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WORLDS OF EAST ASIA
WELTEN OSTASIENS
MONDES DE
L'EXTRÊME-ORIENT

SEEKING THE SELF

Individualism and Popular Culture in Japan

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Introduction

The Japanese word *manga* is today in no need of translation today. The medium has become familiar to readers outside of Japan during the last two decades, initially through exported TV animation programmes (*anime*, hereafter) and pirated copies that circulated mainly in East and Southeast Asia. Today one can find translations of *manga* at news agents at local train stations in Germany. In cities, larger comic shops dedicate entire shelves to *manga*. In France, where *manga* has been embraced by the younger generation, related activities such as *kosupure* (コスプレ a short form for ‘costume play’: cos-play, hereafter)¹ or *dôjinshi* (同人誌 a journal produced by fans and amateur artists)² now constitute a major part of the local youth culture. It is noteworthy that in Europe, these Japanese products are not referred to as comics or cartoons but as *manga*. This suggests the recognition of characteristics peculiar to *manga*, which do not fit into the Euro-American category of comics and cartoons. Whether reflected in the drawing style or form as a medium, these characteristics are manifestations of the particular social context from which they derive.

1 See pp. 50 –2.

2 See Ch. 1.1– 2; p.32, fn. 2.

Manga: a Historical Overview

Some scholastic accounts trace the genealogy of manga as far back as the twelfth century, to Chôjû Giga (鳥獣戯画 Animal Scrolls), a narrative picture scroll³ drawn by Bishop Toba (鳥羽僧正 1053–1140).⁴ Others lay a larger emphasis on *ukiyoe* (浮世絵 woodblock prints) that were developed during the Edo period (江戸時代 1603–1868), not only because Katsushika Hokusai (葛飾北斎 1760–1849), the popular *ukiyoe* artist, had coined the word *manga*⁵, but also because the medium played a key role in the formation of popular culture with its use of mass printing techniques.

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, Japan embarked on a far-reaching project of modernisation. A growing dissatisfaction with the Tokugawa shogunate and its political views among the population was exacerbated by the threat of an US-American intervention in 1853, embodied by Commodore Perry and his black ships. Responding to the mounting unrest, a restoration movement, which had emerged among the lower-middle class samurai, was accomplished by the Meiji Ishin (明治維新 Meiji Restoration) in 1868, replacing the feudal shogunate with a new political order.

European style cartoons were introduced during this tumultuous period by two expatriate artists: the Englishman, Charles Wirgman (1833–91) and the Frenchman, Georges Bigot (1860–1927). Wirgman, sent to Japan in 1857 as a correspondent for *The Illustrated London News*, did not only record significant political events but also captured the life of commoners from his foreign, satirical perspective. *The Japan*

3 This art form, originally introduced from China, was called *emakimono* (絵巻物). A scroll did not consist of pages or frames but formed a continuum, which was sometimes 80 feet long. Religious themes often built the framework for the narratives.

4 Ishiko 1980a, Shimizu 1991.

5 Hokusai published his collected sketches as *Hokusai Manga* (北斎漫画) since 1814. They were also appreciated in Europe, especially in France, where during the mid- and late nineteenth century, *ukiyoe* had become an object of admiration at salons.

Punch, published monthly by Wirgman since 1862 for the expatriate community in Yokohama, had begun to fascinate Japanese readers by its witty, journalistic views on their own society. Georges Bigot arrived in Japan in 1882 to teach art at an army officer's school. He also created his own magazine *Tobaé* in 1887, in which he satirised the authorities as well as the lives of commoners. The influence that both cartoonists brought to bear on Japanese art forms were considerable: not only drawing techniques but also British and French traditions of political satire were adopted by Japanese artists. Inspired by and modeled after their magazines, satirical magazines and journals created by local artists numbered thirty by the end of the Meiji era.⁶

The following Taishô period (大正時代 1912–26) witnessed two pioneers of Japan's modern cartoon: Kitazawa Rakuten (北沢楽天 1876–1955) and Okamoto Ippei (岡本一平 1886–1948). The liberal atmosphere of the Taishô democracy⁷ enabled them to demonstrate their abilities to the full. It was through their works published in daily and weekly newspapers that a *manga* readership grew by leaps and bounds, and at the same time, the *manga* artist as a profession became established. According to Ishiko Jun (石子順 1935–), a pioneering scholar of *manga*, it was through Kitazawa's contribution that the word *manga* became popularised.⁸

Kitazawa learned the latest techniques of cartooning while working for the US-American weekly magazine *Box for Curios*. After drawing political satire for *Jiji Manga* (時事漫画), a Sunday supplement of the newspaper *Jiji Shinpo* (時事新報), Kitazawa started his own *manga* magazine *Tokyo Puck* in 1905, during the height of the Russo-Japanese

6 Ishiko 1980a: 78.

7 See p. 149, fn. 28.

8 Ibid. 16. In 1899 Kitazawa employed the word *manga* for his caricatures which were serialised in the newspaper *Jiji Shinpô* (時事新報). According to Shimizu Isao (清水勲 1939 –), it was Imaizumi Ippyô (今泉一瓢 1866–1904) who was the first to employ the word *manga* as a translation of the English word 'caricature' (Shimizu 1999: 3–4). However, both scholars agree that it was in the early twentieth century, during the Taishô and the early Shôwa period, that the word *manga* became popularised through an increasing number of newspaper cartoons and collected works.

War (1904–5). The popularity of *Tokyo Puck*, the coloured, weekly journal with a circulation of over 100 thousand copies, enabled Kitazawa to produce other *manga* journals as well as to train novices.

Okamoto Ippei, a journalist of the newspaper *Asahi Shinbun* (朝日新聞), also produced a significant number of caricatures. As recounted in a famous episode, Natsume Sôseki (夏目漱石 1867–1916), one of the Japanese great writers of the twentieth century, who appreciated Okamoto's works, contributed a prologue to his first collection of drawings *Tanhô Gashu* (探訪画趣 1914). Sôseki's acknowledgement of the *manga*'s ability to capture current events and record social trends encouraged Okamoto to produce more, which contributed to the development of the medium itself.⁹

In addition to caricature and satirical drawings, narrative *manga* strips, initially experimented by Okamoto,¹⁰ had also developed during the late Taishô period. Asô Yutaka's (麻生豊 1898–1961) popular four-panel family strip *Nonki na Tôsan* (のんきなとうさん Easy-going Daddy) was serialised in 1924 in the newspaper *Hôchi Shinbun* (報知新聞) at the request of the editor, who wished to supply diversion to survivors of the Kantô Great Earthquake (関東大震災) in 1923. Around the same time, *manga* strips for children also started to be serialised in newspapers. Together with child magazines that had first appeared in the late Meiji period (明治時代 1868–1912), *manga* for children received attention as a new, promising marketing genre. This also coincided with the formation of juvenile literature, the demand for which had been prompted by the *shinkyôiku undô* (新教育運動 new education movement).¹¹ By the early Shôwa period (昭和時代 1926–89), *manga* of

9 Ishiko 1980a: 28.

10 Inspired by cinematography, Okamoto deployed the technique of frames and created a style of narrative *manga*. His idea was put into practice as a form of *shôsetsu manga* (小説漫画 novel *manga*), first serialised in 1921 in *Asahi Shinbun*.

11 The early-twentieth-century educational movement emphasising the individuality and initiative of the pupils in opposition to the standardised education of the state-controlled school system since the Meiji period. The principles and methods espoused by the Japanese movement were those of the European and American's that arose in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The need for this movement was at first suggested by Tanimoto Tomeri (谷本富 1867–1946) who

samurai dramas and adventure stories were produced as part of juvenile literature.¹²

The interwar years hampered the further development of *manga*, as well as all other cultural forms of expression. Since the 1930s, an ever more draconian censorship and mounting pressure from the authorities had turned *manga* into a medium of political propaganda. Child magazines featured ever more photographs and articles that depicted brave soldiers and glorious armies, leaving little room for entertainment. Besides, the general shortage of supplies, conscription and work in ammunition factories hindered artists and editors from pursuing their professional interests.

Postwar Development: *Manga* as Commodity

Manga soon re-appeared after the Second World War. With Japan's unconditional surrender in August 1945, *manga* artists gradually returned from evacuation points in the hinterlands or military assignments to re-start their professional careers. Tezuka Osamu (手塚治虫 1928–89), generally accredited as the founder and master of Japan's postwar *manga*, was then only eighteen years old and had already drawn 2,000 pages of *manga*, despite the absence of any prospect of publication.¹³ Dispirited

spent three years in Europe and the United States studying new educational theories. The movement had developed during the Taishō period. Private schools such as *Seijō Gakuen* (成城学園), *Jiyū Gakuen* (自由学園), *Myōjō Gakuen* (明星学園) and *Tamagawa Gakuen* (玉川学園) made 'new education' a basic tenet of their teaching philosophy. The movement, however, suffered under the conservative educational policies of the militarists in the 1930s and had lost much of its vitality by the time World War II began. Many of the movement's central ideas were revived during the postwar educational reform (KEJ 7: 121). Cf. Ehmccke 1979, Itsuno 1976, Nakano 1975.

12 Complete works for children such as *Shōgakusei Zenshū* (小学生全集 1927) and *Nihon Jidō Bunko* (日本児童文庫 1927) also contained volumes devoted to *manga*.

13 Tezuka 1999: 62.

and destitute in a war-torn country, people were longing for diversion just as desperate as they were for regular meals. On black markets, loose pages and parts of old *manga* comics sold like hot cakes. While a majority of the population could hardly afford leisure, low-cost *manga* paperbacks, called *akahon* (赤本 ‘red book’, denoting the extensive use of red ink), served as a diversion exclusively for children. In accordance with the booming *kashihon-ya* (貸し本屋 rental book shop) business, *manga* developed quickly into a significant mass medium.¹⁴

The postwar *manga* boom was initiated by an *akahon* called *Shin Takarajima* (新宝島 New Treasure Island), produced by Tezuka Osamu in 1947. This 200-page-long *akahon* sold over 400 thousand copies shortly after its publication. It had a significant influence on young *manga* readers, some of whom later became professional *manga* artists themselves. Tezuka soon became a star with this first publication and started serialising *manga* in some boys magazines, which were newly created. Tezuka, who had been brought up in a wealthy intellectual family, had come into contact with art, literature, *manga* and films in his childhood. His application of cinematic techniques created unprecedented effects of dynamics and speed that dazzled his young readers.¹⁵ He had been especially fascinated by the animations of the US-American cartoon artist Walt Disney and subsequently produced *Tetsuwan Atomu* (鉄腕アトム Atom Boy), Japan’s first animated television series, which started in 1963.

In Japan, television broadcasting, which had started in 1953, contributed to a significant increase in consumption of media in general.¹⁶ The weekly intervals of TV programmes conditioned people for an equivalent publication scheme of magazines and journals. The latter half of the 1950s witnessed a virtual boom in weekly magazines.¹⁷

14 Fujishima 1990: 61–78; Soeda 1983: 25–44.

15 Fujiko Fujio Ⓐ (藤子不二雄 Ⓐ 1934–), the *manga* artist who had created a great number of popular child *manga* since the late 1960s, described Tezuka’s great importance in the formation of postwar *manga* in his biographical *manga* *Manga Michi*. See Image 1.

16 The diffusion of television sets had multiplied each year and had reached its peak shortly before the Imperial wedding in 1959 (Ishiko 1980b: 115).

17 Ibid. 112.

While popular *manga* serials were often turned into TV dramas with real actors, the first locally produced TV *anime*, *Tetsuwan Atomu* was broadcast every week in the form of 30-minute episodes. It also served as a model for subsequent TV *anime* productions. Inspired by *Tetsuwan Atomu*, many popular *manga* were turned into TV animations. However, due to the lack of the professional labour force, US-American TV animations and old *manga* films, originally produced for cinema, were frequently put on air to supplement local productions.¹⁸

The pervasiveness of television sets in Japanese households had cast a shadow over the *kashihon-ya* business. *Manga* comics had hitherto formerly been produced for and circulated through *kashihon-ya* shops, which were often located near elementary schools. By the end of the 1950s, the number of *kashihon-ya* shops had reached a point of market saturation and revenues started to drop. Not only television sets but also the general improvement of living standards rendered the thrift aspect of the *kashihon-ya* business obsolete. During the high economic growth period of the mid-1960s, *manga* evolved into full-fledged merchandise: as with other commodities, *manga* was now something to be possessed rather than borrowed. Just as the ever increasing number of weekly *manga* magazines incited a more consumptive behaviour, it also intensified the pressure on the productivity of *manga* artists. As the market expanded, the medium diversified and became more elaborated. Around the same time, *manga* magazines that targeted older generations started appearing. By the late 1960s, the number of *manga* magazines published for adult readers amounted to more than forty, including a few publications specifically for a female readership.¹⁹

Thus, *manga* began to evolve into a full-grown commodity that created a wide range of consumers groups. Throughout the following two decades, it became one of Japan's largest industries.

18 Ibid. 124.

19 Ibid. 156.

Consumption as Self-articulation

This dissertation will limit itself to *manga* developed in Japan's postwar years. It conceptualises *manga* as a commodity, that is, an object of consumption. The discussion will also take into consideration other print media, as well as animation films, television programmes, diverse merchandise and relevant activities, such as *dôjinshi*-making, comic markets and internet-based fan communication. For many Japanese, the subject-matter of the present study constitutes a significant part of their everyday lives.

A number of theories of consumption tend to see in this fundamental human practice the constitution of identity. According to this view, consumers not only accomplish a specific self-perception through their choices, they also communicate this self-image by way of consumption. When tracing the intellectual antecedents of these theories, clearly the most influential works are Veblen's analysis of what he called conspicuous consumption,²⁰ Simmel's essays on fashion and money,²¹ and Weber's works on status value.²²

Among the most important contemporary theorists of consumption is Pierre Bourdieu, whose work, *Distinction: A Sociological Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, was first published in France in 1979 (the English translation became first available in 1984). Bourdieu developed his theory on the basis of research on people's articulations of 'taste'. What distinguishes Bourdieu from other theorists of consumption prior to him is the decisive role he attributes to an individual's symbolic or cultural capital and the ways in which this can be put to use to display 'taste'. While he tends to downplay the role of material possessions, Bourdieu recognises the limitations for individuals' social mobility given the deeply ingrained norms and forms of behaviour and thought and that

20 Veblen 1925.

21 Simmel 1957, 1978.

22 Weber 1958, 1978.

even recently acquired wealth will not necessarily enable individuals to enhance their status.

Postmodern production techniques, however, cater to an ever widening diversity of tastes and values and thus seem to encourage more individuals' social mobility than the reproduction of cultural capital. It should be kept in mind that Bourdieu's research was undertaken in France where distinctions between class differences appear to be more decisive than other social distinctions. Unlike in France, however, in the Japanese case, class relationships do not assume the same determining role. Here, consumption makes possible social mobility just as it reproduces existing social distinctions. In Japan, consumption, especially that of popular culture, is often more an experiment and exploration of oneself than a reflection of a *habitus*.²³

Implicit in the analytical perspective that I am trying to outline is a postmodernist theory of subjectivity. Central to this is the idea that individual subjectivity is not a coherent and unitary source by which an individual makes sense of the world. Rather, subjectivity should be seen as a heterogeneous assemblage of self-images that is constituted through the meaning systems or discourses present in a given society. Since the work of Michel Foucault, the notion developed into a theory of language, knowledge and power and has established a new intellectual paradigm.²⁴

Yet, this paradigm notwithstanding, the modernist premise of the individual with a unique vision and private identity remains a recurrent theme in the Euro-American philosophical tradition: in the mid-1980s, shortly after Frederic Jameson had pronounced 'the death of the subject' or 'the end of individualism as such',²⁵ Charles Taylor newly delineated a genealogy of 'individualism as such'.²⁶ He thereby demonstrated the inevitability in the historical context of Christianity of an ideology of the inner self as the essence of personhood. This essentialist vision of the self permeates the unitary, coherent notion on the subject and its

23 Clammer 1992.

24 Cf. Foucault 1982, 1990, Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982.

25 Jameson 1985.

26 Taylor 1989.

conscious, self-determining subjectivity. The self is here an authorial source of meaning, a given point of reference for individual experience.

The Japanese form of the self that we are going to examine here demarcates it from this Euro-American, essentialist view. As we will see in the first part of this dissertation, in which remarkable *manga* phenomena in the last decade are illustrated, a Japanese self is often articulated by placing oneself among relationships with others. In regard to *manga* consumption, such relationships can be those with fictional characters or even virtual creatures. Here the knowledge of the fictional world merges into the person's self-knowledge and symbolic meaning attached to it is presented as her/his self-image. This is one of the manifestations of relational vision of the self that is frequently observed in Japanese society today. I call this the *relational self*. Whilst the essentialist vision of the self is a historical development in European, Christian contexts, the *relational self* emerged and developed in Japanese contexts.

Jiga (自我): the Self in Japan

With reference to Karatani Kôjin (柄谷行人 1941–), one could argue that the development of modern Japanese literature has been a search for a sense of inner self.²⁷ Among the many outcomes of Japan's opening in the early twentieth century, the preoccupation with the idea of individuality was one of the most significant. Lacking a tradition of philosophical liberalism, Japanese intellectuals of the Meiji period found Western notions of personal freedom and individualism simultaneously attractive, frightening and elusive.

Mori Ôgai (森鷗外 1862–1922), the great writer of the time whose first novel *Maihime* (舞姫 A Dancer 1890)²⁸ has often been considered

27 Karatani 1981: 67.

28 Mori 1965a.

as a manifestation of a emerging sense of *kindaiteki jiga* (近代的自我 the modern self), admitted later in his essay *Môsô* (妄想 A Daydream 1911)²⁹ that he had felt distressed by his inability to gain a sense of inner self:

Europeans say that having no fear of death is a sign of barbarity. Then I might be a barbarian. I remember that my parents often told me that, born to a samurai family, one should be courageous enough to commit *seppuku* [切腹 suicide by cutting the abdomen]. [...] [Although I feel no pain in losing the self through death,] it is tragic to think that I lose the self before I could grasp it. [...] I feel a complete void in my mind. This makes me feel extremely sad. [...] It is sheer agony. It is pain.³⁰

A medical officer in Japan's Imperial army, Ôgai was sent by the government to study public hygiene in Germany from 1884 to 1888. Unlike his contemporary Natsume Sôseki (夏目漱石 1867–1916), who gloomily confined himself to London, Ôgai took an active part in social and intellectual circles in Germany. After returning to Japan, he also made significant contributions to the country's intellectual debates by translating European literature as well as writing his own novels and essays. Despite all this, Ôgai never attained the assuring sense of an inner self.³¹

There was, however, a common tendency to interpret individualism as an invitation to self-indulgence and thereby threatening the unity of the nation state.³² Sôseki took issue with this wide-spread misperception in his famous lecture *Watakushi no Kojinshugi* (私の個人主義 My Individualism) delivered in 1914.³³ Warning against prejudice from both sides of the political spectrum, he argued self-realisation could only be attained when the nation was at peace and that therefore individualism and nationalism were compatible ideologies. Reflecting on the tendency of his contemporaries to oppose the two ideologies, Sôseki's novels often

29 Mori 1965b.

30 Ibid. 99.

31 Cf. Bowring 1979.

32 Harootunian (1974) argues that the redefinition of individualism in Japan during the Taishô period likened it to a form of privatism, that is, pursuit of private interests were over-stressed while its inner conscious was toned down.

33 Natsume 1974b.

focussed on the desperate struggle to pursue a life of self-fulfilment in a society that did little to support this effort.³⁴

From the late Meiji to early Shôwa periods, the desire for a clear sense of inner self manifested itself in numerous literary movements and experiments. This included the emergence and development of *shishôsetsu* (私小説 I-novel),³⁵ a passion for a free, self-determined life and romantic love as expressed by the *Myôjô* (明星)³⁶ *tanka* poets, a series of philosophical essays on the pursuit of self-awareness, initiated by Takayama Chogyû (高山樗牛 1871–1902),³⁷ *Shirakaba* group's (白樺派) 'new village' plan,³⁸ and so forth. This preoccupation with individualism was not limited to the field of literature, but evolved into public debates and gave rise to reformist undertaking that included new methods of education³⁹ and feminist movements.⁴⁰

Returning to Sôseki's critical viewpoint: the inner self was often conceptualised in opposition to the nation state, a collective entity to which one belonged and yielded. The anticipated tension between a pursuit of self-fulfillment and a commitment to the nation became a source for indigenous models of individualism during the interwar period. As public attention became channelled into issues of national concern of

34 Cf. Roske-Cho 1973, Karatani 1981.

35 The narrative form of the novel is often compared to the 'Ich roman' or the Euro-American sense of autobiography, while other scholars regard it as specific to Japanese literature. It can be pronounced as *watakushi shôsetsu*. It is also called *shinkyô shôsetsu* (心境小説) for its tendency to describe states and changes of the human mind. The genre constitutes a significant part of history of modern Japanese literature (NKB 4: 539–44). Among German scholarship on *shishôsetsu*, Hijiya-Kirschner's research (1981) is especially suggestive.

36 The literature journal was founded by the *tanka* poet Yosano Tekkan (与謝野鉄幹 1873–1935) in 1900. It provided the opportunity for many young talented poets to reach the public. The journal also served as a platform for Japan's Romanticist movement (NKB 5: 422–4).

37 See p. 204, fn. 50.

38 In addition to voluntary work in the fields, each member was expected to devote their remaining time to an introspective search for the inner self. The village was organised and supported by Mushanokôji Saneatsu (武者小路実篤 1885–1976) and other members of *Shirakaba* group (Kuno and Tsurumi 1965a).

39 See p. 12, fn. 11.

40 Cf. Mae 1997.

the 1930s, intellectuals were to refute the Euro-American concept of the individual and instead to provide a Japanese one, which posited a dependence of the individual on the collective. Among the best known accounts was perhaps Watsuji Tetsurô's *aidagara* (間柄 betweenness), which stipulated the existence of relationships prior to that of individuals.⁴¹ Beyond the debates on individualism, scholars began to highlight the traditional cultural characteristics in many other fields during this period and to contrast them to Euro-American ones. The focus on traditional Japanese values manifested itself especially in the field of ethnology, represented by Yanagita Kunio (柳田国男 1875–1962)⁴² and the so-called ‘village sociology’ of Aruga Kizaemon (有賀喜左衛門 1879–1979),⁴³ both of whom advocated the central role of fieldwork.

Efforts to distil a ‘traditional Japan’ can therefore be seen as a concomitant of the country’s modernisation. This was because accounts of the nation always had an in-built reference to *Seiyô* (西洋 ‘the West’), that is, ‘the West’ as a kind of guiding principle for modernity. Ironically, a sense of national unity among Japan’s population was grounded in this feeling of national inferiority and at the same time motivated by the passion for overcoming it. This self-image, precisely a feeling of unity as Japanese, I call *Japaneseness*.

Japan’s victory in the Russo-Japanese War, however, had effected a fundamental change in national self-perception: a general sense of national self-confidence evolved and peaked during the interwar period. Japan’s national characteristics, which had up until then been the cause

41 The central idea that constitutes Watsuji’s *Rinrigaku* (倫理学 Ethics, Watsuji 1961–3). *Aidagara* refers to the relational network which provides humanity with a social meaning. For Watsuji, a person is born to the world already within this network of relationships and thus human existence is a priori in this ‘betweenness’. This idea is demonstrated in Watsuji’s account for the Japanese word *ningen* (人間 human being) as 人 (a person or people) and 間 (between). His philosophical etymology makes clear that the Japanese word ‘human beings’ refers to a dual nature of a person as an individual as well as an inextricably communal existence. Laying emphasis on holistic character of a society, *Rinrigaku* demarcated itself from the tradition of modern Western ethics (cf. Watsuji 1996, KD 14: 930–1).

42 See pp. 107–8.

43 See p. 167.

for a sense of inferiority toward ‘the West’, now became a matter of mere differences. This change was supported by a qualitative shift in perspective on *Japaneseness*, first by intellectuals and later by society at large. The sense of *Japaneseness*, initially propagated by the state to raise people’s consciousness of the nation, evolved into a more fundamental quality of primordial ties that bound an ethnic group. The essence of this naturalised cohesiveness was attributed to the Tennô, the Japanese emperor ‘since times immemorial’.

As part of this transformative process, ultra-nationalistic ideas became dominant in the intellectual discourse on nationalism by the 1930s. These ideas manifested themselves at first in terrorist actions by Asahi Heigo (朝日平吾 1890–1921) and Nakata Konichi (中田良一 1903–21). Presenting himself as a *sekishi* (赤子 Tennô’s subject),⁴⁴ who had been suffering exploitation by social evils, Asahi assassinated one of the richest entrepreneurs of the time. The link between an egalitarian ideal of individualism and the Tennô system formed the very core of this form of ultra-nationalism that was later elaborated by Kita Ikki (北一輝 1883–1937) and his followers. Following two failed attempts to overthrow the government and the execution of Kita, the proponents of an ultra-nationalist ideology gradually disappeared from the political stage, while the conservative Tennôists seized power confronting international wars. Here, the form of Tennô worship advocated by ultra-nationalists became absorbed into a fascist model of national unity. By this time, *Japaneseness* had become synonymous with Tennô worship, whose embodiment of the nation was both political as well as cultural.

It is worth noting that in postwar Japan, when the country had achieved a high level of economic growth and began to attract foreign attention, public debates on Japanese cultural uniqueness became wide-spread again. This was evident in the discussion of *nihonjinron* (日本人論 theories of being Japanese), which suggested the cultural uniqueness of the Japanese. Among the various subject that ranged from psycho-

44 *Sekishi*, which means a baby, figuratively referred to Japan’s population as descendants of the Tennô (KJE: 1431).

analysis to business management, Doi Takeo's (土居健郎 1920–) *Amae no Kôzô* (甘えの構造 Anatomy of Dependence)⁴⁵ and Nakane Chie's (中根千枝 1926–) *Tate Shakai no Ningen Kankei* (縦社会の人間関係 Japanese Society)⁴⁶ were also translated into English. Both authors depicted a Japanese worldview that was premised on a fundamental value of co-dependence. The intellectual genealogy of a relational notion of the person, which was first pronounced by Watsuji, was taken up and developed in intellectual discourse in postwar Japan.⁴⁷

The search for the inner self gradually came to be treated as a problem of the past that belonged to the particular stage of modernisation. Today, the Euro-American sense of self, though articulated from a Japanese perspective, has become self-evident to people, especially for those generations born after the high economic growth period. At the same time, the relational notion of personhood is interwoven on different conscious levels.

The Euro-American sense of the self, the way in which it is envisioned by a Japanese, might be called the *essential self*, which is thought to constitute the core of a unique, individual person. Despite their fundamental differences, the *essential self* coexists with the indigenous notion of the *relational self*. While the sense of *essential self* is consciously articulated and asserted in everyday contexts, the *relational self* operates at a more unreflective level. This two-fold structure is, I suggest, most evident in consumerist behaviour especially in that of *manga*.

What caught my attention during my stay in Tokyo in the 1990s was a striking passion for self-knowledge, which was frequently referred to as *jibun sagashi* (自分探し self-seeking), *jiko shuchô* (自己主張 self-assertion), *jiko jitsugen* (自己実現 self-realisation) and *jiko hyôgen* (自己表現 self-expression). Especially for the young generations, these were major concerns. Typical *manga* activities such as *dôjinshi*-making⁴⁸

45 Doi 1971.

46 Nakane 1967.

47 See Ch. 4.3.

48 See Ch. 1.1–2, p. 32, fn. 2.

or cos-play were often referred to as means of self-expression.⁴⁹ What to wear, which music to listen and which film to watch were choices that had to be carefully made. My reflections gradually evolved into the form of scholarly inquiry during my studies in England and later in Germany. With these research objects narrowed down and specific points to ask, I undertook some fieldwork, in spring 1999 and summer 2001.

Most broadly, this dissertation is about a certain form of self-perception in contemporary Japan. *Manga* is the research object through which I investigate this issue. For *manga* is no doubt a socially significant phenomenon evolved in Japan, though not limited to it. Therefore I suggest that it reflects especially well this desire for self-knowledge that has preoccupied the Japanese since the country's modernisation.

In the first two chapters, I will illustrate a number of case studies that pertain to the consumption of *manga* and thereby situate the research object. These two chapters form the ethnographic part of this dissertation. It is based on my own interviews, personal observations and material taken from popular press and television programmes rather than scientific accounts. My methods and theoretical approach derive from anthropological accounts in Media and Cultural Studies. In Part II, I trace these issues to Japan's historical process of modernisation. The Japanese preoccupation with the self began with the country's modernisation and its investigation therefore requires a closer look at different debates, ideologies, events and sentiments of the time. Among them the Tennô system is crucial, as it embodied and signified both the oneness of the Japanese people (i.e. *Japaneseness*) and an indigenous form of self-perception as individuals. Until the end of the Second World War, the Tennô system served as a political, and in practice, also a religious one. I will suggest in the following that the *relational self* is an outcome of Japan's modernisation process that was initiated within the framework of the Tennô system and that continues to pertain to Japan's society until today.

49 See pp. 50 – 2.