13. The Troubled Youth in Japanese Popular Culture
Telus Centre 131 | 17:00-18:00

One Punch Man: the invisible gap between a hero and a nobody

Cyrus Huiyong Qiu, University of British Columbia

With continuing development of global capitalism and proliferation of communication technologies, power and information are increasingly decentralized and fragmented. In this regard, "grand narratives" such as the notion of "absolute justice" (personified as "Big Brother" in George Orwell's 1984) has lost its social function and has come to be replaced by an enormous system composed by multiple coexisting "justices," interacting with and, at times, challenging each other. To elaborate how this new social/power structure is manifested in the world of Japanese popular culture, this paper presents a critical reading of the manga-turned-anime series One Punch Man.

The comedy anime series, immensely popular not only in Japan but also world-widely, problematizes the politics, social structure, as well as power struggle between different "justices" in its fictional world of heroes. I would argue that through the lens of its protagonist, the most powerful yet least recognized hero named Saitama, One Punch Man criticizes the rigid social stratification in Japan, while offering a comedic fantasy for the increasingly stressful everydayness and repressed anxiety of the post-adolescent generation through de-/re-constructing heroism embedded in today's modern society.

Male Caretakers and Masculinities in Anime and Manga

Evan Teruo Koike, University of British Columbia

This paper examines how Japanese anime and manga present the role of the male caretaker, a figure that has become popular across genres—from josei to shōjo to shōnen—that appeal to various demographics. Initially finding himself burdened with an unfamiliar and needy dependent, the narrative's male protagonist often accompanies a child in a story formula that allows him to exhibit both the behaviors linked with conventional masculinities and the caring behaviors still widely associated with women in Japanese society. Although such older titles as Kozure Ōkami (Lone Wolf and Cub) appear to stress the former over the latter, newer series, such as Usagi Drop (Bunny Drop), foreground the ways in which child care requires men to revise their performances of masculinity. These revisions often bar male protagonists from claiming hegemonic masculinity, effectively shifting the men toward gender constructs that stress empathy and compassion. At a time in which fatherhood-oriented masculinities, including ikumen, are emerging, anime and manga have begun to represent and explore the implications of Japanese cultural tensions about gender roles.

Shojo to Rorikon: A Short History of the Symbolic Body and Desires

Atsumi Nakao, University of British Columbia

The paper examines the representation of rape culture in Japanese visual media since the early 1990s as to draw how an image of shojo is fantasized and exploited.

In 1994, the word “enjo-kosai (high school girl prostitution)” has been chosen to be the most popular word of the year. This male gaze towards juvenile woman was reflected onto visual media. So called otaku culture has come to the surface not only within the fantasy but also in the reality in a form of JK industry (the industry of high school girl). The paper will address how this desire is redrawn in the Japanese popular in 1990s.

The subject of research is the both male and female visual medium such as Neon Genesis Evangelion and Sailor Moon. The relationship between a female school girl and a male adult is romantically depicted and female juvenile body has never been addressed as a child yet most of the times, it becomes sexually available entity due to its semiotic nature.

The examination of this transitional body in the fantasy shall account for the connection of societal problems of pedophilia and the reproduction of its desire.