

Sexual Tentacles: Japan's Fight Against Neocolonialism

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Japan's film industry changed dramatically during the era of the American Occupation. There was a movement toward Westernization through the use of censorship via the creation of the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP). This program was created to introduce democratic social, political, and economic ideals into the culture. SCAP censored, banned, and burned wartime propaganda and materials. SCAP also encouraged modernization in the film sphere. For instance, kissing scenes, once not accepted, were encouraged.¹ Japan's film industry had already used American technology, such as the rotoscope, in the creation process. However, the themes of films were based on traditional Japanese culture. This essay will explore Japanese film history, specifically through how hentai provides a way for individuals to express their private desires as an act of counterculture in a time of censorship placed upon the Japanese by Americans.

The word *hentai* itself means "perverse" and was initially developed in the middle of the Meiji period. It was a term used to describe mental disorders such as hysteria and paranormal abilities.² However, it quickly replaced *hentaiseiyoku* (perverse desires), which was a word developed during the *laissez-faire* sexual atmosphere of Japanese defeat post WW2.³ Hentai is now used to describe a genre of animated pornography, which in itself has many subgenres. Pornography and the sex industry in Japan changed rapidly and leaned into a more American style. For example, stripping and burlesque dancing became popular with American and native audiences. However, SCAP had a much easier time monitoring anything that needed to be published. SCAP prohibited any sexually explicit material.⁴ Even after active occupation, Japan's government required censorship of frontal nudity, as well as pictures of pubic hair or genitals.⁵ An excellent

¹ Dan Geary, "Butts, Blood, and Bombs: The American Occupation's Effect on Japanese ...," *Cinesthesia*, 2020, <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1183&context=cine>, 2.

² Mark McLelland, "A Short History of 'Hentai,'" *Intersections*, 2009, <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue12/mccllland.html>.

³ Mark McLelland, *A Short History of Hentai*.

⁴ Milton Diamond and Ayako Uchiyama, "Pornography, Rape, and Sex Crimes in Japan," *Redirecting*, 1999, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-2527\(98\)00035-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-2527(98)00035-1).

⁵ Milton Diamond and Ayako Uchiyama, "Pornography, Rape, and Sex Crimes in Japan."

example of this restriction is in the animated film *Cleopatra: Queen of Sex* (1970) by Osamu Tezuka⁶, which was meant to be shown in the theatre and was considered scandalous for its time. The nudity of Cleopatra started and ended with her breasts and nipples showing. Her bottom half resembled that of a modern Barbie with ambiguous genitals. Furthermore, the story itself reveals occupation influence. Since it caters to classical Western rhetoric, it ended up flopping, which we can only contribute to the unratable context of the film and the perverse content.

However, this was not the end of anime erotica. Japan experienced the "New Wave" of animation in the 1990s. This New Wave rebelled against Japan's traditional film culture of occupied censorship. Although filmmakers would still use Hollywood-style technology, filmmakers expressed national identity through themes of national pride, showcasing Japan's unique culture and history, all the while maintaining a Western style.⁷ For instance, *Viper CTS* by Masami Obari depicts the struggle of two scantily clad demons who collect human souls through having relations with human men. The three demons represent two fantasy types: sexy, clumsy/ innocent. Furthermore, the girls were named after car companies like Mercedes as a way to further appeal to a male audience. Despite the shallow storyline, *Viper CTS* was a popular series in Japan.⁸

Hentai also became a means of kink experimentation. Beginning with *Lolita* (cute, youthful) and expanding into realms of horror. *Black Bible* (2002) by Hamuo is one of the first erotic video games/anime series that includes sexual acts with horror. *Cream Lemon* by Various directors depicts various scenarios of youthful girls experiencing sexual pleasure in many different forms. In the episode "Escalation," a girl has a dream where aliens capture her, and she is tormented and stripped by their tentacles.⁹ This episode is eerily similar in concept to Hokusai's *Dream of the Fisherman's Wife* woodblock print, which depicts a naked woman entangled in the tentacles of an octopus. It is an art piece that is so inherently Japanese that it embodies the argument of Japan's Second Wave in the film industry.

⁶*Cleopatra Queen Of Sex, YouTube* (YouTube, 2020), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1kOBCPUeIug&ab_channel=carrmx0.

⁷ Dan Geary, "Butts, Blood, and Bombs," 3.

⁸ Jonathan Clements and Helen McCarthy, *The Anime Encyclopedia: A Guide to Japanese Animation since 1917*, PDF (Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 2007), 705.

⁹ Jonathan Clements and Helen McCarthy, *The Anime Encyclopedia*, 181.

Outside of Japan, erotic anime was always seen by businesses as a "blue chip" venture." In other words, it is guaranteed to make money since they are short and straightforward and can be sold at high retail costs.¹⁰ It was also why most people see anime as synonymous with hentai. Japanese animated pornography often obscures its characters' genitals, so when the censorship marks were removed for the American version, penises and vaginas often appeared incomplete since animators often would not put effort into drawing them. This misrepresentation led to a misconception, resulting in unfair accusations of supporting child pornography. The Lolita style emulates child-like youthfulness, and some works can be interpreted in a way that caters to the fetishization of children. In hentai, social norms that protect children are chipped away and blurred, and objectification of children as sex objects can either legitimize child sexual abuse or minimize its impact.¹¹ The United Nations tried to ban media produced by Japan that had suggestive themes of child porn. Japan responded publicly, and the ban did not go through. Japan was once again confronted with the threat of foreign censorship and control. Japan, in its response, pointed out that they apprehended over 7000 individuals who were in possession of child pornography, and they were strongly in favour of persecuting those who sexually harm children.¹² Arguably, a person's sexual preference defines what that character means to them, so the way a character's physical body and age may be misconstrued is of little consequence.

In conclusion, hentai confronts modern concepts of Neocolonialism while paying homage to traditional Japanese concepts. Japan's occupation was, in many ways, a colonial experience, and control through censorship was one of the means of American diplomats to influence the public. Initial pornographic films like *Cleopatra* did not do as well as expected because they still focused on appealing to an Americanized audience. After the New Wave revolution in the 1990s, anime

¹⁰Jonathan Clements and Helen McCarthy, *The Anime Encyclopedia*, 181.

¹¹ Sam Louis, "Why Millennials Love Anime and Hentai Pornography," *Psychology Today*, July 2020, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/minority-report/202007/why-millennials-love-anime-and-hentai-pornography>.

¹² "CRC/C/156: Guidelines Regarding the Implementation of the Optional ...," CRC/C/156: Guidelines regarding the implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, September 10, 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/legal-standards-and-guidelines/crc156-guidelines-regarding-implementation-optional>, 46.

found its footing again, most especially in the porn industry since it was a guaranteed money cash cow. However, kink exploration and diversification of the hentai scene led to accusations of objectifying children, resulting in a perception of supporting the use of child pornography by allowing child-like characters (Lolita) to be viewed in sexual acts. Japan responded to this accusation through the United Nations, saying that they disagreed with the exploitation of children. At the same time, they were confronted with censorship laws imposed upon them by foreign powers once again. Suppose we are genuinely going to combat sensitive topics like child pornography. In that case, we must approach the topic with compassion and cultural understanding, or we will meet resistance for fear of neocolonial controls.

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