what's next?

T: Another divorce after a few years, perhaps? [laughter]

R: [laughter] Really! Before that, though, she'll probably have another child.

T: Yeah, and she will make sure that she gets enough of what she wants from this guy.

R: Probably.

Here, we articulated Matsuda as an amazing woman, although we disagreed on how to interpret the way she is leading her life. While I admired Matsuda's active and innovative qualities, T emphasized selfishness that he thought could have harmed her former husband and her daughter. Through this conversation, we played into social conformity ourselves, thus reflecting the social idea, for example, that women are with men to get certain things by commenting on how Matsuda gets what she wants from this guy.

From the standpoint of Masaru Nashimoto, known for years for his professional experience as a tabloid reporter, all this is part of the media-impact that Matsuda managed to calculate and control. Nashimoto states:

> [Seiko Matsuda] got married as a pop-idol and marketed herself as a mom-idol; and as a single-mother, she encouraged many female fans who were hesitant about remarrying. I can see how she consciously tries to observe the [social] surrounding and continuously attempts to walk a half step ahead [of people]. As for the surprising [and unexpected] announcement of her marriage this time, too,

> I think that she calculated the strength of the impact [upon the public]... She knew how she wanted to be represented by the media. I felt that those tears she showed at the press conference came from her confidence that she had overcome many scandals and harsh conditions set by the mass media -- as much as they came from the joy of remarriage (*Asahi Shinbun* [evening edition] 5/26/1998).

This confirms Matsuda as an impenetrable public figure who manages to control the mass media (and the public) before being controlled by it. Tabloids have become facilitators of Matsuda's stylized promotion.

***Promoting Articles***

Pop-idol magazines such as *Bomb!*, *Heibon* (publication ceased 1987), *Momoco* (publication ceased 1994), *Myojo*, *Potato*, and *Up To Boy* provide elaborate data on pop-idols' personal backgrounds, ideas and activities. In the feature article, *Seiko Matsuda: The Twenty-Year-Old Memoir*, in the March, 1983 issue of *Bomb!*, for example, there are eight cover pages of Matsuda in color photos (some of which have promotional quotes on the side). This is followed by a 31-page article that includes her personal history: when and where she was born, which schools she attended as a child, what she wanted to be as a young girl, behind-the-scene stories of her debut, first concert, performances on television and so on. Subsequent pages include supportive comments (from her colleagues, producers and managers), stories of her dedication as a performer, personal messages, list of released singles and albums, astrology, and palm-reading. This article ends with a handwritten letter from Matsuda to her fans, calling for their continuous support and encouragement (figure 19).

Fashion magazines, such as *non no*, *Men's non no*, *Popeye*, *an an*, *JUNON*, *mc Sister*, *Hanako*, *Seventeen*, *Olive*, *Duet*, and *Potato*, also included many cover pages and special interviews that promoted Matsuda and other pop stars by representing their model roles in fashions, lifestyles and romances. Other popular journals with more general topics on popular

**Figure 19. The first cover-page from the March, 1983 issue of *Bomb!*, featuring Seiko Matsuda: the title on the right says, "Seiko Matsuda: Adult Romance"; while the side quote toward the left reads, "Our goddess Seiko will become 21 years old on March 10th. Her smile these days is even a bit sexy. [We] would like to open the doorway into her mind, although [we] may feel somewhat scared to do so."**

culture, such as *SPA!*, *Views*, and *Monthly Kadokawa*, also offered feature articles on Matsuda in a style of presentation similar to that of the *Bomb!* article mentioned above, but with a somewhat more analytical overview of her life, activities and ideas.

An eight-page article in the April 6, 1994 issue of *SPA!* called *The Way of Life Called Seiko Matsuda* (*Matsuda Seiko to iu ikikata*) is a case in point. Commemorating the 15th year of Matsuda's career, this article gives Matsuda the title, "super-lady who made all the dreams of Japanese women come true." Its center-page spread features a computer-graphic image of Japan in the ocean on which Matsuda stands gigantically as a Statue of Liberty -- with a torchlight in her hand, smile on her face, and feet placed on Tōkyō.

The first column of this article, written by Akio Nakamori, characterizes Matsuda as an innovative pop-idol that represents Japan. This opening is followed by another center-page spread in which the editors make connections between Matsuda's activities and a series of fads involving young Japanese women over the span of a decade. For example, Matsuda's child-like performance that appeared not long after her debut influenced many other young female performers to act in a child-like manner. The rumor that Matsuda had an eye-lid operation had an influence on the increasing number of young women getting cosmetic eye-surgeries. Matsuda's wedding influenced women to put more emphasis on having a luxurious wedding. When Matsuda became pregnant and had a child, many young women followed her. Matsuda's success in the boutique-business facilitated career-consciousness among women. Her sex scandal encouraged a sense of openness about extramarital affairs. This listing, which the editors claim to have produced on the basis of thorough research, tries to explicate Matsuda's cultural influence by showing how Matsuda influenced changes in the collective behavior of Japanese women. Certainly, practices such as cosmetic surgery and extramarital affairs predate

Matsuda, and these practices were not rare. Yet, the editors are trying to show that resurgent cycles of already existing trends among Japanese women are additionally affected by Matsuda.

Underneath this list is another column that signifies Matsuda as a pioneer of Japanese womanhood. Part of this reads:

> How can the life of one woman over the past ten years or so stir up the curiosity of so many women? She [i.e., Matsuda] is certainly a scandalous entertainer who can double the sales of women's magazines... A rapidly increasing number of women are sympathizing with the way of life called Seiko Matsuda and are feeling much easier [than ever before] about devoting themselves to live according to their desires. Time is about to catch up with Seiko. What sort of guide can Seiko, who has been an evangelistic figure for Japanese women in terms of the lifestyle for ten years or so since her debut, provide from now on for all those women who are becoming the agitators of their own desire...? The value of Seiko Matsuda will depend upon the next ten years [of her activities] (pp.38,39).

This signifies Matsuda as a leading figure of the time -- what many Japanese calls "person of the time" (*jidai no hito*) or "person who constructs the times" (*jidai o kizuku hito*). This is followed by a 2-page list of interview commentaries from different audience groups that further signifies Matsuda's leading sociocultural role:

> Transvestites: "Seiko-*chan* is an eternal symbol of cuteness."
>
> Young mothers: "I am working hard by making Seiko-*chan* my spiritual support."
>
> Students of Tōkyō University: "We want to follow the example of Seiko's aggressiveness."
>
> High-school gals: "Seiko-*san* is the model for our lifestyle."

Finally, supportive comments by Matsuda's fans are followed by a concluding remark by the editor summarizing how Matsuda represented the youth of 1980s. According to this remark, Matsuda's wavy hair-style and her frill-dress fashion were imitated by many other pop-idols and young women of the same age-group, while her fresh, active personality inspired them.

Although there is a certain degree of variation in their content, all supportive materials on Matsuda applaud her unique personal qualities and achievement with an elaborate discussion on why and how that was possible. In this way, they counteract tabloids that try to estrange her from any meaningful existence in the public entertainment of contemporary Japan.

### *Analytical Essays*

Aside from popular magazine articles, there are essays that also glorify Matsuda through elaborate analyses of her lifestyle and philosophy. Perhaps, the two classic examples from this category are *Blue Tapestry* (*Aoiro No Tapesutorii*) by a female cultural critic Mariko Hayashi (1982), and *A Treatise on Seiko Matsuda* (*Matsuda Seiko Ron*) by a feminist sociologist Chikako Ogura (1989). Other examples include *Is Seiko Matsuda an Evil Woman or Is She a New Woman Who Lives the Times?* (*Matsuda Seiko Wa Akujo Nano Ka Jidai O Ikiru Atarashii Onna Nano Ka*), *Seiko Matsuda: Women's Revolution* (*Matsuda Seiko Onna Kakumei*), and *All Women Like Seiko Mastuda* (*Onna Wa Minna Matsuda Seiko Ga Suki*) are examples of this particular genre. In a large book store that I often visited in the Shinjuku district of Tōkyō, I found a section dedicated to essays by cultural critics, freelance writers, editors, sociologists, and psychologists, most of which appeared between 1994 and 1996. Every time I visited, I saw some young female workers and female high-school students examining them. I occasionally observed couples and groups, talking to each other about Matsuda's extraordinary characteristics as they examined some of these items.

The book by Hayashi is unique in the sense that it was written as a dialogue and analysis based on interviews that the writer conducted with Matsuda. Several people recommended this book as a necessary part of my pop-idol research. It elaborates on Matsuda's backgrounds and experiences, as well as her ideals and values at the time she had turned 20 years old. Becoming

20 has a special meaning in Japan: it is the year in which a subject who has reached this age is recognized socially as *seijin* or "adult." In this book Hayashi identifies two mutually-opposing characteristics in Matsuda: an average young girl who dreams about being together with a reliable male-partner, marrying him and following him, and having a happy family-life to which she can retire from the current work in show business; and an ambitious individualist who wishes to be independent, active and self-reliant, and who wants control over her own life. If Matsuda is a role model for Japanese women, this characterization represents the ambivalence of Japanese female existence.

In her book in which was introduced to me by some of my female informants as "one of the most sensational books on Matsuda," Ogura takes this point further and suggests that both of these characteristics are equally realistic for Matsuda. She argues:

> Many women criticized Matsuda's *burikko*-quality..., the *Seiko white* [or her cute and pure appearance]..., and rejected it as nothing more than flattery toward the young men's dream [of an ideal woman]. These women were implying that the real Seiko is the *Seiko black* [which is her ambitious and egocentric side]... However, both white and black are the real Seiko. As Matsuda says [in her interview with Hayashi], being a professional is not putting on a mask [of a fake-child], but becoming one itself [when necessary] (Ogura 1989:21, italics mine).

Thus, Ogura stresses that ambivalent selfhood is a constructive part of Matsuda's expertise. In a thorough examination of Matsuda's activities, comments, and songs, Ogura concludes that Matsuda's way of life can enlighten many women of her generation to take their decisions about romance, womanhood and femininity into their own hands. Staying outside of the established system, or the ideological role of "good wife, wise mother," enables women to be free to chose between conformity and resistance (1989:228,230).

However differently they are packaged, other essays demonstrate these common themes which ultimately converge to the point made by Ogura: Matsuda's struggles and challenges in life; and her personal strength that enabled her to overcome these struggles and challenges.

These characteristics and approaches to life earned Mastuda an unshakable position in Japanese society as a female role model. Somewhat like fables, these essays bring to the readers' attention certain events that marked the stages of Matsuda's personal development, and indicate how Matsuda managed to resolve each of these problems. In doing so, they provide the readers with a series of guidelines to cope with life problems.

Kawanobe (1994), for example, demonstrates how Matsuda's tenacity to accomplish what she intended to do enabled her to become an entertainer. A strong sense of accomplishment led Matsuda to come all the way up to Tōkyō from one of Japan's southern-most local towns, Fukuoka, to perform in spite of repeated failure in audition contests. This spirit of accomplishment allowed Matsuda to engage in a romance with Hiromi Go, someone she adored and openly expressed her intention to be with to people around her since she was ten years old (1994:22). However, this same spirit of accomplishment also led Matsuda to sacrifice her marriage and family for the sake of her career.

Hashimoto (1994) illustrates Matsuda's leading role in romance and marriage from the perspective of women, making meaningful associations between Matsuda's life-stages and love songs she released in these stages. She credits Matsuda for expressing through her songs and behavior what many women could not express. Thus, Matsuda's *burikko* performance relates to the song she released at the time, *Cherry Blossom*, in which she sang, "I am becoming awakened to everything... It's tomorrow that our promise will be fulfilled. The flower of love that I embrace in my heart; you will catch it for me, won't you?" When her romance with Hiromi Go was proceeding, she released a song called *Love Song* in which she sang, "When I can't see you, and feel sad about it, I can only mutter to encourage myself: I love you very much..., I will keep waiting for you." When Matsuda ended her romance with Go and married Kanda, she sang a song titled *Time Travel*, part of which said, "I probably still love you... The

love I am supposed to have forgotten, but my heart began to hurt once more... If we hadn't separated, we would have been travelling under the same wing... I can't reverse the time, can I? I can't go back into your arms." In *Precious Heart*, Matsuda implied her intention of pursuing a career by singing the line, "Please listen to my dream, my big dream. It's something I couldn't tell anyone, but I will now confess it honestly... What is burning deep inside my heart is the desire to deliver my melody across the world. I am always chasing my dream... dream... dream..." At the same time, she expressed the significance of life together with her husband Kanda in another line, "I need your love. Nobody can do anything alone. Supported by your love... love... love, I want to grasp a shiny moment in my hands." When Matsuda developed an extramarital affair in New York with a young American man, she projected her feelings in the song *Kiss Me Please*, part of which reads "I want to be hugged by you from the back. I want to feel your sigh. In a white bed, two heartbeats merge into one... Kiss me please. From your lips, please send me a gentle message." For Hashimoto, who emphasizes love as the most important value in life for every woman, all of these lines in Matsuda's songs are appealing examples that represent how much a woman can do by being frank to her desires and emotions -- something many Japanese women are still too shy to do. With the attitude of not rejecting one's womanhood that lies deep inside the self, Matsuda and her songs became the bible for all the women who are seeking romantic relationships with men (1994:26).

In a prologue to his essay on Matsuda, Inoue states that his intention was to examine Matsuda's lifestyle as a way of overcoming one's handicaps, complexes, and a sense of failure. Matsuda, he says, was neither a beauty nor a genius by nature: her legs were bow-shaped, and she suffered from considering herself overweight. She also had a local accent, which is considered in Japan as backward vis-a-vis the standard language spoken in Tōkyō. She also had nervous breakdowns due to the series of scandals. However, it was her positive thinking and

incessant effort that opened up a sturdy and cute way of life in which many people and particularly young women could find much to gain (1996:11-13).

These are but a few examples showing how writers identify aspects of Matsuda's *raison d'être*, or define her social values, in the way that they can inspire the readers and stimulate their sense of self-improvement. Most of these materials are targeted for young women who are likely to find much to share with (or contest against) Matsuda in terms of their ideas, outlooks, and attitudes.

### *Autobiographic Essays*

Aside from books and articles written by journalists and cultural critics, there are many essays that are purportedly written by pop-idols themselves as first person's accounts (see appendix I). Speculating that many of these essays might have been written by ghost writers, I asked several producers about their authenticity. Their answers revealed that some essays were written by ghost writers, while others were written by idols themselves under the direction of their promotion agency. Although I could not determine the authenticity of Matsuda's essays, I will, in this section, read them as texts that reflect her points of view as a public persona.

The first series of essays written by Matsuda was *Ryōte De Seiko* (*Seiko in Both Arms*), published soon after her debut in 1980. One essay was published each year during the subsequent few years of Matsuda's career, commoditizing each stage of her personal development. *Ryōte De Seiko* sketches Matsuda as a prospective novice who held many dreams about becoming a popular, adorable personality. The second essay, *Mōichido Anata* (*You Once Again*, 1981), commemorates the first two crucial years of Matsuda's career as a novice. *Seiko 20-Sai: Ai To Uta No Seishunfu* (*Seiko 20 Year-Old: A Youthful Chronicle on Love and Music*,

1982) signifies the importance reaching adulthood. These essays were recommended to me by my informants, who were influenced by Matsuda in one way or another. Another book, *Seiko* (1986), considered written by Matsuda under her married name, Noriko Kanda, is considered a reflexive autobiography commemorating her marriage with Masaki Kanda. These essays are more valuable to the readers who want to know more about Matsuda than other sources such as tabloids and feature articles in magazines. This is because they detail in a single package what is purportedly an extraordinary individual's own account of her ideas, experiences, and practices, her life and her world, her thoughts about herself, her reactions to the ways she was treated by people around her, and messages she wishes to deliver to the readers.

In each of these essays, a wide range of issues concerning life, including work, romance, marriage, womanhood and manhood, sex, stories about memorable events in the past, current activities, and future prospects are discussed. More important culturally are recurrent themes related to socialization and self-development. Training in social membership and the cultivation of the individual have been serious enterprises in Japan for centuries, and they are regarded as imperative to the creation of an orderly society, individual quality, and personal fulfillment (Rohlen 1986:327). Many parts of Matsuda's essays contribute to these cultural enterprises by interweaving her own experiences to issues that are related to socialization and self-development. For example, interpersonal relationships are commented as follows:

> Seiko is very happy now. It's because there is someone like you who are supporting me. I feel really glad that I became a singer. I am beginning to feel that even someone like me can look out for myself. (1980:16)

> The fact that I am here today owes much to your support. Thank you!! -- I am sorry for such a hackneyed statement, but this is my true feeling. The staff members of Sun Music, those of CBS/Sony, those of various TV and radio stations..., and all the fans who have always been supportive of me since my debut, thank you very much. There were many joyful events on my way here, but there were sad and bitter events as well. In all of these moments I said to myself, 'Seiko Matsuda is not alone. Seiko is here because she is together with her staff

> and her fans', and worked hard with my teeth clenched. I am [insignificantly] small, but I do not want to forget to keep up [in life] with my earnest stance. (1981:24)
>
> [As I was touring around for my concert] I became increasingly exhausted. When I faced my fans who cheered me, such exhaustion easily vanished. 'There are so many people who are supportive of me all across Japan!!' This fact very much touched my heart. It encouraged me to work much much harder from now on as well!! (1981:59)
>
> It has been three years since I made my debut. All this time I have been running with all my might. I did my best to live up to your enthusiastic support. From now on, too, I wish to walk along with you all the way. (1982:21)
>
> One after another, the new world comes surging at me. A new passage opens before my eyes. There is no turning back for me. I can only march forward, and forward. Because everyone takes me by the hand, because everyone takes me by hand, I can march onward. (1982:127)

These comments reflect the high value given to interpersonal relationships in Japanese society which, rooted in the socio-psychology of dependence (*amae*), encourages close emotional ties between actors. There are prominent Japanese concepts that emphasize the importance of social ties in which one is situated, such as *giri* and *on*: *giri* signifies the sense of social obligation; and *on* or "beneficience" signifies the tendency to feel appreciation for what others have done on one's behalf (Doi 1973; Suzuki 1976; Hamaguchi 1980; Befu 1986). Interpersonal relationships are stressed in reference to these concepts and in the indication of the importance of togetherness as well as mutual support. In her essays, Matsuda repeatedly expresses how much feel obliged and thankful to those who support her, including fans and staff members. She is projected as a benevolent subject that appeals to the readers' sense of empathy.

If dependence offers an emotional ground for establishing social solidarity, the sense of responsibility enables Japanese actors to coordinate their ideas and behaviors toward the maintenance of that solidarity. Matsuda's essays certainly reflect this, as the following excerpts show:

> During the rehearsal [of my concert], dozens of cameramen were taking photos of me singing. People in the band, lighting staff, equipment staff, and sound-mixing people -- when I thought that everyone was working hard on my behalf, I could feel that I was about to do something very important, and I felt extremely responsible. (1980:27)
>
> [When I acted in drama for the first time] I was caught up, and I made many mistakes. I had a particularly difficult time with my accent, which I could not get right. Tears streamed from my eyes, really, because I felt bad for my co-actors who had to wait for me for a long time. The fact that such a beginner like myself took away the precious work-time of famous actors made the sense of responsibility come home to my heart. I felt so bad that I couldn't stand it. (1981:27)

In Japanese families, schools and places of work, the moral value of becoming a responsible adult who can adequately perform one's social role is given emphasis (Lanham 1979; Cummings 1980; Rohlen 1986). Matsuda's essays contextualize this value by demonstrating Matsuda's sense of responsibility to do the best as a performer toward her assistants, supporters and coworkers.

Elsewhere, essays touch on the issue of self-cultivation as stories of Matsuda's experiences about struggles, challenges, and the overcoming of suffering at important moments of her life. As the following excerpts show:

> My father's dream was to have me attend a university... and then make me a cute bride. In that sense, I let my parents down, and I am an undutiful daughter. Nevertheless, I just didn't want to have regret [in my life], so... I pled [with my father to give me his support]. Then my father slapped me even before he ended saying, 'If you want to be a singer so much, get out of this house at once!' I patiently kept my dream... People from the record company and the production came to see my father and had a talk with him, many many times. As a result, my father eventually changed his opinion toward giving me permission. Yet, he did not tell me, 'You can be a singer', until the very end. (1980:138,140)
>
> Before making a record-debut, it was decided [by my agency] that I should perform in a television commercial, so I took an audition for an ice cream commercial first. I failed this one completely, however. Without being disheartened by this, I took the audition for Shiseido's commercial called 'cheek dimples' [advertising a cosmetic product] this time. There was this thing called test-filming, and I changed my hair styles and washed my face [before the camera] many times... I remained as a finalist, but there was a sudden reversal at

> the very end... I don't have any dimple on my cheek!! It was decided that there was no point in using a model without any dimple to advertise a product called 'cheek dimples'. I worked hard to perform in the audition, and I was rewarded for this in the end, and they allowed me to sing the image-song instead of acting as the model. (1981:30)
>
> The concert held in Kyushu in the late summer of 1983 was one ordeal for me. As such, summer concerts made you exhausted because you had to run around the whole country in the middle of the heat. Besides, there were two stage performances, daytime and evening, each time. Work for a TV station in Tōkyō was added onto this, and I was quite anxious by the time I reached Kyushu... On the evening stage, I lost the sense of what I was doing. My legs were not firmly placed on the ground. My throat was dried up. My voice faded out. Before long, gastric juice came up to my throat. I tried to endure it as hard as I could. I encouraged myself to keep singing with a smile on my face. If people who took the trouble of coming to see found out that I wasn't feeling well, they probably wouldn't be able to enjoy... And if I collapsed, the place would be in chaos, and people would be in shock. 'I feel sick a little, but I think I can keep up till the end', I said to the staff when I came down from the stage for a change of costumes. The staff knew that I didn't eat at all before the concert, and they seemed much more anxious than me because they saw me dripping the greasy sweat from my paled face. I changed my costumes, pushed back the gastric juice that came up, and made strenuous efforts to sing. (1986:66,67)
>
> I was shocked when I first found [an article] in a [tabloid] magazine indicating that high school and university students of my generation say 'your legs are Seiko-ed' [(*ashi ga Seiko-tteru*) after my bow-legs] when they see a bowlegged person. Then, when I looked at my legs they were indeed bowlegged... Although I have given up in the sense that they were given to me [and thus there was nothing I could really do about them essentially], I have been... reminding myself 'not to be Seiko-ed' wherever people were watching. (1986:104,105)

These comments illustrate Matsuda as a willing and patient individual who manages to conquer difficulties, such as the father's counter force and her physical shortcomings (not having dimples, being exhausted, and being bow-legged), to accomplish her goals. This reminds the reader of a popular Japanese phrase, *shoshi-kantestu* or "carrying out one's original intention," that signifies the importance of fulfillment through intention and discipline. Readers are led to believe that once Matsuda intends to do something, she does not let go of it until she accomplishes it, even if it involves much suffering.

Lebra (1976:75) contends that individuals in Japan subject themselves to a long-range effort to elevate their status through education and occupation, which are subject to the development of self. A Japanese individual expects to work hard in her or his youth with an optimistic belief in the efficacy of strenuous personal effort in attaining a goal. Strenuous effort (*doryoku*) and suffering (*kurō*) are expected of a young person who has ambition. While the above comments represent Matsuda's experiences of suffering, other passages demonstrate her expectations on effort. Matsuda states:

> At the time of my debut, I couldn't express my opinion in interviews at all, thinking 'I cannot say this' and 'I cannot say that either'. It's not that people in my agency told me not to say anything unusual. Although it was the case that I could go ahead and express my ideas, I was bad at doing so. That is why I was misunderstood by many people and hated by women [who called me *burikko*]!! Starting this year, however, I am expressing my feelings and thought in terms of my own opinions. (1981:146)

> Let me tell you about my image of adult and child. The image of an adult -- to be able to take responsibility for everything that one does, without troubling anyone. The image of a child is to work hard and furiously. As for me, both of these conditions apply. It's true that I am working hard and furiously, and it is also true that I wish to act with the sense of responsibility... To be more precise, I am still a child, but I am making effort to become an adult. (1981:158)

> It's less than a half year before I will turn 20. I will not become sentimental about my teenage that is passing away. I don't like to look back to the past and whimper about it. As I mentioned before, only now and the future are important for me... It is [generally] thought that sentimentalism is a typical characteristic of young women, isn't it. When you think about it, however, such logic is a big fallacy. By young-womanhood I mean... much healthier young-womanhood... Thus, I am grateful to be able to turn 20, and I am in high spirits, ready to make more efforts. (1981:160,161)

> Many times, I was asked, 'If you had a choice between a love-affair and a career, which would you choose?' I answered, 'Both of them are equally important'. I am sure that I can love someone no matter how busy I am with my work... Even when I loved one of my coworkers, I hardly got confused [between work and private business]... In my high-school years, whenever I fell in love with a boy, and if this boy and I had a similar grade..., I studied hard so as to demonstrate that I wouldn't fall behind him... It was the same when I entered this world [of show business]. I worked hard when I had to. When someone I liked was

> working near me, I worked harder not to be defeated [by him]. I felt at the time that my lover ought to be my strongest rival at the same time. (1986:22,23)

These comments together project Matsuda as a child making efforts to become a responsible and opinionated adult. The idea of effort is valued in education and occupation. Yet, statement on the ideal image of children to work hard and furiously suggests that even something like aging does not simply happen -- one should make efforts to grow up. This echoes a prominent Japanese perception that childhood is regarded as the time to play, and that this play is part of the child's work which contributes to her or his self-development. As in the phrase "the child's work is play" (*asobi wa kodomo no shigoto*), the child is expected to play hard as much as the adult is expected to work hard. An ambitious adolescent role model such as Matsuda is envisioned as incorporating such an idea of childhood as already a stage prepared for adulthood in which one's social status is achieved. As the last statement suggests, even youthful romance motivates hard work in Matsuda's scheme of effort.

Not only do the essays demonstrate Matsuda's positive attitudes toward life to the readers, but they also encourage the readers to be positive about their lives as well. In a section of Matsuda's 1980 essay, for example, it is stated:

> For those of you who think you are no good: I often feel the same way, [that I am no good,] too. In such times, I decided to think this way: that this is not just my problem. It happens to everyone. Although it is seldom expressed, we all are trying hard to cut out a path through it, you know. If you think, 'I am no good', people around you will strangely start to think that you are no good, and if you think, 'I am not popular', you will indeed become less and less popular. I suppose things often do not turn out the way you want them to, but rather because of this, one cannot live without believing in the possibility of the self. It's not fun, is it, if you don't challenge every possibility there is, thinking, 'I can do it if I try'? (1980:197,198).
>
> For those of you who can't make friends: youth without a friend may be lonesome. I thought about how to make a friend with whom one can encourage each other and help each other. This is what I think: for example, if there is someone that one can feel, 'Ah- This person looks alright', then she or he should open her or his heart [and approach this person]. Otherwise, that person will not

> open her or his heart either. If one wants to have a friend, she or he should try to be a friend for someone, too, shouldn't she or he? I think that not having a friend does not necessarily mean that there is no one there to talk to. It's simply that there is no close friend, or real friend, or someone with whom one can share understanding, or to whom she or he can honestly reveal her or himself. (1980:199,200).
>
> For those who are brokenhearted: It's wonderful to be in love, but somehow it's accompanied by disappointments. I think it is hard to feel sad every time you lose your love... Yet, I think those without any experience of being brokenhearted are boring. I think that one can become evermore strong as a person and understanding toward other people's feelings through disappointments in love. There are many beautiful things on earth, I think... Beautiful flowers, beautiful skies, beautiful scenery... If there is a heart to feel beautiful things as beautiful, your heart will be polished beautifully. If so, I think that you will meet a wonderful person once again. (1980:202-204).

By providing thoughtful and encouraging comments on some potential problems that beset growing adolescents, Matsuda -- the cutesy pop-idol – is envisioned as a pop-philosopher who provides her audience with symbolic power for self-development or transformation.

Apparently, all the lines presented above, publicized between 1980 and 1986, together explicate Matsuda's dedication to her performances and her audience, as well as the substantial development of her personality over time. Matsuda is represented as someone who transformed herself from an inexperienced, support-seeking girl to a confident and established performer who mastered the skills she needed to lead a meaningful life through the youthful stage. All of this is based on the assumption that youth -- to which Matsuda and the readers of her essays are together entitled -- is a progressive state in which one is expected to actively explore the world, cultivate her or his way of life, and seek after her or his dreams, and make them come true. As another part of Matsuda's essay expands:

> I think that youth is about taking a risk. To bet [one's life] on something that one can think 'This is it' -- be it in study, sports, or romance... -- is what makes that person youthful... It's all right to make mistakes, really. In my case, I jumped into the entertainment world because I wanted to entrust myself to this kind of a risk. One of the reasons that my parents opposed... was that the entertainment world is a world full of unknown. 'It is much safer to graduate from high-school,

> attend a university, learn tea ceremonies and flower arrangements [that are typical subjects of bridal training in Japan], and get married with someone nice', they said. Although I think it is very important to be safe or easy [about one's life], I feel like not being able to prove myself that I had a life when I was young if I simply followed my parents' path... (1980:206).

This demonstrates the view that the creation of a personality is made possible through challenging explorations in youth. Elsewhere, it is repeatedly reminded that the readers are together with Matsuda in youth. The prologue of *Seiko 20-Sai* states, "I want to walk along the same passage of youth with you -- that is my [i.e., Matsuda's] wish" (1982:21, brackets mine).

By combining Matsuda's life-stories with directive messages to which the young readers can empathize, these essays try to saturate the consciousness of the young people with the ideology of capitalism: that is, personal success, as the saying goes "You can make it if you try hard." In demonstrating that all of us can be successful in life if we try hard enough, the pop-idol Seiko Matsuda advises fellow adolescents to actively take part in the adult social order, or initiate themselves into it, without losing the sense of self-esteem. In doing so, Matsuda's model role is reinforced not only in fashion but also in mind, body, and soul. She is depicted as a bright, cheerful, hardworking, healthy, honest, patient, positive, and progressive personality who, with a great deal of internal strength and will-power, manages to learn from her mistakes and march forward in life.

**Staging the Lifestyle: *It's Style '95***

On a hot and rainy July 7, 1995, I went to observe Matsuda's concert with several acquaintances. It was the first of the three days in which the performance took place in Budōkan, the hall that can hold an audience of little over 10,000 people for the audience. Matsuda's concerts were by then famous for the speed in which their tickets sold out, and the tickets for this particular concert were sold out in fifteen minutes after their sales had begun.

Thanks to the help of Ikeda-*sensei* (a pseudonym), a university instructor who kindly managed to reserve a ticket for me through his powerful contact with a salesperson, I was able to attend the concert without much difficulty. I became acquainted with Ikeda because of our mutual interest in Japanese popular culture and entertainment. Known for his study of Japanese celebrities, he was one of the first helpful persons I contacted in the field. On this day, he attended the concert with his former students who worked in media institutions. These people also provided me with their assistance while I was in the field.

Since Budōkan is surrounded by a small park, it took some time to get to the hall's entrance from the main gate. On the way, I encountered many yakuza-looking ticket scalpers who approached me persistently saying, "Hey *niichan* (bro), do you want a ticket? I have a great seat for you." After fifteen or so minutes of walking, I found a table around which a crowd of people gathered and competed for souvenirs of this concert. These souvenirs included videotapes, photo albums, concert pamphlets, T-shirts, caps and pins, all of which featured Matsuda. "*Hai*, it's 3,000 yen. Thank you very much!" -- the loud voices of clerks mingled with noise created by customers who tried to push each other out of the way to get what they wanted. Then, one after another, these customers departed from the table with bags in their hands, looking satisfied, and prepared themselves for the line up.

The door opened at 5:30 p.m., one hour before the concert began. I was waiting toward the front of the crowd that was repeatedly told by the security personnel to form four lines. There were people of both sexes and all ages were in the crowd. Some came alone, while others came as couples, families, and groups. As we went up the stairs approaching the entrance, security personnel checked our bags to make sure that we did not have a camera or tape-recorder to carry inside. Once I entered the large hall, I went to my reserved seat, located at the front row in the second-floor balcony of the three-story theatre. Looking around, I noticed a gap of about five

meters between the stage and the front row of seats. Security personnel were everywhere, reminding me of the fact that I was attending a concert given by Japan's most famous female pop star. Knowing the scene from 1980 in which this same individual performed in front of a small crowd on a street-corner of Tōkyō as part of her debut campaign, I felt how time had really changed. Matsuda had grown to be a big star. It was like entering the time capsule of some unseen future.

The long-waited moment arrived at 6:30 p.m. A great uproar emerged out of the hall that was packed with people when the lights became increasingly dim and the whole area was covered with darkness. Once the curtain was raised, a giant screen emerged, and the music began to play. There appeared the image of Matsuda on a black and white screen, dancing and singing around a shiny silver bar, dressed in an equally shiny silver costume (figure 20). As the audience shouted with joy, Matsuda on the screen went on singing:

[I] always try to avoid notice
[I] act plainly and privately
Something that nobody knows
The secret between the two of us
It makes me thrilled [with joy]
The entire body feels strange...
Everyone is in love with you
They are kissing the photo of you
Rumor says that you are the sexiest person in the world
I am the only one who will be embraced in your arms
It's style, style for '95
I want to feel you
Yes, style, style for '95
[Your] white finger strokes [my body]
You cast a spell on me...

Given the frequent gossip about Matsuda's extramarital affairs with American men (the latest of which at the time of the concert involved one of the dancers from New York that she hired), this song, bedecked with terms such as "white finger," seemed to suggest problems deriving from American influence.

**Figure 20. The cover jacket of Seiko Matsuda's live concert video, *It's Style '95.***

As I watched Matsuda on the screen, I asked myself what kind of style Matsuda was trying to advocate through this particular sequence of her performance. After some thoughts, I settled with a two-fold interpretation that: 1) Matsuda was trying to justify her own extramarital affairs which took place abroad; and 2) by making this a style she was trying to show women in the audience that they had a right to take actions into their own hands, and that extramarital affairs are not necessarily bad, if handled discretely. In agreement with this interpretation, one of Ikeda's former students later pointed out that Matsuda inflamed the so-called "extramarital affair boom" (*furin boom*) in Japan today. Indeed, extramarital affair became a common topic of television dramas at the time, and some of my acquaintances went on to have such an affair. To be sure, extramarital affairs have always existed in Japan, although according to cultural projections, it was always assumed that men took the initiative in these affairs. What distinguished this new trend, represented by Matsuda, was the idea that women take the initiative. This idea led some media critics to argue in television programs that Japanese society has been recently becoming more immoral than before. It celebrated the idea of womanhood (or women's attitude) which in the past was unthinkable to go public.

With a blast of fireworks, followed by another delightful shout from the audience, the screen went down and Matsuda appeared on stage with seven back-up dancers (4 men and 3 women). She demonstrated a series of rhythmical song-and-dance performances under colorful flashing lights. Seeing her dressed in black costumes and putting on sexy acts, a man near me turned to his female partner and said that she looked just like Madonna. This reminded me of some scenes from the American pop-diva's music videos such as *Lucky Star*, *Like A Virgin*, *Express Yourself*, and *Vogue*.

After the sexually expressive performances came a series of ballads. Matsuda reappeared alone on stage with fancy frilly costume, coming down the stairs to close the distance between

herself and the audience. The special-effect fog contributed to the creation of an image that Matsuda was coming down before the audience from the sky. This was followed by her reappearance in a more child-like, doll-like costume. Her hair was curled and had ribbons on top. A highlighted set-design that included gothic-style churches and rococo-style houses added to the effect. A closer observation of the stage-setting shows the presence of a suspension bridge, and this evoked the idea that this wonderland was New York -- the point confirmed subsequently by Ikeda and his former students. New York has been a major source of Matsuda's inspiration in performance since her first visit in 1983. She frequently visited this city to acquire the techniques of American-style performance as represented by Broadway musicals, even though tabloid would present it as just to enjoy her vacation and "engage in extramarital love affairs."

In her essay, Matsuda recalls her visit to Billy Joel's concert as one of the most enlightening experiences she had in New York. In 1983, Joel invited Matsuda to his concert that took place in Madison Square Garden. Matsuda was overwhelmed not only by the size of this concert, but also by the way Joel caught the hearts of his large audience and made them all stand in joy by the power of his songs (Matsuda 1986:258-260). She thought that although she was no comparison with Joel, her songs also had some value, and she became eager to appeal to more people with her songs (1986:260). For those in the audience who were familiar with this background, the symbolic meaning of Matsuda's emergence from the exotic landscape on stage was all too clear: Matsuda had accomplished her dream by mastering the skills of American performances and returned from New York to demonstrate her brushed-up performance before the Japanese audience.

This immediately evoked in my academically-oriented mind the images of scholars, such as Amane Nishi (1829-97), Yukichi Fukuzawa (1835-1901), and Umeko Tsuda (1864-1929), or

politicians, such as Toshimichi Ōkubo (1830-78), Takayoshi Kido (1833-77), Hirobumi Itō (1841-1909), who became known as the pioneers of Japan's modernization in the late 19th century. These Japanese emissaries between Japan and the West contributed to the transformation of Japan to an industrial nation-state at the beginning of the Meiji era (1868-1912). They looked up to the West as the source of inspiration, traveled to Europe and North America to study philosophy, science, and technology, brought back to Japan and domesticated anything they considered useful in the name of "public education" (*kokumin kyōiku*).[13] By importing the civilized and professional style of Western popular performances and making them accessible to Japanese audiences, Matsuda became a contemporary pioneer in the modernization of Japanese popular culture. Whether in science, technology, or entertainment, the modern Japanese have always looked up to the West as a place for *akogare* (longing). Matsuda shares with other pioneers her leadership role in appropriating these inspirational sources as she incorporates them into her own style.[14]

Internationalization has been a national agenda since the dawn of Japan's modern era. In this historical setting, the West has been a point of reference as well as a national goal -- in reference to which Japanese people have been trying to define and redefine their national identity (e.g., Ohnuki-Tierney 1990). In this sociocultural context, returnees from overseas are viewed as a catalyst for positive social change. Their acquired foreignness is considered as a resource for Japan's internationalization (Yoshino 1998:29). Elsewhere, Kelsky's study of women's internationalism in Japan (1996) shows that internationalist Japanese women continue to construct a national binary between backward Japan and a progressive modern West today, while inhabiting ambiguous, hybrid transnational spaces that radically destabilize Japanese ethnicity and implicating these spaces in Western agendas of universalism and modernity (1996:29). The West, particularly the United States, is imagined as a kind of promised land, the

source of freedom, opportunity, and a new lifestyle or *ikikata*. Western (especially American) men are represented as women's allies against Japanese men, who are imagined as conservative, feudalistic, and sexist. It is found that many young internationalist women in Japan believe that they can discover a "new self" (*atarashii jibun*) and remake themselves through their contacts with Western things and Western men (1996:31-37). In light of these studies, the cultural implication of the "white-finger" in the song which Matsuda sang at the outset of her concert, her extramarital affairs with American men, and her "style '95," become all the more clear. Images of exotic whiteness, American men, stage settings which resemble New York, and fancy Western-style costumes become instruments for Matsuda to contextualize a transitional space in which she positions herself as a symbolic role model for internationalist women. Her performances act upon Japanese, especially young female, audiences as a powerful source of progressive imagination.

One technique used by Billy Joel in his concert is to program a medley after his new songs have been introduced. He then points his microphone to the audience and guides them to participate in singing some of his earlier songs that supposedly invoke nostalgia in the minds of many who knew his earlier work in his career. Naturally, the audience reacts to this and sings the lines with Joel, provoking a sense of unity. This same technique which I observed as a participant of Joel's concert in 1993 was used by Matsuda in her concert in the final part which she called "let's sing together corner." When she announced that the first song in her medley was going to be *Tengoku No Kissu* (*Kiss in Heaven*), the members of the audience, who were already standing, reacted immediately with a shout. Then, many of them jumped up and down with joy. Matsuda then pointed her microphone to the mass of her audience and the dialogue in music began:

Audience (A): Kiss in blue heaven, far far away

Kiss in blue heaven, please take me
Please darling

Matsuda (M): Splashing the beads of wave
I pretended that I couldn't swim
I was going to tease you a little
But embraced in your arms, I fainted

A & M: Kiss in blue heaven, a balloon of cloud
Kiss in blue heaven, please take me away on it
Please darling...

As everyone in the audience sang along with Matsuda through the medley, Matsuda went up on the bridge that was set on the side of the hall so that she could get a better view of the entire audience. This spatial movement seemed to have more symbolic than pragmatic significance, however: the bridge was enhanced with cable-like designs, creating an illusion that she was standing on the extension of a New York suspension bridge. Matsuda moved back and forth between this bridge and the center of the stage, establishing a symbolic linkage between her Japanese audience and the imagined landscape of New York, which is filled with exoticism, dream, and stylistic inspiration.

Those who looked the most excited during this medley performance were Matsuda's long-term fans and fan-club members, most of whom occupied the front rows. Fan-club members distinguished themselves by wearing official T-shirts. There were also cheering squads who held paper-fans (*uchiwa*) in their hands and cheered Matsuda in the same rhythmical way as I remember a decade earlier. Cheering squads are commonly observed in Japan in pop-idol concerts and sport tournaments such as baseball and martial arts. Members of these squads prepare rhythmical cheers, and paper-fans are used by their leaders to keep time while the rest of the members execute the cheer. One cheering squad in this concert held up paper-fans with inscriptions, where one letter appeared on each paper-fan. Together they made up a sentence that said *ganbare Seiko!!* or "Keep it up, Seiko!!" It did not take long for their cheer to be

transmitted to the rest of the people in the audience. When Matsuda started to sing her last song, a 1981 smash song called *Natsu No Tobira* (*The Summer Doorway*), the cheer became one big rhythm of harmony to be executed by the entire audience in the hall:

Keys: C=clap; J=jump; [ ]=boundaries of non-lyrical utterance

Round 1a. Matsuda (M): To me who cut my hair,
ka-mi o ki-itta wata-shi-ni
| | | | | | | | | | | |
Audience (A): C C C C C C C C C C C [SEIKO!]

Round 1b. M: you said, 'You look like another person'.
chi-gau hito mi-tai to-
| | | | | | | | | |
A: C C C C C C C C C

Round 2a. M: You seem a little embarrassed,
a-nata wa su-koshi te-re-ta yo'o
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
A: C-CC J C-CC J C-CC J C-CC J

Round 2b. M: [and] you start walking ahead of me.
ma-e o a-ru-i-teku-
| | | | | | | | |
A: C C C C C C C C

Round 3a. M: To be honest, 'You look beautiful'
ki-rei-da yo to hon-to wa
| | | | | | | | | | | |
A: C C C C C C C C C C [LET'S GO SEIKO!]

Round 3b. M: is what I wanted you to say.
i-itte ho-shi-ka-a'tta-
| | | | | | | | | |
A: C C C C C C C C C

Round 4a. M: You are always beyond the cloak
a-nata wa i-tsumo ta-me-rai no
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
A: C-CC J C-CC J C-CC J C-CC J

Round 4b. M: of hesitation.
ve-eru no mu-ko-o ne-
| | | | | | | | | |
A: C C C C C C C C C

Round 5a. M: [Everybody together!] Fresh! Fresh! Fresh!...
A: FRESH! FRESH! FRESH!...

Thus, Matsuda establishes an empathetic unity between herself and her audience by the time the concert is in its finale.

Overall, the concert proceeded in such a manner that Matsuda shifted her style from the vibrantly sexual performance of recent times to the more familiar, cute performance of the past. Indeed, Matsuda took her audience backward in time along the trajectory using her songs as the vehicle of exploration. In Ikeda's analysis, this transition from the present, "matured" style to the past, "innocent" style represented the process in which Matsuda's Japanese identity is reconstructed. Matsuda demonstrated herself to be an established Japanese pop-idol who has mastered the expertise of Western performance.[15] "Certainly," said Ikeda, "Matsuda has reached the finest stage that a Japanese performer can ever reach! She is the idol of all idols." One of his students, a 27 year-old female publishing agent, added that Matsuda was "Japanese after all" (*yappari nihonjin*). The concert she just saw made her feel "overwhelmed in the beginning, and relieved at the end" (*saisho wa attōsareta kedo, saigo wa hottoshita*). This combination of exotic inspiration and national identity (or pride), or the transition from one to the other, according to her, was the power of Matsuda's performance. She said:

> I think it is relatively easy for a person with such fame, money, and interest in overseas life to run away from Japan and not come back. But Matsuda wouldn't do this. She frequently goes to New York or Los Angeles. where she learns about leading Western performance and fashion, but she never immigrates there... She brings back home what she has digested abroad as her own style, which everyone now looks up to. This, I think, is her strength. She probably knows that she would not be able to accomplish so much in the U.S.A., where she is likely to end up as an unknown person. It would be difficult for her to compete with professional American singers like Whitney Houston, Tina Turner, or Janet Jackson, or Madonna, I think... She probably knows that her opportunities lie here in Japan where everyone knows her very well, supports her

> very well, and continues to expect a lot from her. Her true identity is as a Japanese pop-idol, and I think she is very much aware of it.

Thus, Matsuda's commercial value depends on her role as cultural symbol. Matsuda performs as a Japanese role model whose passage toward establishing the self has been shared, followed, or debated. Her style has become the source of inspiration for many people in constructing their gender and national identities in the age of internationalization.

**Summary**

The dramatic nature of identity-formation in idol-performances is revealed through the examination of Seiko Matsuda's life history as illustrated in a variety of media sources. The Japanese virtue of accomplishment is realized through a rite of passage which consists of a struggle in which the young actor wishing to publicly express her or himself faces a series of social pressures and obstacles. In the case of Seiko Matsuda, these pressures and obstacles included family resistance, physical deficiencies, negative tabloid coverage, and heavy workloads. Matsuda is represented as someone who managed to express her sense of self in the history of Japanese popular culture by overcoming these pressures and obstacles and developing a style in which her confident-self is portrayed, and by which other people can be inspired. Thus, the passage of maturation toward individualization is carefully traced and described by the media, critics, and consumers, allowing Matsuda to win social recognition upon the public's acceptance of Matsuda as a diligent person who works hard to accomplish her dreams, as Japanese would say *asoko made yaretara sugoi!* meaning, "Being able to do that much is admirable!"

In establishing a style, Matsuda is transformed from a dependent novice to a confident pop-diva. In this process, she is projected as someone who breached traditional Japanese norms and

in particular those regarding gender, and deconstructed the conventional image of appropriate Japanese womanhood -- one that conforms to the ideological role of "good wife, wise mother." Matsuda is considered to have led her female audience toward what many people consider Japanese women's liberation from the home. That is, her life and her performances explicated the importance of a woman's personal choice over her family duty, or her self-esteem over her group conformity.

Although Matsuda's career offers a good example of a pop-idol's establishment mechanism that is capitalized by the industry, her case is by no means unique. In the field of pop-idol production, establishing the self through style is a common expectation, as the producers' statements shown at the outset of this chapter demonstrate. It is said that before Matsuda there was Momoe Yamaguchi, and after Matsuda came Yu Hayami, Noriko Sakai, Hikaru Nishida, Rie Miyazawa, Yuki Uchida, and Namie Amuro, to list a few examples of female pop-idols. These young performers are considered to have developed their styles as they competed over the bigger share of an economic and symbolic pie. To delve into this field of stylistic competition that characterizes Japan's pop-idol industry will be the theme of the following chapter. The goal of my venture into the present ethnographic nexus was to illuminate by means of examining the life-stories of a successful pop-idol how this idol is constructed in the industry over time through the symbolic interaction between the performer, the mass media, and the masses.

**Notes:**

1. Some of my informants considered Matsuda one of three examples of Japanese pop-idols. Two other chief examples were Hiromi Go and Momoe Yamaguchi (retired in 1980) who both dominated the entertainment scene in the 1970s.

2. I am here inspired by Portelli's study of subjectivity in oral history. For further details, see Portelli (1991:ix).

3. I find Dyer's (1991:132) discussion of the pop star noteworthy here. He argues that notions attached to the words "star," such as magic, power, fascination, authority, importance, and aura, signify the differentiated relation between the values perceived to be embodied by the star and the perceived status of those values -- especially if these notions are felt to be under threat or in crisis, or to be essential in understanding and coping with contemporary life. He also suggests that the symbolic power of the pop star depends on the degree to which these stars are accepted by the audience as truly being what they appear to be.

4. In her song, *Girls Just Wanna Have Fun* (1984), Cyndi Lauper sings, "I come home in the middle of the night, and my mother says 'When are you going to live your life right?' Oh mama, ain't we not the fortunate ones? Girls just to want to have fun..." This is a good example of the family/sexuality tension in American popular culture. A similar form of tension is apparent in Madonna's *Papa Don't Preach*, although in this case the relationship between father and daughter is emphasized. In both present-day Japan and North America, young women perceive family as an ideological apparatus that keeps sexuality in line with social conformity.

5. For further details, see Kōdansha (1993:1286).

6. Hideyoshi Aizawa, the president of Sun Music Productions that produced Seiko Matsuda, recalled in my interview with him that it took some time for the agency to reach the decision to bet their money on Matsuda in the beginning.

7. My personal communication with Millie Creighton, my graduate committee supervisor, pointed out that when she was living in Japan, she found that Matsuda's role as mother was celebrated in the media in such a way that she was chosen by powdered milk companies as the *okaasan* (mother) of choice. This image of Matsuda was used to push baby products with the theme, 'If Matusda, who can afford to buy any brand, uses ours, it must be the best!' Creighton observes that in this way, Matsuda became the ideal of motherhood projected for female consumers as a progressive *okaasan*.

8. Budōkan, or Hall of Martial Arts, was originally designed for martial arts tournaments. The English rock band the *Beatles*, making their first concert visit to Japan in 1966, were the first to perform at the Budōkan.

9. Matsuda's case is somewhat analogous to the scandal of Michael Jackson, who was believed to be undergoing skin lightening operations. It was suggested that Jackson was buying into the belief that whiteness was somehow to be aspired to vis-a-vis blackness.

10. In dramas, mothers are often betrayed by their children, who eventually abandon them as they grow up to be adults. Yet, they are presented as ever-forgiving mothers who pour their affections constantly as they endure their suffering or who simply smile beatifically (Buruma 1984:25).

11. For a concise and elaborate discussion of the Japanese emphasis on group-controlled behaviors, see, for example, Mouer and Sugimoto (1986).

12. One is reminded of an old hero-tale *Chūshingura* here. Based on a true story, it talks about a landlord named Naganori Asano who loses his temper at a meeting held in the Shogun's castle. Asano draws his sword in an attempt to attack Kōzukenosuke Kira, another regional lord who kept picking on him. Charged with disrupting the social order and public harmony for personal reasons, Asano is ordered to commit *seppuku* (an authenticated form of suicide in which the subject cuts open his abdomen in a traditional samurai fashion to repay the shame he had caused). Subsequent episodes speak of 46 of Asano's servants, led by Kuranosuke Ōishi, who avenge their lord and assassinate Kira. The Shogun later orders the 46 men to commit *seppuku* as well. The story celebrates the loyalty and bravery of these 46 men, but it also moralizes the tragic outcome of losing one's temper in public. I remember as a child my father used this story as an example to teach me about the importance of patience in one's dealing with public affairs. "Never expose your emotion," he told me, because "if you do both you and your associates will lose face and end up suffering."

13. See, for example, Beasley (1972), Bolitho (1977), and Jansen (1980) for further details.

14. Matsuda's CD-debut in New York in 1990 and her advancement into the U.S. market (which many Japanese speak of as a testimony to her international success) are likely to have meaning for Japanese audiences in Japan in terms of enhancing her role as a pioneer of Westernization in popular culture. In the U.S., she is hardly known to many people. A few American informants of mine vaguely remembered seeing her in a news program on television where she was introduced as a Japanese Madonna. They were generally cynical that this previously unknown personality would ever make it in American show business.

15. This point is very similar to that made by Kondō (1992) in her observation of Japanese fashion designers, who find their sense of identity and accomplishment in acquiring, mastering, and overcoming the superior modes of Europe and North America.

## CHAPTER VI – THE FIELD OF COMPETING STYLES

During my fieldwork, I took a three-day trip to Kyōto, a symbol of Japanese history and culture, which is located some 360 kilometers to the west of Tōkyō. A former capital of Japan founded in 794, Kyōto is home to 202 national treasures (20 percent of Japan's total) and 1,684 state-authorized cultural properties (15 percent of Japan's total). Almost 2,000 Shintō shrines and Buddhist temples spread across its 610.6 square-kilometer area, where thousands of tourists visit each year.[1]

As I made a pilgrimage along these places, spending 300 to 500 yen in each place for offertory money to pray before religious icons for their supernatural protection, I began to note something curious: everywhere I was told by the priests, guides, and clerks that their place was the best. They said, "Our shrine [or temple] is distinctively sacred!" "Our place has a rich and unique history to which no other places can compare!" "The icon you see here is the only one that existed in the world!" Alternatively, they said, "We carry some of the most precious treasures in Japan!" Then, I found many visitors rushing to souvenir corners to buy charms, postcards, and other memorabilia when their inspections were over. Kyōto, seen in this perspective, is a field in which old religious institutions continuously strive to win recognition that serve the interest of their prestigious positioning in the city's museological and tour-oriented social structure. Icons and the individualized styles that they represent are invested in this setting as symbolic instruments that differentiate one religious institution from another. In other words, religious institutions use icons and related art forms in order to compete against each other over the value of social existence. Tōkyō's entertainment industry, where pop-idols and their manufacturing agencies conduct their show business, is a parallel to this contemporary

religious scenario. Like shrines and temples, promotion agencies and affiliate institutions invest symbolic values and symbolic qualities of their pop icons to make a profit.

This chapter focuses on the nature of competition that takes place in this field of pop-idol production. The subsequent discussion will compare in detail strategies and techniques that are employed by promotion agencies to differentiate themselves in the field of symbolic production. From the standpoint of business institutions, the value of pop-idols is measured in terms of their usefulness in facilitating commercial activities. Thus, the more an idol-talent can attract consumers, inducing them to buy what they advertise and allowing the advertisers to make a profit, the more recognition she or he earns. To this end, every idol-candidate tries to develop her or his own style that can attract people and distinguish her or him from coexisting rivals. With this in mind, the first section will introduce some of the existing pop-idol as they are perceived by producers and fans.

A style developed by certain pop-idols that appeals to a large number of people is often imitated by other candidates in their pursuit of fame. Many of these copycats subsequently try to derive their own forms to distinguish themselves from the originator as well as other imitators. The stylistic performance of a pop-idol may last as long as the style appeals to the consumers as something trendy, but it is often the case that one trend quickly gives its way to another. This puts producers in a situation where they are constantly on the look out for a new style that can inspire the public.

The question of style, then, cannot be limited to the realm of subjectivity, but must take into account its inextricably interwoven relationship with the dynamic power structure that characterizes the Japanese entertainment industry and consumer society today.[2] This means that the process whereby the field of symbolic production becomes a temporal structure that defines the temporal status of taste is taken into account (Bourdieu 1993:108). This process

contextualizes the chronological contrast between the newcomers and the old-established, the challengers and the veterans, or the avant-garde and the classic, in concurrence with the economic opposition between the poor and the rich, the small and the big, the cheap and the dear. In such a context, the development of symbolic art forms and their producers is subjected to the continuous creation of the battle between those who have made their names and those who have not established themselves as of yet. Those established are struggling to stay in view; while those who are new are fighting to relegate to the past the established figures, freeze the movement of time, and fix the present state of the field (Bourdieu 1993:104-106). With this in mind, the second section of this chapter will try to illustrate promotional techniques developed by pop-idols and their agencies. I will here include my own experience of being promoted by my mentor Akio Nakamori and his producing staff, so as to provide a better picture of how stylistic promotion is planned and exercised. The story of my promotion will also be used to explicate the relationship I developed as a researcher with my informants in the field.

The symbolic competition between different pop-idols is not a practice of promotion agencies alone. Fans and audiences also participate in the politics of differentiation as they identify themselves with their favorite pop-idols and group themselves against each other. The third section of this chapter, then, will discuss how members of the audience locate, distinguish, and root their selves in the field of idol-consumption in reference to a public event involving two idol-groups, one idol-duo and a solo.

## Into the Islands of Eight-Million Smiles

### *The Mythological Interplay*

In Japanese mythology, the four main islands as well as some 1,000 smaller islands that spread across the country, and various geographic landscapes in them, are considered works of

gods. These spaces are also believed to be inhabited by gods, and are characterized as gods themselves. In mythical times, these so-called *yaoyorozu no kami* or "eight million gods" interacted in many ways: some coexisted in solidarity, while others fought against each other and even killed; while others made love to each other and gave birth to the next generation of gods. Today, one can find places everywhere that are noted in connection with these gods, and find shrines which people of regional and local communities visit to worship their gods. According to the *Kojiki* (*Record of Ancient Matters*), which describes the divine origin of the imperial descent, earthly gods created Japan's archipelago, or initiated activities that are known as *kuniumi* (lit. "giving birth to a country") and *kunizukuri* ("constructing the country"), in accordance with directions given by heavenly gods (e.g., Konoshi 1994:118).

Idol performances resemble this creation myth in many ways: pop-idols, equipped with their symbolic qualities, aim to establish their territories or "islands" (so to speak) within the field, and in the process interact with each other in various ways. Like gods, they enhance their activity space or landscape differently, creating legends to be spoken and shared by their worshippers. Behind all this are producers who, like heavenly gods, nurture and direct the earthly pop-idols according to their visions of creation. One producer made this explicit in an interview, saying that nourishing the idols with one's vision of social influence is the producer's *raison d'être* (figure 21).

In his study of *bikkuriman chocolate*, a hit-product that was targeted to children for consumption, Ōtsuka discovers that child consumers were attracted to a series of stickers that came with the chocolates as a gift rather than the chocolates themselves. These stickers featured animated figures -- heroic and villainous -- whose names and roles were briefly inscribed on the back as a caption entitled "the gossip of the devil's world." What motivated the consumers, according to Ōtsuka, was the fact that they could collect these stickers and in the process use

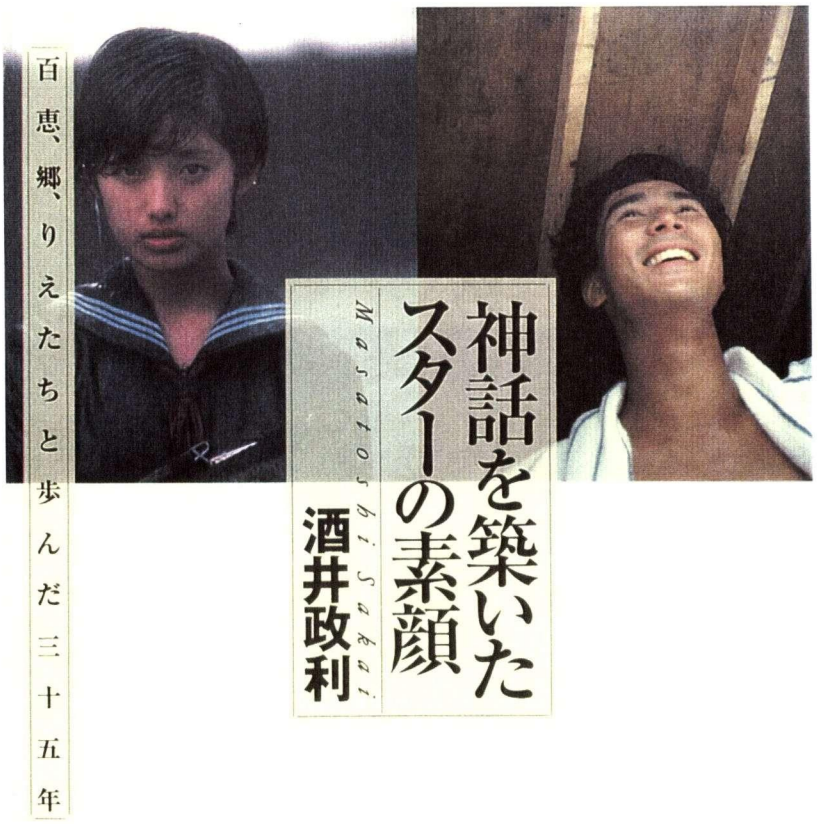


**Figure 21. An example of the mythical presentation of pop-idols from the book written by an idol-producer, Masatoshi Sakai, whose title reads *The True Faces of Pop Stars Who Constructed Myths* (published 1995).**

their imaginations to create their own stories about how these figures interacted with each other. In this, Ōtsuka sees a structural similarity with Japanese mythology. He argues:

> In fact, there is no particular hero in the *bikkuriman* series. There are heroic god-like figures called 'heads' representing different eras, but none of these figures is a hero throughout the entire series. This structure is identical to that of the *Kojiki* in which the myth is centered on heroic gods who represent different eras, such as Susano'o, Ōkuninushi, Yamatotakeru. There are altogether 772 gods in the *bikkuriman* series which is no match with the eight-million gods, but *bikkuriman* is systematized in such a way as to be sufficiently compatible to the Japanese mythology (Ōtsuka 1990:312, italics mine).

Ōtsuka rightly contends that children are constructing their own historical narratives in the process of consuming commodified images -- the kind of historical narratives that you do not learn to read and create in Japanese schools due to their mechanical focus on the mere memorization of enumerated dates and names (1990:311).

Likewise, the series of stylized pop-idols are consumed popularly as they appeal to people's sense of time – that is, the sense of popular history which is not limited to the recording of events that occurred at the level of, say, national politics and state economy. Pop-idol fans and audiences enjoy creating their own epoch-marking stories as they relate themselves to their idols. The mass media function here as mediators or by-standers, which direct these people's interests and imaginations toward preferred readings of the time. The media offer descriptions about the pop-idols and their performances that are similar to those captions that appear on the back of *bikkuriman* stickers.

I found numerous materials and activities that signify this mythological interplay between pop-idols, promotion agencies, the mass media, and consumers. Writers on popular culture kept publishing taxonomies and genealogies that classified pop-idols on the basis of styles (e.g., Kitagawa *et al.* 1988; Takakura *et al.* 1995; Scholar 1996)(figure 22). Fashion magazines featured articles that commented on the model role of each pop-idol in fashion and lifestyle, or

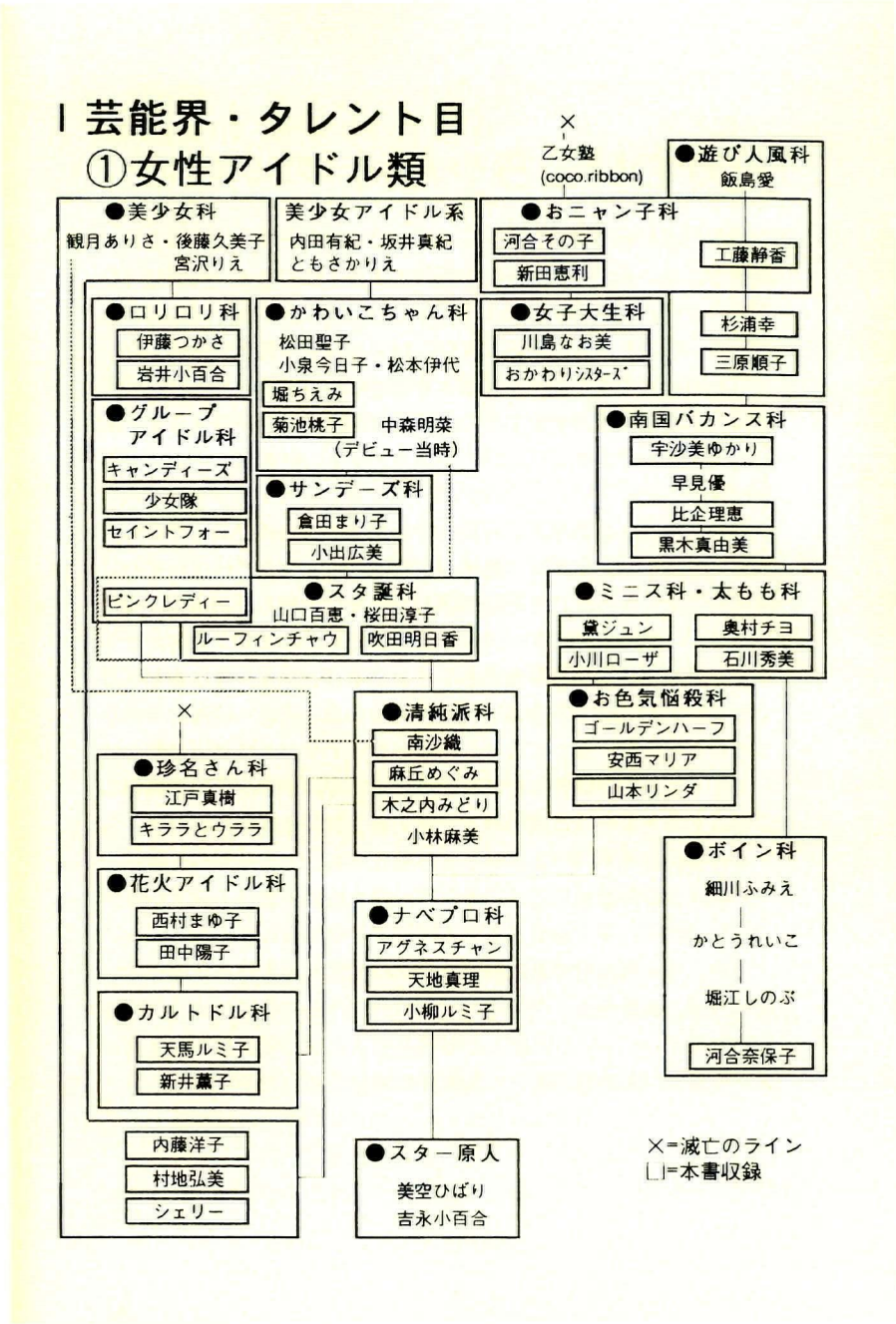


**Figure 22. An example of pop-idol genealogy from *The Encyclopedia of the Evolutionary Classification of Extinct Entertainers* (1995:23); in this particular book, the authors classify successive Japanese pop stars as if they were paleontological specimens.**

provided rankings of popular personalities based on consumer surveys (figure 23; cf. figure 24). Fans and readers, on the other hand, often debated the validity of these classifications and rankings based on their own criteria.

When I participated in a get together of an idol research group at a restaurant, one fan pulled out two issues of *Bejeans*, a popular magazine for men. In it appeared articles called *The 25-year history of pop-idols as seen in record jackets*.[3] One of them, the June 1, 1995 issue, focused on the history of female pop-idol solos while the other, the July 15 issue, emphasized female idol-groups.

At the beginning of these articles were commentaries titled *All about heroine's memorial* (written in English) that laid the foundation of these particular narratives, such as:

> In 1970, Yuki Okazaki played a heroine role in a TBS drama and had a sudden rise to popularity. In 1971..., so-called the *Three Girls' Company*, including Mari Amachi and Rumiko Koyanagi, dominated the Braun tube [i.e., the TV]. In the following year, pop-idol [performances]... was established [as a genre] with the appearances of Megumi Asaoka who sang along with choreography, and Miyoko Asada who emphasized her friendliness in a drama (6/1/1995, p.24).

This offered a genealogical diagram describing the connection between some important idol-groups that appeared between the 1970s and 1990s (figure 25). These commentaries were followed by lists of idol-names and captions that briefly described their backgrounds.

Members of the research group started to discuss these articles, evaluating the validity of media-constructed genealogies and making various comments about the list of pop-idol biographies. One of the members, for example, questioned the association between two idol-groups in the diagram saying, "I have no idea what this arrow means. How does the [idol-group] *Shōjotai* connect with [another group] *Onyanko Club*?". To this another member offered his interpretation: "They're probably referring to the big-money spent on their planning." "Oh yea," replied the skeptic, "I remember that *Shōjotai* was advertised as what, a ten-million-yen project?

小出由華（こいで・ゆか）
1985年1月5日生。「ウゴウゴ・ルーガ」のルーガ役で脚光を浴びる。美少女ながら親しみやすさが持ち味。「グッドモーニング」で子役の吉田亮のガールフレンド役で活躍。フジテレビのスペシャルドラマ「平成カイシャイン物語」にも出演する。

山咲千里（やまざき・せんり）
1962年4月24日生。80年のNHKの連ドラ「鮎のうた」でデビュー。最近では「誰にも言えない」で佐野史郎の妻を好演。「勇雄い」でも四姉妹の次女で結審室のお局様をはつらつと演じていた。10月からがらり「OH！エルくらぶ」（写真）の司会だ。

高樹沙耶（たかぎ・さや）
1968年8月21日生。モデル出身の女優さんで今やベテランの領域か。それにしても「お金がない！」（写真）ではバリバリのキャリアウーマンぶりを見事に演じて、高視聴率の一翼を担う。「江戸の用心棒」につづき10月からは「妊娠ですよ」にも出演。

高橋玲奈（たかはし・れな）
1978年5月8日生。グリコBIGプッチンプリンのCMで注目を浴びる。資生堂フレッシュドライシャンプー、サークルK、肥後銀行のCMにも出演。森高千里や「水の中の8月」に主演する小保麗奈とともに熊本は美少女の宝庫説の要因となる存在だ。

菊池麻衣子（きくち・まいこ）
1974年7月19日生。映画「薄れゆく記憶の中で」でデビュー。「RAMPO」や「四谷怪談」に出演。「平成教育委員会」の回答者、「お金がない！」で社長秘書役。写真也実の後を受けて全国信用金庫協会のキャラクター（写真）として活躍中。

小林由美恵（こばやし・ゆみえ）
1974年1月29日生。ソニーのゴク歯ビデオのCMがどうしても印象的だが、今年はコカコーラネオアクエリアスのCMでなかなか元気で健康的に駆け回り中か。「お金がない！」の受付役も悪くないが、いかんせん出番がもう少しあったらよかったのに。

## 高樹沙耶、洞口依子などベテラン女優系の健闘も注意

前回のこのコーナーで、ドラマの本数が増えたことで若手に一気にチャンスが回ってきたと指摘したが、チャンスが回ってきたのは若手だけじゃないようだ。いろいろな人にチャンスが与えられているといえる。ベテラン系も例外ではなく、「お金がない！」の高樹沙耶、「オトコの居場所」の大島智子、床嶋佳子、洞口依子、さらに「勇雄い」の山咲千里、「グッドモーニング」の菅井潤、「遠山金志郎美容室」のかたせ梨乃などなどの健闘も目立つところ。特に彼女達は気を抜いて安心して見ていられるところが実にテレビドラマ向きでいい。実はドラマの成功のカギは彼女達が握っているかもしれないくらいである。その辺はこちらも今まで見逃しがちだったが、今後はきちっと注目していきたい。

子役系も同様である。冬の「子子家庭は危機一髪」に続いて「花王愛の劇場」「夏は秘密がいっぱい！」も主演の尾羽智加子が大健闘。さすがは安達祐実の先駆的名子役だ。「君といた夏」では子供のころから瀬戸朝香以上に美少女だったという設定で注目の妹役にも起用されたのはさすが。あえて言うと少々気になるのは、奥菜恵と印象が互いに接近してきたことくらいか。

その他、ヘアヌード全盛の中、衝撃のグラビア展開もかなりインパクトがあった。前回ふれた武田真子につづいて、この「宝島」の誌上も飾ってくれた、田山真美子、宇田川綾子、古紫雀織など、ヘアヌード以上のインパクトがあったのではないか。特に古紫雀織の初セミヌードはビックリしました。

### ランキング51～100位

| 94年秋 | 94年夏 | 上昇注目 | 氏名 | ワンポイント |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 051 | 060 | △ | 宝生舞 | 目のインパクトは強いが、表情が少ないのが気になりませんか？ |
| 052 | 050 | | 飯島直子 | とにかく明るくていい人だ。好感の持てるキャラクターである。 |
| 053 | 070 | △ | 藤田朋子 | いつまでも妙に可愛い不思議な人だが、成熟の成長も見られる。 |
| 054 | 041 | ★ | 山口智子 | いつのまにか堂々の主演女優に大成長、しかも数字取れちゃうんだな、これが。 |
| 055 | 071 | ★△ | 大塚寧々 | OF、ドラマと快調な活躍ぶり、また白竜との共演が見たい。 |
| 056 | 058 | ☆ | 水野真紀 | 堅実なお嬢様女優。このまま本人が満足するかどうかが問題。 |
| 057 | 053 | | 鈴木蘭々 | 本当はフォトジェックなんだけど、特異なキャラクターが爆発中。ま、いうが。 |
| 058 | 045 | | 渡辺満里奈 | さすがフリッパーズ解散の原因説が出るだけある？ バラエティ路線には強い。 |
| 059 | 055 | | 奥菜恵 | まだ中学生ながら意外といいバストの持ち主。人気復活も時間の問題か。 |
| 060 | 049 | | 中嶋朋子 | 演技力は同世代女優の中でもピカイチ。将来もいい女優でいてほしいものだ。 |
| 061 | 085 | ★△ | 浦江アキコ | またドラマに得てきてくれて嬉しい。演技、歌、トークとバランスのいい好感アリ。 |
| 062 | 064 | | 若村麻由美 | NHKの「戦国武士の有能休暇」はドラマの出来も良好で良かったっス。 |
| 063 | 052 | | 大路恵美 | TBSの時代劇「夜叉百両」に堂々主演。そういえば時代劇向きのルックスかも。 |
| 064 | 066 | | 酒井美紀 | 早く学校を卒業して、東京に出てきて下さい。待ってまーす♡ |
| 065 | 094 | ▲ | 高田万由子 | 意外と演技力があるのでビックリしました。さすが宮大卒はダテじゃないぜ。 |
| 066 | 073 | △ | 細川直美 | ここまで持ち直すとはビックリ。国民的美少女もダテじゃない。 |
| 067 | 054 | ★ | 深津絵里 | ロングヘアになってからというもの、日々フェロモン度アップ。 |
| 068 | 093 | △ | 奥山佳恵 | もっとナイスバディを武器にしてのし上がって欲しいと思うのは僕だけじゃない。 |
| 069 | 040 | | 近藤サト | ショートヘアには賛否両論。結婚の噂は本当か？ すごく気になるっス。 |
| 070 | 090 | | かとうれいこ | ドラマ、バラエティ、OF、相変わらずのご活躍。さすがクラリオンガール。 |
| 071 | 043 | ★ | 遠山景織子 | 今度のドラマで再起をかる。ごはんは良くかんでいっぱい食べてね。 |
| 072 | 058 | ☆ | 水野美紀 | 明力があってアクションが出来るのに…。今度のドラマこそ…。 |
| 073 | 044 | | 麻木久仁子 | 結月でも仕事をするその根性はエライ。さすが母は強しといったところか。 |
| 074 | 062 | △ | 伊達公子 | アジアを意識って…してください。ライジング・ショットを見せてにQ |
| 075 | 068 | | 森口博子 | バラドル生き残り組として、次世代の山田邦子となるか。 |
| 076 | 056 | | 清水美砂 | 不倫、愛人役をやらせたらこの年齢の女優さんはNo.1出るものアシ！ |
| 077 | 075 | | 永井美奈子 | アナドルの王冠を歩み続ける。後を追うのは誰だ。 |
| 078 | 067 | | 星田ユキ | せっかく女優として大成するかに見えたが、彼女は自らの変を選んだ？ |
| 079 | 082 | ★△ | 田中律子 | ドラマも快調だし、OFも好調。判てる倒としては得よりだ。 |
| 080 | 198 | ▲ | 浅野温子 | やはりさすがだなあ。 |
| 081 | 097 | △ | 川合千尋 | 最近やや疲労感。モデルとしては活躍中だが、TVの露出をもっと欲しいニャア。 |
| 082 | 104 | △ | 松本明子 | 「進め電波少年」ますます好調。パワフルで何よりだ。 |
| 083 | 083 | | 大神いずみ | 日テレ期待のアナドル、どこまで先輩の水野さんに肉迫するか？ |
| 084 | 074 | ★ | 小泉今日子 | 1年半に1回のドラマ出演。もはやマイペースで皇々としたもんだ。 |
| 085 | 080 | | 角田智美 | もっとTVに出て欲しいけど、学業優先みたいだからなあ…。 |
| 086 | 126 | △ | 横山めぐみ | 「人間・失格」は明後ってた。野島脚本ではバイプレイヤーとして定着だ。 |
| 087 | 064 | | 鷲尾いさ子 | とりあえずOFは相変わらずの好調ぶり。またドラマでお会いしたいっス。 |
| 088 | 077 | | 相楽晴子 | 演技力には定評アリ。それを生かすドラマに出てちょーだい。 |
| 089 | 092 | | 山口リエ | いい意味でも悪い意味でも典型的アイドル街道爆進中。 |
| 090 | 124 | △ | 篠原涼子 | 歌も大ヒットで、せっかく表紙なのにこの順位でいいのか！ と言う編集長。 |
| 091 | 111 | | 渋谷琴乃 | 抜かく期待もあることだし、シリアスな面も発せてほしいなあ。 |
| 092 | 125 | △ | 千堂あきほ | 歌もいいけど、やっぱりドラマかなあ。 |
| 093 | 078 | ★ | 夏川結衣 | ムうやくヒロイン役に抜擢。ここで真価が問われるところ。 |
| 094 | 061 | | 吉田真希子 | 最近髪を切って良くなった気がする。バラエティ以外の番組に進出して欲しい。 |
| 095 | 081 | ☆ | 田中広子 | 今度のドラマは子持ちのバツイチ役だそうだが、お仕事順調で何より。 |
| 096 | 098 | | 辺見えみり | 意外な両親を持つ血統の良さはダテじゃない。歌も上手い、演技力はグッド。 |
| 097 | 109 | ★△ | 今村雅美 | ドラマのレギュラーも決まったので、じっくり見させていただきます。 |
| 098 | 072 | | 菊池あゆみ | この人こそ、ナイスバディを徹底的に武器とするべし！ |
| 099 | 091 | | 小島奈津子 | フジ若手アナの中では超期待株だったんだけどなあ…。 |
| 100 | 113 | | 伊牟田麻矢 | ムシューダのCFだけじゃ物足りない、というロリコン支持層の声。 |

**Figure 23. A sample pop-idol ranking chart with profiles and stories from the October 19, 1994 issue of *Takarajima* (p.44).**

Emperors and Reigning Empresses

| Number in traditional count | Sovereign | Birth and death dates | Reign dates | Year of enthronement |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Jimmu | | | |
| 2 | Suizei | | | |
| 3 | Annei | | | |
| 4 | Itoku | | | |
| 5 | Kōshō | | | |
| 6 | Kōan | | | |
| 7 | Kōrei | | | |
| 8 | Kōgen | legendary emperors | | |
| 9 | Kaika | | | |
| 10 | Sujin | | | |
| 11 | Suinin | | | |
| 12 | Keikō | | | |
| 13 | Seimu | | | |
| 14 | Chūai | | | |
| 15 | Ōjin | late 4th to early 5th century | | |
| 16 | Nintoku | | | |
| 17 | Richū | first half of the 5th century | | |
| 18 | Hanzei | | | |
| 19 | Ingyō | | | |
| 20 | Ankō | mid-5th century | | |
| 21 | Yūryaku | | | |
| 22 | Seinei | | | |
| 23 | Kenzō | latter half of the 5th century | | |
| 24 | Ninken | | | |
| 25 | Buretsu | | | |
| 26 | Keitai | | | |
| 27 | Ankan | first half of the 6th century | | |
| 28 | Senka | | | |
| 29 | Kimmei | 509–571 | 531 or 539 to 571 | |
| 30 | Bidatsu | 538–585 | 572–585 | |
| 31 | Yōmei | ?–587 | 585–587 | |
| 32 | Sushun | ?–592 | 587–592 | |
| 33 | Suiko | 554–628 | 593–628 | |
| 34 | Jomei | 593–641 | 629–641 | |
| 35 | Kōgyoku[1] | 594–661 | 642–645 | |
| 36 | Kōtoku | 597–654 | 645–654 | |
| 37 | Saimei | 594–661 | 655–661 | |
| 38 | Tenji | 626–672 | 661–672 | 668 |
| 39 | Kōbun | 648–672 | 672 | |
| 40 | Temmu | ?–686 | 672–686 | 673 |
| 41 | Jitō | 645–703 | 686–697 | 690 |
| 42 | Mommu | 683–707 | 697–707 | |

**Figure 24. A chart showing the history of imperial reign from Kodansha's *Japan: An Illustrated Encyclopedia* (1993:337).**

**Figure 25. An example of pop-idol genealogy from the July 15, 1995 issue of *Bejeans***

Or, was it a hundred?" Thus, the members compared different pop-idols or idol-groups, evaluating their social, economic and historical statuses to the best of their knowledge.

Sitting next to them, I was discussing with another idol-fan his preferences between different types of pop-idols. This fan distinguished first between solo and group, devaluing the latter as worthless. He said there was no point in adoring idol-groups because they are *kikaku-mono* (lit. "planned thing"), by which he meant groups whose members were put together under a certain concept of marketing. I asked what was wrong with it, to which he replied, "In these cases, the producers' concepts inevitably precede personal qualities. This goes against my belief in the principle of pop-idol production, which is to put heart [*kokoro*] into nurturing each of the young candidates as an individual personality."

Putting heart into doing something has an important implication in Japanese culture. Japanese often make moral judgments in accordance with the presence or absence of sincere motives toward others. A culturally emphasized notion, the morality of *kokoro* or *magokoro* (lit. "true heart") supports the Japanese sense of social obligation. Heartedness signifies the pure self, which is identified, morally, as sincere, selfless and altruistic -- vis-a-vis the impure self which is identified with pursuit of selfish interest (Lebra 1976:162; 1986:364). From this standpoint, I thought that the idol fan to whom I was talking tried to devalue idol-groups socially and culturally because they exposed commercial interests, rather than the producers' willingness to provide careful attention to the performers' personal development.

Before long, other idol-fans joined our conversation, and we developed a heated discussion on the topic, "Is there a royal road to pop-idol marketing?" The fan to whom I was originally talking insisted upon his view that pop-idol production had to focus on human development rather than the pursuit of commercial interests. However, another fan said that there was no royal road to idol marketing. Other fans replied to this, expressing their mixed feelings about

the issue. Subsequently, the topic of our conversation shifted from preferences based on idol types to that based on the details of existing idol-personalities. In the end, everyone enjoyed the debate on pop-idol appropriation, just as they would enjoy appropriating history by identifying what is good and what is bad in the tales of struggle over some territorial power. Such a debate was a common occurrence in meetings held by other pop-idol research groups. In these meetings, some fans frequently brought new, inspiring references on idol taxonomies, providing other members with points of entry into the field of pop-idol contestation.

### *Creation Stories*

Ambitious pop-idols and promotion agencies situated themselves in a constant rivalry against each other, and competition over winning prestige always centered around the politics of stylistic differentiation in which actors tried to develop their own trade-mark. Some of these trademarks such as sexy idol were visually oriented; while others like pure-type were based on personal qualities, and still others such as idol actors emphasized their acting skills. There were also child actors whose age ranged between eight and thirteen.

Oscar Promotion, Inc., with its emphasis on the idea of beauty (*bi*), established its territory, known today as the "kingdom of 1,300 beauty queens," in the field of idol-production by promoting a series of idolized fashion-models since 1970. Sei'ichi Koga, the president of this agency, describes his cause for creating this agency in an article that looks back at its 25 years of history. His mission was to develop a new beauty standard by inhabiting the space created by the gap between what he considered to be the developed beauty-standard of the West on one hand, and the backward beauty-standard of Japan on the other. As Koga elaborates:

> [During the 50 post-war years,] Japanese beauty has been rarely recognized in international beauty contests as well as the worlds of cinema and fashion. This indicates the fact that Japanese beauty has not reached the global level. If the

> entertainment industry is... the 'industry of dreams', I thought that [people who work in it] must have a sense of beauty that can be compared to that of Europe and North America, nations that champion our dreams... That is why I started Oscar Promotion... In Europe and North America, it was becoming a common practice for fashion-models to... perform in movies, stage, and television programs. In Japan, however, there hasn't been a place for fashion-models to expand their activities as actors or singers. Thus, I started Oscar Promotion... as a producing system to create stars out of fashion-models. The business strategy [we used] to establish this system was... to send high-quality campaign girls to various image-up campaigns that became a popular practice among corporations in the 1970s... Subsequently, these girls developed a wide range of talent activities, and became the first star-talents who grew out of fashion-models in Japan as they won recognition not only as visual models, but also as talented performers (Koga 1996:116).

This suggests that there should be the recognition of the Japanese sense of beauty in its own right, rather than the expectation that the Western standard of beauty should be the one that prevails. Koga's agency has been trying to initiate such recognition through the production and popularization of a new idol-relic. The Oscar's recent master-model, Kumiko Gotō (who debuted in 1987), was advertised as *kokumin-teki bishōjo* or the "nation's beautiful girl," creating a public sensation. The agency reacted by holding annual "beautiful girl" (*bishōjo*) audition contests that attracted thousands of applicants each year.

Johnny's was an agency that became successful since its emergence in 1967 by focusing exclusively on the production of young male pop-idols. Their first product was a group by the name of *Four Leaves* (1967-1978), whose popularity lasted through the next decade. This agency has dominated the male side of the Japanese idol market ever since, producing a stream of big names over the years. Johnny's big names included individuals such as Hiromi Go (who debuted in 1972) and Toshihiko Tahara (who debuted in 1979), as well as groups such as *Hikaru Genji* (1987-1993, named after a playboy character of the royal family in the classic of Japanese literature, *Genji Monogatari* or *The Tale of Genji*, published in the early 12th century) and *SMAP* (that debuted in 1993). These pop-idols and idol-groups appealed to thousands of

young female fans. The ultimate message to be delivered by these performers and their promoters was that each of them was considered unique and had high potential vis-a-vis others.

Yoshiharu Noda was a president of an emergent promotion agency, Yellow Cab, Ltd. (founded in 1980), and his trademark was "large-breast pop-idols" (*kyonyū aidoru*). Over the past fifteen years, his career involved producing such popular figures as Shinobu Horie (1984-1987), Reiko Kato (who debuted in 1990), Fumie Hosokawa (who debuted in 1992), and Akiko Hinagata (who debuted in 1995). These personalities repeatedly appeared in magazines and television commercials in bikinis (figure 26).[4] Upon his kind reply to my interview request, Noda explained to me concisely about his reasons for developing this particular style. He said,

> In the past, there were two types of performances in Japanese show business involving young female performers: the white type and the pink type. The white ones, called pop-idols, sold the images of purity. They were publicly adorable for their 'cute and healthy' images, as you know. On the contrary, pink ones, called porn actresses, sold their nudity... to satisfy men's sexual desires. Considered obscene, their performances were limited to mature audiences. For most pop-idols, appearing in bikinis was as far as they would go in terms of exposing their bodies in public space -- albeit shamefully. My idea, then, was to develop a new style that would fit between these two categories. I wanted to nurture [young female] performers who could attract greater numbers of people. I wanted to transform these performers gradually, from a physically exposed personality that appears in bikinis and appeals to boys to an experienced actor who can impress people of both sexes and all ages. Since there has been a strong emphasis on motherhood in Japan, I recruited young women who I thought could symbolize Japan's future motherhood. Thus came those with large breasts, the glamorous symbol of motherhood. As the Japanese saying goes, to be big is to be good. So, I wanted to capture people's attention with a big symbol of motherhood in producing female actors.

Thus, Noda justified his cause for bringing in a new style into the idol-market in an attempt to make his agency's name. In the struggle for social recognition, certain concepts, or pseudo-concepts, are produced as practical classifying tools that create similarities and differences by naming them (Bourdieu 1993:106). In Noda's case, "large breast" is one such concept that

**Figure 26. The front cover of Shogakkan's comic special, *Hina Ni Mune-Kyun* (*In Love with Hina*), where Akiko Hinagata (nicknamed "Hina") appears in a bikini; this book tells the success story of Hinagata and Yellow Cab, led by Noda, in an animated form.**

helped him create a new position beyond the positions presently occupied in the market, namely cute-idols and porn stars, in the avant-garde.

I pointed out, somewhat suspiciously, that the large breast style he is advocating might become a subject of critique due to the existing public norms about sexuality. Noda confidently replied that although the style he developed surprised people in the beginning, they eventually got used to it in the end. However these people thought, they made the performers famous by talking about them. Apparently, the large breast style became an instrument of the mass-motivating tactic. Noda added to this:

> Things become problematic when one does it secretly or thoughtlessly. When you are reasonable, and are capable of demonstrating your reason to the audience, you will eventually be able to convince the public. In my experience, that's the way [Japanese] people are in general.

Indeed, Horie (who passed away of cancer in 1987), Kato, Hosokawa, and Hinagata all turned out to have successful careers, and they subsequently performed in dramas and movies.

A busy promoter, Noda was on the move constantly. My first meeting with him took place in a hotel cafe during the time of his coffee break. This was interrupted by a call, however, only to be retrieved upon my second request to get together two weeks later. When I arrived the second time, Noda was giving instructions to his assistant on his cell telephone. Working papers were spread across the large table he occupied in the cafe in which there were profiles of candidates in bikinis. As I peeped into these profiles looking curiously, Noda told me that they were performers of the new generation, and that he was running around many offices of event organizers and record companies to advertise them.

In his study of product development, an advertisement consultant Nobuyoshi Umezawa contends that there are conceptual and artistic sides to all items designed for consumption. The former refers to how much an item can stimulate the wants of the consumers, and the latter

refers to how well it can satisfy the consumers and make them feel that they want more (Umezawa 1984). The field of idol-production is full of concepts developed by promotion agencies in order to differentiate themselves from coexisting others; and producers are constantly seeking individuals that meet these concepts. Eminent styles evolve when performers, backed up by inspiring concepts, manage to perform well and develop themselves into marketable personalities.

## Strategies and Techniques of Idol-Promotion

### *Criteria of Marketability*

In the competitive world of consumer capitalism, the survival of pop-idols depends on how much she or he can continue to attract people and sell her or his images. Most of the agencies and media institutions with which I came into contact conducted consumer surveys, known commonly as *tarento kōkando tesuto* or "talent likability test." This examined which pop-idol (or a talent from any other genre) is favored by the audience and why.

In the process of investigating how pop-idol popularity is measured by respective agencies, I met Masanobu Naito, a producer who worked at Dentsū Corporation. Dentsū is a leading advertising agency in Japan that performs as a matchmaker between promotion agencies (that offer talents) and marketing corporations (that hire talents selectively in advertisements to heighten the image of advertised products). In our meeting, Naito showed me a pile of materials that related to the research he conducted in 1993 and 1994, which he thought, may be of some use for my research. The project aimed to index the popularity of existing female pop-idols, identify the components of their popularity, and create a formula that could predict the marketability of newcomers for advertising purposes.

What distinguished Naito's research from others was his focus on producers' needs rather than consumers' demands. He explains in the opening of his research report:

> Projects that seek to determine how well talents appeal to the average majority of consumers... are certainly important and necessary for those who take part in advertisement. However, relying solely on such a greatest-common-measure can be problematic because: 1) it drives all corporations to choose any talent as long as she or he is popular and this may lead to tedious recruitment programming; and 2) the balance of power between advertisers and talents may become skewed to the talents' side, creating situations in which a) advertisements set off talents without contributing to the successful advertising of products, and b) the appearance of celebrated talents in a variety of advertisements may reduce the efficiency of individual advertisement. In either of these cases, corporations will have to suffer from sacrificing a high contract fee without getting much in return (Naito 1994:1).

Naito's intention here was to shift his advertisement-research perspective from that oriented in consumer taste to that which takes more of producers' insights and perceptions into account. In his view, the over-adoption of existing celebrities in advertisement discourages the creativity of advertisers. Driven by this cause, Naito conducted interviews with 20 individuals he called "professionals" who handled talented performers on a daily basis, and examined their perceptions of talent marketability in advertisement. Participants included presidents of promotion agencies, directors of television stations, producers of record companies, publishing agents, freelance writers, and advertising agents. Through an elaborate statistical analysis, Naito tried to postulate what he called an "objective measure to judge the latent ability of performers" (1994:4).

Despite the use of technical terms, detailed charts and diagrams, Naito's study did not strike me as something more than a survey in which he and his team of professionals ranked 250 female pop-idols of their choice, and then classified into three categories using Umezawa's criteria. These categories included "stars," who can be hired [for advertisements] any time because of their excellence in both concept and performance, "fire-crackers," who should be

hired with reserve because of their excellence in concept but obscurity in performance, and "slow-starters," who will slowly and gradually develop their popularity due to their excellence in performance. Above all, I had a problem accepting his decontextualied account of so-called talent marketability that, after all, did not consider the very claim it made against other studies: the relationship between talents and *advertised commodities* in each case. Nevertheless, his research pointed out three conventional elements that are considered important by the professionals for promoting pop-idols. These, in Naito's words, are: providing something "unexpected" (*hen*), which gives the viewers an impression that the actor is unusual, "tempting" (*waku*), which would charm the opposite sex, and "able to induce" (*do*), which would lead the public appealing to certain value(s) that they find inspiring.

The three aspects identified by Naito were apparent in many television commercials, a notable example of which is a lip-stick commercial that featured Takuya Kimura, a well-celebrated male pop-idol and the member of a popular idol-group, *SMAP*. In this television commercial, produced by a leading cosmetic company Kanebō as part of its spring 1996 campaign, Kimura appears naked in bed, covered in a white sheet, awakened by the touch of hand that just colored his lip red with the lip-stick. Traces of his struggle against this forceful hand during sleep are signified by red lines on his cheek. Accompanying street posters featured Kimura, bedecked in long hair and red lips, facing the viewers. The poster highlights Kimura's face as well as the advertised product (figure 27).

The unexpectability of this advertisement, at least in part, is due to the implied trans-sexualization of Kimura's gender identity. His image surprised people when they first saw it because, as one informant puts it, "they thought that Kimura, who is a handsome young man, had turned into a woman!" This switch in the female subject of the male gaze into making the male the subject of gaze is unexpected not so much because Kimura turned female, but rather

**Figure 27. A Kanebo lip-stick poster featuring Takuya Kimura.**

because the expected gender message was inverted. Kimura was slotted into what has conventionally been a female position, reversing the existing gender patterning.

The temptability of Kimura was quite apparent from a well-known fashion magazine survey, conducted in 1995, that ranked him number one among all male pop-idols in terms of "who young women want to sleep with the most." The message advocating the power of the lipstick -- that could transform the beauty of one of the most adored and handsome pop-idols in the country -- induced a large number of female consumers. It captured the attention of a news reporter from *Yomiuri Shinbun* who, in the March 21, 1996 issue, quoted:

> Kanebō adopted Takuya Kimura from the popular group *SMAP* in its spring campaign, creating a sensation. Thanks to the "Takuya Kimura effect," 2.5 million units of the lipstick named "Testimo II" were sold in two weeks since the campaign's opening on February 16. This is so far the top sales record in [the history of] the company's campaign. The campaign, which overturned the common assumption that women are the main actors [for lipstick commercials], developed when an executive director of the company... happened to ride on the same bullet train with Kimura. Being surprised by the craze created by female fans in the train as well as the station yard, the director arranged to hire Kimura in a hurry.

This quote itself is a good indicator of Kimura's strength in all three aspects of talent popularity: the reporter confirms that Kimura, an attractive male pop-idol, impressed the audience with the image of the advertised lipstick by overturning gender expectations. Thus, the director's attempt to surprise, sexually attract, and lead the public in the creation of beautiful life was recognized as successful.

### *The Nori-P Phenomenon*

How, then, are pop-idols promoted to meet the demands of both the industry and the consumers, or the realms of cultural production as well as consumption? Masahisa Aizawa, the

vice-president of Sun Music Productions, told me that the strategic dynamic of idol-production can be compared to creating a kingdom headed by a pop-idol. He said,

> A good kingdom excels [others] in technology and leadership. The skilful use of technology can cultivate things that can enrich the livelihood of people, while good leadership is necessary to create solidarity among the people. A kingdom is not built in one day, so one must take time to activate a series of constructive events and earn people's recognition and trust. A kingdom is not possible, either, unless the king or queen and her or his supporting staff have talents and powers that enable them to earn the people's recognition and trust. When they cannot hold people together, the kingdom will collapse sooner of later.

This quote relates to the general emphasis on long-term planning and long-term relationships in Japanese corporate institutions. The continued existence of the firm is idealized in many Japanese companies, as well as the continued existence of workers in the firm, developing especially in large enterprises systems such as lifetime employment and long-term bank-firm relationships. On one hand, lifetime employment, coupled with hierarchical promotion, motivates workers to work hard consistently. On the other hand, long-term bank-firm relationships allow the continuous monitoring and adjustment of business management (e.g., Aoki 1990, quoted in Ito 1992:369). The pop-idol industry also does this by trying to develop a long-term promotion system, which in principle enables successful candidates to grow and benefit the industry on a long-term basis. With this preface, Aizawa elaborated on how he went about promoting Noriko Sakai, one of the top-selling pop-idols in Japan as well as other Asian countries.

Sakai was one of several hundred applicants who took the agency's annual audition contest. Aizawa explained, "She did not make it to the final, but I saw a potential in her. She was very small, cute, and had an unusually lively, 'burst open' kind of image that caught my attention. I thought it would be worth promoting her to see how far she could go. Now that I look back, it was a right decision on my part." He stressed his decision to adopt Sakai in the agency's

meeting and arranged a trip to Fukuoka City in Kyushu Island to bring Sakai back to Tōkyō. In order to draw out the liveliness in Sakai and mould it into a marketable personality, Aizawa and his newly organized staff -- who belonged exclusively to Sakai for promoting her -- issued a debut campaign.

In Aizawa's view, the popular-cultural scene at the time of Sakai's debut was dominated by women in their 20s, who included university students and office workers. Emergent feminist movements, which led, on the one hand, to the promulgation of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOL) in 1985, extended, on the other, to the realm of popular culture. This created phenomena such as Juliana boom, where young women above the legal drinking age gathered in large discotheque-bars to dance up on high-stages in showy costumes. Their buzzword was "Express yourself!" The fashion industry and the media facilitated this trend by highlighting tight, fancy styles of dress which they called "body-conscious fashion" (*bodikon fashion*).

Aizawa's goal was to promote "a new style of identity for younger boys and girls headed by a cute, 16-year old Sakai" that can equal in strength the established youth culture led by elder women. He also told me that the so-called "junior market," involving children whose age ranged between six and fifteen, was considered a significant source of investment in Japan during the 1980s. There is a research estimate of as much as 10-trillion yen in gross product (a large portion of which came from allowances and savings). In Aizawa's view, attracting at least a portion of this segment of the population with a new style was not a bad idea.[5]

Given this socioeconomic background, Aizawa exercised his strategy for promoting Sakai, the first of which was to highlight Sakai's child-friendly image by making her an advocate of child-like handwriting and slang. The former refers to an unusually round handwriting that altered the shape from a previously vertical, stroke-oriented Japanese script. The original forms

of this handwriting developed among high school students in the 1970s. The latter has to do with the deliberately mispronounced speech-style mimicking the speech of a toddler incapable of adult pronunciation. Aizawa's cultural strategy was to entitle Sakai to these existing popular culture items representing infantile cuteness and innocence, make them Sakai's trademarks, and thereby establish Sakai as an adorable leader of her generation.

Apparently, one of the first things Sakai did after making her debut in 1987 was to invent her own infantile speech-style that became known as *noripiigo*. *Noripiigo* is literally translated as "*noripii* language," in which *noripii* is a cute characterization of Sakai's first name, Noriko. The transformation from Noriko to Noripii (later inscribed as "Nori-P") would be the equivalent of transformation in names from, say, Marcela to Marcelita in Spanish, or Tom to Tommy in English. In *noripiigo,* words such as *kanashii* (sad) and *ureshii* (happy) were altered into *kanappi* and *ureppi*, respectively. New words such as *mamosureppi* (very happy) were invented (Kinsella 1995:225). Sakai appeared on television and used these forms as a part of her stylized promotion. *Noripiigo*, inscribed in rounded characters appeared with her cute images in a vast quantity of magazines and comic books. Even a dictionary called *Noripiigo Jiten* was published from one of the major publishers, Shōgakkan in 1989.

Aizawa and his company had no demographic data demonstrating the success of this promotion campaign. Aizawa himself did not know how many children and young adults adopted *noripiigo* and Sakai-style handwriting in their everyday life. He did tell me, however, how excited he and his staff were when they saw *noripiigo* appear as an item in an annually published dictionary, *Gendai-Yōgo No Kiso-Chishiki* (*The Basic Knowledge of Contemporary Terminology*). This, according to Aizawa, convinced them of Sakai's success in terms of cultural influence. Indeed, Sakai's rise to popularity during this period is indicated by her

continuous appearance in some of the nation's pop-music countdown programs such as *The Best Ten* and *The Top Ten.*

According to Yamane (1990), child-like language such as *noripiigo* created a teen craze and developed into a vital form of popular culture through the 1980s. Following this view, Kinsella (1995) observes:

> The spread of cute-style handwriting was one element of a broader shift in Japanese culture that took place between the mid-1960s and the mid-1970s in which vital popular culture, sponsored and processed by the new fashion, retail, mass-media, and advertising industries, began to push traditional arts and crafts and strictly regulated literary and artistic culture to the margins of society. At the same time as Japanese youth began to debase written Japanese, infantile slang words began to spread across the nation -- typically coming into high-school vogue for only a few months before becoming obsolete again... There are... a few examples of deliberately contrived childish speech such as *norippigo* [sic.] officially invented by pop-idol Sakai Noriko, alias Nori P..., [which] consisted of changing the last syllable of common adjectives into a *pi* sound (Kinsella 1995:224,225).

Thus, Kinsella acknowledges the contribution that chubby handwriting and *noripiigo* made to the construction of popular culture at large. Kinsella further suggests that this and other forms, such as child-like fashion, represented a female-led youth subculture that refused to cooperate with the established social norms. Young people who participated in this subculture celebrated physical appearances and social attitudes that contributed to the creation of adolescent utopia in an affluent socioeconomic environment -- where young people could be liberated from the filthy world of adult politics (1995:220). Aizawa's intention, as demonstrated above, confirms and specifies this point in terms of the symbolically competitive positioning of junior adolescents against young adults.

Strategies for promoting Sakai did not end in language, however. The staff invented a cute, animated figure, supposedly invented by Sakai herself, called *Nori-P chan*, and collaborated with Glico, Inc., Japan's leading confectionery industry, to commercialize chocolates and ice-

creams featuring *Nori-P chan*. They further created franchise stores called *Nori-P Land* in various amusement parks across the country. People could visit there to eat *Nori-P candies*, or buy T-shirts, stuffed toys, stationery, and other goods related to Sakai and her alternate ego *Nori-P chan* for souvenirs (see figure 12). Seeing success in all of these areas, the promotional staff organized a fan club whose members were called *Nori-P zoku* or "*Nori-P* tribe." Monthly newsletters were published to celebrate Sakai as well as advertise her activities; and aside from her regularly produced songs, the so-called *Nori-P chorus* (*Nori-P ondo*) was released by a record company, Toshiba, to which she belonged.

In effect, *Nori-P* became one of the nation's most adorable personalities of the late 1980s. Male university students considered her as their ideal little sister, while members of her generation regarded her as their adorable colleague. Those younger than her treated her as their ideal elder sister. Apparently, these terms relate to the idea of fictive kinship. Kinship terms are extended in Japanese speech to all kinds of people in order to enhance empathetic identity (Suzuki 1976). The use of relational terms, such as "big sister" (*oneesan*), "big brother" (*oniisan*), "mother" (*okaasan*), and "father" (*otōsan*) outside family contexts is found in groups of traditional female entertainers (*geisha*), organized crime groups (*yakuza*), and artisan communities (e.g., Dalby 1983; Seymour 1996). Such a use allowed the users to establish sociological kinship as a means to strengthen or maintain social bonds among members who are not originally related by blood.

This strategic mechanism shows how producers, as part of their stylistic promotion, link the personal qualities of the young performer with a wider social issue or cultural climate, enabling the image of the performer to be marketed as a role model through the stages of personal development. What I failed to examine in reviewing this dynamic with Aizawa, however, was how this development of the self was perceived by Sakai herself. This examination, I thought,

would offer answers to some of the important anthropological research issues on identity formation that takes place in capitalist institutional settings: the advantages and disadvantages of transforming oneself into a popular personality; whether the performers have a sense of self-control; the extent to which they can exercise power; whether they become disillusioned by the image fabricated by the institution to which they belong; and the way in which they negotiate public image with image-makers. My failure to answer these questions by approaching Sakai was partly due to the tremendously busy working schedule of Sakai -- the official reason provided by the agency that was known for the protection of its talents' images against their constructions by outsiders.

### *Becoming an Idol-Like Personality*

One way for me to handle these research problems regarding the strategic process of myth-making was to experience the process myself -- to be produced as a differentiated figure in the field of symbolic production. The chance was brought to me by Akio Nakamori, who took pleasure in promoting unique individuals within the range of his power and network of people. Some of these individuals were talked about in columns that Nakamori held in popular magazines. I met Nakamori in the summer of 1995 at an audition contest where both he and I participated as judges who evaluated idol candidates. Nakamori knew my name from the article published in the July 9, 1995 issue of *Sunday Mainichi* which outlined the content of my pop-idol research project which I presented in a press conference.

### *Being Recruited*

In our first short conversation that took place during a lunch break, we introduced ourselves and shared some of our thoughts about pop-idols and the Japanese entertainment industry.

When I expressed the need to gather ethnographic data that would allow me to examine idol performances as contemporary symbolic rituals, Nakamori said he would provide me with any support that he could. Later, I invited Nakamori to my research base, an old wooden house of my relative that I called "Laboratory for Research in Cultural Idology." After a long chat in which I told him more about my research, Nakamori requested me to take part in his idol-promotion program. "I want to make you an idol!" he said to my surprise.

### *Being Transformed from Researcher to Idol-Like Personality*

A columnist who wrote about popular culture in one of the nation's most widely distributed weekly magazines *SPA!*, Nakamori held a meeting with his regular publishing staff and discussed producing my public image. The image he envisioned of me was that of an "idol professor" (*aidoru hakase*) who came to Japan from a Canadian academic wonderland to analyze pop-idols. Then, one of his staff-members called me to confirm my participation. There was a cultural play here in that I was Japanese, presented as a curious import from Canada, which raises a more general issue of cultural presentation and identity-formation in Japanese mass media. For instance, Creighton (1995) indicates that foreigners are frequently adopted in Japanese advertisements to reinforce the idea of Japaneseness. Foreigners, particularly Caucasians, are considered both as the bearers of highly valued innovation and style as well as violators of traditional Japanese norms and etiquette. Their depictions in advertisements fit into Japanese advertising images of fantasy, where one can become personally carefree and innovative for the sacrifice of the traditional emphasis on maintaining the status quo. In providing representations of foreigners as fantastic outsiders who contrast with Japanese images of themselves, Japanese advertisers highlight the distinguishing features believed to define the Japanese. In doing so, they reinforce collective self-identity for Japanese (Creighton 1995:136;

see also Ohnuki-Tierney 1987; Brannen 1992). In my case, however, someone Japanese was transformed into the exotic who is more expert on Japanese than Japanese, and who can possibly innovate the existing perceptions on Japanese pop-idols and their sociocultural importance.

This positioning of mine in relation to the cultural self and other is similar to the advertising technique used in the 1984 *Exotic Japan* campaign of the Japan National Railways. *Exotic Japan* was a mass-mediated campaign designed to enhance the popularity of domestic tourism. In her analysis of posters used in this campaign, Ivy (1988) indicates that the phrase *Exotic Japan* (pronounced in Japanese fashion as *ekizochikku Japan*) is written in *katakana*, the script used to transcribe foreign words. The goal was to represent Japan as if it had been interjected as the foreign, non-native, or something that entered from the outside. Since place names that are written in *katakana* are by definition not Japanese, *ekizochikku Japan* establishes Japan as non-Japanese seen through Japanese eyes on the level of script (1988:25,26). At the same time, *Exotic Japan* invokes the stereotypical image of Japan as seen through the eyes of outsiders (especially English-speaking Westerners): visions of the triumvirate of the Japanese exotic such as geisha, cherry trees, and Fuji-yama (the Western mispronunciation of *Fuji-san*, Mt. Fuji). In doing so, the message appropriates Japan from the perspective of a foreigner looking at Japan, while the inscription indicates the subject position of a Japanese looking at the foreign. Ivy argues that this movement of self-exotication turns any claim to self-identity into a claim for radical alterity. What is considered to be identical is set apart and imagined as non-comparable, and therefore different (1988:26). In the story-making campaign launched by Nakamori, this same movement was applied, transforming my image into something exotic, different, unusual, and therefore interesting.

According to the way things happen in the hierarchy of Japanese mass media, when a writer proposes to write about a celebrity, a staff member from the publisher takes the issue to the editor-in-chief, who in turn discusses the issue with higher authorities. Once permission is granted, the staff-member reports to the agency to which the celebrity in question belongs. Once the consent is obtained from the agency, an interview schedule is arranged. The writer interviews the celebrity and produces a rough draft of the article on the basis of obtained information, while staff members, in consultation with the writer and copywriter, design the layout of the article and calculate the number of words to be written.

The ability to convince people plays a significant part here. Compliments and encouraging comments are frequently made by the writer to convince the publisher, or the publishing staff to convince the talent and her or his agency in question. In my case, the staff member who called me said, "Nakamori-*san* thinks that you are really extraordinary. He says you are a star who turned up like a shiny comet, and he is willing to promote you all the way this year! We really look forward to seeing you take part in our project! Could you give us your most serious consideration?" Having no reason to reject, I told him that it would be my pleasure to participate.

An interview was scheduled at my residence, and Nakamori showed up with his assistant, Kazuhiro Yoshimura (a pseudonym). I, on the other hand, asked Toshio Fujiwara, my first key informant, to be my agent who would supervise me on how to go about being produced. Given his expertise in the entertainment world, I thought Fujiwara would be an appropriate manager for me. He kindly agreed and came to the meeting that day. After briefly introducing ourselves to each other, Nakamori started to explain the main point of his project. He said,

> I am going to produce Aoyagi-*san* because I thought his unique personal quality and his research topic would have a great appeal to many readers [of our magazine *SPA!*]. I'm going to make him the first star-scientist to ever touch on

> the subject of pop-idols! This will be a sensational topic for feature articles. At the same time, this will help Aoyagi-*san* develop his research contacts with a large number of people in the industry, who will surely recognize his name and make contacts easier. I am going to take a four-step approach. First, I am going to make Aoyagi-*san* jump out in my *SPA!* column, surprising the readers and making them wonder who this person is. Then, Aoyagi-*san* will outline his research project using the space of my column, attracting the reader to a unique research project that never existed before in history. Then, he will write another article providing a case study of pop-idol performances. Finally, by the time his research is finished, he will write another article that looks back to his fieldwork experiences. How does this sound?

As everyone agreed, Nakamori described how interesting my house as a place was, and that he wanted it to appear in his feature article. He, then, told Yoshimura to look around, saying:

> Look at this place -- a finely preserved, old wooden house. Such a house is becoming increasingly rare in a city like Tōkyō! Besides, look at all the idol goods, and posters, autographs and photos on the wall. The scene demonstrates how successfully Aoyagi-*san*'s unique research on pop-idols is developing. In addition, look at the [Buddhist] alcove and the [Shintō] altar he has next to his idol posters and photos... This is just a perfect site for the feature article, don't you think?

Immediately after Nakamori made this comment, Yoshimura opened his mouth and started to provide his vision of the first article's layout. Nakamori responded to this and conversation quickly developed between the two:

Yoshimura (Y): This wall with autographs and photos can be made into a background, and we can take a picture of pop-idols standing in front of it.

Nakamori (N): Yes, but we need another one outside where they stand by the garden gate...

Y: That's two photos there, and...

N: We have to make this house the subject, not pop-idols.

Y: Yes, that's right. I wonder who would be appropriate to bring here.

Following this exchange, Nakamori decided to arrange for some pop-idols to participate in a photo shot. When Yoshimura started to propose many possible scenes that could be considered, Nakamori interrupted and said, "Well, we've only got 15 minutes or so for photographing.

Besides, Shinoyama-*sensei* has the final say on what scenes to shoot. Just give him the rough idea of this house's layout."

I listened quietly as Nakamori and Yoshimura negotiated their plan to put me in what I thought was *Nakamori Bunka Shinbun* (*Nakamori Culture Newspaper*), a three-page, black-and-white column that appeared in *SPA!* where Nakamori discussed popular culture issues every other week. Realizing, however, that they were planning something much more serious when I heard them utter the name of Kishin Shinoyama, Japan's leading photographer whose many works featured female pop stars, I panicked and interrupted their fast-flowing conversation. I asked, "Please wait a minute! Are you talking here about putting me on the cover-page where Kishin Shinoyama demonstrates his artistic photos of some of the most celebrated people in Japan?" Looking astounded, all three people around me started to laugh at my ignorance. Nakamori said, "What did you think it was that we are discussing here? You are going to appear on the front page!" "But you said I was going to write in your column," I replied. Nakamori followed and said, "No, no, no. That's from the second stage. We're going to do the front page first."

Overwhelmed by its magnitude, I expressed my hesitation to participate. I strongly felt that I was not qualified to appear in the most prestigious magazine-space of all to be reserved for chosen celebrities, and not a common student like myself. I thought that once I had exposed myself in such a way, I had to prove to the readers that I was in fact an outstanding scholar. I did not think this was possible when I had not even finished a Ph.D. It was too late to pull back, however. Nakamori replied that he had already arranged an appointment with Shinoyama. To cancel it was a great offence, he said. Following Nakamori, Yoshimura said, "What are you intimidated about? You are unique. There is no question about that -- unless you are faking your identity. You are really a pop-idol researcher from Canada, aren't you?" Fujiwara followed up

on this and said, "I wondered that, too. Maybe he is just an idol-fan who wanted to approach pop-idols by pretending to be a researcher from Canada. I've seen cases where some fans fake their identities to get better access to their favorite idols. Maybe you are one of them...!" Fujiwara joked, and everyone started to laugh. I was embarrassed, and my intention to veto my appearance on the cover-page of *SPA!* was overruled.

### *Being Produced*

A week later, on October 25, 1995, nearly thirty people, including performers, managers, Nakamori and his staff, Fujiwara and myself, and, of course, Shinoyama and his crew, gathered at my residence. The first to arrive on the scene were Shinoyama's assistants, who came with equipment to set the place up for photography, followed by performers and managers. There were three rooms in the house plus a kitchen and a wash room, and I opened one of the rooms to be used as a dressing room for participating pop-idols. As for performers, one idol-group (nine members) and five individuals were present altogether. "Are we not inviting any big name?" -- when I asked Nakamori this question after his arrival, he replied, "No, they can't be here because they will have to be the center of attention if we did. Our central theme is this laboratory and you, Aoyagi-*san*, not necessarily pop-idols." This statement opened my eyes to the status of performers within the hierarchy of fame to be considered in producing feature articles. Indeed, talent, fame and power cannot be separated from each other in the world of entertainment: if you were considered talented, or you demonstrated your potential to be popular, you got a better role to play.

The sense of competition between different pop-idols as well as their agencies was expressed in the way participants interacted (or "disinteracted" to be more precise) with each other on the scene. When the performers sat shoulder to shoulder in the dressing room to do their make up,

they hardly talked to each other; and neither did their managers who stood waiting for them silently in the living room. The fact that these people kept their psychological distance from each other, and reserved openness only for those who they considered to be the event organizers or mediators (in this case Nakamori, his staff, and myself) told me how crafty they were in their attitudes towards interaction. My laboratory space was soon divided into territorial segments, and tension filled the air. As such, the site became a field of symbolic competition.

Nakamori brought a lab-coat with him and asked me to put it on. His aim was to dress me up as a scientist and make me strike a pose with my idol-specimens in one cut. He also wanted to use "Laboratory for Research in Cultural Idology" as an official name to appear in the title page of the *SPA!* article. The image of a scientist was going to be my trademark, indeed my style. "You shall be called 'idol-professor' from now on!", he exclaimed. Since all participating models were young women, I felt uncomfortable about the way my public image was being constructed. I told Nakamori that I was not really planning to look like a lunatic, or a Lolita maniac who took pleasure in objectifying, experimenting, and dissecting young female pop-idols as if they were guinea pigs. Nakamori was insistent, however. "Don't you worry," he said, "readers will know that this is part of an image-play, and they will come to understand who you are when they read your upcoming articles. Besides, you are a social scientist who came here to analyze pop-idols, aren't you?" Overcome by the will to put myself on a scientific experiment (on how the audience would react to my style), I went ahead and wore my lab-coat.

After one and a half-hour of preparation and waiting, Shinoyama arrived with his crew. A noisy house with people chatting suddenly became quiet, and everyone started to look tense in the presence of this 58 year-old legendary photographer. Shinoyama received awards in art including that from the Ministry of Education in 1973, and published best-selling photo albums such as *Silkroad*, *TŌKYŌ NUDE*, and *Santa-Fe*. *Santa Fe*, published in 1991, became a best-

selling collection of photos in which a pop-idol, Rie Miyazawa, strikes various poses, naked, in the desert landscapes of New Mexico. It created a public sensation because it was considered as the first photo-album in which a well-known pop-idol appeared naked at the height of her popularity -- where the convention has been that pop-idols appear naked only when they do not sell well. Naked images of Japanese, particularly Japanese women, appear in late-night television shows, ads, and products directly or indirectly defined as part of sex trade (*fūzoku*). Yet, nude representations of Japanese for everyday, mainstream products and businesses are not common because they are considered culturally inappropriate (Creighton 1995:137). In this sense, *Santa Fe* was sensationally challenging to the social norm at the time.

Appearing to be in a rush, the first thing Shinoyama told me when I introduced myself was that he wanted to look around the house quickly. It took him a matter of five minutes to do so. Yoshimura followed him around, adding few extra words to clarify the plan of the scene that had already been arranged (figure 28).

Taking the images proposed by Nakamori into account, Shinoyama decided to do three cuts: the first cut had a pop-idol stand by the door; the second had me sit in front of a line of idol-group members; and the third had four other pop-idols stand in the backyard of the house. He gave a few words to his assistants who then moved briskly to set up the equipment so that their master could get to work. For each of the three cuts, two to three test photos were shot. Upon shooting these test photos, Shinoyama called Nakamori and me to see whether they were okay. "What do you think, Professor!? Is this all right!?" -- he would ask me, making an overly respectful gesture, corresponding to my image-motif of being an idol-professor.

In one of the test photos, I found the model with a relatively serious expression on her face, which I thought was inappropriate because pop-idols generally smiled all the time. When I informed Shinoyama of this idea, he said, looking offended, "This Professor threw cold water

**Figure 28. Scenes from *SPA!* photographing: performers and managers wait for the action while Kishin Shinoyama inspects the layout of the site (top); members of the crew set up the scene (bottom)**

on my photography!" Those observing around us were all intimidated by the exchange. Expressing one's personal opinion before the group or to the authority is considered risky behavior in Japan, and people seldom do this without a good reason with which everyone else can eventually agree. It was apparent that I violated this rule by challenging the authority. Shinoyama, however, ordered the model to smile and quickly took another test shot. Then, he showed it to me and asked, "What about this time, Professor!? Is this what you wanted?" Considering Shinoyama to be an international-class photographer who handled English without any problem, I purposely replied to him in English saying, "I don't think I like it..." Then, just as his face was about to show anger, I added, "I love it! There's no problem!" My goal was to reflect the idea that foreigners, or *gaijin*, can get away with violating cultural norms because foreigners are not expected to be competent in the cultural norms (e.g., Creighton 1995:137). Here, code switching between two languages served as a useful strategy in expressing a mixed identity (e.g., Gumperz 1976; Auer 1998). By utilizing the method of code switching in language, which shifted my identity marker from Japanese to English, I positioned myself as if I was a foreigner who lacked the ability to communicate in a Japanese way.

My effort to compensate humorously for the tension I had created worked. Shinoyama replied, "No problem!" with a smile on his face, and everyone looked relieved. Fujiwara, who was quietly observing the situation, later said that at first he couldn't believe that I challenged Shinoyama, but was glad to know that it was a gag after all. I wondered whether Shinoyama was truly offended, to which Nakamori replied that it was no problem because I was an expatriate from Canada who could get away with violating norms anyway. Thus, on one hand, I was allowed to violate the Japanese rule, but only because, on the other, I was denied my Japanese identity.

The fruits of this event turned out in the November 15, 1995 issue of *SPA!* as the 268th part of the front-page series called *Woman catch the news*. The title I gave for my research base appeared as the heading on the first page, at the bottom of which were the profiles of me and the pop-idols who appeared in the article. The pop-idol who marketed her futuristic image was featured on this page (figure 29). I appeared as an idol-scientist in the following centerfold page that, in fact, was a composite of two photographs taken in different rooms (figure 30). This was followed by the page on which the photo taken in the back yard appeared next to a column written by Nakamori (figure 31). The column introduced me and my research in a tale-form. The excerpt below shows its mystical orientation:

> I visited him one deepening-autumn day, getting off at the Myogadani subway station and walking along the quiet neighborhood of Bunkyo district [in Tōkyō]... Next to a grassy back yard was a time-honored, isolated wooden house that was probably there for a half-century or so. When I rang the door-bell and stood there waiting, the squeaky door opened and a roaring voice that said 'Welcome'... was heard as if it arose from the bottom of the ground. A man with shiny glasses and lab-coat appeared before my eyes. As I entered the mansion guided by this man with a lab-coat, I shouted 'Wow!' in surprise. Young girls were smiling everywhere... There was a large number of pop-idol goods including photos, autographs, CDs, albums, etc.! The man was the famous idol professor, Dr. Hiroshi Aoyagi, and this was his secret pop-idol research center!! After a long talk, I excused myself and started to walk away from the research center, it was late at night... As I heard strange voices at the back, returned [to the center] with stealthy steps, and peeped between the sliding screen... Alas! One after another cute idol-girls appeared like spirits and danced joyfully, and the mad idol-scientist in his lab-coast was smiling looking satisfied! Is this a dream, reality, or illusion? Or, is this the professor's idol black magic!? When I regained my consciousness, there was only a dark back street of Myogadani... The professor's idol-research center was entirely out of sight, and there were only grasses and trees before my eyes (p.6).

This shows how Nakamori contextualized a mystical story, much like native myths and folklore, in which I was projected as a popular figure who came to Japan from an exotic land to play magic using pop-idols.

**Figure 29. The first cover-page from the November 15, 1995 issue of *SPA!***

**Figure 30. The second cover-page from *SPA!* Featuring the researcher as a "scientist"**

「アイドル博士、現る！」 Nakamori 中森明夫

私がその人を訪ねたのは深まりゆく秋のある日、地下鉄……

6

**Figure 31. The third cover-page from *SPA!* which shows a column by Akio Nakamori next to the photo of four cute-style pop-idols standing in the grassy yard.**

### *Outcomes*

It did not take long for me to see the fruits of this stylistic promotion. Within a few weeks after the article was published, I began to receive telephone calls from publishers requesting me to provide commentaries in their feature articles on pop-idols or write an essay about them. One television station contacted me to appear in a variety show, which I politely declined and asked the staff to contact me again when my dissertation was complete. When I interviewed fans, many of them asked me for my autograph. For some of them who asked me for a short quote, I wrote, "They're just pop-idols, but they are cultural symbols..." Some idol candidates, claiming to be my fans, also approached me.

Although I enjoyed being in such an adored position, I could not simply indulge in having a good time because some skeptics questioned my positioning. One day, I was approached by another individual who had been promoted by Nakamori long before me. He wanted to have a chat with me, so we went out to do what many Japanese white-collar businessmen (*sarariiman*) do in Japan, namely after-work drinking. There was nothing particularly substantial about the content of our conversation, but the man kept expressing his interest in hearing stories about my background, my research project, and how I met Nakamori and reached the point of being promoted. As conversation opened after several bottles of rice wine (*sake*), the man who had been acting reservedly until then started to reveal his true feeling. "Hearing all your stories," he said, "I think you are just a graduate student who is interested in studying pop-idols." When I replied that this was the case and asked him what he was trying to get at, he said, "Well, I suppose many people who read that article in *SPA!* would think that you are a braggart!" When I pursued his cause for making this statement, he explained that there was no reason for a student to call himself a "professor," and much less he was qualified to become a center of national attention by jumping out in one of the nation's best-selling magazines, simply because

the topic of his study was interesting. Realizing that I had become a nail that stuck out, only to be hammered down by this white-collar worker who also appeared in *SPA!*, I asked what qualification he thought he had to appear in the magazine as a "wonderman" as I did. He said he neither used his real name nor exposed his face in the article that talked about him.

When I discussed this issue with Nakamori later, he told me not to worry about it. He said that what I experienced was simply a form of jealousy, and that it was easy for many Japanese to get jealous at each other over the slightest difference -- although they themselves had "no gut to act with personal dignity." Nakamori thought that this was a negative quality of the Japanese due to the strong cultural emphasis on group conformity: "Whenever they want to express themselves, they tend to do it secretly, indirectly, or innocently. This is why Japan can never have strong leadership in international politics, you know, because Japanese are not used to expressing themselves."

Thus, as much as my appearance in *SPA!* provided me with an excellent opportunity to participate in the cultural practices of celebrities, it was a bizarre experience on my part: I became an academic turned entertainer, or the observer turned the observed. Certainly, the constructed public image of me had its roots in my personal qualities and my long-held identity as an ethnographer. Yet, my "excess value" (so to speak), which led me to earn popularity and become a marketable personality in the world of mass media, was due to the style bestowed upon me by the image-making machine. In this sense, the characterization of me as a pop-idol professor was an enforced identity rather than a quality that I could accept as part of myself.

Fabrication of image is a frequent practice in pop-idol production, and indeed it is necessary for pop-idols to embody styles, differentiate themselves from coexisting rivals, impress consumers, facilitate their marketability, and develop their career (Inamasu 1989). My own experience of becoming a unique personality that was not exactly myself indicated that I could

use it to hold a privileged position in the industry, which allowed me to have my voice heard, get jobs, and obtain a greater economic as well as symbolic capital. Elsewhere, an emergent pop-idol who has been fabricated by her agency as "an internet specialist who grew up playing with computer since she was a little child" told me that she had to study hard to acquire computer skills so that she could live up to the artificially-constructed public image (which nevertheless allowed her to play a model role in the computer market). Her skills in computer and in particular her abilities to create a home page and communicate with fans through e-mail, at the time, were compensated by the members of her promoting staff. Seen in this light, mythical stories function as a cloak used to symbolize performers and display their selves in society as meaningful commodities, whose values are auctioned by their users.

**The Arena of Symbolic Competition**

The back-stage of events involving multiple pop-idols and agencies was no place for me to conduct interviews with my informants. As much as there were clammed up mouths, there were eyes and ears that opened everywhere trying to read each others' thoughts. Should any misbehavior occur, it became the subject of subsequent gossip and criticism that, in some cases, led to scandals. Each agency protected the image of their pop-idols carefully, and the interaction between different agencies rarely took place outside of the mediation by a field overseer and her or his staff, who in turn concentrated on directing the stage performance. Partly because of their need to appear adorable, pop-idols looked relatively relaxed and friendly, and some of them talked to each other at times. Still, they were very much aware of their limits. Most of the time, they appeared innocent, indifferent, and only interested in playing their roles on stage.[6]

This tension, created by the symbolic competition between different agents of idol-performances, is not limited to the domain of production. In many events where two or more

pop-idols and/or idol-groups appear, the competition is provoked by different groups of fans and audiences as well. Yano's study of fandom in Japan shows that the very popularity of the public figure becomes defined by the devotion of the followers, and these followers make a person into a public, symbolic figure -- the star (Yano 1997:336). The fan can become a private surrogate for the star who shares vicariously in her or his fame and triumphs. As Yano indicates:

> One becomes a surrogate through internalizing the other, through empathy. The empathetic internalization is complete. In Japan a fan is she who publicly takes on the responsibilities and obligations of the star, upholding the star's image, anticipating the star's needs. Through the created bonds of surrogacy, a fan takes on the burdens (and glory) of stardom (Yano 1997:337).

By virtue of surrogacy, the contestations of style between different pop-idols in the field of production become congruous to the contestations of identity between different fans and fan-groups. As much as stylistic competition shapes and is shaped by the way performers interact with each other, it also determines and is determined by the way fans act toward one another, as well as toward their idol vis-a-vis other idols.

On a late cold afternoon, November 10, 1995, approximately 2,500 people lined up before a large hall that stood in a recreation area known by the people as Ōmiya Sonic City in Saitama prefecture, just outside of Tōkyō. The public event people came to see was a concert organized by the state's Ministry of Public Welfare, collaborated by promotion agencies and the mass media, as part of the United Nations' 10-year anti-drug campaign which began in 1991. The Ministry was particularly concerned about the recent increase in the number of drug-related problems in Japan, and they sought to advertise their campaign on the local level and educate people about the dangers of drug abuse.

I was invited to attend this event to observe the performance of the *Seifuku Kōjō Iinkai* or *School Uniform Improvement Committee*, also known as *SKI*. This idol-group emerged in 1993 as a "facilitator" (so to speak) of the high-school uniform renewal project organized by the Tōkyō-based school uniform industry, Sato Sangyō, Inc. (since 1900). In the late 1980s, the industry launched a project to renew high-school uniforms for young women under the slogan "collective beauty" (*shūdan-bi*). Uniforms have functioned as a tool by which Japanese schools and companies reinforce the value of uniformity, and the idea of collective beauty adds an element of beauty to this collective ethos of group conformity (e.g., Ōtsuka 1989; cf. Tanioka and Glaser 1991).

What started as an experiment in a few high schools became a national sensation as the project appealed to the fashion sense of female high-school students across Japan. In Tōkyō and its vicinity, many students are now known to choose their high schools in terms of how nice their uniforms are, although this may not be the *only* reason for their selection of high schools. In 1993, the industry organized *SKI* as the signifier of this trend, adopting seven young women to perform as fashion models. Eventually, the group extended their activities to the realm of idol performances, appearing on television shows, producing music CDs, and holding a series of concerts. I followed *SKI*'s activities over a period of one year. Some idol-fans criticized the group as unorthodox or amateurish, partly because the agency was interested in organizing events on its own rather than seeking to develop a promotion network. Members kept changing quickly as well.

The anti-drug campaign concert functioned as an instrument for the government to attract and educate many people in the name of entertainment and by virtue of the symbolic quality of pop-idols. Such interplay between education and entertainment is a common socializing

strategy used by Japanese institutions outside the school context.[7] The pure, healthy, righteous, and friendly images of cute-idols were qualities suitable for representing the campaign as public role models. The loss leaders of this event consisted of Tomomi Nishimura (who debuted in 1986) who was the mascot personality of the campaign, the idol duo *Wink* (1988-1996), the idol trio *Melody* (that debuted in 1993), and *SKI*. As for *SKI*, the group's proclamation to be the representatives of righteous school-girls, and their past involvement in welfare activities (e.g., donating part of the money made from their concerts to the World Wide Fund For Nature), provided them with a chance to perform in this campaign concert.

The event was organized into two parts: the first of which, greetings, consisted of a series of speeches made by officials; and the second of which, Yes to Life Young Festival, consisted of talk shows and stage performances featuring pop-idol participants. After passing with a side-glance at the line of audience members, I entered the hall and observed officials in charge passing out campaign posters and packages containing a program, brochures, and a telephone card. Then, I situated myself in one of the seats at the center of the hall. People flowed into the hall before long, and the three-hour event started on schedule at 6:00 p.m.

The majority of those who entered the hall first were idol-fans, who had spent hours waiting outside long before other people started to form a line. As they rushed into the hall, they quickly grabbed posters and packages and occupied front seats as they divided themselves into four factions. It was like being in a multi-party parliament where members of different political parties occupied different sections: conservatives to the right, liberals to the left, and so on. Some fans appeared in distinct costumes to express their identities creatively. Others brought flashlights and had to surrender them to officials on the ground that they disturbed other people in the audience.

In the first part, the minister and the governor appeared to address their speeches to the people, which said, "Drug abuse has been a problem in our country since the [Second] World War. It is becoming a serious problem in recent years especially, and it is our wish to prevent it. Drugs are dangerous not only because they can cause damage to your health, but also because they can destroy your family..." The fact that the end of the Second World War was chosen in this speech as a temporal boundary marker is interesting, because it marked Japan's surrender to the allied forces of the West and the beginning of the U.S. occupation. There is an implicit linking of the drug problem to the time when Japan, re-engaged in interaction with the Western world, has undergone strong Western influence. This further suggests a subtle underlining of the idea that drugs were not originally a Japanese problem but a foreign one -- a kind of reasoning that derives from a tendency to see foreigners as standing in contrast to Japanese images of themselves. In a social environment where foreigners are often represented as overtly breaking the conventional rules of Japanese society, Westerners are seen as egoistic and contravening essential Japanese values of collectivity and social harmony (Creighton 1995:136,137,144; see also Moeran 1986; Applbaum 1992). Thus, drugs, which symbolize Western egoism, impose a moral threat to the Japanese, and pop-idols, representing the images of Japanese adolescent purity, are used as a symbolic force to counteract against this foreign threat.

After the last speech, everyone was asked to stand up and sing a song, *Yes To Life*, whose lyrics appeared on the program:

Do you know?
I cannot see
I don't understand love
My friends and lovers went away
My tears are dry
Please call me, please call
Someone said to me
Let's hold our hands, be brave
Kick the ground and fly into the blue sky

Yes To Life, Lovely Nice Day For You
Yes, Yes To Life...

At this time, Nishimura also appeared on the stage to sing with the audience. Throughout this ritual, two female high-school students who sat next to me giggled and made cynical remarks. They did not think it was possible for the state officials to prevent drugs from coming into Japan and spreading among young people, as was the case in the Tōkyō area at the time. They wanted the officials to get over with their boring speeches quickly, and start the concert that apparently was their main reason for being there. Parents who brought their children were at my back, and they were attending the ceremony more seriously. As they observed the data presented by the officials, they made comments like "Drugs are becoming a pretty serious problem, aren't they?"

Once the event reached its second part, the atmosphere changed drastically. Fans who sat quietly during the first half transformed themselves into ever-energetic and noisy cheering squads. Naturally, different sections reacted to different idols that appeared on the stage. They shouted, clapped their hands, raised their arms, and jumped up rhythmically as their idol(s) sang. Some fans hooted "Rubbish!" (*dasai!*) as fans from other factions cheered their idol(s). Those who sat behind these enthusiastic fans stood in their seat and observed the stage performances by the first two groups, *Melody* and *SKI*, in progress. Many of those who sat around me laughed at the scene. Some referred to the fans as cheering squads as a "bunch of weirdoes" while others made fun of what they thought were artless performances of groups that they never saw before.

Events involving a multiple number of entertainers were arranged according to seniority in Japan, where newcomers commonly appeared before those who were considered to have been performing for a greater number of years. Occasions to which this seniority rule did not apply

included cases where those who are considered by the event organizers to be exceptionally popular and important were invited. In this particular campaign-concert, the stage-performance proceeded according to the hierarchy based on seniority, and it matched nicely with different levels of popularity (or public recognition) attained by each participant. This was reflected in the number of fans that were present as well as the manner in which other people in the audience reacted.

When *Wink* appeared on stage, a large number of people stood up and cheered, causing the rest to stand up and clap their hands as the duo sang songs including smash hits. Winner of the 1989 Japan Record Award, the duo popularized their images of innocent babes between the late 1980s and early 1990s. Unlike those of the first two groups, *Wink*'s stage featured live bands and stage-effects. Along with the fancy, frilly costumes that they wore, the stage created an illusion that they were singing in a forest of Europe, which evoked the sense of romanticism in the minds of the viewers.

As far as I could tell, nobody laughed or made fun of Wink's performance, which led me to realize that the more recognition the performers attain, the more seriously they are attended by the audience. Giving famous performers their serious attention represented a kind of respect to them -- like that given by Japanese students to a respected teacher – this indicates a hierarchical view of social organization. Yet, one of the two female high-school students who stood next to me told me that their doll-like images looked somewhat outdated, when I asked them about the style represented by the duo. The style they preferred was much more vibrant, artistic and cool as represented by Namie Amuro -- to whom the generation of teens today could associate themselves better.

What interested me all the more was the fact that some of the idol-fans who cheered other groups stood in their seats while the rest of the people stood up to dance along with *Wink*'s

melody. Other fans walked out of the hall while *Wink*'s stage performance was in progress. Apparently, these acts were purposely exercised by their actors to distinguish their group against other groups. When I subsequently interviewed one of the fans who walked out, he said that he was there only to show his support for the idol he adored:

> I don't care how popular other idols are. I don't care if anyone wanted to make fun of my idol. I take pride in supporting my idol -- especially when she is not considered so good by others. If we [the fans] don't support her, who will? People are generally mindless. They're probably there simply because the event was fun, or because it included someone famous... They wouldn't think or care about putting their heart in supporting someone they can adore, but we do. I was there to support someone I find worth supporting, and not to go with the flow of an event with a bunch of mindless people!

This fan expressed his indifference and even hostility, and therefore differentiated himself and his group of idol-fans, against other idol-fans as well as those he thought to be the members of the general public.

Nishimura, whose name and delightful personality were widely recognized by the public, was met more by respect than by loud cheers. Everyone in the crowd clapped their hands as she sang until the event reached its finale. Like the great Sun God Amaterasu in Japanese myth, Nishimura invoked the sense of tolerance vis-a-vis other pop-idol(s) who, like less renowned gods in the myth, provoked emotions and political conflicts. Indeed mystically, the campaign-event demonstrated that all symbolic conflicts could come to an end, and people who remained throughout this life-celebrating event could join together in harmony under one prominent performer whose style surpassed the contest between different styles. This reflects the value emphasized generally in Japan of harmony and the idea of *nakayoshi* (lit. "good friends"), indicating the importance of friendship and social solidarity -- against the intrusive forces of egoism and individualism -- in Japanese society.

**Summary**

This chapter has delved into the mechanism of pop-idol promotion in order to explicate the political-orientation of styles. The formation of styles is a strategic means for pop-idols and their fans to differentiate themselves from each other symbolically. At the same time, the development of different styles contributes to the establishment of idol-performances as a historically (or genealogically) meaningful genre. The style differentiation constitutes the field of pop-idol production as a culturally recognized domain. Given such a sociohistorical establishment, the idol-system shows a striking structural compatibility with the religious arena in which the iconographic styles and symbolic powers of sacred figures are signified and contested. In either of these cases, the symbolic competition and instability tend to promote convergence on a unity of identity rather than result in symbolic chaos. Thus, pop-idol producers, performers, and consumers identify themselves with the idol-pop and take pride in their activities of manufacturing, enacting, and supporting pop-idol styles through the very act of participating in the symbolic competition.

From the standpoint of a general audience who stood outside of the group of dedicated idol-fans, the symbolic contestation between different pop-idols and their styles occurs within a homogeneous social category. Details of this competition appear to be insignificant, or even ridiculous. As the old Japanese saying goes, people who take part in such a competition are caught in *donguri no seikurabe*, or "acorns' fighting over their height," which means it is not worth a fight after all. The associated idea is that many of the things which people consider important or worth fighting over, from some other perspective, are rather meaningless. The acts of enthusiastic fans who seriously fall into such an identity struggle are often denigrated as *otaku*, a term derived from its original meaning "your home" and translated as "lunatics." *Otaku* implies a psychological symptom of a presumed social dysfunction (Jenson 1992:10).[8]

**Notes:**

1. These statistics are adopted from Kodansha (1993:857,864).

2. This point is inspired by Ewen (1988:23), who considers style as the source of cultural power. Seigle's (1993) study on Yoshiwara brothels, which developed in Tōkyō, Japan during the Edo-period (1600-1868) as the only government-approved pleasure quarter in the region, shows how stylization served as a means for the class of prostitutes to upgrade their social status -- to empower itself as a group. One way in which Yoshiwara lifestyle mobilized itself upward was through its convergence with the class of literati and artists. Yoshiwara became the popular subject of how-to-books called *sharebon*, the contemporary equivalent of which are lifestyle magazines. It also became the popular theme of *ukiyoe* woodcut prints, making it the subject of dandy culture at the time (see 1993: chapter 5 for the details of this developmental process).

3. Idol research groups (*aidoru kenkyūkai*), often called "pop-music research groups" (*kayōkyoku kenkyūkai* -- although most of their topics focus on idol performances) are one of many informal student organizations, or "circles," that develop in universities. Usually, members who are interested in, and are knowledgeable about, pop-idols get together to enjoy hanging out, engaging in informal conversations, playing games, drinking and going to karaoke-boxes together. Their more serious activities include interviewing pop-idols, publishing periodicals (so-called *minikomishi* or "mini-communication magazines") that discuss idol performances, and organizing pop-idol concerts in collaboration with promotion agencies during annual student festivals (*gakuensai*) on campus.

4. The company's name, Yellow Cab, reflects the sexist stereotype about Japanese girls that emerged in the 1980s as Japanese women overseas became known for their openness in having affairs with men. "Yellow," in this case, refers to the skin color of Japanese girls, while "cab" refers to taxi, signifying how easy these girls can be picked up on streets. Noda adopted this name to parody the popularity of Japanese girls in the world, and signify the sexual attractiveness of his company's pop-idols.

5. This research refers to Yoshida (1984).

6. I found it most difficult and risky on my part when I followed my informants from one agency to the back stage and met the people I knew from another agency (other agencies). Caught between the two (or more), I had to worry about not being considered a spy. I purposely avoided going to the back-stage when two or more agencies invited me to the same event.

7. In her study of department stores, for example, Creighton (1992,1994a) shows that large marketing institutions develop theme parks and play floors for children, along with shopping clubs for their mothers. In these amusement spaces, activities are developed in such ways that participants can interact with each other and learn behaviors that are considered appropriate for one's status (or class), age category, and gender through goods and services that stores offer. While stores present their offerings and activities in terms of educational and cultural development

themes, they also struggle to make them appear pleasant, playful, and fun: that is, something to which participants can look forward. Retailing amusements in Japan are cloaked in appeals to education, which is given a high cultural value in Japan (Creighton 1994a:40).

8. Yano (1997:336) observed that the characterization of fandom as a social pathology is a cultural trend in the United States. In Japan, fandom is regarded more often to be part of a culturally affirmed dyad of dependency, as constituted by those who seek indulgence and those who provide that indulgence. Based on my own observation, I am skeptical of this rather simplistic cultural dichotomy. If otherwise, the tendency to regard fandom as a psychological symptom was facilitated in Japan since 1989 when an extreme enthusiast of both female pop-idols and other young female personalities turned out to be a serial killer. He kidnapped and killed young female children and wrote letters to their parents about the killing. According to some sources, he often stood in his own house where he enjoyed collecting and watching video-tapes of female infants including those he himself produced after committing his crimes. The incident became a national scandal. Two cultural critics, Akio Nakamori and Eiji Ōtsuka, published a best-selling book, *M No Jidai* (*The Age of M*), that discussed the incident. In this book, Nakamori and Ōtsuka created the term *otaku* to refer to those who are predominated by fantasies to the extent that they became incapable of making a moral distinction between illusions and realties, or good and bad.

# CHAPTER VII – THE SPREAD OF POP-IDOL PERFORMANCES IN ASIA

Japanese-style pop-idol performances are no longer limited to Japan's national boundary. By the mid-1980s, a number of personalities who were referred to as "idols" in the Japanese-style became popular in other Asian countries, most noticeably among Chinese populations. A preliminary examination of pop-idols in other parts of Asia finds that just as in Japan, pop-idols in these countries sing, dance, act, attract fans, and merchandise the process of maturation in ways that reflect lifestyles for young people.

The analysis in this chapter will focus on the way Japanese pop-idols are perceived, interpreted, and transformed by other Asian nationalities. It will show how Japanese-style pop-idols construct their local identities in the era of so-called "open regionalism," contributing to the understanding of symbolism and culture contact: specifically, how pop-idol performances contribute to the transformation of cultural consciousness in developing Asian countries. Moreover, the popularity of Japanese pop-idols and the activities of the Japanese entertainment industry in other Asian countries raises the specter of cultural hegemony, or the relationship between culture and power (e.g., Gramsci 1971; Williams 1977). Modification of this analytical concept in the light of studies of language and culture contact (e.g., Samarin 1971; McKellin 1991) sheds light on the ways in which people in developing Asian countries respond to lifestyle changes initiated by the entertainment industry. These transformations are part of the more widespread changes in the societies and economies in the region.

## The Symbolic Flow of Pop-Idols: Japan and Beyond

In many Asian countries, Japanese popular culture forms such as fashion, television dramas, popular music, and animations have become as well known as Japanese cars and electronic products. Representing a modern, urban lifestyle, these items become points of cultural

dissemination for students, young working people and tourists in Asia's upward-moving economic areas. The popularity of Japanese-style pop-idols is one of the most interesting recent examples of cultural dissemination in the Asian region.

For example, a popular Japanese pop-idol duo, *Puffy*, burst onto Japan's pop music scene in 1996, using their debut song, *Asian Purity*, as the theme song in a widely shown Kirin Beer television commercial. In doing so, they not only joined a long list of Japanese pop-idols and idol-groups, but also became a prototype on which young performers who have a prestigious presence in East and South Asia are modeled (figure 32).[1] Popular magazines and television programs from China, Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Vietnam feature a plethora of images representing young Asian movie, television, and pop music stars. These personalities smile coquettishly and strike shapely poses. As in the case of Japan, these adolescent personalities attract a large number of devoted followers, and their images are massively consumed.[2] Japanese pop-idols are also popular in these Asian countries, as evidenced by featured magazine articles and countless internet home pages organized by local producers. These cases reflect a trend of looking-toward Japanese and Japanese-style pop-idol performances by a non-Japanese audience.

In *Asian Purity* (*Ajia No Junshin*), *Puffy*, sings:

*hirake doa ima wa mo nagaredetara ajia*
open the door, flow out now and there is Asia
*shiro no panda o dore demo zenbu narabete*
lining up any and every white panda
*pyua na haato ga yozora de hajike-tobisō ni kagayaite iru*
pure hearts twinkle in the night sky as if they are about to burst
*hibana no yō ni*
like a spark

This speaks not only of the growing interest of Japanese and Japanese-style pop-idols in many Asian countries outside of Japan, but also of Japan's deepening cultural engagement with the

**Figure 32.** ***Puffy*** **(top), mimicked by a Taiwanese duo,** ***A My-My*** **(bottom) (from CD jackets).**

rest of Asia in recent years. "Pure hearts," which signify young Japanese girls (or cute and innocent youngsters of Japan), are willing to explore other Asian countries, or what they might regard as new frontiers that are full of wonders. In Japan, interest in other Asian countries has been booming in the 1990s, an era in which Asia as a region is considered energetic and hot with high expectations for economic growth. This is evidenced by a growing public interest in ethnic foods, increasing travel to Asian destinations, the popularity of studying Chinese or Korean in place of previously dominant European languages (e.g., English and French), and a growing familiarity with movies and pop music from different Asian countries.

In the domain of political economy, the expectation for Asia's regional development is realized in such intergovernmental organizations as APEC, or Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation.[3] The present goal of APEC is to enhance open regionalism in the Pacific Rim, which has been seen to be evolving as a sub-global system, drawing countries in the area closer together through increased trade, communication, investment, and population movement (e.g., McGee and Watters 1997:4). At the 1993 APEC summit held in Seattle, Washington (U.S.A.), Japanese Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama called upon APEC participants to develop "partnerships for progress" and thereby "encourage regional institution building to avert sub-regional trade wars and protectionism and to stimulate trade creation" (Hadi 1995:85). American President Bill Clinton, in agreement with this view, proposed his vision to create what he called the "Asia-Pacific Community." However, critics such as Malaysian Prime Minister Mohammad Mahatir and his ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) colleagues perceive such a vision as an ideological cloak serving primarily the interests of Japan and the U.S. (the two superpowers in the Pacific) to dominate Asia's regional economy.[4]

Aside from this debate rooted in politico-economic cooperation and conflict, there is another trend in the Asia-Pacific region -- one that belongs to the realm of mass culture. This trend

coincides with the vision of sub-global development implied by APEC, but is conceived of as a popular vision of socioeconomic progress. This view is symbolically embodied in the everyday practices of individuals and groups. This is where the cultural apparatus, such as the entertainment industry, develops its own themes and events that facilitate the formation of local identities. In this setting, Japanese and Japanese-style pop-idols play evocative roles (figure 33).

While documenting activities related to the industry's production of pop-idols in various parts of Asia is undoubtedly pivotal, the ethnographic analysis in this chapter will consider the local consumption of pop-idols as well. Thus, the investigation will focus on how consumers develop a web of meaning around their favorite Japanese and Japanese-style pop-idols. After Friedman (1990:312), the act of consumption will be considered as a cultural strategy that specifies the structure of desire. Consumption defines the contours of a specific identity space, or a sum of products configured into an arrangement that expresses "what I am." Friedman elaborates:

> Consumption within the bounds of the world system is always a consumption of identity, canalized by a negotiation between self-definition and the array of possibilities offered by the capitalist market... [Consumption is] the libidinous half of social reproduction [that] is a significant part of the differential definition of social groups and individuals (1990:314).

This aspect of consumption is useful in understanding how people of different nationalities develop their local identities in an era in which the world is becoming increasingly interconnected. It also suggests how the difference between local cultures and artifacts are made predictable, surprisingly uniform, and therefore shared on a cross-cultural scale (Friedman 1995; see also Wilk 1990,1995). Thus, through the act of consuming a global culture forms in a local context, the consumers are absorbed into a global arena of contest in which they can evaluate their own culture vis-a-vis other cultures from which the shared art-form was originally borrowed. This arena of cultural comparison is also an area in which power is reinscribed. It is

**Figure 33. Celebrating Asian pop-idols: the cover of a 1996 issue of Japan's *Asian Travellers Journal.***

where contradicting identities are asserted in such forms as economic power, cultural authority, world recognition, or place in a world order -- at a historical moment when boundaries among nations are contested and highly charged (Kondō 1992:177).

Seen in this light, the subsequent discussion will detail how the spread of Japanese-style pop-idols across east and southeast Asia reflects a growing ethos toward the transcendence of self in local areas. A consumer, working on the assertion of what is more desirable, uses Japanese and Japanese-style pop-idols as instruments to cultivate a sense of socioeconomic progress. I will consider the way in which Japanese-style pop-idols become the motif-dissemination point for other Asian nationalities to develop their lifestyles in the direction of catching up and surpassing Japan -- their transcendental other.

For people in developing countries, particularly those with a colonial past, it is often assumed that the future will be a repetition of the past. Pop-idols can be seen as one example of a historic discourse in which the future is realized in new ways – ways which reference such notions as "progress," socioeconomic improvement, etc. (e.g., Gadamer 1989:195; Bhabha 1994:156; Rowlands 1995:41). With this in mind, the subsequent ethnographic analysis examines how particular informants consume Asian pop-idols as a way of claiming their identities for themselves within what they conceive to be an increasingly modernized world.

**The Development of Pop-Idol Performances in Asia**

Young popular entertainers existed in places such as China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea long before Japanese pop-idols appeared on the scene. Yet, by the mid 1980s, many of Asia's new homegrown pop stars bore the unmistakable stamp of the Japanese pop-idol. These homegrown personalities have been featured as cute, pure, righteous, or pretty. Their songs have included exact copies of Japanese idol-pop songs, or have contained themes borrowed

from them. Promotion networks and fan clubs have been developed around them in the same way as the Japanese idol-promotion system. These cases imply that many indigenous pop-idol promoters are facilitating a knowledge transfer of Japanese-style idol marketing techniques. From the standpoint of Japanese pop-idol promoters, other developing Asian countries represent new opportunities for business growth.

In August 1993, the Hori Agency of Japan and the Beijing City Department of Culture held a live television broadcast audition that attracted as many as 400,000 Chinese applicants including Rao Dai. In spring 1995, the Hori Agency held another audition in cooperation with the Vietnamese government, drawing 1,800 local applicants. Another large-scale audition -- the television program, Asia Bagus, based in Singapore and involving multinational corporate sponsorship -- attracts applicants from all over Asia. In a 1996 collaboration, Japan's Yoshimoto Kōgyō Productions, the Sony Music Entertainment Corporation, and a Japan-based international supermarket chain operator, Yaohan, recruited four young women from the Shanghai region to form an idol-group, *Shanghai Performance Doll*. This was a Chinese version of Japan's *Tōkyō Performance Doll* (debut 1990; see figure 34).[5]

Many Japanese pop-idols have become celebrities in other Asian countries as well. A typical pattern, followed for example by Noriko Sakai and Mika Chiba, is for a Japanese singer to start out in Taiwan and then to move into markets such as Hong Kong, China, and Singapore using Chinese connections. Home-language magazine articles and internet home pages stimulate and feed the demands of Asian fans for information about Japanese and local pop-idols.

In South Korea, Japanese television programs, magazines, music, animation and other forms of popular culture have been officially banned for historical reasons. This is due to Japan's annexation of Korea from 1910 to the end of the Second World War, which included an attempt

**Figure 34.** ***Tōkyō Performance Doll*** **(top) and** ***Shanghai Performance Doll*** **(bottom) (from CD-jackets; Sony Music Entertainment, Inc.).**

to replace the Korean language and culture with those of Japan. The prewar Japanese imperial government issued the Act of Annexation in 1910 and practiced economic deprivation and political suppression in Korea and Taiwan. Under the colonial administration, Koreans were denied the rights of full citizenship, and were forced to accept a subordinate identity and serve the interests of metropolitan Japan. Many were forced to migrate to Japan to be recruited and mobilized as low-wage colonial labor (Weiner 1997:84). The current attitude of the Korean government to boycott Japanese items is deeply rooted in this historical past. Even so, many young Koreans today look to Japan for trendy fashions and lifestyle. They obtain information about pop-idols and other forms of Japanese popular culture through underground sources.[6]

One notices that the areas in which Japanese pop-idols and their manufacturing agencies are particularly active are places undergoing rapid economic growth. After Japan, the countries in the Asia-Pacific region with the largest gross national product since 1980 are, in order, China, South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong. As of 1992, China, Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan respectively overtook Japan in their rates of economic growth (PHP Research Center 1995:52). Although Vietnam has not yet reached these levels, its strong national drive toward economic development is manifested in its recent participation in ASEAN as well as its willingness to open-up trade. These cases confirm that the performances of Asian-idols is part of a broader public movement toward what is perceived as regional progress.[7]

## Japanese-Style Pop-Idols as the Motif-Dissemination Point

### *The Symbol of Socioeconomic Affluence*

Hideyoshi Aizawa, the president of the Sun Music Corporation, pointed out that Noriko Sakai's success in Asia was due not only to Sakai's own achievement, but also to the

socioeconomic affluence she represented. This representation had an appeal to people in other Asian countries. In fact, Sakai was first acknowledged by consumers in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China through a Panasonic television commercial, which contributed to the explosion of her popularity as well as the increased market sales of the co-advertised product. Taking advantage of this opportunity, Sun Music debuted Sakai as a singer, produced albums in Chinese, and held frequent concerts in places like Taiwan. In Aizawa's observation, both Sakai and the product offered dreams about a rich and happy world like Japan as it was imagined by the people in these countries. The dream manufactured by the pop-idol industry, in this case, is a dream that signifies the nation's socioeconomic well being.

Thus, the successful promotion of Japanese and Japanese-style pop-idols throughout rapidly developing countries in Asia would have been unlikely had there not been a tendency for young people in these countries to look at Japanese popular culture as one source of new trends -- in the way the United States, for example, once was for Japan (see chapter five). In my preliminary interviews with two informants from China, two from Hong Kong, two from South Korea, and three from Taiwan, I tried to understand how Japanese-style pop-idols are perceived in developing Asian countries. I asked 1) about their thoughts on the meaning of Japanese pop-idols in their home countries, and 2) if they thought there was a relationship between these pop-idols and socioeconomic development in the Asian region. Their responses revealed that these informants saw Japanese-style pop-idols as a place to watch in terms of stylistic trends.

For example, one informant indicated that Japanese pop-idols represent a positively imagined way of life for many of her people. She said,

> People such as Momoe Yamaguchi and Seiko Matsuda from Japan are extremely popular in my country. Everyone knows their songs, and many know how to sing them in places like *karaoke* bars. I think that they are famous because we admire their way of life. They showed us how to make an effort, work hard, and

> establish oneself in contemporary society through the messages of their songs and performances (Female, age 24, from China).

This statement confirms the fact that some established Japanese pop-idols provide young Chinese with models for lifestyles. It should be noted here that the *karaoke* bar is another Japanese trend picked up by many people in other Asian countries. *Karaoke* (lit. "empty orchestra") refers to prerecorded musical accompaniment, usually on tape or disc. Recording studios and television stations began using *karaoke* tapes in the mid-1960s to save the cost of hiring bands and choruses. In the early 1970s, bar and pub owners widely adopted *karaoke* as a means to accommodate their patrons, who could choose some of their favorite songs from a prepared catalog and sing along. *Karaoke* became one of the most popular leisure-time activities as many people in the public hit upon the idea of singing along with one's favorite songs. Specialized *karaoke* bars with large, eclectic catalogs developed as places for amusement and socialization (Kodansha 1993:746,747). Apparently, the popularity of *karaoke* bars plays an important role in the public recognition of pop-idols.

Other informants suggested that Japanese-style pop-idols symbolize Japan's socioeconomic affluence, to which many people in their countries are drawn towards. Their comments are as follows:

> There are many pop-idols and idol magazines in Taiwan that imitate Japanese pop-idols and magazines. Some of them adopt identical titles, or titles that are so similar that we immediately know which Japanese counterparts they have imitated. I have an impression that Japanese pop-idols are generally like romantic dolls that represent happiness and dreams of a developed country. I think that is why we like them so much. We also want to be fanciful (Female, age 22, from Taiwan).

> I think that pop-idols dramatize economic dreams and pack them in their songs, which are three to four, or five minutes long. They unite us, for example, like us Chinese all over the world, in Chinatowns in America or Great Britain or Canada. They bring us together spiritually, you know. I think that this kind of spiritual unity is important for Chinese and everybody who listens to the songs of Hong Kong pop-idols, Japanese pop-idols, or Taiwanese pop-idols, or

> wherever they are from, for regional economic development (Male, age 26, from Hong Kong).

These statements show that economic dreams and spiritual affluence are linked in the minds of these informants. What underlies the socioeconomic dream is the desire to realize economic affluence through social progress, as it is especially evident in the second informant's comments. In his view, economic affluence is a goal under which all Asians can explore their local identities in an age of economic affluence, or a time in which this affluence is no longer associated with the Western world. Thus, pop-idols perform a lubricant role in the formation of local identity for adolescents in Asia.

One other informant explicated the leadership role of Japanese-style pop-idols. She said,

> If pop-idols can contribute to the modernization of Asia, that would be because they can direct many people to one and the same economic or social issue. It is like leadership, but an entertaining one -- not as serious and boring as political statements made by politicians, and not so light-hearted or ironic as jokes made by comedians. I'd rather listen to pop-idols sing than go to a political speech, and hear about our cross-cultural friendship, or unity, or development (Female, age 26, from South Korea).

This informant compares pop-idol leadership with political leadership, and sees a greater advantage of the former over the latter due to its entertaining function. This recalls my own observation of political campaigns in which pop-idols were used as an allegorical means to attract people. Politicians relied on pop-idols' fame as well as their cheerful images to turn their campaigns into public spectacles. Even so, some young people in the audience rejected political messages and "just wanted to have fun" with pop-idols (see chapter six).

Two other comments clarify the role played by Japanese-style pop-idols in constructing Asian identity. They explained:

> Japanese pop-idols keep inspiring young performers from Hong Kong who give us the messages of love, dreams and hopes, although whether they are valuable or not depends on the person's evaluation. These messages can at least unite the

> feelings of many Asians and construct some kind of identity that is different from Americans or Europeans (Male, age 26, from Taiwan).
>
> Pop-idols are simply entertainers, and I do not think they have any essential significance. But that is why I think they are necessary. People everywhere cannot live without some kind of entertainment, right? We all have to take a break and run away from the real world. That is, I think, what entertainment, including idol performances, is all about. The reason that pop-idols are so popular these days in Asia is, I think, because people in Asia are working hard now and they need to take a break sometimes. Hollywood movie stars and other exotic-looking actors are okay, too, but I think as an Asian I prefer to see people who look like me... with black hair, black pupils, yellow skin... I feel like I can relax more when I see pop-idols. Then, I can refresh myself and get to work for Asia's economic development the next day (Male, age 24, from Taiwan).

Both of these informants use Japanese-style pop-idols to identify Asia's sociocultural and economic potential against Europeans and North Americans. Asian pop-idols, represented by the Japanese prototype, emerge as popular icons under which all Asian people can unite, work hard, and overcome the Occidental economic superpowers, represented by glamorous Hollywood actors. In these views, Japanese-style pop-idols constitute a brand, not simply of singers or actors but of a modern lifestyle.

Takumi Hayashi, a Japanese columnist and culture critic, observes in a 1990 survey conducted in Taiwan that Japanese pop-idols provide their Taiwanese audience with various fictions about Japanese culture. The people of Taiwan use these fictions to expand their knowledge of and construct their own ideas about other aspects of Japan: entertainment, arts, subcultures, fashion, comics, music, and so on (Hayashi 1994). This indicates that Japan, in terms of many stylistic trends, has become the place to watch for other Asians -- in the way Europe and the United States once were for Japanese during the era of postwar economic development in the 1950s and 1960s.

My preliminary interview data also revealed that Japanese-style pop-idols provide a point of reference for making sense of the changing social and workplace conditions that accompany

economic growth. Most interview respondents were skeptical about any direct impact of pop-idols upon regional economic development. Yet, it was generally acknowledged that pop-idols are symbolically significant for enhancing a developmental atmosphere in the region where people are trying to catch up and surpass what they see as the Japanese level of economic and technological development. Japanese-style pop-idols propel the desire among the people of developing Asian countries to have the rest of the world perceive them on equal terms with the Japanese in economy and lifestyle.

In a separate interview, Eric Suen (debuted 1993), an idol-pop singer from Hong Kong, indicated his intention to contribute to the cross-cultural communication and exchange in Asia. According to Suen:

> It would be my greatest pleasure to unify the hearts of many people all around Asia, encouraging them with my music and acting. I would certainly like to help us cope with a variety of social problems that might occur in many parts of Asia together, and support the development of the region in any way I can.

Suen's attempt to join the list of famous Japanese-style pop-idols includes his frequent business trips to Japan, where he was adopted by Sun Music to be debuted in Japan. In the spring of 1995 he released a duet-single with Noriko Sakai which symbolized the partnership between Hong Kong and Japan (figure 35), and he participated in the 1996 Asia Music Festival, held in Fukuoka, Japan. These not only provided Suen with opportunities for being recognized in Japan, but also being acknowledged back home by earning a place in the Japanese entertainment industry. In an increasingly cosmopolitan world, the recognition of pop-idols reinforces performers' national identity (i.e., the country from which they come, or the area that they represent) – just as athletes would represent a sense of national pride in Olympic Games.

The connection made above between Japanese-style pop-idol performances and the growing ethos in East and Southeast Asian countries for national and economic development yields

**Figure 35. Eric Suen and Noriko Sakai in duet (from an official photo, Sun Music Corporation).**

further examination. Factors that contribute to the construction of Japanese-style pop-idols as tools in formulating local social identities will be explicated in the following section through a deeper examination of consumer consciousness.

## Idol Symbolism and Social Transformation: A Pop-Idol Consumer in Hong Kong

### *The Informant*

Gregory Chang (a pseudonym) was a 24 year-old university student (a business major) who lived in Hong Kong. He was the son of an upper-middle-class family, whose father owned a business firm and whose mother worked as a secretary in a large company. As with many students of his social class, Chang received part of his education in Britain and the United States. Chang's parents provided him with an apartment in the Kowloon district, where he lived alone. They gave him all the money he needed for his living, including the monthly allowance of 12,000 Hong Kong dollars that enabled Chang to buy most of the things he needed or wanted in his everyday life. His room was well equipped with furniture and electronic appliances, including a 16-inch color television, radio cassette, CD player, and a high-power computer.

I spent three weeks living with Chang in the spring of 1996 to examine his activities and conduct interviews. A long-time friend of mine, Chang was disturbed neither by my presence nor by my intention to analyze him. He treated me and spoke to me just as he would to any of his other friends under normal circumstances. Chang expressed particular interest in Japanese pop-idols. His limited ability to read, speak, or write in Japanese helped him to decode lyrics of idol-pop songs and Japanese magazine articles related to pop-idols. Taking advantage of my presence, he frequently asked me to translate parts of these songs, articles, and Japanese television dramas that he could not comprehend.

### *The Environment*

Hong Kong, where Chang was born and raised, developed as a center of commercial exchange between the British and the Chinese when it became a colony of the British Empire in the late 19th century. Over the years, the city prospered as a paragon of capitalism with its active participation in the *laissez faire* economy (e.g., market competition, free enterprise, and free trade) as well as the government's willingness to keep hands off business. Hong Kong's hard-working labor force has been mobilized into textile manufacturing, financial institutions, insurance companies, telecommunication agencies, tourism, and retail corporations. In concurrence with the terms indicated in the 1898 Second Convention of Beijing, which authorized the British rule of Hong Kong for 99 years, Hong Kong was returned to China on July 1, 1997. The city became part of the People's Republic of China. Under the 1994 Sino-British Joint Declaration, however, the Chinese government promised to retain Hong Kong's economic autonomy for at least 50 years by making it a Special Administrative Region. Today, Hong Kong's 6 million people -- most of whom have a Cantonese background -- live in an area of 1,070 square kilometers total.

My fieldwork in Hong Kong took place when its return to China was approaching, and people around me as well as the mass media were becoming more outspoken about their local identity than ever before. As for Chang, he was certain that Hong Kong would maintain its autonomy as a city with advanced industry, sophisticated service systems, and many educated workers. Hong Kong was expected to grow continuously as China's gateway to Western capitalism. Chang believed that Hong Kong would continue to prosper as a center of cosmopolitan fashion and lifestyle. He said that Hong Kong citizens held the key to China's future socioeconomic development.

### *The Development of Pop-idol Performances in Hong Kong*

Until the early 1970s, the pop-music scene in Hong Kong was dominated by a style inspired by traditional Chinese operas: a form of musical theater in which actors appear on stage with elaborate makeup and costumes to perform mythical tales, classical love stories and military legends as they sing in high-pitched voices and dance with a mainly percussive orchestra. Many young people of the time who were less interested in this rather classical form of performance turned their attention to Taiwanese pop music which consisted of Western-inspired, Mandarin-language ballads.

The first locally-produced pop music in Hong Kong emerged when a major television network, TVB, began hiring songwriters who composed theme songs in the local Cantonese dialect, for television dramas. Outstripping the shows in popularity, these songs constituted a new genre of popular music, otherwise known as Canton-pop. This genre featured singers such as Samuel Hui, Alan Tam, and George Lam. Hui, considered to be the pioneer of Hong Kong's pop music, wrote and sang songs that spoke of everyday matters, the hardship of life and tragicomedies of romance which were set to Western-style melodies and instrumentation. Other singers imitated and elaborated upon his successful formula.[8]

This original style of pop music gave way to a new wave of Japanese idol-pop at the end of the 1970s, inspiring the reorganization of Cantonese pop music into a more elaborate style of musical performance in terms of melodies, ornate fashions and complicated choreography. Like Japanese pop-idols, many young singers in Hong Kong began acting in movies and television dramas. Long-term planning was incorporated into their promotion system, enabling the successful performers to develop their career as they matured from novices to experienced actors. I could not find any source of the time that accurately describes how Japanese pop-idols became popular in Hong Kong. Yet, I found that many popular magazines of this period

dedicated a page or section to information related to Japanese pop-idols, discussing anything from their styles to private affairs (figure 36). Later reports, on the other hand, confirm the emergent popularity of the Japanese idol-pop, as the following example shows:

> At the end of the '70s, the Canto[n-]pop boom hit unexpected resistance, as Hong Kong teenagers turned their attention to Japanese pop idols, whose peppy, electronic music was more fun and danceable than the melodramatic love songs of the local Canto[n]-minstrels. The J[apanese]-pop fad ultimately faded, but only because the Hong Kong music industry had learned to assimilate and adapt to this new challenge: The '80s saw the emergence of a crop of artists who combined the teen-idol appeal and... dance groove of Japanese popsters with a feel for traditional romantic ballads (Yang *et al* 1997:255).

This short passage indicates how Canton-pop burgeoned through the borrowing of Japanese pop-idol styles. It also shows that the Cantonese audience in Hong Kong enmeshed themselves into Japanese pop-idol performances until homegrown artists employed similar techniques. As greater numbers of local artists appeared on the scene, the popularity of Japanese pop-idols began to drop in Hong Kong.

My interview with Chang was conducted as part of an effort to delve into the meaning assigned by a member of the Cantonese audience in Hong Kong to Japanese pop-idol performances -- particularly this individual's perception regarding the cause of the development of Japanese-style idol-pop in Hong Kong. The following interview excerpts substantiate the role played by Japanese pop-idols as motifs of modernity in Asia -- the state of socioeconomic being to be achieved and owned by the citizens of Hong Kong.

### *Interview Data*

One way in which Chang articulated his local identity was through expressing his ethnic rivalry against the British. By stressing the Chineseness of the Hong Kong people against the

**Figure 36. A sample article in Hong Kong's popular magazine indicated by Gregory Chang featuring information about Japanese pop stars and dramas (from the November 11, 1995 issue of *Yes! Idol*)**

Anglophonic-orientation of the British other, he demonstrated his long-awaited sense of liberation from English domination. The following conversational excerpt clarifies this point:

Chang (C): As you know, we the Chinese people in Hong Kong have been under British influence for a long time. We enjoyed the advantage of possessing a British passport that enabled us to go to many places around the world without much problem, but we never identified ourselves with the British culture.

Researcher (R): Why not?

C: Because people in Hong Kong generally dislike the British who not only colonized China with their military power and dirty tricks in trading, but also continue to discriminate against the Chinese people today. I often find myself in conflict with British politics.

R: How so? Can you provide me with an example?

C: For example, until the 1970s or so, most important positions in the government, civil services, or large companies, were dominated by the British, and they gave no opportunity for Chinese to occupy these high positions. Chinese end up as servants and never the boss, you know. Another example is that in education, children like myself when I was a kid were forced to watch English educational programs in school whether we liked it or not. The more you became British-like, the more prestigious you became, but you could never become the top because the top was always occupied by the British.

R: So, you are saying that the British set up a system that marginalized the Chinese people, right?

C: That's right, and we were becoming fed up with it.

R: So in this sense you are glad that Hong Kong will return to China, are you not?

C: In this sense, yes.

R: Have you ever been in a situation where you were personally discriminated against by the British?

C: Yes, I remember going to a restaurant once where many British people hung out. When I went inside, one white woman pointed at me when she saw me and said 'Hey look! There comes a Chink! [*sic*]'. You know that 'Chink' is a [derogatory] term they use to discriminate against the Chinese, don't you? Then she made a funny face, and all the white people around her started to laugh at me. This happened here in Hong Kong, my hometown, for Christ's sake! When I lived in Britain, too, I was looked down upon by the white people there countless number of times, simply because I was Chinese. It seems that the British draw their boundary clearly against the outsiders, and never really try to accept them, whereas in the United States, I felt more comfortable. Not that there wasn't any discrimination, but Americans seemed much more open to outsiders. In a way, the United States is a country made up of many immigrants,

and you could always find someone who is sympathetic or willing to take your side. In Britain, you are either the obvious insider or the obvious outsider. One exception, though, was to speak English fluently with a good English accent. Then they were impressed, and said something like 'Oh you speak well even if you are a Chink'. Still, I wasn't sure whether they were trying to compliment me or they were trying to discriminate against me.

R: And you feel that it is impossible for the Chinese and the British to understand each other really?

C: I am sure that there are nice people in Britain as much as there are racists in China, but in general terms, I believe that even if the Chinese people are willing to accept British culture and learn about their lifestyle, it does not work the other way around. Here is another example: I remember when I was little, my friends and I often played soccer games with American soldiers in a playground near my house, but we never played such a game with British soldiers, although many of them were always around. I have never seen or heard a case where the British socialized well with the natives of Hong Kong. They only try to rule us, and keep their distance from us. They communicate with us only to the extent that we are useful to them. We really feel this way.

Chang's comparison of Britain with the United States implies that the United States is more of an immigrant society that can tolerate ethnic (and local) diversities, or where ethnic differences are more openly expressed and understood. This is not to say that Britain is culturally homogenous, but perhaps there is more of a sense of this than in an immigrant nation such as the United States. What Chang sees as the distinction made by the British between the obvious insider and the obvious outsider reflects a national characterization that Britain is an insular country, which results in the highlighting of certain ethnic similarities or partial similarities. This trend is also evident in Japan, where the culturally prominent distinction between inside (*uchi*) and outside (*soto*) sets a clear line of demarcation, and people who do not fit in are considered as potentially threatening (e.g., Valentine 1986; Weiner 1997).

The discussion of insularity is by no means limited to insular countries where ethnic similarity is emphasized. Any local community, social class, or interest group with a strong sense of collective identity can draw a line of demarcation according to the needs and wants of its members. As for Chang who considers himself proud to be a Hong Kong citizen, not only

the British but also the Mainland Chinese were considered outsiders. While referring to the British colonists as "foreign barbarians" using the Cantonese derogatory term *gwai lo*, Chang also distinguished Hong Kong from the People's Republic of China, or mainland China, whose culture he thought was underdeveloped. This is indicated in the following excerpt:

C: To begin with, our Chinese forefathers came to Hong Kong as they fled from China's communist regime. Many of us feel, especially after the June-4th Incident [of 1989] in which many students were killed in Beijing during their democratic protest against the Chinese government, that we cannot trust the Chinese government. We are afraid that this government is highly unpredictable. We are not sure as to whether it will keep its promise to maintain Hong Kong as an independent economic district after its return to China in July 1997.

R: Okay, so you are saying that people of Hong Kong cannot accept the Chinese politics, right?

C: Yes. That's right.

R: Let's shift our view to...

C: You mean society?

R: Yes, and culture. What about the people from Mainland China? Are they perceived differently in the eyes of Hong Kong residents?

C: Indeed they are. We think of them as uncivilized, backward, out of fashion, distrustful, and so on. They are way behind the Western world. China to me is really like another third world country.

R: Why do you think that Chinese people are distrustful?

C: Many Chinese people are aware of what will happen to Hong Kong in the near future, and many of them try to take advantage of it. They want to immigrate to Hong Kong and enjoy whatever power and prestige they can get from becoming a Hong Kong resident.

R: Can you be more specific as to what you mean by taking the advantage of power, or prestige?

C: One example will be to get a license to come work in Hong Kong. Because the people of China will need a special permission to come to Hong Kong, many of those who want to come to Hong Kong will try to do whatever they can to get this license. I read in a magazine recently that many young people in China are trying to arrange a marriage of convenience with those from Hong Kong. If these people have kids, these kids will surely qualify for a Hong Kong residence by birth. We are now very afraid of the growing Chinese population in Hong Kong. It's a Chinese invasion in a way, you know. In this sense, we like to identify ourselves more as the people of the British colony rather than the Chinese.

R: I see...

C: By the way, do you know that famous song by an idol folk-singer from mainland China, Ai Jin – the one that goes something like '1997 come quickly, 1997 come quickly, I want to go to the land of prosperity, I want to go shopping there, I want to get the visiting permit'? Many of us in Hong Kong were frightened by this song when it came out.

R: Can you elaborate on this a little more as to why people in Hong Kong are so much frightened by the mainland Chinese, if it is eventually going to become part of China anyway? Why wouldn't Hong Kong people want their Chinese comrades to come to live and prosper together with them?

C: See, it's not really going to be part of China, because Hong Kong will assume its autonomy even after its official return to China. So, the residents of Hong Kong are officially promised to keep their capitalist way of life within the Hong Kong district, and this means their way of life as well as their jobs. Imagine what will happen if thousands of mainlanders who know nothing about how things work in Hong Kong start to immigrate to Hong Kong and take over Hong Kong residents' jobs and everything? It would be chaos, wouldn't it?

R: I see, but do you think this will be likely to happen?

C: That's what I meant when I said we never know. It might very well happen, if not sooner then later. See, in the past we the people of Hong Kong regretted that high positions of work in Hong Kong were taken by the British, but now we are afraid that low positioned jobs will all be taken away by Chinese immigrants.

R: Interesting! So in effect, you think that you people in Hong Kong distinguish yourselves from both the British and the Mainland Chinese, right?

C: Yes. Now, we are evermore strongly identifying ourselves with the Chinese, but as the citizens of free China and not communist China. By free-China we don't necessarily mean democratic, by the way, because we know that the chance for China to become democratic is nil -- well, at least in the near future. By 'free' I mean economically independent.

R: Would it ever be possible for you people in Hong Kong to feel that you are really Chinese?

C: Well, we are essentially Chinese, but given the present historical condition we want to keep ourselves different from the mainlanders. We developed our own unique culture, I think, and it's a pragmatic one. We call ourselves *tsat hai*, which means 'shining other people's shoes'. All these years, we were shining British shoes, and after 1997, we will shine Chinese shoes. That's how we survive, and that's how we can always adopt useful things and ideas from the outside world while adapting ourselves to a changing social environment.

Thus, Chang narratively constructed his local identity as he defined Hong Kong's place in the world order at a historical moment when its boundary is contested and highly charged. His

version of the historic discourse about Hong Kong stressed the Chinese-origin of Hong Kong society against the British while distinguishing this society politically, economically, and culturally from Mainland China. His desire for Hong Kong's future is reflected here in such a way that his vision of Hong Kong's ongoing possibility to develop economically is extracted against two impossibilities: the repetition of Hong Kong's colonial past; and the impossibility of Chinese domination.

In this visionary setting, Japan's contemporary culture as represented by a series of Japanese products and in particular Japanese popular culture forms was the first and foremost source of inspiration. In Chang's view, Japanese products offered criteria to question, evaluate, indeed reappropriate, Hong Kong's power of production as signified by the quality of things that are and can be produced there. As Chan commented:

C: To me, Japan is amazing. People there take whatever they think to be useful from the West and make them part of their own lifestyle. At the same time, they improve some of the materials they import and then export them in advanced fashion -- be it radios, color televisions, cars, or computers, they make them smaller, lighter, work better, and last longer. Whether they like it or not, people in the West have to admit that these things that are made in Japan are much better and attractive in terms of their quality. When it comes to Hong Kong, Japanese products were always admired. But especially since the early 1980s, many people here in Hong Kong looked up to Japanese popular culture, too, when a whole new set of consumer goods started to come into Hong Kong -- mostly software products. These added an entirely new dimension to the existing market of Japanese hardware products, and they fascinated us with futuristic images and digitized audio-visual effects. We just fell in love with them.

This suggests that Hong Kong identity has shifted from looking to Britain to looking to Japan as a trend source. Yet, Chang also indicates that Japanese culture is not altogether attractive for people in Hong Kong. He distinguishes between more traditional and more modern aspects of Japanese culture, as the following excerpt shows:

C: Although we are fascinated by Japan, we are not necessarily in favor of Japan's traditional culture.

R: What was wrong with the Japanese traditional culture?

C: Our image of traditional Japanese is not a good one -- you know, like those represented by Shintō shrines, serious-looking samurai swinging their swords, *kamikaze* fighters, and subordinate women. These things evoke bad memories of War, you know, Japan's invasion of China during the Second World War.

R: And, the image of contemporary popular culture and related software products is different?

C: Absolutely. They are very positive. They are considered as light, fashionable, cool, and progressive...

R: Cosmopolitan, you mean?

C: Yes, it's very cosmopolitan. It makes us yearn, and feel that we want to be like the Japanese today.

R: What examples of Japanese popular culture forms triggered the outbreak of Japan fetishism among Hong Kong people?

C: Pop music, animation, soap operas, computer games, novels... and Japanese pop-idols of course.

This reflects an interesting idea about Japan's image construction on a global context: that Japan, as an image statement, is being constructed differently by Asia and by the West. The West tends to emphasize images of traditional Japan, or a more Asian Japan, in their symbolic processing. In North American politics, business and consumerism, for instance, this is manifested in the representation of traditional motifs in architecture, furniture, tourist campaigns, as well as ads and articles about various made-in-Japan products.[9] In contrast, the Japan that other Asian countries look at, in terms of the motif-dissemination point, is a modern, more Westernized Japan (figure 37).

In a subsequent interview, I asked Chang about the way Japanese popular culture items, as motifs of modernity, entered Hong Kong and earned their recognition by people there. My questions and his replies were as follows:

R: Can you recall how they came in to Hong Kong?

**Figure 37. A hierarchical arrangement of Japanese, British and Cantonese pop-idols in the cover of the March, 13, 1998 issue of Hong Kong's *Yes! Idol* (notice that Japan's Noriko Sakai is featured as a central figure, indicating her dominant model-role, while the face of the local Cantonese pop-idol Gi Gi appears closest to the viewer in perspective).**

C: In the beginning, many idol-pop singers from Japan like Akina Nakamori and Hideki Saijō came to Hong Kong to sing, and young people went crazy over Japanese pop music. People listened to Japanese pop-songs more than British- and American-pop music put together, and many Canton-pop singers covered Japanese songs in Cantonese or assimilated their style to the Japanese-pop style. That's when young Hong Kong singers like Alan Tam, Sandy Lam and Anita Mui became big stars, too. Singers like Alan [Tam] went to Japan to get good training in J-pop, did you know?

R: Hong Kong had pop music and pop-idols before J-pop came in, right?

C: Of course...

R: And why did people prefer J-pop over Canton-pop?

C: Well, people thought J-pop songs were more upbeat and livelier. They were somehow more futuristic and more exciting than Canton-pop. Back then, Canton-pop songs were becoming outdated, you know, like old fashioned.

R: In what sense? Can you elaborate it a bit more?

C: Too overemotional, maybe. We wanted something more light, I think. The sound quality itself was very different. J-pop had a digital sound, whereas Canton-pop was more simplistic and more analogue, you know. In short, they lacked technology and creativity.

R: Okay, then what happened after the J-pop boom?

C: Japanese animations like *Gandam*, *Macros* -- was it? -- and *Doraemon*, and soap operas followed this J-pop boom and ignited the Japan boom. When they were imported and broadcast in Hong Kong, almost everyone that I knew were nailed to the television everyday. Hong Kong television, magazines, and newspapers started to talk about Japan, too. My favorite program to watch was *Enjoy Yourself Tonight* or *Fun Lok Gam Siu* in Cantonese, which introduced where to travel and what to buy in Japan. All of my family watched this program all the time, and we really wanted to go to Japan. Japanese fashion became a big thing, too, and most of my female colleagues got busy reading magazines like *Non-No*. They talked about Japanese fashion and pop stars all the time. Many young girls in Hong Kong today are still crazy about Japanese fashion and pop stars. Even my mother tries to keep up with what's new [in Japanese fashion and entertainment scenes].

R: But why? Why is Japanese popular culture so popular among so many people in Hong Kong?

C: I think we admire Japanese science and technology a lot. Japan is the first world, and it's the most advanced country in Asia. We have a lot to learn from it.

R: And you are implying that Japanese popular culture and consumer products symbolize this fact?

C: Oh, yes. Japanese pop music, fashion, lifestyles, and all the hard and software products that they produce are outcomes of Japan's technological development and economic prosperity. People here in Hong Kong want to show that they are as capable as the contemporary Japanese in that sense.

R: Well then, why not the West? Why Japanese and not, for instance, Americans, or French, or Italians for fashion?

C: We admire them, too. American consumer products are becoming increasingly trendy in Hong Kong, especially since the early 1990s when many American companies started to invest in China and Hong Kong. Many of us eat at McDonald's, wear Hard Rock Cafe T-shirts, and put on jeans. Yet, there are two good reasons that Hong Kong people prefer Japanese products. First, Japanese products are more suitable for Hong Kong people in size and style. They are Asian, you know. In clothing for example, American and European products are often too big, wide, or colorful to wear, whereas Japanese clothing fits better. That's what my mother says, too. Another reason is that Americans and Europeans often use Hong Kong as a dumpsite. I mean, they bring things that didn't sell well back home, so we feel that we are discriminated -- not only economically but also racially. We feel that they can trick us because we are still like those Chinese they exploited back then, you know. When it comes to Japan, things are different. Things imported from there may be more expensive, but they are as high quality as they are in Japan, and we'd love to consume them.

R: In other words, you all can identify or associate yourselves with the Japanese economic and technological affluence through Japanese products that you consume, right?

C: That's right. Japanese things keep improving fast, you know. I can tell that Japanese put a lot of energy in seeking refinement and progress, and we have to keep up with them and learn from them.

This illustrates how modern Japanese products are popularized around the idea of ethnic suitability. The gist of Japan's modernization has been to master Western cultures and technologies according to the nation's domestic needs. Innovative fashions, customs, and products that are supportive to indigenous lifestyles have been enthusiastically incorporated into the existing system, strengthening the idea that Japan has risen to the level of the Western superpowers.[10] Chang offers a similar explanation for the situation in Hong Kong -- that modern Japanese fashions and products are more suitable to Hong Kong people in terms of their body size, stylistic familiarity, and perhaps the scarcity of space in Hong Kong, than their Western counterparts.[11]

Finally, I investigated Chang's perception of Japanese pop-idols. Chang revealed how Japanese-style pop-idols joined other popular art-forms in the creation of what he saw as the contemporary atmosphere in which other Asians are looking to Japan as a selective choice for Hong Kong people in terms of innovative trends and customs. This is indicated as follows:

R: What roles do Japanese pop-idols play in all of this? You mentioned Japanese pop-singers inflaming the Japan boom back in the early 1980s. What does their popularity have to do with the people's admiration of Japanese science and technology?

C: Well, Japanese pop-idols are our role models. They bring us fashion, music, and dramas about our closest first-world nation. It's the leading Asian country in the world, too. Japanese idols allow us to visualize the lifestyle of the developed nation that we look up to.

R: They symbolize Japan's socioeconomic development, right?

C: Definitely. They symbolize Japan's economic well being as a dream for Hong Kong people.

Thus, Chang elucidated the role of Japanese pop-idols as providers of dreams for Hong Kong people. My following expectation was that home-grown idols in Hong Kong, through their images of becoming, represented the local effort to realize that dream. This point was elaborated as follows:

R: What meaning do Hong Kong pop-idols hold for Hong Kong people? Are they followers of this Japanese dream?

C: In a way, yes, but there is more to this. Hong Kong pop-idols are our own Chinese role models. Japanese are Japanese, as we all know, who will never be culturally Chinese. Our pop-idols bring the Japanese dream even closer to us. They make us believe that we can actually be like Japanese as Chinese, you know.

R: I see, they have domesticating functions, right?

C: That's right. And I think the level of Hong Kong pop-idols and pop-culture in general improved greatly over the last few years. We are indeed catching up well with the Japanese!

R: Is Hong Kong trying to go beyond?

C: Sure! I hope that in the near future, we'll be able to come up with leading Cantonese pop stars on an international stage, or have a world-renowned Canton-pop! Why not!?

Indeed, for Chang, Hong Kong pop-idols embodied the local attitude of striving for a desired lifestyle, or the standard of living, that has not been obtained as of yet. While Japanese pop-idols in Hong Kong function as fantasy depictions which assist the people's sense of cultural development by portraying modern personal ideal-types, home-grown pop-idols in Hong Kong reify these ideal-types as a series of dream-come-true native celebrities. Clearly, Chang saw Japanese-style pop-idols as a vehicle to enhance Hong Kong's current economic status and future progress in Asia.

Chang's interest in Japanese pop-idols began when he became naturally aware of their popularity in high school. He said:

> Everyone around me talked about Noriko [Sakai], Rie Miyazawa, and other Japanese pop-idols. Both boys and girls competed with each other over how much they knew about these personalities, and the most recent and the trendiest Japanese fashion they represented. The more you demonstrated how much you knew, the more you felt privileged -- like showing off the most recent famous model of Japanese car you acquired and telling your close friends what you know about its mechanism, you know. I thought I needed to brush up my knowledge about Japanese pop-idols, too, and here I am now.

This implies that Chang's sense of empathy toward his pop-idol intensified as he developed a knowledge about that idol and her sociocultural background. This knowledge, was also a status-marker that helped Chang establish a position in his high school.

What intensified Chang's interest in Japanese pop-idols was his encounter with Noriko Sakai. He happened to find Sakai one day in a 1994 television drama, *Wo Ai Mei Ren Yu* (*My Be-Loved Pretty Mermaid*), which was the Chinese version of *Little Mermaid* that dramatized the romance between a cute mermaid (played by Sakai) and a young man (played by a Taiwanese actor). Not only was Chang attracted to Sakai's cute image in the drama, but he was also amazed by the fact that the drama was co-produced by Japanese and Taiwanese agencies. He felt that the Chinese media had reached a point where it could collaborate with the Japanese

industry, and Chinese producers could adopt a well-known Japanese pop-idol such as Sakai to produce their own forms of entertainment. This provided him with a sense of pride in what he called the "development of Chinese technology." Subsequently, Chang rented many videos from a nearby shop and watched Sakai and other Japanese and Chinese pop-idols sing, dance and act in various television shows.

In effect, Sakai for Chang was not only an adorable personality but also a "guiding angel" (as he called her) that provided him with a chance to expand his knowledge about Japanese-style science, technology and modern culture. He explained:

> Originally, I was only interested in Noriko [Sakai], I mean only her attractive personality. Then, I got interested in her activities, the way she performs, how she is produced, and so on. I started to pay attention to her surroundings, including her music, her fashion, her stage performances and their settings, people she performed with, backgrounds of the agency and record company to which she belonged, backgrounds of publishers who published her articles and so on. Suddenly, I realized that I was becoming interested in Japanese idol-production technology. I noticed that I was fascinated not only by Noriko, but by the way she was being produced, and how her promotion agencies operated. Then I realized I was becoming interested in something much more general -- about Japanese popular culture, then contemporary Japan at large. I never thought I would come this far, or that I would associate Noriko with what I already knew and admired about Japanese hardware technology -- you know, like how they make cars and electronic equipment. It's somewhat exciting to see all of these [specific and general] bits of information about Japanese culture and technology coming together through Noriko! Indeed, I think that Noriko represents the advanced technological world of contemporary Japan.

This discussion of Sakai as a symbol of innovative style for which Japan is currently treated as a dissemination point reminds the researcher of the role American pop stars once had for the Japanese audience, when Japan was trying to mimic the United States in the 1950s, and 1960s. For example, a Japanese female informant recalls how she was crazy about many American actors such as Clark Gable, James Dean, and Marlon Brando during her youth, and that hundreds of young people rushed to movie theatres every time their performances were featured on screen. In her view, these Hollywood actors and movies brought with them a desirable vision

of a bright future (*akarui mirai*) where poverty (or material shortage), experienced by many Japanese during and immediately after the Second World War, was no longer an issue. In such a future world, a greater emphasis was placed on personal happiness through luxurious lifestyles. As American political and economic influence dominated the international scene in the postwar period, American material and popular culture began to permeate Japanese society. The early postwar period in Japan brought with it a craze for American-made movies (Creighton 1995:143,144). In a similar way, Japanese and Japanese-style pop-idols now offer the desirable image of an affluent modern nation for adolescents in those countries wanting to be equally modernized.

Apparently, Chang struggled to keep his knowledge about Japanese pop-idols and their manufacturing agencies updated by purchasing magazines and newspapers regularly and paying special attention to sections on Japanese entertainment. One of his most dedicated hobbies was to collect CDs of Japanese and Cantonese pop-idols and listen to them comparatively. He had hundreds of these CDs piled up in his shelf, which he collected over the years. Chang sang most of the songs in these CDs, including Japanese songs in Japanese whether or not he understood what the lyrics meant exactly. His apartment was covered with idol-posters, many of which featured Sakai, which he said would create an encouraging atmosphere. Chang also sat in front of his computer for two to three hours every evening browsing through idol-related sources in internet home pages (figure 38).

For Chang, all of these activities were part of learning about Japanese science, technology, and culture through entertainment sources. In school, Chang's interest in Japan led him to take courses in Japanese language, business, history and culture. His interest in Japanese pop-idols and their environs expedited his studies in Japan-related subjects. Chang also thought that all the knowledge he was gaining about Japan as centered around Japanese pop-idols would

# A Million Kisses for NORIKO SAKAI

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PROFILE
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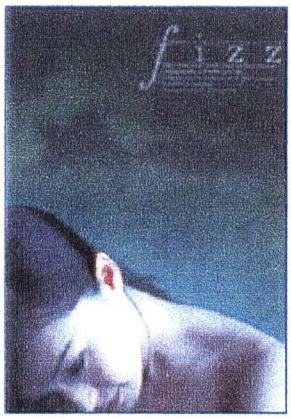
TELEVISION
PHOTO ALBUMS
PHOTO SHOP
SONG LYRICS
COMPLETE LINKS
E-MAIL ME

U R Visitor #:

Recipient of The Complete Noriko Sakai Dream Page Award 1997

Welcome to *A Million Kisses for Noriko Sakai*! She's one of the most beautiful and popular entertainment idols from Japan. This wonderful singer and actress has appeared on stage, television, media advertisement campaigns, and not to mention, in the dreams of countless fans like you and me! Please enjoy your adventure here and have fun with over **100 full color pictures** and tons of information to go along with them. I do all the work so you don't have to! Continuously updated (just like the picture to the right...)!




*f i z z*

*NEW!* Noriko's latest photo album is out and it's titled "fizz". From what I've seen, I think it is her best collection of pictures that I have come across yet. This album portrays her as a young, feminine woman with a bit more sex appeal as compared with her earlier works. A definite "must get" for all Noriko fans! Check out 25 new pics from this album by clicking on the image to the left. Enjoy!

Please bookmark this site / add me to your links.

This site was originally launched on April 29, 1997 and was last updated on **April 20, 1998**. Please read my disclaimer.

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japansound.com

**Figure 38. A sample internet home page of Noriko Sakai.**

encourage him to become an informed businessman in the near future -- who could communicate with and even impress the Japanese.

All in all, Chang's case demonstrates how everyday adoration of Japanese-style pop-idols can become a meaningful practice of cultural identity formation. Japanese pop-idols and their Chinese versions provided Chang with a way of figuring his local identity, in the context of Asia as a region, in terms of the level of socioeconomic development. The process in which Chang crafted his local identity in light of Japanese-style role models was also the process whereby he was socialized into an evermore global consumer culture, grounded in capitalist-class values and manifested in the historical discourse on Asia-Pacific. The political, economic, sociocultural, and historical meaning of pop-idols is read, understood, and developed by consumers such as Gregory Chang who are conscious about their own national well-being.

### *Hegemony, Symbolism, and Culture Contact*

The Hong Kong audience's response to Japanese pop-idols can be interpreted as an example of cultural hegemony, or the influence of one cultural group upon another (Gramsci 1971; Williams 1977; Roseberry 1989). McKellin (1991:319) summarizes three significant aspects of hegemony: 1) hegemony is an attribute of civil authority rather than political coercion; 2) hegemony is a selective tradition, excerpted from a cultural complex, which masquerades as a coherent whole; and 3) hegemony is better viewed as a historical process, or as the process of hegemonization, rather than a static state. McKellin draws on the study of language and culture contact, especially Samarin's (1971) analysis of pidginization, to provide a deeper insight into the understanding of cultural hegemony. Samarin defines pidginization as an ubiquitous process of linguistic development that occurs in varying degrees when communication, specifically

trade, requires the bridging of different languages, dialects, and sociolects. McKellin uses this to discuss the vectors of change in the process of cultural domination.

To demonstrate his point, McKellin examines change in the land tenure system from cognatic to patrilineal land ownership among the Managalase of Papua New Guinea. This change, directed by the Papua government in response to the introduction of coffee as a cash crop, is shown to have altered women's identity and social status from full to halved participants in the network of social and political influence. Managalase villagers recognized these changes as an officially selected portion of the European tradition that would contribute to their membership in the international commodities market. This resembled the way pidgins develop as a colloquial trade language: that is, structural simplification that facilitates communication in contact situations. Thus, McKellin characterizes the Papua government's interpretation of the Managalse principles of ownership and its guidelines for coffee planting as a form of cultural pidginization that simplified the customary rules and reduced the complex distinctions of the old land tenure system. The hegemonization process simplified the Managalse land tenure system in much the same way as the speakers of pidgin simplify their language to communicate effectively with other languages or dialects in trade.

While McKellin's focus on linguistic analogy to illustrate the vectors of hegemonization is suggestive, the analytical scheme regarding language change should be attended more carefully according to different processes involved in contact situations. Appel and Muysken (1987), for example, demonstrate cases in which the speakers of another language imitate the complex sentence patterns of a language (1987:158). Often in these circumstances, the borrowers consider the source language as being prestigious. They incorporate the source language with their own. As the result of this fusion, the language pattern becomes complicated. Such a process is one of several ways in which language could change in contact situations: others

include substration, where a language brought into another region than that of its original use is modified according to the rules of language spoken in the region; lexical borrowing, where changes occur at the level of lexicon rather than that of sentence structure; and drastic relexification, involving the replacement of vocaburary of one language with that of another while maintaining the original grammar (1987:154-158). In this view, pidginization and resultant linguistic simplification is a peculiar form of linguistic convergence. What appears ubiquitous across these different situations is a tendency to standardize, unify, or homogenize linguistic patterns -- where one language assimilates its form, however partially or superficially, toward another. Whether this change involves simplification or complication is dependent upon the contact situation in each case.

The development of Japanese-style pop-idols in Hong Kong -- as a communicative response of the local industry to cultural exposure -- is consistent with the general process of language change in contact situations. The assimilation of Canton-pop toward Japanese idol-pop is reflected in the elaboration of the style, the induction of the performers' role, as well as the performers' extended life expectancy in the industry. These salient features of change to the form and function of Cantonese pop-idol performances are recognized by the audience (such as Gregory Chang) as prestigious markers representing favorable aspects of Hong Kong's technological and social development.

**Summary**

With examples of how pop-idols are thought to be more than venerable and adored personalities in one culture, this chapter extended the view from Japan to other Asian countries. Within the range of ethnographic data, it examined how Japanese-style pop-idols are marketed by their manufacturing agencies and consumed by their audiences as a vehicle for identifying

their positions in an increasingly modernizing world. In light of Friedman's theory that consumption in an increasingly global world serves as a means for people to constitute an identity space, this chapter showed that the expanding capitalization of Japanese-style pop-idols in the Asian market today is an attribute of the emergent ethos in the Asian region that emphasizes the idea of socioeconomic progress.

The growing popularity of pop-idol performances in developing Asian countries testifies to the fact that such youth-oriented personalities are becoming widely celebrated in these places as symbols of national wealth. Japanese-style pop-idols are hereby produced and used by their manufacturing agencies as a set of commodities that arouse, channel, and domesticate a fantasy of a materially developed world, as represented by Japanese consumer culture. The current popularity of pop-idols in various parts of Asia indicates the reception this informed purposiveness has among observers who are inclined to interpret themselves and their local cultures in an increasingly global world through iconic representations.

The discussion in this chapter has tried to draw on ethnographic examples of idol performances and show how the cultivating function of popular culture performances (discussed by Barnouw and Kirkland [1992]) is applicable not only within the domain of one culture or society, but also across different cultures or societies. I have tried to demonstrate how the sense of historical coherence, especially the feeling that Asia is currently catching up with the West in terms of fashion, lifestyle, and consumer culture, is cumulatively created and increasingly shared among Asian people through the consumption of personified symbolic-commodities. At the same time, this symbolic consumption contributes to the realization of the difference in Asian people's cultural backgrounds and identities.

The consumption of pop-idols tends to be prominent in places such as China, Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan and Vietnam -- countries that are currently undergoing rapid

socioeconomic transition. Japanese pop-idol styles provide a point of motif-dissemination for the producers in these countries. On one hand, this motivates some Japanese promotion agencies to collaborate with local agencies from other Asian countries, facilitate new waves, and create cross-cultural ties and networks. On the other hand, it demonstrates the effort of many Asians outside Japan to master the technologies of Japanese-style popular culture production.

Finally, the analysis in this chapter attempted to show that popular culture forms can inscribe ideological themes that nevertheless allow audiences to generate meanings from it that meet the needs of their own local identities. That is, potentially variable meaningful articulations of a specific cultural form must be understood in terms of their dialogic relationship with ideological themes, rather than anarchistic or pluralistic constructions as such (Mukerji and Schudson 1991:41). To borrow from Hall (1980), popular art forms that are produced at any given moment in history can simultaneously include their preferred and alternative, or even oppositional, readings of the time. The emerging genre of Asian idol-pop can inscribe the so-called "partnerships for progress" -- the ideological theme of APEC in the early 1990s -- in the form of a dialogue between political and symbolic forces. While the political side of this dialogue emphasizes the modernizing process led by governmental leadership, its symbolic counterpart focuses on the idealized outcomes of modernization as represented by a rich consumer society such as Japan.

We live in a world today where the increasingly global impact of capitalism stimulates more people in more areas to adopt comparable lifestyles and share similar values through the consumption of widely distributed commodities. The study of popular culture in this context entails the understanding of the dialogue between capitalism and its local or regional manifestations. This may mean analyzing the various international links through an examination

of their consequences within a particular site (Miller 1997:12), or investigating the impact of deterritorialization on the imaginative resources of lived, local experiences (Appadurai 1991:196). The overall aim of this chapter has been to contribute to such a study by emphasizing the role played by pop-idols and their image-making institutions as a mediating apparatus that bridges the gap between global flows and local articulations.

**Notes:**

1. The celebration of *Puffy* in Taiwan and Hong Kong led the duo to release one of their smash hits, *Kore Ga Watashi No Ikiru Michi* (*This Is The Way I Live*), in Chinese.

2. Among the home-grown big-name idols produced by indigenous promotion agencies following Japanese manufacturing methods today are Rao Dai and Jie Liu of China, *Soteji Wa Idol* and Susie Kang of South Korea, Andy Lau, Vivian Chow, and Sammy Chen of Hong Kong, Emile Chow, Tarcy So, *S.O.S.* and Vivian Hsu of Taiwan, Christina of Thailand, Itje Trisnawaty and Mellyana of Indonesia, Sheila Majid of Malaysia, *Smokey Mountain* of the Philippines, and Hong Nhung of Vietnam.

3. APEC was founded in 1989. Its original members included Australia, Brunei, Canada, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, the Philippines, and the United States. The People's Republic of China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan joined in 1991, followed by Mexico and Papua New Guinea in 1993, and Chile in 1995.

4. ASEAN's members include Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Brunei. Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar are proposing to join the membership.

5. By 1992, Yaohan had a total of 26 overseas stores in Brunei, China, Costa Rica, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Taiwan, Thailand, and the United States (Kodansha 1993:1739). Its Canadian branch was established in 1991.

6. For further details regarding the activities of Asian entertainment companies, see Kawakami (1995).

7. Interestingly, some Japanese producers who were acquainted with overseas Asian markets commented that the pop-idol fad and popular-culture boom in Asian countries other than Japan, along with the standards of technology, reminded them of Japan back in the 1960s and early 1970s when it was still economically developing.

8. See Yang *et al* (1997:254-256) for further details.

9. Images of *samurai*, *geisha*, *sumō*-wrestlers, and Mt. Fuji are considered to be symbols of traditional Japan. These appear on the front cover of popular magazines that discuss Japan (see, for example, *International Business Week*, 9/7/1987; *New York Times*, 9/26/1987; *Fortune International*, 2/26/1990). Logos featuring *samurai* and *geisha* figures on the side of Japan studies articles in recent issues of *Ethnology* are academic examples of the traditional characterization of Japan.

10. See, for example, Hendry (1987:18). In her article, Creighton (1995:143), based on her interview, shows that Japan copies Western fashion while seeing it as based on a different body type. The Japanese sense of mastering Western technology in the Japanese way was also observed in a talk I attended in Seattle at the height of economic conflict between Japan and the United States. In this talk a Japanese ambassador suggested that Japanese are good at refining American products in such a way that they become smaller, more portable, more energy efficient, and therefore more accommodating to the lack of space and people's sense of saving in Japan.

11. One of the well-known characteristics of Japanese manufacturing technology is miniaturization. Various companies emphasized the production of small products with maximum utility in order to accommodate an environment in which space has always been scarce. The development of a pocket-size transistor radio in the 1950s, led by Tōkyō Telecommunications Engineering Company, now known as Sony, is a typical example (e.g., Schiffer 1991). Hong Kong faces a problem similar to Japan in terms of the availability of space. It would not be surprising that the people of Hong Kong prefer Japanese products over relatively larger imports from elsewhere for this reason.

## CHAPTER VIII – GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has examined the production of female pop-idols and their identity formation in Japan. A wide range of commercial activities, institutional networks, and social relationships that revolve around adolescent personalities who are in the process of becoming talented adult-performers were considered. Pop-idols, while providing foundation for industry proft-making, nonetheless constitute a genre of popular performance that both deploys and creates cultural motifs of adolescent socialization. Pop-idols function as role models for constructing youthful emerging selves, and their performances characterize a contemporary form of *rites de passage* whose function is to initiate young people into the consumer world of present-day Japan. The main goal of this thesis was to analyze this genre and illustrate how young personalities are nurtured, packaged and marketed in Japanese culture and society.

The goal of this thesis was to provide a picture of a commercialized form of initiation ritual in contemporary Japanese popular culture and mass society that goes beyond anecdotal evidence with subjective interpretations of symbolic texts and activities (cf. Inamasu 1989; Ogura 1990,1991). Since the birth of Japan's modernity in the late 19th century, fashions and lifestyles, to a great extent modeled after those of Europe and the United States, have pervaded the everyday life of Japanese people. Yet, traditional ideas, customs, and norms remain essential parts of Japanese life, and people develop a multifaceted sense of selfhood as they are enmeshed in a number of behavioral options and social roles. In this setting, pop-idols and their manufacturing agencies try to establish themselves as agents of socialization that can coordinate the organizational courses of people's action. An amusement genre, the idol-pop offers youthful fans a place of refuge, a fantasy world where they can liberate themselves from family and school obligations and play with their ideal personal and sexual role models. At the same time, pop-idols present themselves as public role models that contribute to public socialization by

providing their viewers with such desirable Japanese values as pure-heartedness, hard work, consideration for others, and self contentment. These values are reflected in their performances, through which pop-idols project themselves as adorable public figures as part of their self-promotion.

**Adolescence and Identity Formation**

The public role of pop-idols is made possible within the a culture that regards adolescence as a significant life-stage in which individuals are expected to explore themselves as they socialize with peers. Pop-idols reflect this life-stage through their images and narratives, developing social ties with their generation of fans and emphasizing their roles as adolescent companions. Eventually, pop-idols transform their images from an innocent novice to an experienced actor in the process of winning their public recognition. Adolescents can grow up together with their favorite personalities through the act of consumption for which the very process of self-transformation is merchandised.

To become a socially competent adult is to accommodate oneself to culturally defined roles, which involve sex, gender, class (or status) and ethnicity. For female pop-idols in particular, becoming professionals generally meant molding oneself into a personality that could act out the ideological role of "good wife, wise mother" in media spaces, if not in real life as well. To this end, many pop-idols, in the past, have embodied a cute style -- a meek, weak, and benevolent style of femininity considered a necessary stage on the way to becoming a "good wife, wise mother." However, this formerly predominant image of subservient femaleness gave way to a more powerful, self-expressive, and sexually vibrant image of new femaleness along with a trend toward women's liberation since the late 1980s. As the cultural definition of what is appropriate changes in time, so does the image of pop-idols. Yet, it was questionable as to

whether the movement in representation toward the powerful image of adolescent femaleness truly empowered their actors and imitators. In the observer's eyes, these supposedly new images of women were designed and marketed under the supervision of male producers who dominated the industry and acted with masculinist principles. In the end, the empowering female imagery was shown to be appropriated by the industry and retooled to suit the masculinist mode of production. In this way, the pop-idol industry operated as a symbolic field in which gendered images were created and contested. As an encompassing cultural matrix, the idol-system of production generated a repertoire of gender ideals over time from which consumers could choose and develop their own gender identities.

As the case study of Seiko Matsuda's life-history has shown, the passage of one particular pop-idol characterized the transition of gender stereotyping. Matsuda, represented originally as a cute and innocent novice, wise mother," was eventually projected as an independent, self-reliant, and self-creative personality who rejected her earlier socially subservient role. Part of this metamorphosis, which enlightened the lifestyle of many young female fans, is expressed in the form of Matsuda's convergence with urban American lifestyles and performances. Her frequent trips to New York, sexual relationships with American men, and adoption of various American fashions, values and techniques in stage-performances provided her Japanese audience with a playful excursion into an exotic world of fantasies.

While Matsuda's incorporation of exotic Western images into her style signified her popular role as a bearer of innovative style and value, it also imposed a moral threat upon many of her viewers. As Western culture is often considered to carry negative values of egoism and individualism that go against the traditional emphasis on collectivities, the Americanized Matsuda has been seen as an alien figure who projected individual self-indulgence and

sensuality. A series of articles about Matsuda in the Japanese mass media attempted to criticize her and suggested that Matsuda's innovative activities posed a moral threat to the public.

Against this, Matsuda projected herself and was accepted by the public as a clever cultural strategist who absorbed media-created scandals into her self-promotion process. Matsuda appealed to the idea of self-accomplishment, an important concept in Japanese culture. One who accomplishes her or his goals in life through hard work and the overcoming of various obstacles deserves public recognition in Japan, and Japanese popular literature is filled with idealized personalities who sacrifice themselves for a greater social achievement. This is the value which Matsuda came to represent. The idea of self-accomplishment is not unique to Matsuda, however, and it runs through the symbolic mediation process -- between self and society, childhood and adulthood, and/or traditional values and modern lifestyles -- which characterizes pop-idol performances in general. Successful pop-idols not only market dreams that can feed the minds of thousands of people, but also demonstrate before them that one can make these dreams come true with her or his passion and effort. Largely, this process of self-accomplishment is dramatized by the mass media that beset the idol-subject in a recurrent agonistic situation.

The adoration of pop-idols as symbols of transcendent ego is not, of course, limited to Japan, and one may just as easily name examples from places like America's Hollywood. For example, Judy Garland is often considered a personality who transformed herself from a small-town, all-American girl-next door to a capable singer as well as the personification of good humor in show business. She did so through a series of struggles to overcome her neurotic private life (e.g., Dyer 1987). Yet, such a viewpoint may coexist with that of others who see Garland as a wholesome girl who became a star but an unhappy one. She brought herself to a downhill decline, ultimately, to death by an overdose because of her struggle for career and glamour in

show business. In any case, one may argue that pop-idol performances differ from these individual cases elsewhere in terms of the extent and intensity in which young personalities appear as adolescent role models, or by the fact these personalities are expected as the genre's *sine qua non.*

The images of becoming that pop-idol performances merchandise is not limited to the representation of adolescents' personal quest for self-accomplishment in the period of their maturation. Idol performances can also represent the youth of a nation. This point is suggested by the expanding popularity of pop-idols outside of Japan and in particular developing Asian countries. Japanese pop-idols in these places signify Japan as a model of modern consumer society. Subsequently, homegrown pop-idols emerge in these areas as "facilitators" (so to speak) of socioeconomic progress. Idol performances can be characterized as rites of modernization in this regard (Peacock 1968). What might be for adolescent individuals a field in which adult social values are playfully acquired through a series of cultural role models may also be a domain in which the people of developing Asian nations construct modern fashions and lifestyles. Thus, Japanese pop-idol performances provide a point of dissemination for the producers and consumers of trends in these Asian countries.

**Pop-Idol Performances and Middle-Class Identities**

The question of identity and that of cultural boundary are deeply implicated in each other. To identify oneself with certain cultural forms is to meaningfully distinguish oneself from those who do not identify themselves with that form. In the Japanese entertainment industry, this distinction is manifested in terms of different genres of popular cultural performances. In popular music, for example, there are *enka* for elders and working class people, rock'n roll for

youngsters who are *kōha* or "on the solid side," folk and new music for *nanpa* or the "moderate," and idol-pop for younger adolescents and love-struck audiences of all ages.

Within the field of pop-idol performances, this distinction is further demonstrated by the differentiation of styles between pop-idols and idol-groups, as well as by fans and fan-groups who support different idols and idol-groups. Audience members establish different degrees of involvement in pop-idol performances: while some are enthusiastic fans who fell into (*hamatteiru*) the traps of idol attraction, others simply want to enjoy seeing likable personalities are more spontaneous in their engagement. Different layers of boundaries could be seen among pop-idol fans themselves. There were even those who, less serious about their engagement, tended to ridicule those who take great joy and pride in chasing and cheering their idols. Enthusiastic fans are considered abnormal (*ijō*) because of their heavy involvement in what other people thought was *karui goraku* or "light entertainment."

These distinctions in popular cultural performances coexist with distinctions based on commodity-tastes in other spheres, together constituting the social environment of contemporary Japan that can be characterized as a consumer society (Bourdieu 1984,1993). In this sense, pop-idol performances socialize young people into the capitalist system where differentiation through acts of consumption and consumption-driven production become the primary means of locating oneself. As Clammer points out, such a tendency for consumption decisions concentrates around a middle-class identity:

> It does not mean primarily a spontaneous identification with the imposed category of class, but the recognition of reality based on the large but nevertheless surprisingly structured range of consumption choices which is in turn linked to similar incomes, and the desire for homogeneity which is a powerful element in Japanese psychology (Clammer 1997:102).

This emphasis on homogeneity in Japan does not eliminate difference, but defines it within, and assigns it to, particular categories in such a way that those who express themselves accordingly

must conform to the norms and expectations regarding the categorical definitions of who they are. In addition, the cultural ideal relevant to this is the idea of classificatory status, expressed in Japanese as *bun* or "one's part" (Lebra 1976; Smith 1983; Hamaguchi 1985). Oriented toward cooperative aspects of relationship, Japanese gain a strong sense of self by approximating ideal role types, joining groups, and situating themselves in relation to others (Smith 1983, quoted in Rosenberger 1992b:10). Elsewhere, Kumon (1982:26,27) argues that although Japanese can engage in keen competition, Japanese-style competition, due to the cultural emphasis on group conformity, focuses on not falling behind the others rather than standing out. Both of these arguments indicate how Japanese frame or wrap up personal differences in the scheme of the interpersonal similarity or the idea of the group harmony (see Creighton 1990:294,295). Present-day Japanese consumer society can be perceived in terms of these prominent cultural values – as a manifestation of social ties in the structured range of consumption choices.

In characterizing Japanese consumer culture, Clammer further notes:

> This is handled not by denying differences, but by regarding them as largely symbolic, which gives every actor the opportunity either to accept or to redefine the code, which is thus inherently unstable. But this instability does not produce symbolic chaos; on the contrary, it tends to promote convergence on a very unity of identity, the parameters of which are set both by convention and by the objective consumption possibilities -- what is in the market (Clammer 1997:102).

Seen in this light, one may argue that the stylistic promotion and symbolic competition that occur in idol performances signify the nature of social interaction enacted by those who identify themselves with Japan's middle-class: that is, competition over symbolic details within an actually very homogeneous social category. This competition simultaneously plays down the disruptive and overtly competitive consequences of such rivalry.

The ethnographic case studies in this thesis were intended to examine the above point made by Clammer by uncovering how and why conventions and forms of consumption are

manipulated by the entertainment industry, or the network of people who belong to talent-promotion agencies, sponsoring corporations, and the mass media. Thus, the contextualized account of pop-idol performances contributes to the understanding of conventions, established through practices of consumption.

**Pop-Idols and the Logic of Late Capitalism**

The study of pop-idol performances is further demonstrates the nature of the contemporary Japanese consumer society which is often associated with postmodernism, or what Jameson (1984) identifies as the cultural logic of late capitalism. Above all, such a logic emphasizes the multiplicity of meanings that are manifested in the ongoing, dynamic interplay among different views, values, and interpretations -- none of which predominates over the others (Kaplan 1988; Hutcheon 1989).

The postmodern aesthetic of the consumer society marks a social life that is situated in planned obsolescence; an ever more rapid rhythm of fashion and styling changes; the penetration of advertising, television, and the media generally to a hitherto unparalleled degree throughout society. The replacement of the old tension between city and country, center and province, is paralleled by the growth of the great networks of superhighways and the arrival of automobile culture. All of these conditions signify a radical break with the society in which modernism played an underground force (Kaplan 1988:28). In such a social setting, the boundary between illusions and realities are blurred as people invest socially, economically, and physically in the fantasies with which they represent, imagine, and use to escape their social realities (Allison 1996:18). This is where industries that rely on fashions and trends step in with their idea of marketing dreams. In Japan, *yume* or "dreams" and *fantajii* from the English

"fantasies" have been an important marketing concept used to drive the public, especially young people who are sensitive to trends, toward the act of consumption.

The idol system is precisely a system that has been built on this middle-class logic of late capitalism. It facilitates the symbolic exchange of commodities that borrow on and produce sensual illusions, or the series of crafted, adorable icons called *aidoru*, that are intended to appeal to consumer tastes, desires and pleasures. Not only do pop-idols contribute to this form of capitalized symbolism by wearing fancy costumes, singing romantic songs, emphasizing dreams in their narratives, and appearing on stage with stage effects illuminating exotic wonderlands, but also by continuously driving love-struck audiences to participate in the reproduction of a fantasy world. They can repeatedly escape from the realities in which they are usually situated.

It is no wonder that a youth-oriented movement like the idol boom reached its peak when it did in Japan during the 1980s -- at the height of the nation's economic bubble. This followed years of rapid economic growth. The hard work ideology geared toward the modernization of the country gave birth to a new cultural atmosphere, fed by rising incomes and inhabited by a new generation intent on differentiating themselves from their elders by enjoying the fruits of socioeconomic and technological developments. This is also the time when the idea of Japan as a middle-class society became popular, and terms such as "postmodern" and "avant-garde" became key words to appear and be discussed in academic as well as popular texts (e.g., Miyoshi and Harootunian 1989). In this respect, pop-idols, like television and other consumer products, function as objects that signify class-identity. The study of pop-idol performances provides the understanding of the relationship between popular art forms and class differentiation.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

Several aspects of pop-idol performances yield possibility for further investigations. For example, my research focused on female pop-idols and their promotion agencies. This is because I was able to contact a large number of people who were related to female pop-idols in the realms of both production and consumption. In contrast, I was not able to develop a sufficient number of quality contacts among the small number of agencies that control male pop-idols. A comparison of the production of masculinity manifest in male pop-idols with the femininity of female pop-idols, therefore, is an important component of future research.

Likewise, a cross-cultural comparison between Japanese, Asian, and non-Asian idol performances needs further examination. I examined in the scope of my ethnographic fieldwork some aspects of Asian pop-idols and their local production techniques in comparison to their Japanese counterparts. However, Asian pop-idols, as much as the categorical concept "Asia" itself, must be deconstructed furthermore in relation to different ethnic identities, ideologies, religious beliefs, socioeconomic trends, and other cultural values that exist and interact within this vast region in the Pacific. A similar task applies to the examination of similarities and differences between Japanese pop-idols and their Euro-American counterparts -- especially in reference to recently popular pop-idol groups such as the *Backstreet Boys* and the *Spice Girls* that are attracting millions of teenagers all around the world. Whether these specific cases have any tie with Japanese idol-production technology (and if so why) may reveal some important aspects regarding the capitalist globalization of popular culture.

In spite of these limitations, the present study of Japanese pop-idol performances hopes to have contributed to the anthropological understanding of symbolism in a contemporary social context. Using idol as a guiding concept, I have tried to show how cultural institutions manipulate the very arbitrary nature of symbols. Francis Bacon in the quote that introduced the

thesis describes idols as a "faulty and unskillful abstraction." In my analysis. I have examined the skills used to craft these embodiments of cultural ideas. Pop-idols are used by commercial institutions to saturate the public consciousness, substantiate meanings that can become part of cultural competence, and organize social events, practices and experiences within their power structure. More importantly, I have tried to illuminate how individuals within this institutional power structure lead their lives through the ongoing dialectic between self and society.

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## APPENDIX I – JAPANESE TEXTUAL AND MEDIA SOURCES ON POP-IDOLS CONSULTED

Listed below are some of the sources that I consulted either during my fieldwork or used in this thesis. The classification of these sources is based on interviews with producers, publishers, and editors.

**Popular Books and Articles**:

***Books Written on Pop-Idols by Journalists and Promoters***:


Aizawa, Hideyoshi (1995). *Aidoru Kōbō: Yume No Tsumugikata* (*Idol Factory: How To Spin One's Dreams*. Tōkyō: Scholar. [Memoir written by the president of Sun Music Corporation]

Amano, Jack and Arisaka, Ayumi (1991). *The Idolist Manual: Aidoru Pops 80-90* (*The Idolist Manual: Idol-Pops, 1980-1990*). Tōkyō: Matsuzaka Jazz-Hihyōsha. [Manual of idol classifications and profiles]

Aoki, Ichirō (1990). *Zettai Aidoru-Shugi* (*Perfect Pop-Idolism*). Tōkyō: Seishinsha. [Promotional essay]

Hashiguchi, Takashi and Negishi, Yasuo (1996). *Hina Ni Mune-Kyun* (*In Love with Hina*). Tōkyō: Shōgakkan. [Promotional comic book]

Hashimoto, Maki (1994). *Onna Wa Minna Matsuda Seiko Ga Suki* (*All Women Like Seiko Matsuda*). Tōky ō: Chihaya Shobō. [Critique of Seiko Matsuda]

Hayashi, Akemi (1989). *C-Chō Aidoru Daigokai Heiseiban: Aidoru Yōgo No Kiso-Chishiki* (*The C-Class Pop-Idol Dictionary, Heisei Version: Basic Pop-Idol Terminology*). Tōkyō: JICC Shuppankyoku. [Profile manual]

Higano, Harufusa (1994). *Otoko Nara Ichido Wa Netemitai Seijo: Matsuda Seiko No Kenkyū* (*A Research on Seiko Matsuda, A Sacred Woman With Whom Any Man Wants To Sleep With Once*). Tōkyō: Pocket Book-Sha. [Critique of Seiko Matsuda].

Kanai, Satoru (1996). *Aidoru Babylon: Gedō No Ōkoku* (*Idol Baylon: The Kingdom of Outlaws*). Tōkyō: Ōta Shuppan. [Fan analysis]

Kawanobe, Shizuki and *Seiko Matsuda Special Team* (1994). *Matsuda Seiko Onna Kakumei* (*Seiko Matsuda: A Woman's Liberation*). Tōkyō: Wani Magajinsha. [Critique of Seiko Matsuda]

Kimura Takuya Kenkyū Iinkai (Takuya Kimura Research Committee)(ed.)(1995). *Kimura Takuya: Ima Nihon De Ichiban Kakkoii Otoko* (*Takuya Kimura: The Coolest Guy in Japan Today*). Tōkyō: Itakura Shobō. [A volume of essays promoting Takuya Kimura]

Kindaieigasha, Inc. (ed.)(1995). *Big Aidoru On Parade* (*Big Idols On Parade*). Tōkyō. [Profile manual]

Kindaieigasha, Inc. (ed.)(1996). *Visual Meikan: The Star Gojū-Nen* (*Visual Encyclopedia: Fifty Years of Pop-Stars*). Tōkyō. [Profile manual in two volumes: male and female idol pop-stars]

Kitagawa, Mashiro and T.P. Ranking (eds.)(1989). *Aidoru Tanteidan* (*Idol Detectives*).Tōkyō: Takarajimasha. [Profile manual, published annually since 1989]

Kitagawa, Mashiro and T.P. Ranking (eds.)(1995). *CM Aidoru Meikan* (*An Encyclopedia of TV-Commercial Pop-Idols*). Tōkyō: Bunkasha. [Profile manual, published annually since 1995]

Konishi Yōhei (ed.)(1996). *The Best Mook Series 61, Super-Photo: Oscar Promotion: 1300-Nin No Bijo Teikoku* (*The Best Mook Series 61: Super-Photo: Oscar Promotion Agency: 1300 Members of the Beauty Empire*). Tōkyō: KK Bestsellers. [The profile manual of Oscar Promotion Agency]

Konishi, Yōichi (ed.)(1995). *The Best Mook Series 52, Super-Photo: Yellowcab & Sands.* Tōkyō: Mediaworks. Tōkyō: KK Bestsellers. [Profiles of two sister agencies, Yellow Cab and Sands]

Konyanko Club (Kitten's Club, Jr.)(ed).(1989). *Onyanko Hakusho* (*Kitten's Club Files*). Tōkyō: Fuji Television Shuppan. [The profile manual of a pop-idol group, *Onyanko Club* or *Kitten's Club*]

Miyazawa Rie Kenkyūhan (Rie Miyazawa Research Team)(ed.)(1994). *Miyazawa Rie: Higeki No Shinsō* (*Rie Miyazawa: The Truth Behind Her Trajedy*). Tōkyō: Rokusaisha. [Critique of Rie Miyazawa]

Momoko Tokubetsu Henshū (Momoko Special Editing)(ed.)(1985). *Jōdan Wa Yamete Mazu Kikuchi Momoko* (*Put Jokes Aside, Momoko Kikuchi, First Of All*). Tōkyō: Gakken. [Profiles of Momoko Kikuchi]

Ōsaka Kinki Kids Kenkyūkai (Ōsaka Kinki Kids Research Group)(ed.)(1996). *Kinki Kids Ga Shiritai* (*I Want To Know About Kinki Kids*). Tōkyō: Kōdansha. [A volume containing essays which promote a pop-idol group, *Kinki Kids*]

Sakai, Masatoshi (1995). *Shinwa O Kizuita Star No Sugao* (*The True Faces of Pop Stars Who Constructed Myths*). Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū. [Memoir written by a producer]

Scholar, Inc. (ed.)(1995). *Chūmoku Aidoru Kanzen Data Book* (*A Complete Data-Book on Remarkable Pop-Idols*). Tōkyō. [Profile manual, published annually since 1995]

Sony Music Entertainment, Inc. (ed.)(1995). *Tōkyō Performance Doll: TPD in the CASE.* Tōkyō: Sony Magazines, Inc. [Profile of a pop-idol group, *Tōkyō Performance Doll*]

TV & Idol Chōsa Iinkai (TV and Pop-Idol Research Committee)(ed.)(1996). *TV & Aidoru: '80-'95 (TV and Pop-Idols: 1980-1995)*. Tōkyō: Take Shobō Bunko. [Profile manual in two volumes: 1) idols who made debut between 1980-1986; 2) idols who made debut between 1986-1995]

Takada, Taiji (ed.)(1997). *The Sun Music*. Tōkyō: Scholar. [The profile manual of Sun Music Productions, Inc.]

Takakura, Fumitoshi (1989). *Bishōjo O Sagase (Look For Beautiful Girls)*. Tōkyō: JICC Shuppankyoku. [Promotional essay]

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*SPA!* Tōkyō: Fusōsha. [Business, culture, and entertainment magazine]

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