Manga and Education: A Study of *Gakuen Manga*

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to inquire into the relation between *manga* and education. It centres on *gakuen manga*, a genre of *manga* whose protagonists are actively teachers or students. Particularly important to this inquiry is the surge of *gakuen manga* from the late 1970s, which occurred in conjunction with the implementation of new educational policies in response to widespread concern about the socialization of youth in Japan. This study thus addresses the emergence and transformation of the *gakuen* genre as well as the key debates and historical transformations in the Japanese education system, such as the *tsumekomi* or cram system, the *yutori* or relaxed system, and finally the move toward *ikiru chikara* or "life skills." Central to this study is a careful reconsideration of *gakuen manga* and other school life *manga* for the ethical insight they provide into the problems, conflicts, and contradictions encountered by students in contemporary Japan.

Abstrait

Le but de cette étude est de s'interroger sur la relation entre le manga et l'éducation. Il est centré sur le *manga gakuen*, un genre de *manga* dont les protagonistes sont des enseignants ou des étudiants actifs. La poussée du *manga gakuen* de la fin des années 1970, qui s'est produite parallèlement à la mise en œuvre de nouvelles politiques éducatives en réponse à la préoccupation généralisée de la socialisation des jeunes au Japon, est particulièrement importante pour cette enquête. Cette étude aborde donc l'émergence et la transformation du genre *gakuen* ainsi que les débats clés et les transformations historiques dans le système éducatif japonais, comme le système *tsumekomi* ou "cram, " le système *yutori* ou "détendu, " et enfin le mouvement vers l'*ikiru chikara* ou "compétences de vie" au centre de cette étude est une reconsidération prudente de *manga gakuen* et d'autres *manga* de la vie scolaire pour la perspicacité éthique qu'ils fournissent dans les problèmes, les conflits et les contradictions rencontrées par les étudiants dans le Japon contemporain.

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Introduction

While Japanese education is well known worldwide by its fashionable multitude of iconic school uniforms and a strict learning environment, many of us only have glimpses of what student life is like in Japan. In many cases but not limited to *manga* fandom this exposure takes its roots through a vast multi-genre school themed content. Yet it is only recently that the uses of its pure entertainment value as a popular medium has been recognized and explored beyond the confines of story-telling. As one such example, in recent years there has been an increase of *manga* use for promotion of tourism by using real locations as the setting, as in the example of *Flying Witch* about a witch-in-training set in Hirosaki city in Aomori prefecture, as well as *Minami Kamakura Kōkō Joshi Jitensha-Bu* following the activities of the cycling club set in Kamakura city in Kanagawa prefecture. In the same way, *manga* may offer an insightful point of view on school life. Whether through critique, endorsement or anything in between, the sheer exposure can be a powerful tool that through its reflection on social issues can be directly or indirectly of educational value is worth exploring further. It connects the real world of education in Japan, the very real challenges faced by policy makers, the schools left with implementing them over extended periods of time, as well as the media focus and public debates that continually demand and reshape the very essence of education and the school environment with an outlet of artistic expression where those conflicts manifest in many different ways that remain unfailingly relatable.

Despite *manga* having already received a lot of analytical attention, through debates by scholars like Jean-Marie Bouissou, Adam L. Kern and Frederik L. Schodt as to its origins or precursors, as well as the contemporary comics analysis by Thomas Lamarre, Scott McCloud,

Eiji Ōtsuka, Yū Itō and Tomoyuki Omote, that aim at deconstructing the internal forces and meanings that produce specific effects on its audience, the fact that it has already been used as part of the educational apparatus for decades had been given limited attention by Hiroyuki Yamada and to which Itō refers to as a "blind spot of *manga* culture and studies."[1] In the sense of a direct tool for educational purposes, *manga* styled drawings can be found in a plethora of manuals, textbooks, instruction books and guides. They are not limited to occasional illustrations and single or even few panel intermissions as a stylization choice for a text heavy classroom textbook, but also include full *manga* from cover to cover as well. These and other *manga* that were specifically made as direct study supplements are referred to as *gakushū* (learning) *manga,* being highly popular with parents who wish to incite early learning in their children, but also among students who prefer a quicker read of a *manga* as opposed to a full text only book. Yet recently there is another, more indirect use of popular *manga* that has become a household staple. For those who read *manga* or watch anime based on *manga* nowadays, it is impossible to go a season without multiple titles that slightly touch or completely revolve around the thematic of school life, referred to as *gakuen* (school) *manga*. Though that is not unusual considering Japan like many other countries institutes compulsory education, ensuring that a large part of youth is experienced from the confines of a public or private school, having not only a higher emphasis on this part of life within a school environment but also having it bear more influence within a plotline of *manga* is relatively recent. What they reflect and focus on however, is not simply school life as part of the story to make it interesting or unique, nor is it there simply to

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[1] Itō, Yū. Global Manga Research Vol.3: *Introductory Research of "Learning Manga"* Education, Character, Reality (Kyoto, 2013) 201

evoke a sense of commonplace familiarity to appeal to a broader reader base or to follow the established genre standards. Likewise in parallel, much like this rapidly expanding phenomenon, very little attention has been paid to the new ministry goals that nonetheless exert a tremendous impact on the role schools have in both their curricular and non-curricular capacities. Yet political forces and public debates, specifically the public opinions they generate, pressure for policy changes and continue to invoke change in the midst of conflicting agendas for socio-cultural preservation and economic sustainability.

My own experience teaching in Japan coincided with the end of the adjustment period from *yutori* (relaxed) education to *datsuyutori* (de-relaxed) education in 2010-2013. Toward the end of my contract, the media was increasingly focused on renewed discussions on ethics, teacher training and the various pros and cons of *bukatsudō* (school clubs or extracurricular activities). The timing was not only due to the upcoming changes to the system including the re-instatement of moral education, but also the incident on December 23, 2012 involving the suicide of a student. The captain of the basketball team in Osaka's Sakuranomiya Senior High School, had committed suicide after then-coach Hajime Komura publically and repeatedly slapped him and berated him to punish him for mistakes he made during training matches several days earlier.[2] I recall frequently the mention of caution and understanding towards students in staff meetings throughout that term and the following one as well. Although in the case of my placement school there was a near perfect club attendance and only two students in that entire period that were largely absent from both school and *bukatsudō*, the dangers of mishandling situations were frequent topics during meetings.

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[2] "Student commits suicide after being beaten by school basketball coach." 2013. *Japan Today Newspaper* January 9: https://www.japantoday.com

Due to this incident, and the minimal punishment ruling resulting in three years, payment of damages to the parents in the sum of 75 million yen, the decades earlier irreproachable and rarely questioned role and responsibility of *bukatsudō* stood at the fore of public debate. Since then, when addressing the negative aspects of clubs in specific incidents, the media adopted the term "black *bukatsudō*" reminiscent of "black *kaisha* (companies)" where abuse and exploitation of usually "young" employees is involved to highlight the similarities. It is in this context that I began to wonder if the reason why *gakuen manga* became so popular and grew into a well known genre has anything to do with a desire to expand the discourse on education through alternate forums, using *manga* as an easily accessible medium with a vast audience. In such a way does *manga* also provide an outlet for the then missing ethical critique that can be exposed and engaged with due to the power of what Lamarre terms the site of pure immanence or absolute de-territorialization in the mode of organisation (of vision, knowledge, and community) in the context of otaku culture.[3] It is within this framework that questions arose. For example, when did *gakuen manga* start to really take off as a genre and why? Was it a gradual or sudden growth? Are there any connections to school life or school reforms in recent years that aided in this popularization? What issues in the public debate are at stake and how are they represented or tackled through *manga*?

The aim of this work therefore is to trace and delineate the formation of *gakuen manga*, to understand its connection to education and determine what are the possible purposes and visible possibilities and outcomes of this relationship.

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[3] Lamarre, Thomas. *Introduction to Otaku Movement.* Animation. (Special issue of EnterText 4.1., 2004) 154

Chapter 1

Education through Manga

This study offers an inquiry into the relation between *manga* and education. It focuses in particular on the emergence of *gakuen manga*, a genre of *manga* whose protagonists are actively teachers or students throughout the series. While the study looks at *gakuen manga* over a period of roughly sixty years, between 1957 and 2017, it was in the late 1990s and early 2000s that this "school genre" of *manga* boomed in numbers and popularity, and arguably came into its own as a recognizable genre. Interesting enough, this boom in *gakuen manga* corresponded historically with transformations in the actual structures and goals of Japanese high school education. What is more, *gakuen manga* address many of the problems and conflicts within Japanese school system that educational reforms aimed to address. As such, *gakuen manga* offer another perspective on the goals and aspirations of high school education.

In this chapter, I propose to provide some basic background for understanding *manga* and education in Japan, and the relation between them. I will begin with a brief history of *manga* in postwar Japan and then turn to *gakushū manga* (educational *manga* or *manga* intended for educating) and *gakuen manga* (the school genre, usually deemed to be for entertainment). Finally, I will introduce some of the key policy changes and debates in Japanese education to pave the way for the fuller discussion of implications of the emergence of school genre at the turn of the century.

The rise of *manga* culture

Although there are various historical precedents for the aesthetics and politics of *manga*, it is only in postwar Japan that the "*manga industry*" developed, allowing for the mass-producing

and widely circulated *manga* that are under consideration in this study. The success of *manga* in general and one of the primary points of departure for its proliferation into social and political aspects of Japanese society lies in no small part in what Frederick Schodt describes as the transformation of manga as a medium for children into the mainstream in the 1950s. He gives stylistic credit to Osamu Tezuka for the introduction of decompressed storylines using cinematic techniques applied to comics, which introduced new expressive possibilities into the medium. Such factors, in conjunction with usage of cheap paper and monochrome printing, enabled the '*manga industry'* to grow exponentially.[4] Of course, in postwar Japan, having such an inexpensive commodity ensured its success to some degree, but it was also the emotional comfort afforded by this new form of cinematic drawing style that let *manga* artists develop psychological and emotional depth through their story lines and characters as well as the all encompassing subject matter celebrating the ordinary, which became the social pillars of its appeal.[5] By the 60s and 70s, *manga* had developed a less defined borderline between adult and children's material when compared to other media.[6]

The history of divergence of *gakushū manga* from popular *manga* and its long-term position in relation to academic aims paves the way for understanding the underlying groundwork that allowed *gakuen manga* to so faithfully address pressing social issues and rise in popularity in a short amount of time. The emergence and rise of *gakushū manga* reflect the early debates in the 1960s and the appropriation of *manga*'s framework of representation towards purely informative and educational goals. In contrast, *gakuen manga* address moral and ethical

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[4] Schold, Frederick. *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga.* (Berkley, Stone Bridge Press, 1996)

[5] Ibid., 27-28

[6] Ibid., 53

implications of social and educational realities of the late 1990s. The key differences between them lie in their view of the value of entertainment. Proponents of *gakushū manga* see the entertainment value of the medium of *manga* as a hindrance to the authenticity of acting as a supplement to academic material and a threat to the supposition of authority of adult culture and obligations over the impermanency of child culture. Proponents of *gakuen manga* see advantages in its popularity and "relatability" (easy to relate to), for purposes of highlighting, defining, critiquing and debating social and ethical values.

From *gakushū* to *gakuen manga*

Usually, when people think about the relation between *manga* and education, it is educational *manga* or *manga* designed for educational purposes (*gakushū manga*) which comes to mind. Yū Itō points first to *manga* style learning materials in the form of four-panel East Japan Primary School Newspaper circa 1939 that continued to be published until 1944. It covered curricular contents taught in schools such as Japanese language, mathematics, science, and humanities, providing a first visual alternative to traditional textbook material.[7] This comic, however, was a limited publication; therefore when examining *gakushū manga* as a useful learning supplement, the post-war mass consumption and rising popularity of *manga* in general has to be taken into consideration as a possible catalyst for the expansion of the medium into alternative uses. According to Hiroyuki Yamada, the catalyst making the true convergence between the world of *manga* and the world of education possible, started with the emergence of the *manga* generation in the 1960s. This postwar generation was the first to transition from child to adult in the context of a considerable expansion of both anime and *manga* into common

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[7] Itō, Global Manga Research, 206

consumable products, which in turn called into question the necessity of "graduating from *manga*."[8] Yamada describes this notion of graduation in terms of considering the transition from children's culture to adult culture to be a natural part of growing up and becoming a respectable member of society. He also suggests that the principal point of divergence between past debates and those of the 1960s comes of the fact that popular *manga* as a medium for children and youth has no such division in the first place. Even should one try to remove "child culture," there is no other original state where "adult culture" can be covered or represented differently in *manga*.

As a result, the debates of the 1960s not only created a framework for shaping the *gakushū manga* to come, but also forged a path for future debates about the value and credibility of popular entertainment *manga* in education by inscribing a division within *manga* culture. What Itō classifies as *gakushū manga* became established as a grey zone of *manga* culture because "learning *manga* is defined as a child-oriented medium prepared by the 'adult' in order to gain information and knowledge to live the 'adult' society," which presupposes a graduation from the "introductory book" to the real "adult culture" of scientific books and literature.[9]

In essence, the goal of *gakushū manga* is to downplay the entertainment value inherent in the popular and therefore "child culture" component from the *manga* as a medium, while retaining the educational component of textbooks in a visually appealing framework of image centric, visual information. The mass distribution and consumption of this new type of *manga* begun with the publication of the Japanese History (*Nihon no Rekishi*) series spanning twelve volumes, published by Shūeisha Publishers in 1968, and later expanded into four major series including the Historical Biography (*Jinbutsu-den*) series in 1978, World History (*Sekaishi*) in

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[8] Yamada, Hiroyuki. *How Have Manga Been Told?: Reading the Children's Essay*, Edited by: Otani Toshitoshi (World Thinker, 2003) 55-74

[9] Itō, Global Manga Research, 208

1983 and Chinese History (*Chūgokushi*) in 1987. Since then, many other publishers and brands have moved manga into domain of other post-secondary subjects such as technology, science and economics. One of the best known and widely circulated educational series today is the "Understanding through *Manga*" (*manga de wakaru*) series, which spans curricular subjects ranging from secondary school all the way through specialized technical school and university material. As impressive as its range of subject is its popularity: it can be found in any book store in the country. It is this long-term widespread expansion and proliferation of manga in general that encouraged the market differentiation that eventually set *gakushū manga* apart from popular *manga*, or, as Yū Itō puts it, *manga* aimed at enlightenment versus *manga* for pure entertainment.[10]

The first distinctive criterion comes in the form of a production committee made up of mainly university professors and intellectuals who are familiar with the subjects to be taken up that decide the composition and direction of the content. This stage often results in a rejection of any creative input that would detract, impede, contradict or overly distort the educational validity or accepted academic accuracy of the content. While this process necessarily does not necessarily lead to the complete rejection of certain styles, it nonetheless demands a wide-ranging reconsideration of received *manga* conventions. Because of this criterion, Itō expresses hope that *gakushū manga* will provide a better historical account of the atomic bomb at Hiroshima than the re-published serialization of *Barefoot Gen* in 1977 and 1982. Originally written by Hiroshima survivor Keiji Nakazawa and published by *Shōnen Jump* in 1973, *Barefoot Gen* is, for Itō, an example of a *manga* that was simply re-published and not remade. In other words, it kept its original shōnen *manga* conventions even while being re-published by *gakushū*

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[10] Lamarre, Thomas. *Manga* Bomb: Between the Lines of *Barefoot Gen'Comics Worlds & the World of Comics*, ed. Jacqueline Berndt (Kyoto: Kyoto Seika University, 2010) 264

publishers such as *Bunka Hyōron* or *Kyōiku Hyōron.* His and Omote's main criticism lies in a necessity for a distinction to be made between entertainment and education; or between comic art and the art of the witness. They worry that fascination with war necessarily runs counter to serious history, possibly undermining the validity of pro-peace or anti-war statements in popular *manga*."[11] Yet it is within this very criticism that we can observe a commitment to academic accuracy begins to take on moral connotation that may clash with other values, such as emotional expression.

The second criterion for *gakushū manga* is as much a matter of the artistic choices that work within the rules set by the committee as it is a matter of the collaboration among numerous artists and illustrators. Since reading *manga* for its education value represents a different mode of learning than that of the written word in a standard textbook, the lack of excess and an honest straightforwardness, which Art Spiegelman claims comics need in order to "equal to the task of bearing historical witness,"[12] must be outset by a more relatable, emotional, or softer delivery of content that meets a younger reader half way between the world of comics and the world of textbooks. Reading classics such as *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari*) or going over the events, strategies and major players in the Genpei War (1180-1185) in order to advance their curricular knowledge can be an arduous task for a teenager. Yet a *manga* rendition like Waki Yamato's *Asakiyumemishi – Genji monogatari* can be read quickly while imparting the general understanding of the story in a format that is both popular and familiar to school aged readers, which explains its popularity from the first publication in 1980, and which led to its republication in 1988, 2001, 2003, 2008, 2012 and 2016 by Kōdansha. Similarly, the aforementioned

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[11] Ibid., 264-265

[12] Ibid., 265

"Understand Through *Manga*" series, by Ryō Sunasaki and published in 2011, was followed by "Read Through *Manga*" (*Manga de yomu*), created by Yōko Ogawa and Tsubasa Nanaki and published in 2014. This trend suggests that the demand for *manga*-based materials to supplement existing textbooks has not waned in the least over the last four decades.

Despite the criticism by Itō and Omote, what makes *Barefoot Gen* stand out as an earlier exception, or perhaps a bridge between the world of entertainment *manga* and educational *manga* lies in the fact that the "power of the *manga* derives from its combination of historical witnessing and the medium of comics."[13] It can be read equally as a popular entertainment *manga* and as an eye witness account and which "depicts an event that is often deemed to be unrepresentable in its violence and trauma."[14] It is worth to note that this same ability to represent the unrepresentable can be equally applied to the moral advantages of using *manga* in classrooms. Which is to say; while the ethical responsibility of a teacher to impart both knowledge and skills is even more relevant now that new educational reforms demand ever more encompassing courses of study, the role of "moral studies" had also been re-evaluated. In this new curriculum, exposing younger audiences to traumatic events such as the aftermath of the atomic bomb, for example, might meet with opposition due to the graphic violence depicted in archived photos and films. In such a context, having a *manga* such as *Barefoot Gen* as an aid to a history class eliminates the need for such concern.

These two criteria, which allow *gakushū manga* to remain true to their curricular subject's objectivity, nevertheless remain centered on facts and procedures; they take on an explanatory tone that makes them suitable for imparting factual knowledge of the sciences and

[13] Ibid., 265

[14] Ibid., 262-265

technical or procedural learning. These criteria, however, hamper manga's ability to engage its audience in the critical thinking processes, or to engage with moral or ethical issues. There is not much room for or need on the part of the reader to engage in an emotional reaction with content that tends toward the mode of generalization that is inherent in conventional pure science curricular subjects. This lack of flexibility in pursuit of maintaining purely educational outcomes has fallen under considerable critique and led to social debates, first in the late 1970s and later at the turn of the millennium, when there were calls to re-evaluate the lack of critical thinking and socially relevant moral issues. In other words, the social understanding of education shifted to acknowledge that it is not only the material that makes for educative value but also the manner of teaching. Using popular manga can allow teachers to address students in a different way and to pose different kinds of questions. Herein lies the potential of *gakuen manga*, but to understand its potential, one must first understand some of the key debates in Japanese education.

Gakuen Manga

The *Manga* College of Japan's Human Academy refers to school themed content simply as school or school life (*gakuen*) *manga*, further subdividing it into the teacher protagonist or student protagonist types of stories. According to the academy, the teacher protagonist subtype may be further subdivided into two major subtypes, one where the teacher is an unlikely character who brutally reforms the school or class, or one who imparts know-how on improving test scores, studying and passing examinations.[15] An example of the first "reform" type is *Great Teacher Onizuka* centered on a former delinquent turned unlikely teacher, Eikichi Onizuka. An example of the "know-how" type is *Dragonzakura* in which a Tokyo University graduate and

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[15] Human Academy – *Manga* College. 2017. http://ha.athuman.com/*manga*/list/column/028708.php

lawyer creates a special class for students to enter Tokyo University. He imparts insider knowledge and disabuses the presumption that such a prestigious establishment is beyond students who attend the "bottom of the barrel" school. In keeping with Itō's contrast between educational and entertainment venues, where *gakushū manga* is specifically designed from the ground up to serve as a learning tool or supplement, *gakuen manga* follows popular shōnen and shōjo *manga* conventions. Nonetheless, in *gakuen manga*, there is a significant potential for exposure to problems facing educators and students alike, regardless of what genre it falls under.

Obviously, since *manga* is a work of fiction and a form of art of storytelling, it may not be verbatim to real life, but there is tremendous potential for using *manga* as an extension to at least provide a platform for a debate or at most aid in promoting certain outcomes and behaviors as well as discouraging others. A study of motivations for reading *manga* in Europe shows that "a significant percentage of respondents (44.5 percent) felt that manga protagonists were 'easy to identify oneself with,' and 36.5 percent thought that manga stories were able to encourage reflection about life and society, and 34 percent also stated that manga characters showed qualities that they as readers would like to have."[16] Although this might not reflect Japanese readership precisely, the focus on school life and social issues related to education in *gakuen manga* clearly provide a forum for reflection on life and society, in a format that allows for identification with a diverse range of characters and their problems.

To expand on this potential of manga, we need to understand its connection to issues relating to real education and the social debates surrounding them. Let me pave the way by considering what makes *Great Teacher Onizuka* a good example of a manga that allows for reflection on issues affecting education, specifically, school violence and delinquency. The

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[16] Bouissou, Jean-Marie. *Manga*: *An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives* Edited by Toni-Johnson Woods (New York , 2010) 261

titular protagonist of *Great Teacher Onizuka* is an avid fan of the longhaired, no-nonsense teacher Kinpachi in the long-running television drama, *3-nen B-gumi no Kinpachi-Sensei*. Both teachers find themselves in charge of a class of troublemakers. The reference to Kinpachi in *Great Teacher Onizuka* takes on additional force because the teacher Onizuka was himself a delinquent, and he would have been attending school during the first season of *Kimpachi* (1979-1980), which dealt with such issues as delinquency, truancy, bullying, bad parenting and student pregnancy. It was also at this time that Japan saw the largest increase in educational levels and standards of living in both rural and urban areas. Lynne Nakano argues:

> The emergence of a diversity of values and lifestyle choices created widespread social anxieties. The media capitalized on these anxieties by focusing on a minority of Japanese youth whose delinquent behavior seemed to contradict the postwar values of educational success, hard work, and commitment to the institutions of school, family, and company… Commentators blamed affluence and modernity for a variety of social and psychological ills among middle-class children including hyper-sensitivity, selfishness, and an inability to withstand hardships resulting in socially dysfunctional behavior such as bullying, violence at school (referring to attacks against teachers), violence at home (referring to violence against mothers), drug abuse, shoplifting, underage girls' selling of a range of sex-related services to adult men (*enjo kōsai*), robbery and minor infractions such as smoking or the altering of school uniforms.[17]

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[17] Nakano, Lynne. *Community Volunteers in Japan: Everyday Stories of Social Change*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2005) 91

These among other themes are frequently addressed in television dramas throughout the 1980s and then migrate to *manga* where they persist throughout the 1990s. These themes are concurrent with growing criticism of earlier models of education. They also add an additional layer of critique, implicitly countering the one-sidedness of discourses related to designing reforms and proposing recommendations, in which actual students had no input. The rise of delinquency is only in part an act of rebellion. It is often the only recourse students have to contest the system, in this case, the system commonly known as "cramming" education, based on cramming for the entrance examinations for high schools and colleges.

Manga and *yutori* education

The late 1970s saw one of the biggest educational reforms in recent times. Lynne Nakano refers to two important shifts that played a major role in rethinking Japanese education. She also notes that these shifts went in somewhat contradictory directions. The first shift entailed the reshaping of the national image into that of an ethnically, socially, and economically homogeneous society. The need for such a national image was spurred in part by rising social affluence and in part by changing formulations of national policy. The second shift lay in the "breakdown of the postwar consensus on economic growth as the primary national goal."[18]

In the case of the former, reflected in cramming education's policies, the ultimate goal of regular education was the university entrance examinations. Methods like introducing a competitive environment on all levels including higher education were deemed necessary to foster homogeneous, compliant, high quality workers. Under the conditions of high economic

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[18] Ibid., 90

growth from the mid-1950s through the 1970s, this educational method was commonplace.[19]

This method was, however, highly critiqued for the way in which it relied on cramming and

memorizing for the sake of passing tests, and excelling only on tests. Because it placed so much

emphasis on memorizing only a vast amount of knowledge, it discouraged the ability to ask even

the most basic analytical questions, and suppressed the creative process inherent to critical

thinking. Similar problems arise around the educational value of *gakushū manga*. Despite their

capacity to impart knowledge on some curricular subjects, they often prove ill suited for moral

and ethical learning. Both the cramming system and *gakushū manga* focus on detached factual

or procedural knowledge. They lack and even tend to suppress empathic, analytical, decision-

making, and judgment-based components.

With respect to the second shift, this educational method created undue stress at a time

when death from overwork (*karōshi*) and suicide from mental stress (*karōjisatsu*) were beginning

to enter public discourse and to be recognized as an epidemic among adult workers.[20] At this

time Japan had entered a relatively affluent period, which invited discussions about the

disadvantages and obsolete nature of the sorts of social pressures that were then common in

education and the workplace. Reflections on the disadvantages of cramming education

eventually led to a decision to dispense with the old models and to move towards newer models

of education with an emphasis on motivating children and students to learn. According to Ken

Terawaki, the Yasuhiro Nakasone cabinet, which promoted the privatization of state enterprises,

also took the first steps in questioning the unilateral decision-making discussions conducted only

by the Ministry of Education. Instead, the Nakasone administration created the extraordinary

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[19] According to d.hatena.ne.jp keyword definition

[20] Nishiyama, Katsuo and Johnson, Jeffrey V. *Karoshi-Death from overwork: Occupational health consequences of the Japanese production management*, 6th draft (1997) http://workhealth.org/whatsnew/lpkarosh.html

education council consisting of private experts established, to be led by the Second Nakasone

Cabinet, which would work alongside the Ministry of Education.[21] Its goal was to "privatize and

liberate public education." Experts hailing from the economic and conservative sectors came to

an agreement and established the educational system that would later serve as the basis for *yutori*

(relaxed) education. The results of trial stage are summarized in the four guidelines that would

form the basis of *yutori* education, such as "principles emphasizing individuality," "transition to

a lifelong learning system," "response to change such as internationalization," and

"informationization."[22]

Needless to say, public acceptance and the implementation of *yutori* depended a great

deal on a critique of the old system, its failures and stagnancy. Principal among its failure was its

inability to produce student who could adapt, due to its reliance on rote memorization. Such a

learning method aimed at producing docile (unquestioning and conformist) yet skilled workers.

It is above all the emphasis on docility and rote memorization that come under attack in

gakuen manga featuring unlikely teachers, such as *Great Teacher Onizuka, Gokusen,*

Dragonzakura and *Hammer Session*, to name a few. The unlikely teachers in these manga range

from the former delinquents featured in *Great Teacher Onizuka* and *Dragonzakura*, to a mafia

family head in *Gokusen*, and a con artist and wanted criminal in *Hammer Session*. Such teachers

are able to compensate for the shortfalls of cramming education due to their street knowledge

and common sense, which has enabled them to carve out their positions in life. When brought

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[21] Terawaki, Ken. *Central Theory Educational reform of MEXT: "Yutori Education" Request of the Times* (The Nippon Foundation Library, 2004) http://nippon.zaidan.info/seikabutsu/2002/01254/contents/732.htm

[22] Terawaki, Ken. "Special Lecture on 'The way of *yutori* education and educational reform: part 1'" 2007. *Asahi Shinbun.* July 14: http://www.asahi.com/edu/university/kougi/TKY200707140244.html

into contact with actual educational setting, such abilities allow them both to surpass and even to subvert and reshape the school system, exposing its inferiority for the world to see.

Nonetheless, for all the praise and hype about *yutori* being a solution, or at least a different course of action for education, such a system was not able to avoid some of the deeper problems plaguing education. Indeed, in some respects, it could be held responsible for making them worse. For one, it soon became clear that, despite calls for "liberating" and "privatizing" the education system, implementing or standardizing any new changes across the entire school system nationwide would be slow and difficult. When it came to the methods of implementation and decisions on materials to be used, these fell into a grey zone where materials and their implementation undergo negotiation at the level of prefecture, or the individual district board of education, or the level of a specific school. Due to the discrepancies arising for internal reasons, some *yutori* policies, such as the Japanese faculty and staff association "five-day system," were only finally fully enacted nationwide in 2003, even though they had proposed together with *yutori* education in 1972. Moreover, although the start of the *yutori* curriculum dates back to 1980 for elementary schools, 1981 for junior high schools and 1982 for high schools, the system changes were also based on grade progression. The switch thus began with first graders in the first year of enforcement, while those in second and third grade continued under the previous educational model. Consequently, the transition was only completed in 1992, 1993, and 1994 for elementary, junior high school and high school, respectively.

According to Yuki Honda from Tokyo University's Education Department, another general criticism of *yutori* education and policies stems from the tendency of the education system to rely too much on abstract symbolism and spiritual positivism in making decisions and

its operating capacity.[23] This overreliance on vague and symbolic terminology also explains, to some degree, the slow implementation of policies. She argues that, in order to prevent education goals from excessively stepping into ideals and personality in the design of the curriculum, the focus of education needs to shift towards evoking in the learner a behavior and thinking based on the acquisition of the necessary knowledge and skills in gradual stages linked to social life. She suggests that nothing short of a new education reform is needed to the main core of the design of the curriculum.[24]

In his study of keywords such as *kosei* (individuality) and *yutori* (low pressure/relaxed), Keita Takayama notes another underlying problem: an ambiguity internal to the meaning of terms. Such terms were first mobilized in progressive political struggles against the Ministry's central control of public education. In order to legitimize more progressive ideas, such terms were used to reform people's common sense about education. But they also tended to naturalize the radical systemic change towards the neo-liberal settlement.[25] This neoliberal bias entailed a slow but definite shift in responsibility for success and failure from the agency of society, education and the governing institutions, towards the individual and their immediate environment.

The consequences of such a shift became evident in the wake of the "Kobe child murders" of March 16 and May 27 of 1997, when a fourteen-year old boy under the alias Seito Sakakibara murdered ten-year old Ayaka Yamashita and eleven-year old Jun Hase. The media

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[23] Honda, Yuki. *How to evaluate "Educational curriculum design with high social reward"* 4th Discussion meeting on educational goals / contents and evaluation based on qualities and abilities to be trained, Delivery materials (Tokyo, 2013) 3

[24] Ibid., 16

[25] Takayama, Keita. *Is Japanese education the "exception"?: examining the situated articulation of neo-liberalism through the analysis of policy keywords* Asia Pacific Journal of Education, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Routledge, 2009) 125

attention and public discourse initially turned towards the parents, singling out mothers as the

culprits to blame. Lynne Nakano makes mention of an article in the weeks following the murder,

"Return the joy of living to children: Flexible parental discipline," which appeared in *Nihon*

Keizai Shinbun on July 6, 1997.[26] The use of the word *oya* (parent) in the headline implies that

mothers are to blame for their inflexible disciplinary practices. Others argued that mothers are

confused about how to raise their children because they are isolated within the confines of the

nuclear family.[27] Others focused on the "self-centered" nature of modern children. Here Nakano

calls attention to another article titled, "Let's get rid of self-centeredness: We need to create an

environment where instincts emerge." In this article, Assistant Professor of Education at

Yamagata University, Haruo Okabayashi, writes, "Today's children think only of themselves.

They lack groups that allow them to develop relationships in which they can express their

instincts. They have become unable to develop deep relationships."[28] Commenting on the crime,

Chiba University educational sociologist Yōichi Akashi argued that today's children exist in

"convenient society's air pocket" in which they can survive on a daily basis without

communicating with other human beings.[29]

Another problem becomes apparent in this context. Although efforts had been made to

lower the number of classes per scholastic year and to create "Comprehensive Learning Time" (a

new subject whose goal was to foster the "ability to think subjectively" through motivation of

teachers and students), these programs were not utilized effectively. In fact, while there were

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[26] Nakano, *Community Volunteers in Japan*, 93

[27] Ibid., 93

[28] Okabayashi, H. "Jiko chū shin nukedasō. Honne dashiaeru kankyō zukuri ga hitsuyō [Let's get rid of self-centeredness. The need to make an environment where true selves emerge]," 1997. *Asahi Shinbun*. July 1.

[29] Nakano, *Community Volunteers in Japan*, 91

schools that used comprehensive learning time meaningfully, there were many cases where they were used for improving academic ability related to purely traditional subjects such as math and science, in effect compensating for the reduced class hours for those subjects. Commentators also pointed out those students with low basic academic skills tend to have low goals. Moreover, the growing disparity between public and private schools, in conjunction with the growing cram school industry, put pressure on some public schools to dispense with the "Comprehensive Learning Time" altogether, despite the Ministry's instructional guidelines.

Nevertheless, the Kobe incident in 1997 created deep social anxiety, which a subsequent incident served to deepen. The "Sasebo slashing" incident of 2004 (*Sasebo Joshikōsei Satsugai jiken*) involved the murder of a fifteen-year old Japanese high school student Aiwa Matsuo by a fifteen-year old female classmate. These incidents led to lowering the legal age of criminal responsibility, because in both cases the perpetrators were deemed to have exhibited "normal" behavior prior to committing the crimes.[30] Even the teachers and friends said the 11-year-old had not shown any signs of trouble. Welfare workers said the girl wept as she repeatedly apologized for the crime. The apparent "invisibility" of the moral deficiencies, or at least the inability of the current system to deal with ethical abnormalities, exerted a counter-pressure against school environment focusing only on the academic scores and standing. This problem spurred the last major policy change to the *yutori* system of education. It encouraged the implementation of what is now included under the *datsuyutori* (de-relaxed) educational umbrella. The watchword of this new push to move beyond an exclusive focus on academic achievement is "the ability to live" (*ikiru-chikara*). Central to this emphasis on the ability to live is a re-instatement of moral education as a subject across all school levels and a creation of a community school model.

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[30] "Japan stunned by schoolgirl stabbing." 2004. *The Telegraph* June 2 http://www.telegraph.co.uk

The Ability to Live

The website for MEXT (The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology or *Monbu-kagaku-shō*) defines *ikiru-chikara* (power to live) with the phrase, "To nurture the ability to live, for the future of children." The website goes on to characterize the new philosophy of education in terms of an emphasis on training children's thinking ability, judgment, and power of expression, in combination with the acquisition of knowledge and skills. It states clearly that future education is neither "relaxed" nor "cramming." The ideal is thus summed up: "We would like children of the next generation to acquire 'the power to live' which is necessary in future society. With that kind of thought, we set the current course of study guidelines. In order to foster 'ability to live' it is important not only for school, but also the home, the community and all of society to co-educate children."[31]

The website statement on "power to live" or "ability to live" tries to find a middle ground between the cramming system based on quantification and the "relaxed" system based on qualitative experiences. It also extends the experience of school life to include a wider range of activities, kinds of interaction, and possibilites for choices. As I will show in the next chapter, this shift coincides with the widespread growth of *gakuen manga*, which increasingly focuses on school life in ever growing detail. What is more, the protagonists of *gakuen manga*, whether teachers or students, enter into an exploration of school life in a manner that seems in alignment with the expectations of the *ikiru-chikara* philosophy: they which test and hone their communication skills, thinking ability, judgment, and expressive power. The mass media

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[31] Japan. Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Source. 2011. Course of guidance "Ikiru Chikara' Delivery materials: 8 http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/new-cs/pamphlet/__icsFiles/afieldfile/2011/07/26/ 1234786_1.pdf

sometimes call this new course of learning "guidance education." In any event, it is clearly designed to find a middle ground between the two prior educative philosophies, namely, *tsumekomi* and *yutori*.

This proposed reform attempts to satisfy the opposing agendas of (1) global competitiveness through skilled workforce (albeit one that is much more flexible and versatile in order to tackle the demands of the changing power paradigms) and (2) the obligation to fother moral and civic values in order to assuage fears of a Japanese identity crisis. MEXT breaks down the proposed guidance process into two stages. First, students are to acquire acquiring basic knowledge and skills. Second, they are to utilize such knowledge and skills to think for themselves, to educate themselves and to develop their *ikiru-chikara*. The goal is to develop a more rounded and comprehensive type of pedagogy, which is also to include "health and physical strength," the development of judgment and self-expression, and the cultivation of a desire for lifelong learning.[32] Insofar as education is to allow for interaction, for two-way relational engagement with school life, this philosophy has the potential to change not only the overall experience but also the perception of education.

Precisely because this philosophy emphasizes a more interactive school life and a movement away from strict regimentation, it has a profound impact on extracurricular activities as well. As it prepared its move towards *datsuyutori* education, MEXT also made an amendment to the curriculum guidelines. It struck the until then mandatory *kurabu katsudo* (club activities) which was included in the primary and junior high curricula until 2003. It replaced them with expanded voluntary *bukatsudō* (extracurricular activities) at junior high and high school levels of

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[32] Japan. Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Source. 2011. "Understanding the New Course of Study" Delivery materials: 4 http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/new-cs/pamphlet/_icsFiles/afieldfile/ 2011/ 03/30/1304395_001.pdf

education.[33] As such, it is no mere coincidence that recent manga devote so much attention to the ways in which students can empower themselves by changing or challenging traditional activities (such as class representatives, student council members, or familiar types of club), opting to pursue increasingly varied interests in the context of increasingly varied types of clubs, events, and activities. It is worthwhile, then, to consider why participation in extracurricular activities has not experienced any significant decline, despite this transformation.

Peter Cave's account of the role of clubs in Japanese education provides some insight. He calls attention to three discourses on clubs, the first "drawing heavily on *seishin kyōiku* ideas, the second emphasizing the broader socializing role of the club, and the third more influenced by liberal beliefs about individualism and freedom."[34] Needless to say, such discourses also apply to other areas of school life, especially those that entail sharing responsibilities, such as student council, student-teacher relations, and peer-to-peer interactions. What distinguished Cave's account is the emphasis he places on the role of extracurricular activities. Prior accounts of education, as with Thomas P. Rohlen's study, considered the construction of the curriculum to be the key to understudying education, ignoring extracurricular activities. Cave persuasively argues that clubs play as important a role in establishing the school's order of things, such as routines, patterns of participation, the promotion of mutual attachment and shared responsibility within the group, which are in evidence elsewhere in Japanese society.[35]

I fully agree with Cave's assessment that both curricular and extracurricular formations serve to shape the overall civic and behavioral education. But I feel that the non-curricular

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[33] Niki, Yukio. *Study on educational effect of club activities in junior high school* (Waseda University, 2010) 177

[34] Cave, Peter. *Bukatsudō: The Educational Role of Japanese School Clubs*, The Journal of Japanese Studies 30: 2 (2004) 395

[35] Ibid., 383

should be extended beyond the received activities called *bukatsudō*, to include student

committees, councils, projects and other groups and activities for managing school life. The

changes proposed by MEXT also serve as a reminder that educational problems stemming from

past generations have not been completely dealt with. This is why MEXT wishes to re-instate

morals and ethics class as a regular subject, with an emphasis on the social obligation to co-

educate children.

In the next chapters, I will show how *gakuen manga* prove insightful, not only by

bringing these issues not only to the fore, but also dealing with them without censuring

possibilities in advance. As such, I wish to conclude this section on education by considering

some of the potential drawbacks of three benefits identified by Cave in the context of the

expanded role given to *bukatsudō* and *kurabu katsudō*. In particular, Cave credits *seishin kyōiku*

(building character) with helping to "socialize children into the hierarchical, self-disciplined

behavior demanded by adult life" through its stress on perseverance through hardship as a path to

maturity based on a "set of ideas and practices of learning and human development that date to

the Meiji period or before."[36] Building character through adversity is indeed a useful educational

tactic, but only so long as there is moderation between its intended role of developing deeper

thinking and the support Keith Sawyer calls instructional scaffolding that was originally inspired

by Vygotsky's Proximate Zone of Development. Moderation, then, entails a firm understanding

of the motivational role of leadership and the proper application of corrective measures in a

supportive and meaningful way rather than simply following authoritative directions. In other

words, if there is not a balancing force based on proper and ethical judgment exercised by the

advisor, the senior members and the junior members in tandem, it is exceedingly easy for the

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[36] Ibid., 385

application of "adversity" to turn into systemic abuse and harassment. Cave, for instance, acknowledges that some of his interviewees suggested that bullying usually resulted from interpersonal friction or jealousy between club members, or from abuse of authority by *senpai* (upperclassmen).[37] Cave implies that advisors and members adhere to a code of ethics through their use of motivational slogans with Zen connotations. Still, in the absence of an ethical standard, there is no assurance that ethical guidelines will remain in place, since they may easily be changed as new members and leaders rotate into the club. This is clearly a risk, for as Cave points out, "Aside from specialists such as physical education or art teachers, most supervisors had no professional training as coaches of the activities they were supervising. According to questionnaire returns from 78 supervisors, half (39) had been members, at school and/or university, of the club they were supervising, while 31 had no experience of the activity at all."[38] As a consequence, in a large number of cases, clubs rely on inadequately trained leaders, or fall back to the authority of the *senpai-kōhai* system, relying on the seniors to execute the transfer of skills through rigorous and sometimes harmful methods. It is not surprising, then, that the adversity experienced by juniors is such a common subject in popular manga, which explore who juniors either comply in order to succeed, or reject and fight against this form of power to assure their progress.

About the Current Research Topic

In order to examine fully the relationship between education and *gakuen manga*, the first step is to build a chronologically specific database of individual publications using criteria

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[37] Ibid., 412

[38] Ibid., 394

provided by the definition of this subset of *manga*, that is, "*manga* with school themed content subdivided as the teacher protagonist or student protagonist types of stories." [39] The dataset will also provide the specific area of school life that each title is associated with as well as whether this aspect of the *manga* is an active element contributing to the development of the characters and story line or a static setting choice that bears no particular relevance. Another parameter will define the publication start and end dates; finally, the last parameter will include the number of published volumes in order to provide a clear delineation of its availability to the reading audience. The second step will be to outline a chronology of educational policy changes, including their causes and effects and to take note of any convergences between a specific policy and a rise or drop in the number of *gakuen manga* publications. The final step will be to analyze a cross-section of the major subtypes of *gakuen manga* and determine whether they relate to the changing goals and desired outcomes of educational policies over time and what position they take, if any, in the public discourse surrounding them.

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[39] Human Academy – *Manga* College. 2017. http://ha.athuman.com/*manga*/list/column/028708.php

Chapter 2

Mapping *Gakuen manga*

To test my working hypothesis that *gakuen manga* enjoyed a surge in popularity at the same time that major transformations in high school education were being proposed and implemented in Japan, I consulted a variety of databases and compiled information about *gakuen manga*. The resultant dataset not only offers definitive evidence for a massive increase in the number of *gakuen* titles but also allows for a tentative delineation of historical periods and affords insight into the diversification of themes within the recent period. In this chapter, I will first introduce the basic criteria for the dataset and explain the significance of my findings. I will then turn to a discussion of some representative titles of *gakuen manga*, to consider in light of educational paradigms and reforms.

The Dataset for *Gakuen manga*

School life is such a staple of manga that it is hard to find manga that do not touch on school life in some form or another. I thus began by considering which manga featured a teacher or a student as a major protagonist. Yet it is common for a manga series to begin with a student or teacher as a protagonist (introduction or back story) or to turn to the school days of a protagonist (flashback or side story), and then, ultimately, to move into storylines without any reference to school life. This pattern is relatively common in manga based on professional sports or on adult life. While such school-centered segments of manga series are not without interest, they prove misleading for the purposes of this study. Thus I adhered to the definition of *gakuen manga* offered by the Manga College within the Human Academy online, which comprises "all manga whose protagonist is *actively* a teacher or a student."

In addition, because this study focuses on national policies, mainstream discourses, and widespread debates concerning Japanese education, I excluded manga not produced in Japan, that is, non-Japanese imported manga, which are sold primarily in specialized stores and are fairly limited in circulation. I also excluded *dōjinshi*, that is, "amateur," "coterie," or "hobby" manga. The numbers and varieties of *dōjinshi* are difficult to document, and their circulation varies greatly. I chose to focus on manga that are widely distributed and readily available to a nationwide audience, which are in keeping with the focus of this study on Japan-wide debates and attitudes. The database thus takes into consideration the large publishing companies such as Kōdansha and Shūeisha as well as their subsidiaries.

I located the titles using English and Japanese manga databases that permitted keyword searches. Among English-language databases were "My Anime List"[40] and "Baka-Updates Manga."[41] Japanese-language databases included, for instance, "Manga Ōkoku."[42] I also consulted Wikipedia's "List of manga works in Japan" (*Nihon no manga sakuhin ichiran*),[43] Kodansha's "Comic Plus,"[44] Shueisha's "S-Manga"[45] and Kadokawa's "Comic Walker."[46] I searched these websites for information concerning genre and year of publication, which information was cross-referenced to assure accuracy. Both parameters merit some additional comments.

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[40] My Anime List at https://myanimelist.net/manga.php

[41] Baka-Updates Manga at https://www.mangaupdates.com

[42] Manga Ōkoku (漫画王国) at https://comic.k-manga.jp/genre/

[43] https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/日本の漫画作品一覧

[44] Kodansha's Comic Website http://kc.kodansha.co.jp/new_comics

[45] Shueisha's Comic Website http://www.s-manga.net

[46] Kadokawa Comprehensive Manga Site at http://comic-walker.com/contents/genre/132/

Although genre clearly has a profound impact both on audience expectations and cultural production, it is a notoriously difficult to define. The term *gakuen manga*, for instance, only began to appear in the late 1990s, and as the term became widely accepted, it was applied retroactively to older titles. The emergence of a genre thus tends to create its own lineage, and its own history. For the purposes of this study, this self-inventing aspect of genre is not a problem. On the contrary, it has the advantage of making clear that this history of the relation between manga and education is constantly undergoing revision, and what matters in this study is, in fact, the genealogy of the contemporary situation, in which the movement towards education based on *datsu-yutori* or *ikiru chikara* is accompanied by an explosion of *gakuen manga* titles. Genre is also difficult to define because any individual instance of a genre often turns out to be a combination of genres upon closer inspection. Genre is inherently hybrid. English-language websites tend to designate *gakuen manga* either as "school life," or "slice of life," or both. Indeed *gakuen manga* often show a good deal of overlap with so-called the "everyday type," or *nichijōkei*. Japanese websites frequently introduce even greater variety into what is called "slice of life" in English, referring to "daily life (nichijō)," "humanity" (ninjō), "heartwarming · healing" (honobono iyashi), and "excitement/ emotional" (kandō), to name a few. To avoid confusion, I here used only the genre information provided by publishers' websites in Japanese.

For the sake of uniformity regarding year of publication, I used the convention of the Japanese-language databases, which reckon year of publication in terms of the publication of the *tankōbon* or "trade paperback" edition. Manga are commonly serialized first in weekly, bi-monthly, or monthly manga magazines. Popular serialized titles are eventually published in *tankōbon* format, usually within a year. English-language websites tend to refer to the serialization dates, while Japanese publishers, Japanese Wikipedia, and Japanese Amazon base publication date on paperback edition. I cross-referenced dates with these websites as well as the

"*sakuhin* database"[47] used for products, sales, and ranking. The use of *tankōbon* data is also in keeping with the focus of study on widely circulated and widely read titles.

The dataset of *gakuen manga* includes 1,128 titles that conform to the above criteria. The titles range from March 1957 through the third quarter of 2016.

Figure 1 shows the number of *gakuen manga* published each year over a period of roughly six decades. Three major periods, roughly two decades each, can be identified. Between 1957 and 1977, exceedingly few *gakuen manga* were published, and in some years, none at all. Between 1977 and 1997, only a handful of new titles were consistently published each year. Suddenly, around 1997, the number of titles doubles, and then, at the turn of the new millennium, there is a veritable explosion of *gakuen manga*.

It should be noted that this graph concerns the appearance of new titles. Depending on their size and their clientele, bookstores may feature a range of backlist and mid-list titles, which means that older titles may still be available even as newer titles appear on the shelves. Nonetheless, given the consistency of the distribution system in Japan, bookstores in various locations offer a largely similar experience. Older titles are neatly shelved, organized first by publisher, such as KC (Kōdansha Comics) or SS (Shōnen Sunday) and then by author and title. New releases typically appear on tables, with cover displayed, to enhance their visibility. New releases include both new series and new releases of older series. Generally speaking, these new releases have greater impact on manga readers, and exposure to the previously released, shelved series is limited. As such, it is useful to adjust the previous graph to include new releases and continuing releases of previous manga titles, which would be prominently displayed in bookstores and arguably affect the readers' sense of the scope of the *gakuen manga* market.

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[47] *Sakuhin* Database at https://sakuhindb.com

Figure 2 adjusts for such overlaps in publication, taking into account both start and end dates and new releases. It thus shows the total number of *gakuen manga* based on actively published manga series.

Adjusting to consider the number of *gakuen manga* titles actively in circulation affects how we evaluate their importance on the contemporary scene. Figure 2 reconfirms the pattern of emergence seen in Figure 1: relatively few titles until 1997, followed by a boom in *gakuen manga*. When we consider ongoing titles, however, we see less of a decline in recent years. Although we still see a pronounced drop in titles after 2013, from about 350 per year to 200 per year, it is nonetheless clear that *gakuen manga* are far from disappearing. On the contrary, they may be returning to the levels seen in the early 2000s, prior to the large spike in publications, leveling off at a very high level of two hundred titles per year. As mentioned previously, the data for 2016 goes only through the third quarter, and so these figures do not take into account the surge of publication that sometimes occurs at the end of year. In any event, instead of a decline in *gakuen manga*, the data would seem to indicate either a maturation of the market, or a saturation effect, or both. In other words, *gakuen manga* are now staying in serialization for significantly long periods: their average span of publication is 30.7 months, with an average number of volumes at 7.5 per series. The persistence of titles makes it more difficult for publishers to introduce new titles, which would compete with titles on their current list.

The combination of maturation and saturation of the *gakuen manga* market has also encouraged greater differentiation of titles, to the point where something like sub-genres and genre hybrids are becoming increasingly evident, as shown in Figure 3. This figure presents the different kinds of activity associated with school life manga. For instance, the broad category of sports clubs or *undōbu* may be considered in terms of different kinds of sports, such as baseball, tennis, skating, and others. The equally broad category of "culture clubs" or *bunkabu* may

likewise be considered in terms of the focus for activities, such as art, literature, board games, to mention a few. Figure 3 maps the number of different activities in terms of three periods of roughly twenty years each. In the first period, between 1957 and 1979, in which there were exceedingly few *gakuen manga* to begin with, we find very little diversity. Only five different types of activity appear across eight titles, and all the activities are variations on sports clubs, representing the most popular manga sports of the era, baseball, volleyball, table tennis, and kendō. In the second period, between 1980 and 1999, *gakuen manga* begin to diversify a good deal: there are sixty-five distinct activities associated with school life, representing a range of clubs, school events, and other activities. These 65 activities arise across 134 titles. Not surprisingly, in the third period, in conjunction with the explosion of *gakuen manga* titles, there is an accompanying expansion and diversification of activities: 277 activities across 986 titles. With such an expansion and diversification of *gakuen* activities, manga series become highly creative in inventing new kinds of clubs, activities, and events. Later I will discuss two series with unusual clubs, *S.O.S. Brigade Club* and *The Service Club*.

Another transformation merits attention. Figure 4 breaks down *gakuen manga* activities into three types: sports clubs, culture clubs, and what I will call school functions. This latter grouping includes a range of extracurricular activities that fall outside the traditional sports clubs and the newer culture clubs, such as student council and other student activities. Students in Japanese high schools frequently become involved in a broad range of projects related to the functioning of student life and school, such as beautification committees and festival committees. I use the designation "school functions" to indicate this broad range, although the preponderance of *gakuen manga* in this category centres on student councils and their committees. When the kinds of activities falling in these groupings are charted, we see that the bulk of earlier titles are *gakuen manga* based on sports clubs, and these titles have increased in a slow and steady manner

over the decades. The number of manga centred on student government and school functions increased a somewhat more rapid pace. Clearly, however, manga dealing with cultural activities and culture clubs show the greatest increase. The boom in *gakuen manga*, then, occurred through a massive expansion and diversification of culture-related activities. As of late 2016, the cultural category had expanded to comprise 210 different activities, while school functions comprised 56, and sports clubs only 48.

Such is the diversification within *gakuen manga* that the internal limits of the genre begin to shift and transform. As the explosion of titles spurs greater inventiveness and creativity in producing kinds of culture clubs, the internal hybridization inherent in any genre designation is dramatically transformed. If we consider earlier titles in terms of their genre hybridity, we see combinations that feel logically connected, as such sports and school, or delinquency and school. With the boom in *gakuen manga*, however, we begin to see combinations that demand a greater conceptual leap, such as science fiction and school, or horror and school. Such combinations are not without precedent, and yet they have become increasingly common, even dominant, in recent years.

Now that I have established the basic contours for *gakuen manga* over the past sixty odd years, I wish to open a dialogue between these manga and the educational debates, reforms, and policies introduced in chapter 1. In the next section, I will look at some school life manga whose widespread popularity makes them feel representative of the era, precisely because they arguably helped to shape its attitudes.

Gakuen Manga and Educational Ideals

Recall that, although the full impact of actual policies was not felt until the 1990s, calls for loosening education (*yutori*) had become common by the late 1970s and early 1980s, in

opposition to the system based on cramming for exams (*tsumekomi*), which made for the so-called examination hell. In other words, if we consider the previous periods of *gakuen manga* in light of educational debates, the first twenty-year period roughly corresponds to the examination hell system. The second twenty-year period, 1977 to 1997, corresponds to the debates over *tsumekomi* and the gradual implementation of *yutori* ideals. During this period, however, participation in clubs was largely mandatory, and students were not actively shaping clubs. The sharp increase in *gakuen manga* (and even the emergence of the genre as such conceptually) that occurred from around 1997 corresponds with debates over *yutori* and the gradual implementation of *datsu-yutori* ideals, that is, ideals extolling *ikiru chikara* or the power to make one's life. It is in this context that participation in clubs lost its mandatory status, and students gained new freedom to join and to shape clubs as they pleased, within certain parameters.

A brief discussion and comparison of popular *gakuen manga* titles will thus allow for another perspective on these transformations. In constructing a dialogue between *gakuen manga* and educational debates and ideals, I do not mean to imply that manga are merely responding to decisions made elsewhere by educators and government officials. Rather, if there is overlap and resonance between situations depicted in manga and educational ideals, it is both because both are responding to the same educational situation. Both are equally active players in shaping attitudes toward education, although, not surprisingly, manga tend to adopt the perspective of individual students and teachers, while educational policy tends to adopt the perspective of institutions and procedures.

Ranma ½, a manga written by Rumiko Takahashi and serialized between 1987 and 1996, addresses school clubs in manner that appears poised between the *tsumekomi* and *yutori* ideals. The protagonist, Ranma Satome, practices martial arts, learned while living in China. Through a strange series of events, Ranma transforms into a girl when doused with cold water, and back

into a boy when struck with hot water. Because he practices a hybrid style of martial arts literally named, "The Anything Goes Saotome School of Martial Arts", the school martial arts clubs, such as kendō, as well as other sports clubs play a key role in the manga, and yet they function primarily as a site for action, another place for characters to meet and interact. Ranma encounters his rivals there, and the female protagonist, Akane Tendō, to whom Ranma has been engaged by arrangement from an early age. Yet clubs do not play an integral role in building characters or the story. They remain flat or faceless, stereotypical places, vehicles for the plot that do not impact it. Yet tension arises between Ranma and school life. He is an outsider, a transfer student without affiliation other than his engagement to Akane. As such, he does not represent the authority of the club or any school function, and resists such authority in various ways. For instance, as shown in Figure 5, he commonly appears in a Chinese long skirt (*changshan*) rather than a standard school uniform or even a designated club uniform.

In sum, *Ranma ½* provides a comedic take on school life, which allows for a critical perspective on its regulations and procedures. Clubs remain part of this homogeneous school life, as if just another facet of the institution. The role of clubs is static, and they are pushed into the background.

Kimagure Orange Road, written by Izumi Matsumoto and serialized between 1984 and 1987, affords another perspective on school life in this era. Although this manga has many elements in common with later *gakuen manga* and is sometimes considered a source of inspiration for them and for *nichijōkei*, it does not give an active role to clubs within school life. Instead, the critical perspective on school life is articulated through delinquency. The school setting in general is treated statically, and its very immobility inspires students to act against it. The rebellious acts of the female protagonist, Madoka Ayukawa, range from actual delinquency to simply tuning out in the classroom, staring out the window rather than engaging with the class.

The progress of story and characters depends on this implicit critique of the monotony and irrelevance of the established educational methods. These methods do not simply fail to tame Madoka's wild behavior. They fail to engage with it altogether. Where education fails, the male protagonist, Kyōsuke Kasuga, steps in, as if to solve the complex problem that is Madoka. Kyōsuke frequently tries to correct her delinquent behavior, and Madoka responds critically to this imposition of a normative stance, calling out his right-or-wrong stance as highly conservative.

Kimagure Orange Road adopts a stance that reveals the contradiction within the ideals of *yutori* educational reform. While the manga offers a critical look at the failure of the system to correct delinquency, it introduces a new kind of normalization in the figure of Kyōsuke. Oddly enough, Kyōsuke himself is far from normal in that he is an "esper" (possessing a range of extrasensory perceptual abilities). In the manga's use of the esper, we see both the incipient crisis of the *yutori* system (it exerts norms that remain unexamined because appearing as if from out of nowhere) as well as the possibility for a more active engagement with school from without the school itself. But for this "esper solution" to function within school life, clubs themselves need to take on increased autonomy. This is precisely what happens with the boom in *gakuen manga* and the movement toward "strength to make one's life" within the educational system.

The exceedingly popular *Suzumiya Haruhi* series adopted this stance, and may even be said to exemplify it. Nagaru Tanigawa penned the series of *Suzumiya Haruhi* light novels between 2003 and 2011, and these were quickly adapted into manga, anime, video games, and other media. Its female protagonist, Haruhi Suzumiya, is the leader of the S.O.S. Brigade Club whose mission is to investigate supernatural phenomena. It thus presents an instance in which the club operates within school life as an alternative space, one shaped for and by students. The position of espers (and other outsiders) within the *Suzumiya Haruhi* series offers a fine contrast

with *Kimagure Orange Road*. The comic tone of absurdity in the *Suzumiya Haruhi* series comes of the fact that, while Haruhi is obsessed with supernatural phenomena, those who join her club are, in fact, supernatural beings, including espers and aliens; they have joined to club to assure that Haruhi does not discover that she herself is a supernatural being. As such, where *Kimagure Orange Road* used the esper to critique the educational system from without, the *Suzumiya Haruhi* series situates its espers and supernatural beings within the school itself, in the form of the extracurricular club. Such a setup situates *bukatsudō* or extracurricular activities at once inside and outside the school. Clubs, then, through the expansion of "culture clubs," are positioned in such a manner that they present creative and imaginative alternatives within the school.

The domineering Haruhi, who exerts her control over the club and its members, exemplifies, albeit in comedic and fantastic tone, the process of students taking control of their school life. Haruhi's S.O.S. Brigade stands in sharp contrast to the passive participation associated with the previously mandatory club experience. It offers a good deal of active interaction among students as well as between students and the educational system. Where the previous mandatory club system forced students to make the best out of a situation they could not change or control (a top-down one-way relationship between school club and student), the new non-mandatory club system encourages a two-way relationship between student and club, one that is also more horizontal, for the clubs must appeal to clubs to cultivate both their activities and their institutional presence. In other words, once clubs were no longer mandatory and were open to student to choose and to shape, extracurricular activities also became highly performative. Clubs had to reassert their value, to prove their worth to all parties involved in maintaining them.

It is worth noting that the relationship between manga and education also undergoes a profound change due to these new clubs. Recall that, as discussed in chapter 1, scholars such as Itō are in favor of expunging the entertainment value of manga in order to improve their educational mission, as *gakushū manga*. With these changes in educational ideals, however, the entertainment value of manga puts in play a different kind of function: enhancing the appeal of clubs for students. As such, there is today greater potential for manga, precisely due to their broad appeal, to intersect with education. Rather than offering instruction in particular areas of the curriculum, manga encourage students to take an active role in education, by participating in the shaping and maintaining of extracurricular activities. Of course, what counts as education is undergoing a profound shift. Education is no longer seen primarily in traditional terms, that is, in terms of instilling knowledge to be used directly in the work place or for securing employment. Instead, what is emphasized is self-improvement, and the desired outcome is to produce students with the ability of cultivate their own potential. In sum, *gakuen manga* are in keeping with the changes in the curriculum guidelines that were enacted during the transition from *yutori* ideals toward a system that moved beyond them (*datsu-yutori*) in the late 1990s and early 2000s, which became characterized by the power to make one's life or *ikiru chikara*. As such, the values implicit in the notion of *ikiru chikara* demand a closer look.

The Power to Make One's Life

Figure 6 shows a diagram of the desired outcomes for skills and other traits associated with *ikiru chikara*, as discussed by Ikuko Nunomura.[48] Nunomura argues that the notion of *ikiru*

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[48] Nunomura, Ikuko. "Changes in the 'Zest for Living' (*ikiru chikara*), and the Subject of Teacher Training Courses at University," In *Education of Nippon with only stasis, runaway and backward movement: Why will reforms continue forever?* (Nihon Library Center, 2013) 115

chikara remains fairly ambiguous, precisely because the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology has for many years tended to promote and interpret it in response to public opinion, instead of establishing and sticking with defined educational goals. Consequently, she concludes, the ability to deploy the term flexibly has allowed the term to take on a great deal of authority and popularity throughout society while remaining diverse in its interpretation. Generally speaking, however, the notion of *ikiru chikara* stands in contrast with prior ideals for education, which insisted that the mission of educational institutions was to place students on an equal footing in order to produce a skilled and able workforce. The focus now falls on providing the tools with which to learn, in an environment in which students acquire skills not because they have to but because they want to. In this respect, *gakuen manga* and the educational movement toward *ikiru* are in agreement, and indeed, seem to have emerged together and to have converged around notions of self-reliance and self-cultivation.

The notion of *ikiru chikara*, then, generates a series of new problems for education, which are often addressed within *gakuen manga*, sometimes deliberately and sometimes by default. First, there is the problem of how to situate a critique of education. As we have seen, in manga of the *tsumekomi* period, the institution of education itself was seen as an obstacle to the development of a space of possibilities. Manga like *Ranma ½* and *Kimagure Orange Road* envision a sort of anarchical resistance to the hierarchical order of education. With the emergence of a diverse range of non-mandatory clubs, however, the school appears to become a site of possibilities. It is as if the institution was incorporating the anarchical, anti-institutional energies of youth and channeling them into an expanded school life. Consequently, it becomes more difficult to center the critique of education on the institution, for the institution is beginning to pose itself as a solution. This risk is evident in the *Susumiya Haruhi* series. Nevertheless, as I shall argue, school life is not moving beyond norms and normativity; it is now producing new

kinds of normalization. Indeed, the epser, that is, the notion of everyone having special abilities, cuts to the heart of the problem. This new normalization becomes clearer, however, if we consider the second problem with the notion of *ikiru chikara*, already raised in Nunomura's account: the notion is internally ambiguous, even contradictory. Honda Yuki expands on this problem in her account of *ikiru chikara*.

Honda identifies two key guidelines implicit in *ikiru chikara*, "when things do not go well I will think about cause and solution method by myself," and "if there is something I don't know or understand, at first, I will search myself."[49] On the positive side, such notions encourage creative, innovative thinking and personal expression. It presents a dramatic departure from the rote memorization encouraged in the past under the *tsumekomi* system. On the negative side, such notions place the burden of responsibility for success or failure squarely on the shoulders of the student. The notion of "relaxed" education obscures the relationship between student and teacher, effectively absolving the teacher of responsibility. Honda attributes this emphasis on self-responsibility to neoliberal forces associated with globalization. Takayama's study of the keywords in educational policies confirms her point. He shows how "individuality (*kosei*) and low pressure, more room for growth (*yutori*), were mobilized as keywords to legitimize a plethora of curricular and systemic changes throughout the 1990s, including constructivist curricular reform, streamlining of curricular contents and schooling, administrative decentralization, and quasi-market measures such as school choice and market competition."[50]

Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) adopts such a contradictory stance in its emphasis on multiple vectors for knowledge and skill transfer.

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[49] Honda, Yuki. *The School "Atmosphere"* Mood of Young People Series (Tokyo, Iwanami Publishing, 2011) 15

[50] Takayama, *Is Japanese education the "exception"?*, 128

On the one hand, the goal of the multiple-vector model is to allow students who are less responsive to traditional methods of instruction to pursue other methods, which is supposed to broaden the overall level of the entire class. This broadening is intended to encourage diversity, in response to recommendations from the MEXT research group to the effect that education needs to stress "the basic ability necessary to work with diverse people in the workplace and community" (MEXT, 2006). This recommendation expanded a series of ideals for students, as such:

> Independence (force to progress things forward), working skill (ability to encourage others to be involved), execution power (ability to set purpose and act reliably), problem discovering ability (ability to analyze the current situation and clarify purpose and task), planning capabilities (the ability to clarify and prepare processes to resolve issues), creativity (power to create new value), power to work in a team (teamwork), outgoing ability (ability to communicate your opinion clearly), listening ability (ability to carefully listen to the other's opinion), flexibility (ability to understand differences of opinion and position), situation grasping ability (ability to understand relationship between you and people and things around you), discipline (ability to defend social rules and promises with people), stress control power (force corresponding to the source of stress).[51]

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[51] Japan. Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. 2009. Ministry of Education's Ministry of Career Education and Vocational Education Special Subcommittee (30th) (2010) Delivery materials, http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/chukyo/chukyo10/shiryo/attach/__icsFiles/afieldfile/2009/07/16/1278415_1.pdf

The above list of desired outcomes clearly shows the other hand. If, on the one hand, students are encouraged to express themselves and to discover their diverse skills and abilities, they are, on the other hand, enjoined to take responsibility for their success or failure, evident in the calls for self-discipline and self-control. The result is an outright contradiction: these ideals demand an empathic and flexible mindset that is open and attuned to complex social interactions, and at the same time, autonomous and resilient to outside pressures. What is more, such ideals are intended to encourage lifelong self-motivated learning.

The basic contradiction internal to the notion of *ikiru chikara* tends to play out in a practical register in terms of a social tension between (a) the neoliberal demand for the production of the entrepreneurial self or *Homo economicus* who is self-managing, responsible for her own satisfaction in life, and (b) actual social interactions comprising friendships, group interactions, community spirit, and civic virtues. These latter ethical features, consonant with the call for self-cultivation within group settings, become the domain of students' groups, student counselors, and parent-teacher associations (PTA). If we consider studies of the challenges faced by counselors in Japanese schools, it appears that the ethical side of *ikiru chikara* is in trouble. According to the Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO), in their studies of the urgent issues encountered by counselors in technical schools and other institutions of higher education, 80% of students are experiencing severe difficulties with social and interpersonal relations (Fig. 8). In response to such findings, MEXT has moved to re-implement ethics as a subject of study across the board in earlier phases of education. When MEXT conducted its own survey on the time devoted to ethical guidance within schools, it found that only 10% of schools set aside any class time exclusively for such issues. The National High School PTA Federation came to a similar conclusion. It found that students urgently need some form of instruction related to social

and interpersonal skills, which is currently entirely lacking in any form within their school experience (Fig. 9).

A case may be made here for the value of *gakuen manga*. Such manga show a keen interest in the distribution of responsibility within extracurricular clubs and other student functions such as class representative, student council duties and other administration-related mechanisms. What is more, they explore the ways in which such activities take on a sort of "group therapy" function, rehabilitating problem students, that is, those deemed to be delinquents, delinquents, social outcasts and otherwise maladjusted. In other words, *gakuen manga* do not merely mimic or embody neoliberal calls for self-responsibility and neoliberal forces incorporating the glitch or noise into the functioning of the system. They strive to impart an ethical perspective on procedures of self-regulation and self-cultivation. Tentatively and schematically, two tendencies may be observed. On the one hand are those manga in which ethical perspectives arise through group interaction. An ethical perspective arises through a process of trial and error as students and their peers explore possibilities. Examples are the manga series *Seitokai Yakuindomo* (Student council staff members, 2007-ongoing) and *Tonari no Kaibutsu-kun* (The Monster beside me, 2008-2013) as well as the manga adaptation of the light novel series *Boku wa tomodachi ga sukunai* (I don't have many friends, 2009-2015). On the other hand are the manga whose ethical perspective arises through guidance or support on the part of some higher moral authority such as an adult, a teacher, an alien, or some other being. Representative series are the manga series *Ansatsu kyōshitsu* (Assassination classroom, 2012-2016), and the multimedia series *Kokoro Konekuto* (Hearts connect, light novel: 2010-2013; manga: 2010-2013) and *Yahari ore no seishun rabukome wa machigatteiru* (My young rom-com went wrong, as expected; light novel: 2011-ongoing;

manga: 2012-ongoing). I subsequently return to the ethical implications of such manga, especially in the third chapter, but at this juncture, I wish to address the third problem with the notion of *ikiru chikara*, which concerns its relation to the *tsumekomi* and *yutori* ideals.

The previous discussions point toward this third problem: although *ikiru chikara* is supposed to move beyond *yutori* ideals (*datsu-yutori*), prior ideals and the actual institutional structures associated with them remain in place within schools. The examination system remains in place, as does the movement toward loosening education, in conjunction with ideals of "power to make one's life" combining neoliberal calls for self-responsibility with more anarchic forces of self-expression and self-realization. As a result, all three educational modes are currently in effect at the same time, which makes for a situation in which the "older" norms of the examination system co-exist with "later" ideals of a looser multi-track system and "newer" ideals of self-realization, which latter serve to obscure the ongoing importance of the examination system. The importance of the examination is abundantly evident in the ongoing growth of the private cram school (*gakushū juku*) industry. Students whose families can afford the fees attend cram schools to prepare for examinations. Honda argues that the growth of cram schools follows from the widespread perception in Japan that Japan's public school system ranks among the lowest in the world in providing adequate training (Fig. 7). In Honda's opinion, the problem lies in the tendency for policy makers to introduce a divide between the actual design of the curriculum and the call for increased emphasis on "spirituality and personality." This is to say, educational transformations based on *yutori* and *ikiru chikara* have been layered on top of the examination system, which remains in force. The upshot of this flexible and ambiguous combination of ideals and practices is what Honda among others calls a "caste system."

Honda considers how the "formal equality" implied in *yutori* ideals in conjunction with the emphasis on self-management within *ikiru chikara* has not resulted in "horizontal diversity," that is, actual social mobility that might improve the socio-economic standing of students. On the contrary, the result has been greater stratification based on academic achievement, a mode of "vertical diversification" based on which students are able to secure their "spot or turn." David Slater's recent account of the multi-tiered education system has documented a similar effect: while students are enjoined to function within the group in accordance within social ideals of education, they receive a rude shock when preparing for the high school entrance examination. Students of lower socioeconomic background discover that they are not prepared to compete with elite students for high school entrance.

In sum, there are two basic paradigms operative in the education system. On the one hand, there is an emphasis on a general enhancement of personal skill acquisition in the context of an idealized vision of the future workplace as one of horizontal diversification. On the other hand, there is an emphasis on a very limited number of exceptionally skilled students who move easily to the top of the vertically diversified workplace. The first paradigm remains something of an ethical ideal, which may be mobilized to promote teamwork and cooperation, inclusivity and group effort. At present this ethical ideal is largely subordinated to the socioeconomic realities of the marketplace, operating as an ideal supplement rather than a genuine alternative. Manga dealing with school life, however, often strive to transform this ideal supplement into a social alternative to neoliberal self-management. I will explore some possibilities in the next chapter. But by way of conclusion to this chapter, I would like briefly to consider how one manga series in particular tries to expose and undermine the caste system currently emerging from the contemporary combination of *tsumekomi*, *yutori*, and *ikiru chikara*. That manga is one introduced previously, *Ansatsu kyōshitsu* or "Assassination Classroom."

Assassination Classroom

        Popular manga have long shown an awareness of the socioeconomic divisions, but it was in the 1990s that the formation of castes of the sort discussed by Honda and Slater came directly under attack in manga. The highly successful girls' manga *Hana yori dango* (Boys over Flowers, 1992-2004) offered a critical perspective on elite students at private schools, from the perspective of a girl of modest means who receives a scholarship to attend a wealthy school. The series directly addresses the privilege enjoyed by the children of wealthy families, and the power exerted over the running of the school itself by corporate and financial interests. The critique and comedy hinges on the refusal on the part of the girl of modest means to respect the authority of wealthy young students; indeed she actively expresses her lack of respect for them, and for private education. Interesting enough, very little happens in the classroom. Confrontations occur in the corridors, before class and after school, as well as at school events.

        In the wake of the boom in *gakuen manga*, such a critical perspective becomes not only more common but also more radical and dramatic, and it moves directly into the classroom. Take, for instance, *Dragon Zakura* (2003-207), in which a poor lawyer is given the opportunity to offer a class that prepares students to take the entrance exam for the University of Tokyo. The comedy arises around the contrast between the high goals set by the rough-and-tumble teacher (a former motorcycle gang member) versus a school so notorious for its low academic level that is called the "idiot school." The manga offers an inside view of the factors working to keep non-elite students from doing well on the entrance exams for college. Another example is *Baka to tesuto to shōkanjū* (Idiots, exams, and summoned monsters, 2007-2015), which depicts a school where students are rigidly separated on the basis of their exam scores. The series follows a boy whose poor performance leaves him without access to necessary materials and instruction. High

grades are literally translated into excellent conditions, such as well-equipped classrooms. A girl who falls ill and fails to take an exam, for instance, is automatically exiled to the lower classrooms. The boy, who dreams of eradicating the caste system, vows to help her regain her position. At this school where children learn to summon beasts, the boy organizes a "summoner war" in hopes of leveling the hierarchies.

As such manga indicate, the caste system is so exceedingly rigid and entrenched that it lends itself to radically, fantastically cruel scenarios. Perhaps the best example of taking the caste formation to an extreme is *Ansatsu kyōshitsu* or "Assassination Classroom." An alien is the homeroom teacher at the fictional Kunugigaoka Junior High School. This exceedingly powerful monster, dubbed Koro-sensei, has already conquered much of planet Earth, but to give humans a fighting chance, he decides to offer instruction in the arts of assassination in his homeroom. The student who kills him will receive a massive reward. Although he is apparently impossible to kill, as the students learn from him, he turns out to be a fine teacher. Significantly, he does not discriminate against those who have been rejected socially and educationally. In this way, the manga offers a direct critique of the formation of castes associated with the multi-tiered educational system. Koro-sensei proves an able teacher precisely because he overturns the system in which access to quality education is based on academic performance, and academic credentials thus determine future social status. Interestingly enough, Koro-sensei proceeds in a manner seemingly at odds with overturning entrenched hierarchies: he promotes competition and ingenuity. The difference, however, lies in the ends of such competition. Koro-sensei does not sort students into winners and losers based on academic outcomes. He encourages students to act in their capacity, to discover their natural talents and skills. He encourages the process of creative exchange and group amplification of inventiveness. In this way, *Ansatsu kyōshitsu* unravels the current configuration in which *yutori* and *ikiru chikara* function as an ideal

supplement to reinforce the socioeconomic hierarchies associated with the *tsumekomi* system. It is as if *ikiru chikara* had come into its own, effectively undermining the examination system. In effect, this manga uses competition as a tool for self-development rather than as a measuring stick for separating winners from losers. In fact, it comes close to two of the ideals for educators outlined by Howard Gardner in his recommendations for promoting multiple intelligences in the classroom, namely, to "individualize the teaching style (to suit the most effective method for each student) and pluralize the teaching (teach important materials in multiple ways)."[52] It should be noted that, in this manga, educational reforms occur only in the most extreme circumstances, which suggests that current configuration of the caste system is so entrenched that its end can only be imagined under the most radical conditions.

In sum, manga such as *Ansatsu kyōshitsu* reveal one of the other gifts of manga to education. Previously, after mapping the contours of the explosion of *gakuen manga* in the early 1990s, I argued that such manga come to imply a new relation to education, where manga are not mere entertainment that functions outside and beyond school. Rather *gakuen manga* are situated at the site where educational reforms promise an opening to other modes of instruction and learning within the institution. Although I subsequently showed the ways in which such openings tend at present to be shut down due the persistence of the exam system and caste formation, I also tried to show, though the example of *Ansatsu kyōshitsu*, that manga may provide a site of radical experimentation with the basic parameters of Japanese education, not only through clubs, but also through classrooms. Nonetheless, I tend to think that manga like *Ansatsu kyōshitsu*, while not properly *gakuen manga*, build on the popularity of such manga. Indeed, the

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[52] Gardener, Howard. "'Multiple intelligences' are not 'learning styles'" 2013. *Washington Post.* October 16 https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2013/10/16/howard-gardner-multiple-intelligences-are-not-learning-styles/

reconfiguration of the classroom in *Ansatsu kyōshitsu* makes it feel more like a club than a classroom. The classroom of *Ansatsu kyōshitsu* is closer to the S.O.S Brigade Club of the *Susumiya Haruhi* series than to the classroom of, say, *Ranma 1/2*.

With these possibilities in mind, I propose in the next chapter to take a closer look at the critical perspectives on education afforded by *gakuen manga*. I will focus on how *gakuen manga* address of the common social "dysfunctions" bearing on education in Japan today, such as delinquency, social withdrawal, and social maladjustment.

Chapter 3

Non-Normative Education

Chapter 2 presented the major historical paradigms that have shaped Japanese education, in relation to emergence of *gakuen manga*. In that chapter, I focused on primarily on debates related to education, in particular the largely unacknowledged hierarchies based on socioeconomic background or class. In this chapter, I propose to take a closer look at the ways in which *gakuen manga* deal with some of the other social issues related to school life, with a focus on problems related to social interaction. At the time of the emergence of *gakuen manga* and the shift toward *datsu-yutori* education policies, discourses on the social inadequacies of Japanese youth proliferated in the mass media. Although these discourses usually spoke of Japanese youth in general, they focused attention especially on the anti-sociality of young men and boys, imagining a crisis in masculinity that had the potential to undermine Japanese society itself. The general concern was that young men were finding it increasingly difficult to engage in social interaction, which made them unable to enter into romantic interactions with young women, thus undermining the ability of Japanese society to reproduce itself. These discourses were not adverse to making exaggerated, overstated, and even fanciful and unfounded statements about Japanese youth, and tended to blame youth for the social crisis, often criminalizing and pathologizing them. These discourses had a powerful impact, in part because they built on anxieties about the future experienced by youth.

In this chapter, I wish to consider how *gakuen manga* respond to such discourses on the antisocial nature of Japanese youth. Three discourses interest me. First, there is the discourse on delinquency. While discourses on delinquency tend to blame the delinquent and to focus on correction, what is interesting about *gakuen manga* is how the social delinquent is at once a

source of concern and admiration. Second are the discourses on social withdrawal, which have

settled on a variety of figures. At one extreme is the so-called social recluse or *hikikomori*. In the

absence of the actual evidence for actual clinically valid instances of social withdrawal,

discourses gravitated toward this syndrome to pathologize how youth in Japan related to new

media. At the other extreme is the NEET or "not in education, employment, or training." The

NEET was allegedly refusing to take education seriously and refusing to enter into permanent

employment, opting to drop out of "normal" social existence. In this chapter, I will look

primarily at how, in *gakuen manga*, school life is imagined to be responsible for producing such

socially withdrawn and dysfunctional young men. Finally, there is the very broad question of

sociality and romance. Romance is a staple of manga, but what distinguishes *gakuen manga* is its

interest in imagining new sites of romantic encounter, especially through extracurricular

activities, which are beyond the classroom and yet still intimately connected to school. In all

three instances, I propose to consider how *gakuen manga* tends at once to repeat these normative

discourses and to displace them into new possibilities.

The Redemption of Delinquency

To situate my approach to discourses on delinquency in relation to *gakuen manga*, I

propose to look at two *manga* titles, which will allow me to delve into two ways of bringing an

ethical perspective to bear on the procedures of self-regulation and self-cultivation mentioned in

chapter 2. The first title is *Great Teacher Onizuka* (or *Onizuka*), which, as mentioned previously,

began serialization in 1997 and ended around the time of *gakuen manga* boom in 2002. This

manga series will provide an example of what I call the "guided" or "intermediary" ethical

perspective. The second title is *Yankī-kun to Megane-chan*, published between 2006 and 2011,

which will furnish an example of what I will call the "self-discovery" ethical perspective.

The serialization of *Onizuka* began in the wake of the Kobe murders, which spurred debates on the morality of Japanese youth. Initially, discussions of the murders consisted primarily of attempts by journalists, professional experts, intellectuals and politicians to lay blame on specific social agents, such as parents or teachers. What eventually came to the fore, however, was the state of the education system, in particular its tendency to produce and reinforce social disparity due to its exclusive focus on test scores at the expense of civic and ethical instruction. It was in this context that manga series like *Onizuka* enjoyed widespread popularity, for they dovetailed the new concern over and a demand for a thorough reevaluation of education.

While *gakuen manga* titles dealing with delinquency are quite numerous, if *Onizuka* in particular seemed to strike a chord with readers, it is because of its attention to how its great teacher Onizuka could serve as an intermediary between delinquent students and the flawed educational system. Thus *Onizuka* not only raises ethical questions in the context of institutionalized education but also develops a distinctive perspective the experience of school life, presenting it not merely as a means to an end, but as a rare, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

The protagonist, Eikichi Onizuka, was himself a delinquent. A former motorcycle gang member who is intent on "graduating" from his virgin status, Onizuka decides to become a teacher in hopes of enhancing his image and appeal to women. He actually forgets to take the public teachers' civil service exam, and yet through a strange coincidence, he nonetheless ends up becoming a private school homeroom teacher in charge of the problem class, group 4 of year 3 of high school, or "3-4" for short. The reputation of this class is so bad that it has driven past teachers insane and one to commit suicide. Onizuka not only survives students' attacks on him, but also succeeds where others failed, by befriending his students, addressing their problems and

needs directly, and thus turning their life around, one by one. His conduct and personal philosophy often stand in sharp contrast to those of the other teachers at the school. Other teachers adhere to the inflexible and stagnant system in which they began their careers, focusing exclusively on the academic performance record rather than on teaching. The *manga* focuses on Onizuka teaching life lessons by pointing out potentials and possibilities in the mundane and ordinary. Due to his sense of ethics and his expression of his beliefs, he succeeds in getting students to focus on how to live life, how to enjoy life. The manga thus affords an image that runs counter to the portrayal of delinquency in the media in the 1980s and 1990s: instead of laying blame on the students or their families, *Onizuka* implies that the problem lies in the school system.

As such, *Onizuka* also challenges the reigning assumption that adults cannot be held accountable, either in their institutional function as teachers or in their social function as civic role models. What is more, *Onizuka* challenges the previously unchallenged methods of education, adopting the perspective of the youth on whom such methods pass judgment. The manga thus calls into question both the *tsumekomi* examination system and the focus within the *yutori* ideal on personal responsibility without ethical guidance. In effect, Onizuka is a great teacher because he bridges the world of students and that of adults (not only those in school, that is, teachers and administrators but also those in society at large). He demands and enables a renegotiation of the mode of interaction students have access to in their daily school experience. When he corrects students, he does so on their behalf. Ultimately, then, a situation that appears anarchic from the perspective of the institution (the perspective of neglected students is given greater force than that of those in charge) results in an overall improvement of education, both in terms of social relations and in terms of efficacy of instruction (positive re-enforcement). In effect, Onizuka corrects the system and eliminates disruptive elements by undermining the social

forces that produce delinquency. He thus occupies something of a paradoxical position: his solutions to problems serve to validate him as a "different" teacher, which tends to contradict his position as a "part" of the system. But this paradox stems from a contradiction within the system wherein delinquents are thought to be "naturally" produced elsewhere, not constructed socially by the institutions of education.

In sum, if Onizuka is a great teacher in comparison with others trained in the *tsumekomi* and *yutori* systems, it is because he listens to students, acknowledges their position, and works on negotiate alternatives, in terms of both methods and outcomes, for students who had no voice within the older systems. In one scene, the vice-principal, by Hiroshi Uchiyamada, repeatedly uses the term waste or scum (*kuzu*) to refer to drop outs, delinquents, and rebellious students that refuse to conform (Fig. 10). Uchiyamada embodies the attitude toward social unevenness at the heart of the supposedly egalitarian system: if you do not succeed, the problem is with you. Yet the belief in equality often produces a demand for equality that Uchiyamada's egalitarian system cannot accommodate. What Onizuka challenges, then, is precisely what Takehiko Kariya describes as a failure of egalitarian ideas, because they imply modes of segregation based on meritocracy, which emerged out of a system utilizing a conformist approach to pedagogy, and which ultimately turned into a "credentialist" society.[53] Uchiyamada is the personification of this default social stance that refuses to look closely at how the system in which he participates produces something very different from the ideals it declares.

The manga uses a variety of techniques to underscore Onizuka's paradoxical position inside and outside the school system, often through close-ups that show Onizuka's response to what passes as normal in high schools. His shock and disdain in response to Uchiyamada, for

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[53] Kariya, Takehiro. *Demographic Change and Inequality in Japan*, Edited by Sawako Shirahase (Melbourne, Trans Pacific Press, 2011) 99-101

instance, break the flow of the page and the story, introducing its ethical perspective. It is in this way that the manga redeems delinquency, showing it to be a product of the combination of systematic rigidity and "responsibilization" of students for their failures, which together encourage the social vilification of allegedly delinquent students. Onizuka shows that it is not primarily the student who needs correction but the school system.

The *Onizuka* series also allows for the redemption of the delinquent in its portrayal of Onizuka himself. In the previous chapter, I discussed how the combination of *tsemekomi* and *yutori* ideals tended to reinforce the formation of castes within school, that is, distinctive and clearly demarcated status groups. As Kariya notes, the reinforcement of status groups tends to naturalize forms of inequality and discrimination, making them appear inevitable and thus to remove them from scrutiny.[54] As such, Onizuka's success as a teacher flies in the face of received hierarchies based on academic performance and self-managing, self-responsible behavior. Onizuka lives at the bottom of the social hierarchy, with wealth or power, hopping from job to job to survive. Yet it is precisely this delinquent who has the power to correct the system. What he brings to the school system is primarily an ethical stance, which is exactly what the prior ideals of education discouraged due to their tendency to stigmatize failure. As such it is worthwhile taking a closer look at how such stigmatization actually emerges and come to seem rational.

To cite Kariya's account again, we need first to acknowledge that goal of the egalitarian model in education was to minimize unevenness, both between educational institutions (especially financial unevenness that spurs inequity in access) and between students within institutions (meritocracy). Paradoxically, however, the result was increased pressure on students

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[54] Ibid., 123

to be competitive, especially on examinations. On the one hand, the egalitarian model rules out the possibility that students might have different abilities or capacities, not to mention different kinds or degrees of intelligence. In its bid to champion equality, this model moves away from notions of innate inability. It thus assumes not only that material and teaching methods can be standardized, but also that standardization places students on an equal footing. On the other hand, then, when it tries to account for discrepancy among individuals, the egalitarian model assumes that effort and determination are responsible: neither the students' ability or capacity nor the curriculum and methods are taken into account.[55] Nonetheless, it should give us pause that such egalitarian ideals, designed to avoid discrimination, nonetheless result in a mass education system in which some students continue to fall in the lower 1% of nationwide ranking.

This egalitarian model also explains how the *tsumekomi* system was so readily combined with the *yutori* system. Equating failure with a lack of effort, and success with effort, tends to transfer responsibility for failure and success back onto the individual. It is an instance of what Thomas Lemke describes as entrepreneurial and competitive behavior among economic-rational individuals.[56] As such, it jibes with the neoliberal ideologies that justify the maintenance of a credentialist society. It justifies the marginalization of and discrimination against those who are labeled delinquent, assuming them to be violent and lazy rather than addressing the deficiencies of education. Thus the egalitarian emphasis on effort turns into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

When popular culture considers the positive side of delinquency, it drives a wedge into egalitarian model, separating the desire for equality from the credential-driven system that produces nothing but high pressure and no diversity. A delinquent-become-teacher such a

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[55] Ibid., 107

[56] Lemke, Thomas. "'The birth of bio-politics': Michel Foucault's lecture at the Collège de France on neo-liberal governmentality". *Economy and Society*. (2001) 200

Onizuka brings to fore both what the system produces (high pressure, no diversity) and what it rejects (diversity, ethical considerations). The series focuses attention especially on the relation between diversity and moral guidance, in that Onizuka's strength derives from his egalitarian application of ideals such as "bonds," "loyalty," "self worth" and "altruism," in a manner that exposes the non-egalitarian effects of the egalitarian model.

Yankī-kun to Megane-chan (2006-2011, published in English as *Flunk Punk Rumble*) also challenges the received ideas about delinquency to offer a different perspective on education than *Onizuka*. Like *Onizuka*, this series poses a profound challenge to the pre-established hierarchies associated with the caste system discussed in Chapter 2, by placing a former delinquent and a current delinquent together in the position of class representative. But, where *Onizuka* focuses on the intermediary role of the teacher, this series stresses the student's process of trial and error, in the absence of external guidance. This manga series merits closer attention not only for the ways in which it proposes to liberate the social potential of these students but also for the ways in which it responds to contemporary educational goals based on *ikiru chikara.*

Both *Onizuka* and *Yankī-kun to Megane-chan* highlight how regret over lost opportunities in the past leads to a desire to start over again, as if from zero. As such, both series risk falling into the sentimental discourses Lynne Nakano aptly criticizes, which "locate the solution to delinquency in a nostalgic past in which women nurtured children and men provided moral guidance and strength."[57] On the whole, however, neither series remains locked into a nostalgic view. They focus our attention instead on the rehabilitation process, inviting us to consider three interrelated problems: (a) who determines what is normal and what is not, (b) how have those deemed maladjusted come to be that way, and (c) who benefits from rehabilitation.

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[57] Nakano, *Community Volunteers in Japan*, 95

Thomas Rohlen offers one way of thinking about how certain people are marginalized. He argues that, to avoid applying coercive force directly, the state creates anxiety, publicizes potential dangers, and shifts responsibility downward to citizens and localities.[58] In contrast, Nakano calls attention to how a wider chain of agents, from the state all the way down to individual families, grapple with the desire to impose social cohesion administratively, through the negotiation of the meaning, interpretation, and implementation of social dangers. Nakano underscores how juvenile delinquency prevention patrols, for instance, "rather than reproducing social order, provided an arena for expressing deeply felt local and personal concerns involving the status and importance of local volunteers in shaping social life, the reputation of the neighborhood and the school, and hopes for the success of individual children within the school system."[59] In other words, there are counter-currents within the agencies commonly associated with social order, with very different concerns. In this study, I see a similar kind of negotiation at work in *gakuen manga*. The perspective afforded *gakuen manga* continues to be ignored due to the establishment of a rigid divide between "child culture" and "adult culture," which encourages the top-down view that such manga have no agency in comparison with the state. Yet, like the neighborhood organizations described by Nakano, *gakuen manga* are deeply engaged with basic structural unevenness and ethical problems of education, for better or for worse. This is why they merit attention. Particularly important is how such manga series distance themselves from the major hypothesis about delinquency promulgated in mass media beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s, which Nakano describes beautifully:

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[58] Rohlen, Thomas P. *Order in Japanese Society: Attachment, Authority, and Routine*. Journal of Japanese Studies. N.15 (1989) 18-19

[59] Nakano, *Community Volunteers in Japan*, 95

Headlines blaring of sensational youth crimes, popular books fretted over why children succumb to delinquency, schools established increasingly stringent rules to control minute aspects of student dress and behavior, and government bureaucrats began to describe juvenile crime as a "national epidemic." Juvenile crime continued to make headlines in the 1990s although the overall incidence of youth crime has not risen dramatically (Hōmu Sōgō Kenkyūjo 1995). As the public grew accustomed to juvenile crime stories, violent acts and juvenile misbehavior were portrayed as confirming the moral and social deterioration of Japanese society.[60]

It is precisely this overblown and preposterous image of an epidemic of criminal and delinquent youth that vanished in the pages of series such as *Great Teacher Onizuka* or *Yankee-kun to Megane-chan*. On the one hand, they completely undermine the state-centered top-down understanding of administrative power. On the other hand, even though they put a positive spin on delinquency and stress its coolness and unorthodox stance, they arrive at a contradictory stance: they still propose to reform what is apparently negative about delinquency. Indeed, they lean toward a stance like that of *ikiru chikara*, which proposes systemic reform towards an interactive mode of negotiating school life, by providing a solution in the form of the right environment and learning attitudes to greatly reduce the pressures that drive rebellious behavior. In effect, then, these manga seem to align with the ideals of *ikiru chikara*.

One of the goals of *ikiru chikara* is to provide better tools to resolve what James Marcia and Erik Erikson term as *identity diffusion* or *role confusion* whereby adolescents may fail to

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[60] Ibid., 90

commit to any goals or values while trying to figure out especially their social and occupational identity.[61] This feature of *ikiru chikara* becomes especially prominent in manga dealing with another entrenched discourse about social flaws of contemporary Japanese youth, namely, social withdrawal or social reclusion. Thus, in the next section, I propose to reconsider the educational aims of *ikiru chikara* by looking at it through the lens of *gakuen manga* focused on social reclusion, ranging from the pathologized *hikikomori* to the economically disabled NEET.

The Rehabilitation of the Recluse

As discussed in the previous chapters, the both reconfiguration of economic realities due to the affluence of the 1980s as well as the neo-liberal shift towards self-regulation in education play a big role in the symptomatic increase of pathologizing Japanese youth. What started with discourses on rebellion and violence of delinquency, next spread into issues of social and economic withdrawal in the form of *hikikomori* and *NEET* respectively on the fringes of the extremes, while *freeter* (part-timers or the unemployed) was being regarded as less severe. Yet *hikikomori* presents a problematic that is unlike specific mental disorders such as "social anxiety disorder" or "PTSD" (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) in so much as the use of the term covers an extremely wide spectrum of conditions from a loner to an array of autistic and developmental disorders alike. In most cases though, the previously discussed *identity diffusion* coupled with the stress of interaction, can be partially accounted by the pressures of *tsumekomi*. The competition in the school system to secure placement in the most prestigious schools and the continued and accelerated credentialist social attitudes of the 1980s and 1990s created a ripple effect, in effect spilling the pressure on Japanese youth to succeed into successively earlier phases in their lives.

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[61] Marcia, James E. *Development and validation of egoidentity status*. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. 3 (1966) 552

The JASSO data discussed in chapter 2 (Fig. 8) and the MEXT data (Fig. 9) both confirm this over-emphasis on academic achievement, but MEXTs move to redistribute the shared responsibility for raising children under the *ikiru chikara* model addresses the re-assessment of the credentialist pressures from without rather than only within education. Even though attempts have been made since the late 90s to relieve the "pressure cooking" environment in schools, parents simply applied more pressure on children by outsourcing education to cram schools. As the symptomatic appearance of *futōkō* (children who refuse to go to school), *hikikomori* and *NEETs* spreads however, a social anxiety of complete social breakdown in Japanese youth demands a change in social attitudes.

The long neglected issue of lacking the ethical tools and guidance necessary also pushed the question of the efficacy *tsumekomi* and *yutori* systems in providing for the imagined future workforce of Japan. Simultaneously, Since the 90s, regular employment among young people has decreased while non-regular employment has increased and as Honda points out "the path leading to regular employment opportunities is narrow, which heightens anxiety levels and has a negative effect on future prospects.[62] She also points out that "not only is their employment situation unstable, but their wages are also extremely low, and they are assigned menial jobs, are constantly required to transfer from one workplace to another, which makes it difficult to build good relationships with colleagues."[63]

Gakuen manga represent *hikikomori* often displaying mistrust to the existing social formations and systems on a personal, social level whereas the majority of *NEETs* or *freeters* mirror that mistrust on the professional, economic level towards the labor market. In both cases

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[62] Honda, Yuki. *Shimane-Yamaguchi Global Seminar* (2008) Lecture 3 1
archive.unu.edu/gs/files/2008/sy/SY08_Honda_text_en.pdf

[63] Ibid., 1

losing faith and confidence in both themselves and the system to which they are supposed to conform. There are numerous titles dealing with the issue of all types of social recluse, however one in particular *ReLife* takes a unique approach to equating passive approach or coasting through school life to dire social consequences later in life as well as developing a habitually withdrawn interpersonal ethic that extends into work prospects and work relations. In the case of the main protagonist, 27-year-old Arata Kaizaki, a traumatic work experience working for one of Japan's notoriously oppressive and abusive "black companies" (referring to companies blacklisted by the government for labor law infractions and/or work hours and rhetoric leading to employee suicides or death from overwork, most notably the many infractions of the Watami Takushoku Co. Ltd. (Japan Press Weekly, 2012)(Japan Times, 2012)) left him quitting and unable to find employment. He becomes a subject in a one-year experiment called "Relife" in which he begins his life as a high school student again and with the help of Ryou Yoake of the ReLife Research Institute. In the process he engages in a course of a social self-rediscovery and a chance to re-evaluate what school life and socializing can offer.

Although regularly, recluse characters that pop up in a lot of *gakuen* titles, follow and mesh with otaku discourses, Thomas Lamarre points out that "otaku are frequently linked to these other discourses on youth, particularly discourses on 'criminal youth' or 'youth violence' in the case of delinquents and social misfits and on 'unemployed-because-unemployable youth'" in the case of the recluse.[64] Is a sense, both of those social stigmas interrupt or interpret an alternative to regular social formations, where the character in question cannot reconcile their own understanding of the system or social behaviors or their traumas of it with a positive image that is constantly pushed on them by others.

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[64] Lamarre, Thomas. *"Cool Creepy Moé: Otaku Fictions, Discourses, and Policies," Changement et Diversité au Japon, ed*. Vincent Mirza and Catherine Sédillot, Diversité urbain 13: 1 (2013) 140

This pathology of social anxiety comes under critique in the world of the manga *Yahari ore no seishun rabukome wa machigatteiru*, in which we see the main character disillusioned and purposefully disconnected from what he considers a mere bureaucracy of meaning behind symbolic concepts such as friendship, school life, social rules and roles permeating school participation. The story follows two loners who are pinned together by their advising teacher, the pragmatic Hachiman Hikigaya who is both shunned and chooses to be loner and the beautiful Yukino Yukinoshita who is a top student. Despite their varying personalities and ideals, these two offer help and advice to others as part of their school's 'Service Club', assisted by the cheerful and friendly Yui Yuigahama. Although Hachiman Hikigaya is presented as having an defect in the form of over analysis of information one could easily liken to a near-psychosis, the unique filter he possesses functions exceedingly well in isolating and peeling off the layers behind all social interaction he encounters. The story's popularity and one of its major appeals is the analytic depiction of various social situations faced by teens in a high school setting and the psychology driving their interactions.

Hachiman's main and well repeated critique is the lack of the "real" within the symbolic concepts used to represent the finest elements of education and school life has to offer as both the source of academic achievement and personal enrichment. Yet his critique may not be as far-fetched as a vehemently nihilistic approach, I argue that it represents a realistic assessment especially in view of Kariya's description of the egalitarian issues responsible for covering up inequalities and I would add motives for going along with the reproduction and propagation of the concepts Hachiman critiques.

The manga itself starts off with Hachiman narrating his school essay *seishun* (youth), but the twist comes in the form of his utter contempt for the fake enthusiasm and adoration of the expression. In the scene depicted in Figure 11, he points to a flaw that adults misrepresent and

that is the idea that the more struggles one encounters, the more 'youth' one is living and the more one is growing from the experience. His counter-argument is that this fallacy contends that if one fails to socialize, or garner friends (as an example of struggle) the more growth one can expect, counter to real life outcomes.

Although the manga depicts Hachiman as a typical loner on the one hand evoking the narrative of discourse on the *hikikomori,* on the other it also takes up the challenge of differentiating between the desire of self and that of choosing to be "real" towards others as much as towards life choices versus desired outcomes given to us by others, the social templates that are referred to as "duty, obligation and expectation" as well as what Erving Goffman refers to as "social masks" or the presentation of self in everyday life. In Japan, this refers rather to the concept the person's true feelings and desires *hon'ne*, and the façade encompassing the behavior and opinions one displays in public *tatemae*. But as Honda remarks that while the path to regular work narrows, "young regular workers find it increasingly difficult to find a sense of camaraderie among their colleagues. With the number of antagonistic relationships up instead, more workers have come to experience mental health issues."[65]

Yahari ore no seishun rabukome wa machigatteiru uses Hachiman's self-consciousness and over-rationalization as a radical force precisely because he represents both the force capable of overcoming the stagnation and inability of the "fake" or even bureaucratic politeness that exposes the surface only egalitarianism but is also sub-consciously desiring the "real" relations that are only capable of being achieved when the group or common good is the outcome, in other words, Hachiman is an element of change needed for the system to be corrected, and in the process the corrector seizes being an outside element and normalizes as part of the system. In a

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[65] Honda, *Shimane-Yamaguchi Global Seminar,*2

sense, his ability defines in an excessive way the contradictions of *ikiru chikara* that operate in conjunction with older systems still in place. In such a scenario, the suggested course of action "to share responsibility for upbringing not only at school but throughout society," may be the correct; however the roles and responsibilities for each level of the social relation to the child path need to be clearly delineated and internalized.

Hachiman displays more of a cynical and calculating approach to social life is a great example both as a recluse in the sense of interests in interaction and as a loner by choice more than circumstances. His opening statement in the form of a homework assignment about his "recount of past high school life" (Fig. 15) calls out what to him is the hypocrisy of valorizing negative early life experiences and failures as part of youth which would according to him mean that the more oppressive and negative the experience the more rich and invigorating the experience of youth one is living. In a sense, this also calls into question the creed "living to the fullest" as without assigning meaning to its purpose, one who is living to their fullest without understanding what it means or why it is encouraged in the first place cannot attain the full benefit of that exercise.

This also applies to educational objectives as a whole, the core of the problem does not lie with lack of good intention in creating a fuller school life experience in order to raise more rounded individuals, rather that the vagueness of methodology necessary to derive the course of proper training and the mode of execution that is sorely lacking in clarity of the overall design of the curriculum. Both Honda and Nunomura refrain from necessarily criticizing the direction or the decision to reinstate moral studies, but support the idea that using vague and symbolic slogans to appease public concern should find its place in the contents of studies and not the framework the teaching professionals use in order to achieve the desired outcomes. This is where the pathology of social anxiety clearly interferes with the achievement of educational

goals, through long-term critique of the system before the implemented changes even have a chance to manifest results. One such example leading to the end of *yutori* and implementation of *datsuyutori* was the severe critique of the falling standing of Japan in the OECD student achievement studies, namely PISA2003, 2006 and TIMSS2003 when Japan fell by 4 positions in mathematics and 5 in reading compared to PISA2000, and an additional 4 positions in mathematics, 3 positions in science and one position in reading three years later. This drop does not however include the additional 11 additional new participating countries, nor does it explain how the scores then climb by 1 position in mathematics and 6 positions in reading by 2009 before datsuyutori measures were even implemented.

In the manga Hachiman acts by breaking the façade of a democratic process of choosing the slogan for the school festival, but in doing so the manga itself calls into question the motives of those using well intentioned slogans only at face value without truly committing to its full meaning and implication on all levels of social interaction the task itself demands in order to be realized. His example is a different spin on what Honda underlines in her suggestion to the design of the curriculum in that, it is required to evoke in the learner a behavior and thinking based on the acquisition of the necessary knowledge and skills in gradual stages linking to social life.[66]

Her critique of too much focus on vague (disjointed from meaning) symbolism in moving forward in the new curriculum design discussed in chapter one is likewise well illustrated as an issue of the broken mechanism debates surrounding symbolism in *Yahari ore no seishun rabukome wa machigatteiru.* In the end of the first arc of the story Yukino and Hachiman

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[66] Honda, Yuki. *How to evaluate "Educational curriculum design with high social reward"* 4th Discussion meeting on educational goals / contents and evaluation based on qualities and abilities to be trained, Delivery materials (Tokyo, 2013) 3

expose and examine the issue of unequal distribution of work and responsibilities through their participation in the school festival committee. Minami Sagami and Yukino's classmate, volunteered to be the event organizer for the cultural festival, in an attempt to garner popularity and self-worth; however, she possessed neither the actual ability to do such job not the attitude to lead effectively. The fundamental problem of the committee therefore lies with the motives for participation as well as obstructing the preparatory process by hijacking and shifting priorities through authoritive force. This is not very different from the breakdown of proceedings in which communication is no longer the driving force of the debate. Rather it is a pretense at communication designed to cater to symbolism that is devoid of meaning.

Romance and School

Where the social pathology of the social recluse draws from the economic anxieties and the future of Japanese youth, this section will examine the reproductive dimension of interpersonal discourse. Since the changing age demographics and work conditions mentioned in the previous section already greatly affect sociability first at school and later at work, the same can be said about relationships and the reproducibility of not only family and cultural values but also of Japanese society itself.

This register of school representation in manga focuses on presenting the appeal of developing relationships, that is to say, beyond friendship and into romantic relationships as desirable. As such, beyond delinquency and social awkwardness this register deals more with the loneliness that can be said to be more prevalent in a multi track educational environment. That is because in an already stratified inequality due to uneven distribution of resources some families have over others, coupled with the idea ingrained since the *tsumekomi* era of the 70s that effort

yields success and a lack of success is held invariably as the responsibility of the individual, relationships can be viewed as hindrance.

Participation in cram schools often outweighs club activities in importance as such students can feel left out straining their in-school social life. It cannot be under stressed that due to this lack of faith in the school system to provide adequate skills and guarantee job and life security and the increase of priorities outside in order to compensate have prompted worries over the implementation of cultural and civic education. At the same time the influence that technologies have brought along in self regulation, monitoring efficiency and changing the types and rules of socializing further degrade the learning curve that the platform like school and activities therein encompassed by an active participation and a sense of belonging without which just passively coasting through school life can lead to a deep feeling of loneliness. Yet but for the most damaging to the building blocks of Japanese and indeed most developed countries is the diminishing birth rate coupled with an aging population.

Many *gakuen* titles deal with the issue of miscommunication, lack of interest, lack of experience with the opposite sex as well as how less defined and more diverse gender roles have led to a general feeling of romantic and/or erotic disorientation. This is not only due to discourses on the changing demographics and the impending social changes associated with an inverse pyramid of elderly population versus caretaking ability of the younger generations, but also in the economic sense of redefining fan cultures as primary consumers. Lamarre states that what defines otaku worlds "is not a subject position or identity but the formation of erogenous zones at once individual and social, which are sustained precisely by staging a consummate relation – usually a couple whose relationship is consummate in the sense of absolute or perfect

and in the sense of skilled or highly qualified."[67] In his example, Yūto, the main protagonist from *Nogizaka*, and his rejections of the harem situation around him, meaning the many girls or women alluring him towards more and more "experiences of moé (maid uniforms, school uniforms, panty shots)," result instead in a site for chastity and monogamy as he is only attracted to, Haruka. "This is also where otaku production of consumption begins to afford "practices of self" in the Foucauldian sense."[68] Albeit these "practices of self" are not subject to the formation or reproduction of identity in a mass standardized form education operates in, the *gakuen* representation of self-cultivation or civic and cultural growth through individual means extends quite seamlessly into the realm of reproducing individual connections and meaning to mass concepts like identity.

This is very urgent and appealing to younger generations as technology and changing trends in both socializing and parenting leave in their wake confusing new social paradigms especially in the duality of the real and the digital self and the inherent reconfiguration of communication in the social self. For example, even in the case of delinquency, social withdrawal of hikikomori or changing relationship rules, the idea of what Baudrillard defined as "hyperreality" or "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality"[69] is increasingly becoming the mode of interaction in a bi-directional sense when propagating content and meaning that can propagate, amplify or normalize those social abnormalities as older social rules, wisdoms and etiquettes cause expectations to clash with experience.

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[67] Lamarre, *Cool Creepy Moé,* 137

[68] Ibid., 137

[69] Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra & Simulation*. *The Precession of Simulacra:* (PDF) (University of Michigan Press, 1994) 1 http://www.kareneliot.de/downloads/JeanBaudrillard_Simulations_and_Simulacra.pdf

This helplessness in the face of negotiating relationships, whether creating them or maintaining them has been well explored in manga such as *Boku wa tomodachi ga sukunai,* (2010) in the form of "The Neighbors' Club" whose soul goal and reason for existence is to practice getting friends and to eventually make friends for its members. The main failing of most of those members is not their unwillingness to create relations; instead it is their inexperience and lack of understanding the meaning of friendships or even romantic relationships later on that hinders progress. This perfectly reflects the most pressing concerns students and young people in general face in school and then beyond it as we have seen in Chapter 2 (see Fig. 8).

As such we can call this rehabilitation a normalization process, where the clubs and other special education mechanisms whether they embody a real space such as the meeting place embodied by the club room or a more imaginary space play host to a collusion of various unusual characters who do not fit the otherwise preset definition of normality individually, however, through their inclusion by membership and bonds associated with their duties and responsibilities, whether their attempts at carrying them out are smooth and successful or not, eventually leads them to be more socially accepted. It is not a coincidence that the desire to be normal or the success of being socially integrated falls as a responsibility to the individual despite the fact that it's clearly more beneficial for the system in place than the individuals themselves. In fact, in manga, much like other similar media, the vast majority of background characters that would represent the said normality are often featured as plane looking, devoid of special characteristics and at times devoid of facial features altogether. In such a sense, it would not be wrong to say that protagonists who stand out through appearance, attitude, social status or any other means simultaneously draw positive changes in others who fit too much by drawing out creativity, individuality, strengths and weaknesses engaging into a melting pot of diversity and potential that was previously ignored and dormant, as well as in this process the diversity

and the positive action redefines the outrageousness of the protagonist's character as well as making a space of inclusion possible.

Another *gakuen manga* that exposes not only the difficulty of relating, but also addresses the complexity of romantic relations as viewed by the unprepared Japanese youth is *Kokoro Konekuto*. This story follows five high school students, Taichi, Iori, Himeko, Yoshifumi, and Yui, who are all members of the Student Cultural Research Club. Although at first, their mundane interactions exude a reluctant cooperation, an alien initiates extraordinary phenomena such as mind-swapping, emotive impulse magnification among others to force new ways for them to interact. This portrayal of an extreme as it is social experiment in the guise 'alien experiment' is not accidental. It speaks to the bizarre extreme of the deep mass psychological entrenchment that Japanese youth deals with as a set of performance pressures and inability to enact a healthy pattern of social and cognitive development. The act of physical gender exploration and the psychological immersion into 'empathy' by walking in another's shoes or the literal understanding of other by picking up their random thoughts through telepathy all insinuate breaking this trend requires substantial overhauls of not only school life, but the way society exerts its pressures on youth.

The soaking popularity of both titles as light novels, manga and a serialized anime series exposes a resonance with Honda's research results on junior high and senior high students' perception of the reality of their relations both as "being friends without being actually understood" as well as "acting in character versus being oneself" (Honda, 2011)[70] and exposes a flaw that maintains and helps to propagate social malformations in the form of delinquency, social withdrawal and confusing relational paradigms so long as social and cultural education is

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[70] Honda, Yuki. *The School 'Atmosphere' Mood of Young People Series* (Tokyo, Iwanami Publishing, 2011) 58-59

enacted without the a deeper understanding of their meaning and purpose, but in re-instating moral studies this problem can be remedied for the incoming generation of students. In the meantime, although the gakuen manga publication number has dropped and leveled off in recent years, its ability and influence to point out the flaws will fuel its popularity as a stable genre.

As discussed previously, rare but extraordinary events such as murders by juveniles, continuation of rebellious behavior, bullying, ostracization and abuses of authority despite various reforms, coupled with waning trust in the educational establishment created a breakdown of operational independence on the part of schools. The increase in reviews, reforms and amendments to the content of curriculum, school rules and changing internal pressures of community and parent participation though well intended, create an unclear and visibly incomplete methodology that is too dependent on symbolic meanings conveying only the desired outcomes but lack the road map necessary to implement the changes all the way down to the foundation, that is teacher training. This new mode of intervention in education has a secondary negative effect that exposes the internal struggle of forces at the level of decision-making that due to lack of trust expect immediate results and draw immediate conclusions guided by only the most surface level academic achievement data available. Likewise, the continued propagation of negative or disruptive behaviors shows that this lack of teachers' own understanding of their function and methodology in this new paradigm translates very easily into children performing the cultivated social behaviors without a good understanding of its deeper moral and civic meaning.

The choice MEXT took in order to remedy continuing social problems on the level of school life such as bullying, ostracization, truancy, abuses of power and so on, was to address the commonality of the ethical core of the role education plays in social and civic behavioral instruction. Considering that the academic standing of Japanese education is not in as

dramatically dire straits as the fears of the prevalent credentialist social views would have it represented, and in answering the demands to increase the pupils' ability to adapt, think creatively and be morally and physically balanced while maintaining a high academic score outcomes, re-instating moral studies as an obligatory course of study is a reasonable compromise.

But one thing that doesn't change is that the agency of change remains shifted as a responsibility to the individual and not the system, in which case this neo-liberal framework in conjunction with ambiguous symbolism redirects the focus from an unstable foundation of learning with its lack of clear methodology to the outcome of the individual in determining their success-failure. Since there is no clear way to evaluate moral outcomes with a scaling system much like the one used for academic achievement, and academic achievement is often criticized for not accurately measuring real skills and abilities the suggested course of action "to share responsibility for upbringing not only at school but throughout society" needs to clearly delineate the roles and responsibilities for each level of the social relation to the child.

In such a sense, much like the *yutori* system before it, *datsuyutori* reforms might only be able to produce marginal results if implemented without the willingness of society at large to do without its credentialist frame of thought. As mentioned in chapter one, manga as a visual form can provide a forum to explore multiple paths for different experiments and ideologies inserted into the realm of imagined education. This is where the wider social audience much like a traditional fanbase as the social dimension of anxieties and opinions can exert its influence without causing any harm.

Conclusion

As contemporary Japan confronts a range of challenges such as demographic shifts, global economic trends, and transformations in cultural values and personal lifestyles, Japanese youth must find a way to navigate a pathway through the contradictions generated through the meshing of old and new paradigms. Through an analysis of the relation between manga and school life, this study has revealed a basic contradiction between *tsumekomi* and *yutori* stances on education that has emerged in the context of education. This basic contradiction persists due to the persistence of credentialism, which has so effectively combined the *tsumekomi* and *yutori* stances on education. Although newer proposals for *ikiru chikara* seek to find an alternative middle ground between *tsumekomi* and *yutori* stances, credentialism threatens to overwhelm it as well.

Across the three main chapters of this study, in relation to emergence of *gakuen manga*, I have considered a variety of factors, such as the socio-economic shifts from the 1970s to the 1980s, as well as how the formation of castes and the neglect of ethics in favor of academic achievement have shaped Japanese education. Interestingly enough, looking at both "pure" *gakuen manga* and hybrid school life manga such as *Ansatsu kyōshitsu, Great Teacher Onizuka*, and *Yahari ore no seishun rabukome wa machigatteiru*, I found that the critique of prior educational goals within *gakuen manga* (and the solutions they offered) was largely consonant with the ideals associated with *ikiru chikara*, as currently promoted by MEXT, both in terms of desired outcomes and modes of execution. The overlap was especially striking in the context of social problems and conflicts such as delinquency, social withdrawal, and difficulties in male-female romantic interaction, which educational reforms also address.

The overlap between *gakuen manga* and *ikira chikara* found additional confirmation through the compilation of a dataset to analyze the emergence of *gakuen manga*. The dataset confirmed that the surge in *gakuen manga* publications corresponded with the rise of debates over *yutori* education and the shift toward the implementation of *datsu-yutori* grounded in *ikiru chikara*. In other words, *gakuen manga* may be considered to be playing a central role in the debates about educational goals, rather than merely responding to them. Considering the overlap between *gakuen manga* and shifts in educational policy brought two problems in particular to the fore. First, as is evident in the statistical research conducted through JASSO and MEXT as well as educational research more generally, discourses on "youth trouble" increased dramatically at the very time when it became clear that relaxation desired by *yutori* policies had not mitigated the examination hell of *tsumekomi* policies. On the contrary, students were increasingly forced into exerting pressure on themselves within an increasingly credentialist society. This tendency was reinforced by the implementation of *yutori* policies that cut away at the curriculum to gain social approval while sustaining the examination system, which led to an increased usage of cram schools to prepare for exams, thus acerbating socioeconomic unevenness. At the same time, the moral and civic components of education were increasingly pared down or eliminated, leaving Japanese youth with an exceedingly limited toolkit for developing social skills.

In such a context, the value of *gakuen manga* and other school life manga lay in the ethical perspective they offered on social issues that were pathologized in the mass media and treated as problems to be resolved by education policy makers. The boom in popularity of extracurricular and alternative curricular activities implies, on the one hand, that school was coming to be seen as a potential site for self-realization, precisely because the new possibilities for shaping and participating in a wide range of activities meant school life could be construed in terms of negotiable, two-way interactions, instead of top-down authority and mandated goals —

which is entirely in keeping with *ikiru chikara*. On the other hand, however, manga series do not merely embrace *ikiru chikara* as a solution. Rather they dwell on the problems posed by persistence of the credentialist system, which presents a profound challenge for policies based on *ikiru chikara*, for we begin to see how *ikiru chikara* may also be folded back onto the contradictory yet persistent bind of Japanese education. As such, the current boom of *gakuen manga* is worth closer consideration, for such manga may hold the key to a better understanding of the social factors that impede education, and what enables it.

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Appendices (if any)

Fig.1
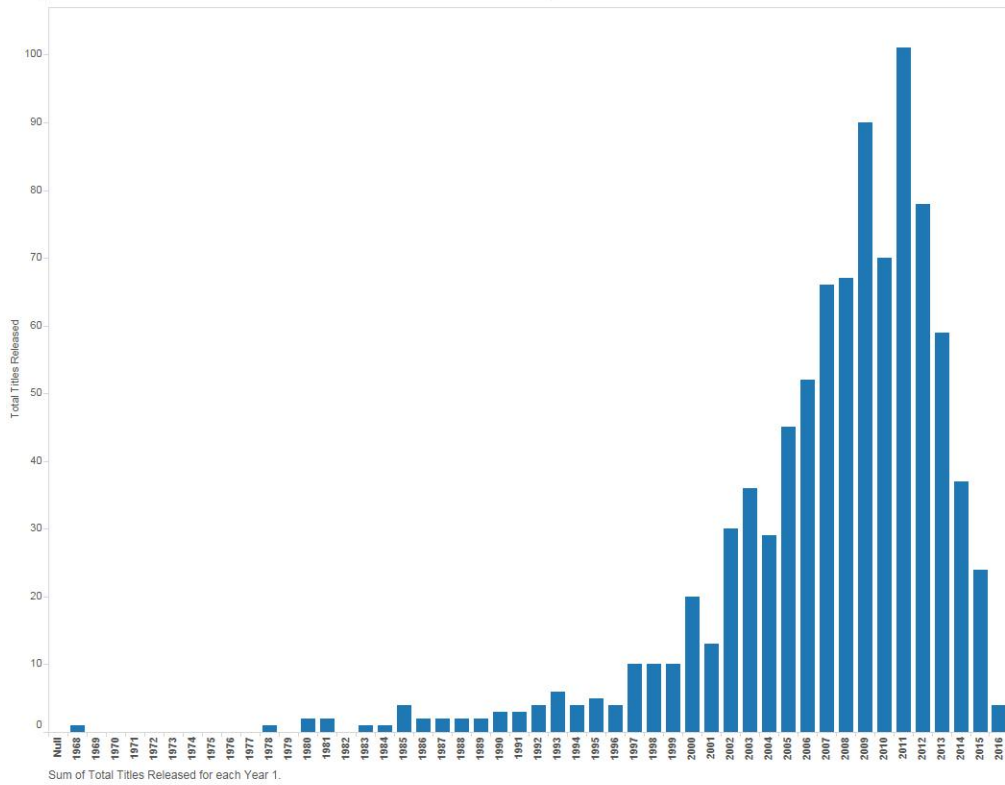

Sum of Total Titles Released for each Year 1.

Fig.2

The trend of sum of Number of Active Manga Publications with School Life/Club Content for Publishing Timeline Year.
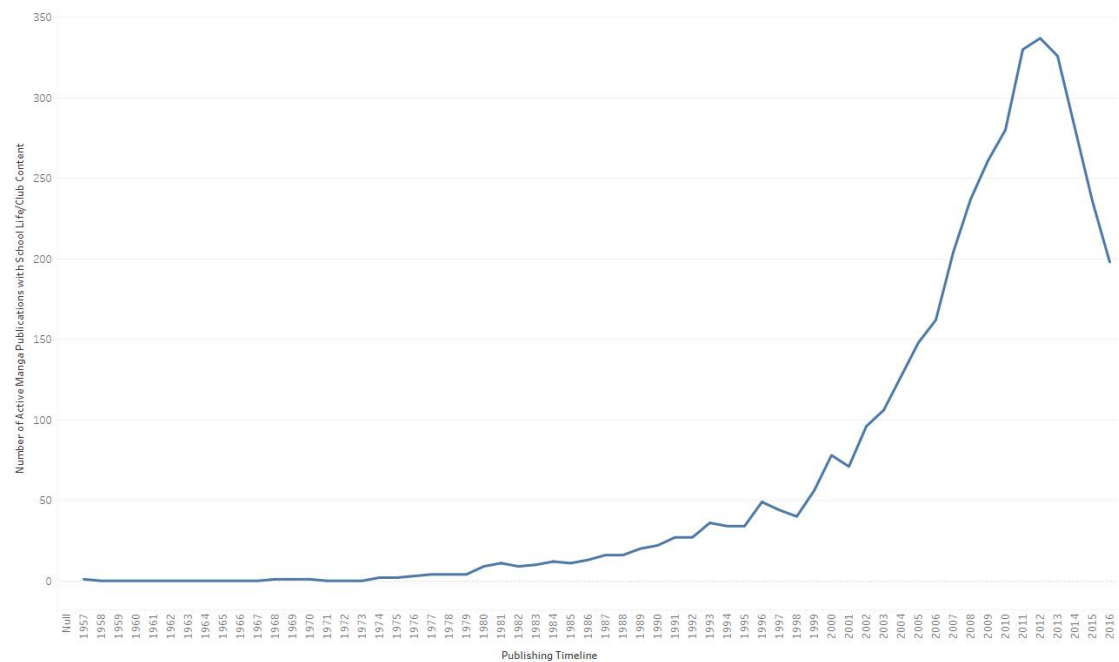
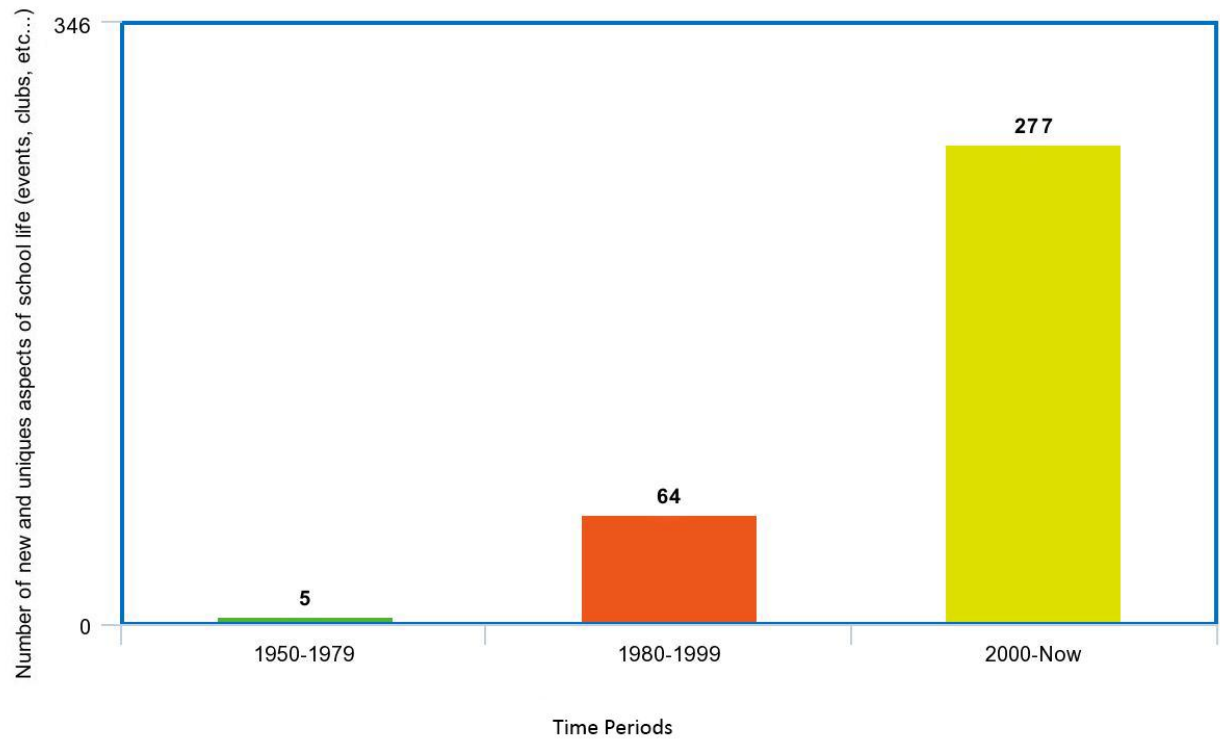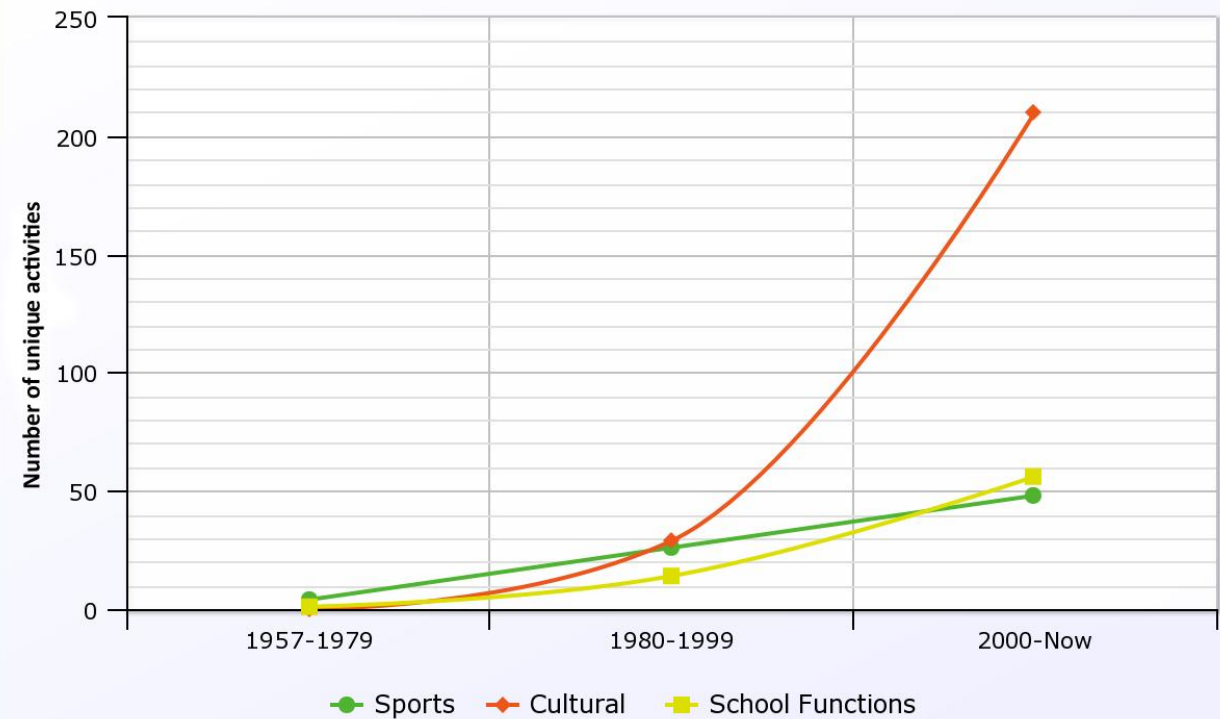Fig.3 — Diversification of the Representation of School Life

Fig.4 — Gakuen Activity Type Breakdown

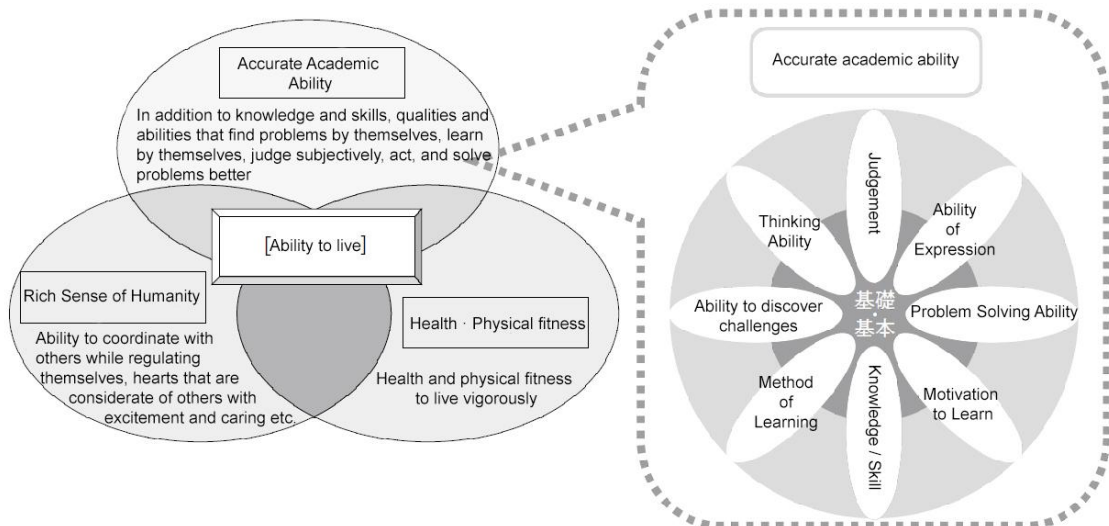**Fig.5:** Source: Rumiko Takahashi, *Ranma 1/2* Vol.1, page 73, 89, 90 (VIZ Media LLC, 2003)

Fig.6 ：「 Ability to live 」Conceptual diagram

Fig.7 The Lows of vocational relevance of education in Japan

Ratio mentioned as the significance of school education in "acquisition of vocational skills"
（国別・最終学歴別、「第6回世界青年意識調査」）

Legend:
- upper secondary education (e.g. high school)
- post-secondary education

Categories: Unites States, France, England, Sweden, Germany, Russia, Brazil, Phillipines, Thailand, Korea, Japan
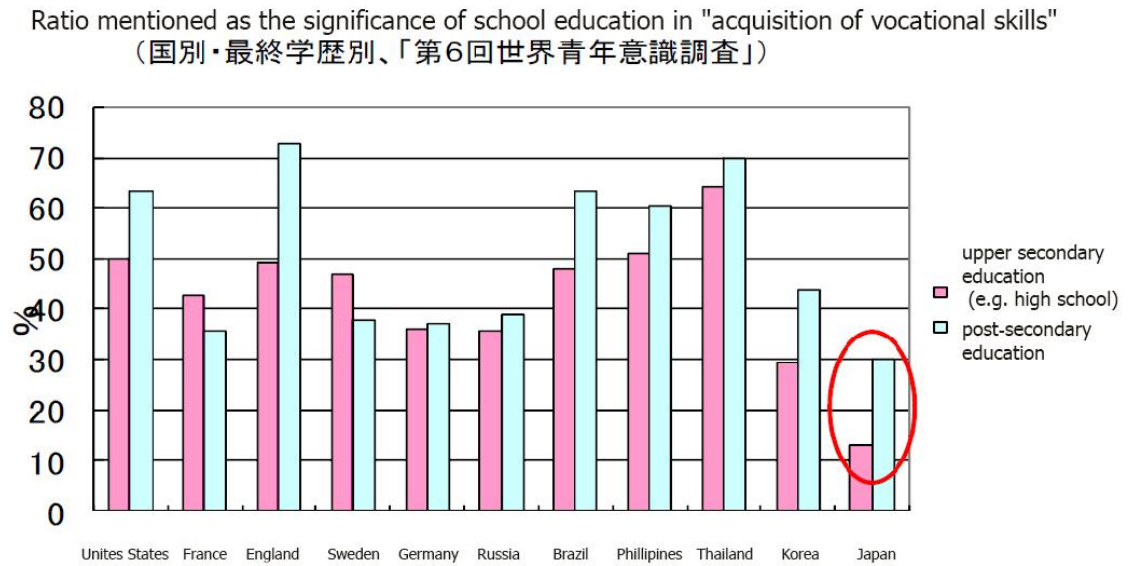
Fig.8 Content of recent student counseling

About 80% of universities etc. answered that the contents of consultation on "interpersonal relationship (family, friends, acquaintance, opposite sex relations)" is increasing

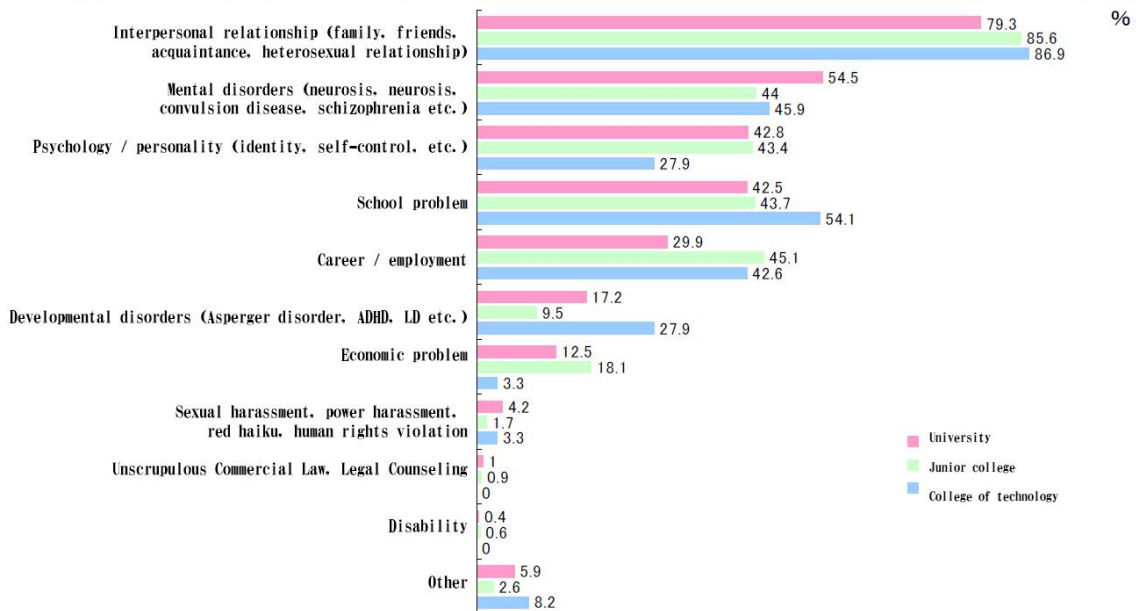| Category	University	Junior college	College of technology
Interpersonal relationship (family, friends, acquaintance, heterosexual relationship)	79.3	85.6	86.9
Mental disorders (neurosis, neurosis, convulsion disease, schizophrenia etc.)	54.5	44	45.9
Psychology / personality (identity, self-control, etc.)	42.8	43.4	27.9
School problem	42.5	43.7	54.1
Career / employment	29.9	45.1	42.6
Developmental disorders (Asperger disorder, ADHD, LD etc.)	17.2	9.5	27.9
Economic problem	12.5	18.1	3.3
Sexual harassment, power harassment, red haiku, human rights violation	4.2	1.7	3.3
Unscrupulous Commercial Law, Legal Counseling	1	0.9	0
Disability	0.4	0.6	0
Other	5.9	2.6	8.2

Fig 9 Subjects that are being implemented in association with "industrial society and people"

Many schools conduct comprehensive learning time and home-room activities, however these are associated with subjects. Very few schools, about 10% have dedicated class time related to social ethics which not associated with any subject.
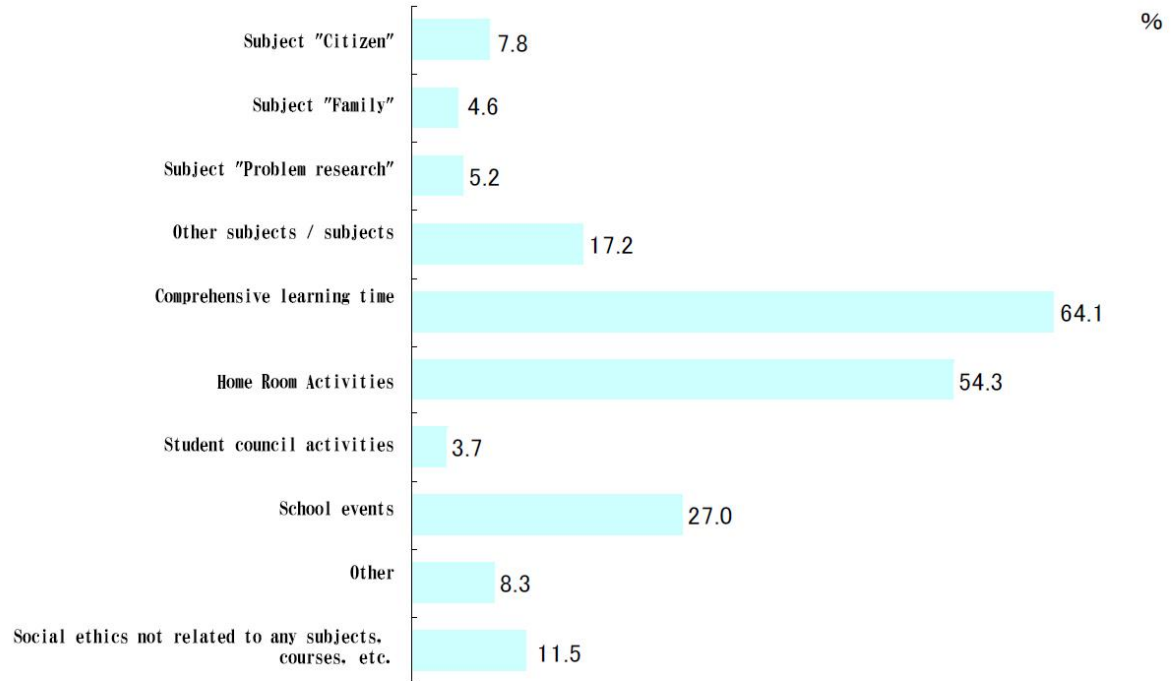
Subject	%
Subject "Citizen"	7.8
Subject "Family"	4.6
Subject "Problem research"	5.2
Other subjects / subjects	17.2
Comprehensive learning time	64.1
Home Room Activities	54.3
Student council activities	3.7
School events	27.0
Other	8.3
Social ethics not related to any subjects, courses, etc.	11.5

Fig.10 **Source:** **Fujisawa Tohru,** *Great Teacher Onizuka* **Vol.2 (Tokyopop, 2002) p.80-81**

Fig.11 Source: Rechi Kazuki, *Yahari ore no seishun rabukome wa machigatteiru* **Square Enix-Monthly BIG GANGAN (2012) p.1-3**