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The Light Novel: A New Medium of the Otaku Culture

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Abstract

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The light novel culture is a re-discovered medium in the otaku culture. Despite the declining publishing market, it has gradually increased its sales in the last decade, drawing attentions of the academic scholars as well. In chapter one, I discuss about the main consumers of the light novel, the otaku, and about the third generation otaku more in details at the end. The shifting environments around the generations of otaku changed their psychological status and consumption style. In chapter two, I introduce the light novel and its characteristics in details. The light novel is known for its manga-like illustrations and narration, and due to these, it has been frequently re-adapted into anime, manga, game, and other goods of the otaku culture. In chapter three, I draw the relationship between the light novel and the third generation otaku in order to analyze the essence of the light novel culture. In addition, I question the position of the light novel within the text culture of Japan, employing the cultural theories of modernity and postmodern.

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Introduction

The light novel is a fairly new form of medium in contemporary Japanese society. Combining texts and anime-like pictures, the light novel is placed in a separate section not far from the manga area in Japanese bookstores. This is a clear indication of the light novel's position in Japanese society today. It is certainly not a part of the mainstream culture. Rather, it shares the roof with various Japanese subcultures; more specifically, it is categorized as a part of the otaku culture, which includes video games, manga, anime, figures, costume play, character songs, character goods, etc. Nonetheless, despite its limited popularity, both as fruitful commodity and source of academic discussion, the potential of the light novel is immense. Here, I will briefly introduce the light novel market and its prosperity in spite of the declining publishing market these days, and also the academic discussion of this fascinating culture, mainly quoting Hiroki Azuma's works. At the end, I will suggest a revision to his theory and how I will support the argument in this thesis.

In Japan, developments in popular culture are now breaking down the boundaries among many forms of media. An original piece of art no longer limits itself to one field but is transformed into many different forms of media, such as movies, manga, games, goods, dramas, and novels. Before the 2000s, within the otaku culture, the original source was manga. The major adaptations came from *Weekly Shonen Jump Magazine* 週刊少年ジャンプ, such as *Dragon Ball* ドラゴンボール, *Slam Dunk* スラムダンク, *Jojo's Bizarre Adventure* ジョジョの奇妙な冒険, *Rurouni Kenshin* るろうに剣心, and *One Piece* ワンピース. However, this trend changed course in the 2000s. The source expanded into a certain type of a novel; it consisted of cover pages and several pages of manga- or anime-styled images, and the contents were also similar in narrative style to the way anime and manga stories are written.

This type of novel is currently called a light novel ライトノベル, shortened as “lanobe” ラノベ. The success of this medium drew attention from a variety of publishers over the last decade; the major ones, for instance Kodansha Limited 株式会社講談社 and Kadokawa Shoten Publishing Company 株式会社角川書店 made extensive investments in this medium. Not only did they gradually increase the number of light novels published per year, but also they collaborated with manga authors, anime productions, and goods companies in order to advertise their brand of the light novel to the Japanese population. Such efforts bore fruit. In 2009, All Japan Magazine and Book Publisher’s and Editor’s Association estimated the sales of light novels accounted for 30.1 billion yen, about 20 percent of “bunko” paperbacks. This was a 13.6 percent increase since 2004, while sales of paperbacks continued to decline over the same period.¹

The birth of this new medium in the Japanese otaku culture was predictable from the beginning of the 2000s. A famous original source, manga lost its hegemony as a leader of the Japanese otaku culture. It had segmented itself to meet the demands of readerships with particular tastes and interests, exploring all possible niche markets by major and minor publishers. Of course, this is not to say that the market was no longer profitable. All of the top ten series of manga in 2010 sold more than three million, with *One Piece* selling thirty million copies.² Nonetheless, the market was still stagnant in the sense that there were no authors who could come up with new styles, plots, characters, or settings. For the most case, the manga were constant repetitions of what the previous manga authors produced, and the readers (and possibly producers) became fed up with it. The decline of manga magazine sales, from 1.34 billion copies in 1995 to 745 million copies in 2006, reflected this decreasing

¹ Yusuke and Shigeyuri, 2009.

² From 2011 Oricon Chart

demand for manga.³ As a result, the publishers looked for a new market to develop another otaku commodity, and the light novel industry, which had existed for decades but as a minor culture, became their choice. The text-based medium may seem low-tech, but it gave the publishers and creators freedom to explore creativity in the most basic form of media. It is not hard to observe their experiments with this medium, such as “4-coma novel” and a novel that reads like a movie scenario.

Although the expansion of the light novel market took time and investment, the simple form of it helped publishers and creators achieve their objectives. Several illustrations and text narratives were all that was needed to produce a one-volume light novel. The publishers made sure to hire famous, creative professionals from the otaku culture who understood their consumers very well as well as talented illustrators from the Internet community or the game industry. A sufficient influx of talented authors from the popular literary genres also consolidated the foundation of the light novel industry. NISIOISIN, one of the most well-known light novel authors, fits in this category.

Unfortunately, little research has been conducted on the light novel in Japan and the United States alike because it is such a new form of media; in the U.S., this medium and its characteristics are virtually unknown, even to academic scholars of Japanese studies. In the U.S. market, the translated light novels such as the Boogiepop series, began to be published in 2006, but the sales of the many following series were not as lucrative as expected, so many of the publishing companies in the U.S., including TOKYOPOP and Seven Seas Entertainment, stopped publishing light novels. Compared to Taiwan, China, and South Korea which succeeded in generating a profitable light novel market with the original form of the light novel, in the U.S., the light novel faced problems of proper translation, genre specification, and lack of interest on the part of American readers, except for those who had

³ Wiseman, 2007.

been familiar with the Japanese otaku culture to some degree. After the failures in the first couple of years, the light novel industry in the U.S. attempted to change its form in order to suit the American readership by changing manga-like illustrations of the cover page to artsy pictures. Nonetheless, the profits of the light novel are still negligible. Therefore, it is no surprise that research on the light novel is virtually non-existent in the United States. *Mechademia*, a peer-reviewed academic journal published by the University of Minnesota Press, occasionally publishes articles that mention the light novel briefly; however, because the focuses of the journal are manga and anime, the analysis is in conjunction with anime, not the light novel itself.⁴

In Japan, the academic discussion of the light novel began in the last decade. However, the light novel is still minor in mainstream society, and the scholarly journals about this medium are very few. Because the light novel is read mostly by young adults, academic fields such as Children's Literature or Educational Studies predicted the light novel as replacing contemporary literature for children in the future publishing industry⁵ and also discussed its high demand in China.⁶

Azuma Hiroki 東浩紀, a cultural critic at Tokyo Institute of Technology, has researched light novels in depth. Following "The Theory of Narrative Consumption" by Ōtsuka Eiji 大塚英志, a literary analyst and writer, Azuma developed "The Theory of Database Consumption" and detailed its postmodern characteristics in accordance with the otaku culture. He sees the otaku's consumption style after the 1980s and the light novel, enjoyed by them, as evidence of the development of postmodern society in Japan. He points out that the characters in anime and manga today are much more stereotyped than in the

⁴ Drazen 2006, pp. 174-177.

⁵ Sato 2008, pp. 51-60.

Suzuki 2008, pp. 77-94.

⁶ Yamashita 2009, pp. 4-29.

previous generations. For example, these stereotypes include a character who wears glasses and uses complicated vocabulary (difficult kanji), a beautiful heroine who either cannot cook or tumbles over nothing, and a short-tempered, violent heroine who invariably falls in love with a protagonist. These characteristics, Azuma argues, are not portrayed naturally in relation to the development of the stories. Instead, the characters are mechanically produced by adding up popular traits from the database of characteristics created by the new generation of otaku. Calling this “database consumption,” Azuma considers the new generation of otaku and their engagement with this activity as a characteristic of postmodern society.⁷ Because his theory provides a solid framework for the otaku culture and the light novel alike, his ideas on the database consumption theory and the otaku culture will be further discussed in the following chapters.

However, although his academic work is invaluable for future research on otaku culture, his take on the light novel is brief and lacks concrete examples. He only points out that the light novel was “rediscovered” in the 2000s, and does not provide a detailed analysis of the light novel itself. Therefore, in this thesis, I will extend his theory to analyze representative works of the light novel. In addition, I will critique his theory of postmodern society and the otaku culture, investigating the essence of the light novel, which Azuma assumes to be a product of database consumption. In analyzing the light novel as a reflection of the otaku culture and further, the Japanese society in the 21st century, at the end I propose a distinctive consumption style of the otaku culture, characterizing it as a unique postmodern phenomenon in Japan.

In contemporary Japan, the new generation of otaku born around the 80s, or labeled as “the third generation otaku” by Azuma, are the leading consumers of the light novel culture. Compared to the first and second generation of otaku, they faced harsh, social

⁷ *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* 2001.

criticisms in their youth and reinforced their solitude and alienation from the mainstream society. When reading the light novel, they find the experience gratifying due to the unique narrative structure of the light novel and further materialize the fantasy gained from the light novel in the forms of the various types of fan fictions. Such consumption style of the third generation otaku and the light novel represent unique traits of postmodern society in which ideologies and social morality lose their values, and people aim to position themselves according to their own individual desires, instead of to the nation or the society.

In the first chapter, the three generations of otaku are discussed. Social environments and their mindsets distinguish each generation. The second chapter introduces the light novel, its characteristics, and its links to the other otaku cultures, such as manga and anime. The third chapter discusses the relationship between the third generation otaku and the light novel culture, and its implication for contemporary Japanese society by employing the cultural theories of modernity and postmodernism.

Chapter 1: The Otaku Culture

In Japan, otaku refers to groups of people who fanatically indulge in their hobbies. These hobbies include fashion, military goods, trains, food, travels, movies, and any forms of entertainment. However, for the purpose of this thesis, I limit the fields of the otaku culture to anime, manga, games, and the light novel due to similarity of their contents and the consumers, and exchanges of feedbacks among the media. They are loosely connected to each other, and this is most evident from the vibrant media mix among them, which I will discuss in chapter two.

In contemporary Japan before the 2000s, otaku was known to possess a vast amount of knowledge in his or her field. They were proud of their knowledge, and sometimes collaborated to create their own artworks such as short anime clips and fan fictions. However, as the social and media environments shifted from the 90s, otaku started to alienate themselves from not only the mainstream stream society but also from the same otaku; this particular group of otaku, the third generation otaku is cornered into its own world, agonizing over their status in the contemporary Japanese society.

Otaku オタク

The word “otaku” was spread by Nakamori Akio 中森明夫 in 1983 through a manga magazine called *Manga Burikko* 漫画ブリッコ. The following description depicted a specific group of people whom Nakamori intended to address his term to:

How should I put it? Well, every class would have it. Those guys-who have no athletic ability, isolate themselves in class during break time, and only play chess in the darkness; a kid who waits in line the night before the premiere of an anime movie. There would also be a kid who would jump into the train track having the train almost crash into him, just to capture the blue train on his favorite camera. Or those kids who have the back numbers of science fiction magazines and the series of science fiction by Hayakawa bunko filling up his bookshelf. Those science kids who wear round glasses that look like the bottoms of milk bottles gather at mycomshop. And there would be a kid, who wakes up early in the morning to get a seat for the

idol autographing event. There would also be a student who goes to a prestigious after schools for college, but becomes dumbfounded on anything other than studying.⁸

Nakamori's definition of otaku is equivalent to stereotypical images of "geeks" in America. His categorization of otaku included all individuals who lacked social skills due to extreme indulgence into their hobbies, including idols, trains, SF novels, and computers. The tone of his writing was very much condescending, and his writings no longer appeared after three episodes due to the readers' strong criticisms regarding this stereotypical portrayal. Nonetheless, the word spread in many areas of the Japanese subcultures because it provided a useful vocabulary to define or to label who the people in the subcultures are.

However, it is worth nothing that as with many other cultural words, the word "Otaku" was used well before the 80s. Since the 70s, the members of manga, SF, and anime clubs used this word in order to denote each other. "Otaku" was derived from *otaku* お宅, an honorific second-person pronoun, used when one talked of another's house or family. Until Nakamori attached stereotypical images of "geek" to it, the word was what distinguished the members from other ordinary people. The meanings of "family" and "house" associated with the word inherently implied otaku's intention to group themselves under a single roof.⁹ The roofs took a variety of forms, but the word oriented the members according to their own specialty, and they had their pride of belonging to a specific group.

The First and The Second Generations

For scholarly discussion, Azuma separates otaku into three different generations: the first generation born around the 1960s; the second generation around the 1970s; third

⁸ Nakamori 1983.

⁹ *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* 2001, p. 27.

generation around the 1980s.¹⁰ In this section, I analyze social environments that have changed around them and the shifts of their psychological status, according to each generation.

Although the term “otaku” appeared to the public in 1983 by Nakamori, it was evident that this so-called otaku had already formed in the Japanese society before the 1980s. The otaku born around the 60s reached their twenties in the 80s, and Azuma identified this group of the twenties as the first generation of otaku.

The 70s and the 80s during which the first generation spent their teenage and the beginning of their 20s were historically important eras for Japan. The student movements plagued with excessively complicated ideologies and internal power struggles essentially died out in the beginning of the 1970s. Japanese Expo 70 was held in Osaka and marked the brilliant economic progress Japan was making from the 1960s. The era of doctrines had come to an end, and began the era of economic prosperity that had given the people opportunities to relish their own lives through various ways, including hobbies, innovative electronics, high-class restaurants, and foreign travels.

For the otaku culture, a number of TV animes opened the era of abundant productions in the 1970s. The representative animes from this era included *Mazinger Z* マジンガーZ, *Space Battleship Yamato* 宇宙戦艦ヤマト, *The Rose of Versailles* ベルサイユのばら, *Galaxy Express 999* 銀河鉄道999. In addition, this was also the era when the special-effects movies like *Godzilla* ゴジラ came to appear as TV series; other famous TV series were *Ultraman* ウルトラマン, *Masked Rider* 仮面ライダー *Himitsu Sentai Gorenger* 秘密戦隊ゴレンジャー, all of which gained enormous popularity.

The financial stability from the 70s and the dramatic development of the popular

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 6.

culture in the 80s led to the birth of the first-generation otaku. By the end of the 1970s during which the first generation otaku grew to maturity, Japan had overcome the first oil shock and the currency crisis, and the prospect of economic progress was widely positive in the Japanese society. The productions in the popular culture made resolute investment in a variety of fields, and the publishing companies especially explored niche markets of the magazines that could suit with the demands of a particular readership. This was also the time when the publishers started to novelize manga, and the novels that resembled the light novel today began to be published.

A few of the first generation otaku produced creative works of their own. An amateur group called Daicon Film was established by this first generation otaku, and from 1981 to 1985, they created short anime clips and exhibited them in the SF-related conventions. Their works parodied various work by letting a heroine battle with Darth Vader, Spider-Man, Mobile Suits from Gundam series, and etc., reproducing characters of anime and movies from Japan and the U.S. alike. This group later developed into GAINAX, the anime production which created *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, which will be discussed later in this section.

Despite Nakamori's demeaning criticisms of otaku, the first generation otaku had their prides as experts in their respective fields. The number of works they had seen, rarity of their possessions, and an amount of knowledge determined their "ranks" within the otaku groups, and in their views, these accumulated achievements had distinguished the otaku from others. According to Toshio Okada, otaku had an endless desire for self-development and for showing off their knowledge.¹¹ Daicon Film was the one case who did motivate themselves to make creative works, showing their ability to the public. It was not a surprise to see that their prides had built into something more than what a general group of people with the same hobby shared.

¹¹ *Otaku wa sudeni shindeiru* 2008, pp. 123-124.

Then, in the summer of 1988, a horrifying serial killer case occurred, in which four young girls aged from four to seven were killed. The convict of the case was a 26-year-old man, Miyazaki Tsutomu. The cruelty and bizarreness of his crimes shocked the Japanese society; he took a video of himself sexually harassing the dead bodies of girls; he sent the teeth and the bones of the first victim girl to her parents; he confessed to have eaten the hands of one of the victims. The psychopathic behaviors of Miyazaki brought attentions of media, and in contrast to the present Japan, no protection of his private life was reserved for him whatsoever. In his room, there were six thousand video cassettes and manga magazines. The press introduced him as “otaku,” and the otaku culture came to the judging eyes of the public. As reflected in Nakamori’s writing, the word otaku had a discriminative tone, but the negative image worsened, when it became known to the public in association with this horrific case. The general public began to consider the otaku as a group of people who were not able to distinguish between the reality and the fiction because Miyazaki attempted to materialize his desire of fantasy with the four girls. Seven years later, the Aum Shinrikyo Subway Attack in 1995 also contributed to further development of this stereotype because the incident was perpetrated by individuals who saw their own “truth world” as the real world, and this inability to perceive reality had been connected to the otaku culture since the case of the otaku killer.

Therefore, from the end of the 80s to the 90s, the otaku was vulnerable to severe social criticisms and stereotypes, but a few made vigilant attempts to improve the image of the otaku. The most enthusiastic supporter of the otaku culture was Okada Toshio 岡田斗司夫, the first generation otaku himself. In Tokyo University, he created a lecture about methods of becoming otaku and even published a book called *Introduction to Otakugaku* オタク学入門. He changed a hiragana form of otaku (おたく) to katakana (オタク), and started to argue for the unique mentality of the otaku, by comparing them with ordinary

people. For this argument, he considers the otaku as the strong-willed individuals who have their own determination and passion, and mocks others as the weak-willed who craze over passing fads. Moreover, he argues that an extensive amount of studying is required for one to be accepted as otaku; the threshold of knowledge is different from group to group, but the membership of “otaku” is usually not qualified with some instant knowledge.¹² His arguments were unique and brought attentions of media, although they were also seen as a defense of the otaku killer to some extent.

However, whereas a few from the first generation otaku made active efforts to improve the images of otaku, the second generation otaku was much more desperate for finding excuses for themselves. According to Okada, this psychological disparity was what distinguished the second generation from the first generation:

The first generation have made a choice to be an otaku and lived the life of it, ignoring and neglecting what other people say about them. Whatever they say, lazy rich misters and mistresses were the core of the otaku group. Compared to that, the second generation otaku, due to the Miyazaki Tsutomu and the Aum Shinrikyo Subway Attack, have lived their life with an urgency to protect their life styles and hobbies from social criticisms and persecution, ever since their early childhood years to adolescence. This has caused them to seek for salvation from academia and/or from authorities.¹³

From these characteristics, Okada associated the first generation with aristocratism and the second generation with elitism. In other words, because the former believed that they were already respectable beings, except for a few like Okada Toshio, most of them did not care for the social criticisms around. However, in the case of the second, they were elites who made arduous efforts to become otaku, yet the society around them considered their endeavors completely futile and anti-social. Protecting themselves from this harsh reality, they gradually built a psychological fortress of their own by sharing the sense of the victimized ego among otaku.

¹² *Otaku-gaku nyūmon* 1995.

¹³ *Otaku wa sudeni shindeiru* 2008, p. 146.

The director of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, Anno Hideaki 庵野秀明 provided a snapshot of the second generation otaku that reflected this psychological turmoil:

If you were to list the characteristics of the otaku, they are introverts, lacking in communication skills; easily put, they are unable to keep a rightful distance with others; their knowledge and information are overpowering their subjectivity. They are also obsessive, self-righteous; in order to preserve themselves, they become exclusive. Their conversation is unilateral; they want to only talk about their stories. Their excessive self-consciousness limits their ability to make proper judgments. They are also narcissistic. They want to identify their idols with themselves. They become weak when they are threatened.¹⁴

Not surprisingly, *Neon Genesis Evangelion* included a message of harsh criticism against the otaku culture. Because Anno was an otaku himself, he was able to include a variety of the otaku-related codes to mock the otaku culture; not only it included an apocalyptic background, beautiful heroines, robots, and monsters, but the anime was also full of allusions and codes that were only understood by the otaku who had seen a countless number of animes. When the otaku were excited to see the anime which understood their tastes, the anime tragically ended with the end of the world in a literal sense. However, the only one human left in the world, the protagonist decides to stay and connect with the world instead of cornering himself into his own shell again. The movie version, known to provide an alternative ending to the TV version, also ends with the protagonist's acceptance of the harsh reality. In both cases, Anno urges the otaku to return to their own reality.

The Third Generation Otaku

Unfortunately, Anno's anti-otaku messages and his urge return to reality did not change the otaku culture. As a matter of fact, according to Azuma, the new generation of otaku was born around 1995, a year *Neon Genesis Evangelion* was aired.¹⁵ Before the introduction of this generation's characteristics in details, it is important to note the

¹⁴ Anno 2005, pp. 141-142.

¹⁵ *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* 2001, p. 6.

environmental changes that contributed to the birth of the new, third generation otaku.

The first factor was an increasing number of late night anime 深夜アニメ. Before 1996, TV anime were usually screened either in the morning (6AM – 9AM) or in the golden hour (17 PM– 19PM) of the afternoon, but after the end of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, many of the anime’s schedules changed to a nighttime. For example, in 1998 TV Tokyo broadcasted more than ten series of anime at late nights. This change resulted in two interesting changes of trends in the anime industry and viewership. Before the late night anime became norm for the otaku, it was very hard to distinguish the otaku’s “taste” from that of ordinary viewers. Because the anime was scheduled to suit with the otaku and the public alike, it was produced to meet the “standard” demands of the public. However, the late night anime, usually screened after midnight, liberated itself from these limitations. The anime productions started to create many unique series that targeted their own specific viewership, and the otaku was able to choose from a variety of anime, unlike in the 1980s, when they had to watch the “standardized” anime.

The second was a shifting trend in the otaku culture that the otaku started to indulge in characters, rather than the storylines and the settings. *Neon Genesis Evangelion* was categorized as a SF robot anime, but the main narrative focused on psychological status of main characters. The unsociable characters reflected the contemporary Japanese society lacking of communication and warmth, and as mentioned above, by depicting the protagonist this way, Anno intended to open the eyes of the otaku who alienated themselves from society. Nonetheless, instead of accepting the message, the viewers indulged in the characters only. It had a variety of pleasing codes and tastes that they could enjoy, regardless of the characters’ genders and ages. The strong personalities of characters in *Neon Genesis Evangelion* were archetypes of many standardized characters in the 2000s. For example, Rei Ayanami, a female character who gained enormous popularity, led to the creations of two popular female

characters, “Ruri” in *Martian Successor Nadesico* 機動戦艦ナデシコ and “Yuki Nagato” in *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya* 涼宮ハルヒの憂鬱. Because there were a variety of characters, each otaku found his or her favorite one and developed his or her own “taste” through this anime.

The third factor that led to the birth of the third generation otaku was a growing number of academic discussions on the otaku. Since the otaku killer case in 1988, otaku had been unilaterally discriminated in the Japanese society, but on the flip side, such attention of the public drew the attention of a few academic scholars who started to give serious thoughts on the nature of the otaku culture. Saito Tamaki 斎藤環, a Japanese psychologist in Chiba, examined the stereotypical opinion in the public that the otaku are unable to distinguish between the real and fiction. Proposing “the otaku sexuality,” Saito argues that the otaku’s sexuality centers around fiction not because they are confused between reality and fiction, but because they know it is fiction. In the real world, they are clumsy geeks who are unable to talk to women, whereas the fictional state of attractive female characters gives the otaku an opportunity to express their passion with no fear of being rejected.¹⁶ In addition, Azuma investigated a signal of the postmodern society in Japan by analyzing activities of otaku.¹⁷ Azuma has published the otaku-related articles for the last decade, and his influences have gradually grown in the general public. In 2003, an architect Morikawa Gaichiro researched on Akihabara, “the sacred land” of the otaku and published a book titled *The Birth of The City of Hobby: Akihabara the City of Moe* 趣都の誕生—萌える都市アキハバラ.

Last, along with the academic discussions, the appearance of otaku in the popular culture gradually created a positive atmosphere in the public. Of the stories regarding otaku,

¹⁶ Saito 2011.

¹⁷ *Otaku: Japan’s Database Animals* 2001, pp. 25-95.

one called *Train Man* 電車男 drew attention of the general public widely, and it was cinematized and gained popularity as a drama series as well. In this drama, the male protagonist is not much different from the image of stereotypical otaku the general public holds, but the story in which this character dates a lovely and beautiful heroine was perceived by the general public as unique and funny; at the same time, the public became aware of the existence of a “nice” geek. In 2005, a word “moe 萌え” from the otaku culture was ranked 10th at “The Awards For You Can-Trendy Words” that annually pinpoints famous vocabulary in the public. Whereas in 1997 negative opinions towards otaku were close to 67% with 17% positive opinions, this changed to 42% negative and 35% positive opinion in 2007.¹⁸ These indications proved that otaku was slowly relieved of social discriminations. The Japanese society gradually accepted the existence of otaku, whether reluctantly or willingly, and the general perception softened.

The new generation otaku, the third generation otaku was born, surrounded by these changes in their environment. The late night anime and the indulgence in the characters led each otaku to develop his or her individual “taste” when enjoying the otaku culture. They excluded works that emphasized tastes of others, and they developed their own way to enjoy their favorite anime.

A word that reflected this change was the “moe.” The word moe is an expression of otaku when they see male or female characters with attractive and/or charming points. The word was popular enough to be ranked in the annual popular words, but as a matter of fact it was impossible to define what the word meant. Because “feeling moe” was completely based on emotional and/or sexual tastes of individual otaku, the word was by nature bound to be subjective:

“Moe” means not only the trait of the object itself, but the reaction of self when

¹⁸ Kikuchi 2008, p. 66.

observing that object. That shows that what they are interested is neither SF nor anime; it is the reaction of self.¹⁹

The moe culture distinguished the third generation from the first and the second generation who competed with each other. Whereas the first and the second generations focused on accumulating their knowledge, the third generation otaku prioritized their sentiment towards characters. “The Theory of Database Consumption” by Azuma Hiroki was based on this third generation; he points out that the third generation “consumes” the database characters. According to his theory, the previous generations analyzed and accumulated the knowledge of anime; for the current generation, the emphasis on analysis and knowledge became weaker, evidenced from many anime and manga that gained popularity only by mixing the popular traits of characters.²⁰ In the previous generation, what distinguished the otaku from the ordinary people was “knowledge,” such as details of mechanical designs, a grand scale setting, or names of manga and anime artists; in the third generation, “the understanding of the database” of moe elements became the boundary between the otaku and the general public.

The third generation actually ended up distancing much further from the general public by emphasizing “sentiments” rather than “knowledge,” which could be at least understood by the general public when explained. No ordinary people could understand when the otaku cried “moe.” In their perspective, it was merely an expression from the otaku culture, and they did not bother to learn its meaning. Even if they tried, they could not grasp it without watching several anime, which most of them did not care for. For the otaku, the moe database actually consolidated the unity of the third generation otaku by having a vocabulary to share their excitement; however, it also had a side effect, alienating the third generation otaku from the mainstream Japanese society.

¹⁹ *Otaku wa sudeni shindeiru* 2008, p. 152.

²⁰ *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* 2001, pp. 29-55.

The third generation otaku gained an opportunity to avoid the neglectful real world and went more introspective than ever, with the development of the Internet community. The Internet created an optimal environment for them to indulge in their hobbies by themselves. The first and the second generations often belonged to certain clubs: SF club, anime club, manga club, or creative art club. They might be unsociable in the mainstream society, but in there, they actively shared their opinions with each other. However, for the third generation otaku, they do not need to belong to clubs in order to discuss about anime and manga. 2ch, blogs, twitter, and facebook provide perfect environments for the communication among them. They only have minimal contacts with others, going introspective more than any previous generations.

Consequently, the psychological turmoil of the third generation otaku is much more intense and dramatic than the first and the second generations. Although the Japanese society started to show some positive opinions about the otaku culture in the 2000s, this did not mean that the strong discrimination in the 90s was completely eradicated. The 42% negative views in the 2008 survey indicated that the discrimination was decreasing, but still prevalent enough to be threatening to the third generation otaku. As a result, because they frequently found themselves alone, the third generation otaku had to endure the contempt all alone, and it led to strong self-compassion and self-hatred. Currently, it is very easy to spot the otaku self-loathing themselves and/or insulting each other in the Internet forums of the otaku community. In other words, compared to the first and the second generation who had a few companions to share their emotional turmoil, the third generation otaku, who tend to indulge in their hobbies alone, are unable to communicate their sense of outcast as otaku to others. Therefore, they end up internalizing the mental pain from the social discrimination, estranging themselves from the mainstream society and escaping to their primal shell. Nevertheless, because there is no one that validates their lives as otaku in the tiny shell as

well, they develop strong self-compassion and self-hatred.

Chapter 1 Conclusion

In chapter 1, I discussed about the three generations of otaku and the social environments that have changed around them, from the 1970s to the 2000s. The first generation of otaku, who was born around the 1960s, benefited from an amazing economic progress Japan had made since the 60s. The publishing market and the film productions alike created a number of magazines and special-effects TV series, and the first generation took advantage of this flourishing culture and developed a sense of pride as an “amateur expert.” However, the second generation, who was born around the 70s, faced cold reality after the homicide case of the otaku killer. Against strong social criticism, they became more protective of themselves than the first generation who kept their prides regardless of the harsh reality.

The birth of the third generation otaku coincided with Hideaki Anno’s *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. The anime had a variety of characters that the otaku could indulge in, and each otaku began to develop his or her taste of character, disregarding other parts of it. The de-standardized, late night anime also contributed to the development of the otaku trend that focused on characters, rather than the storylines and/or other settings. In the 2000s, a positive image of the otaku culture has developed; however, with the development of the Internet, the third generation otaku frequently found themselves alone and became unable to talk of their psychological anguish from the still prevalent, social discrimination. As a result, they internalized the pain by escaping into their own small world, but finding no comforts in it, they engage in self-hatred and self-compassion.

In chapter 2, I will introduce the light novel culture, one of the media in the otaku culture that the third generation indulges in these days.

Ch. 2 The Light Novel Culture

As I stated in the introduction, the light novel is a new topic of research in Japan and the United States alike. Before the 21st century, it was treated as an extreme minor culture even within the otaku culture, and not many publishing companies noticed of its potential until very recently. The publication of it was minimal, and one can probably argue that there were not enough series to analyze this culture before. However, the situation is very much different now. When the sales of paperbacks declined in the last decade, the light novel alone gradually increased its sales, making its market noticeable to the otaku and the public. The light novel market became one of the main otaku cultures, on a par with the anime and the manga industry.

In America, again the light novel is a new subject; therefore, I intend to provide as much information and background as possible for this medium, including its history, definition, and characteristics. In the case of the light novel, it is also critical to know not only its contents but also its external factors that influence this culture. These include its origin in the otaku culture, characteristics of its readership, and the readers' activities that go beyond reading the light novel.

The light novel culture was born as a medium surrounded by a variety of visual media; therefore, a theoretical framework of media will be helpful for the understanding of its culture and its position in the contemporary media culture.

For this purpose, I utilize Marshall McLuhan's theory of hot media and cold media in *Understanding Media*. He places a variety of media on a scale, setting "hot" and "cold" at both ends:

There is a basic principle that distinguishes a hot medium like radio from a cool one like the telephone...A hot medium is one that extends one single sense in "high definition." High definition is the state of being well filled with data. A photograph is, visually, "high definition." A cartoon is "low definition," simply because very little visual information is provided... Hot media do not leave so much to be filled in or completed by the audience. Hot media are therefore, low in participation, and cool

media are high in participation or completion by the audience.²¹

From this paragraph, two criteria exist for determining whether a medium is hot or cold: the amount of data within a medium and the audience's participation in perceiving the medium. Of course, these criteria are interrelated; when the amount of data is high, the audience's participation is likely low, and vice versa. For positioning the light novel in the contemporary media culture, I use these two criteria and determine whether the light novel is a hot or a cold medium. From the information and discussions that follow, I conclude that the light novel belongs to the category of cold media. The manga-styled structure of sentences and illustrations encourages the readers to participate highly, by filling in the information left out in them.

History of Light Novel

The history of light novel goes back to the middle of the 1970s when novels with illustration came to be published by Cobalt and Sonorama bunkos. Cobalt bunko published easy-to-read love stories targeted to its female readership, and Sonorama bunko focused on SF and fantasy stories. At the end of the 70s, Sonorama bunko published a novel version of a sensational robot anime *Mobile Suit Gundam* with illustration. In the 80s, new light novel brands were established, called Kadokawa Sneaker bunk and Fujimi Fantasia bunko, and this new form of the text culture began to spread; followed *Legend of the Galactic Heroes* 銀河英雄伝説, *Demon City Shinjuku* 魔界都市新宿, *Record of Lodoss War* ロードス島戦記, and *Slayers!* スレイヤーズ!. Among these works, *Slayers!* is considered a completed form of prototype of light novels these days.²²

The term “light novel” was born at the beginning of the 90s, around the publication

²¹ Marshall McLuhan 1964, pp. 24-25.

²² Shinjō 2006, p. 86.

date of *Slayers!*. In the less developed world of the Internet, there was a genre novel club called “SF Fantasy Forum” The genre novel referred to the popular literature with subcategories of romance, history, military, suspense, and detective novel. The supervisor of the club, Kamikita Keita 上北敬太 wanted to create a separate category for works from Kadokawa Sneaker bunko and Fujimi Fantasia bunko, but there was no appropriate word to accurately describe the text. They were sometimes called “Juvenile” or “Young adult literature,” but “Juvenile” specifically referred to the Children’s books from America, and “Young adult literature” was not inclusive enough to refer to novels with manga- and anime-styled illustration. In addition, the word “adult” was frequently employed for erotic contents in Japan, and Kamikita wanted to avoid the term to be misleading. Finally, among the words “light/lite,” “neat,” and “fast/first,” he chose the first word “light” and started to use the phrase “light novel.”²³ However, this word was fairly unknown to the public until around 2003, when light novel started to gain popularity.

Over twenty light novel brands have been established, and the major nine of them are as following, in the order of popularity from high to low according to 2011 Oricon ranks: Dengeki Bunko, MF Bunko J, Fujimi Fantasia Bunko, GA Bunko, Famitsu Bunko, Kadokawa Sneaker Bunko, HJ Bunko, Super Dashi Bunko, GAGAGA Bunko.

Definition

A definition of the light novel has always been a topic of fierce discussion. From an outward appearance, the novels with manga- and anime-styled cover pages of illustrations are noticeable traits. However, the definition solely based on the cover pages is unsatisfactory and can be misleading.

In *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Words (Gendai yōgo no kiso chishiki,*

²³ Shinjō, 24-29.

現代用語の基礎知識), the word “light novel” appeared in the 2005 edition for the first time.

Listed as a term in the publishing market at first, the following definition was used until the 2007 edition without much change:

Entertainment novels that can be lightly read. They use illustrations and are published as paperbacks. Their target readership is the youth. Contents-wise, they have few background descriptions and explanations but have a lot of dialogues. From *Dengeki Bunko, Boogiepop and Other* (written by Kouhei Kadono) became a long-seller since its publication in 1998 (Heisei 10), selling 2.6 million copies. One sees the popularity of the light novel reflecting the new text culture that suits with the needs of the mail generation, who are familiar with games and anime, but distancing themselves from paperbacks.²⁴

However, in the 2008 edition, the definition went through dramatic revisions. The characteristics became much more concrete and specific, and from the 2009 edition, the term light novel started to appear in the category of “literature and art.” The 2010 edition goes as following:

Shortly called Light novel. An entertainment novel whose readership is mostly the youth. Presently, these books are mostly read among the college students. As for the genres, there are science fiction, fantasy, mystery, and more. The difference from the so-called juvenile novels is its affinity with the comics and games. They employ comic authors and game illustrators for the cover page of the book. Also they tend to focus heavily on the character molding than the plot. The representative brands include *Dengeki bunko*, *Fujimi Fantasia bunko*, *Kadokawa Sneaker Bunko*, *Kodansha Novels*, and etc. Some, such as *Outaro Maijo* and *Yuya Sato*, are also active in the pure literature.²⁵

The update in the 2008 edition gives a better take on the definition of light novel. The definition consists of three parts: 1) the usage of manga- and anime-styled illustration 2) the importance of characters rather than plots 3) main consumption by the younger generation.

Nonetheless, these characteristics are still not sufficient enough to convey what the light novel really is. The novel version of an anime *My Neighbor Totoro* となりのトトロ consisted of cover pages and several pages with illustrations employed from the anime. If the

²⁴ *Gendai yōgo no kiso chishiki* 2007.

²⁵ *Gendai yōgo no kiso chishiki* 2008.

light novel is defined as “a novel with the manga- and anime- style images,” the text version must be labeled as “light novel.” However, the publishing company did not label the novel as light novel but as the children’s book. The issue with the illustration became more complicated when the light novel with no illustration came to exist. In addition, “the importance of characters” is also dependent on each light novel author and his or her style. *Lens and Devil* does have charming characters, but its focus heavily centers on the narrative part. *Meikyuga Chronicle* 迷宮街クロニクル, written by Hayashi Ryosuke 林亮介, does not put importance on characters but is close to a pure SF novel. However, it is categorized as light novel by the publishing company. Because there are always such exceptions content-wise, it is virtually impossible to tell the light novel apart from other genre novels. The weight and size (15 x 11) were also considered as a part of definition, but they also proved to be unreliable during the last decade when the readers saw a 1091-page “light” novel (*The End Of the Chronicle* Vol. 7) and hard-covered light novel series by Kodansha. An easy solution to this problem is simply calling the works published by the light novel brands as light novels, without any other additional qualities; however, it does not really serve as a “definition.”

For the time being, it is impossible to define the light novel. However, for the purpose of this thesis, I suggest a revised version of the definitions aforementioned. In later section of this chapter and the chapter 3, I position the light novel in accordance with anime, manga, and games, which are considered parts of the otaku culture, discuss its interaction with third generation otaku from the chapter 1. Therefore, the definition goes as following, including this specific consumer group: the manga-like entertainment novels that 1) are mostly adorned with cover pages and pages of anime- and manga- styled illustrations and 2) that share a unique sentiment with the third generation otaku.

Characteristics of the Light Novel: The Manga-Styled Narration

The light novel is famous for its “easy-to-read” sentences. The publishing company and authors restrain the usage of complicated kanji, or when they do, they make sure to append furigana, a reading aid for the youth readership. The frequency of abstract and long sentences depends on authors’ styles. Some of them, such as Kadono Kouhei 上遠野浩平, enjoy using technical terms from psychology, sociology, philosophy; some, such as Gatoh Shoji 賀東招二, employ extensive military vocabulary; for the others, who are evidently major portion, they deliberately refrain from using complicate vocabulary and instead utilize concise sentences and a unique type of sentences one can only find in the light novel culture. In this section, I will introduce the sentences called manga-styled narration, using the examples from the light novel.

The manga-styled narration was born in 1978 when Arai Motoko 新井素子 novelized a popular anime *Lupin III*. In this work, she employed a technique of “manga-sketching”; instead of realistic descriptions of backgrounds and characters, she wrote a novel that read like a manga. According to Ōtsuka, this became one of the primary characteristics of the light novel culture today. Ōtsuka discusses Arai’s her work as the following:

The idea of Arai Motoko was a breakthrough in the history of Japanese literature. When everyone thought realistic writing is a natural way, she tried to write anime-like novels. If I may exaggerate a little, she broke an accepted code of the Japanese modern novels that focused on realism and easily reached out to the outside of the system.²⁶

It is not hard to find the examples of such sentences in the light novel. The following examples are from three different series of the light novel:

- a) Dokuro stuck out the thumb, and winked her eyes.²⁷
- b) To Asahina who bowed her head with the formation of longitudinal lines on her

²⁶ Ōtsuka 2003, p. 21.

²⁷ Okayu 2003, p. 29.

- face,²⁸
 c) Clunk!
 I vigorously shoved my head into the soup dish.²⁹

The face expression and the finger of a), the longitudinal lines of b), and one's head in the plate of soup of c) are not something we readily see in the real world. These narrations actually accompany with the manga-styled illustrations on the next page, so that the readers can visualize the characters' actions and situations easily. Although the light novel authors utilize traditional literary techniques such as metaphors or simile, they also enjoy these kinds of manga-styled sentences, as if portraying the movements of manga characters.

In fact, a book that introduces this technique was published for novice light novel authors. Titled *The Manga Novelization: Light Novel Mastery Class (Manga novelize ni yoru lanobe jōtatsu kyōsitsu, 漫画ノベライズによるラノベ上達教室)*, this book consists of a variety of practice manga cuts for the novice authors to describe them in sentences so that they become adept at the technique.³⁰ The mere existence of this book proves the importance of the manga-styled narration in the light novel.

The following is another example of the manga-styled narration from one of the popular titles in 2010:

What?! You are the devil in me?! Shit! You are here to tempt me into the pit of evil!
 Don't underestimate me! My heart of justice will not lose to you!

 Huh? Angel? Angel within me?! Wait. Hurry up and come out. If you do this it will seem like I only have evil in me!³¹

This example depicts a psychological state of a protagonist when he encounters an opportunity to play a prank on a girl. The description of demon and angel talking to the

²⁸ Tanigawa 2003, p. 83.

²⁹ Kanzaka 1989, p. 41.

³⁰ Hiyoshi 2011.

³¹ Inoue 2007, pp. 109-110.

narrator is very manga-like. In addition, it is also worth noting the usage of “...” in this narration. In manga, “...” is a technique to indicate silence, when the characters have no sayings or wait for something to occur. In this example, “...” indicates a period of time the narrator waits for the angel to appear. By adding more “...”, this gives a manga-like visual impression of the waiting period getting longer and longer. For these particular lines, the light novel readers not only read but also visualize a scene directly from the changing structure of lines.

Sometimes, pages of the light novel are covered with endless dialogues, without specifying which character is saying:

“Yuuji, there’s one thing on my mind. Why Class D? If we were to be taking steps, wouldn’t Class E be before D? And if we challenge, wouldn’t class A be the first?”

“Yes, it seems like it.”

“Well, there is a reason behind that decision.”

Yuoji nodded his head like an adult.

“What are you thinking?”

“There are many reasons, but the reason we are not attacking Class E is simple. It is meaningless to fight them.”

“Huh? But they are higher than us?”

The classes are divided by grades, so Class E is definitely higher than our Class F. How is it meaningless to fight them...?

“Certainly when we took the division test, may be they were stronger. However, it is different now. Look around you.”

“Hm...”

As told, I looked around the members here. Hm... um....

“There are two beautiful girls, two idiots and a filthy horny guy.”

“Who is a beautiful girl?!”

“Huh? How come Yuuji is reacting to the word beautiful girl?!”

“..... (Blushes)”

“Even Mutsurini?! What should I do? I can’t tackle everyone by myself!”

“Ok, ok. Calm down. Captain and Mutsurini.”³²

This example is a scene where five main characters meet in order to plot their next moves. Just from this example, it is impossible to know which character is saying which dialogue because it omits the sentences of “A says B” seen in ordinary novels. However, each dialogue contains obvious clues for clarification. Although not specified in these translated sentences,

³² Inoue 2007, pp. 56-57.

characters use words such as “za(じゃ)” or polite “desu(です)” at the end of their sentences, distinguishing themselves from others. “Za” is Japanese speaking ending word frequently used by the elderly, but it is applied to this character in order to give him a unique idiosyncrasy. Also, by having only one character who uses “desu(です)” in this scene, it becomes obvious to the readers who says the particular dialogue. As in the last example, this dialogue is a manga-styled visual expression. The omission of narration reminds us of the manga structure which progresses its story only through dialogues and pictures. For the part of “.....(Blushes),” the narration is indeed replaced by the frequently used manga-like expression of onomatopoeia. Further examples of onomatopoeia are easy to find in the light novel:

"Yes. Well, it's just my personal leisure. Chewing. She started eating another one.
"But I don't force you to look at it." Chewing. "You can just stay here and eat."
Chewing.³³

This scene is where the character eats and talks with other characters simultaneously. However, instead of narrating the concurrent activities, the paragraph includes onomatopoeia of eating sounds in the middle of dialogues.

Of course, these examples are not to say that the sentences in the light novel all incorporate onomatopoeia and lack of concrete narration sentences. Rather, the light novel both uses visual expressions of the manga-styled sentences and conveys messages by semantic usage of the sentences. However, instead of explaining everything, the light novel sentences do make use of intuitive visual structures of the sentences, just like pictographs in the traffic.

Because the manga-styled expressions are sometimes not even sentences, it is hard to argue that it has some literary or artistic values. In general, the literary sentences describe situations by full sentences; onomatopoeia rarely replaces a full sentence, or an author does

³³ Shibamura 2004, p. 253.

not forget to refer the speaker of a particular dialogue is. Therefore, the manga-styled sentences in the light novel are merely a “technique” for this specific medium to take the roles of complete sentences.

Nonetheless, the fact that this technique transforms the medium of reading to the medium of visualization is worth noting. The narration itself is in a form of phonetic symbols, but these symbols convey symbolized pictograms that are frequently applied in the manga culture, such as longitudinal lines on the face, the usage “...”, and onomatopoeia. The light novel is certainly a novel and categorized as “bunko” in the publishing market, yet it is definitely not an independent medium that stands on its own. For the proper understanding of the light novel, one needs to be knowledgeable about the visual codes of the manga culture. Without it, one may find the narration style of the light novel childish, weird, incomplete, or just confusing.

The light novel is therefore close to “cold medium” in McLuhan’s scale of hot and cold media. The light novel does not give realistic, graphical descriptions of the background. The amount of data the manga-styled narration possesses is minimal, and the readers are encouraged to perceive and understand situations in the light novel by filling in the information based on their knowledge of the manga culture. Therefore, the light novel is a cold medium, considering only the manga-like narration.

Characteristics of the Light Novel: The Illustration

The images in the light novel are probably the most noticeable characteristic. In one corner of the Japanese bookstore today, the light novel section is usually placed right next to the manga section. The cover pages of both media have similar styles of illustrations, yet in the light novel section, one sees mainly texts, not the illustrations. The number of images in one volume of a light novel depends on the series; the popularity and the nature of the work

determine it. In the first pages, one may see colorful cuts of actual manga or illustrations of characters as well as short introductions of them. However, whatever the format is, the illustrations of the light novel do not exist to merely give visual images of the characters; the illustrations help the readers consolidate their images of characters by filling in the parts left out in the manga-styled narration.

A significant role of the illustrations in the light novel is evident from the status of illustrators on a par with that of the authors. In the contemporary literature, illustrations are used, but they only function as complements to texts, mainly included in children's books to facilitate children's reading. However, in the case of the light novel culture, it is different. Since 2005, a magazine called *This Light Novel is Amazing* このライトノベルがすごい! has provided an annual rank of light novels based on popularity, along with interviews and analysis of the culture. Every year, the magazine devotes a separate section for illustration, again with ranks, interviews, and analyses of the images. As with the famous light novel authors, there are popular light novel illustrators, who these days sometimes write an afterword along with the author's afterword at the end of the text. Many readers even claim to buy light novels solely based on the illustrations,³⁴ and knowing this trend, the publishers make sure to employ the well-known illustrators who gained popularity in the Internet, the game, or the manga industry.

A primary characteristic of the light novel illustrations is its manga- and anime-styled arrangement of images. Therefore, the understanding of such images is important to analyze the light novel's illustrations. For this purpose, I would like to cite Tezuka Osamu 手塚治虫, "the Godfather of Japanese Manga."

Tezuka considered the images in his manga as symbols. For example, the facial

³⁴ Shinjō, 95

expressions in the manga are based on actual ones, but since they are not real but images of the real face expressions, they only function as symbolic media between readers and an author. When a character has a band-aid on his face, the character does not have an actual band-aid, but it only functions a symbol of message that the particular characters has been involved in a fight and hurt.³⁵ This symbol is much simpler than photographs and therefore less informative.

However, Tezuka revealed that “the degree of reality” in the symbol can produce a variety of images, from realistic portrayals of the faces to the most simplified ones in comic strips. The degree increases if one adds more lines and details; it decreases if the minimum number of lines is used, but it still can serve as comprehensible images in comic strips. One can make images more informative by adding more details of the clothes the characters wear, or leave the images as a simplified form so that the readers can “fill in” the extraneous features in them. Wherever located in the scale of the degrees, the images are still symbols of what an author tries to express something in the real world.³⁶

Of course, the manga is not only about images, but also other features including dialogue boxes, sound effects, cut sizes, and backdrops of cuts. When the dialogue boxes are balloon-shaped circles, the sayings in the boxes are intended as ordinary conversation; however, if the boxes are spiked, it indicates that the character who accompanies the dialogue box is shouting. The background of cuts sometimes show natural settings in which characters are placed in, and black clouds or ominous shadows can function to indicate psychological status of characters. In addition, the sizes of cuts can be manipulated in order to stage impending, dramatic changes of situations.

Manga is therefore by nature a medium of visual representation and is close to cool medium in McLuhan’s scale. Manga may engrave a fixed image of character in the heads of

³⁵ Ōtsuka 2003, p. 62.

³⁶ Ibid, pp. 62-63.

the readers, yet the fact that the images are not as detailed as photographs and only symbolic representation of real people leave room for interpretations and/or “filling ins” by readers. Indeed, the readers visualize symbolic images of the characters given by the author, and follow a storyline set in the stages of symbolic representations of the real world. These symbols in the visual narrative culture belong to the characteristic of “cool media.” If one is not familiar with the symbols, one cannot understand the meanings and implications of them clearly. One should vigilantly participate in perceiving the contents to understand the symbolic codes of the manga.

The illustrations in the light novel are not much different from the manga and its interactions with the readers. It borrows a variety of visual symbols from the manga, and the readers have to interpret the symbols based on their knowledge from the manga culture. The only difference from the manga images is that the readers of the light novel may have an aid in understanding the symbols from the slightly more detailed texts than manga; however, the light novel author may or may not include the description. The following is an excerpt from *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya*, describing one of sub-characters in the story:

I once again started to observe the unique member of the literature club.
She had the white-skinned, emotionless face, moving fingers like machinery. Shorter than how a bob hair cut should be, the hair style has well fit her, covering over her face. If possible, I would like to see her without the glasses.
A Doll-like ambience was thinning out her presence.
Blatantly speaking, she was a typical so-called mysteriously emotionless type.³⁷

The ambiguous statement of “so-called mysteriously emotionless type” originates in the existence of illustrations in the light novel. By leaving room for an illustrator to depict this character in her own way, the text leaves the consolidation of character images to the manga- and anime-like illustrations. As a matter of fact, individual characteristics not mentioned in the texts frequently appear only in the illustrations of the light novel. For example, a main heroine of *Haruhi Suzumiya series*, wears a hair band in illustrations, but the description of

³⁷ Tanigawa 2003, p. 53.

the hair band is non-existent in texts. Nonetheless, the fans of this series find the hair band as an identity of this character. This indicates the influence of the illustrations overshadowing the text descriptions, as long as they are not contradictory. Therefore, a light novel author, well aware of the power of illustrations, sometimes leaves room for the illustrators to create the characters, by leaving ambiguity in narration.

At least in the otaku culture, illustrations are much stronger in creating and consolidating a mental image and expectation than descriptions of texts. For the most cases, the light novel include images of characters on their cover pages and devote the first five to six pages to the color illustrations, each with a couple of lines of texts. The colored illustrations contain different information according to different series, but they usually include a prologue, introductions of characters, descriptions of interesting scenes in the novel so that the readers can easily grasp genres, ambience of the stories, and characters. In other words, the readers of the light novel not only perceive the external appearances of characters and develop their images with minimal text descriptions, but also gain a visual representation of the light novel from the first pages of illustrations.

All in all, the illustration in the light novel are not merely complements to the text. The illustrators have the same status of significance as the authors, and the publishing company and readers alike acknowledge this fact. To understand these manga- and anime-like illustrations, one should be able to understand symbolic representations of the real world. The illustrations are by nature function to give visual representation of the text; however, they take another role of creating and consolidating the images of characters and further the visual representation of one volume of light novel.

Media Mix

The last characteristic of the light novel culture is its endless reproductions in other

media. Using the rank provided by the aforementioned magazine *This Light Novel is Amazing*, the following table indicates the ranks of titles and their crossovers into other media for the last three years. The double circles indicate that the title was adapted to that particular medium more than once, and the diamonds indicate work in progress.

2009						
Rank	Author	Title	Anime	Game	Manga	Movie
1	Mizuki Nomura	Book Girl Series	○	○	○	
2	Yuyuko Takemiya	Toradora!	○	○	○	
3	Kenji Inoue	Baka to Test to Shokanju	◎	○	◎	
4	Kazuma Kamachi	Toaru Majutsu no Index	◎	○	◎	
5	Isuna Hasekura	Spice and Wolf	◎	○	○	
6	Nisio Isin	Bakemonogatari series	○			
7	Sekina Aoi	Seitokai no Ichizon series	○	○	◎	
8	Shoji Gatoh	Full Metal Panic !	◎	○	○	
9	Hitoma Iruma	Usotsuki Mii-kun to Kowareta Maa-chan			○	○
10	Koroku Inumura	Toaru Hikushi e no Tsuioku	◇			
2010						
1	Kenji Inoue	Baka to Test to Shokanju	◎	○	◎	
2	Nisio Isin	Bakemonogatari series	○			
3	Muziki Nomura	Book Girl series	○	○	○	
4	Yuyuko Takemiya	Toradora !	○	○	○	
5	Sekina Aoi	Seitokai no Ichizon series	○	○	◎	
6	Sazane Kei	Tasogareiro no Uta Tsukai series				
7	Hitoma Iruma	Usotsuki Mii-kun to Kowareta Maa-chan			○	○
8	Asaura	Ben-To	○		○	
9	Kazuma Kamachi	Toaru Majutsu no Index	◎	○	◎	
10	Koshi Tachibana	Sokyu no Karma				
2011						
1	Kazuma Kamachi	Toaru Majutsu no Index	◎	○	◎	
2	Yomi Hirasaka	Boku wa Tomodachi ga Sukunai	○	○	◎	
3	Kenji Inoue	Baka to Test to Shokanju	◎	○	◎	
4	Reki Kawahara	Sword Art Online	◇	◇	○	
5	Asaura	Ben-To	○	○	○	
6	Mizuki Nomura	Book Girl series	○	○	○	
7	Sekina Aoi	Seitokai no Ichizon series	○	○	◎	
8	Tsukasa Fushimi	Ore no Imoto ga Konna ni Kawaii Wake ga Nai	○	○	◎	
9	Ryohgo Narita	Durarara!!	○	○	○	
10	Hikaru Sugii	Kami-sama no Memo-cho	○		○	

(Table 1. This Light Novel is Amazing Rankings from 2009 to 2011)

Considering overlaps, out of 18 popular titles, 16 titles were adapted into more than one media form. 7 titles were adapted into one medium more than once, whether they were forms of direct adaptations or spinout stories to originals, but with the same characters. As clearly noticeable in this table, the light novel frequently lends their stories and characters to the anime, manga, and game industry, which are considered to be cores of the otaku culture. It is also worth noting that one title made it to film industry. The media mix became a much more vibrant marketing strategy as the years went by; in 2011, all of the top ten titles made debuts or were on their way in anime and manga industry.

As with manga, the media mix based on the light novel culture has a couple of benefits for both publishers and anime productions. The light novel provides its original works to be adapted. Utilizing the already established storyline and characters, the anime productions do not have to start from scratches, which include creations of new characters, backgrounds, detailed settings, and of course a storyline. These original works by the anime productions, unfortunately, do not always guarantee successes. Therefore, if a certain light novel gains success and is adapted, the anime is at least likely to draw attentions of the light novel's fans, who would be the foundation of the anime's success as well. Second, the publishers and the anime productions exchange financial benefits to each other. The publishers can sell more of their books after the production of anime, and the anime production gains the publishers as reliable sponsors. For example, Kyoto Animation and Kadokawa Shoten have been partners in this manner since 2006, and Kyoto Animation produced multiple works from Kadokawa, such as *Full Metal Panic* フルメタル・パニック, *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya*, *Lucky Star* らき☆すた, *K-On!*, and *Nichijou* 日常.

There are three types of media mix routes an original work, including manga, game, and light novel has taken in the last decade. First, the most typical form of media mix,

“simple media mix,” is when an original work is created without any intentions of media mix. When it gains popularity for an extensive period of time, the publishers and the anime productions at the same time identify the work and start to consider for its adaptations into a variety of media. Second, in “gradual media mix,” the publishers provide contents of the original work to other productions of media, simultaneously or not long after the publication of the book; the productions gain a chances to review the work and monitor the popularity of it as well, and when they confirm the potential, they gradually produce different media works one by one. This route is the least risky. Finally, in “concurrent media mix,” when one company has ability to plan a variety of media, it can flourish into other media very much at the beginning. This is an aggressive and risky route yet an effective way to interact with potential buyers because the different media help expose the original work to a great extent.³⁸

As with manga, the light novel is based on the principle of commercialism, sometimes in an extreme way. When the light novel is written, unless an author is guaranteed of success, the editors heavily participate in the process of character and plot makings. Most of the light novel authors make debuts by winning in one of the contests for the light novel, but the publishers normally do not let the books be published as they are. The winners of the contest and the experienced editors talk of the directions of the light novel’s plot, expressions, character traits, and many minutia details in order to transform the work to be a decent seller. When a professional light novel wants to start a new series, he or she should contact the publisher first and submit a detailed proposal in order to receive feedbacks from the editors. Such system is very close to manga industry, in which the editors take more than advisory roles.

The serialization of the light novel is also based on strict commercial reasons. When the first of volume of light novel gains popularity, usually multiple volumes of the series

³⁸ Hong 2010.

follow afterwards. What distinguishes the light novel from manga or other media is that there could be a major plot line which continues for multiple volumes, but a minor plot line is always fit into one volume. In other words, even if one series continues for more than twenty volumes, “an episode” within its general storyline ends with one book. For many cases, new characters appear in the following volumes and start a new storyline centering the characters. This structure is useful when the editors need to decide whether they continue the publications of a particular series. The first volume of light novel is not numbered for this reason in order to not give readers that this is the first of the series. The publication of the second volume of a series is therefore determined by the sales record of the first volume.

These commercial formulas behind the light novel influenced how it has been adapted into other media. Before the 2000s, the intrusion into other media by the light novel was a slow, gradual process. The media mix was never considered without an enormous success of the original novel. The representative example for this process was *Record of Lodoss War* ロードス島戦記. The first appearance of this story was in a magazine in 1986.

After the popularity spread among the readers of the magazine, the first volume of the series was published in 1988. After four years of scrutiny, the OVA version³⁹ of the anime was produced. The most popular form of media, TV series version of the work was produced in 1998. It took twelve years for this famous series to make its debut in the TV screen because light novel was a minor culture even in the realm of the otaku culture and therefore did not have a stable foundation of fans to rely on for media mix. However, since the 2000s, the otaku culture was popularized; the nighttime anime increased and differentiated otaku into special “tastes”; the digital era cut down the costs of anime productions significantly. For example, the first volume of the *Haruhi Suzumiya* series was published in 2003, adapted into

³⁹ OVA refers to Original Video Animation. The work was produced in video format only. These days, OVA refers to DVD format only.

manga 2004, serialized as TV series in 2006; at the same time, drama CDs, games, and goods related to the series were constantly produced. Such rapid developments into other media indicate of a new trend with the growth of the light novel market in the 2000s. Before the 2000s, the media mix for light novels took the route of “simple media mix,” but currently the routes are close to “gradual media mix” and “concurrent media mix.”

An interesting trait of the light novel’s media mix is that the stories in the other media do not always follow the original works. In the perspective of the light novel publishers, media mix is advertisement of their own product. Therefore, as long as the media mix fulfills the purpose, the publishers are not uptight about preservations of the contents of the original work in minutely details. For example, *Boku wa Tomodachi ga Sukunai* 僕は友達が少ない gained enormous popularity in 2011 and was adapted into two mangas; however, whereas one manga follows the storyline of the original work, the other creates a completely different storyline by placing a different heroine character at the center of the main plot. The characters and the settings stay the same, yet because the focus of narration changes, it creates a storyline that could be characterized as a parallel world to the original work.

The light novel may look like a separate form of medium distinguishing itself from anime and manga, but because it shares the common grounds with anime, manga, and games, the light novel always develops along with the other subcultures. Technically speaking, the existences of anime and manga led to the birth of the light novel culture itself. By interconnecting with manga and anime, the light novel achieved an evolutionary foundation in the 1980s and dramatically grew into a vibrant market in the 2000s. In a way, the media mix of light novel was not a choice, but an unavoidable marketing scheme considering its nature.

Chapter 2 Summary

In this chapter, I gave a brief history and a definition of the light novel, and introduced characteristics of the light novel and its intrusion into other media. A novel is a medium usually only composed of letters. The letters are phonetic symbols of everyday language, and they reflect people's understanding of the language as they are since the Meiji period. However, although for the most cases the light novel resembles the forms of sentences used in the contemporary literature, they also utilize the manga-styled narration. The visual effects of the symbolized words and sentences remind the readers of the manga they have seen before, and bear a unique impact of changing the medium of reading to the medium of visualization. In addition, the existence of illustrations in the light novel is also important because the narrations and illustrations depend upon each other for the consolidations of images of characters, storylines, and backgrounds.

The manga-styled narration and the manga-like illustrations are less complex, and the symbolized sentences need high participations of readers in deciphering the author's intention; therefore, the light novel is, according to Marshall McLuhan's scale, close to cool media. The readers of the light novel, however, do not finish their consumption just after reading the novel. The original work is continuously reproduced into anime, manga, and games. Considering the nature of the light novel's inherent characteristics, the media mix was an unavoidable marketing choice.

Nonetheless, due to the light novel's nature, readers may find themselves isolated from the mainstream society. They need to understand symbols of manga in order to understand the light novel, and the process of acquiring the knowledge and intuition can lead them to indulge in a variety of the otaku cultures. There is nothing wrong with the activities, although one may find himself or herself only surrounded by the people who understand the symbols, which the people in the mainstream society may find difficult to understand or too

childish to associate themselves with.

In the last chapter, I will investigate the otaku's interaction with the light novel culture and how the third generation otaku engulf themselves into a fantasy world far from the mainstream society. For this purpose, three works of the light novel will be analyzed for their stories and the consumption of them by the third generation otaku, and also the implications of their indulgence it holds for the otaku and the Japanese society today.

Ch. 3 The Narrative Consumption and The Reproductions

In chapter 1, I introduced three different generations of otaku, characteristics of each, and the shifting social environments surrounding them. Compared to the first and the second generation otaku, the third generation otaku puts more emphasis on “individual tastes” and “sentiments” than the accumulation of “knowledge” cherished by the previous generations. The moe culture based on subjective feeling towards characters is a representative example of this trait. Although social discrimination towards the otaku has declined somewhat in the 2000s, prejudice and rejection are still prevalent enough to threaten the third generation otaku. Therefore, when the Internet community flourished in the last decade, the third generation otaku gained an opportunity to retreat from the hostile reality. However, as a side effect, they ended up internalizing their mental anguish from social contempt, and now they are cornered into the fictional world that relieves them of this pain.

In this chapter, I will discuss the mechanism of pain relief experienced by the third generation otaku when they read the light novel. For this purpose, I will introduce works of Ōtsuka Eiji and Azuma Hiroki. Ōtsuka asserts a Theory of Narrative Consumption: the otaku reads “small narrative” (storyline) in order to consume “grand narrative” (setting, worldview, fictional history). However, Azuma argues that Ōtsuka’s theory only applies to the first and the second generation and suggests a new theory based on the third generation otaku in the 90s and 2000s: The Theory of Database Consumption. According to Azuma, the third generation otaku are not interested in grand narrative, but instead they indulge in characters, byproducts from the database of moe elements. Using this theory, Azuma finds the essence of the light novel culture as the imagination that springs from the proper arrangement of traits in the database.

I critique Azuma’s view with analysis of the light novel’s narrative culture. Although Azuma’s theory is a valid approach to the light novel, I characterize the light novel according

to common traits within the narrative of the light novel, not within the otaku and their database. I assert that the database is merely a tool for effective commercialization of the light novel. The essence of the light novel lies in the third generation otaku readers and their reflections in the stories. They identify with the ordinary protagonists in the light novel, and the female characters who partly resemble women in the real world give them sexual fantasy and/or relief from the aforementioned mental anguish.

However, they do not settle for passive enjoyment of the light novel. They create a variety of fan fictions to materialize their fantasy in a concrete form. The works of reproduction by the otaku can be characterized as a mark of the postmodern society in Japan. They no longer accept pedantic words from authoritarian figures and position themselves according to their interests, not in political ideologies or economic environment, but in fictional stories and characters. Usually, these take the form of hardcore, erotic manga. They overwrite the subtle, romantic ambience and even characters' unique traits from the original story to express their desire aggressively, as if these fan fictions are their only windows of communication between themselves and the world.

Azuma Hiroki: The Narrative Culture of the Otaku Generations

For the last two decades, Azuma has greatly contributed to the understanding of the otaku culture. His interpretations of the otaku culture were unique in a sense that they provided historical, philosophical, psychological, and cultural approaches to the otaku's fanatic indulgence in their hobbies. For the development of narrative consumption model by the otaku, Azuma adopts Ōtsuka's theory of the otaku from the 70s to the 80s, and revises it to fit with the characteristics of the third generation otaku in the 90s. Based on the revised theory, Azuma finds the essence of the light novel culture in the database of moe elements of characters and narratives.

In his book, Azuma introduces “The Decline of the Grand Narrative” proposed by a French philosopher Jean Francois Lyotard in order to explain the otaku’s indulgence into fictional world. The Grand Narratives are systems and/or ideologies that have served as backbones of the human society. From the 18th century to the 20th century, many ideologies, such as Marxism and fascism, existed to unite the people. In the case of Japan, these Grand Narratives started to spread during the pre-Meiji Restoration under a slogan of *Sonnō jōi*, roughly translated as “revere the Emperor and expel the barbarians.” The vertical relationship between the Emperor and the people was established, and the country “Japan” and its citizens “Japanese” were born, starting its development as a modernized country. Capitalism and industrialization shaped the livelihood of people in terms of their consumption styles and working environments, and even during the war period, the Grand Narrative of “Japan’s sacred duty to save Asia from the West” served as a story that united Japanese people. These Grand Narratives effectively functioned to create a homogeneous group of people called “Japanese” under the roof of the imperial line.

Contemporary Japan until the 1990s was diligent in providing appropriate grand narratives as well, but during the 1960s alternative political ideologies spread among students. In the high-growth era of the 60s, Prime Minister Ikeda established the 10-year income-doubling plan for the nation and achieved it within seven years. Despite the progress, in the same era the political disturbance in Japan invited the Japanese youth to voice their political beliefs and philosophy, allowing them opportunities to re-identify themselves. They shouted Marxism, participated in anti-war marches, and demanded curriculum changes in their universities. However, the movements dwindled in the beginning of the 70s because the economic surge under Ikeda’s leadership satisfied the basic, biological needs of the Japanese and further allowed them to enjoy the affluence, rendering the political movements unnecessary and anachronistic. The activist students became white-collar in the prospering

Japanese business world in support of the nation's objective to surpass other advanced capitalist countries. Nevertheless, for some of these students and teenagers who grew up seeing the social upheavals of political ideologies, or "Grand narratives," the nation's capitalistic goal to be number one was unsatisfactory and superficial. For alternatives, they began to look for their own grand narratives in the fictional world.

Before the 1970s, economic prosperity had produced a shared culture of consumerism in Japan. There were specific items categorized as desirable objects to symbolize their affluence and success, according to each era. Such cultural trend of homogeneity became much more diversified in the 70s and the 80s, with the birth of otaku who wanted to spend an excessive amount of their assets on their hobbies. The greater heterogeneity of "micro-masses" was born; otaku could pursue their own special interests and hobbies that were provided by the fragmented markets. The publishers especially reacted actively to the diversified tastes of the consumers by starting hundreds of weekly and monthly magazines targeted for specific ages, demands, and areas.

The economic failure of the 90s accelerated the spread of the otaku culture, due to the collapse of economism that functioned as the only grand narrative in Japan for twenty years. When the bubble burst in 1991, the level of affluence observed in the previous decades was no longer guaranteed. No significant political ideologies arose in the mainstream society, and the youth especially stayed apathetic to the political discourse, as they had been for twenty years. In other words, from the 90s, all of the Grand Narratives of Japan lost credibility among the general population. Some conservatives attempted to create new narratives through nationalistic textbook revisions or paying respects to the Yasukuni Shrine where the Japanese soldiers are buried. Nonetheless, for a significant number of the youth, which of course included the otaku, it was either too late or did not fully satisfy their desires of the new grand narratives. As in any advanced countries, education is all about teaching

grand narratives: scientific principles, democracy, feminism, egalitarianism, patriotism, and communism. The Japanese youth learnt these grand narratives and knew their existences in school, but the apathy towards political discourse and its evident failure in the 90s made them steer clear of the grand narratives in reality.

According to Azuma, the otaku's obsession with fictional stories not only originates in their search for Grand Narratives in the fictional works such as manga and anime but also in social merits:

Their preference for fiction...is related to their identity. The otaku chooses fiction over social reality not because they cannot distinguish between them but rather as a result of having considered which is the more effective for their human relations, the value standards of social reality or those of fiction...[T]hey choose fiction because it is more effective for smoothing out the process of communication between friends, reading the Asahi Newspaper and then going to vote, or lining up with anime magazines in hand for an exhibition. And, to that extent, it is they who may be said to be socially engaged and realistic in Japan today, by virtue of not choosing the "social reality."⁴⁰

Because of the youth's apathy towards politics, there are no social reinforcements for attending to politics. On the contrary, at least within the otaku culture, the otaku are aware of each other's strong interests in the grand narratives provided by manga, anime, and popular fictions. Therefore, they indulge in the fictional worlds not only for the grand narratives behind them, but also for rewarding social interactions with other otaku.

The birth of otaku took place in the 1970s, when the political ideologies and student movements died out abruptly. The loss of Grand Narratives, such as anti-war message, communist ideals, or a simple purpose of changing their universities, led the youth to search for their own narratives. The otaku chose the media of the otaku culture as the foundation of their identity and social interactions, and ardently followed its production lines in order to find the Grand Narratives set in anime, manga, and SF novels.

Providing this background for the birth of the otaku narrative culture, Azuma Hiroki

⁴⁰ *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* 2001, p. 27.

utilizes Ōtsuka's Theory of Narrative Consumption as a guide stone for the understanding of otaku's interaction with the narratives. According to Ōtsuka, each work of the otaku culture contains "grand narrative" and "small narrative." "Grand narrative" refers to "worldview" and "setting"; "small narrative" refers to a main plotline readers usually recognize as a "story." Ōtsuka argues that when the otaku interact with a variety of works of the otaku culture, on the surface level, they interact with small narratives; however, for the otaku, the value of a commodity is determined by the grand narratives behind the main storylines because they are the grand narratives they look for, as a replacement for the grand narratives from society. In other words, the otaku consume numerous small narratives in order to indulge in the grand narratives, such as annals of fictional countries and designs of Mobile Suit in Gundam series in details. However, these grand narratives usually cannot stand alone as commodity, so the small narratives function to draw the attentions of the otaku. This consumption style is what Ōtsuka refers to as The Theory of Narrative Consumption.

Azuma accepts this theory as a valid theory for the narrative culture of the first and second generations, but he suggests a revised version of it, called The Theory of Database Consumption, in order to explain the third generation otaku's new narrative culture. According to Azuma, the third generation otaku no longer demand the grand narratives; instead, they indulge in their own individual tastes, which have accumulated as the database of moe elements and narratives. The grand narrative is very much fixed. The fixed fictional history was what they were looking for, and they demanded it as the replacement for their grand narratives in the real world. However, in the case of the third generation otaku, they do not look for the grand narratives. They consume the fictional world not to look for the lost narrative, but to enjoy the fictional world and its characters for their own individual pleasure. For example, in *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, they do not care for Anno's anti-otaku message or religious implications of enemies; rather, they seek out female characters and their charming

behaviors or outward appearances, at which they may experience moe. Azuma's database refers to accumulation of these charming elements. He suggests that the third generation otaku create a database of moe elements that they desire to see in characters, and the publishing companies and anime production have responded to this demand.

He gives an example of the database consumption with one anime called *Di Gi Charat デ・ジ・キャラット*. The elements of moe, such as big bells, a tail, ears that look like cats' are employed from the database to the main heroine of this anime, and reflecting on this character, Azuma argues for the increase of moe characters in the otaku culture:

There used to be a narrative behind a work. But as the importance of narrative has declined, the characters have become more important in otaku culture. Subsequently, a database for moe-elements that generates the characters has been established. Otaku culture of the 1990s has followed this general trend... In fact, the characters in this work were created with intentionally excessive moe-elements. The novelization describes Digiko as having "the maid costume with lots of frills, a cap with white cat ears, cat gloves, cat boots, and a cat tail... Digiko has cat ears and speaks with "-nyo" (the Japanese sound for "meow") at the end of her sentences. This not because cat ears or the "-nyo" endings are exactly attractive themselves, but because both cat ears and peculiar sentence ending are moe-elements and, to be exact, because the otaku of the 1990s accepted them as moe-elements as they became aware of the whole structure of this process.⁴¹

In other words, the database decreased the importance of grand narratives in the otaku culture. Since the 1990s, there has been an increasing demand for "well-made" stories that motivate readers to think to some extent and respond emotionally. Azuma sees this demand as another compelling proof that the database is at the center of the otaku culture. He argues that the similar plotlines, such as incurable disease or destiny of war, are continuously employed, labeling the storylines another category of moe elements within the database. He concludes that otaku consume stories and characters based on the database, and extends this view to the light novel as well.

In his book, *Game-teki realism no Tanjō – Dōbutsu-ka suru Postmodern ゲーム的*

⁴¹ *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* 2001, p. 47.

リアリズムの誕生－動物化するポストモダン, he asserts the essence of the light novel as the following:

With that said, we conclude that the essence of the light novel or the light-novel-like novel lies on not in the internal (story) or external (circulation) features, but in the character database by which the imagination of light novel develops. In other words, we define the light novel as a type of a novel that is written on the basis of the character database.⁴²

Although his argument has validity, his definition of the light novel solely based on the database theory can be very problematic. Characters may share similar moe elements, but it is impossible to deny that the narrative also contributes to the formations of certain characters, such as their internal conflicts and their own ways of resolving issues. In many cases, the charms of characters come not only from the elaborate mix of moe elements, but also from the characters' determinations and interactions with the narratives. In other words, when one particular medium is analyzed, one cannot disregard the narrative culture behind it altogether, assuming it to be an irrelevant factor for the understanding of the light novel.

I accept the validity of Azuma's Theory of Database Consumption, but I reject it as the essence of the light novel. The Theory of Database Consumption is more strictly applied to bishojo gaming industry only in which some illustrators literally mix outward appearances and moe elements to create a number of characters. I do not claim that his theory is not applicable to the light novel. However, I argue that there are more important characteristics of the light novel to discuss its essence. In the following section, I introduce an alternative theory for the understanding of the light novel and further, the otaku culture.

The Third Generation Otaku and the Light Novel Culture

As with other novels, the narrative of the light novel contains five basic elements: setting, character, point of view, plot, and theme. For the purpose of this thesis, I will explore

⁴² *Game-teki realism no Tanjō – Dōbutsu-ka suru Postmodern 2* 2007, p. 45.

three of them, setting, character, and plot in order to find common traits in the light novel narratives, based on three popular works from this culture. I assert that the sense of ordinariness from a high school setting and an ordinary protagonist helps the otaku identify the narratives as their own; when the protagonist does a heroic action and the attractive female characters engage with the protagonist, the readers are excited with their achievement and sexual fantasy, finding the reading experience consolation of relief from the harsh reality.

In the last decade, the annual number of the published light novels was about 800.⁴³ Among them, this section will choose three titles that have proven their popularity within three criteria: anime-ted more than two times; sold more than three million copies; media mixed multiple times as games, manga, drama CD, and etc. The three titles that meet these criteria are *Haruhi Suzumiya* series, *Shakugan no Shana* 灼眼のシャナ, and *Zero no Tsukaima* ゼロの使い魔. The first two titles were translated and published in the U.S. market, and *Zero no Tsukaima* is being translated in the Internet-based communities (14 out of 20 volumes complete). The narratives of these three titles all focus on bishoujo, a Japanese term for a pretty young girl, and the popularity of the content reflects the prevalence of the third generation otaku and their moe culture. Though, it is important to note that these titles cannot be generalized to the whole light novel culture because the light novel culture consists of various types of exceptions.

The following are the information about these three titles:

- Title: Haruhi Suzumiya Series
- Author: Nagaru Tanigawa / Illustrator: Noiji Ito
- Publisher: Kadokawa Shoten
- Media mixes: two TV series, one anime film, 4 Manga series, 8 games, Multiple Drama CDs, and a concert.
- Summary: “Haruhi Suzumiya. From East Middle School. I have no interest in ordinary humans. If there are any aliens, time travelers, sliders, or espers here, come join me. That is all.” On the first day of high school, Suzumiya makes a

⁴³ Enomoto 2008, p. 174.

bold yet peculiar introduction of herself. She is a pretty girl, but her demeanor is eccentric, and she is isolated in the classroom. However, Kyon (キョン), an ordinary person, becomes curious about her behaviors and starts to have conversations with her from time to time. Unsatisfied by dull, boring clubs present at the school, with Kyon, Haruhi decides to make her own club. The club named SOS Brigade is launched under the purpose of finding aliens, time travelers, and espers.

- Title: Zero No Tsukaima
 - Author: Noboru Yamaguchi / Illustrator: Eiji Usatsuka
 - Publisher: MF Bunko J
 - Media mixes: 4 anime-ted TV series, two Manga series, three games, two drama CDs.
 - Summary: An ordinary high school student Saito Hiraga is summoned to a fantasy world Halkeginia ハルケギニア. A magician who summoned him was Louise Francoise le Blanc de la Valliere, a main heroine of this story yet an incompetent student magician labeled “Zero no Louise.” It was another failure of her magic, but she decides to sign a contract with Saito as her familiar. Saito is treated as her pet afterwards, and adventures and school life surround these two characters begin.
-
- Title: Shakugan no Shana
 - Author: Takahashi Yashichiro / Illustrator: Noizi Ito
 - Publisher: Dengeki Bunko
 - Media mixes: 3 anime-ted TV series, two manga series, two games
 - Summary: Yuji Sakai is an ordinary high school student living an ordinary life in Misaki. However, one day he observes an appearance of a monster named Rinne and finds himself in an extraordinary situation where he meets a girl with red eyes and hair. The girl named Shana informs him that his soul was taken away from the monster long time ago, and he would disappear from the world and memories of the people around him. In a battle between “Flame Haze” and “Denizens of the Crimson realm,” Yuji becomes a target of the monsters, and Shana tries to protect him from constant threats.

In these three titles, the stories are all set in high schools. In *Zero no Tsukaima*, the setting is a fictional continent, but both main characters are students in a magicians’ academy. The choice of this setting should not be a surprise considering that the readership of the light novel is mainly teenagers; however, because I am concerned with a specific group of the youth called the third generation otaku, so I will approach this common setting in the light novel from a different angle.

As a place where the third generation otaku spend most of their time, the high school setting is intended to give a sense of ordinariness of the real world. The high school setting

can be seen in many original works in the otaku culture. It is a space of life strictly categorized as “ordinary” for Japanese teenagers who have compulsory education until middle school. Then, they advance to high schools, walking/biking to a school, taking breaks in the middle of classes, enjoying a school festival, and attending club activities after classes. These are familiar for the Japanese readers, and therefore they are frequently given as settings of “ordinariness” for which any Japanese, including the third generation otaku, can find themselves empathetic. In other words, in the three novels, the high school setting is a deliberate attempt to evoke the real world of the third generation otaku.

The main plots of these three novels all include additions of extraordinary events to the ordinary lives which the narrator has led before meeting the heroines. In *Zero no Tsukaima*, it is the most obvious example because the protagonist is transported to a school in a fictional continent. In *Shakugan no Shana*, Yuji lives a bizarre life from the very beginning because he has been dead; nonetheless, he spends a significant amount of time at school and battles with enemies at the same time. The boundary between two different worlds becomes a main stage for this novel. In the case of Haruhi Suzumiya, it contains school and town festivals, club activities, and various parties held on every single holiday, and therefore the novel has the features of the most realistic and ordinary events; however, another side of the main plot is filled with supernatural phenomenon, such as appearances of eccentric beings, time travels, or a case of a serial killer. Although they do so in distinct ways, the trend is clear: unrealistic worlds on the foundation of the real world. The school setting is what the third generation otaku can recognize as “real” and be empathetic, and the unreal world is what they find thrilling to indulge themselves in.

In the case of characters, the three titles depict passive, listless protagonists and their reluctant involvements with the main heroines. Saito in *Zero no Tsukaima* is carefree about everything; even when he is summoned by the main heroine to a fictional continent, he adapts

to his environment very quickly. He always wants to go back to his world, but he seems to be adapting to the fictional world really well, making the readers wonder whether he actually wants to go back. Kyon in *Haruhi Suzumiya* series used to be interested in supernatural phenomenon, but he abandons such fantasy dreams when he enters high school and simply wants to lead an ordinary life. After he becomes involved with Haruhi, this wish is denied, but even when with Haruhi and her club members, he is more or less an observer rather than an active participant, consciously preventing himself from experiencing extraordinary things, at least at the beginning of the novel. Yuji in *Shakugan no Shana* technically dies, according to the main heroine Shana, but when not engaged in the battles with Shana, he also leads an ordinary life, just like Kyon and Saito. Every protagonist in these titles is a listless protagonist who just wants to lead an ordinary life. They do not have concrete plans or objectives, and even when one expresses such a feeling (Saito's willingness to return), it is not described in urgency.

The passive protagonists of the light novel contrast with the protagonists of manga and anime; in the light novel, such protagonist is desirable to draw empathy from the third generation otaku. In general, the images of male protagonists in the anime and manga are trustworthy, adventurous, handsome, and willing to protect women at all cost. However, in *Shakugan no Shana*, the protagonist is protected by the main heroine, Shana. Kyon in *Haruhi Suzumiya* series sometimes does not do anything when other sub-characters engage in battles. Such a weak male protagonist is visible in many other light novel series, including three No. 1 ranking light novels, *Book Girl* 文学少女 series, *Baka to Test to Shokanju* バカとテストと召喚獣, and *Toaru Majutsu no Index* とある魔術の禁書目録, respectively from 2009, 2010, and 2011. *Book Girl* series has a weak-willed protagonist who refuses to go to school; *Baka To Test to Shokanju* and *Toaru Majutsu no Index* have

protagonists similar to those of traditional manga, but they are frequently labeled as “incompetent,” “stupid,” and “not manly enough.” Of course, when harsh situations arise, they do show some courageous behaviors, but they are often not direct participants but more of intruders in the action, after keeping their status of “observers” for a while. Some may find such characters unsatisfactory as protagonists in the otaku culture, but the light novel readers find a series of protagonists’ active/aggressive actions exhausting or unpleasant to follow.⁴⁴ A significant discrepancy between the strong, non-stop protagonists and readers leading ordinary lives (or the third generation otaku) makes the readers distressed, and they subsequently lose empathy with the stories. On the other hand, if the protagonists are ordinary, the readers can easily identify themselves with them. The trend of ordinary, listless protagonists functions to evoke empathy of the otaku readers, by reflecting the ordinary lives of the otaku in the narratives.

However, when these protagonists do heroic actions, the light novel readers are given gratifying catharsis, identifying their actions as their own. As briefly noted above, the passive protagonists do not keep their apathy towards their environments until the end of the stories. The passive protagonists and the high school setting reflect the third generation otaku and their real world; if these protagonists stay as they are, the light novel would be fictional diaries of the otaku. In *Zero no Tsukaima*, Saito becomes able to control any weapons, from swords to battle planes. Yuji in *Shakugan no Shana* does not have much unique ability, but he does what he can do in battles. In volume 4 of *Haruhi Suzumiya* series, Kyon saves the world by time-travelling multiple time frames. Their abilities are limited, but they all take on their roles in their own ways and capture the main heroines’ hearts. When the readers see the protagonists similar to them save the main heroines and resolve the problems, such story development gives gratifying catharsis to the readers. In the stories, they are no longer

⁴⁴ Enomoto 2008, p. 177.

languid youth of the contemporary Japanese society, but heroes who save the world, people's lives, or in the case of *Haruhi Suzumiya* series, the whole universe.

Another characteristic of the light novel culture is presence of attractive female characters, or bishojo, with their look and personalities derived from Azuma's database. In the three titles, there are many types of female characters with idiosyncratic personalities. For example, the main heroine of *Zero no Tsukaima*, Louise is awful as a magician, but she has a strong sense of pride and is very much blunt in her relationship with Saito; wearing glasses, Tabasa enjoys reading constantly in quiet environments; Siesta, despite her status as a princess, wears a maid uniform. From the database Azuma suggested, these characteristics all can be assigned to three categories of moe elements: appearances, roles, and personalities. Shinjō Kazuma introduces 25 types of moe elements⁴⁵; appearances include megane 眼鏡, pony-tail, twin-tail, maid, cat's ears, cat's ears, one-eyed, wheel-chair, shortcut; roles include sister-type, class-leader-type; personalities include tsundere ツンデレ, yan-dre ヤンデレ, dojik-ko どじっ子, cool-dere クルデレ, and etc. In these types, Louise is categorized as dojik-ko and tsundere; Tabasa is categorized as megane and cool-dere; Siesta is categorized as maid. In contrast to the male protagonists who are fairly uniform in their personalities, the female characters are expressed with a variety of characteristics, but still within the patterned database Azuma Hiroki suggests.

In the three titles I chose, the main heroines all have similar personality which is labeled as "tsundere." Tsun-dere is an abbreviation of tsun-tsun-dere-dere ツンツンデレデレ; tsun is an onomatopoeic word that expresses female characters' anger towards male characters; dere is from a verb tereru 照れる meaning female characters' affectionate, sweet behaviors to the male characters. From these, two different story developments can arise; one

⁴⁵ Shinjō 2006, pp. 139-155.

can call a character tsundere if he or she is cold in front of other people before going out with his or her lover, but not when only with the lover after formal confessions of love; one can also be categorized as tsundere if the character is cold outside but is very shy inside. In this case, there is a depiction of the character's psychological status from time to time to reveal true emotion towards his or her lover. Among these two cases, for main heroines of the light novel, the latter is a popular trend these days. In other words, the main heroines of the light novel love the male characters, but they are not adept at expressing such emotion and end up being angry over the situations, the emotional outburst of which is characterized as "tsun." However, when they do show affection, they are in the phase of "dere." In *Zero no Tsukaima*, the main heroine Louise calls Saito "dog." Haruhi makes a slave of Kyon, and Shana does not show any interests in Yuji and treats Yuji as almost a motionless object, not much of a human being. However, usually after crisis, just as in Hollywood movies, the female characters start to show subtle affection to the protagonists. At the end of the volume one, Louise asks Saito to dance with her. After hearing that Kyon likes ponytail hairstyles, Haruhi changes her hairstyle to it on the next day. Shana shows rather aggressive attacks of affection to Yuji after volume 2.

Such double-faced personality of the female characters is nothing new, but the third generation otaku categorizes it as "a personality type" and consumes the charms of it from the characters which have it. The otaku are aware that the degrees of tsun and dere are different depending on titles. *Zero no Tsukaima* and *Shakugan no Shana* focus on the emotional changes the protagonist and the main heroine go through whereas *Haruhi Suzumiya* series does not reveal the love stories directly, but subtly implies where their relationship is, with a slight change of the main heroine's appearance like the aforementioned ponytail or the emotional distress Haruhi fails to conceal when the protagonist has a delightful conversation with other female characters. However, whether or not the degrees are

different, the few instances of the heroines' affectionate behaviors are sufficient to enthrall the readers' minds. Even if the readers face cold, harsh treatments of the heroine for the 99% of time, they can manage to amuse themselves with the remaining 1%, which is usually shown at the end of each volume. The tsundere character is based on this emotional reward system to the otaku generation who fantasize about bishoujo.

The tsundere-equipped female characters greatly stimulate the fantasy of the third generation otaku. The tsun part of the main heroines reflects the reality which the otaku faces in the real world. They feel that they are treated as socially unlikable in the contemporary Japanese society due to various reasons, particularly by women. Therefore, when they see tsun part of the main heroine, her behavior seems to resemble the behavior of women in the real world. However, in the case of the light novel narrative, the fantasy of "as a matter of fact, those women love you" functions to compensate and remedy their scars. In other words, as the otaku managed to identify themselves with the protagonists and had wonderful adventures, they also managed to expand their fantasy about women by including "reality" in the personality of the female characters and identified themselves as being loved by these characters.

Popular Narrative Structure of Light Novel		
Real	+	Fantasy
High School Setting		Extraordinary Events / Fantasy World
Ordinary and Passive Protagonist		Heroic Protagonist
Maltreated by Women		The Females characters who are in fact in love with the protagonist

Table 2. Popular Narrative Structure of Light Novel

The Table 2 above summarizes the points made in this section. The popular narrative structure of light novel consists of two essential features to enthrall the third generation otaku. "Real" features in the light novel help the third generation otaku be empathetic to the stories; most of them are ordinary students leading ordinary lives; if identified as otaku by their surrounding, they are likely to be maltreated by women due to discrimination against them.

Therefore, they find the protagonists' lives resembling theirs easy to indulge in and therefore are easily assimilated into the narrative as the passive protagonist. "Fantasy" features function to bring gratifying catharsis and sexual fantasy to these readers; by identifying themselves with protagonists, they find themselves in a wonderful world where they actually show manly behaviors and are secretly loved by attractive women whose love cures their mental wounds from the real world. In other words, by indulging in the fantasy world that shares characteristics of their reality, they become empathetic to the stories and the protagonist, and eventually find the love of their lives as well.

This narrative structure is of course not a definitive formula observed in the light novel culture. There are a variety of genres that the light novel authors attempt to explore, and many of them are capable of developing their own narrative styles. Nonetheless, the ones that gained enormous popularity have shared common features mentioned in this section. The degree of usage of this narrative structure is different from one title to another, but it holds true for 8 titles of the top ten light novels in 2011, proving the popularity of the structure and the third otaku generation's fanatic acceptances of it. The most current number one series from the 2011 ranks, *Toaru Majutsu no Index* follows this pattern. The background of this series is a city called "Academic City," where it provides education for ordinary students and ones with supernatural powers. The protagonist Toma is between these two categories; he has an ability to invalidate the supernatural powers, yet because his power is dangerous and weird, he is treated as an outcast. He aims to enjoy his school life with his ordinary friends, just as the third generation otaku spend their daily lives in the real world. Of course, as the story develops, Toma meets the tsundere main heroine and resolves a problematic situation she is in despite his limited powers; the main heroine falls in love with the protagonist, but again, the heroine is rather clumsy at expressing such emotions and ends up biting the protagonist from the frustration.

If I may critique Azuma's Theory of Database Consumption at this point, the database is not the essence of the light novel, but a useful tool for commercialization of this culture. The readers do not just consume the patterned characters and narratives. The third generation otaku does still consume stories, as the first and the second generations have done. The light novel readers indulge in the works not because of the database, but because of the stories into which they can deploy themselves. Even if the characters may be similar from one work to another, the stories surrounding the characters define who they are, and therefore each character of the novels and the reflected self of the third generation otaku together identify his or her unique idiosyncrasies as the story develops. The database of Azuma is not the essence of the light novel, but merely a useful apparatus for satisfying the variety of tastes the third generation otaku may have. In the advanced capitalist country, the database is actually a practical tool for meeting the consumers' demands.

In conclusion, the essence of the light novel lies in the third generation otaku and their reflection in various forms of characters and stories. They may seem to enjoy characters only, but what they see in the light novels are stories about themselves, their fictional triumphs, and their sexual fantasy. In a way, reading the light novel is a healing process for them. The internalized emotional turmoil, passed onto them from the first and the second generations, has cornered them into despair. The narrative structure functions to console their scarred minds, by placing themselves in a story of ordinary life and playing significant, victorious roles in the fictional world.

Otaku and *Niji Sousaku* 二次創作

In addition to the narrative structure, for this last section I investigate the third generation going beyond the consumption of light novel, to the recreation of original works. Their fan fictions, or *dōjinshi* 同人誌 are significant objects of analysis for the

understanding of the otaku culture, which Azuma frequently labels as postmodern. For this purpose, it is essential to understand what we call “postmodern” and “modernity.” This thesis will not go into myriad arguments of postmodern ideologies but focus on core ideas of “modernity” and shifts of their values in the disparate era of “postmodern” society. The relationship between the light novel culture and postmodernism will be discussed at the end of this section, concluding with the light novel’s interaction with the third generation as a postmodern social phenomenon and the sign of restructuring self-identity in Japan today.

Cogito ergo sum, or “I think, therefore I am” by Descartes was the beginning of modernity that founded the perception of “I” or “Individual.” The statement indicates that even if one may doubt everything else in the world, the fact of the one who has the bottomless doubts cannot be doubted. It liberated human beings who identified themselves as subjects of God or local kings into “independent individuals,” and was the starting point of anthropocentric cultures in the West.

When the birth of the “individual” met the Renaissance Movement in the Middle Ages, the individuals set the foundation of modernity. The emphasis on perspective in arts, the absolute trust of reasoning, and the emancipation from the church doctrine led to the development of scientific doctrines and the Industrial Revolution in Europe. Modernity included not only ideologies such as individualism and scientific principles but also the industrialized factories, the acceleration of economic developments, and the shifting lives of people based on these changes.

In the case of Japan, the arrival of modernity took place during the Meiji era in the 19th century. Under the Meiji Emperor, the concepts of the people (*kokumin* 国民) and the nation were established, and Japan, as the nation, reconstructed itself into a modern country. The policy of *genbun itchi* 言文一致, or synchronization of the speaking and writing languages, favored the colloquial language prevalent in the common people instead of a wide

variety of classical and historical styles. The Industrialization of the whole country shifted from the agrarian-based productions to the technologically sophisticated manufacturing, and Japan excelled at exporting some of its products on a global scale, including tea, silk, and cotton. Before the concept of the nation and Industrialization, the Japanese people had positioned themselves within the boundary of town (mura 村) and its provincial belief system including morality and local religions. In the Meiji era, they perceived themselves as autonomous individuals and the nation as formed by the grouping of these individuals.

However, in postmodern society, such readings of the literature and other media collapse and are replaced by “consumptions” of the popular culture in which individuals find their own tastes of entertainment that suit their needs. Alan Swingewood argues this shift of modernity to postmodern as follows:

[T]he postmodern forecloses the possibility of a utopian and liberating potential in popular culture...[T]he turn to the postmodern inaugurated a more active, involved public, one which refused instruction and education ‘from above’, from critics and teachers of high art, turning rather to popular genres (the western, science fiction etc.) in which there were neither ‘leaders of taste’ nor ‘followers.’ ...[T]he postmodern signified a genuine tendency towards a democratic, open culture that finally put the lid on elitist, closed modernity.⁴⁶

The postmodern form of the literary culture is characterized by the collapse of authoritarian lessons of the elites and their followers, and the emergence of the popular culture that does not form pedagogical relationship between a writer and readers. The people become the spearheads of the postmodern literary culture, and they are the ones who determine the path of the culture.

Nonetheless, one should not assume the ideas of modernity and postmodernism in Japan are the same as those in the West, especially regarding the literature. The word postmodernism has an inherent temporal specificity. The existence of postmodernism is contingent on modernity, which should precede the arrival of postmodernism. In the case of

⁴⁶ Swingewood 1998, p. 163.

Japan, however, this is not always the case. A majority of scholars agree that Japan has achieved modernity, but a few scholars such as Yukio Mishima and Masao Maruyama find pre-modern elements in Japanese society, lamenting and questioning the true modernity of Japan.⁴⁷ In addition, Miyoshi Masao points out the existence of *gesaku* 戯作 during the late Edo period, seeing its characteristic as a trait of postmodern culture:

Gesaku fiction is parodic, episodic, and self-referential. Further, it is torn between the acceptance of formal restrictions and the energy for contesting them. On the one hand, there is an attempt to circumscribe the field of an individual's mind and action in the framework of a biography, while the style and tone, ranging freely from the colloquial to the formulaic, from the ironic/parodic to the tragic/sentimental, and from the ordinary to the fantastic, prevent it from constructing anecdotes and episodes into a narrative whole.⁴⁸

Gesaku is translated as “playful writing.” It refused to be pedantic or introspective. *Gesaku* writers did not conform to any authoritarian formulas of fictional narrative and instead playfully structured their stories, if any, to meet the demands of the general audience. However, at the same time, it also exhibited a general trend of resistance and criticism against feudal restriction, which Miyoshi finds “playful sophistication” and therefore suggests *gesaku* as an evidence of postmodern culture before the Meiji restoration.

Moreover, Miyoshi also argues that the I-novel (*Shishōsetsu* 私小説), a dominant form of the modern Japanese literature from 1890 to 1970, was also different from modern novels of the West. In the West, an author and the narrator in a story are considered to be two different entities, or at the very least, the author is expected to distance himself from the narrator so that the narrator within the work is perceived as the sole entity of leading a storyline. A work of modern fiction in the West is read within the frame of the work itself, and therefore, the narrator, rather than the author, becomes the center of focus. However, I-novel is completely opposite:

⁴⁷ Miyoshi 1989, pp. 147

⁴⁸ Ibid, pp. 150

...Rather than a “credible fabrication which is yet constantly held up as false,” the *shōsetsu* [Japanese term for a novel] is an incredible fabrication that is nonetheless constantly held up as truthful...Signs of Western high modernism are conspicuously absent. The author’s will is directed to allowing order to emerge between himself, his work, and his reader, rather than within the work itself.⁴⁹

The fact that the I-novel can be perceived as a semi-autobiographical novel indicates that it is after all a “modern novel” because it deals with the writer’s psychological state and their individuality, rather than pedantic, moral messages or entertainment purposes in the pre-modern period. In a way, it is a more direct way of exposing oneself to the public than how the authors position themselves in the West, and therefore can be perceived as more “modern.” However, there is no doubt that the methodology of Japanese authors until 1970 was distinct from that of their western counterparts, posing the question of whether the standard of “western modernity” at all applies to the modern Japanese literature.

However, according to Miyoshi, this discrepancy between the West and Japan disappeared after the arrival of consumerism in the 1970s.⁵⁰ The end of the student movements coincided with the decline of the postwar Japanese literature, and instead popular literature genres, such as mystery, romance, detective novels, and SF, filled the top sales ranks of the bookstores. Highly commercialized novels were mass produced in order to meet the demands of a variety of readerships, and I-novel lost its popularity, especially among the younger generation. Geared towards an advanced capitalist society, the publishers and the readers alike consolidated the narrative culture of consumerism, a snapshot of which is expressed in *Nantonaku kurisutaru* by Tanaka Yasuo 田中康夫, filled with brand names, excessive foreign terms, and listless adolescents. From the consumerism culture, Japanese text culture began to resemble that of other Western capitalist countries.

According to Ōe Kenzaburō, the Japanese novels, which he calls *junbungaku*

⁴⁹ Miyoshi 1989, pp. 155.

⁵⁰ Ibid, pp. 156

純文学, are essentially dying due to the lack of new cultural theories suitable for Japan. With rapid economic recovery, the era of postwar Japan had ended before 1970. The objective of the postwar writers was “to relativize the value of the emperor, who had had absolute power, and to liberate the Japanese from the curse of the emperor system,”⁵¹ but the consumerism society came to replace the swirling political ideologies of the 60s, including the purpose of *junbungaku*, and began its decline. Possibly in reaction to the political years during which the youth failed to achieve something meaningful, the younger generation especially became apolitical, showing no interests in the Japanese literature and its purpose as well. There was an influx of new cultural theories by young intellectuals to remedy the situation, such as Asada Akira’s *Structure and Power*, but because they more or less summarized the new cultural theories of the West, they did not fit with the Japanese society. Ōe comments as follows:

...[Y]oung intellectuals during the late 1970s and early 1980s felt the decline of Japanese literature most keenly and fell head over heels for new cultural theories from Europe and America...However, enthusiasm for new cultural theories was short-lived, coming and going after only a short craze...In the context of the cultural climate of Japan, the new cultural theories, as one organic part of literature decline, fell prey to the general flow toward decay faster than literature.⁵²

The attempt of the young intellectual did not bear any fruitful results, and continued the decline of the Japanese literature. In other words, Japan proved to be incapable of establishing its own cultural theories, and the younger generation gradually detached themselves from the pure Japanese literature. Ōe mentions Haruki Murakami, who is considered a postmodern author, and his popularity among the younger generation but finds him to be outside the realm of *junbungaku*. He believes that there is a wide gap between Murakami’s works and the postwar literature, and the future of *junbungaku* is dependent on

⁵¹ Ōe 1989, pp. 198

⁵² Ibid, pp. 207

finding the missing link between them.⁵³

Both Miyoshi and Ōe briefly mention postmodernism, but their stances are skeptical. Miyoshi discusses postmodernism in accordance with the novels born in the consumerism society. The fact that they are “merged with the international mass phenomena” can be “possibly” called postmodern, but it does not satisfy the criterion of temporal specificity due to the existence of *gesaku* in the Edo period. In the case of Ōe, his stance is not clear on postmodernism, but considering his lamentation of *junbungaku*’s decline and the failure of new cultural ideas, including postmodernism, he does not seem to be positive regarding postmodernism in Japan. This also comes from his stance on Haruki Murakami’s postmodern works, which he believes are establishing their own territory in the international scale, not on Japan.

Knowing these views of the scholars, it is hard to position the light novel in the scale of linear progression of pre-modern, modern, and postmodern literature in Japan. One may argue that the light novel is a return to one of the pre-modern narratives, *gesaku*, the free-spirited, playful genre of literature, which Miyoshi asserts as postmodern literature in the pre-modern period. The light novel contains a wide variety of works, just as described in the quote above, and it is certainly more playful and parodic than any existing literary genres in Japan today. However, when it comes to “playful sophistication,” there is no common theme of the light novel, such as resistance to feudal restriction of *Gesaku*. It is hard to call the otaku’s fantasizing within the light novel “sophisticated,” but close to a self-centered and pleasure-driven activity. Therefore, the light novel is not a return to pre-modern literature, or at least not to *Gesaku*. It is impossible for the light novel to be included in the category of modern Japanese literature, or *junbungaku* because the only resemblance between them is frequent usage of the first-person view and the fact that they both use the Japanese language.

⁵³ Ibid 1989, pp. 200

Again there is no common theme or “objective” of the postwar literature in the light novel, but the otaku’s consumption pattern. Then, can the light novel be included in the last category, postmodern? To answer this question, I like to introduce the otaku’s reproductive activity, *niji sousaku* 二次創作 and *dōjinshi* 同人誌.

The previous section discussed about the narrative structure of the light novel and the third generation’s attempt to escape reality through identification of the protagonists with themselves. Such interaction of readers and viewers may occur in any kinds of media cultures, but the third generation otaku does not settle for this type of interaction. They go further, parodying and recreating not only the light novels but also manga and anime.

The reproduction works, or more generally referred to as *niji sousaku*, are categorized into four types. The first two types are generally called *dōjinshi*, or self-published works, but there are two types of storylines. The first type of *dōjinshi* is a side story to the original work. This usually depicts a story that is not explicitly described or skipped over in the original, and therefore does not conflict with the stories of the original. Second, *dōjinshi* also takes a form of erotic comics. In American term, these works are “slash fiction,” but in the case of the otaku culture, the sexual relationships include homosexual, heterosexual, Incest, bestiality, and etc. This type most likely breaks the original work’s settings. It is a form in which the sexual desires of the producers and the consumers materializes in the most extreme form, and in some cases, these works only employ characters’ looks, eradicating the personality and/or settings of the characters altogether. The third type of the *niji sousaku* is mad video. The mad video producers utilize more than one original work, for examples, by attaching a song of a particular work to the other or by editing scenes of two works into one. The last type is costume play. Costume players imitate the characters of anime, manga, games, or light novels by wearing clothes of the characters and mimicking their behaviors. For this particular type, it has developed into the theater and the dance where professionals

impersonate manga characters.

Currently, one major offline place and two online sites exist for releasing of these reproductive works. The most representative event is comic market コミックマーケット, the largest, self-published work fair in the world. The comic market is held twice a year at Tokyo International Exhibition Center, or otherwise known as Tokyo Big Sight. The event is held for three days, and an average of 35,000 sellers and more than 500,000 attendees participate in this event. In addition, on the Internet, NicoNico Douga (www.nicovideo.jp) and Pixiv also function as homes to the producers of the reproductions; the former mainly deals with videos and music, and the latter with pictures and novels.

These reproductive works are useful to visualize the consumption style of the third generation otaku; in these works, they materialize their desires much more in a direct and aggressive way. The erotized manga based on the aforementioned *Haruhi Suzumiya series* is a good example. Titled *The Obedience of Haruhi Suzumiya* (Suzumiya Haruhi no Hukuzyū 涼宮ハルヒの服従), this *dōjinshi* shows all characters in the original series, but their behaviors take an extreme form. In the original, the main heroine plays pranks on another female sub-character Asahina from time to time; however, the reproductive work goes beyond pranks, close to extreme case of the same-sex sexual harassment. The *dōjinshi* also depicts the protagonist Kyon as a master of the main heroine Haruhi in a rather unconventional ways, perpetrating a rape as well. In the previous section, I argued that the narrative structure of the light novel consists of the reality and the fantasy; however, in the reproductive works, the third generation otaku minimize the former and maximize the latter. In other words, *The Obedience of Haruhi Suzumiya* materializes the fantasy of the third generation otaku in a concrete form. The producers break down the original work and restructure the characters based on their own tastes in order to expand their fantasy. In the original, the third generation otaku may have found the love between the protagonist and the

main heroine touching and romantic, but in the reproductive works, they become much more aggressive in expressing their sexual desires and enjoy the visual representation of their fantasy.

Therefore, the light novel, one of the medium enjoyed by the third generation otaku, is a cultural evidence of the postmodern Japanese society. The relationship between the light novel and the third generation represents an isolated world from the mainstream society, in which they develop their own moe culture, the unique narrative structure, and the reproductive *dōjinshi* culture. The light novel places itself out of the realm of *junbungaku* and establishes its own world by corresponding to the demands of the third generation otaku. This is a realm completely separate from both the postwar Japanese literature and the works of Murakami Haruki. It neither intends to be a link between them nor belongs to either of them. One may assume the position of the light novel within the popular genres because the boundary between them has been blurred in the last decade. Several popular fictions, not labeled light novel, had a cover page of a manga-style illustration; the representative example would be *Moshi Kōkō Yakyū no Joshi Manager ga Drucker no "Management" o Yondara* もし高校野球の女子マネージャーがドラッカーの『マネジメント』を読んだら.

Nonetheless, the realm of the light novel is unique in that the third generation otaku not only consume but also recreate in order maximize their individual satisfaction.

In the contemporary literary culture, the readers positioned themselves against an author and analyzed the author's intention; however, in the postmodern society, the people position themselves in relation to no one and nowhere; they become the autonomous subjects who determine their own positions. The consumption style of the third generation otaku resembles this trait of the postmodern society. Each individual restructures self-identity in accordance with his or her "tastes" or interests; in the case of the third generation otaku, these are the fantasies presented by animes, manga, games, and finally, the light novel culture. In

the light novel, the third generation otaku abandon the contemporary method of reading novels, read the light novel in their own perspective, and reproduce their fantasy as *dōjinshi*. They create the world they want to indulge in, disregarding the values of the contemporary society and the mainstream society.

Chapter 3 Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the relationship between the light novel narrative and the third generation otaku. The light novel narrative consists of two parts: Real and Fantasy. Through the real features, “high school setting,” “ordinary, listless protagonist,” and “maltreatment by women,” the third generation otaku immerse themselves in the stories by identifying themselves with protagonists whose lives resemble the otaku’s. The fantasy features of the light novel narrative, “the heroic protagonist,” “a loving heroine,” “extraordinary events” give the third generation otaku strong catharsis which they cannot experience in the real world, emotional comfort, and sexual fantasy. These two features essentially work together for the otaku deploy themselves in the light novel story, and I assert this unique light novel narrative style as the essence of the light novel, disregarding Azuma’s database as merely a tool for effective commercialization of the light novel.

In the last section, I discussed about the reproductive works of the otaku based on the original works which include the light novel and other otaku cultures. I suggest it as a postmodern consumption behavior because the eroticized manga function to maximize their own desire and interests, disregarding old authoritarian figures of modernity or even social values of the mainstream society. The otaku do not position themselves within the ideologies of the nation or local communities; instead, they find themselves at nowhere. I conclude that the light novel is postmodern phenomenon because it establishes the world of its own with these aids of the self-orienting third generation otaku.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I discussed about a fairly new medium in the otaku culture called the light novel. In chapter 1, for the understanding of the medium, the discussion about the otaku culture the light novel belongs preceded the information about the otaku. Following Azuma's notion of three generations of otaku, I introduced each generation's characteristic and the changing environments around them from the 70s to the present. Whereas the first and second generations of the otaku focused on accumulating knowledge, the third generation developed highly individualistic otaku cultures, one of which is the moe culture. With the development of the Internet technology, they became much more secular than their previous generations, internalizing the pain from social discrimination.

In chapter 2, I introduced the light novel and its characteristics in details. I demonstrated that although the light novel takes a form of "novel," the manga-styled narration and illustrations give us an impression that the light novel resembles or at least shares the characteristics of the manga culture. In addition, the media mix of the light novel was discussed. Most of the popular titles of the light novel have been transformed into anime, manga, game, and other media in the otaku culture. This proves not only the light novel's cultural affinity with them, but also the light novel's reciprocity with these media.

In chapter 3, I discussed about the narrative culture of the light novel and its interaction with the third generation otaku. The narrative of popular titles includes unique elements, categorized as either "real" or "fantasy." The features of "real" help the third generation otaku identify themselves with the protagonist and recognize the stories as their own. The "fantasy" features give gratifying catharsis and sexual fantasy which the third generation otaku desire from the light novel. Based on this narrative culture, I critiqued Azuma's theory and his stance on the essence of the light novel. I accepted the database as a helpful tool for the commercialization of the light novel, but rejected it as the essence and

instead proposed the narrative style as the essence of the light novel culture.

The last section of chapter 3 talked about the reproductions the otaku make and their implications for the contemporary Japanese society. Using the theoretical frameworks of modernity and postmodern, I discussed about the importance of the otaku's reproductions and how they illustrate the third generation otaku's postmodern consumption activity. They no longer demand pedagogical, vertical relationship between authorities and the general population. They position themselves following their own interests and pleasures, but as a result they become more closed and atomized.

For further research, there are numerous topics of research that can follow, regarding the light novel as well as the otaku culture. The light novel has, as I mentioned frequently, many exceptions that do not follow the characteristics listed in the chapter 2 and the popular narrative style in the chapter 3. There are light novels that specifically target the female readership, and they employ a completely different method to draw the attentions of the readership. Also, some light novel authors play around the boundaries among the light novel, the pure literature, and the popular literature, as if claiming that such categorization is futile. For the otaku culture, much more in-depth analysis of the third generation is desirable. They are atomized and closed; however, they do make connections with the world and sometimes produce rather creative pieces of art. The future of this generation is under a big question mark at this point. In addition, there is already a discussion about the next generation of the otaku culture, the fourth generation otaku who were born in the 90s. They share many traits with the third generation otaku, but the explosion of various Internet communities and the much less discrimination from the mainstream society is creating another unique consumption culture. The discussion of the otaku culture based on this generation will bring another insight to the contemporary Japanese society.

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