Visual Kei Otaku Identity—An Intercultural Analysis

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Abstract

Since the beginning of the 90's, Japanese popular culture has become increasingly popular on an international scale. Otaku, as members (fans) of this culture, usually invest substantial amounts of personal resources into consuming and (re)creating Japanese popular culture. As an essential element, Japanese Otaku also have a special bond with a character from Japanese popular culture; such a bond is often of a sexual nature and also shows a distinctive fetishistic tendency. In the following study I will apply an intercultural approach to analyzing the identity of fans of a specific Otaku subculture—the Visual-Kei (Visual Type), based on qualitative interviews and an opinion poll with Japanese and Austrian fans. Visual-Kei is a genre of Japanese popular culture (Japanese-Rock-music). Band members often wear cross-gender makeup and clothing inspired by the visual design of Gothic, Punk, cartoons, and elsewhere in popular culture. Drawing on fetishistic elements, Visual-Kei exhibits the essence of otakism. Both Japanese and Austrian Visual-Kei fans like to wear makeup and costumes, expressing their tendency toward fetishistic behaviour. Could we say Japanese and Austrian Visual-Kei fans are Otaku? What is found at the core of their fetishistic tendency? How does their fandom relate to their identity? These questions direct this study.

Since the beginning of the 90's, Japanese popular culture such as anime (cartoons), manga (comics), computer games and pop music have become increasingly popular among young people on an international scale, owing to the widespread use of new information technologies. So much so, that the term otakism has been coined to stand for the obsessive preoccupation with Japanese popular culture. Otaku, as members of this fan culture are called, usually invest substantial amounts of personal resources into consuming and (re)creating Japanese popular culture. As an essential element, Japanese Otaku also have a special bond with a character of their choice taken from Japanese popular culture; such a bond is often of a sexual nature and also shows a distinctive fetishistic tendency.

In the following study I will apply an intercultural approach to analyzing the identity of fans of a specific Otaku subculture—the Visual-Kei (Visual Type), based on qualitative interviews and an opinion poll with Japanese and Austrian fans. Visual-Kei is a genre of Japanese popular culture and refers to a movement in J-Rock (music) that became popular in the early 1990's. This is not so much characterised as a musical genre, but rather by its emphasis on visual expression. Band members often wear cross-gender makeup and clothing inspired by the visual design of Gothic, Punk and Glam Rock as well as by Japanese computer games and anime. Drawing on fetishistic elements, Visual-Kei exhibits the essence of otakism. Both Japanese and Austrian Visual-Kei fans like to wear makeup and costumes, thereby emulating their stars and expressing their tendency toward fetishistic behavior. Could we say

Japanese and Austrian Visual-Kei fans are really Otaku? What is really found at the core of their fetishistic tendency? How does their fandom relate to their identity? I will tackle these questions by comparing Japanese and Austrian fans.

Theory

Before I present my empirical findings, I will review the theoretical constructs pertaining to the research at hand, in order to clarify the following three concepts: Otaku, fetishism and identity.

The Term Otaku and Otaku history

As noted above, Otaku are intense fans of Japanese popular culture. Originally, the word means "your house" or "you" in the Japanese polite form of address. In 1983 the essayist Akio Nakamori first used this term publicly to characterise a very idiosyncratic fan gathering that began to attend the "comic market" in Tokyo. In his essay "Otaku no Kenkyu (Analysis of Otaku)" he observed the following: "How curious they are. How should I describe them…? Every school has these kinds of school students who are bad in sports and willingly stay in the classroom during recess. They are either too skinny or fat like a pig. They often wear unstylish glasses and have no friends. There were many of this kind of people there" (Nakamori, 1983).

From this description we can imagine what negative connotations this term must have had in this context at the beginning. In 1985, sociologist Shinji Miyadai conducted a survey of 1500 Students in Tokyo and the greater Tokyo area and in doing so, contrasted Otaku with Shin-Jinrui—another term coined by popular Japanese media and literally meaning "new human being". Referring to a similar youth cultural phenomenon it describes modern young people who, in contrast to Otaku, regard themselves as being cool and stylish consumers. According to Miyadai's survey, Otaku are regarded as antisocial and narrow-minded, because they concentrate their attention on too narrow a field (Miyadai, 1990, p. 188). Miyadai also commented on students' descriptions of themselves to the effect that Otaku not only implies a cultural type but also a distinctive personality type. Otaku and Shin-Jinrui were not terminologically distinguished until 1977, when a part of Japanese youth culture began to be influenced strongly by life style magazines like "Popeye" (Miyadai, 1990, pp. 227-228); until then, they were perceived as a single youth subculture. Towards the end of the 70's however, the two scenes began to be differentiated.

Soon after Nakamori's essay, as negative stereotypes manifested, Otaku as a group became an object of ridicule and discrimination (Miyadai, 1990, p. 191). This tendency became even worse in 1989 in the wake of "The Little Girl Murders", when Tsutomu Miyazaki, an otherwise inconspicuous member of Otaku, was arrested for murdering and mutilating four girls below the age of ten. The media soon took to stigmatizing the entire Otaku culture by emphasizing how dangerous Otaku-type people could be. In the course of widespread media coverage on the Miyazaki Scandal in 1990, the term Otaku was used to such an extent that it finally found recognition for the first time in the 1990's edition of the Japanese-language dictionary, Basic Knowledge of Modern Words. The definition is as follows: "Otaku is a kind of fan of cartoons and comics who are discriminated against by others. They are reclusive, mentally unbalanced and obsessed with details. In addition, they cannot communicate well with others. They usually do not care about their clothing and thus are not dressed well. This word became widely used as a result of reports on

the Miyazaki murders" (Yonezawa, 1990, p. 74) Additionally, in this dictionary one can also find Otaku used interchangeably with the word "nerds". One description of nerds in an English dictionary reads as follows: "If you say that someone is a nerd, you are saying in an unkind way that they are stupid or foolish, especially because they wear unstylish clothes and behave awkwardly in social situations" (Collins Cobuild English Dictionary, 1995, p. 1106).

One year later, in the 1991 edition of the very same Japanese dictionary, Basic Knowledge of Modern Words, a shift in the public perception of the Otaku phenomenon can be ascertained: "Otaku attracted societal attention when members of this group noticeably came to constitute a new type of consumer. With their distinctive Otaku kind of lifestyle they now came to constitute a new trend. Otaku nowadays not only means just being a fan of cartoons and comics but generally characterises people who have curious hobbies and indulge in intensive preoccupation with these objects of interest" (Yonezawa, 1991, p. 1222). From this description intensive fans for example of train models and military plays are also called Otaku. However, this usage is too broad and therefore problematic. The followingsection will offer an understanding of this term that is much narrower and clearer in order to extract the essential features of Otaku.

Moe and the Sexuality of Otaku

Psychiatrist Tamaki Saito maintains that the developmental onset of an Otaku personality usually occurs at the beginning of puberty and relates closely to sexuality (Saito, 2003, pp. 48, 52). He strictly defines Otaku as a personality type that is able to find sexual gratification by means of images of cartoon or comic characters as a stimulus for masturbation (Saito, 2003, p. 53). The assumption that sexuality is an important factor is useful for an understanding of the Otaku personality and is also supported by the architecture theorist Kaichiro Morikawa, whose interest in the Otaku phenomenon was first sparked during research about urban development in Akihabara. This is the district where Otaku have been congregating since the mid 1990's and by virtue of their common sub-cultural interests have begun to change the urban landscape—today Akihabara is an area with a unique design and appearance. Morikawa soon noticed that Otakism contains a strong fetishistic tendency that becomes palpable when one contrasts Japanese and American cartoons (Morikawa, 2003, p. 111). For him the sexual motivation behind Otakism is clearly apparent in Japanese anime, where themes of sexuality or at least eroticism are overly manifest—a topic that is hardly ever addressed in the comparably rather conservative style of American cartoons.

Moreover, the sexual implications are also conveyed by another pivotal expression in the context of Otakism. Moe is a new Japanese word that was created by role-playing game players and is now quite familiar in the Otaku world. As a noun it is used to characterise the love for a particular cartoon or comic character by emphasizing the idiosyncratic aspects of their appearance and behaviour such as glasses, school uniforms and a Lolita way of acting. Moeru as its derivative verb is consequently used in the following way: "I moeru Sailor Moon (a character of a famous Japanese cartoon in the beginning of 90')," meaning "I love Sailor Moon kind of characters who wear school uniforms, behave in a childish and clumsy way, etc." Shinichi Shinano, a researcher at the Hamagin Think Tank, also devotes considerable attention to this expression, and even believes Moe to be the essential criterion for distinguishing between Otaku and general juvenile culture (Shinano, Asahi News Paper, 26. 07.2005). Cartoon director Kazuya Tsurumaki ultimately defines Moe as a "mode in which the lack of information about a certain character became compensated for through individual

fantasy" (Hotta, 2005, p. 25) in order to create a convenient sexual partner. In other words, an Otaku idealizes his enamoured character and by means of his fantasy enhances its appeal to an extent that allows him to obtain sexual satisfaction. Hence, we may even suggest understanding Moe synonymously as a form of fetishism. If Moe is a criterion for Otaku culture, then fetishism is essential for Otaku.

Fetishism

Psychoanalyst Wilhelm Stekel observes that fetishism is a kind of symbol and that for every person the individual form of sexual love is determined to be a kind of fetishism (Stekel, 1980, p. 99). According to Stekel, fetishism is a quite general phenomenon for sexuality. But what actually is the real meaning of this phenomenon? Psychologist Michael Taussig maintains that fetishism is the expression of a desire for representation, in which the constructed image embodies one single idea (Taussig, 1993, pp. 217-247). In other words, fetishism is a symptom that expresses not simply the actual sexual act with objects but also a sexual idea that relates to a symbol. This means if one has a sexual fantasy about a character from cartoons or another medium of popular culture such as Visual-Kei, this would qualify as fetishism. Media theorist Michael Manfe, who wrote the first German book on Otaku, maintains that fetishism is for Otaku not just "sexual deviation, in which objects owned by the sexual partner cause fetishistic sexual excitement, but is also an adoration and belief in the power of fetishism" (Manfe, 2005, p. 43). In this regard Manfe uses the term fetishism in an anthropological sense. But as we saw above in "Moe and Sexuality of Otaku," I strongly believe that for Otaku "an adoration and belief in the power of fetishism" are ultimately not different from "sexual deviation, in which objects belonging to the sexual partner excite fetishistic sexual arousal." Therefore, fetishism displayed by Otaku can be understood as a substitution of the libido object in order to satisfy the libido by use of objects. Thought and fantasy are devoted to a character of Japanese popular culture, thus allowing for gratification.

Fetishism and the mother complex

For Sigmund Freud the causes of fetishism are to be found in experiences during early childhood that can best be understood if one employs the concept of castration anxiety. On realizing that his mother does not have a penis, a young boy might feel a great deal of anxiety about losing his own penis. He does not consciously want to allow this anxiety and therefore denies the reality of sexuality on the genital level (Freud, 1992, p. 330). Freud claims that fetishism subsequently develops in order to serve as a substitute penis for the mother, while allowing the individual to release some of its libido. Similarly, Mohammed Masud R. Khan sees the cause of fetishism as being found in a disturbed and excessively intimate a relationship with the mother during childhood (Khan, 1989, p. 199).

This assumption finds support in the theories in cultural psychology which relate to the Japanese culture. Psychiatrist Takeo Doi maintains that "Amae" is a key concept in the Japanese collective consciousness. As a Japanese word, Amae expresses the wish to be dependent on someone. The prototype of this concept can be found in the wish of an infant to be close to the mother (Doi, 1982, p. 89). Psychologist William Caudill, who examined the differences between Japanese and American childrearing practices, concludes that "The American mother views her baby as a separate, autonomous being with its own needs and desires. Although the mother recognizes and cares for the baby, it is ultimately meant to learn to care for and think for itself. In Japan, on the other hand, the mother views her baby more as

an extension of herself, so that psychologically the boundaries between her and her child are blurred" (Shwalb, 1996, p. 146). This observation supports Doi's theory.

Psychiatrist Shigeta Saito maintains that there are many cases in Japan in which men display a pronounced "mother complex". He defines this concept in much the same way as the Oedipus complex. The difference to the Western reception of this concept, however, is that the father in the Japanese culture usually does not play much of a role in childrearing, so that consequently the complex of psychological and sexual deviations concentrates almost exclusively on the relationship between mother and child (Saito, 1979, p. 97). Therefore it was of great interest as to whether relationships similarly close in nature would be typically found between Visual-Kei fans and their mothers.

Fetishism, female Otaku and Yaoi

In the typical female psychosexual development, Sigmund Freud believes penis envy to play an important role. Similar in nature to castration anxiety in boys, it is not a comprehensive concept for women, however. It therefore cannot serve as the cause for female fetishism. At this point Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel modifies Freud's idea and sees the cause for female fetishism in "the creation of a new reality in which sexuality on a genital level is denied" (Chasseguet-Smirgel, 1986, p. 117). This new interpretation by Chasseguet-Smirgel enables us to understand the female Otaku culture.

Japanese female Otaku tend to like love stories about homosexual boys. This genre is called Yaoi, meaning "no climax, no point and no meaning" and plays an important role in the female Otaku culture. Yaoi is also very popular among Visual-Kei fans, as I will show in empirical findings. The Yaoi genre originated in the world of fanzines and is strongly influenced by the works of several early female comic artists such as Keiko Takemiya, Moto Hagio, Yumiko Ooshima and Ryoko Yamagishi. These comic artists were born around 1950 and became comic artists during the 70's. This generation began to question traditional female stereotypes and therefore drew stories in which the main characters oftentimes were androgynous boys with whom girls could easily identify, thus offering a new self-image for girls. Feminist and sociologist Chizuko Ueno understands the phenomenon of Yaoi as an expression of these comic artists' feminist struggle (Ueno, 2005, pp. 125-154). But for Yaoi sexual description is primarily essential. Many works of this genre could be described, even pornography, as both Nakajima (2005) and Sakakibara (1998) point out this tendency. Therefore I believe it is more suitable to interpret this phenomenon as a form of female fetishism than feminism and as "the creation of a new reality in which sexuality on a genital level is denied," as Chasseguet-Smirgel says.

Yaoi novel author Kaoru Kurimoto, who thinks of herself as a founder of this genre, analyses why Yaoi became so popular. Japanese society is dominated by men. Women, especially girls, are feeling that they have no place to live freely and happily in Japan. But they are too weak to build a preferable surrounding in the real world. Therefore they escape into the Yaoi fantasy world. In this world they can identify themselves with a beautiful boy and be loved by men. In this world there are no gender problems and therefore nothing hurts them any more. In addition they can have great fun with sexuality (Nakajima, 2005, pp. 182-186).

Fetishism has also to do with creativity. How does it work? As Freud wrote to Abraham in a letter, "Fetishism arises in this way; it results from a special repression, which is to describe partial, in which one part of the complex is repressed, and the other is idealized as

compensation" (Chasseguet-Smirgel, 1986, p. 146). This idealization facilitates the creativity of the fetishist. Chasseguet-Smirgel also appreciates this point (1986, p. 228). Therefore we can say that girls who cannot accept sexuality on a genital level will sublimate their libido in this way.

Another Yaoi author Shihomi Sakakibara maintains that Yaoi is for homosexual transvestite women. That means a woman who is feeling herself as a man, but who loves men. She thinks of herself as an example of this case and has a strong feeling of denial of her female sexuality. Her creative work is the only possibility to fulfil her libido. People regard her as a woman, although it is not true for her. She is therefore never happy, even if a man whom she loves, would love her. She wants to be loved as a boy, but it is not possible. This situation causes her dilemma and strong pain (Sakakibara, 1998, pp. 176-193). Her case seems to me a good example of the female fetishism. At first she denies her female sexuality and therefore cannot have satisfaction for her libido and then sublimates her libido with her work.

As followers, many female Otaku are very much immersed in this genre, not just as a reader, but also as a creator. Creativity of fetishism is the source of Otaku culture. Besides Yaoi costume play could be regarded as an expression of fetishistic creativity. According to Kyoko Koizumi, who has done extensive research on Visual-Kei fans, those fans who take part in costume play are almost always female and hence the Visual-Kei culture can be seen as a clearly gender-specific phenomenon (Koizumi, 2003, p. 208). I will elaborate on this point in a later section.

Definition of Identity

I would like to conclude my theoretical summary by discussing the concept of identity, a term which is not static but relative in nature. James E. Marcia defines identity as a self-constructing dynamic organization of drives, abilities, convictions and biographical history. The subject's self is the authority that defines the identity of a human. Something which is important for a person on a personal level is also relevant for the formation of identity (Marcia, 1993). Karl Haußer shows that there exist three main components for identity: self-concept, self-esteem and control conviction. Self-concept means self-awareness, self-esteem means self-evaluation, and control conviction means personal control (Haußer, 1995). How can Visual-Kei fans be described in terms of identity? The following section reports the empirical findings on the identity of Japanese and Austrian Visual-Kei fans, especially with regards to their fetishistic sexuality.

Empirical Findings

Description of the survey

The method of this survey combined interviews and opinion polls. To approach Visual-Kei fans I tried the following three things: First, I attended a Visual-Kei fan event in Vienna, where I interviewed ten persons. Second, I visited Visual-Kei internet chat rooms and got to know a Japanese girl who is an intense fan of Visual-Kei. I first questioned her by way of an opinion poll and then interviewed her further via Internet. Third, I conducted an opinion poll with twenty six Visual-Kei fans on the street in Tokyo, Harajuku, where Visual-Kei fans meet every Sunday in order to engage in costume play. Because I was unable to fly to Japan, this last portion of my research was conducted by an assistant. In this way, it was not possible to organize the empirical research according to exactly the same method in both countries.

But the questions that I asked are nonetheless the same. Therefore I believe that this research could provide material that will serve as a basis of comparison.

The Research questions are as follows: 1. Are Visual-Kei fans Otaku? 2. Do they demonstrate a fetishistic tendency? 3. What is the nature of their social relationship to other persons? 4. How does this fandom relate to the identity of a Visual-Kei fan? 5. Do Japanese and Austrian fans exhibit the same tendencies, or different ones? The interview or opinion poll questions were divided into four parts: 1. Personal data, 2. Quality as a Visual-Kei fan, 3. Activity and identity of Visual-Kei fans, 4. Social background. Specific questions will be considered in the following section.

Personal data: who are these fans?

Altogether I established contact with thirty seven Visual-Kei fans, twenty seven in Japan and ten in Austria. Two from each group are male, and the other thirty three persons are female. Their ages range from fourteen to twenty six. Half of the fans are under twenty years of age. Almost all of the persons whom I contacted in Japan are Japanese except for one American. In Austria on the other hand, two of the persons I interviewed are Chinese; and one is half-Filipino and half-Austrian and another is half-Japanese and half-Austrian. The Austrian scene is therefore more multicultural. Three quarters of Japanese fans and eight of the Austrian fans attend school or university. The Japanese fans live in Tokyo or nearby Tokyo in areas such as Kanagawa, Gunma and Shizuoka; the Austrian fans live in Vienna or the Steiermark. Therefore, Japanese fans show a greater tendency to be city inhabitants, while half of the Austrian groups are city inhabitants and half are small town inhabitants.

Quality as Visual-Kei Fan: how intensively are they occupied with Visual-Kei?

In order to determine the answer to this question, I asked the fans what amount of time they spend on a weekly basis, and how much money they spend every month. I couldn't get valid answers in response to the money question. Either no responses were given, or the responses were not clear. I can only report one interesting answer here. A twenty two-year-old female Austrian fan tells that she paid EUR 700 for two concert visits of "dir en grey" in Berlin and Köln. This figure includes the concert tickets, train ticket, and other expenses. But the figure is so high because she also bought all of the merchandise articles that she could find there. She maintains she would have bought more, if there had been more available.

The responses about the amount of time were much clearer. Thirteen Japanese fans and five Austrian fans answered "almost all the time" in their free time. This is about 50% of interviewees in each country. So in both countries, 50% of the fans are very intensive.

Costume play as an activity of Visual-Kei fans

In both Tokyo and Vienna, female fans were wearing Visual-Kei-type costumes when my assistant and I met them. This supports the results of the research conducted by Kyoko Koizumi. Furthermore Koizumi points out that Visual-Kei costume culture is particular about Visual-Kei fan culture and this differs from other fan cultures of Pop bands and idols (Koizumi, 2003, p.210). Koizumi categorizes costume play as being divided into two phases: The first phase came at around 1990 and they were all fans of "X-Japan". The second phase began in 1998 and continues up to the present; these fans are strongly inspired by "Malice Mizer". The first phase is characterized by adoration of "X-Japan", so that these fans wore the X-Japan-type costume at their concerts. In that way, they wanted to show their stars how

devoted they were to "X-Japan". The second phase is characterised by the obsessive preoccupation with costume play itself rather than fascination with a band and these fans treat Visual-Kei stars in the same way as they would characters from comics or cartoons (Koizumi, 2003, pp. 210-217). This exactly conforms to the image of Otaku, who exhibit a special bond with a character of Japanese popular culture. "Malice Mizer" is a theatrical band whose performances include extreme visual presentation. So it is fun for costume players to be involved in costume play of this band even without being an enthusiastic fan of the band itself. Koizumi detects a strong influence of Japanese comic culture on costume players of the second phase. For many years already, Otaku of comic and cartoons have taken part in costume play at the comic market.

Koizumi reports that some of these new Visual-Kei costume players even visit the comic market in Visual-Kei-type costumes (Koizumi, 2003, pp. 210-211). As this shows, the second-phase Visual-Kei costume players demonstrate a strong affinity with female Otaku. It is therefore possible to suggest that costume play relates to the core of Otakism.

What about the Japanese and Austrian fans whom I interviewed? In 2006 they belong to the second phase of costume players. I asked them what is especially attractive about costume play and offered the following list of possible answers: "Makeup, making costumes, the sex appeal of the details of a costume, self-expression, a stronger sense of self-attractiveness through costume play, a sense of freedom from daily life, a sense of belonging to a fan community, identification with a Visual-Kei star, the fun of playing at being another gender."

For Japanese fans the most attractive aspect was "makeup" and eighteen persons cited this as a reason. For Austrian fans this point was not particularly important and only one person mentioned it. Another point of attraction was "self-expression", which was important for thirteen Japanese and five Austrian fans. Also twelve Japanese and one Austrian cited the "fun of making costumes." "More self-attractiveness through costume play" was important for six Japanese and one Austrian. Eight Japanese and one Austrian agreed with the importance of "sex appeal of the details of a costume," which is an obvious symptom of fetishism. All of the above points are often cited and relate to self-representation, and therefore we can interpret them as indirectly constituting fetishistic characteristics.

Six Japanese and three Austrians mentioned their "identification with a Visual-Kei star." Therefore, a total of nine persons seek identification with their stars, and they orientate their "concept of self" to their stars, which is a factor relevant to identity. A sixteen-year-old Japanese girl comments on this by saying that she wants to not only wear clothes similar to that of her star but also have a similar atmosphere to that of her star. In order to accomplish this, she tries to know about his typical pose, his habits, his taste, his way of thinking, etc. When people tell her that she looks like that star, she becomes happy as if she could have much more appetite. This shows how important it is for her to identify herself with her star. She gives three reasons why she wants to be so similar to him: longing, self satisfaction and communication with other fans.

Communication in the fan community is important for many fans. Fifteen Japanese and four Austrians cited a "sense of belonging to a fan community." A twenty one-year-old Austrian girl says that it was thanks to the fan community that she found her place. She simply feels a sense of belonging to the fan community. The sixteen-year-old Japanese girl says that costume play makes it easier to have contact with strangers, because people can then comment on the costume, etc.

Eleven Japanese mentioned a "sense of freeing from daily life," while no Austrians did. Similarly, while five Japanese cited the "fun of playing at being another gender;" while none of the Austrians did. These two points could be interpreted as being particular to Japanese society. Japanese students generally have to contend with strong pressure, e.g., from examinations, and Japanese society is still a male-dominated society. On the other hand these aspects do not exist in Austria, and therefore the Austrians do not need them.

Yaoi as activity of Visual-Kei fans

As noted above, Yaoi is a form of fetishism of female Otaku. Which role does it play for our Japanese and Austrian fans? In order to determine this, I asked the following three questions: 1. Do you yourself create comics or novels inspired by Visual-Kei? 2. If yes, does it exhibit elements of Yaoi? 3. Do you have Yaoi or sexual fantasies that involve Visual-Kei band members? In response to the first question, seven Japanese and four Austrian fans answered "yes". In response to the second, six Japanese and three Austrians answered "yes". In response to the third, ten Japanese and three Austrians answered "yes". Therefore 26% of the Japanese and 40% of the Austrian Visual-Kei fans are involved in creating comics or novels, and for 22% of the Japanese and 30% of the Austrians these also exhibit sexual meanings; moreover, 37% of the Japanese and 30% of the Austrians do have Yaoi or sexual fantasies about Visual-Kei. Therefore, for a considerable part of Visual-Kei fans both in Japanese and Austria, being a fan of Visual-Kei is something of a creative and sexual nature. Here we see that for them, Visual-Kei fandom constitutes a fetish and Visual-Kei stimulates this tendency in its fans.

For example a seventeen–year-old Austrian female fan told me that certain Visual-Kei stars are extremely sexy for her and she becomes excited when she is thinking about them. She loves to fantasize about love stories of her favourite stars, because she thinks it would be nice if they were to have a relationship. She doesn't care if they are homosexual or heterosexual—the fantasy simply gives her a good feeling.

Social Background: How does social background relate to Visual-Kei fandom?

As noted earlier, Otaku are generally regarded as antisocial and exclusive for their fan community, and are not oriented toward a real relationship. And fetishism has to do with a mother complex in childhood. How does this look in the case of our Japanese and Austrian fans? I asked them about relationships in the following four categories: 1. Family now and past, 2. Friends who are not Visual-Kei Friends now and past, 3. Visual-Kei friends now, 4. relationship with a romantic element now and past. These questions are answered in five scales. (1) Relationship to the family now and past

How does the relationship to their family look, now and past? I asked the following questions: "How close is/was your relationship to each member of your family; mother, father and brothers and sisters?"

Both in Japan and Austria most fans have nice relationships with their families. Eleven Japanese and six Austrians have very close relationships with their mothers, eleven Japanese and three Austrians to their fathers, and ten Japanese and five Austrians to their brothers and sisters at present. And fourteen Japanese and six Austrians believe that they are loved by their mothers very much, eight Japanese and three Austrians by their fathers, and nine Japanese and five Austrians by their brothers and sisters at present.

And in the childhood thirteen Japanese and four Austrians had very close

relationship to their mothers, twelve Japanese and three Austrians to their fathers, and eight Japanese and five Austrians to their brothers and sisters. Thirteen Japanese and five Austrians believe that they were loved by their mothers very much, thirteen Japanese and three Austrians by their fathers, and seven Japanese and five Austrian by their brothers and sisters.

From these results I could not find out if Visual-Kei fans both in Japan and Austria have a particular mother complex, because they generally have close relationships to their families. A sixteen-years-old Japanese girl describes her feelings as follows: "My family is the thing which I love most. I am sure that my family loves me, too. My family is Christian, so we help each other, forgive each other and love each other." Also six Austrian fans told me that they understand their family very well.

Is it possible that these close relationships with family have an influence on other relationships, especially on relationships with a romantic element? I would like to explore this in the following section. (2) Relationship to friends who are not Visual-Kei fans now and past

What about relationships with friends who are not Visual-Kei fans? On this point I would like to find out what the nature of social communication of fans is with people other than family and the Visual-Kei community.

And so I asked as follows: "Do you have many friends who are not Visual-Kei fans?" Most Japanese (10 persons) answered with 3 on a scale of 1 to 5, that means not many friends but not few. Second most frequently Japanese (8 persons) answered they have many friends who are not Visual-Kei fans in scale 1. Three Japanese fans have no friends except Visual-Kei fans. And most of the Austrians (6 persons) answered that they have many friends who are not Visual-Kei fans in scale 1, and four of them have no friends who are not Visual-Kei fans at all. And most of the Japanese (14 persons) believe that they are moderately popular with these friends, 3 on a scale of 1 to 5. Second most frequently Japanese (5 persons) believe that they are very popular, in scale 1. In the third largest Japanese group (4 persons) believe that they are not popular at all, in scale 5. Three Austrian fans believe that they are very popular, in scale 1, and two of them believe that they are not popular at all, in scale 5.

And in the childhood most Japanese (11 persons) answered with 3 on a scale 1 to 5, that means not many friends but not few. Second most frequently the Japanese (5 persons) answered they had many friends in scale 1. Also most Japanese (11 persons) believe that they were moderately popular in scale 3. And second most frequently Japanese (4 persons) believed that they were not really popular in scale 4.

Most Austrians (3 persons) had many friends in scale 1. Second most frequently Austrians (2 persons) had no friends at all. About popularity, two Austrians believed they were very popular in scale 1, two of them were not really popular in scale 4, and also two of them were not popular at all in scale 5. From these results I conclude that just a few Visual-Kei fans are antisocial but that many of them are not really antisocial. More than just a few persons, six Japanese and four Austrian, are even very or relative popular (in scale 1 and 2), although they seem to be less popular in their childhood. This does not fit Otaku stereotype.

I would also like to quote some examples here. The sixteen-year-old Japanese girl whom I quoted above and who has middle scale 3, moderately many friends and is also middle-scale popular at school, says, "Other relationships at school are unstable and they don't understand why I am so intensively involved with Visual-Kei. Only Visual-Kei friends understand it."

A twenty two-year-old female Austrian fan, who has second scale friends (relatively many) and is very popular (in scale 1), says "I'm from a conservative family. My mother

doesn't like the fact that I look different from other people. So I'm playing another role if I am with friends who are not fans of Visual-Kei and attend the university with quite different clothes from private, which is a kind of uniform for me, and I don't speak about Visual-Kei with them at all. They would not understand my enthusiasm for Visual-Kei. Other people are OK but it's difficult to communicate with them because I am occupied with Visual-Kei so intensively and my biggest interest is Visual-Kei. Therefore I do not have many things in common with them."

Relationship to other Visual-Kei fans now

On costume play we saw already that communication in the fan community is for many fans important and fifteen Japanese and four Austrians agreed with "the sense of belonging to fan community".

In this part I asked as follows: "Do you have close contact with other Visual-Kei fans?" The answers given most frequently by the Japanese (9 persons) was that they were very close, in scale 1. The second most frequent answer given by the Japanese (7 persons) were so-so in scale 3. The next most frequently given answer were of five persons and not at all, in scale 5. The answers given most frequently by the Austrians were five persons each in scale 1, very close, and in scale 5, not at all.

I also asked whether they are popular among the fan community. Most Japanese fans of twelve persons answered moderately so, in scale 3. The next most frequent answer was of five persons and scale 2. And the most frequently given answer of five Austrians was scale 1 and very popular.

These results show us that Visual-Kei community has different meanings for two groups. For one it is quite important, but for the other not really important. This result seems to contradict the result regarding costume play, because in that respect more than half find the sense of belonging to fan community to be important. It could mean that, if they do costume play, the sense of belonging to the fan community is important, but otherwise for some of them it's not important all the time.

What do the fans actually say? For example a sixteen-year-old Japanese girl says: "I found my place with the Visual-Kei fan community. It was the first time that anyone recognized me, except for my family."

A twenty one-year-old female Austrian fan told me: "I was alone before I became a Visual-Kei fan. Now I have people who welcome me and similar to me and to the group which I belong to." And a seventeen-year-old Austrian girl told me: "Actually Visual-Kei is very important for me because of the nice friends. I have more fun with them. They are crazier than other people. They have the same kind of humour as me."

But there are other voices. Three of the persons whom I interviewed at the event in Vienna wanted to only leave, because they found the Visual-Kei fans there to be rather curious. These three persons told me that Visual-Kei is just one of the things which they are interested in or some of them are no longer interested in it. So one of them, an eighteen-year-old girl, told me that she liked Visual-Kei when she was sixteen. She thinks it is for someone who is in puberty. Another twenty years old male fan told me: "I listen to the music of Visual-Kei with pleasure, but at a Visual-Kei concert I found other fans that have no manners. They only love the out look of the musicians and just cry during the concert. They don't listen to the music at all. I hate this. I'm not one of them." And a nineteen-year-old Austrian girl told me: "I like Japanese popular culture generally, but not really Visual-Kei. I just visit here, because I knew

some people whom I got know earlier. I want just say hello." These three persons want to say that Visual-Kei constitutes an object with which people can be occupied for just a limited period of personality development.

Relationship with romantic element now and past

I asked then, if currently or in the past, Visual-Kei fans have/ had relationships of a romantic nature.

With regard to the present, seven Japanese answered "yes" and twenty Japanese "no". But with regard to the past, eighteen Japanese answered "yes" and nine Japanese said "no". Two of the Austrians answered "yes" now and five said "no". In the past five Austrian answered "yes" and two Austrians had "no" relationship.

So nine Japanese and two Austrians had absolutely no relationship. But six of nine Japanese are under eighteen years old and two Austrians are both sixteen years old. They are maybe just too young to have had any relationship until now. On the other hand most people, who have already had a relationship, have done so more than twice. So from this result we can not say that Visual-Kei fans are not oriented to a real relationship with a romantic element. This does not fit the Otaku picture.

Conclusion

This study showed that not every Visual-Kei fan has a fetish tendency, but many of them in both Japan and Austria do so. This is obviously because of the influence of the strong visual expression of Visual-Kei artists. Costume play and Yaoi are the creative representation of fans, on which influence of Japanese female Otaku culture is observed. In this sense Visual-Kei culture is very otakish. On the other hand most of them are not antisocial and not hesitate to have real a relationship. And a close family relationship does not seem to have any influence, either on their other relationship or their fetishistic tendency. Their Otakism is therefore limited to their fetish tendency and their self-representation. With regard to these points there are no differences between Japanese and Austrian fans.

On the other hand, while Japanese Visual-Kei fans have no dilemma about their Visual-Kei fandom and just enjoy it, some Austrian fans seem to have problems with being Visual-Kei fans. There are those who were once Visual-Kei fans, but now hold contempt for Visual-Kei or/and Visual-Kei fans, and others who want to hide their enthusiasm for Visual-Kei. I think this is because of the situation of Visual-Kei in both countries. In Japan this culture was very popular during the 1990's and in the mainstream of young culture. Now the boom is somewhat passé, and some bands don't even want to be categorized as Visual-Kei any more, but the genre is still popular and this culture is generally accepted. In Austria Visual-Kei is foreign culture and still quite minor, although it is becoming more popular and having an influence on even a popular new German band, Tokyo Hotel (News Paper Kurier 2006-07-20). Therefore if Austrian fans identify themselves with them, this is something significant. For these fans their fandom signifies very strong self-representation and it gives them the sense of a self who is not an average person.

In any case, Visual-Kei fandom gives fans in both countries the feeling of self-esteem because of their strong active participation and its creativity. This survey is only the beginning of my Visual-Kei research. For the empirical part there was difficulty in obtaining quite the same materials in both countries, and this is a problem which must be solved. And in order to research the identity of these fans I still need to follow their personality development.

Then we will be able to say what Visual-Kei fandom was for them. These are my further tasks and then I would understand more about Visual-Kei fans.

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