

# The Cultural Context and Social Representation

## The Japanese Schoolgirl in British Popular Culture

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### Abstract

As an embodiment of the *shoujo*, a specific Japanese representation of 'girl', the schoolgirl often appears as a central character in Japanese popular culture. With the import, and widespread availability, of Japanese cultural products in the West (such as comics called *manga*, animated movies called *anime*, toys and games), the Japanese schoolgirl has gained a visibility in Western popular culture, and perceived as cute and shy. In this paper, the way the Japanese schoolgirl is represented in British popular culture is examined, and contrasted with the representation in Japan. It is concluded that cultural context influences the representation and, in agreement with the work of Saito (1996), the British representation is simplistic and distorted in comparison to that in Japan.

**Keywords:** *cultural context, social representations, Japanese schoolgirl, Japanese popular culture, British popular culture, manga, anime, shoujo*

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### Introduction

It is an indication of the impact of Japanese popular culture in Britain that a representation of the Japanese schoolgirl has emerged. As can be seen in the following examples, a representation has been employed implicitly on the assumption that the British audience is aware of it. In 2004 Jens Lucking won the Schweppes Photographic Portrait Prize, at the National Portrait Gallery in London, for an image called *Tokyo*, of three Japanese schoolgirls. The photographer comments: "They all come across as strong females so that's how I show them - self-confident, almost arrogant. I was desperate to avoid that cute, looking down, Japanese school-girl thing, and I think this portrait is the antithesis of that." National Portrait Gallery (2004). It is interesting to note that the image set out to present a counter to the 'Japanese schoolgirl thing' and that the viewers in the National Gallery would understand this contradiction. More recently, in the BBC comedy spoof of a reality show of life at an airport *Come Fly with Me* (2010-2011) all the key characters, both male and female, are played by two male comedy actors. In the first episode they play two Japanese schoolgirls waiting to spot their favourite actor at the airport: wearing the uniform and colourful fancy goods, and mimicing the cute shyness and girlishness seen as typical of the Japanese schoolgirl. As well as the humour of the two men playing these roles, there is also the assumption that this image of the Japanese schoolgirl is known to the British audience. In this paper I will be looking at the representation of the Japanese schoolgirl as it has arisen in Western popular culture, and Britain in particular, and examine how this representation relates to that of the schoolgirl in Japan.

### Social Representations

The social representations theory of Moscovici (2000) will be used as a framework for examining the development of social understanding and how representations differ between cultures. Moscovici (1998) uses the metaphor of money to describe how social representations form both the understanding of the individual and the culture. Through communication within a culture representations are formed, circulate

and develop. These form the common sense understandings within that culture. Moscovici (1981) distinguishes between the 'reified universe', which contains academic or scientific knowledge developed through formal procedures, and the 'consensual universe', the social understandings within a culture – common beliefs and values. His early work (Moscovici, 1961) examined Freudian ideas through an analysis of how they were used in popular culture, and showed how certain ideas were ignored and others were altered on entering the consensual universe. He argues that the creation of social representations are “to make the unfamiliar ... familiar” (Moscovici, 2000: 37) and so give social meaning to concepts circulating in a culture.

The transfer or transmutation of a representation from one culture to another has not been examined often. However, the work of Saito (1996) studying the transfer of the concept of Zen from Japan to Britain is very relevant to this paper. Saito (1996) developed Moscovici's (1990) suggestion that Bartlett's theory of social conventionalization could be used to explore the process (Bartlett, 1932). Bartlett himself examined the recall and serial retelling of a Native American story within British culture. He argued that a process of conventionalization operates, altering the recall (as the story is distorted by the listeners own cultural expectations). Bartlett argued for four aspects of conventionalization: assimilation to existing cultural forms, simplification (elements of the representation from the original culture are lost or ignored), elaboration, such as unimportant 'foreign elements' not central to the original representation being retained, and social construction (Bartlett, 1932). Thus, the host culture constructs the new representation not just on what they have learnt but in terms of their own cultural development – and a new representation emerges out of the conventionalizing processes of simplification and elaboration (Saito, 1996, see also Duveen, 2007).

Saito (1996) argued that the Japanese have a rich and complex consensual social representation of Zen: “Most members of society have a general conception of it through some form of personal contact .... as well as through exposure by way of the mass-media or literature or the like” (Saito, 1996: 269). The British conception of Zen differed between practitioners (with high personal involvement) and non-practitioners (low personal involvement). The non-practitioners had a stable but simplistic representation, whereas the practitioners had a more elaborate but less stable representation. Saito showed: “the loss of certain characteristic features of the Japanese conception of Zen which are particular to it, and which are closely linked to the social conventions and values of Japanese society; instead it appears Zen has acquired features distinctive to British society, which are suggested in this case for example, to be an association of the East with mysticism and/or esotericism ... In short, the conception of Zen has been dramatically transformed on its transmission to Britain from Japan.” (Saito, 1996: 271)

The Japanese schoolgirl is recognizable from her iconic sailor-style school uniform (*seifuku*). Uniforms provide a way of identifying a homogeneous group within Japanese society (McVeigh, 2000). The schoolgirl in uniform is used in the Japanese media as a symbolic representation of young Japan, and has been a staple of television advertising (Kinsella, 2002). Unlike in the West, where the school uniform is something young people often reject in favour of more individual clothing, in the 1980s and 1990s, the *seifuku* became the essential fashion item for teenage high school girls, often adapted to make the skirt shorter and with loose socks in the *kogaru* style by these older school girls. Schools even created designer versions to appeal to the girls (Kinsella, 2002). Girls liked wearing their uniforms outside of school (McVeigh, 2000) as it identified them as a positively valued social group. Schoolgirls figure often in comic books (called *manga* in Japanese) and animated movies (called *anime* in Japanese) as central characters, and teenage girl pop groups frequently appeared in a version of the *seifuku* during their concerts or pop videos. With the import of Japanese popular culture in the form of toys, games, comics and animation, the distinctive image of the Japanese schoolgirl has appeared in the West. In this paper the representation in British popular culture will be examined and contrasted with that of Japan. Areas of simplification or elaboration will be explored in the context of emerging and developing social representations.

## **The Western View of the Japanese Girl: The Madame Butterfly Stereotype**

The Western social representation of the Japanese girl owes much to the Madame Butterfly stereotype (e.g. Goebel, 2002) that has existed for over a hundred years since the first performance of Puccini's eponymous opera. In the opera, the fifteen-year-old Japanese bride of an American naval officer remains dutiful and loyal despite his abandonment of her with child. Nineteenth century Western visitors to Japan viewed the Japanese girl as charming, shy, obedient, hard-working, deferential and uncomplaining (Jalagin, 2002; Holland, 1907; Hashimoto, 2005). The British author Clive Holland wrote novels - *My Japanese Wife* (1902), and *A Japanese Romance* (1904) – of Western men encountering these charming Japanese girls – in which he presented the Japanese girl as the idealised desirable female: obedient like a child and desirable as a woman (which he contrasted favourably with Western women). Even the small size of the Japanese woman and her style of dress and behaviour led to them to be viewed as demure and doll-like (Shoaf, 2010). This representation has remained a pervasive stereotype in the West to this day (Morris, 2002).

Yet, in contradiction, the period of the Emperor Meiji (1868-1912) was a period of significant social change in Japan. With the establishment of schools for girls, the period of adolescence became identified for girls between childhood and marriage, who were labelled *shoujo* (usually translated as 'girl' but including the idea of virginity or pre-marital) (Treat, 1996). Formal education for girls (at least for middle class girls) was a reality and there was the beginnings of the emancipation of Japanese women. The novel *Futon* (1907) by Katai Tayama whilst recounting the unrequited love of the male character for a teenage girl, also included his angst at her 'modernity' – the awareness of the change in women's attitudes as they acquire educational opportunities and question their traditional roles (Fowler, 1988). Thus, in Japan, the male desire for the youthful *shoujo* was mixed with male anxiety about the emancipation of women – a subtlety lost on Western authors. Changes in Japanese women's lives were rarely presented in the West to counter the Madame Butterfly stereotype. Yet these changes were taking place. For example, in Japan in the 1920s a specific term was used: *moga*, short for 'modern girl' to describe city girls who adopted Western clothes, and engaged in active lives, smoking, dancing, taking up sports such as tennis or swimming (Dunn, 2007). Thus, for the Japanese a complex social representation of the unmarried young woman – the *shoujo* – was being negotiated within the culture.

During the middle of the twentieth century the Second World War dominated the representation of the Japanese in the West - which became highly negative (Gilbert, 1951). In Britain it focused on the treatment of prisoners of war in the Japanese camps (immortalized in the 1957 film *Bridge on the River Kwai*), with little reference to Japanese women in British popular culture. This was different to the United States of America, with their occupation of Japan: their men encountering Japanese women in films such as *House of Bamboo*, 1955, *Sayonara*, 1957; *The Barbarian and the Geisha*, 1958. Yet the changing Japanese social mores of the time, shown brilliantly in Yasujiro Ozu's *Tokyo Story* (1953), were not visible in Western popular culture as the film was not released in the West until many years later. Ironically, in 2002, it was rated as the number one film of all time in UK film magazine *Sight & Sound* despite not having had a proper UK release until the 1990s.

During the second half of the twentieth century, Western representations of Japan tended to focus around the transformation of the country into a major economic power, particularly after the publicity of the Tokyo Olympics in 1964, with a focus on the hard-working, dedicated *sarariman* (salary man). However, where Japanese women were presented, it tended to reinforce the Western stereotype of the submissive and obedient woman, such as in the James Bond film *You Only Live Twice*, 1967[1], or their traditional role – wearing a kimonos, serving food or performing a fan dance, as in a British Pathé report in 1968 about a traditional Japanese restaurant in London (British Pathé, 1968).

The Madame Butterfly stereotype of the Japanese woman is unlikely to change as a British representation of the Japanese woman due its prevalence in Western culture (Morris, 2002). Yet in Japan itself at the end of the twentieth century, representations were changing due to the changing circumstances of women in society. For example, a popular drama, *Oshin*, aired on *Nippon Hoso Kyokai* (NHK)[2] between 1983-1984, described the struggle of a Japanese woman from her birth at the beginning of the century to the present. As Harvey (1995) argues *Oshin* represents Japan in the twentieth century – which the audience would be aware of - and the national characteristic of endurance is represented in the form of *Oshin* herself, as a strong woman who succeeds through her own determination and perseverance. Despite its world-wide success, such Japanese dramas are not shown on British television (Singhal and Udornpim,

1997). As White (2002) demonstrates the complex (working) lives of Japanese women in the twenty first century bears no relation to the stereotype.

## Japanese Comics and Animation are Children's Entertainment

Over the last forty years many aspects of Japanese popular culture including computer games, toys, *manga* and *anime* have become available to Western audiences (Allison, 2000, Schodt, 1996), influencing perceptions of Japan and the Japanese. “You can ask children in the US, Europe, and many other countries, “What is the image of Japan?” Their answer would be Pikachu, DragonBall Z, *Sailor Moon*, and the *Super Mario Brothers*. Pop culture such as manga (comics), animation, and video games has now become the face of Japan.” (Nakamura, 2003: 1) One of the earliest *anime* imports into mainstream Western television was *Sailor Moon*, about a fourteen year old girl with magical powers that she uses to fight evil (Allison, 2000). She and her friends are represented in their sailor uniforms, identifying them as schoolgirls. Interestingly, when not engaging in action sequences using her powers, *Sailor Moon* is presented as a cute, ordinary girl, essentially “a conservative ideal of socially sanctioned femininity” (Bryce and Davis, 2006: 4). The import of *Sailor Moon* into the USA in 1997 was directed at children, following on from the successful Japanese cartoon-style but live action children's programme, *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* in 1994. *Sailor Moon* became very popular amongst pre-teen girls (McDonnell, 2000) and was the first successful Japanese *shoujo anime* in the USA (Thompson, 2007). In the UK the programme aired on Fox Kids in 1999 and on Independent Television (ITV1) in 2001-2. Japanese *anime* began to appear in Western cinema and on television, including the hugely successful Studio Ghibli animated movies of Hayao Miyazaki[3], often featuring young girls as the central character. With Disney gaining the distribution rights to the Miyazaki movies, the association of Japanese animation with children's entertainment in mainstream Western culture was strengthened.

Whilst there is evidence that people from different cultures will interpret media products in different ways (Hinton, 2007) the programmes were specifically altered to fit Western expectations. Schoolgirl-themed *anime*, including *Sailor Moon* and other later imports, such as *Card Captor Sakura*, another 'magical girl' genre *anime*, were censored for the US target children's market (Sebert, 2000; Poitras, 2001). Scenes in the original animation which were deemed controversial in the West were removed or edited. A lesbian relationship and a young girl's crush on an older boy were cleverly replaced in the text by references to a family relationship between them (they were presented as cousins) to explain the friendships. Also, nudity and outlines of underwear were removed. These sexual elements were deemed inappropriate for the audience and censored to fit this view. Yet in Japan this was part of the appeal to the teenage male audience. The Western association of Japanese comics and animation as entertainment for young children rather than for teenage or adults constructs these elements as problematic, despite the fact that in Japan they were programmes with teen characters appealing to teenage audiences, resulting in a different interpretation of the sexual references. *kodomo no jikan*, a *manga* and *anime* about an elementary schoolgirl with a crush on a male teacher, was dropped by the USA importers due to the controversy about its subject-matter. Yet in Japan it was a successful comedy, written by a female author and certainly not viewed as problematic for the teenage audience (DeAngelis, 2007). In the West there are concerns about representations of characters interpreted as 'under age' (Sebert, 2000) or material deemed inappropriate for the target (child) audience. Yet for a Japanese audience, *Sailor Moon* combines both girls (*shoujo*) and boys (*shonen*) *manga* elements with the sexual references (which were edited out for the US market) specifically created for the adolescent (male) audience.

The style of Japanese animation includes cute characteristics, such as large eyes, which can lead a Western audience to view the characters as younger than their given age. Thus, *anime* created for a teenage audience in its home culture becomes, in the West, a programme for a pre-teenage audience. The versions of *anime* aired on British television are normally those edited and dubbed into English for television in the USA. So, the edited US version of *Card Captor Sakura* was also the version screened in the United Kingdom. Whilst Western teenage schoolgirl heroines, with magical powers, like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, were viewed as appropriate for an older teenage audience, the Japanese schoolgirl characters, such as *Sailor Moon*, of a similar age, are interpreted in the West as appropriate for a much

younger audience. So by scheduling and censorship, these Japanese television imports portraying teenagers are presented in the West to much younger children. Ironically, as Hurford (2009) points out Japanese *shoujo manga* presents alternative constructions of gender and sexuality to that typical in the United States and offers an opportunity for rethinking gender and sexuality. However, due to the editing of the programmes for a Western children's audience (rather than for older teenagers) the schoolgirl characters are specifically altered to make the *anime* fit the norms of television characters for children in the West. Thus, the Japanese representations entering Western popular culture are specifically reconstructed in a process of conventionization to meet Western expectations (Bartlett, 1932)

## Japanese Schoolgirls Like Cute Things – Cute Implies Childlike

One of the most powerful features of modern *shoujo* culture is the concept of *kawaii* (cute) that has dominated much of Japanese popular culture since the 1980s. The term can be used for cuddly toys, such as Hello Kitty, a style of drawing or writing, but can also be used to refer to a cute (attractive) girl. Cuteness exemplifies the idealized *shoujo* world as a pre-adult world of freedom and pleasure, in contrast to the adult Japanese world full of responsibility, duty, hard work and lack of freedom (Kinsella, 1995; White, 1993). High school girls (aged between 15 and 19), in particular, created this cute culture: buying cute, colourful fancy goods and cute clothes. As Kinsella (1995: 241) explained: “Underpinning cute style are the neo-romantic notions of childhood as an entirely separate, and hence unmaligned, pure sphere of human life.” Furthermore, gender inequalities in the workplace meant that there were fewer opportunities for girls in terms of high status careers, with the expectation of a supporting role in the workplace followed by marriage. Thus, girls were aware of their own youth as a time of unique, yet transient, freedom in Japanese society, with a less desirable adulthood creeping up on them. This feeling was best captured by the novels of Banana Yoshimoto (Treat, 1996), whose first novel *Kitchen* published in 1987 achieved wide-spread public acclaim. Nostalgia and loss characterise her *shoujo* characters, who are often poignantly aware of the passing of their youth and hence express a nostalgia for the present. Romance in Yoshimoto's works comprises fleeting sensual moments “producing a sentiment of yearning for the moment that was present and then lost” (Sanchez, 2006: 67).

Interestingly, the *shoujo* has gained a key position in post-war Japanese capitalist consumer society. Traditionally, boys were trained for the workplace, often ending up as the stereotypical salary man working long hours with a lifetime dedication to the company, often at the expense of a family life. Thus, there was academic pressure on teenage boys to work hard at school to get into the best universities and work for the best companies. These boys were driven on by their devoted mothers – the stereotypical *kyouiku mama* (education mother) – to endless study, with little relaxation (Allison, 1996). Education was viewed as less important for girls who were, stereotypically, likely to be end up as *oeru* (OL, short for office ladies) undertaking menial or administrative tasks in a company prior to marriage, at which time they gave up work to devote themselves to the family. Whilst this simplification no longer reflects the actual lives of the Japanese in the 21:st century (White, 2002), the stereotypes of salary man, education mama, and office lady are rooted in the culture of post-war Japan. A perverse effect of these gender roles was that the teenage girl could devote more time to engaging with popular and consumer culture than young men. This has meant that the *shoujo* had the maximum amount of relaxation and freedom in a highly structured and pressured society. The affluence of modern Japan schoolgirls, with good allowances, led them to be viewed as a key consumer group in society, if not *the consumers* of Japanese popular culture in the late 20:th century (e.g. Treat, 1996). So combined with the *shoujo* being viewed as the symbol of personal freedom, the things the *shoujo* consumed were symbolically associated with pleasure. *Kawaii* culture became no longer the sole province of the *shoujo* but began to be enjoyed by adults, to gain a little of the *shoujo* culture themselves. The culture of *kawaii* has been shown to have influenced many aspect of Japanese popular culture from road repair signs to credit cards (McVeigh, 2000) and contains richness in its representation beyond the English term 'cute'[\[4\]](#).

Western ideas of cute are attributed to Japanese schoolgirls in their liking of colourful clothes, accessories and soft toys, such as *Hello Kitty* and *Totoro* (both cartoon characters), and interpreted in the West solely as childlike – where soft toys and bright colours are associated with very young children and babies.

Thus, Japanese schoolgirls are viewed as more childlike by association - despite being teenagers who do not view themselves as children any more than Western teenagers do (White, 1993). As Allison (2004) argues Japanese products packaged as cute, from Pokemon to Sailor Moon, have had a global impact on products for children. Whilst in Japan cuteness has had a major influence on both child and adult culture, in the West cuteness is viewed as primarily a child, rather than adult, quality. Thus, the *kawaii* teenage Japanese schoolgirl has become interpreted as a shy, naïve, child-character in Western popular culture. In the context of the long-standing Western Madame Butterfly stereotype of the Japanese girl as cute, shy, and innocent, the emerging representation of the Japanese schoolgirl and her *kawaii* culture has, if anything, placed greater emphasis on her (misperceived) youthfulness.

## Japanese Schoolgirl Sexuality – Manga and Anime

Given this Western representation of the Japanese schoolgirl as child-like who enjoys cute objects associated with childhood, it comes as a shock to some Western observers that the Japanese schoolgirl features often in sexually explicit comics and animation. The British *Sunday Times* newspaper *Culture* magazine had a front page image of a female *manga* character with the heading “under age, oversexed, over here” (Millar, 1995: 9). Its main anxiety arose from “juxtaposing the wide-eyed Walt Disney innocence these precious poppets convey to our culture with scenes of sexual titillation” (Millar, 1995: 9). The key point here is that the drawing style conveys to the Westerners the connotation of 'under age', despite the fact that erotic *manga* characters are large breasted and are usually older high school girls (so likely to be 18 or 19 years old). Yet the British viewer perceives the Japanese representation as problematic due to the apparent youth of the characters. Millar acknowledged this point: “The danger is that in relatively repressive Britain these images are taken out of their cultural context” (Millar, 1995: 9).

Yet the sexy schoolgirl is a well-known stereotype in Britain. The comedy series of *St Trinian's* films portray the younger girls as unkempt 'naughty schoolgirls' up to no good and the older teenage girls as 'sexy schoolgirls' with short skirts and make-up, mature for their years and out to exploit any suitable man (Harper, 2000). This has had such a pervasive effect on British popular culture that the *St Trinian's* schoolgirl image has become a feature of adult fancy dress and erotic imagery. In 1997 the pop group *The Spice Girls* dressed as schoolgirls for an advertisement. Under the heading of “Girls of St. Spicy 'Uns”, a picture of them took up over half the front page of *The Sun* newspaper with the caption “the Spice Girls dress up as saucy *St Trinian's* girls for their latest escapade” (The Sun, 1997). When members of the girl pop group *Girls Aloud* were involved in a new *St Trinian's* film in 2007 a number of British newspapers pictured them in school uniform. *The Sun* newspaper reported “Here are *Girls Aloud* fulfilling every man's *St Trinian's* fantasy in saucy school uniforms.” Smart (2007). Thus, within British culture the “sexy *St Trinian's* schoolgirl” representation is well-known – and communicated within the culture. The key point is this representation is contrasted rather than integrated with the constructed British representation of the Japanese schoolgirl, for the reasons given above (Gillespie, 2008).

In the film *Perdita Durango* (Dance with the Devil), 1997, R-rated in the USA and 18 in the UK, set in Mexico and the USA, there is one scene where the characters are watching a Japanese adult *anime* on television of the sort referred to as 'sex and tentacles' (McCarthy and Clements, 1998). In this form of animated pornography, strange tentacled monsters sexually assault young women characters who, as in the *LA Blue Girl* series (1989-93), are often high school girls wearing their *seifuku*. Holding the representation of Japanese schoolgirl outlined above, a Western audience may interpret this as highly transgressive, in the light of the (incorrectly) inferred age of the girl. One of the US distributors of adult *anime*, Anime18, included at the beginning of their videos a statement noting the cultural differences between Japan and the West and stating that all the characters depicted were over eighteen years old. Yet to a Western audience the cute youthfulness of the *anime* style and explicit sexuality can present an incongruous juxtaposition, which offers an alternative but transgressive social representation (Gillespie, 2008) of under age sexuality which is not able to be integrated into the dominant representation of innocent cuteness - resulting in lack of a coherent representation in Britain, in line with Saito's study.

However, it is not to say that this form of *anime* does not appeal to the Western audience – as illustrated in the film *Perdita Durango*. The import of these specific *anime* into the West (rather than other popular Japanese adult genres ranging from golf to mah jong) might have more to do with a Western interest in

the sexually exotic rather than the relative popularity of these *anime* in Japan (Schodt, 1996). The selective import of adult *anime* may say more about what Westerners chose to import rather than what the majority of Japanese are actually watching (Izawa, 1997), leading to a Western misperception that schoolgirls embroiled in 'sex and tentacles' *anime* is typical Japanese animation fare.

Yet in Japan the 'sexy schoolgirl' is as much a feature of pornography as it is in the West. "Uniformed schoolgirls have appeared in novels, erotic manga, illustrations, photo magazines, and videos, and on internet sites." (Kinsella, 2002, p.4). Grigsby (1999) describes how Sailor Moon and her friends, as cute girls in their sailor suits, appeal to men, and notes that pornographic parodies of the series have been created for the male market. The culture of *kawaii* and its appeal to men influences the way the actresses presented themselves. Young women may act cute, putting on high pitched voices and girlish behaviour, to portray themselves as the non-threatening *shoujo* to men (in a style called *burikko*). Whilst there is a strict rule of only over eighteen year old participants in pornography, young women AV idols (adult video stars), such as Ai Iijima, Bunko Kanazawa, and the Maria Ozawa, wearing a school uniform have been a consistent feature of Japanese pornography.

There is also schoolgirl erotica in magazines, *manga* and *anime* for teenage boys (Fukuzawa and LeTendre 2001) unlike in the West. Bornoff (1991) gives an example from a magazine for adolescent boys: three girls in *seifuku* are lifting their skirts to show their panties. Allison (1996) points out the "peepshot" (*tousatsu*) is pervasive, with girls panties fetishized, in both erotic material and popular culture. A panty flash or a peepshot is almost ubiquitous in teenage school-based *manga*. Much of the imagery is voyeuristically presented, with the girls unaware that they are being viewed in states of undress (such as boys peeking into girls changing rooms) or positioned where boys covertly look up their skirts. The girls' response to discovering a male voyeur is either embarrassment or to yell at the boy, calling him a pervert. In *Open Sesame*, volume 12, by Kaoru Kawakata, a *shonen manga* from 2001, a boy enters the class where the girls are changing. They throw things at him and call out *bakaa* – idiot. Interestingly, the boy's reaction to observing the girl in a state of undress is often to be transfixed, doing little more than staring (Allison, 1996). Indeed, the male character often has a nose bleed or sweats (shown by a large water drop drawn on his forehead) which are conventional *manga* ways of representing male arousal (Schodt, 1983) and if discovered he becomes highly embarrassed. Hence, the boys are active in looking but then become passive, and subsequently inactive. In *manga* for boys there are many instances of such covert peeking but they don't lead to sexual activity. Allison (1996) sees the presence of this eroticism in boys' *manga* and the reaction of the participants to be linked to Japanese ideas of production and consumption, rather than exclusively about gender and sexuality (as might be considered in the West) indicating that explanations of the 'male gaze' are culturally specific. In *manga* for boys, the boy peeking defines a construction of the genders that is consistent with adult social roles. Firstly, it shows that the genders are different: the boys look at the girls but not the other way round. Peeking, like reading *manga* generally, can be viewed as a brief respite from the traditional male role as worker, but does not detract from that central role - nothing sexual develops from the voyeurism except that brief pleasure – after which the boy can get back to studying. Indeed, in Japan the imagery may be seen as providing a respite from endless hard work: "They are a treat that boys digest as they study just as grown men read erotic comic books as they commute to work." (Allison, 1996, p. 48) Thus, reading this type of *manga* provides a period of acceptable relaxation within a regulated life of hard work, without threatening that structure, rather than a Western interpretation of Japanese male perversity (Jones, 2003).

## Japanese Schoolgirl Sexuality - Enjo Kosai

In 1994 the Japanese newspaper *Asahi Shinbun* first reported on *enjo kosai* (compensated dating). This involved middle-aged salary men paying high school girls for spending time with them, from simply having a meal together to paying for sex (Jones, 2003). Apparently, a girl in school uniform could earn more money than one without a uniform (White, 2002). In Japan the concerns were not focused on the male desire for the young and stereotypically innocent *shoujo*, but about well-off, well-educated girls willing to prostitute themselves for consumer goods (McLelland, 2003), such as (stereotypically) Louis Vuitton handbags.

Western media picked up the story with a degree of sensational interest. *Newsweek* presented a full page image of a Japanese schoolgirl in uniform on its cover with the headline “Japan's Dirty Secret: Schoolgirls Selling Sex” (*Newsweek*, 1996). Under headings such as “From schoolgirl to sex object” (*The Guardian* newspaper in Britain) to “She's only a little schoolgirl” (*Time* magazine) interviews with high school girls appeared in the Western press describing their *enjo kosai* experiences (Fitzpatrick, 1999; Drake, 2001). The British magazine *Now!* (1997) went further with pull quotes in red and underlined: “Sex with girls of 12 is legal”, “They like young girls in uniform”.

*Newsweek* blamed it on the lack of spirituality (i.e. consumerism) of Japanese society (McLelland, 2003). *The Guardian* explained it as a desire for expensive goods: “A Chanel lifestyle, after all, is hard to keep up on pocket money alone” (Fitzpatrick, 1999), with *Now!* arguing the consumer society in Japan had not made people happy. However, these articles tended to emphasise the youth of the girls (“little schoolgirl”, “pocket money”), made no reference to the frequency of *enjo kosai*, and made no comparison with Western teenagers. Indeed, all the girls interviewed in these articles were high school girls and over the age of consent in Britain and usually over eighteen.

In sum, the Western newspapers have implicitly positioned *enjo kosai* as a concern about under age sexuality, whereas in Japan it was about the consumerism of young women, with an underlying concern about the nature and structure of Japanese society around consumption and happiness. Thus, the representation of the Japanese schoolgirl had been changed in the cultural transfer. The implication in the Western articles is that under age sex was going on in Japan – i.e. in contrast to the West – making a representation that is both the transgressive 'cultural other' and to be protected from. Indeed, Schodt (1996) warned against what he referred to as the ‘lolita complex virus’ (an erotic focus on the young girl) implying that the Japanese 'illness' could in some way 'infect' those in the West. Yet the idea that “For Sale: Japanese Schoolgirls” (to quote the headline of *Now!*, 1997) is not born out by the evidence.

Whilst there was real concern about *enjo kosai* in Japan (McLelland, 2003), in 1998 both *Asahi Shimbun* and the *Japan Times* reported the results of a survey of 600 high school girls by Professor Fukutomi of Tokyo Gakugei University, which showed that just 5% had undertaken some form of *enjo kosai*, with only 2.3% actually having had sex for money. According to the *Asahi Shinbun*: “Girls who experienced *enjo-kosai* or feel no qualms about it tend to be susceptible to the media and their peers; or indifferent about their future and afraid of getting old; or feel that being a high school girl has a brand-name quality, Professor Fukutomi has analyzed.” (*Asahi Shimbun*, 1998). Japanese concerns about *enjou kosai* and high school girls were played out in films such as *baunsu ko gaurusu* (Bounce Kogals), 1997, and *Love & Pop*, 1998. The schoolgirls in these films were not naïve “little schoolgirls” but presented as complex young women dealing with their lives in modern Japan, their friendships and the men who seek to exploit them. For example, in *Bounce Kogals*, abortion and violence are dealt with; and in one scene, a schoolgirl accompanies a salary man to a hotel room, but rather than having sex with him she knocks him out with a taser and takes his wallet.

Indeed, as Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) show, Japan is one of the most socio-economically equal countries in the world (along with Sweden) and has low rates of most social problems and high rates of literacy and numeracy. According to the United Nations Statistics Division (2010) the United Kingdom teenage pregnancy rate is five times higher than that of Japan. And according to the UK Home Office (2004) over 6% of UK prostitutes are under eighteen. Thus, presenting the Japanese schoolgirl as the transgressive cultural other, when put in this context, may deflect from the social issues of British teenage sexuality.

## The British Representation of the Japanese Schoolgirl

It appears, therefore, that the representation of the Japanese schoolgirl in mainstream British popular culture is of a young, naïve, child-character that likes soft toys and other child-like things. However, when presented in sexual situations in *manga* or *anime* the schoolgirl is viewed as inappropriately sexualized due to her inferred age. This representation can have the effect of either appealing to certain men who, like Holland (1907), wish to see the Japanese woman as the amenable Madame Butterfly (in contrast to emancipated Western women) or initiating concerns about under age sexual imagery. Yet, as

Saito (1996) showed, such a representation is socially constructed in terms of the host culture, and as has been demonstrated, presents a simplistic view of the Japanese schoolgirl – without the complexity of the Japanese *shoujo* representation. Sanitized, she becomes entertainment for pre-teens, and by placing the Japanese high school girl outside of comparable Western teenage school representations (such as in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* or *St. Trinians* 'sexy schoolgirls') the representation becomes positioned, through the lens of British culture, as a transgressive cultural 'other'.

Western fans of Japanese popular culture, in viewing a wider range of products (like Saito's Zen practitioners) may have a more detailed representation of the Japanese schoolgirl than that discussed here. Indeed, both *anime* and Japanese films feature powerful, dynamic and violent schoolgirls as in *anime* like *Blood the Last Vampire*, 2000 or movies such as *Battle Royale*, 2000. Yet, these fans will to a great extent (unless they are Japanese speakers) be subject to the selection of cultural products imported in the West by companies offering translated or subtitled products. They are also aware that they are outside of the mainstream - adopting Japanese terms such as *otaku*[5] to label themselves (Tobin, 2001). Many *anime* websites include details of Japanese language and culture yet, as Saito would predict, these may be more detailed but less stable representations as, even via the internet, the availability of Japanese cultural products may be highly selective, and represented in terms of Western elaborations.

## Conclusion

It is clear that this examination of the British representation of the Japanese schoolgirl supports Saito's (1996) analysis on the cultural transmission of representations. It is a simplified interpretation of the *shoujo*, elaborated with Western concerns about her inferred youth from her *kawaii* behaviour or interests and the *anime* style of drawing. She is associated with childhood entertainment and Japanese teen *anime* are censored and differentiated from Western teen programmes where references to sexuality are acceptable. Japanese high school girl sexual imagery, rather than seen as comparable with the British 'sexy schoolgirl' is viewed as transgressive and dangerous under age sexuality, positioning the Japanese as the cultural 'other'.

Yet in Japan, the schoolgirl or *shoujo* representation has a richness and meaning that bears no relation to this Western interpretation. Treat (1995, p. 282) provides quotes from two Japanese authors, Otsuka Eiji and Horikiri Naoto, to illustrate this situation: "What name are we to give this life of ours today? The name is *shoujo*" and "I wonder if we men shouldn't think of ourselves as 'shoujo' given our compulsory and excessive consumerism." So the *shoujo* became the model for all Japanese in their consumption of both products and of popular culture (Robertson, 1998) with the term '*shoujo*' generalising to a state of mind: "The powerful and cheerful "*shoujo*" may be a young woman, or she may be middle-aged .... or she might even be a man..." (Aoyama, 2005, p.61). In the Western representation of the 'cute, looking-down Japanese school-girl thing' the complexity of the Japanese representation of the *shoujo*, and the cultural context in which she lives, appears to have been lost in translation.

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[1] Interestingly, in the book it is made clear that this is only a Western perception and Japanese women are not like this. Tiger Tanaka says to Bond: "Our American residents ... enjoy the subservience, *which I must say is only superficial*, of our women." Fleming (1964: 59, my emphasis).

[2] NHK is the Japanese equivalent of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)

[3] *Laputa:Castle in the Sky* (1986) was first screened on BBC television during the early 1990s

[4] A pair of 'cute' elderly twins on Japanese television were viewed as *kawaii* (Kinsella, 1995)

[5] *Otaku* is translated as a 'geek' in this context, but is a label for young Japanese men who are dedicated fans of *manga* and *anime* but may be socially isolated, preferring their fantasy world to real life.