



# Anime and the Declining Birth Rate

CULTURAL REFLECTIONS

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According to [data.worldbank.org](http://data.worldbank.org), Japan has a fertility rate of 1.4. What does that mean? That means every imaginary Japanese woman will only produce 1.4 kids. Just to be clear, in order to maintain a country's population, women must produce at least 2 children. Another way to look at the data is to analyze the rates of deaths and births per 1000 people. Prb.org, with *The World Population Data Sheet*, states that there are 8 births per 1000 while there are 9 deaths per 1000. The data sheets calculate this as a natural decrease of 0.1%.<sup>1</sup> Looking at birthrate data from UNdata, Japan's birthrate has steadily decreased since the 1970's.<sup>2</sup> This data is just numbers disregarding individual women as activists in the process. The role of women in Japan has been, and still has the legacy of, being a "good wife, wise mother" A cultural construction created during the Meiji Restoration in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that was used to keep women in the home. The Equal Employment Opportunity Law of 1987 was a significant event in Japanese women's history where the companies became mandated to hire female employees. This occurred in the historical context of the キャリアウーマン "Career Women" becoming a social norm.



*President Kikuko Yano speaks at her office in Chiyoda*

From 1975 to 1987, there was a 59% increase in female employment which accounted for 24.3 million women in the working force. This is roughly 40% of the labor force.<sup>3</sup> Their role in the workplace is still growing, looking at this chart from the Economist, female influence in the workforce from 1997-2008 shows a significant increase.<sup>4</sup> However, these numbers do not represent the cultural environment Japanese women enter into. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe recently stated that he wants women to hold 30% of senior management positions by 2020.<sup>5</sup> The "senior management positions" is an especially sore subject because women in most industries will be held back from holding powerful positions due to child caring issues or negative perceptions of powerful women in Japanese society. In fact, Abe recently urged women to return to the workplace despite the governmental debacle that is effective social netting in the

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.prb.org/pdf11/2011population-data-sheet\\_eng.pdf](http://www.prb.org/pdf11/2011population-data-sheet_eng.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?d=PopDiv&f=variableID%3a54#PopDiv>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.gojapango.com/culture/japanese\\_women.html](http://www.gojapango.com/culture/japanese_women.html)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.economist.com/node/15174418>

<sup>5</sup> [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2014-05/27/c\\_133365758.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2014-05/27/c_133365758.htm)

form of day care centers.<sup>6</sup> Japanese women in the business sphere are in an environment that still has a strong cultural bias toward the male figure as the breadwinner and the wife as the homemaker. The changing female workforce in Japan has affected the dynamics and perceptions of effective female peers. Currently, women employed in companies many times have to choose either childbearing or being the “career women” which leaves less time and motivation for raising children.

The Love Plus resort in Atami, Japan might be the most telling emergence of the negative perceptions of real women. Anime does have many strong female characters such as Mikasa Ackerman from Attack on Titan, and Yorouchi from Bleach but these characters are far overshadowed by the abundance of cute anime characters.



Mikasa Ackerman

The connection with these cute female characters shows what younger men prefer which is an idealized highschool sweetheart that chooses to pursue love over business success. In June 2010, The “Non-Existent Youth Bill” was proposed in Japan. The bill was proposed to have very strict regulation of depictions on “Non-Existent” underage characters in anime, manga, games etc. The bill was shot down but later came back up as Bill 156 in December of the same year. The bill amended and changed wording which caused it to pass.

- The Metropolitan government is given the authority to propose controls on internet access for children of different ages, although it is required to consult with the telecommunications industry, parents' representatives and educators.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-05-29/japan-child-care-crisis-threatens-workplace-diversity/5487556>

- The definition of harmful material is expanded to include "any manga, animation, or pictures (but not including real life pictures or footage) that features either sexual or pseudo sexual acts that would be illegal in real life, or sexual or pseudo sexual acts between close relatives whose marriage would be illegal, where such depictions and / or presentations unjustifiably glorify or exaggerate the activity."
- Any publisher who has more than six works declared harmful under the new criteria in a 12-month period can be referred to the relevant industry self-regulation body. If the publisher breaches the criteria again within the next six months, the Governor can publicly identify the offender and comment on the reasons for declaring their work in breach.
- The Metropolitan government is authorised to "encourage the establishment of an environment where child pornography could be eliminated and prevent its creation." The bill specifically mentions "any sexually arousing posing on the behalf of children under the age of 13 wholly or partially naked, or wearing swimwear or only underwear, published in books or featured in film," although as with its other provisions this only applies to drawings and animation, not to photography or film of real children.
- The bill affirms the Metropolitan government's role in promoting safe use of the internet and increasing awareness of risks the medium poses.
- Internet filtering services to protect children from harmful content must be more widely accessible. Parents who wish to remove filtering from their children's mobile phones must submit a written request to their phone service provider, and this request must be for reasons the Metropolitan government considers justified.
- Parents and guardians must take responsibility for ensuring children in their care use the internet in a safe manner that limits their exposure to harmful material.

The Association of Japanese Animations (AJA) is an industry group consisting of 52 affiliate animation production companies.



*Hiromichi Masuda, right, chairman of the database working group of the Association of Japanese Animations, and Panida Dheva-aksorn, left, managing director*

Some of these companies you should recognize such as Gainax, Bandai, Kadokawa and Toei. These companies produce the majority of anime, mainstream or otherwise, in Japan. The AJA made public comments about how Bill 156 was made and passed without cooperation from animation producers. The major complaint was its wording that restricts the freedom of speech for artists. The comments made by these companies are important because it represents a big disconnect between what animation companies want to offer and what the government allows. On May 27, 2013, a revised child pornography law was introduced by the Liberal Democratic Party, the New Komei Party and the Japan Restoration Party that would make possession of sexual images of individuals under 18 illegal with a fine of 1 million yen and less than a year in jail.<sup>7</sup> This bill did not pass until June of 2014 only after removing the references to regulation of lolicon anime/manga.<sup>8</sup>

The history of sexual censorship in Japan has had adult genitalia as one of the only factors in censoring material until the late 1980's. The cute heroine of the 1970's Shoujo manga infiltrated traditionally Shounen manga which laid the groundwork for the subsequent erotic depictions of those cute characters. This is when the "Kawaii Craze" or "Cuteness Craze" started and frankly still continues. The outdated approach to censorship in the 80's allowed for artists to eroticize the "kawaii" character of the Shoujo manga origin without fear of getting cracked down by censorship authorities.



To put the situation more simply, age was eroticized to provide a non-normative expression of sexuality not allowed in the real world and companies could do it because of a traditionalist approach to censorship. Here's a quote from a manga artist Toshio Maeda about censorship issues in Japan during the time:

<sup>7</sup> "Japan's Ruling Party to Reintroduce Child Pornography Law Revision". [www.animenewsnetwork.com](http://www.animenewsnetwork.com). Retrieved 2013-06-17.

<sup>8</sup> Tom Porter (2014-06-07). "Japan to Ban Child Pornography". [www.ibtimes.co.uk](http://www.ibtimes.co.uk). Retrieved 2014-06-09.

“At that time, it was illegal to create a sensual scene in bed. I thought I should do something to avoid drawing such a normal sensual scene. So I just created a creature. [His tentacle] is not a [penis] as a pretext. I could say, as an excuse, this is not a [penis], this is just a part of the creature. You know, the creatures, they don't have a gender. A creature is a creature. So it is not obscene - not illegal.”<sup>9</sup>

Scholars also assert that censorship laws during this time allowed for “erotic manga with lolicon flavor” to flourish.<sup>10</sup>



The acceptance of “childhood” being charged with sexuality in manga is a testament to the younger audience’s high erotic plasticity. Younger Japanese males accepted a large array of normative and non-normative sexual acts. The ultimate unlawfulness of non-normative sexual desires such as “childhood” create a reoccurring demand for representations of those subjects. The issue of taboo subjects may have created a circle of desire. Men come into contact with Anime or Manga that features prominent underage characters, sexual desire disconnected with reality manifests, sexual satisfaction and repeat. The very nature of the taboo subjects makes it, usually, impossible to satisfy in reality. Other similar subjects concerning non-normative sexual desire that are exploited in anime/manga are subjects such as incest, bestiality, and futanari.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.bigempire.com/sake/manga1.html>

<sup>10</sup> Schodt, Frederik L. (1996). "Modern Manga at the End of the Millennium". *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga*. Berkeley, California: Stone Bridge Press. p. 336. ISBN 1-880656-23-X.

<sup>11</sup> Zanghellini, Aleardo. 2009. *Underage Sex and Romance in Japanese Homoerotic Manga and Anime*. *Social & Legal Studies*. 18, no. 2: 159-177.

The issue being addressed by the bill shows that the issue is still relevant today. The intense popularity of the anime comedy “*Ore no Imouto ga konna ni kawaii wake ga nai*”, a show about a brother falling in love with his sister, shows that the desire or interest is still relevant in modern Japan. This show ran not only for one season but two. This is where the major disconnect occurs between what younger men want and what anime/manga can provide. The continuing need for “kawaii” characters in anime/manga represents a sexual desire that is disconnected from reality. Therefore, this need for non-normative sexual expression creates difficulty in interacting with real women. This leads Japanese men to continue to desire the idealized women in anime/manga/dating sims.

The recent emergence of a strong female workforce in Japan challenges cultural norms set for women.



Anime/Manga provides a fictional women younger men gravitate to because of the idealized nature of that women. The qualities found in the fictional girls are set within traditional female roles that men prefer. The continuing desire for that idealized women influences the decline in marriages and subsequent births. But the interesting dynamic is how Anime can both reflect and propagate those values. The U.S. T.V. shows “Leave it to beaver” and “Married with Children” did not create cultural values but rather reflected it. Anime/Manga is, in the same vein, a reflection of cultural values that ultimately propagate those same values.

Reference Stuff:

<b>Category</b>	<b>2009 (in USD)</b>	<b>2010 (Estimate)</b>
Electronic Comics (digital manga)	\$520 million	\$616 million
<i>Doujinshi</i>	\$788 million	\$815 million
Plastic Models	\$314 million	\$323 million
Figures	US\$349 million	US\$361 million
Dolls	\$166 million	\$168 million
Railroad Models (Including Dioramas and Related Products)	\$197 million	\$197 million
Idols	\$668 million	\$681 million
<i>Cosplay</i> Outfits	\$500 million	\$527 million
Maid-, <i>Cosplay</i> -Related Services	\$103 million	\$102 million
Online Games	\$2.625 billion	\$3.015 billion
Adult Games	\$367 million	\$339 million
Adult Videos (Including Adult Video Tapes, DVDs, Downloaded Content)	\$727 million	\$713 million
Dating Simulation Games	\$106 million	\$126 million
Boys-Love	\$262 million	\$262 million

<http://www.siliconera.com/2010/10/16/dating-sims-see-83-growth-in-2009-according-to-research-firm/>

If you liked this subject, be sure to read up on my Lolicon article [here](#).

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