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The Costs of Lolicon: Japan's Pedophilia Trade

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**The Costs of *Lolicon*:
Japan's Pedophilia Trade**

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Table of Contents

1. Abstract.....	3
2. Japanese Terms.....	3
3. Literature Review.....	5
4. Theoretical Framework.....	11
5. Introduction and Methodology.....	12
6. Historical Overview	
1. Religious Normalization of Pedophilia.....	15
1. <i>Chigo</i> in Medieval Japanese Buddhism.....	15
2. Historic Normalization of Pedophilia.....	18
1. <i>Wakashu</i> in Edo Period Pleasure Quarters.....	18
2. World War II and Soft Power.....	21
3. A Modern Look.....	24
4. Impact of Pedophilia on Japan	
1. Japanese Pop Culture.....	26
1. <i>Lolicon</i> in <i>Anime</i> and Advertising.....	26
2. Idol Culture and Its Victims.....	29
3. JK Business and the Girlfriend Experience.....	33
4. “Virtual” Versus “Real” Child Pornography.....	36
2. Japanese Society.....	38
1. Population Decline and Feminism.....	38
3. Japanese Economy and Polity.....	41
1. Exporting and Politicizing Japan’s Soft Power.....	41
5. Oppositions to My Perspective.....	46
6. Conclusion.....	49
7. Bibliography.....	52

Abstract

This thesis investigates Japan's normalization of pedophilia via the proliferation of popular culture and media. This analysis will begin by looking at historical examples of pedophilia, specifically focusing on *chigo* in Medieval Japanese Buddhism, *wakashu* in Edo Period pleasure quarters, and the spread of soft power diplomacy after World War II. This phenomenon will also be viewed in the modern context by discussing *lolicon* in Japanese media and advertising, idol culture in the Japanese music industry, the JK business, and “real” child pornography. The ways that Japan benefits from this culture economically and politically will also be investigated. Finally, this thesis will take into consideration the opinions of those who do not see these media forms as morally reprehensible, and consider the ways this phenomenon may or may not endanger children in real life.

Japanese Terms

Anime: derived from the English word “animation,” refers to animation originating in Japan. This term represents a medium rather than a genre, and can include a variety of different genres and styles of animation. However, *anime* characters are often associated with exaggerated features including large eyes and faces, small and thin bodies, and brightly colored appearances. *Anime* can also refer to the animated version of *manga*.

Chigo: “child,” a shortened version of the word *chinomigo* (“an unweaned child”). This term is usually used in Medieval Japanese Buddhism (12th century to 16th century) to refer to young trainee monks (between the ages of around 12 to 18) who were given room, board, and education in exchange for their companionship and sexual services. *Chigo* often had tragic deaths, and were sometimes revealed to be bodhisattvas posthumously.

Kawaii: “cute,” often refers to a culture of cuteness and innocence in Japan. This term can be used to refer to human or non-human objects that reflect a vulnerable and childlike aesthetic. This aesthetic has become a prominent part of Japanese culture, entertainment, clothing, toys, personal appearance, and mannerisms.

Lolicon: a portmanteau of the English words “Lolita complex,” a genre of Japanese media (often *anime*, *manga*, or video games) that includes young (or young-looking) female characters in sexual situations. These characters usually appear to be prepubescent, and can describe a character as young as an infant. A *lolicon* can also be used as an adjective to describe a person who is a fan of media that portrays sexualized young female characters.

Manga: refers to comics or graphic novels originating from Japan, also often representing the comic version of *anime*. Like *anime*, *manga* is a medium rather than a genre and can contain various genres and art styles.

Otaku: a Japanese word, often used pejoratively, that describes men who are intensely interested in popular culture- usually *anime*, *manga*, video games, and animated pornography. It is usually associated with individuals who are obsessed with these media forms to the detriment of their social skills.

Shotacon: a portmanteau of the words “Shotaro complex,” similar to the idea of *lolicon* but it is young boys that are sexualized in the media rather than young girls.

Soushoku-kei Danshi: “herbivore men,” a term used in Japan to describe men who express little interest in relationships or marriage with women. It also often refers to men who take a less aggressive and more passive approach in relationships with women.

Wakashu: “young man,” a term referencing adolescent boys- particularly during the Edo period in Japan. They were usually between the ages of 7 and 18 and were identified by their hairstyle and outfit. This identity was transient, and *wakashu* would transition into adult men after their coming-of-age ceremony. *Wakashu* were considered to be objects of sexual desire by adult men.

Literature Review

This section will review research that has already covered the topics discussed in this thesis paper, particularly around pedophilia in Japanese popular culture and the economic benefits that arise from it, for the purpose of situating my own analysis into the scholarship. The first part of this section will cover the sources I have used to analyze the history of pedophilia in Japan. The next part of this section will cover certain ways pedophilia is incorporated in Japanese popular culture, followed by the ways this phenomenon has impacted the country’s political, economic, and social structure. Finally, I will utilize sources that discuss the impact that Japan’s pedophilic pop culture may have worldwide.

History of Pedophilia in Japan (12th Century to 20th Century)

When discussing the pervasiveness of pedophilia throughout Japanese history, I have decided to use several case studies to represent this idea. Firstly, I will be looking at the normalization of pedophilia in Buddhism during Medieval Japan, from the 12th to 14th century- one of the most widely practiced religions in Japan. In particular, I will be looking at the *Chigo* figure within this religion, and the sexualization of this archetype. To do so, I will look at texts by Christine Guth, Paul Atkins, and Or Porath who argue that *Chigo* were often scapegoated as a means of sexualizing them. In particular, I will look at the texts *The Divine Boy in Japanese Art* by Christine Guth, *Chigo in the Medieval Japanese Imagination* by Paul Atkins, and *The Flower of Dharma Nature: Sexual Consecration and Amalgamation in Medieval Japanese Buddhism* by

Or Porath. From a historical perspective, I will focus on the sexualization of *wakashu* during the Edo period (1603-1867). Like *Chigo*, the sexualization of these young boy figures was ingrained in the societal structure of Japan. This ideology is argued by Asato Ikeda in the text *Curating a Third Gender: Beautiful Youths in Japanese Prints* and Joshua Mostow in *The Gender of Wakashu and the Grammar of Desire*. Mostow particularly outlines *wakashu*'s place in Edo period Japanese society, intricately describing the social structure within which this phenomenon took place. Ikeda goes a step further to discuss the impact that *wakashu* (and the art created depicting *wakashu*) has in relation to our modern and Western ideology related to gender and sexuality, and vice-versa.

For historical context, I discuss the idea of “soft power” after Japan’s loss during World War II, and the ways that Japan utilized *kawaii* (“cute”) culture to win favor on the international stage again. This political idea effectively revitalized Japan’s image after the atrocities committed during the war, and was the policy behind the spread of *anime*, *manga*, and other forms of cute culture- including *lolicon*. I look at the text *Japan’s Quest for Soft Power: Attraction and Limitation* by Peng Er Lam and the texts *Hello Kitty and Japan’s Kawaii Diplomacy* and *Wink on Pink: Interpreting Japanese Cute as It Grabs Global Headlines* by Christine R. Yano. Lam details the impact that the losses of the war had on Japan economically and politically, and the reasons why soft power became the ideal choice for diplomacy. Yano looks at the modern effects of soft power and the ways they have changed Japan’s image in the eyes of other countries.

While these texts do an excellent job of setting up the historical context of these phenomena, my contribution to this scholarship will be to synthesize these pieces of research in order to draw attention to a pattern that has formed throughout Japan’s history since Medieval

times. I show that pedophilia is not a phenomenon brought on simply due to entertainment value or sexual fulfillment. Rather, it is a part of Japanese culture that has been ingrained within the country's very social structure.

Pedophilia in Japanese Pop Culture

When discussing the ways that pedophilia has permeated in Japanese politics and economics, it is important to first show the prevalence of this phenomenon in modern Japan. Most obviously, the sexualization of children can be easily seen in the country's popular culture. Within this section, I have named the most prevalent types of popular culture where pedophilia is included: namely within *anime* and *manga*, the idol industry, and the JK business (sometimes referred to as the “girlfriend experience” business). When discussing pedophilia in *anime* and *manga*, the idea of *lolicon* stands out the most. Author Patrick W. Galbraith is a prevalent researcher on this topic, discussing the context and development of what he refers to as “virtual child pornography.” Here I focus on his text *Lolicon: The Reality of ‘Virtual Child Pornography’ in Japan* by Galbraith. I will also look at the texts *Erotic Comics in Japan: An Introduction to Eromanga* by Kaoru Nagayama and *Cybercrimes in Japan: Recent Cases, Legislations, Problems and Perspectives* by Takato Natui.

The idol industry is another major factor in Japan's normalization of pedophilia. Director Kyoko Miyake shows the idol industry's impact in Tokyo in the documentary *Tokyo Idols*. This source is very useful in that Miyake speaks to both sides of this problem directly: the young girls participating in idol groups and their adoring fans (who are usually men over the age of 40). By getting this first-hand perspective, we can dive deeper into the morality and reasoning for the existence of this industry. The texts “The Japanese Men Who Prefer Virtual Girlfriends to Sex” by Anita Rani and *Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture* by Patrick W. Galbraith and

Jason G. Karlin are also referenced within this section, as well as in later sections about the JK business. Rani's writing discusses the economic and psychological events that potentially impacted this culture in Japan, while Galbraith and Karlin's text covers the idol industry as a whole and the impact it has on Japanese society.

The next section will analyze the JK business, in which young girls (usually high school age) can be "rented" for dates with older men. Here, I will particularly look at the texts *Human Trafficking in Japan Through the Use of Schoolgirls* by Khyrsten Acadimia, as well as statistics about Japanese sex trafficking from the Global Slavery Index and the US Department of State's *2017 Trafficking in Persons Report*. I will also use the news articles "The Sexual Exploitation of Young Girls in Japan Is 'On the Increase,' An Expert Says" by Charlie Cambell written for *Time*, "For Vulnerable High School Girls in Japan, a Culture of 'Dates' with Older Men" by Anna Fifield written for The Washington Post, and "Sex for Sale in Japan" written by BBC Three. These authors discuss the reality of this industry in Japan, and how this title is often a cover for sex trafficking and exploitation of young girls. While these sources are very valuable for laying out the facts of this issue, they do little to analyze the larger scope and context within which this business operates. Not unlike the section where I discuss the history of pedophilia, the ways in which my own scholarship will differ from these authors is that my discussion of these various factors in tandem will serve to paint the larger picture of pedophilia's persistence in modern day Japan.

The final section of the coverage of pedophilia in Japan's popular culture will focus on real child pornography. To discuss this, I will reference the texts "Sex for Sale in Japan" by BBC Three, "Japan Outlaws Possession of Child Pornography" by Melissa Hellmann written for *Time*, "Japan: Child Abuse and Child Pornography Cases Hit Record Highs in 2016" by Eleanor Ross,

“Is Japan Turning a Blind Eye to Paedophilia?” by Ciaran Varley, and the Japanese Penal Code. Each of these texts outlines the contradictory and relatively lax rules related to child pornography in Japan, citing specific statistics about the increase of child pornography in recent years. In particular, these texts focus on the low age of consent in Japan, as well as the late legalization of child pornography in the country. By including each of these sections, I will disagree with criticism against this argument that states pedophilia is an issue of the past in Japan, or that “virtual child pornography” is a victimless crime. In reality, pedophilia is prevalent in various forms of popular culture, and works to normalize the sexualization of minors within Japanese society.

Impact on Japanese Society, Economy, and Polity

In this section of my thesis, I will discuss the ways Japan’s pedophilic popular culture has impacted different facets of society. I first plan to discuss the link often made by scholars between pop culture and the “girlfriend experience” and population decline. I examine various texts including “The World is Running Out of Japanese People” by Dan Kopf, “Japan’s Working Mothers: Record Responsibilities, Little Help from Dads” by Motoko Rich, “The Mystery of Why Japanese People Are Having So Few Babies” by Alana Semuels, “An Investigation into Japan’s Population: The Current State of Decline” by Joel Stewart, and “The Japanese Men Who Prefer Virtual Girlfriends to Sex” by Anita Rani. I will also use statistics from *Population Projections for Japan* by the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research and *Tackling the Declining Birth Rate in Japan* by the Centre for Public Impact. Each of these sources discusses the phenomenon of Japan’s particularly rapid population decline and potential factors that may influence this.

Following this, I plan to look at the ways Japan has benefited from this pedophilic popular culture both politically and economically. When discussing the political impacts, I will primarily focus on the political gains of Japan's soft power diplomacy. To do so, I analyze the texts *Japan's Quest for 'Soft Power': Attractions and Limitations* by Peng Er Lam, *Soft Power Superpowers: Cultural and National Assets of Japan and the United States* by Yasushi Watanabe and David L. McConnell, "The American Occupation of Japan, 1945-1952" by Asia for Educators, and two texts by Christine R. Yano titled *Hello Kitty and Japan's Kawaii Diplomacy* and *Wink on Pink: Interpreting Japanese Cute as It Grabs Global Headlines*. These texts help to contextualize Japanese soft power historically and outline the ways this form of diplomacy has changed Japan's image internationally.

I will then examine the ways Japanese popular culture, particularly the ones focused on in this thesis, have contributed to Japan's economic growth. Along with the sources previously listed in the popular culture section, I will also look at the texts "Sex for Sale in Japan" by BBC Three, *Sexonomic: Profits in the Global Sex Economy* by Takashi Kadokura, and *Regionalizing Culture: The Political Economy of Japanese Popular Culture in Asia* by Nissim Kadosh Otmazgin. These sources illuminate the Japanese economy, specifically after World War II. They outline the ways that soft power and the proliferation of Japanese popular culture impacted the country's economy and led to Japan's economic success.

Oppositions to My Perspective

In the final section of this thesis, I will concretely define pedophilia in the context of the rest of my paper as well as look at the opinions of those who do not feel Japanese media normalizes pedophilia. It is important to discuss the opposing side of my argument, so as to more deeply understand this discourse and offer an explanation of my view. I focus on the text

Lolicon: The Reality of 'Virtual Child Pornography' in Japan by Patrick W. Galbraith as he is one of the primary researchers on *lolicon* and is against its censorship. I also reference the text '*Child Abuse Material' Legislation, Internet Regulation and the Juridification of the Imagination* by Mark J. McLelland, as he discusses his own disagreement of my opinion and also analyzes the general view of Japanese society on the matter. Finally, I will also look at Ciaran Varley's text "Is Japan Turning a Blind Eye to Paedophilia?". Varley includes quotes from artists who work on *lolicon* illustrations, as well as interviews with fans of these media forms. By using quotes from each of these authors' works, I hope to include and discuss the opposing opinion as well as use these texts to strengthen my own argument.

Theoretical Framework

Unlike other scholarly work on the topic of pedophilia in Japan that simply illuminates the topic and its pervasiveness in modern Japanese culture, I plan to address the extent to which Japan has benefited from pedophilia. Although there are various sources that address the historical patterns that led to this culture, or the ways in which this culture is still prevalent in things such as animation and the music industry, there are not many sources that I have found that make a clear stance on the issue. The ones that do so, particularly the works by Patrick W. Galbraith, who is a prominent scholar in this field, state that these forms of media do not harm children in real life. It seems that many works about these topics serve more as an educational tool to explain this pattern, rather than a piece of writing that has a clear stance. These texts do not go much further than implying that this culture is morally reprehensible.

I hope to tie this pedophilic culture to Japan's economic and political status, especially during the time of globalization where this culture does not only affect the citizens of the country in which it takes place. I will discuss the economic circumstances that led to this normalization,

but push further than prior scholarship by explaining the ways in which the country benefits from the exploitation of children. I plan to prove that it is this very pedophilic culture that brought Japan into prominence on the world stage. I will also mention the potential impact this form of media could have on other countries. As Japanese popular culture gains more and more interest worldwide, the normalization of pedophilia may permeate the borders of other countries as well- especially the United States where the sexualization of children has never disappeared. My research will contribute to the scholarship on this topic in that it will express the reasons why this topic continues to be ignored; it is not just for personal entertainment, but for much more serious, deep-reaching reasons as well.

Introduction and Methodology

Japan's popular culture is one of the most well-known and beloved around the world today. This spread of "soft power," which began after the country's loss in World War II, has secured Japan as one of the world's greatest economic powers, on par with the United States. In particular, Japan is known for its *kawaii*, or "cute," culture which has permeated forms of *anime*, *manga*, video games, fashion, and even behavior. This culture revolves around a sense of innocence and child-like sweetness, and the vulnerability it projects has become a point of attraction for many both domestically and internationally. However, this culture has often been sexualized as well. The eroticization of children in these forms of media, as well as child-like characteristics and objects, can be seen throughout Japanese popular culture- particularly in *anime* and *manga* through *lolicon*, the music industry through idol culture, and even the pornography industry. In this context, pedophilia is defined as any sexual attraction or behavior conducted towards someone under the legal age of consent. This normalization of pedophilia has

not gone unnoticed by the Japanese government, yet the government does little to mitigate it. Rather, the country uses pedophilic popular culture to benefit both economically and politically.

In this thesis I analyze the ways that the Japanese government and many industries, as well as many citizens and the culture on the whole, have not only become complacent in the normalization of the sexualization of minors, but in fact even promote it. I will do so by first discussing aspects of the historical context that relates to the normalization of this culture, focusing specifically on *chigo* in medieval Buddhism, *wakashu* in Edo period Japan, and the spread of soft power after World War II. I then outline the various ways that pedophilic culture has permeated Japanese popular culture by looking at the examples of *lolicon*, the idol industry, the JK business, and the prevalence of “real” child pornography. Following this, I will analyze how Japan has benefited and continues to benefit from the continuation of this culture. I also discuss the ways in which this pedophilic culture may impact the country going forward, and even how it may impact other countries worldwide. Through this analysis, I will show that the sexualization of minors is ingrained in Japan’s societal structure and that the country has little motivation to stop its spread.

This research will explain how this phenomenon has set a precursor for a casual acceptance of pedophilia in Japan. Through both societal and religious means, the sexualization of children has become ingrained in Japanese culture. However, it is often an untouched topic in Japanese media and scholarship. I will explain this long-term normalization first by looking at the religious justification of pedophilia through the figure of *chigo* in Buddhism. For historical representation, I have chosen to look particularly at the Edo Period’s pleasure quarters and sexualization of *wakashu*. Despite an abundance of examples, I have chosen these two topics to highlight an integration of pedophilia into the religious and social structure of Japan. These

examples of pedophilia were an unavoidable aspect of Japanese culture that nearly all citizens would have interacted with.

I will then cover several examples of the normalization of pedophilia in modern-day Japan, particularly by looking at the country's well-known popular culture. I plan to pay especially close attention to *lolicon* in *anime* and *manga*, idol culture, and the JK business (including examples of "girlfriend experience" services). Through various sources including the perspectives of girls within the idol industry, I will explain the ways that pedophilia is still common in Japanese culture. I will expand on this topic by analyzing scholarly texts and a documentary film that cover these topics, especially focusing on sources that include the perspective of young people who are sexualized. I will also look at the ways that *lolicon* and *shotacon* are smoothly integrated into popular animation, often in ways that people do not notice and completely accept without issue.

I will then look at the impact of pedophilia on Japan in three aspects: economics, politics, and society. Economically, I consider the impact that prior financial depressions had on the country. In particular, the Second World War was a very formative time for the current state of Japanese culture, particularly in the ways that soft power was utilized in Japan's financial recovery. I will also look at modern economic struggles for the general population, including instability in work and the rise of a female workforce. Politically, I study the ways that Japan has interacted with other countries during this period of expanding global symbiosis. I am also interested to see if any political platforms in the country have relied on pedophilic culture for their success. Finally, I look at the ways this phenomenon has impacted Japan socially. In particular, I am interested in the way this phenomenon has affected the mental health of the population. I particularly look at sources discussing the mental health of young people in the

entertainment industry or JK business, and the men who consume these forms of media. Perhaps most importantly, I will discuss the impact this culture has on the pertinent issue of population decline.

Lastly, I will briefly look at the impact Japanese pop culture has had globally and the ways that the increased spread of this pop culture has influenced the normalization of pedophilia worldwide. I will do so by looking at the extent of the popularity of Japanese culture abroad, particularly in Western culture. I plan to examine the ways that the spreading of this culture may desensitize other countries to the sexualization of minors. However, it is important to talk about the ways that this culture is already normalized in the West. This may be one of the limitations of this section. Another limitation may be the extent to which I can measure Japanese culture's impact on Western views of pedophilia. I attempt to address this issue by finding first-hand sources of people who engage with this form of popular culture, and discuss the rise and spread of *otaku* culture in the West.

Historical Overview

Religious Normalization of Pedophilia

1. *Chigo* in Medieval Japanese Buddhism

A normalization of pedophilia in Japanese culture can be tracked through both religion and history, even if these instances were not viewed as pedophilia while they were occurring. One such example, as discussed by author Paul Atkins in *Chigo in the Medieval Japanese Imagination*, are *chigo*. Atkins defines the term as “adolescent males attached to Buddhist temples or aristocratic households who were educated, fed, and housed in exchange for personal, including sexual, services” (947). *Chigo* played an important role in both Buddhist culture and religion, often being featured in dramatized stories throughout medieval art and literature. Even

so, Atkins points out that they were often exploited sexually in their relationships with monks; these relationships had inherent power dynamics due to differences in both age and societal position, yet were idealized through the various forms of media in which they were portrayed.

Like the sexualized class of young men during the Edo period known as *wakashu*, the *chigo* figure is often thought to be a “child”- even though the technical definitions and parameters of this title varied. Much scholarship points out that the term *chigo* was based more on cultural determinations rather than their particular age. This category was fluid, with some titles indicating factors including social, occupational, and religious statuses (Porath, 51). Even when categorized by age, the particular age in which a boy stops being a *chigo* and becomes a fully-fledged adult was not standard. The average age of *chigo*, however, is considered to be under the age of 19. For all intents and purposes of this paper, the *chigo* I will be referring to will be classified as children (at least in the way we define children in the modern day: under the age of 18).

Atkins analyzes *chigo* by comparing their fictionalized representation in stories and their real lived experiences. He points out one particularly famous fictional *chigo* story, titled “A Long Tale for an Autumn Night.” In this story, a lonely Buddhist priest spiritually manifests a heavenly young *chigo* boy and develops an immediate infatuation with him, which leads to a love affair. The boy is eventually made to return home, leaving the priest grief-stricken. Although the boy makes attempts to see the older man again, a series of miscommunications prevents this from happening, which leads to the young *chigo*’s suicide. When the priest finds the boy’s body, the tragedy turns out to be a necessary spiritual awakening for him. This story reflects what Atkins refers to as the “scapegoat theory,” in which *chigo* are “specially selected as surrogate victims of socially sanctioned violence whose role is to deflect or absorb violence that would otherwise tear

apart the community” (964). In other words, they are used as a sacrifice and a tool for the monks’ salvation; they are a pawn that must fall for the rest of their community to benefit. The harm that *chigo* must face is seen as a necessary evil, and is therefore accepted and normalized.

These fictional stories of *chigo* also reflect the normalization of sex with young bodies. Within his scapegoat theory, Atkins also claims that *chigo* were elevated to divine status and therefore dehumanized. This allows the monks to have both romantic and sexual relationships with them that are deemed appropriate within the religion. Had the *chigo* not been considered divine or other-worldly, and were simply regular young boys, it would be considered taboo for a monk to have this kind of relationship with them. Therefore, these stories become a convenient way for monks to fantasize about and indulge in sexual relationships with these children without any moral repercussions. In many ways, this can be related to the phenomenon of *lolicon* and *shotacon* in modern Japan, which will be discussed later in this thesis.

While I claim in this analysis that the relationships between *chigo* and monks may reflect a historical pattern of pedophilia normalization, one may question whether or not we can discuss this topic from not only a modern perspective, but from a secular one as well. Naturally, the sexualization of *chigo* in medieval Japan was not seen as pedophilic or morally abhorrent in any way. I feel that it is imperative to contextualize this phenomenon, and therefore understand that these monks, nor medieval society at large, did not feel they were committing any form of crime. If this was an isolated phenomenon in which children (fictional or otherwise) were sexualized at one single point in history, perhaps it would be easier to deny this historical normalization. However, as I hope to illustrate in this paper, this phenomenon was not a product of just this time period but rather a pattern that would prevail in Japan in both ancient and modern time periods. Rather than an immediate causal relationship, I am highlighting a suggestive cultural precedent

for pedophilia normalization in Japan. For this reason, we can look at the sexualization of *chigo* as one point in this precedent, and use it to further analyze the ways this pattern developed and became ingrained in Japanese society and culture.

Historical Normalization

1. *Wakashu* in Edo Period Pleasure Quarters



Figure 1. Anonymous. *Aloeswood Incense Pillow of Youngman-Play*, Scene 2. 1675.

The Edo period in Japan, which lasted from 1603 to 1867, is known as the period with the greatest amount of political stability and economic growth in Japanese history. Referred to as Japan's renaissance period, this peaceful time saw a flourishing of Japan's traditional arts and music. In addition, this time period is famous for the exploration and proliferation of sex both in real life and in art. *Shunga*, or pornographic works of art, were prevalent during this time and were created for masturbatory purposes. They often portrayed images of beautiful people, and many images depicted young women, including prostitutes. Other images depicted *wakashu*, a class of adolescent boys during this time (usually under the age of the 18) that were considered to be objects of sexual desire for older men. These images were sexually explicit, with clear visuals of genitalia and active sexual intercourse.

In his text titled *The Gender of Wakashu and the Grammar of Desire*, Joshua Mostow discusses the structures of sexuality during Edo-period Japan, particularly focusing on the role of *wakashu*. The term *wakashu* refers to adolescent boys who had yet to complete their coming of age ceremony. *Wakashu*, in Mostow's text, are classified as a different gender than adult men, although it is important to note that the way gender is defined in this text differs from our modern and Western conceptions. Mostow states that during this time, gender was seen more as a role played in society; *wakashu* were not given this title due to their biological sex, nor their own identification. Instead, this title was defined based on the young men's age and place in society (particularly in relation to the affection they received from the older men at the center of this society).

As part of his discussion of *wakashu*, Mostow illuminates the strict sexual hierarchy during this time. Referred to as "phallocentric pansexuality," desire revolved around the older men in society. These men, called *otoko*, could express sexuality both with *wakashu* and with women (sometimes further classified as wives or *onna*, and prostitutes or *joro*). Regardless of gender or age, *otoko*'s pleasure was the focus of sexuality and they could choose to copulate with whomever they wanted. In other words, older men were at the top of both the social and sexual hierarchy, followed by *wakashu* and ending with women, creating a misogynistic societal norm. This sexual structure, particularly the sexual desires older men had towards *wakashu*, is depicted in the anonymous picture-book *Aloeswood Incense Pillow of Youngman-Play* (1675). This pornographic book displays various images of older men having sex with younger men, and is targeted towards the older men who enjoyed this preference and expressed "devotion" towards *wakashu*. Not only do the images show the power dynamic of these relationships and the level to which *wakashu* are desired, it also shows the unattractiveness of women in equal measure.

Women were portrayed as both physically and mentally unappealing, and artistic depictions of sex with *wakashu* coincided with depictions of the men's wives in tears. Although young concubines could compete with *wakashu* at times, older women were seen as lesser-than and unworthy of sexual pursuit.

Sexuality as it was understood in the Edo period clearly does not coincide with our modern, Western views of the issue. The concept that most strongly goes against contemporary Western morality is the pedophilic nature of the relationships between *wakashu* and *otoko*. As previously mentioned, *wakashu* are only in this role before they are considered to be adult men. Although there is no concrete age, various sources estimate the typical age of *wakashu* to be between 7 and 25 years old.

These artistic depictions of young boys can be compared to Japan's modern version of this phenomena: *lolicon* and *shotacon*. However, it is important to differentiate the context within which these two art phenomena are situated. Sexually explicit artwork involving *wakashu* was normalized at the same time that having sex with *wakashu* was integrated into the very core of Japanese society. It was not considered to be pedophilic or inappropriate in any way; sex with young people during this time was often attributed to a shorter average lifespan and a lack of the puritanical Christian beliefs that came later in Japan's history. *Lolicon* and *shotacon* art, on the other hand, is still mostly ostracized by people outside of the fandom as it is seen as "virtual child pornography" (Galbraith). Although there is a large fanbase for this content, many Japanese citizens find it equally disturbing.

Historian Timon Screech analyzes the ways that Japan has viewed pornography throughout history and pornography during that time differs from its modern portrayal in his text *Sex and the Floating World: Erotic Images in Japan 1700-1820*. Edo period Japanese artists

openly created *shunga* for masterbatory purposes. These Floating World images are almost synonymous with the Edo period, and the images did not shy away from depicting genitalia and sexual intercourse in various ways. Interestingly, Japan's openness towards sexuality diminished as the influence of the West grew stronger. The time following the Edo Period, known as the Meiji Period, is most associated with the ending of Japan's isolationist policies and an increased effect of Europe and the United States. With this came Christian ideals of modesty. During this time, Emperor Meiji created campaigns against obscenity in art and theater as part of the Meiji Restoration. These campaigns changed the way Japan viewed sex from then on. Edo period Japan, a time of sexual "liberation", became one of conservatism and chastity.

2. World War II and Soft Power

In this section, I will look at the ways that Japan rebranded itself as an epicenter of popular culture after the atrocities they committed during World War II. It is this very rebranding that led to the spread of their popular culture around the world- not excluding the spread of the normalization of pedophilia within various media forms. After Japan's defeat in the Second World War, the Japanese government and its citizens had to reckon with the effects of the atrocities they had committed. It was during this time that Japan was infamous for what is sometimes referred to as an "Asian Holocaust"; mass rapes and killings, biological warfare, torture, cannibalism, and human experimentation are some of the crimes that Japan was officially charged with in the Tokyo Trials of 1945. Not only was there material ruin, but psychological ruin as well.

Immediately following the defeat, Japan focused on economic reconstruction and re-entry into the international community. The government had to settle issues regarding the reparations

they owed, as well as reform diplomatic ties between Japan and the other world powers. The United States occupied Japan after 1945 and, headed by General Douglas MacArthur, committed to implementing the terms of the Potsdam Declaration. This included a variety of social and economic reforms, as well as a dismantling of the standing Japanese military. In addition, Japan's constitution was discarded and a new American-written one was put in its place. Approximately \$23 billion was arranged by the U.S. occupation authorities and was shipped to China, the Philippines, Indonesia, and the British colonies in East Asia. Once these obligations were settled, the Japanese government was able to concentrate on reconceptualizing themselves in a favorable view to the rest of the world. Both government-sponsored official movements, such as the "Cool Japan" movement (1980) and unofficial shifts in Japan's cultural and artistic landscape aided in this.

By the 1970s and 1980s, Japan had become an economic powerhouse and the Japanese government was able to put more thought and resources into cultural diplomacy. According to Peng Er Lam, "Post-war Japan [could not] exercise hard military power to coerce other states" (353). This was because Japan was still controlled by the constitutional restrictions placed on it by the United States. A wave of "mass pacifism" formed as a result of the destruction and losses the nation faced in the war, so Japan instead turned to cultural diplomacy, foreign relations, and foreign aid. The government created policies to promote "soft power" because they simply did not have another option. Through this ideological shift (and the influence of the U.S. Occupation), Japan's "miracle" economic growth skyrocketed them to become the world's second largest economy by the 1980s.

The idea of "soft power" that we know today, described by anthropologist Christine R. Yano as the ability to "indirectly influence behavior or interests through cultural or ideological

means” (Wink on Pink, 683), was not always connected solely to popular culture. Long before its use of *anime*, *manga*, and *kawaii* characters, Japan relied on the Japan Foundation, The Japan Exchange and Teaching Program (JET), Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteer Program, and Official Development Assistance (Lam, 354). Some of these programs continue to make strides for Japan’s foreign relations even today; the JET Program is a government initiative that brings in English-speaking college graduates to teach English in Japan and is one of the biggest promoters of cultural diplomacy between Japan and the United States.

From the 1970s onward, Japanese *anime*, *manga*, fashion, video games, music, technology, and *kawaii* culture began to proliferate domestically and abroad. This culture, which was inherently tied to the country’s governmental policies, became ubiquitous in all facets of Japanese daily life. *Anime* and *manga* began to receive a substantial following across the world, from China to the United States and Europe. I will further discuss this important phenomenon in later sections of this thesis. Around this time, the character Hello Kitty was created- a perfect example to discuss the pervasiveness of Japan’s soft power. Hello Kitty has since become the adorable face of “Cool Japan,” a form of Japan’s soft power strategy created by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs to increase the attractiveness of Japan’s culture abroad and to shift the image of Japan from militarization to cool/cute culture. According to Tsuji Shintaro, the founder of Sanrio and Hello Kitty, Hello Kitty was always intended to be a global product.

Many of the millions of consumers of Hello Kitty products have never cared about her character’s story; instead, she had become a branded good. She was popular more as a marketable image rather than a fully-realized individual. The obsession with Hello Kitty worldwide solidified her as the “icon of cute femininity in Asia” (Wink on Pink, 681). The idea of Japan no longer elicited images of samurai swords or POW camps, but rather kittens, the color

pink, and child-like innocence. Alongside *anime*, *manga*, and video games, the spread of the Hello Kitty phenomenon helped to rebrand Japan and offered comfort and sweetness to Kitty's fans across the globe.

The 1980s "Cool Japan" movement is another offshoot of this soft-power phenomenon that followed World War II. During this time, Japan's rebranding effort became more centralized and government-oriented. Following the success of Japanese soap operas internationally, the government pushed for more of Japan's popular culture- including television shows, music, animation, and video games- to be promoted globally. This was a success that benefited Japan both politically and economically, as will be discussed later in this paper. The *kawaii* ("cute") phenomenon played a huge role in the Soft Power campaign's success. However, this *kawaii* culture quickly became intrinsically tied to sexuality. Although it is difficult to track the reasons for this, Japan's simultaneous association of cute things and with pornographic material became woven together and is now often closely associated with one another. In this way, things that are often seen as "childish" are also often seen as "sexy" in modern-day Japan.

A Modern Look

When looking at Japan's relationship with pedophilia today, we can point to a variety of legislation in order to understand Japanese responses to the issue. Article 175 of the Japanese Criminal Code stipulates that "a person who distributes, sells, or displays in public an obscene document, drawing, or other objects shall be punished by imprisonment with work for not more than 2 years, a fine of not more than 2,500,000 yen (\$25,000) or a petty fine. The same shall apply to a person who possesses the same with the purpose of sale" (Japanese Law Translation). It should be noted that what constitutes as "obscene" is not clearly outlined in this legislation. Despite Article 21 of the same code claiming that formal censorship is prohibited, the modern

understanding of pornography is that most of it must be censored at least partially. Therefore, the rules of what must be censored in Japanese pornography are often confusing; for example, genitalia and penetration must be censored in porn featuring real humans, but animated porn featuring sex with a child can be uncensored. In his text *Cybercrimes in Japan: Recent Cases, Legislations, Problems and Perspectives*, law professor Takato Natsui claims that very few arrests have been made for those who fail to censor pornography, however.

Despite Japanese censorship laws around pornography, the government only formally passed legislation claiming the illegality of child pornography in 2014. This relatively recent law states that those in possession of explicit photographs or videos of children can be imprisoned for 1 year and fined up to 1 million yen (\$10,000). *Time* journalist Melissa Hellman states that this legislation was a result of international pressure to tighten possession laws, and “despite banning the production and distribution of child pornography in 1999, Japan is the last OECD nation to make possession a punishable offense.” According to the 2017 US Department of State’s human-rights report, Japan is the “international hub for the production and trafficking of child pornography.” Takato Natsui claims that the laws in place aim to prohibit child pornography, but do little to protect the children at risk. He states, “There are many court rulings. However, sometimes these court rulings contradict each other on the interpretation of this law, due to some ambiguousness of aims and expression in the definition clause of this law” (17). This is the context within which I discuss modern day conceptions of pedophilia in this country. Today, pedophilia is rampant within the country’s popular culture and media. However, more pressingly, both child pornography and child sex-trafficking are occurring at high rates. By understanding the historical context of these modern problems, we can begin to understand the ways that Japan benefits from the exploitation of minors.

Impact of Pedophilia On Japan

Japanese Pop Culture

1. *Lolicon* in *Anime* and Advertising

Despite the intensity with which conformity and homogeneity are emphasized in Japanese society, the \$5.5-billion adult entertainment industry in Japan is known for sexual extremes that rebel against modesty. In particular, a genre of erotic art known as *lolicon*, is not only popular but openly promoted. *Lolicon* is defined as “manga, anime, and games that feature ‘underage’ characters in sexual and sometimes violent situations” (Galbraith, 84). Fans of this genre claim that their attraction is solely to the fictional children depicted, and not to real children. However, it is arguable that the normalization and pervasiveness of *lolicon* in Japan has desensitized many to the sexualization of real children, as will be discussed later in this thesis. Although this type of pornography is not only legal but actively endorsed in popular culture, in reality it is a prime example of how pedophilic imagery has slid into mainstream Japanese culture.

The *lolicon* genre is situated within the larger genre of *shojo* (girls) *manga* and *anime*, which has dominated Japanese media from the 1970s onward due to its idealization of cuteness and innocence. According to author Patrick Galbraith, this “idealized Eros” became attached to the imagery of young girls over time, which ended up forming the *lolicon* subgenre within this larger umbrella term. In the 1980s, adult magazines containing pornographic images of young girls proliferated; many of these images showed seemingly prepubescent bodies, absent of breasts and body hair. Some scholars, such as Galbraith, believe this could be tied to Japanese obscenity laws (such as Article 175) which prohibited images displaying pubic hair and bare

breasts. However, this imagery is undeniably tied to the image of a young girl who has not yet gone through puberty.

Galbraith goes on to say that the rise of this subgenre grew as more adult male fans of *shojo* manga began to produce self-published *manga* works, called *doujinshi*. Many of the characters seen within popular *doujinshi* artworks displayed the aesthetic of *kawaii* eroticism, with more simplified art styles representing young girls. The popularity of this genre flooded the *anime* and *manga* industry during the 1980s, sometimes referred to as a “*lolicon* boom,” which only continued into the 1990s and 2000s. A smaller boom in the early 2000s is attributed to the creation of the erotic magazine *Comic LO*. The LO in the magazine’s title stands for “*lolita* only.” Published by Akane Shinsha since 2002, this manga features sexually explicit images of illustrated children. One of the magazine’s artists, Amagappa Shojogun, stated in a tweet that he was ironically told to draw characters around the age of nine, as the previous images he had drawn with girls around the age of eight were too young looking (Nagayama, 111). This shows that this magazine is aware and open of the sexualization of children in their art.



Figure 2. *Ichigo Mashimaro* Advertisement in Akihabara, Tokyo.

It is no secret that *lolicon* is popular in Japan today; when walking around the electronics-slash-*anime* district Akihabara in Tokyo, erotic imagery of illustrated prepubescent girls are plastered in the fronts of many stores and are used as advertisements on the front of *manga* and video games. Those who are fans of *lolicon* anime and manga will go out of their way to purchase content with their favorite characters, or even just because of the image of a cute *loli* girl. Sex sells, and for this reason *lolicon* imagery is still often used in advertising. It is also common to see young *anime* girls in *hentai* (animated) pornography. Many *lolicon* artists do not attempt to hide that these girls are depictions of children. While some fans may claim they are ageless as they are nothing more than drawings, much of the pornography featuring these *loli* characters openly refer to the girls as elementary or middle-school students and even opt to include them in the actual school uniforms. Galbraith states that “critics such as Naito Chizuko have called Japan a ‘*loliconized* society,’ where *lolicon* has come to represent ‘societal desire in a broader sense’” (84). While *lolicon* images are just images, it is not a stretch to see the link between those who gain sexual gratification from drawings of children and those who gain sexual gratification from images of actual children. As will be discussed later, a connection can be drawn between the popularity of *lolicon* and statistics around real child pornography in Japan. While Japan is not the only country to openly sexualize young girls and eroticize school uniforms, it is rare in countries like the United States to see such young girls so openly and so often explicitly sexualized.

The popularity of *lolicon* is often associated in scholarship with a much larger modern trend in Japan called *soushoku-kei danshi*, or “herbivore” men. This term refers to men who are passive rather than active in the pursuit of dating women. Author Anita Rani states that these men often choose fake or even virtual girlfriends over real ones. There are many different

platforms and services that offer a pseudo-relationship experience to men who do not want to pursue real women. Popular dating games encourage men to woo pixelated *anime* girls, with some games even containing virtual sex scenes for the men to engage in. Some scholars believe that the Japanese culture of modesty and repression is one of the major causes for this shift in men's preferences from real to virtual.

2. Idol Culture and Its Victims

Idols, young girls trained and marketed for their attractiveness in the Japanese entertainment industry, have been growing in numbers since the 1980s. They are usually advertised as singers, dancers, models, and starlet figures, and can range from the age of eight and up. The term “idols” specifically refers to starlets who are brought up from amateur status, with little to no prior experience in the entertainment industry; idols often lose popularity after the age of eighteen. The majority of their devoted fanbase consists of adult men who see this interest as an escape from their often grueling and mundane life. According to these fanatics, a main attraction is the girls' youth; for this reason, talent agencies specifically scout very young girls with no prior experience to train from a young and inexperienced age, thus creating intense fanbases that grow alongside the idol. This phenomenon is explored deeply in the documentary film *Tokyo Idols*, directed by Kyoko Miyake. In this film, the director speaks to both idols and fans to get their perspective on the popularity of this industry, and also speaks to anthropologists, psychologists, and even economists to discuss the greater impact of this culture.

Fans are captivated by the idols' innocence, and many claim that it is this innocence that provides a sense of ease from their daily struggles. In recent years, the number of teenage girls dubbed “idols” has increased to around 10,000 in Japan (McAlpine). The association and fetishization of youth within idol culture is particularly notable. *Tokyo Idols* portrays this side of

the fandom, in which adult male fans seek out new girls to idolize as they are introduced to this fast-paced industry. In one confessional interview shown in the film, a fan states that the younger the idol is, the more he is attracted to her. He justifies this by saying he enjoys watching her grow and develop into a fully fledged entertainer, but it is clear to the audience that the relationship is deeper. The documentary coins the term “expiration date:” after they reach the age of 18, these girls find it significantly more difficult to maintain a strong fanbase and further expand their career. For this reason, families will often enter their daughters into idol contracts from prepubescence.

This nationwide infatuation with young girls, often seen in idol culture but also in other forms of popular culture, shows a preference for women whom the men can dominate. Men are often attracted to women much younger than them, or women who are more “submissive”; this power dynamic inherently creates relationships where the man is in control. In the 1990s, Japan suffered a rapid decline in its economy, leaving the masses in a state of insecurity. In *Tokyo Idols*, economist and industrial analyst Masayoshi Sakai makes a connection between men’s economic insecurity and their interest in idols. He discusses how an idol’s job (and generally the job of all women in the eyes of many Japanese men) is to smile and comfort men. Many of these men feel that loving these idols gives them confidence, and they feel a sense of solidarity within the fandom. They can identify themselves within a group of men like them, and feel accepted by the idol girls whose sole job is to entertain them and “love” them. Idols feed and comfort the insecurities that stem from these men’s poor financial situation, without any of the other “baggage” that comes with having a girlfriend. Idols provide the comfort and attractiveness of a woman without any of the difficulties inherent to being in a real relationship.

Feeding the male fantasy is at the center of idol culture, and one of the clearest examples are the handshake events held by the entertainment companies that own the idol groups. These events provide an opportunity for the fans to interact with the idols face to face. Fans purchase a ticket and are shuffled in lines to spend a minute speaking with an idol while holding her hand. After the minute is up, an event worker will physically move the fan along to the next idol. In the documentary *Tokyo Idols*, Masayoshi Sakai speaks about the historical connotations linked with the act of shaking hands. Throughout Japanese history, handshakes have been seen as a sexual gesture, as many forms of touching were forbidden. It is only in the last few decades that handshakes have become widely acceptable. Although handshakes have become more normalized, Sakai notes that “bringing in the handshake events was a very smart move. From the [idols’] perspective, it seems very innocent. But for fans, there is probably a sexual component to it.” (Tokyo Idols). These events fulfill a sort of sexual fantasy and allow fans to receive gratification from the experience, without actually interacting sexually with the idol.

It is difficult to understand who is responsible for allowing this overt sexualization of young idol girls. Those within the idol fandom, or others who sympathize with these parasocial relationships, feel that the men are not to blame in this situation. Rather, the blame should fall on the girl and her family who chose this career path for her. Many do not see a problem with the “little girl fantasy” enjoyed by many idol fans. Journalist Minori Kitahara disagrees with this complacency, and draws a parallel between the attitude within this culture and the attitude within Japanese culture as a whole- the idea that a women’s role is to serve male fantasies. In the documentary, she states, “Instead of connecting with women in their everyday life, the men choose girls they can dominate, girls who are guaranteed not to challenge or hurt them. This society will stop at nothing to protect male fantasies and provide comfort for men” (Tokyo

Idols). This male fantasy is heavily protected in Japanese society, with those (such as scholars, journalists, and filmmakers like Kitahara) calling attention to it or criticizing it receiving heavy backlash. In speaking out against the normalization of pedophilia and protection of male fantasies in this culture, Minori Kitahara claims that she had experienced “aggressive backlash” when she, an outsider to this phenomena, discussed and criticized it heavily (Tokyo Idols). Others who speak out against this culture, including scholars, journalists, and even former idols themselves, receive harsh criticism from idol fanbases.

In recent years, there has been rampant growth of the idol industry, now assumed to be worth about \$1 billion in Japan alone. One idol fan interviewed in the documentary, a corporate salaried worker in his mid-50s, stated that he spends about \$2000 a month to see his favorite idol. All in all, he estimates that he has gone to about 700 of her shows in the past year alone (McAlpine). Not only is the popularity of idol culture growing, but many men who participate in it feel that the parasocial relationships they have with the idols can replace real relationships with women. Some fans spend immense time and money seeing idols perform and waiting for meet and greets; their primary goal is to attend so many events that the idol may remember their face and name when they come to their shows. Sociologist Satoshi Hamano states in an interview that, “At my university, I meet a lot of young guys who 15 years ago would have had girlfriends. They say they’ve never been in love. They love idols. There’s no incentive to be in a relationship nowadays.” He goes on to state that, in his professional opinion, idols should be banned from Japan.

Idol culture is only one of many examples of services in Japan that emulate or completely take the place of romantic relationships with women (many of which I will elaborate on in later sections). The idea is not to provide sexual gratification; many men are looking for services that

provide psychological and physical comfort that is not inherently sexual. These various outlets provide no incentive to marry or procreate- an issue at the center of Japan's modern-day concerns. With the severity of the population decline in Japan, these new cultural developments are concerning for the country. Idol obsession is one obstacle that the Japanese government faces in its attempt to incentivize the growth of families. Not only does this phenomenon have bearing on one of the biggest issues facing Japan, it also shows the continuation of the male-dominated and male fantasy-driven society. As of now, it does not seem that the Japanese government has an effective plan for depopularizing idol culture or any of the other comfort services used in place of marriage.

3. JK Business and the Girlfriend Experience



Figure 3. Kikuchi, Daisuke. Image of High-School-Aged Girls Working for JK Business. 4 Aug, 2017. The Japan Times.

An even more pressing example is the JK Business, also known as the “high school dating” business, in which young girls (often runaways) are coerced and trafficked into prostitution. This is in line with the pervasive problem of child pornography being created and sold in places like the anime district of Tokyo, Akihabara- an area covered in *lolicon* advertising

in front of many stores. Although many of the “compensated dating” practices available to paying customers claim to be legal, in reality many businesses target girls under the legal age of consent in Japan and coerce them into binding contracts that they are unable to escape from. For reference, the age of consent in Japan is technically 13, but differing laws in some prefectures (such as in Tokyo) may raise this to be 16 or 17. This will be further discussed later in the thesis. While some claim media like *lolicon* does not have real victims as the child characters are illustrated, the JK industry is a very real issue with very real victims and can be pointed to as yet another facet of the pervasive pedophilic culture in Japan.

As mentioned previously, the laws in Japan’s Penal Code regarding the sex and pornography industry are numerous, unclear, and often contradictory. Due to many legal loopholes related to this industry, there are hundreds of bars in Tokyo’s red light district of Kabukicho that employ high school aged girls who advertise to go on paid dates with customers—almost always older men. These men pay for the girls’ company, as the businesses often state upfront that the services of the girls are nothing more than innocent actions such as holding hands, taking walks, or conversing. However, many of these services often transform into sexual favors that are not offered in the initial fee but can be done through outside “arrangements.” Because prostitution is illegal in Japan, this is done under the table (but is an open secret). According to one young woman who worked for the JK Business, she claimed that her boss looked to hire girls who appeared to be between the ages of 15 and 18. She also claimed that her boss, as well as a large percentage of her clientele, requested that she wore her real high school uniforms during their meetings (Acadimia, 2).

In speaking to victims of the compensated dating industry, journalist Charlie Cambell claims that this scam often begins when a person posing as a legitimate modeling agent targets

young and vulnerable women. They are made to sign convoluted contracts which rope them into appearing in pornographic videos or joining older men on pre-paid dates. At the threat of legal ramifications, women become enslaved to these contracts and have little option to escape.

Cambell claims that “the coercion of young women into pornography and prostitution has become an epidemic in Japan, where the fetishization of adolescence is disturbingly common and legal protections for children is shockingly lax.” According to the founder of the Lighthouse NGO, which helps victims of sex trafficking in Japan, Shihoko Fujiwara claims that there have been over 100 new reported cases of sex trafficking in 2019- on top of the hundreds previously reported. In 2018, the Global Slavery Index reported that an estimated 37,000 people lived in conditions of modern slavery in Japan, with about 70% of this being attributed to sexual slavery. This study also states that there were about 5,000 victims of sex trafficking as a result of the JK Business, although this number is incredibly difficult to pinpoint.

The 2017 Trafficking in Persons report conducted by the United States Department of State finds that Japan is ranked as a tier 2 country for sex trafficking. This tier is defined as “countries whose governments do not fully meet the Trafficking Victims Protection Act’s minimum standards.” These standards, as outlined in the act in 2000, require the country to submit an assessment of the government’s anti-trafficking efforts that are then judged by the United States Congress. Some effort has been made by the Japanese government to mitigate the rampant sexual abuse of women in Japan- particularly young women. In one instance, the Japanese government did work to increase prosecutions and convictions of traffickers in 2015, although this did not prosecute trafficking crimes in accordance with international law. There has been an attempt to increase sensitivity training for law enforcements in Japan to combat sex trafficking, including lectures on human rights conducted by university professors. However, this

has done little to improve legal conviction of traffickers, as “The government reported investigating 44 cases for crimes related to human trafficking in 2016, the same as in 2015. It initiated prosecution of 43 suspected traffickers in 2016 (26 in 2015) and convicted 37 traffickers (27 in 2015) during the reporting period. Ten of the 37 convicted traffickers received only fines” (2017 Trafficking in Persons Report- Japan).

Similar to the results of Japan’s popular idol industry, the JK business acts as a substitute for a real girlfriend for many in Japan. Not only do the girls working within this business offer dates and even sex without the commitment of a fully-fledged relationship, they also offer an opportunity for pedophiles to easily access minors under the age of 18 to have sex with without repercussion. While the Japanese government claims that it will attempt to crack down on this business, it is well known that these services are offered in the red light districts of Japan and, in fact, have only been on the rise in recent years with the proliferation of the internet. The fact that this service is so common is yet another example of the normality of pedophilia within Japanese society. Compared to countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, France, South Korea, and other Trafficking in Persons Report Tier 1 countries, Japan has not actively combatted against the sex trafficking of minors and often relies on the support of non-governmental organizations. This is one example of the pervasiveness of pedophilia in Japan and the governments complacency.

4. “Virtual” Versus “Real” Child Pornography

Although there are many examples of popular culture in Japan that can be compared to child pornography, it is imperative to understand the level of popularity of “real” child pornography and the response the Japanese government has to its production and distribution. One study discussed in economist Takashi Kadokura’s book *Sexonomic: Profits in the Global*

Sex Economy claims that 15% of the male population of Japan has seen child pornography while 10% own it. This statistic was drawn from a wide survey conducted by the Japanese government, which may be less shocking when one realizes that Japanese pornography was only made fully illegal in 2014. This law was enacted only after intense international pressure, and finally prosecuted those in possession of child pornography. Even then, the sentencing for those found in possession of the material is light in comparison to other developed countries; the maximum jail sentence is one year, and the maximum fine is 1 million yen, or about \$10,000.

Naturally, the fact that this law has been enacted in Japan has not curbed the desire to view sexually provocative images of minors. If *lolicon* pornography or JK business dates do not satisfy, a popular type of pornography called *chaku ero*, or “erotically clothed,” pornography exists and features pornstars of all ages. These images are considered to be a form of soft-core pornography, where the subjects are not fully nude but often get close to it, still providing the audience with sexualized imagery.

In the BBC Three documentary *Young Sex for Sale in Japan*, journalist Stacey Dooley spoke to a producer of *chaku ero* films who chose to remain anonymous. When asking the average age of the subjects who appeared in the films, the producer answered that the filmmakers make more money filming children than they do older girls. He stated that the youngest subject of one of his films was a six-year-old girl, who was filmed in a bathing suit playing with toys in the bath. From this movie, the producer made about four to five million yen, or approximately \$4,000-5,000 (Varley). Because this form of pornography does not show the childrens’ naked genitalia, it is not considered to be child pornography according to Japanese law.

Various loopholes in the laws that target the production and distribution of child pornography in Japan lead to a relatively small amount of successful prosecutions. For this reason, it has fallen on many non-profit and non-governmental organizations to attempt to lessen the amount of child pornography being produced after the 2014 legislation. One Tokyo-based campaign group, Humans Rights Now, claims that DVDs clearly marked as child pornography continue to be “openly and widely distributed, displayed, and sold at stores, and released on the internet” (Ross). The sexualization of minors, as well as the consumption of pornography, has a fairly lax response from both citizens and law enforcement in Japan, representing a culture in which child sexual abuse has become normalized.

Japanese Society

1. Population Decline

The population of Japan has been declining to a critical condition. According to censuses conducted by the Japanese government starting from more than a century ago, the population is shrinking at an alarmingly fast rate. In one of the government’s more recent studies, it has shown that there were fewer than 1 million births in 2016, and the population has decreased by over 300,000 people (Semuels). This population decline has been attributed to a number of sources, from economic insecurity to changing roles and attitudes of Japanese women to the government’s apprehensiveness to bring in more immigrants. The Japanese government has put in place many initiatives to attempt to minimize this crisis, from enhancing childcare services to tax incentives, but none has yet been successful as the decline has yet to be reversed. As we have seen, another significant factor is men’s modern day reluctance to enter into real romantic and sexual relationships.

One of the most relevant factors in Japan's population decline that scholars have focused on is overall financial decline. The opportunities have become more limited for Japanese men in today's economy. Although the rate of unemployment is currently under 3 percent, there has been a rise in precarious employment across the world, and within Japan as well (Semuels). According to Jeff Kingston, a professor at Temple University in Japan, around 40 percent of the Japanese workforce are employed by companies that provide temporary jobs with low salaries and few benefits. Between 1995 and 2008, the number of regular workers decreased by 3.8 million, while irregular workers increased by 7.6 million (in a working population of about 70 million people). Men are continuously expected to be breadwinners in Japan's patriarchal structure, and this financial instability plays a key role in the current lack of new households. According to Ryosuke Nishida, a professor at Tokyo Institute of Technology, about 30 percent of young people between the ages of 20 and 30 who have irregular jobs are married, as opposed to the 56 percent with regular jobs. Simply, many young people in Japan do not know if they can afford to support a family financially.

The role of women in the workforce and in society has also had an impact on the population decline. Because of the obstacles working mothers face in Japan, the birth rate is declining as more women enter the workforce each year. Despite their increased influence in Japan's workforce, the working mothers of this country are still held to dated gender roles. They work the same hours as their male colleagues, but are still expected to do the majority of housework and child-rearing. According to a time use study conducted by the OECD, "men in Japan do fewer hours of household chores and child care than in any of the world's wealthiest nations," including the United States and several European countries (Rich). According to the

BBC, roughly 70 percent of women quit their jobs after they have had their first child. Japan is considered to be one of the most difficult countries to succeed in for working mothers.

Population decline in and of itself is not a problem that is strictly limited to Japan by any means; one finds it in Russia, Germany, and even the United States. However, the problems causing the declining population in these countries somewhat differ from the ones facing Japan. For example, some of the leading causes of this decline in the United States include urban decay and rural flight in smaller towns. In Russia, although the numbers of declining population are seemingly high, the decreasing death rate and increasing birth rate, as well as continued immigration into the country have been helping to solve this problem. Despite the incentives put in place to find an effective solution, Japan continues to struggle.

While many point fingers to the increase of working women in Japan as a primary reason for the country's rapid population decline, it must be noted that this argument is backed by sexist rhetoric. It is imperative to clarify that, while there may be correlation between an increase of working women and a decrease in childbirth, this is not to suggest that women should stop working and prioritize starting families. Rather, there are other factors within Japanese culture that can be tied to this issue as well- namely the country's relationship with their popular culture. Businesses like the idol industry and the JK industry, among others, provide the "girlfriend experience" for many, which substitutes the desire to enter into real relationships and have children.

According to the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, Japan's population could potentially drop below 100 million by 2049. The decline is alarmingly rapid, with birth rates decreasing and the age of the population increasing every year. This same study

claimed that of 5,276 Japanese people between the ages of 18 and 34, 69.8 percent of men and 59.1 percent of women were not in a relationship. Many scholars such as Anita Rani, Alana Semuels, and Joel Stewart draw a parallel between this statistic and the statistics of popularity of *anime*, *manga*, idol culture, and other “girlfriend experience” products. These popular culture forms supplement the need for a real life relationship, and are seen as easier in many ways than a real relationship. For this reason, many have become satisfied with a virtual relationship and have chosen not to pursue their peers.

Japanese Economy and Polity

1. Exporting Japan’s Soft Power

Japan has used “soft power” as a form of economic progress and diplomacy, exporting popular culture not only to benefit the country economically, but also to improve political relationships with other countries and raise Japan’s standing in the international opinion. On the official website for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, one reads that “the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, aiming to further the understanding and trust of Japan, is using pop-culture as its primary tool for cultural diplomacy.” This form of diplomacy can be traced back to the beginnings of the American occupation of Japan from the mid 1940s until 1952 following Japan’s loss during the Second World War. America restructured not only the country’s constitution and political policy, but its economic practices as well.

General Douglas MacArthur, named the Supreme Commander of the Occupation forces, felt that only a democratic Japan would truly promote peace, assuming that democratic countries were inherently more peaceful than nondemocratic countries such as Germany and Japan during World War II. The shift to democracy involved immense political and economic restructuring, which changed nearly all aspects of Japanese life in just seven short years. Most notable were the

political shifts, including a completely new constitution that Japan was made to adopt. Naturally, America played the most major role in the drafting of this document, which differed greatly from the former Meiji Constitution of 1889. The document includes several important political shifts, the biggest perhaps being that the sovereignty rested with the people rather than the emperor. The war crimes Japan became infamous for led to the creation of Article 9 in the newly revised constitution, which prohibited Japan from holding a standing army or engaging in warfare of any kind. This legislation naturally took away Japan's power to enforce diplomatic relations with other countries through any form of active military power- the most direct influence on Japan's later use of soft power.

In support of these political changes, MacArthur enacted various democratic economic policies. This included the allowance of free trade unions and the reformation of the country's land redistribution policies. This new way of life was taught and advertised in newspapers and magazines to popularize democratic ideals, and America was seen as the model to be copied ("The American Occupation of Japan"). These new democratic ideals allowed for the proliferation of Japanese popular culture, including animation, video games, technology, and soap operas, which quickly spread and found popularity abroad. After the 1950s and 1960s, a wave of "Japanism" emerged in the West. The spread of Japanese popular culture was often attributed to the "global proliferation of mass consumption economy combined with a growing middle class," which gave an edge to the global spread of Japanese popular culture (Watanabe and McConnell, 1999). The country wanted to create a softer image for itself while simultaneously benefiting from the spread of its popular culture both in Japan and outside of it. A focus on *kawaii* culture that prioritized cuteness and child-like naivety was one way to do so,

and it spread quickly and fervently. Interwoven with sexuality and sexual idealization, *kawaii* imagery in popular culture became one of the country's greatest economic and political strengths.

Author Patrick W. Galbraith states that “Japan has a history of positioning the young girl at the center of consumer culture” (“Lolicon”, 86). The 1970s were difficult years for Japan in the aftermath of its occupation by the United States, as the new constitution put in place by General Douglas MacArthur included so many changes in such a short time. This leadership by Japan's former enemy included various forms of military occupation, economic restructuring and recovery, and social upheaval, and by the 1970s Japan was left to consolidate American influence as consumerism rose rapidly. The country focused extensively on advertising, packaging, and design. It was during this time that the young girl, or *shojo*, became one of the prevalent images in the media. The *shojo* figure represented the pleasures of capitalist consumerism, and appeared in magazines, radio, and television to promote products. Japanese culture professor John Whittier Treat comments that she appeared to “excite the consumer and herself be thrilled by the flurry of goods and services that circulate like toys around her” (“Lolicon”, 86). From this point on, the sexualization of young girls and the promotion of consumerism became intrinsically tied in Japan.

Galbraith also points out that the *shojo* figure represented cuteness and innocence, and therefore the progressively younger age of the girls in these advertisements was a somewhat expected development. Author Serizawa Shunsuke states that *yojo*- young girls who are often younger than *shojo* girls- began to signify an idealized Eros in Japanese culture, and therefore became more prominent in advertising. He states that this figure's integration into consumer culture can be seen as an inevitable consequence of the drive of capitalism to market Eros as a new commodity. As this culture developed, many men on the fringes of Japanese capitalist

society turned to hobbies like *anime* and *manga* rather than relationships, and therefore turned to fictional girls rather than real ones. These *otaku* (men obsessed with popular culture to the detriment of their social skills) began to find other resources to simulate relationships- usually via *anime* and *manga* girls. These relationships were seen as “pure love,” or a love that was not determined by socioeconomic concerns. These men could love fictional women as they wished, without worrying about marriage or supporting a family financially.

In the 1980s, an official branding strategy proposed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, titled the “Cool Japan” movement, began to spread in an attempt to increase the allure of Japan around the world. Even more intense attempts to spread the country’s popular culture began, specifically focusing on *anime* and *manga*, video games, fashion, technology, and- as always- *kawaii* culture in general. This political and economic move by the Japanese government was a deliberate attempt to redefine the country; no longer was it brutal and militaristic, but rather it was sweet, innocent, and associated with the color pink. By the 1990s and 2000s, Japan was labeled as a “soft power superpower” due to the country’s ability to promote cultural diplomacy and spread the positive reception of Japanese cultural products (Watanabe and McConnell). Due to new forms of technology and social media, Japanese popular culture and media-related exports became a central export in the country’s economy and one of the fastest growing markets during this time and onwards.

A study showed that in 2018 Japan had the third largest sales of media culture in the world behind the United States and China (Otmazgin, 41-42). Exporting popular culture not only benefited the economy immensely, but also provided a method for Japan to spread its culture and override previous historical or political animosities with other countries. It allowed countries to forget prior disputes and accept Japanese culture and politics. In the text *Regionalizing Culture:*

The Political Economy of Japanese Popular Culture in Asia, author Nissim Otmazgin discusses the ways that popular culture exports immensely affected Japan, claiming that popular culture commodities “have greater potential to shape people’s identities and images” (42).

Fan culture in Japan, sometimes referred to as “fandom” culture or *otaku* culture, played a central role in the popularity of this pop culture both domestically and internationally.

Primarily centered around *anime*, *manga*, video games, music (especially idols), and even the pornography industry and its stars, fandom culture spread throughout Japan and funneled immense funds into this sector. As this popular culture spread outward, so did the spirit of fandom culture- thus, continually sending profits into Japan from this export. According to the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, of the world’s animation, 60% is produced in Japan. The total value of video game exports is estimated at about 252.8 billion yen each year. In addition, according to economist Takashi Kadokura in his book *Sexonomics: Profits in the Global Sex Economy*, the porn industry is estimated to earn the country over \$20 billion annually (including profits both domestically and internationally). Even more surprising, Kadokura states that the teenage prostitution market in Japan, also known as the JK business, can be estimated to be as high as 54,700,000,000 yen per year, or around \$700 million.

Today it is unavoidable to consume Japanese popular culture without being inundated with pedophilic themes and imagery- particularly in *anime* and *manga*, the idol industry, and the pornography industry. The exporting of this culture, when little attempt is made to lessen the sexualization of minors permeating within it, shows that Japan benefits economically and politically from its proliferation. This is one of Japan’s primary exports, and individuals spend great amounts of money on this both within Japan and outside of it where the culture has gained tremendous popularity. Using soft power as an export has also changed the image of Japan

worldwide, shifting it from a militant power to one associated with *kawaii* culture's innocent eroticism. Rather than rejecting the media that may have imagery that goes against their own moral standards, those involved in fandom culture internationally consume these media forms hungrily, slowly becoming desensitized to the pedophilic themes included throughout it.

Oppositions to My Perspective

Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to show the ways pedophilia has developed in the different facets of Japanese society. While it is difficult, it is important to define pedophilia within the context of the topics discussed. We generally define pedophilia as a psychiatric disorder characterized by a reoccurring sexual attraction to children- usually under the age of 13. However, in more colloquial terms, we think of pedophilia as any sexual attraction or behavior conducted towards someone under the legal age of consent. In order to properly contextualize the way pedophilia is defined in this paper, we must also look at the ways it is defined in the Japanese legal context. The age of consent in Japan is 13 years old, which is the youngest out of the G8 countries, a standard used to measure the world's most industrialized countries. However, while this is legally true, this law is usually not the standard by which pedophiles are persecuted. Similar to federal legislation in the United States, Japan consists of 47 prefectures that each have their own local statutes. While 13 years old is the minimum age of consent country-wide, each prefecture has its own legislation regarding obscenity, also known as "corruption of minors" laws. Depending on the prefecture, these laws raise the age of consent to 16-18. For this reason, the de-facto age of consent in Tokyo, for example, is 18.

Another important factor to consider is whether or not the sexualization of fictional characters can truly be considered pedophilia. There are opposing opinions on this topic, with some seeing these media forms as pedophilic while others claim it is nothing more than fiction.

Lolicon pornography, for example, is still legal in Japan despite laws regarding pornography in general. This legality gives those who do not see this media as pedophilia a way to justify the acceptance of this phenomenon. Many defenders of *lolicon* pornography, for one, claim that sexualizing drawings cannot be constituted as a real crime and therefore should not be illegal.

In his text *Australia's "Child Abuse Material" Legislation, Internet Regulation and the Juridification of the Imagination*, Mark J. McLelland stated that “Japanese scholarship has, on the whole, argued that, in the case of Japanese fans, neither the *loli* nor the BL fandom represent the interests of paedophiles since moe characters are not objectified in the same manner that actual images of children can be, rather they express aspects of their creators' or consumers' own identities”(16). The common consensus in Japan is that *lolicon* art is not morally wrong. Another outspoken critic of the argument that *lolicon* pornography equates to child pornography is the well-known translator of Japanese manga, Dan Kanemitsu. When responding to a potential ban of this form of pornography by the Japanese government in 2014, Kanemitsu stated that he disagreed that this form of pornography normalized the sexual abuse of children, but rather was a “venting mechanism” for those with pedophilic fantasies (Varley).

Patrick W. Galbraith, one of the leading researchers on both idol culture and *lolicon* in Japan, also does not believe that possession of *lolicon* should be penalized. In *Lolicon: The Reality of “Virtual Child Pornography” in Japan*, Galbraith ends his argument by stating that both possession and creation of *lolicon* is within the realm of free speech, which must be upheld- even if some are offended by it. He states that it should remain legal until it actively hurts someone. He claims that “sexual violence against women and children is an unfortunate social reality, and censoring fiction depictions does not reduce it. It does, however, make it taboo to even imagine sexual violence and denies a space to represent and respond to it” (110). Similar to

Kanemitsu's argument, Galbraith believes that this "art form" can be a way for pedophiles to express their sexual inclinations in an environment that does not directly hurt children.

It is this very point that I disagree with. While I can agree that there is no literal crime being committed when one creates virtual child pornography, my claim in this thesis is that the normalization and proliferation of this culture creates a society in which viewing children sexually is not abhorrent. This leads to a culture where the sexualization of minors is more acceptable, as proven by the rampant numbers of young sex trafficking victims and child pornography circulated in Japan. The question then becomes whether or not I can state my opinion on Japan's policies as someone accustomed to the Western perspective. What right do I have to pass judgement on Japanese culture? My answer to this relates to Japan's diplomatic policy of soft power. Exporting popular culture is one of Japan's major priorities. It has proven to be very successful, as the United States is only one of the hundreds of countries in which Japanese popular culture is immensely popular and beloved. However, with the spread of this culture comes the risk of the spreading a normalization of pedophilia. Although America's views on pedophilia are much more strict, there has already been a noticable shift in American culture leaning towards the acceptance of this phenomenon. For one, despite its illegality, Japanese pornographic manga including *loli* and *shota* images is easily accessible and purchasable both in brick-and-mortar *manga* stores and online for American audiences. These works are translated into English for easier accessibility, and are not looked at as child pornography in the American anime community (as far as anecdotal evidence can tell).

While it may not be my position to comment on a culture I am not a part of, I feel that it is important to speak out against it when I see it proliferating in my country and community. Those who disagree that these various forms of popular culture are pedophilic in nature may

state that there is no correlation between the creation of this “art” and the number of children being sexually abused. However, these forms of media play a role in the casual normalization of pedophilia, which contributes to a society that passively accepts child endangerment. It is my fear that the more this culture becomes accepted in the United States alongside the popularization of *anime*, *manga*, and other forms of Japanese popular culture, we may see an increase in the numbers of child sexual abuse victims. I fear that, like in Japan, fans of these works may begin to dissent against the laws already put in place in the United States and claim that the illegality of this form of pornography goes against their right to free speech. For this reason, it is important to draw the parallels between “virtual” child pornography (in its various forms) and “real” child pornography so that those who may find themselves interested will not become complacent to the crimes that are related.

Conclusion

As I have discussed in my thesis, the sexualization of minors is prevalent in various forms of Japanese media. Whether it be in animation, gaming, music, fashion, or pornography, the *kawaii* culture that the country has grown famous for is often synonymous with eroticism. This culture is consumed and exported as one of Japan’s most lucrative products; the *anime* industry alone was worth 2.5 trillion yen (\$24 billion) in 2019 (“Anime Industry Report 2019”). Despite the Japanese government being aware of the normalization of pedophilia, it does little to prevent it as it benefits the Japanese economy. While some may argue that this culture is not a point of concern since it does not involve real children, research has also proven this to be untrue. Rates of real child abuse, including child pornography and sex trafficking, in Japan are some of the highest in the developed world. Now that Japanese popular culture is one of the

country's largest exports and is spreading rapidly across the world, the concern falls on whether or not this culture will spread as well.

From personal experience, I have already seen the ways that the sexualization of children in Japanese popular culture has spread to the United States. In attending a popular *anime* convention, Anime NYC, I saw no shortage of *lolicon* art, cosplay, and fanaticism. At this event, artists can display their artwork for sale. I counted more than 5 vendors that were selling their own *lolicon* art. I have included this photo reference, which was taken with the informed consent of the artist. His face has been blurred for privacy.

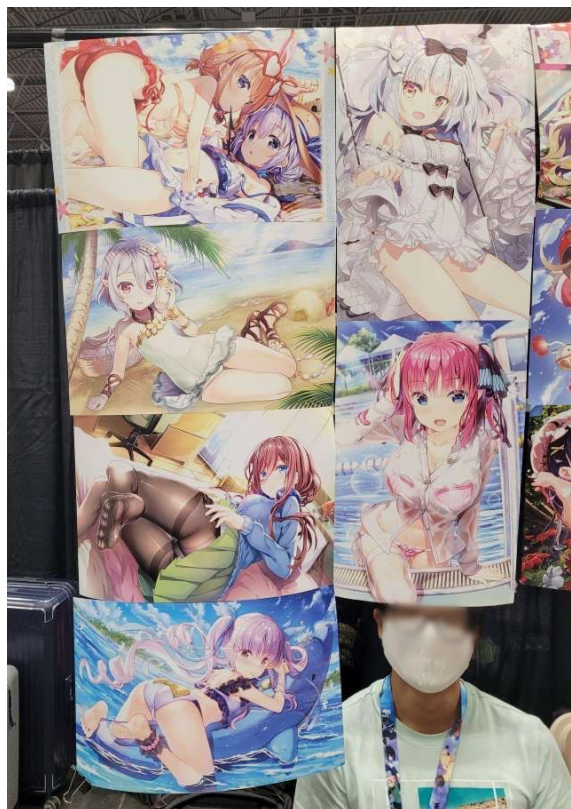


Figure 4. Sluzhevsky, Megan. Booth Selling *Lolicon*

Art at Anime NYC. 20 Nov, 2021. Author's Personal Collection.

In addition, popular websites used to rank *anime*, including MyAnimeList, IMDB, and LetterBoxd, show the popularity of anime that sexualizes minors. These websites are organized by user ratings, and can be rated both by enjoyment and by popularity. On MyAnimeList, arguably the most popular website for this purpose, shows such as *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, *No Game No Life*, *Seven Deadly Sins*, and *Miss Kobayashi's Dragon Maid*, which feature sexualized young or young-looking female characters, are some of the most popular in the United States today. While this can all be considered anecdotal evidence, to my knowledge there have yet to be any studies conducted on the spread of pedophilic Japanese popular culture in the United States or elsewhere.

When discussing the ethics of consuming media, it is vital that we prevent ourselves from becoming complacent. I feel that many fans of these genres write off the harm it may cause as they do not feature “real” children in sexualized situations. However, one must question the morality of someone who enjoys media that even features drawings of sexualized children. Accepting even “virtual” images of child pornography shows a morality that states sexualizing children is acceptable. This issue becomes more urgent as the lines between what is “real” and what simply exists online become blurred.

Even more so, we must look critically at those who consume or promote content that actively harms real children, such as in the idol or JK industry. While the rights to free speech and expression, as written in both the American and Japanese constitutions, remain a top priority in Japan, children continue to be hurt as a result. Throughout history and into modernity, there is not much of a voice given to victims of this pedophilic culture. There are actually no accounts of the perspective of *wakashu*, and even today it is rare to hear the voices of young people who suffer from these phenomena, such as ex-idols or former JK business victims. It is important to

consider the ways this may be affecting children physically and mentally, especially in a country where mental health is not prioritized while suicide rates are rising. In 2020 alone, the rates of suicide among Japanese women grew nearly 15% (Wingfield-Hayes). Research must be conducted to realize the true impact this culture may have on young women, and young children in general.

In the beginning of this thesis, I contemplated why this culture is being ignored in Japan. Through my research I learned that it was not solely because the Japanese government benefited from this culture. It was also due to a disconnect people made between what was “real” and what was “virtual.” Perhaps it is easy to ignore the harm being done to children when looking at pedophilic drawings rather than a real child’s face. However, the complacency of this culture leads to real damage to real children, like in the idol culture, the JK business, and in *chaku ero* child pornography. It is only through active discussion of these topics that we can spread awareness of this content and fight against the normalization of it. While there are many who disagree that these works hurt children, it is only by continued diligence that that can be proven otherwise and propel the Japanese government to take further action to protect its country’s children.

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