

# CROSS-CULTURAL READING OF DOLL-LOVE NOVELS IN JAPAN AND THE WEST

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*Abstract: This paper makes the following two points: first, Japanese doll-love novels, especially those at the dawn of the genre in Japan, such as Jun'ichiro Tanizaki's Some Prefer Nettles (Tade kuu mushi), should be read from the perspective of Japanese reality, history, philosophy, and culture. Second, the popular criticism of doll-love novels needs to be reconsidered as representing adult male childishness and female objectification.<sup>1</sup>*

## Introduction

It has been said that love of a doll or a figure represents narcissism, fetishism, or a transitional object. These are technical terms of psychoanalysis, and supposedly, psychoanalytical theory is universally applicable to human beings. The representation of love of a doll in a literary text and thus the text itself are, therefore, universally regarded as psychically strange. Reading a literary text from a feminist perspective leads to the same conclusion. In feminist theory, doll-love, especially a novel of an adult male love of a female doll, is regarded as asymmetrical in gender difference and thus outrageous and condemnable. Feminist criticism of the objectification of a woman in love, as Atsushi Koyano points out, is based on an asymmetric relation in mutual love, but not in one-sided love (Koyano, 2001, 24). A doll-love novel is one-sided love as long as the doll is regarded as an object; generally, a doll has no will, no heart, and no language. In many novels, however, an adult male protagonist loves a doll as a female human or a female human as a doll in order to gratify his own desire, and thus his objectification of a woman can be criticized because he does not see the woman as a living individual. In this sense, Koyano's counterargument to feminism is not suitable to an adult male love of a doll.

However, whether psychoanalytic or feminist, the theoretical reading of a text sometimes overlooks concrete history, tradition and culture peculiar to each region. There is no *universal* culture, tradition or history. We should remember Edward Said's comment,

It is the critic's job to provide resistance to theory, to open it up toward historical reality, toward society, toward human needs and interests, to point up those

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concrete instances drawn from everyday reality that lie outside or just beyond the interpretive area necessarily designated in advance and thereafter circumscribed by every theory (Said, 1983, 242).

I focus on the fact that during the Meiji era (1868–1912), when Japan began walking the path of modernization by making “escaping Asia for Europe” its national policy, it imported a new concept of “subject” or an independent agent from the West.<sup>2</sup> The Japanese began regarding as “a mature person” one who clearly insisted on his or her own opinion and made clear statements. The Japanese, especially men, were forced to perform this imported subjectivity in order to be acknowledged as a mature person in society. Naturally, this initiated in Japanese men feelings of strangeness or alienation, within the establishment of an identity in society. To escape these feelings, Japanese men began to turn their attraction to objects which represented quiet and innocence, or sometimes ‘immaturity’. The typical objects were dolls or figures, and subsequently, Japanese doll-love novels appeared. However, loving a doll as if it were human could easily become popular in Japan, where the border between human and not-human (other things) is ambiguous to the Japanese way of thinking. This phenomenon is related to the loss of traditional Japanese culture and history, Japan’s relatively recent and traumatic connectedness to the West, possession of a new concept of identity as subjectivity, and the resulting psychic discomfort alienation—rather than with transitional objects or asymmetric diversity in gender.

#### I. Humanity and Localization

Acceptance of a new standard and concepts born in the West often inflicts discomfort on non-western peoples. Even when they adopt the standard and concepts with transfigurations suitable to their cultures and then modify their behaviors and philosophies accordingly, non-western peoples still feel discomfort, whether consciously or unconsciously.

However, psychological shock as a result of cultural change does not happen in the non-West alone; sudden and drastic changes in society and culture happen everywhere. One good example can be seen in William Faulkner’s fictional characters of the American South.<sup>3</sup> Defeat in the Civil War and the subsequent, profound changes wrought by reconstruction destroyed the foundation upon which Southerners identified and based their existence. Consequently, they hastily tried to tie themselves to another community standard to escape from sudden, frightening and illimitable freedom. Some tried to adopt Northern standards, while some grasped the remnants of the old Southern standard. However, when people cannot settle into a community identity, they view their existence as meaningless and incompetent. They become psychically lost, angered and saddened; they cry and complain. Theirs is the very

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<sup>2</sup>I use *the West* repeatedly, but *the West* means areas and people that have economic and political power in the international world, in other words, a kind of hegemony. As a result, in this paper, *the West* means Europe and America.

<sup>3</sup>As for the remarks on Faulkner’s fictional world, see Suzuki, 2000.

world of *The Sound and the Fury*, signifying nothing. There, the people are all like Benjy, the idiot abandoned by his mother and always looking for his substitute mother, Caddy, who is actually his older sister. Benjy, 33, in the novel's opening, becomes angry and cries if he feels Caddy is not available or cannot look for her. Similarly, the sorrow and remarks of Quentin and the anger and remarks of Jason, who, respectively, want to adopt the standards of the old South and the North, are equivalent to Benjy's anger and crying. Alienated from what they had been, Quentin and Jason try to belong somewhere, in order to restore themselves through a community identity. According to Erich Fromm, the German social psychologist and humanistic philosopher, "the older meaning in which 'alienation' was used denotes an insane person" (Fromm, 1955, 121). Still, alienated people are not literally idiots, especially when we consider conditions peculiar to human beings. Humans are orphans in the universe, or originally alienated; they were expelled from Eden, or from the natural laws underpinning their existence, unlike other animals and plants. Indeed, human beings are always trying to ground themselves or to identify what they are and how valuable they are, as if to reconnect the umbilical cord to the core of their existences, or their vicarious mothers, but in vain. In this sense, alienation is a very human phenomenon, and the world of Faulkner's fictions is a collection of very human, frightened reactions to loss.

In my view, Faulkner's works became popular wherever and when society was drastically changing: South America after the revolutions in the latter 20th century, Japan after World War II, and China after the periods of reform and openness. Influenced by Faulkner, many writers including Garcia Marquez, Kenzaburo Oe and Mo Yuan described this very human phenomenon in their own regions. However, the motifs and concrete descriptions differ in each area, depending on society, its history, traditions, and facts; what foundation of existence was lost, what new foundation people tried to tie themselves to, why and how people suffered, struggled, and so on. As Zhang Longxi mentions, quoting Mikhail Bakhtin, "the novel" "is by nature polyphonic, containing a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artificially organized. That is to say, the novel is always a microcosm of social and ideological heteroglossia" (Zhang, 2005, 209). The various literary manifestations represent concrete happenings in each region, and certainly, alienation causes people to react typically of each region. On one hand then, stereotyped criticism within some theoretical framework might overlook concrete facts and conditions in a region and so the point of why people cannot but do "something like that." Sutpen in *Absalom, Absalom!*, for example, is often condemned for his brutality, but we should consider his alienation and suffering after he moved to the American South. Just after his origin was denigrated and he felt incompetent, he started trying to ground his existence in an upper-class identity, following the story of the Southern aristocracy. On the other hand, when we focus only on something concrete, we may overlook something common and important to human beings. We can criticize Quentin because of his narcissism and Jason because of his miserliness, but we cannot criticize their alienation, suffering, and struggle after a drastic, perhaps traumatic, social change. Theirs are very human, frightened reactions to the severe loss of social foundation and identity. Their reactions leave

room for leniency. We should regard suffering and inhuman and brutal behaviors as the results of alienation from, for instance, the traditions, habits, history, culture, politics, and rule peculiar to each region; simultaneously, we should view these reactions from the standpoint of human fear, frailty, and inadequacy.

## II. The Trend of Western Novels and Japanese Doll-Love Novels

Now, what happened to Japanese people when their society dramatically changed? One great change to Japanese society took place during the Meiji era (1868–1912). After the Edo era (1603–1867), Japan began walking the path of modernization through “escaping Asia for Europe,” which became its national policy. Breaking with old Japan and Asia, the Emperor Meiji brought Japan out of the Samurai era into the modernity which accompanied westernization and militarization. At the dawn of westernization, Japan, which had relied mainly on Chinese culture, philosophy, habit, and so on, began importing a wide range of ideas and concepts from the West; the Japanese tried to adjust themselves accordingly.

This situation also held true in literature, especially in the way individuals began to be represented in literary texts. In fact, Japanese modern novels originated with the import of western novels, and with the prevalence of these translated versions in Japanese, the Japanese modern novel also established its position. According to Yumi Hirata, circulation numbers of translated western novels and of Japanese modern novels increased in tandem. On the other hand, the circulation of Japanese traditional fiction—a “factual story” that described an incident, especially a juicy story such as adultery—decreased.<sup>4</sup> A major reason is that intellectuals and newspapers insisted on revolutionizing fiction in Japan after the introduction of western novels. For example, the newspaper *Eiri Asano Shinbun*, reported,

Today, a series of articles in a certain newspaper contributes to distorting a truth because it foments delusion and simultaneously to hindering people’s imagination because it is a story of fact. Instead of such a juicy story, our newspaper should include a fruitful and interesting novel in the track of magazines in Europe....

Additionally, the newspaper writer wished “improvement” on readers and emphasized the “benefit” of reading western novels, including those of Charles Dickens, which “can abolish evils in this world” (*Eiri Asano Shinbun* Jan. 10, 1884).<sup>5</sup> Another newspaper, *Yomiuri Shinbun*, echoes this insistence with the following:

Recently we read a couple of Western novels. All of the authors of the novels are genuine scholars who represent their countries: they have high scholastic abilities. Hence, their novels are totally different from our novels in their contents and qualities. Western novels are philosophically fruitful, but our novels are not. The reason lies in the difference of scholastic abilities of the authors. (Nov. 9, 1884)<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Cf. the chart by Hirata, 1996, 179.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 176-7.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 177.

So, translated western novels became popular in Japan because of an emphasis on scholarship and philosophy. With the popularity of western novels, various concepts and philosophies stemming from western culture, such as romantic love, self, independence, self-help, and love-based marriage were introduced to Japan.<sup>7</sup>

Historically, then, the doll-love novel appeared in Japan. In the history of Japanese literature, it is said that the first novels of the genre are Rampo Edogawa's "Love of a Brute" (*Hitodenashi no koi*), Jyun'ichiro Tanizaki's "Mr. Bluemound" (*Aozukashi no hanashi*) and Seishi Yokomizo's "The Sweetheart in the Shop Window" (*Kazarimado no nakano koibito*), all published in 1926.<sup>8</sup> After that, doll-love novels were published one after another: for example, Edogawa's "An Insect" (*Mushi*, 1929) and "A Man Travelling with a Padded Cloth Picture" (*Oshie to tabisuru otoko*, 1929), Tanizaki's *Some Prefer Nettles* (*Tade kuu mushi*, 1928-9), and so on. These novels are often critiqued stereotypically, mainly in the theoretical framework of psychoanalysis and feminism.<sup>9</sup> The critics theorize that the love of a doll, especially an adult male's love of a female doll, represents narcissism, fetishism and/or the childish love for a transitional object. At any rate, an adult male's love of a doll is regarded as a childish desire to return to his mother's womb and to objectify a woman in order to own her forever, both situations indicating psychological problems.

Let us take Edogawa's "An Insect" as an example. The protagonist Aizo Masaki, a 27-year-old man, received a substantial inheritance from his deceased parents. He would seem to be fortunate, but he has actually been a misanthrope since childhood. Masaki loves Fuyo Kinoshita, one of Masaki's peers, now an actress. Masaki is attracted by Fuyo's beauty and her kindness toward him, but he knows that Fuyo keeps company with one of his acquaintances. Furthermore, he knows that she often insists on her own opinion (unacceptable in traditional Japan) and speaks ill of him behind his back. Masaki finally kills Fuyo. Despite his anger toward her, he begins loving her corpse and tries to keep it. In one sense, it might be said that the novel represents Masaki's desire to own a woman, in other words, to objectify her. But at first, Masaki did not try to own Fuyo. Considering that fact, we could say that Masaki's love of the corpse represents his childish desire; for him, the corpse would be a transitional object, which the psychoanalyst, D. W. Winnicott, defines as an irreplaceable and specially affected object for an infant who grieves leaving his mother.

<sup>7</sup>See, Koyano, 2000; Koyano, 2001, 129-130; Yanabu, 2002; Yanabu, 2010, 1-34; Ishihara, 2013. As for concepts and philosophy imported from the West and social change as the result, there are various references in Japan.

<sup>8</sup>Yokomizo's "The Sweetheart in the Show Window," however, is not a doll-love novel in the pure sense, and hence I do not discuss this short novel here. In order to increase the sales of "The Sweetheart in the Show Window," written by a friend of his, Sojin Tamaru "loves" a mannequin in a show window, steals it, and is arrested. The newspapers give a great deal of space to the event, and consequently, this short novel's sales increase; Tamaru then receives a reward from the author. In other words, Tamaru conducted a charade for money. In this sense, Tamaru does not love the mannequin.

<sup>9</sup>For example, Takayuki and Ogino (eds.), 2006; Fujita, 2006.

Talking to the corpse, he suddenly remembered his past. A shy boy was alone in the corner of an eight-tatami-mat living room, where he, in tears, was talking to a doll in his hands or rubbing his cheek against it. The shy boy is Masaki at 6 or 7, no doubt. Now, instead of talking to the doll in the hedge of building blocks, he was talking to the beautiful corpse in the storehouse. It was so strangely like. Masaki thought so, and he suddenly lifted the corpse into his arms, and began rubbing his cheek against it with tears in his eyes, as if it were the doll which he loved in his childhood.... (Edogawa, 1993, 135)

Tanizaki's *Some Prefer Nettles* is criticized in a similar way. The novel is set in the 1920s, when Japan was in the process of westernization and modernization. One of the themes of the novel is, therefore, the clash of western and traditional Japanese cultures. The novel's motif is a puppet, and it compares an Occidental puppet and a traditional Japanese Bunraku puppet. The protagonist Kaname and his wife Misako live under the assumption that they will divorce at some future point. Misako likes western culture and has become westernized. She has a boyfriend and often goes to him. Kaname cannot accept such a woman, and their relationship is cold. Consequently, Kaname sometimes goes to a western prostitute, and it seems that both husband and wife accept each other's affairs. However, Kaname does not feel a mental gap with the western prostitute. In fact, Kaname is attracted to the female Bunraku puppet, more specifically, a female puppet of the Edo era. Critics interpret Kaname's adoration of the traditional Japanese female puppet as representing his idealization of a Japanese woman as an object or a transitional object.

Such analysis about the adult male love of a female doll began in Japan, but followed western literary criticism through its application of psychoanalysis and gender study; both disciplines developed in the West. In this sense, the western episteme contributed a fresh perspective to the Japanese. On the other hand, the following question arises: can western theories adequately capture features of Japanese doll-love novels when those theories treat the characters' surface actions and remarks without considering the socio-historical situations peculiar to Japan? Given that Japanese doll-love novels appeared during the westernization process, what happened to Japanese society and the Japanese mind at that time?

As mentioned earlier, Japanese modern novels came about because of the respectful acceptance of western novels. Edogawa was influenced by Edgar Allan Poe, and Tanizaki by other western authors, for instance, Oscar Wilde. Did Japanese authors simply accept western fictions with blind respect and imitate the fictions of the lineage of doll-love tales and novels from *Pygmalion* through E.T.A. Hoffman to today's Steven Millhauser? No doubt some did. For example, Edogawa respected Edgar Allan Poe and wrote "Dancing Inch-High Samurai" (*Odoru issunboushi*) on the basis of Poe's "Hop-Frog." Additionally, Edogawa had been very interested in western psychology even before his writing career began. One of Edogawa's doll-love novels, "Love of a Brute" is the tale of a man who cannot love a human female, and may be based on western psychology.

However, we should consider that at least Tanizaki's *Some Prefer Nettles* represents the male protagonist's suffering due to the westernization of Japan. Additionally, *Some Prefer Nettles* was penned at the time Tanizaki began to consider problems with the westernization of Japan. Thus, it seems that Tanizaki used the doll-love motif to confess or elucidate discomfort because of westernization. However, before discussing the point further, let us carefully examine Japanese doll-love culture.

### III. Japanese Doll-Love Culture and Escape from the Western "Subject"

No matter what reasons a person has, of course, objectifying another person and reducing her or him to a commodity should be prohibited. However, we should be careful when we criticize, within a certain theoretical framework, some protagonists' love of a doll without considering the concrete context. Additionally, we should remember that Japanese doll-love novels were first criticized when the western episteme became influential in Japan, and in the same way, western doll-love tales were criticized. However, theoretical frameworks sometimes contribute to the ignoring or suppression of culture and people of non-western regions, especially when critics omit concrete facts and histories peculiar to those regions. As Haidee Kruger asserts,

Theories cannot be transferred to different contexts as if they were neutral "instruments" that can simply be "applied" to a given object of study, regardless of whether this object of study is part of the same temporal, spatial and cultural configurations as theory, or whether it is far removed in time or space from the original context of that theory (Kruger, 2012, 93).

In fact, as mentioned earlier, Japan and the Japanese are often criticized as childish by the Japanese themselves and by western theory because many Japanese adults like dolls or figures and treat them as if they were their own children, siblings, family, or friends (figure 1).<sup>10</sup> Certainly, one can observe that Japanese people include dolls and figures in their everyday lives (figure 2).<sup>11</sup> Various shops have figures in front of them (figure 3), and customers sometimes talk to them; not only to figures, but even to coffee and juice vending machines that "talk." Colonel Sanders of Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) was born in the United States, but his figure, or statue, was born in Japan, on the basis of the original made in Canada, but was not used there (figure 4). The figure of Colonel Sanders has long been loved by the Japanese, who even dress him suitably for certain seasons and events (figure 5). Another example of the Japanese love of figures is Sento-kun (figure 6). Sento-kun was born as a mascot sponsored by Nara prefecture to promote the 1,300th anniversary event of metropolitan Nara's establishment. After the event, he was relieved of his position. However, the Japanese became concerned about his future—as if he were a friend of theirs. The Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) repeatedly broadcast concerned

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<sup>10</sup>See, Napier, 2006, 281-2.

<sup>11</sup>See, Inoue, 1998.

news stories about his future. When Sento-kun finally obtained another job, some newspapers ran the article on the front page. Currently, Japanese people like metamorphosing themselves into various figures, an activity called “costume play.”

In Japan, these phenomena have nothing to do with gender. And if they are considered according to Winnicott’s theory of transitional object, it might follow that Japanese culture and the Japanese themselves are childish. However, before critiquing the phenomena on the basis of gender or Winnicott’s theory, we should consider Japanese tradition, culture, and thought process. First, the Japanese tend to regard everything in this world as having life like they do; they even feel themselves as living in this world with the souls of the dead: in the Japanese psyche, the border between living organisms and inorganic substances is ambiguous.<sup>12</sup> For this reason, they do things like issue residence certifications to *Manga* or animated characters (figure 7) as if to humans.<sup>13</sup> The Japanese even hold funerals for a doll, a figure, a needle, and so on (figure 8).<sup>14</sup> Second, the Japanese tend to feel themselves simply part of nature, rather than as having dominion over the Earth and all its creatures; they do not have a mind to accept that reason was specially gifted to human beings, as Descartes and other western philosophers insist (Kida, 2010, 45). Additionally, Japanese Buddhism is a philosophy based on the idea that everything, even each plant, *is* Buddha; Indian and Chinese Buddhism, which are the bases of Japanese Buddhism, do not have such a philosophy (Sueki, 1996, 169-72).<sup>15</sup> So, in Japan, a doll or a figure tends to be regarded as an innocent life, rather than as just an object. These attitudes spring from Japanese culture and history, rather than from asymmetric diversity in gender or from the concept of transitional objects.

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<sup>12</sup>This is a kind of animism. Jean Piaget regarded animism as a tendency of an infant mind, but it is also a Euro-centered viewpoint.

<sup>13</sup>For reference, some animals living in Japan also have residence certifications.

<sup>14</sup>Through the funeral rite for needles, the Japanese express their appreciation when discarding them, because in their minds, the needles helped and supported them. Some Japanese mess around needles and anything else, but they are despised. In Japan, traditionally speaking, a kind and warm person not only cherishes people, but also appreciates every creature and thing. As for the funeral rite for a doll, if the Japanese discard a doll without the rite or any feeling of appreciation, they may become frightened that the doll will curse them.

<sup>15</sup>For reference, Sigmund Freud denied Buddhism’s mystical experiences as primary narcissism.





Figure 1: People reluctant to leave the figures. Figure 2: Osaka, Japan



Figure 3: In front of pharmacy Figure 4: A figure of Colonel Sanders



Figure 5. Akiba Soken. From the left to the right



Figure 6: Sento-kun and the article on the front-page of a newspaper



Figure 7: Residence certifications of Manga characters



Figure 8: Funerals for needles and dolls

Japanese figure- and doll-love culture, as Shoichi Inoue suggests (Inoue, 1998, 258), became evident after Japan began to westernize. During that time, Japanese doll-love novels also appeared as Japan imported various western ideas. One of these was the concept of the individual human being as “subject ‘I’” or independent agent. According to Eri Takahara, “It is said that since the Meiji era Japanese had have a strongly aversive reaction to the self-assertive ‘subject’ of the Western people” (Takahara, 2003, 211). Takahara explains,

In the Japanese mind, the modern Western ‘subject’ was ugly and unclean because it seemed to have staunch desire and will, and to compete and battle with others but never to get together with others, while ‘object’ was clean because it seemed to have no desire of gain and never to cause conflict. Still, if the Japanese were to compete with the Western powers, they crucially needed to become the ‘subject’ of the nation and not give up the desire of gain in fact (211).

Hence, despite their discomfort, the Japanese started regarding a person with western subject traits as mature. The Japanese, especially men, were forced to perform the imported, active, and “self-assertive subject” in order to be acknowledged as a mature person in society. Not surprisingly, this caused Japanese men to feel strange or alienated in their establishment of a social identity. Consequently, they wanted to eradicate uncleanness from their own subject through “innocence as the object” (Takahara, 2003, 211). In other words, to escape their strange feelings and discomfort, the men became attracted to quiet and innocent, or immature, objects.

In this socio-historical context, the first “object of the innocent” in the Japanese modern novel became a beautiful boy, whose representation has a lineage from *Whistle* (“*Kuchibue*”) by Shinobu Origuchi, through *Evening Makeup* (“*Yuu geshou*”) by Toshio Yamazaki, and on to *Confessions of Mask* (“*Kamen no Kokuhaku*”) by Yukio Mishima.<sup>16</sup> After a while, a female gradually replaced the beautiful boy as the object of the innocent (Takahara, 2003, 228). For, as the boy was growing up, he was expected to become the subject in westernizing Japan, not to remain an innocent object. Furthermore, some Japanese women, called “modern girls,” began respecting and enacting western subjectivization.<sup>17</sup> Soichi Ohya remarks of a modern girl, “We can completely see her modernity when she talks. She is not quiet at all like a traditional woman. ... First of all, she can offer criticism straightforwardly to others, especially about his or her weakness...” (Ohya, 1989, 397). This means, of course, that she is self-assertive. In his short novel “An Unburnable Doll” (“*Moenai ningyo*” 1930), Tadashi Iijima describes a girl who refuses to become the object of the innocent: in a highly symbolic scene, she throws into the fire a doll given to her by an adult man who wants to marry her. He had perceived the doll to be this girl and then given her the doll. The quiet and immature object has thus transformed into

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<sup>16</sup>The genealogic study of beautiful boys in Japanese modern novels is the essence of Takahara’s study.

<sup>17</sup>Ishihara points out Japanese women were also forced to enact western subjectivization. Ishihara, 2013, 209.

something cute and innocent, or “*kawaii*.” In fact, as Hiroshi Aramata points out, the Japanese culture of affection for *kawaii* began in the mid-Meiji era, in other words, during the westernization of Japan (Inoue, 1998, 253). Typical of *kawaii* are a doll and a figure (Masubuchi, 1995, 77-78).

In summary, the love for a doll or a figure became widespread in Japan where the border between human and other-than-human was originally ambiguous. Japanese doll- or figure-love culture and doll-love novels, therefore, appeared during the process of Japanese adjustment, a required cultural change led by the government, to the new concept of the subject or subjectivity imported from the West.<sup>18</sup> In fact, with women’s changed participation in society, not only Japanese men but also women began loving *kawaii* figures in order to seek healing. Additionally, novels of an adult females’ love of a male doll have appeared.

#### IV. Japanese Doll-Love as Retroaction against Alienation of Japanese Men

Now, from the standpoint of Japanese history and culture, let us discuss Tanizaki’s *Some Prefer Nettles*, in which the protagonist Kaname is attracted to Koharu, a female Buraku puppet of the Edo era. In the novel, a male Bunraku puppet, named Jihei, appears, too. Kaname, however, does not like Jihei, but, as western interpretation might immediately assume, the reason is not that Jihei is a male puppet. Instead, Kaname dislikes Jihei because compared to Koharu, the male puppet is overly active and seems to have no center or “inside.” Thus, Kaname’s love of a doll (puppet) basically has nothing to do with gender. In fact, in the novel, Kaname’s father-in-law makes this clear as he compares puppets.

He [Kaname] concentrated on Koharu [a female puppet]. Jihei’s face had in it something of the dignity of “Noh” classic dance masks, but his *exaggerated clothes hung lifelessly* from his shoulders as he moved about the stage, making it a little hard for one as unfamiliar with the puppet theater as Kaname to feel any human warmth in him. Koharu, kneeling with her head bowed, was infinitely more effective. ... The old man, when he discoursed on the puppet theater, liked to compare Japanese Bunraku puppets with Occidental string puppets. The latter could indeed be very active with their hands and feet, but the fact that they were suspended and worked from above made it impossible to suggest the line of the hips and the movement of the torso. There was in them none of the force and urgency of living flesh, one could find nothing that told of a live, warm human being. The Bunraku puppets, on the other hand, were worked from inside, so that the surge of life was actually present, sensible, under the clothes. (Tanizaki, 1995, 23)

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<sup>18</sup>As long as the western, self-assertive subject does not fit the Japanese mind, even if the Japanese are forced to be self-assertive, they cannot do so completely. It is often said that the Japanese remark is ambiguous, but in my view, the ambiguousness itself stems from the clash between the Japanese traditional mind and western mind.

From the father-in-law's perspective, the activeness of western puppets, controlled from the outside, have "in them none of the force and urgency of living flesh," thus leaving them to be just objects. On the other hand, with the exception of Jihei in his lifeless baggy clothing, the quietness of Bunraku puppets, acted from the inside, endow them with "the surge of life," "actually present, sensible"; they seem alive. Kaname agrees with his father-in-law and then develops the following view:

The activity of Jihei was ungainly, a little repulsive. That was undoubtedly because it was not possible to keep the body of the standing puppet from dangling a little and thus falling into the defects of the string puppet. If one pursued the old man's argument a little farther, the kneeling puppet, it would seem, ought to have more of the "urgency of living flesh" than the standing puppet; and indeed, as she knelt there, still but for the slightest movement of the shoulders to suggest breathing, and now and then a hint of coquetry, Koharu was almost disturbingly alive (24).

To put it another way, the quietness of a Bunraku puppet's outside vividly reveals its active inside; this gives the impression that it lives. However, activeness of an occidental puppet's outside leaves its inside vague; this gives the impression that it has no life. This comparison is analogous to the comparison between Kaname's dislike of his westernized wife (a self-assertive subject) and his admiration for a traditional Japanese woman (the traditional Japanese subject). For the Japanese, the western subject's attitude seemed overly active and self-assertive. Hence, Jihei represents a Japanese enacting western subjectivity, and Koharu is a traditional Japanese object of innocence.

The ambiguity of the outside indicating the clarity of the inside is a concept not only Kaname possesses, but also Kaname's creator Tanizaki himself. Although *Some Prefer Nettles* is often considered Tanizaki's autobiographical novel, Tanizaki also, like his character Kaname, considers the ambiguity of the outside a way to vividly reveal the inside. This concept finds its expression in Tanizaki's writing style. Edward G. Seidensticker, one of the novel's translators, confesses in "Introduction" of *Some Prefer Nettles* translated by him, "how difficult Tanizaki is to translate." The reason is that his prose belongs in the ambiguity of the "pure Japanese stylists" (Tanizaki, 1995, xv, xiv-xv). "Once when Tanizaki was criticized for not exploring the inner life of one of his characters, he retorted, 'But why should I discuss his psychology? Can't the reader guess from what I've already told him?'" (Tanizaki, 1995, xv). In other words, the sort of agency a character has can appear through language, rather than authorial psychoanalysis.<sup>19</sup> His view could stem from anti-western subject and style, in other words, an anti-western kind of agency.

However, as long as Japanese men built their subjectivity by adjusting themselves to the western concept, they had to confirm their subjectivity through western eyes. Although a Japanese man was subject in the eyes of a Japanese woman,

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<sup>19</sup>As proof by counterexample, we know that broken syntactic structure in narration of a character, like the protagonist in *Snow White* by Donald Barthelme, makes the character's subject unable to appear.

he was object to western eyes. In *Some Prefer Nettles*, Kaname wanted to escape from western subjectivity, and so expected a quiet, innocent subject as his wife. Unfortunately for Kaname, Misako has already become westernized, and so Kaname becomes attracted to the innocent, or the traditional, doll from the earlier Edo era. Overall then, this interpretation according to Japanese history and culture situates the problem in the forced change of Japanese men's subjectivity rather than in adult males' objectification of a female—men's suffering from alienation resulting from required adjustment to cultural change, consequent to exposure to the modern world's impact.

We may interpret Edogawa's "An Insect" from the same standpoint, even if he was interested in western psychology. Like Misako, Fuyo has become westernized; she is active and clearly speaks her opinions. Her "lips have protean contour like western people. ... She has completely changed from an innocent girl and a sacred maiden into ... a sensual witch" (Edogawa, 1993, 100). In Masaki's murdering her and then loving her corpse, it may be said that Masaki eradicates Fuyo's "active and self-assertive subject," and then can love the quiet, innocent, traditional Japanese subject. This view is supported by the fact that Edogawa wrote another doll-love novel to help westernized Japanese men remember times before Japan's westernization. As Tetsuro Nobutoki concludes in his study on Edogawa's "A Man Travelling with a Padded Cloth Picture," it is a novel to "grab Asakusaism lurking in modern men's mind and return the men to 'Asakusa,' in the background of the times of transition of Japan to westernized and sophisticated modern world" (Nobutoki, 1996, 19). "Asakusa" was a place where "people could seek, or feel, the exact same thing as what people in the Edo era, the times before westernization of Japan, did" (Nobutoki, 1996, 4). In other words, the doll-love novel exists to return westernized Japanese men to times when the Japanese were not expected to enact the self-assertive subject.

#### V. Object or Organism, the West and Japan

But still, why is "loving a person like a doll" regarded as objectification? This might stem from different western and Japanese philosophies and different tendencies in the protagonists of western and Japanese doll-love tales and novels. As far as I know, the western male protagonists of doll-love novels and tales create the dolls themselves, but Japanese male protagonists meet a female doll by chance or obtain one by accident or on their own, but do not create one themselves. Even in current Japanese doll-love novels, female protagonists who love male dolls or figures do not create them.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, for example, the characters of Millhauser's novels make the dolls themselves, love them, and own them:

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<sup>20</sup>See *Love of A Doll* [*Ningyo ai*] by Takako Takanashi, *Vacation of Boy Mikazuki* [*Mikazuki shonen hyoryuki*] by Mayumi Nagano, *Theory of Glass Life* [*Galasu seimeiron*] by Yoriko Nagano, *A Specimen of Annular Finger* [*Kusuriyubi no hyohon*] by Yoko Ogawa.

With the onset of adolescence my powers of imagination, so lively and varied during childhood, took a conventional turn. My sexual fantasies were precise, obsessive, and inaccurate. I was particularly fond of imagining the slow, the very slow, the dreamily slow raising of a dark wool skirt or light summer dress to reveal pastel underpants molding themselves to disturbing bulges. I imagined that girls were quite smooth under there, like rubber dolls....

... I would mentally mold a being whose existence would be sustained by the detail and energy of my relentless dreaming. My ambition was to create not an actual human being or a mere work of art but rather a being who existed in a realm parallel to the other two—a third realm, obedient to the laws of physical bodies but utterly discarnate. ... One night I thought of the name Olivia. ... Despite my vivid sexual imaginings in adolescence and beyond, despite Celia Ann Hodges, I had never made the attempt to visualize a girl or woman or any human being in exhaustive detail. I spent two nights and two days imagining her hands, summoning them out of vagueness into the precision of being (Millhauser, 1990, 185, 189).

Millhauser even describes the process of making a doll in detail, and Pygmalion, the king of Kypros, sculpted a woman of ivory and loved it. But a doll does not implicitly have life. Pygmalion's doll, in the form of a statue, only comes to life after being inspired by Aphrodite. In other words, creating a doll is analogous to inspiration, or literally "the drawing in of breath." This view is suggested by Bruno Schultz as well (Schulz, 1934/1977, 59-62). In Schultz's *The Street of Crocodiles*, the narrator's mad father delivers a series of lectures to Adela, the tyrannical housemaid, and two seamstresses Polda and Pauline: "Matter is the most passive and most defenseless essence in cosmos. Anyone can mold it and shape it; it obeys everybody" (59). Then, he mentions the creator god, "the Demiurge." He wants to become a "second Demiurge," saying "we shall give priority to trash," and concluding, "In one word, we wish to create man a second time—in the shape and semblance of a tailor's dummy" (62).

Still, the protagonist's creation of a doll does take place in Tanizaki's short Japanese novel, "Mr. Bluemound." Mr. Bluemound, who makes balloon dolls of the narrator's wife and loves them, recounts the doll-making process. However, Mr. Bluemound lives like a western person. He raves about American movies and the people in them, and belittles Japanese movies (Yokomizo, 1995, 358-9, 377-8);<sup>21</sup> he likes American movie directors' ideals and sensibility (358-9), and western philosophy (380). He bought and proudly uses a bottle that Americans usually use to store liquor (384-5); he lives in a western style house (389-90). In other words, he is described as not-Japanese and as lost in Westernness.

Be that as it may, as expressed in the story of Pygmalion and in Shultz's character, a western character who creates a doll is like the Creator who creates human beings. In other words, the western viewpoint sees such a creator as arrogantly usurping the place of God, making a being freely, according to his own will and to his

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<sup>21</sup>For reference, the element of the West in the novels by Edogawa and Yokomizo brings the readers the atmosphere of Gothic. Elements of the West imported to Japan itself could be Gothic for Japan.

own taste. And at the point a man makes a female doll to his own taste, his selfishness and oppression of the woman are criticized. That attitude toward doll-making, however, differs fundamentally from Japanese tradition. Although he does not create a female doll to love, the narrator in “The Sixth Night” in *Ten Nights’ Dreams* (1908) by Soseki Natsume makes a suggestive and illuminating discovery pertinent to my argument. The narrator, who lives in the Meiji era, dreams that he lives in the Kamakura era (about 1185-1333). In the dream, he is impressed by the great craft of Unkei, a famous sculptor of Buddhist statues. The narrator wonders how the sculptor can carve perfect wooden statues of the Nio, the guardian gods of a temple gate. He asks a young man beside him: “How can he make the eyebrows and nose the way he wants?” (Natsume, 2000, 25). The young man says to him, “He doesn’t do it with his chisel. All he does is just dig out the eyebrows and nose already buried in the wood” (25). The narrator exclaims “What a discovery! So this is what sculpture is! It occurred to me that if that is all there is to it, anybody can do it” (25), and he begins to carve a piece of oak wood. However, he “couldn’t seem to find the Nio” (26). He “carved into the stacked wood piece by piece, but in none was hidden the Nio” (26). Finally, he “had to accept the fact that the Nio does not reside in the wood of the Meiji period,” and simultaneously, he “also learned the reason why Unkei is alive today” (26). This dream suggests Natsume’s very Japanese criticism of westernization: Human beings cannot carve a statue according to their will and art, and to their own taste, but can only uncover the Buddha already in the wood. Aware of the problems with the westernization of Japan, Natsume confessed that the narrator who cannot find the wood’s Buddha-nature represents the loss of the Japanese way of thinking and way of being in the world—to the western, artificial way of making things to their own taste.

The comparison by Natsume corresponds to a difference between western and Japanese philosophy. As Gen Kida argues, western philosophy stems from the perspective that Someone created the world. Thus, westerners live with constant awareness of the Creator as actively and purposefully constructing the world and human beings—a concept similar to western human subjectivity. In Japanese philosophy, the world has already been as it is—a given—and the Japanese feel the deity of the world in front of their eyes—without care about who made either the world or human beings (Kida, 2010, 54-5).

This difference might reflect the relationship between a fictional character and a doll, as well, that is, the difference between making a doll to the character’s taste, and owning and controlling it *or* turning to a doll for healing from cultural discomfort and alienation. Scot Shershow points out that Plato saw the relationship between puppet and puppeteer as kindred to the relationship between humans and God (Shershow, 1995, 21). It follows that humans began living after God manipulated or inspired them. In other words, a human being is a doll of God and an object of no life without God. A western doll has no life, but is just an object whose inside is nonexistent, or vague at best. Remember that in Hoffman’s *Der Sandmann*, Nathaniel criticizes Clara, “Du lebloses, verdammtes Automat!” (a lifeless doll) (Hoffman, 1960, 348). As mentioned, the mad father in Schulz’s novel declares, “We shall give priority to trash.” Although Hans Bellmer made dolls with ball-joints to criticize his time’s



excessive respect for health, he believed that a sentence is collection of lifeless words just as a doll is a collection of lifeless parts (Tanaka, 2005, 77-8). In short, dolls are made of trash, odds and ends, with no life, as objects. A doll-object has life only when it is manipulated and made to act. Hence, a doll-human has no life to be manipulated. Regarding this view of a doll, Paul Claudel's comparison between a western doll, or a puppet, and a Japanese Bunraku puppet in his essay "Bounrakou," is suggestive:

A puppet is the complete animated likeness, not only of the face, but of the limbs and the whole body. ... A puppet is not, like a human actor, held captive by its own weight. It has no contact with earth, and moves with equal ease in all dimensions. It floats in an intangible element like a drawing in an empty space. Its life is in its center, and its four limbs and head, spread out like rays around it, are merely its elements of expression. It is a talking tar, untouchable. The Japanese have not tried to make it walk; that is impossible, for it does not belong to the earth but stands on an invisible stalk and turns its mocking face to every side. Legs and feet are not simply means of progress or support, but the instrument of every attitude, walk, and witty contortion, expressing anxiety, eagerness, resistance, defiance, weariness, awakening, and the wish to go or stay (Claudel, 1972, 50-1).

Loving a person like a doll can certainly be regarded as objectification because the person is seen and treated as a toy, trash, a collection of parts, or an object without life. Additionally, if the objectification is asymmetrical in gender, the relationship, whether real or fictional, can be criticized. Of course, not all western doll-love novels show an adult male's objectification of a woman. The doll-love novels by Hoffman and Poe can be read as the tragedy of people who have gotten into a space where everything goes mechanically, or, as depicted in Ernst Jünger's *Storm of Steel*, into a space without life. In that case, too, western doll-love as fictionally represented is love of something lifeless; however, Japanese doll-love is love of the innocent for the healing of the discomfort and alienation that the Japanese government brought from the West.

### Conclusion

Contrary to the western way of thinking, the Japanese mind tends to regard everything in this world as having life; each thing has its Buddha-nature and innocence. After Japan's westernization, figure- and doll-love appeared when Japanese individuals, because they connected to the western concept of subject, became alienated from their former concept of self or, perhaps, no-self. When we consider these facts and this history and culture, should a Japanese doll-love novel be criticized through the psychoanalysis and feminism developed in the West? Surprisingly, the answer is, "Yes." But only when a person is reduced to a commodity, like the female protagonist of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll House* or when, with western episteme, we deal with the action and dialogue on the surface of a Japanese literary text. In this paper, I discussed doll-love novels from the dawn of the genre in Japan, and there might be such novels that depict enjoyment of another's oppression. But before critiquing Japanese doll-love novels through western episteme, we should consider Japanese

philosophy and history that includes often-difficult connectedness to the West, new identity, and alienation. Again, we should remember Edward Said's comment about the critic's job quoted in the beginning of this essay.

Must a Japanese novel be deconstructed by western episteme? If it oppresses Japanese historical reality, or in other words, imparts *theoretical alienation* to Japanese literature, the answer is, "No." Finally, because the West itself consists of various philosophies and histories, we should also localize western doll-love novels before we frame them theoretically.

#### Figures (All accessed February 5, 2013)

- Figure 1. GLOBAL Sebu Net (<http://cebu.jocv.net/blog/index.php?eid=1010>).
- Figure 2. 4 Travel.jp (<http://4travel.jp/domestic/area/kinki/osaka/oosaka/nanba/trabelogue/10300546/>).
- Figure 3. Mashikaku shashin de mita nichijo. (<http://blogs.yahoo.co.jp/funky830funky830funky830/33112295.html>).
- Figure 4. Gigazine (<http://gigazine.net/news/20121125-kfc-colonel-sanders/>).
- Figure 5. Akiba Soken. From the left to the right, (<http://akiba-souken.com/article/akiba/13000>), (<http://akiba-souken.com/article/akiba/12486/>), and (<http://akiba-souken.com/article/akiba/14800>).
- Figure 6. Nara Economic Press (<http://nara.keizai.biz/headline/522>).
- Figure 7. From left to right, Niiza City Industry and Tourism Association (<http://www.niiza.net/t-atom/>), Kasukabe City (<https://www.city.kasukabe.lg.jp/kouhou/shisei/kouhou/pr/shinchan/juuminhyou.html>).
- Figure 8. Upper left and right, Koedo Net (<http://www.koedo.org/event/21972.html>); lower left, Shokoji Temple (<http://shoukouji2.blog.fc2.com/blog-entry-18.html>); lower right, Town News in Isehara (<http://www.townnews.co.jp/0405/2012/10/19/161786.html>).

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