

The *Hiden* Hypothesis: Examining the Influence of Popular Media on Idealized Genders in Japan

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Introduction

Gender is a societal construct dictated by cultural norms that influence the ways in which everyone perceives their environments, each other, and themselves. While it is generally accepted as a universal truth that people in cultures worldwide are influenced in many integral ways by gender, the ways in which gender stereotypes enter into and thrive within societies are unique to that specific culture's evolutionary process. One learns stereotypes and bias' regarding gender subliminally, through cultural immersion, like language. This can be likened to the Japanese concept of *hiden*, or, "secret transmission".

One very prominent way in which these societal norms surrounding gender find their way into the perceptions of people in a society subliminally is through texts of popular culture.

This research explores the ways in which such Japanese popular cultural texts as *Kabuki* theatre, *anime*, and *manga* influence popular conceptions regarding gender of those in Japanese society; as well as how these conceptions have thrived throughout history.

Cultural Artifacts Examined

Fushigi Yuugi: The Mysterious Play. By Watase Yuu; *Love Hina* by Akamatsu Ken; *Ouran High School Host Club* by Hatori Bisco; *Negima!? Magister Negi Magi* by Akamatsu Ken; *The Woman Student* by Kawatake Mokuami

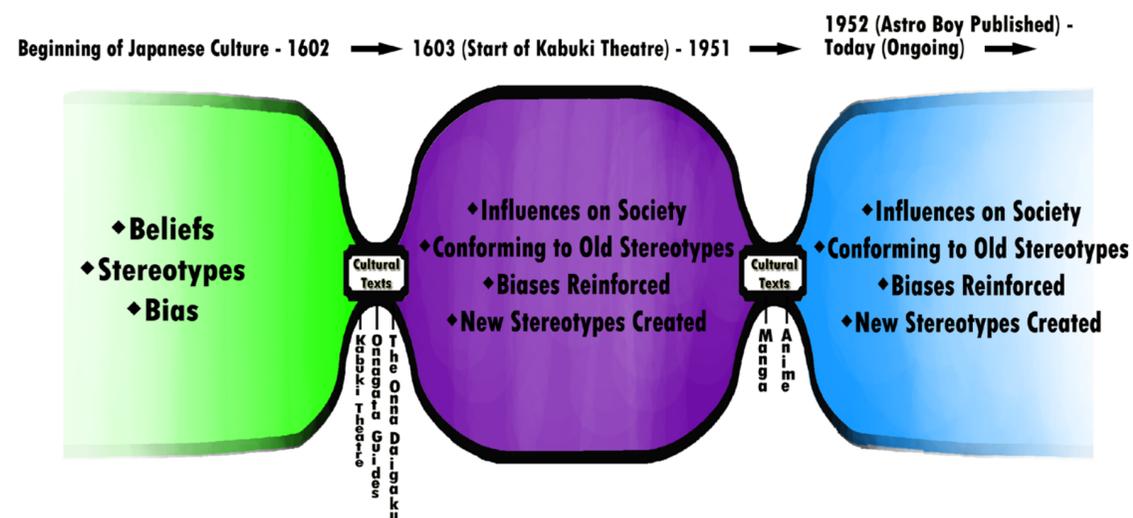
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Methods

The ways in which this research was conducted was through close examinations of specific Japanese popular cultural artifacts, such as *Kabuki* theatre, *anime*, and *manga*. I then analyzed these texts in terms of gender performance.

I chose these artifacts because they contain very salient examples of the popular conceptions surrounding stereotypes of feminine performative gender.

The *Hiden* Hourglass



Conclusions

The transmission, and thusly the perpetuation of these acts, is accomplished through what is known as *hiden*. This term is normally reserved for the transference of enlightenment in some sects of Buddhism, as well as knowledge in other aspects of Japanese culture. Also, popular culture artifacts, such as *Kabuki* theatre, have served to influence the ways in which gender is performed in more modern pieces of popular culture, like *anime* and *manga*. (See figure above)

Conclusions (cont'd)

Idealized gender is performed through actions, known as "gender acts". These are specific actions, performed by the material bodies of those performing, in order to produce/communicate gender. Examples of these acts include, but are not limited to:

- "When they are upset, women cry before speech." (Isaka, 9)
- "When a woman hugs a man while faking love, she will hug him over both arms and face sideways. If it is with true affections, she will cling to him, with her arm deeply under his left arm." (Isaka, 10)

Discussion

I feel that these gender acts have been given life, and have been able to survive throughout history because of a seemingly insatiable consumer culture. The common phrase "you are what you eat" can be slightly revised in this situation to say "you become what you consume". Since the *Edo* era, an obsessive fan culture, known as "*otaku*", has kept these popular concepts alive through consumption.

References

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Isaka, Maki. "Box Lunch Etiquette: Conduct Guides and Kabuki Onnagata." *Manners and Mischief*. Ed. Jan Bardsley and Laura Miller. Berkeley: University of California, 2011. Print.