

2007-2008 Japan Foundation Study Support Programme Report Akiko Shimada (University of Warwick, PhD Student)

• Project description

My research project focuses on the way in which Japanese 'Magical Girl' TV animation programmes for girls have influenced constructions of the gender identity of Japanese female viewers since 1966. Magical girl animation programmes in Japan are defined as the programmes that feature a girl or girls with supernatural power aged approximately 12. These witch girl heroines, characterised as western-oriented, fashionable and respectable, have been admired by many girl audiences in Japan. Representations of active and assertive witch girls embody different feminine ideals compared to Japanese traditional ones. I explore the way in which witch girl heroines' sophisticated and respectable femininity has served to restructure or reconceptualise Japanese female gender identity in cultural, social and historical contexts.

I use two methods to conduct my research: 1) a text analysis of animation televised texts such as *Sally the Witch* (1966-68), *The Secrets of Akko-chan* (1969-70), *Meg the Little Witch* (1974-75), *Lulu the Flower Angel* (1979-80), *Magical Angel Creamy Mami* (1983-4), *Sailor Moon* series (1992-7) and *Magical Doremi* series (1997-2003) and 2) a qualitative research of focus group discussions in three groups (women growing up in the 1970s-80s and the 1980s-90s, and girls aged 10-11) and individual interviews. I have conducted the focus group discussions and interviews in Japan in the summer, 2007.

• The objectives of the research

The objectives of this research are 1) to do research on archives of the magical girl TV animation programmes in Japan, which I will deal with in my thesis. Toei Animation Gallery, Toei Animation Studio Library and Suginami Animation Museum offered me opportunities to use their archives, and 2) to do qualitative research: focus group discussions and interviews with Japanese women born in the 1960s-the 2000s, who enjoyed magical girl TV animation programmes as a child. Groups are divided into three—two groups of adult Japanese women growing up in the 1970s and 1980s and in the 1980s and 1990s, and a group of girls aged 10-11 (the 5th graders).

Self-evaluation

Research on archives

I could successfully collect sufficient data, including some televised texts, some confidential documents on projects of magical girl TV animation programmes and some drawings of characters and settings, which are needed to support my thesis. I owe my success

in research to the kind offer of Toei Animation Co. and Suginami Animation Museum. Although some old archives were not accessed because of their loss, I could obtain enough materials. However, because of difficulties in arranging an appointment with the company which produced *Magical Angel Creamy Mami* I will also deal with in my thesis, I could not access to its archives except the televised texts of that programme during my stay. I keep on contacting with it to ask for an opportunity to use its archives in Japan when I can go back there.

1) A qualitative research

I have successfully conducted two focus group discussions and interviews with a group of adult women growing up in the 1980s and the 1990s and a group of girls aged 10-11. These two discussion and interview sessions offered me many new findings and materials, which I will explore and develop more. However, I failed to make an appointment to conduct another one with the other group (women growing up in the 1970s and 1980s) this time because schedules of the volunteer participants could not properly arranged. Some happened to be forced to work on weekends and some could not find anyone to take care of their children while they were out on weekends, so they cancelled my pre-arranged appointment. I realised that it was quite difficult especially for Japanese working mothers to arrange their schedules in one of the busiest months.

My research in Japan was very successful except above mentioned problems. I would like to go back to Japan and try to finish my research, hopefully next year.

General Comments

1) Publications

I have submitted an article on magical girl TV animation programmes, based on my research in Japan, to a Japanese university journal. If my paper gets accepted, it will be published in March 2008.

2) Conferences

I plan to present my research paper on magical girl TV animation and witch heroines at a conference of EAJS (European Association of Japanese Studies) in summer 2008. It is based on my research in Japan as well.

3) Thesis

I plan to complete my PhD thesis in 2009 and get it published hopefully in the following year.

I would like to thank the Japan Foundation for offering me a great opportunity to do research in Japan.