

**The Consumption of English-language  
Music Videos on YouTube in Japan**

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I declare that, unless otherwise stated, all the work presented in this thesis is my own.

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## **Abstract**

Euro-American (Western) popular music has been imported, performed and adapted to Japanese musical sensibilities since 1854. It influenced Japanese popular music throughout the 20th century and can be heard everywhere these days in shops, on university campuses, at school festivals, on the radio and television, and at the live shows of touring artists. Although record sales indicate the dominance of the domestic industry, especially the J-pop market, young Japanese people are actively consuming Western music through YouTube. This study demonstrates the eclectic musical tastes of young Japanese people today and the role of YouTube as a music platform.

Using a mixed methods approach that combines a survey of over 500 university undergraduates with interviews and focus group work with 82 students, a rich description is presented of the ways in which music videos on YouTube are consumed mainly through mobile digital devices. The data show that the music videos themselves are watched with varying levels of engagement because music provides a background accompaniment to other activities much of the time. Nevertheless, certain types of music video, such as those with skilful dancing, great originality, or a dramatic storyline, tend to attract higher levels of engagement and repeated viewings. The role of English-language lyrics and the priority given to melody and rhythm are also explored.

Although many of the YouTube viewing practices of young Japanese audiences resemble those of their Western counterparts, this study highlights attitudes, values and expectations of Japanese and non-Japanese artists that are unique to Japanese audiences. In doing so, it underscores the need for investigating global phenomena in local (non-Western) contexts and sharing those findings to build a more accurate understanding of music video consumption through YouTube worldwide.

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## Introduction

The purpose of this research is to present a rich description of the ways in which young Japanese are consuming popular music, in particular English-language music videos, through the website YouTube. This study also presents responses to a small selection of English-language music videos by Japanese university students. The aim is to fill gaps in existing English-language scholarship on popular music and YouTube audiences in Japan. Sullivan (2013), an American scholar, underlines the current significance of YouTube when he says: 'Perhaps the single most important online tool for empowering audiences in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been the video-sharing website YouTube' (p. 220). In order to obtain a broad understanding of the empowering effect of a global media phenomenon such as YouTube, it is important to take into account localized practices and their cultural context because it is unwise to assume without investigation that a global phenomenon implies globally shared styles of consumption.

Among the most viewed types of video clips on YouTube are commercial pop music videos. Kinskey (2014), also writing from an American perspective, implies that music video is a medium that has universal influence: 'Music video, as a form that unites popular music, visual communication, and changing sociocultural aesthetics, touches the everyday practices and interest of almost anyone engaged with contemporary culture' (p. 34). Again, it is advisable to explore the situation in a variety of contexts. Since I have not come across any studies of music video audiences in Japan, or anyone researching this area in my encounters with scholars of Japanese popular music, I wish to rectify this situation.

This study used a mixed methods approach, combining survey data with interview and focus group work in order to get as full a picture as possible. The research subjects were undergraduates at the middle-level, mid-sized private university where I am employed. Two surveys were conducted in 2010 ( $N=2,217$ ) and 2015 ( $N=511$ ). Interviews with 51 students were carried out in 2011-

12, and in 2015-2016, work with 33 additional students was carried out in focus groups. The total sample of females and males in interviews and focus groups was 52 and 36 respectively.

Qualitative research uses non-probability samples for selecting the population to study. This means that the units are deliberately selected to reflect particular features or groups within the sample population. The sample is not intended to be statistically representative as in quantitative research. It is the characteristics of the population that are the basis for selection because they have particular features which will enable detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes and puzzles which the researcher wishes to study (Ritchie and Lewis, 2010). In this case, the overall sample population was large, but drawn from the same institution. They shared the essential features of being young people who listened to and watched Western popular music and music videos. Although a significant proportion of the students at this university came from Western Japan, there were many from other regions throughout the Japanese archipelago. They also were studying in nine different faculties. Although there is clearly the possibility of institutional bias, and I can only say with certainty that my findings are true of the Japanese young adults at this particular university, I believe they provide a reasonably representative sample of average young Japanese people living outside the Tokyo area and that readers familiar with Japan will find my findings applicable to a great many Japanese young people. They are not part of the relatively small number Japanese fashion leaders and trendsetters, but represent the far larger, less conspicuous majority. Moreover, they were a sample population that I had daily access to and was able to obtain permission from my university research ethics committee to survey and interview.

The aim of this research project was to find out what English-language music videos ordinary young Japanese were consuming on YouTube as this was the most common means of accessing music videos at that time. I also wanted to investigate their interpretations. As will be seen, this depended a lot on their level

of engagement with the visuals as well as with the music and the song lyrics. None of the students interviewed had studied media in school or university classes (apart from five students who were in my media studies seminar) because media studies are not part of the Japanese high school curriculum. This is an additional way in which they can be seen as representative of Japanese middle-class youth.

One of the difficulties in discussing popular music in a Japanese context is terminology. In the Japanese language, there are two words closest to the English phrase 'the West'. One is *ōbei*, in which the Chinese character for *ō* represents 'Europe' and *bei* represents 'America'. The other is *seiyō*, in which the Chinese character *sei* represents 'west' and *yō* represents 'ocean'. Both words are usually translated into 'the West'. Many young Japanese consider that *ōbei* (Europe-America) means the United States and, to a lesser extent, Europe, while *seiyō* (west-ocean) corresponds to Europe, which is particularly symbolized by France. While at least two ideas of 'the West' exist, Japan is not seen as part of 'the West'. It is considered to be part of Asia because Japan and Asia are similar in terms of 'appearances', 'culture', 'race', 'mentality', and 'geography' (Fujita, 2008). This could also be because the young generation has been influenced by Japan's positively reasserting its Asian identity after its long retreat following its defeat in WWII. This renewed Asian identity has been stressed since the 1990s when the rise of Asian global economic power meant Japan could not neglect Asia as a vital market for its products (Iwabuchi, 2002).

The term Western music is used throughout this discussion to refer to music imported from Europe and the USA. This is for convenience, rather than to imply that music from these regions does not encompass multiple influences from other regions around the world. For Japanese people, the term *yō* means 'from outside Japan' and is used in the word *yōgaku* (music from outside Japan). The most common translation of *yōgaku* is Western music, regardless of the language of the lyrics or the origins and mixed influences inherent in music styles from

outside Japan. While I use the term Western on the understanding that this encompasses all music from outside Japan, it needs to be acknowledged that in the minds of most Japanese people Western music usually signifies English-language music. In order to facilitate understanding of Japanese terms, a glossary can be found in the Appendix.

I should also explain that Japanese words are written in roman letters in italic style and English translations are provided in parentheses. Japanese names are also written in roman letters, but in the Japanese order with the family name before the given name. When quoting from interview transcripts, to preserve anonymity, all student informants are referred to as “S” (S1, S2, S3, etc. in group interviews) and A = Amanda, the researcher.

After explaining my research methodology and Japanese cultural background information, I provide a brief overview of Western music from the time it was introduced in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Japan to the start of the current Heisei era in 1989. This section explains how Western music has both influenced Japanese musical aesthetics and been integral to the Japanese entertainment industry. Craig (2000) notes that a hallmark of Japanese culture is the readiness to allow ‘cross-fertilisation between old and new, native and foreign, one genre and another’ (p. 8). Japan has a history of borrowing foreign things (Chinese characters, English words, capitalism, democracy) and adapting them by merging them with Japanese elements ‘so that they become something new and often quite distinct from the original’ (p. 8). This chapter illustrates this process.

Chapter 3 looks at the contemporary Japanese music scene and the place that Western music still occupies, combining research by others with my own data, in order to demonstrate how eclectic the music listening practices of young Japanese are nowadays. Although J-pop is clearly the genre most listened to, many other genres are also popular and Western music is far more popular than many researchers have concluded by looking at record sales data. One reason

why its popularity has been hidden is that access to music these days is mainly through YouTube, which is accessed through digital devices. Consequently, the changes brought about by new technologies and the functions of YouTube are examined in Chapters 4 and 6 by combining commentary on published research literature with the voices of my informants.

The roles and aesthetics of modern music video are explored in Chapters 5 and 7. I integrate the views of Western scholars with the questions and opinions of my research participants. As will be seen, music video is probably heard more than seen by my informants, and the reasons for this are discussed, together with a description of the YouTube 'viewing' practices of my informants.

The final Chapter is an exploration of the responses of ten students to a selection of English-language music videos. Most were presented in the way that they might first view such videos on YouTube, without much background information or knowledge of the song lyrics. Their reactions provided new insights into the ways in which such videos are perceived, and confirmed many of the themes that had emerged during interviews. Research on young media audiences has relied heavily on textual analysis or content analysis, both of which place an emphasis on what has been encoded in a text and tend to overlook the decoding process of diverse audiences. Such an approach separates media from everyday activity and overlooks the relationship between the cultural and the social (Zaslow, 2009). For this reason, I have not analysed the music videos used in this section in great detail. The focus is not on my own textual analysis of each video, but on the textual interpretation of the focus group participants. My intention is to provide insights into Japanese interpretations of Western music videos and I invite my readers to view the music videos and to compare their own responses with those of my participants.

Finally, I discuss evidence from a music video analysis class that I started teaching to Japanese and international students during the course of my

research. This was not in my original research plan, but has highlighted the lack of training in critical thinking that the Japanese school education system provides and which leaves university students seriously underprepared for academic inquiry which requires thinking in an abstract and analytical way. Moreover, as media studies are not included in high school curricula, Japanese students have no academic training to draw on when analysing media texts and no familiarity with concepts such as audience reception and the polysemy of media messages.

This study provides new insights into the ways young Japanese audiences are engaging with and interpreting pop music videos that are valuable for the Western and Japanese music and Internet industries. The reason for the narrow focus on YouTube is that at the time the research was conducted, it was clearly the main platform through which the Japanese young people surveyed accessed Western music. It is interesting that this apparently audiovisual medium is being used for aural consumption as well as audiovisual and throws into the question the role of music videos in the consumption of popular music. This research highlights the different levels of engagement of the informants when they are consuming music videos in a wide range of situations during their daily lives. As the discussion is based on the music videos the informants reported watching, the focus is mainly on commercially produced work by artists known to the Japanese informants.

# 1 Research Approach and Methods

Since the launch of YouTube in 2005, internet-connected audiences worldwide have been able to upload, access and share video clips wherever and whenever they want. In order to understand contemporary media audience behaviour, media researchers around the world need to investigate the extent to which routine and mundane yet globally shared media activities, like watching music video clips on YouTube, are related to their social and cultural setting. I will briefly outline some of the main approaches that mass media and popular music audience researchers have adopted in the West to research audience response to media texts and identify the issues that are related to this research project. I will also provide background information on the Western media research paradigms and methodologies, which have been influential in Japan. Next, I will outline my own approach and methodology and ways in which I have dealt with some of the potential weaknesses of my study. Finally, I will discuss aspects of Japanese society and culture that make ethnographic research difficult for Japanese researchers as well as non-Japanese, but which provide explanations for many of the findings that may be puzzling to people unfamiliar with Japan. In doing so, I wish to highlight the need to look carefully at local situations when considering a global phenomenon and to endorse the view of Ito that a globally shared technology “is not independent of a social and cultural setting” (Ito et al., 2005, p. 6).

## **Audience research in the West and Japan**

The notion of audiences and their role in the communication, interpretation and consumption of media messages has undergone radical changes. These changes are reflected to some extent in the dual uses of the word ‘communication’ that Carey (1989) identified: the transmission view and the ritual view. The transmission view has been common in industrial cultures. It denotes the sending, giving, imparting or transmitting information to others, usually for the

purpose of control. It is based on a metaphor of transportation: the movement of goods, people and information have been seen as essentially the same processes. The audience is seen as passive receivers, and even when a feedback loop is added, the receiver still remains the end point of the communication process. This passive role of the audience has been challenged, and ways in which audiences actively negotiate and create meaning will be discussed below.

The ritual view of communication predates the transmission view and is linked to terms such as 'sharing', 'participation', 'association', and 'fellowship' (Carey, 1989). This definition focuses on the roots that the word 'communication' shares with other words such as 'commonness', 'communion', and 'community' and sees the role of communication in modern society as the maintenance of society, not the imparting of information in order to exert control, but the sharing of beliefs with the aim of drawing people together through their commonality to construct and maintain 'an ordered, meaningful, cultural world' (pp. 18–19). This view of communication had not been explored as fully in scholarship as the transmission view at the time that Carey was writing. However, the subsequent spread of digital technologies, the Internet, and the prevalence of social media and alternative media have highlighted its relevance in our current global digitalized age.

The transmission view of communication dominated academic thought from the 1920s. It focuses on the content of the message, together with an emphasis on the roles of the transmitters and receivers. The sender sends a message to the receiver and communication is achieved when the message reaches its target. The message can be subject to interference from ambient sound and psychological interference in the form of competing thoughts and feelings as it travels from its source to its intended receiver. This model describes both interpersonal communication and mass communication. An alternative view of communication sees it as a process rather than a transaction (Sullivan, 2013).

The focus is not on the message itself but on the meaning that the receiver creates and this is carried out through a two-way interaction between the receiver and sender called feedback. In face-to-face communication, feedback is immediate, but while it is just as crucial in mass media communication, it has been inevitably delayed. The spread of social media networking, however, is increasingly allowing audiences to provide instant feedback to media text producers.

There are three basic models of media audiences identified by Webster (1998) on which scholarly inquiries have been based since the early 20th century. The audience-as-outcome model sees the media as influencing people and reflects concerns about the power of the media to produce detrimental effects on individuals and society as a whole. It has given rise to research on media effects, propaganda, attitude change and film theory. The audience-as-mass model sees audiences as large collections of people 'scattered across time and space who act autonomously and who have little or no knowledge of one another' (Webster, 1998, p. 193). Research based on this model asks questions such as: What kinds of media do people consume? How many and what types of people are in the audience? How do specific groups respond to a particular issue? Public institutions and for-profit corporations rely heavily on this notion of the audience and use quantitative measurement techniques, such as TV ratings and public opinion surveys, to gauge mass responses to specific stimuli. The third model, the audience-as-agent model, sees people as free agents choosing what media they will consume and bringing their own interpretive skills to the texts they encounter. Audiences select specific media content to fit their own needs and desires and interpret those media within the framework of their own personal experiences. The research approaches that are based on this model include the uses and gratifications approach, reception theory, interpretation of media content, and media rituals.

A fourth model that has come into being with the spread of digital technologies is the audiences-as-producers model (Sullivan, 2013). The traditional dichotomy between message producers and receivers has become blurred since audiences were able to become active fans and online interactive users and producers of media. Research into fan activities and interactive audiences is based on this model.

This new model raises questions related to the notion of 'active' audiences and the actions they undertake. Are 'active' and 'passive' suitable terms to describe audience reception of media texts? Should we be talking instead about levels of engagement with media texts? Moreover, how can audience activities be measured and observed when mobile devices allow them to consume media content throughout the day in a wide range of locations?

### **Research into the effects of media messages on audiences**

Scholars and social commentators in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century started to worry about the effects of films and other popular amusements on crowd psychology. It was suggested that the unique cognitive and emotional state experienced by audiences watching a motion picture left them vulnerable to forms of psychological suggestion and warned that films can be used to implant ideas into unsuspecting audiences. This notion led to a tradition of 'effects' research based on the operative mechanism of suggestibility that assumed that effects were controlled by the media and not by the audience (Shimpach, 2011). This view of media audiences as an isolated, anonymous and vulnerable mass dominated the twentieth century with the rapid expansion of new media technologies such as radio, television, computers and the Internet. There is a body of research, however, that questions this assumption and 'considers individuals to be rational, decision-making creatures whose actions can be understood within particular social contexts' (Sullivan, 2013, p. 113).

## **Uses and Gratifications Research**

The focus of this research is not on what the media do to audiences, but on what audiences do with media (Katz, 1959). This new focus emerged in radio audience research in the 1940s and posits that audiences actively choose media sources and content to match their needs at a given moment. The key idea is that the media provide pleasure and information, which are used for diversion, personal relationships, personal identity, and seeking information (Dutton & Mundy, 1995). Katz and Foulkes (1962) emphasized that the same radio or television programme can be used in a different way by different members of the audience and it is therefore very difficult to infer effects from programme content.

Uses and gratifications is a user-centred approach to understanding media audiences that is also sensitive to the social environment of audience members. However, several questions are left unanswered. For example, what happens if the media environment changes and new technologies are introduced? Or how great is the influence of family or friends? For this reason, further research was directed towards the social origins of media uses and needs, starting with research into the uses of television within the family.

Whereas researchers had focused on the individual and relied initially on self-reports by the people undergoing investigation, Lull (1976) observed and took detailed notes on 20 families in their living rooms while they watched television. In this way, he was able to record their uses of the medium at the moment the medium was being used. This allowed him to consider the role that social interactions and interpersonal relationships played in shaping media usage. By using ethnographic, participant observation methods, he was able to observe patterns of television viewing behaviour, in a natural domestic setting, and was able to reach his own conclusions about media uses free from his subjects' self assessments. He made important discoveries about the role of gender in programme selection as well as structural and relational uses of television. For example, it was used structurally as background noise for companionship when

family members were alone, and it was used for relational purposes when family members wanted to engage others in conversation or reduce conflict. Collette and Lamb (1986) carried out a similar investigation, with similar findings, but did not observe the families in their homes. Instead, they placed video cameras inside the television sets and recorded the activities of family members while they were in front of the television. Although this new media audience research approach provided valuable new insights, it was not without problems because scholars were required to insert themselves into the research process when interpreting observed audience behaviours and interview responses.

### **The role of semiotics in the interpretation of media texts**

In order to understand the notion of interpretation, it is necessary to understand the process of communicating ideas and experiences. We use signs in order to do this and the systematic study of signs and their meanings is called semiotics. Everything that can be used for communication, for example, words, images, traffic signs, music, and so on are studied, together with the ways in which such signs communicate, and the rules that govern their use. Signs are defined by the interaction between the signifier (the form of the sign) and the signified or referent (the concept that the signifier represents). The connections between signs and referents are not natural. They are the result of human social relations and the rules of particular symbolic codes. This means they are not permanent, but constantly changing and subject to power relations. Given that media texts can be interpreted in multiple and unpredictable ways by audiences with shared national backgrounds, it is likely that audiences from different national backgrounds will read signs in ways that the text creators do not intend or predict.

### **The Encoding and Decoding Model**

Stuart Hall (1980) created this model in which the message producer first encodes an idea or event in a format that will be meaningful for audiences. Audiences then decode these messages within their own context. Decoding is a

creative practice because message receivers draw on their own cognitive and associative resources to interpret a message. At the same time, decoding is a social practice because the receiver is informed by community practices, cultural conventions and language. In this way, the meaning of a message is subject to human intervention and therefore involves power relations. There is also a high chance that there will be degrees of understanding and misunderstanding in any communication exchange because audiences react to both the denotative and the connotative levels of meaning. Moreover, connotations leave the meaning open to wider interpretations, especially when media messages are received by audiences from different social and cultural backgrounds. Media texts are therefore said to be polysemic because they can be interpreted in a variety of ways by different people. Hall argued, however, that audiences do not have complete freedom to interpret messages as they like because social processes of meaning construction influence their interpretation. Hall outlined three hypothetical positions from which media decoding could take place. The first position, called the dominant-hegemonic position, occurs when the audience decodes the media message exactly as intended by the producers. This happens when the audience is operating within the dominant ideology and sees the message as simply providing information and does not question the content. The second position, called a negotiated position, is when audiences accept a message but with some oppositional elements. This happens when they relate to and understand the dominant code, but at the same time, they refer to and draw on their own individual experiences and worldview. The third position, called the oppositional position, refers to when viewers decode a message but then recode it in a new oppositional way. They do this by paying attention to the connotative meanings of the signs and opposing them ideologically. Hall argued that it was impossible for a third-party researcher to determine the ultimate meaning of a text as understood by an audience using systematic measurement techniques. In his view, meaning is both multi-layered and multi-referential and needs to be approached using semiotics and structuralism. This brings into question the role of the researcher, especially a British researcher like myself who is investigating

interpretations of Western media texts by Japanese audiences with their very different cultural experiences and expectations.

### **Pioneering work in television audience studies**

David Morley's (1980) study of audience responses to the television current affairs programme *Nationwide* was a turning point in audience reception studies by putting Hall's theories of decoding into practice. Although it inspired further audience reception work, it raised several issues. First was the questions of who determines the difference between a dominant, negotiated and oppositional decoding? Is it the informants or the researcher? Second, does the presence of the researcher, an outsider to their community have an unintentional influence on the informants? Third, the fact that Morley brought his informants into a different setting (not their home), selected episodes of *Nationwide* for them to view and then led discussions was very different to the natural setting in which the television programme would be viewed in the home. The same questions could be raised about my research methodology and will be discussed later.

John Fiske (1987) pointed out that audiences draw on outside experiences and their knowledge of other media texts when interpreting television. Media texts do not exist in isolation from one another, especially in our current era when television, the Internet, and radio converge in one digital flow. Audiences have always naturally related texts to their own personal experiences, which include past experiences with other media. The process of connecting media experiences is called intertextuality. Gray (2006) emphasizes that we create meaning from texts by relating specific messages to other media texts or messages we have seen or heard. Intertextuality can be seen in practice though the process of web browsing where you can find hyperlinks to related material. If you follow these, you will soon be far away from the original web page you started at. This is especially true of YouTube browsing, as was confirmed by my own participants. The concept of intertextuality has existed in literature for many centuries with authors regularly alluding to previous works. In the modern era,

remixing popular music to create new songs that are posted on the Internet is another example. Many music videos draw on other sources. This is also called remediation and one of the most famous examples is Madonna's video for her song "Material Girl" in which Madonna re-enacts the scene in the film *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953) where Marilyn Monroe performs the song and dance routine "Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend". Intertextual recognition can enhance the pleasure of viewers and add layers of meaning to a media text. However, there is no guarantee that audiences will recognize the allusions, especially when there are generational and cultural background differences between the text producers and receivers, as is frequently the case when young Japanese audiences, like the participants in my study, watch non-Japanese music videos.

### **Studying modern media reception**

Media reception theorists are interested in the social and situational contexts of media use and the unit of analysis has been the family. For my research, however, I focused largely on the individuals' experiences during the interview stage because my interview data showed that watching YouTube, although sometimes a communal activity, is far more often an individual pastime. Moreover, with the wide use of personal media players, audiences are engaging increasingly with people and events outside the family, rather than those present or occurring in the same room. This individualisation of media usage poses new challenges for media scholars wanting to observe media audiences in a natural setting. Nevertheless, for reception theorists, it is very important to study how human beings engage with one another in modern societies and the role of modern technologies in this.

Green and Jenkins (2011) recommend inclusion of a focus on 'the processes of circulation and appraisal' as part of audience research in the twenty-first century alongside the 'more traditional focuses on interpretation and appropriation' that have been the main concern of cultural studies for the last twenty years.

Audience members nowadays play a role in the value chain of media production

while using the media content they have access to for creating connections with each other, mediating social relations, and making sense of the world around them. Audience members have agency. They select the material that matters to them (both user-generated and industrially produced) and pass it on. Moreover, media consumers do not only consume: they recommend content to their friends, who recommend it to others, and so on. In this way, consumption can be seen as participation and it can take place at different levels. 'Even the simple act of clicking the mouse may gain new significance when it is part of the meaning making and value negotiation that occur in a social network' (p. 126). The difficulty for media researchers to investigate such practices is that they often take place quickly and at unpredictable times, in various locations and with varying levels of engagement during the course of the media user's day.

### **Quantitative, qualitative and mixed-method research methodology**

Early research into media effects relied mainly on audience surveys to describe the behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs of audiences and their relations with media and patterns of media consumption. Such surveys consist of standardized questions organized in a systematic manner and are administered either as self-completion forms (returned by post or online), or as standardized interviews (Deacon and Keightly, 2011). According to Ritchie and Lewis (2010), preceding a qualitative study with a quantitative research enquiry is "a particularly powerful way of combining the two approaches. There are many cases where statistical enquiries present findings that need further explanation or where more detail or depth about a phenomenon is needed" (p. 42).

In order to gain a representative sample of a population, surveys generally use formal sampling strategies. The ideal form of sampling is randomized, where all members of a population have an equal and random chance of being selected. This randomization allows researchers to make population estimates on the basis of the sample data or to estimate the likelihood that observed relationships and associations between sample variables are likely to exist in the population as

a whole. Researchers need access to very large populations if they are to obtain a sufficient number of random samples. Such access is often not possible for individual researchers. Where it is not possible to employ randomized sampling techniques, non-random quota sampling techniques are used to achieve representative samples. This was the approach I adopted during my first survey for this study when the opportunity arose for me to survey all the first year students in my university who had just taken a required English language exam. They served as a representative sample of the Japanese undergraduates at my university, however, not of the whole Japanese student population.

Some of the drawbacks to quantitative methods are the planning involved and the need to run a pilot survey in order to check that the questions asked generate the data that the survey seeks to collect. In my first survey, which was arranged in a hurry when the chance presented itself, I did not run a pilot and consequently found later that the questions needed adjusting. In fact, it is better to employ a mixed- or multi-methods approach and include ethnographic approaches, such as participant observation and in-depth interviews with a sample population before formulating the survey questions. In my case, the main purpose of the initial survey was to establish whether young Japanese people were in fact listening to Western popular music and using YouTube as a platform to do so, but in retrospect, I could have asked questions that would have provided more meaningful data if I had conducted some pilot interviews prior to the survey. The second survey I conducted, although the sample size was considerably smaller, was informed by my interview data and so produced far more detailed and useful results. In-depth interviews and observations can reveal factors that researchers are unaware of and about which they could therefore never formulate survey questions.

There are researchers, however, who maintain that quantitative and qualitative methods are ontologically and epistemologically irreconcilable. The many advantages of mixed- or multi-method studies have been highlighted by the

sociologist Alan Bryman (2008). He acknowledges that in the present era, there is a tendency to stress the compatibility between quantitative and qualitative research. I agree with his pragmatic viewpoint, which advocates using any approach that allows research questions to be answered regardless of its philosophical underpinnings.

### **Japanese popular music audience research**

Hesmondhalgh (2002) observes that although the focus shifted from textual analysis to audience reception in cultural and media research in the 1980s, there are surprisingly few studies involving ethnographic fieldwork based on interviews or participant observation with popular music audiences, and we hear the actual voices of the audiences in very few of the studies. In fact, this is not easy to achieve and Maxwell (2002) explains the difficulties for ethnographic researchers to remain objective when they have immersed themselves in the world of the fans they are investigating. His research was inspired by the work of Keil (1994), while my own has been inspired by the relatively few English-language studies of Japanese popular music audiences. Atkins's (2001) comprehensive account of the Japanese jazz scene combined his personal experiences with historical background. Yano (2002) explored the world of *enka* audiences and Aoyagi (2005) explored Japanese idols and their fans through interviews and immersion in their world. Condry (2006) immersed himself in the Japanese hip-hop scene and Furmanovsky (2008) explored the Japanese practitioners and fans of American country and western music through interviews and web sites.

### **Ethnographic studies of media audiences by Japanese researchers**

Although only one of the above-mentioned studies published in English is by a Japanese researcher (Aoyagi), Japanese media researchers have been actively investigating audience behaviour and attitudes since the end of World War II when research in American communication studies was introduced and translated into Japanese. Japanese researchers used the same questionnaires as American researchers and this produced cross-cultural analyses in fields such

as effects theories, uses and gratifications research, and marketing research for the purposes of advertising (Takahashi, 2010; Tsuji, 2012).

Takahashi (2010) explains that *joho kodo* (information behaviour) studies of Japanese *joho shakai* (information society) have emerged as an original Japanese tradition since the 1960s. The term *joho shakai* was originally translated from Japanese into English by Masuda in 1970 and his conception of the “information society” has greatly influenced both Japanese and Western scholars. *Joho kodo* (information behaviour) attempts to understand the interaction between people and all kinds of things that comprise the media environment, such as computers, CDs, diaries and photos. It examines behaviour that involves seeking, gathering, storing and transmitting information. This includes activities like watching television, reading magazines, writing emails, talking with friends and listening to music. The concept of *joho kodo* is broader than simply ‘communication’. In fact, there was not an equivalent term for ‘communication’ in Japanese until the word *komyunikeishon* was borrowed from English. In Japanese, however, *komyunikeishon* refers only to interaction between people. While *komyunikeishon* is part of *joho kodo* in cases of media-facilitated interpersonal communication, *joho kodo* also covers communication behaviour which does not involve communication with another person, such as making a photocopy or writing a memo for oneself.

The basic assumption of *joho kodo* is very similar to that of uses and gratifications studies: the central concept is audience activity and the behaviour of audiences is seen as goal-directed. Both theories also take into account audiences’ expectations and value judgements. One difference is that *joho kodo* studies do not limit themselves to one medium; they consider media exposure within the total information environment and look at the large variety of communication behaviour in everyday life. They concentrate mainly on new media use and see the audience as senders as well as receivers of messages and examine the messages themselves. The overall aim is to try to understand

people's communication behaviour in everyday life rather than the psychological mechanisms of media use that are the focus of uses and gratifications studies. Data is gathered every five years in Japan through an Information Behaviour Census conducted by the University of Tokyo. It examines four sources of information: mass media, personal media, non-media and events. The data are analysed quantitatively and comparisons made based on age, gender, and occupation in order to outline typologies of people in terms of their communication behaviour.

Takahashi (2010) appreciates the broad scope of *joho kodo* studies. However, she took a qualitative ethnographical approach when she investigated the role of information and communications technologies in the lives of Japanese families. In the field of popular music, Tsuji (2012) informs us that, in the early 1990s, studies targeted fans of different kinds of artists such as the quantitative studies of the fans of popular singer Oda Kazumasa (Matsui, 1994). The types of gratification the receivers experienced were identified through fan letters submitted to the fan club's monthly letterzine. A survey was compiled based on these findings and, through quantitative analysis, three broad categories of gratification types were identified. Further content analysis of the lyrics of fifteen of Oda's hit songs revealed more characteristics of the male and female fans of Oda and his songs. These studies were criticised, however, for not taking sufficient account of the broader social context (Tsuji, 2012) so the usefulness of what the studies showed about fans of Oda is in terms of the broader society is questionable. Unfortunately, for popular music audience researchers unable to read Japanese, such discussions of the findings of most Japanese researchers are currently inaccessible. More research needs to be published in English.

### **General issues that qualitative researchers face**

This section draws on the insights and recommendations of qualitative research practitioners to explain the process I followed and decisions I made during the

course of this study. There have been two broad approaches of inquiry into phenomena in the social world: the positivist and the interpretivist. For some time they were seen as incompatible for philosophical reasons, but more recent thinking sees that there are advantages in combining the two approaches (Bryman, 2008; Dörnyei, 2007; Ritchie and Lewis, 2010). Thus mixed quantitative and qualitative methods are now commonly accepted and suited my own purposes.

### **Media Ethnography**

The aim of ethnography is to 'make direct contact with social agents in the normal courses and routine situations of their lives to try to understand something of *how* and *why* these regularities take place' (Willis, 2000, p. xiii, emphasis in original). My aim was to investigate and produce a description of my subjects' music video reception and use of YouTube. However, this occurs throughout the day in multiple locations making it impossible for me to accompany my subjects all day, especially at the times when they were most likely to be accessing YouTube, such as commuting, or in their free time at home, and even in the bath. I therefore had to compromise by asking my subjects to report on their routine situations and to watch music videos during interviews and focus group sessions. According to Murphy (2011), the distinguishing features of media ethnography include a range of investigative activities, such as participant observation, conversational interviews in naturalistic settings, observation and the recording of speech-in-action, and detailed field note documentation. In my study, I observed and made audio and video recordings of my participants during interview and focus group work, but neither this nor the interviews I conducted were carried out in naturalistic settings. For reasons that will be explained below, they were carried out in my office or in a classroom. I was able, however, to keep detailed notes and records of my own observations and thoughts and of written work on music video analysis by students. Coman and Rothenbuhler (2005) asked the following pertinent but troubling question: "Where is the dividing line between doing

ethnography in the classic sense and doing research that is ethnographic in some respects? How important is that line?' (p. 2). I suggest that this line needs to be highly flexible because modern technology has made media consumption increasingly private and ubiquitous, and that researchers need to be cognisant of the limitations of their data.

### **Ethnographic proximity and distance**

Another issue raised by Murphy (2011) is the need for ethnographers to reflect on how close to or distant they are from their subjects in terms of age, gender, race or ethnicity. I am clearly distant to my subjects in all these respects. Moreover, an additional distancing factor is my position of power and authority as a university professor and as the academic who oversees the English Studying Society, the student club that I used as the source for most of my focus group participants. In this situation, focus group work is beneficial because focus groups can shift the power dynamic between the researcher and participants (Zaslow, 2009).

Another challenging question is how can ethnographers like myself validate their truth claims? Mike Crang and Ian Cook (2007) recommend three steps. The first is theoretical sampling. This means the researcher seeks out appropriate groups of people who may be concerned with the research topic and encourages them to inform the researcher about their experiences, feelings and thoughts. It is not a matter of finding a representative sample population, but people who can provide the information that the researcher is seeking. I wanted to find out whether Japanese young adults listened to Western music and watched Western music videos on YouTube and so I sought out informants from the population of young Japanese that surrounded me on a daily basis. They may not represent the entire population of Japanese youth, but they could answer my research questions and provide me with a lot of additional insights.

The second step that Crang and Cook suggest is theoretical saturation. It is impossible for a researcher to find out about the lives of every member of the target research group. Researchers can know when they have probably sampled enough, however, when the stories they hear begin to have the same ring to them. I found this to be true in the course of my interviews and later during the initial stage of focus group work when asking my informants to describe their music and music video consumption.

The third step is theoretical adequacy. Researchers need to confirm that their study has been rigorous enough by studying the work of other researchers based on similar situations as well as general theoretical concepts within which their study can be situated. I have been unable to find work by other researchers on music video consumption by Japanese young people, but found that some of the reasons why they access music videos and the ways in which they consume these videos on YouTube are strikingly similar to those of American teenagers who watched music videos on MTV in the 1980s (Roe and de Meyer, 2001).

### **Validity, reliability, generalisability and reflexivity in qualitative research**

For their findings to have credibility, qualitative researchers need to prove the validity, reliability, and generalisability of their work by practising reflexivity.

#### ***Validity***

Takahashi (2010) says that validity can be enhanced by researchers observing participants in their homes, or other places of media use, as well as conducting in-depth interviews. In my case, I was unlikely to obtain the approval of my university research ethics committee if I asked to spend time in my participants' one-room apartments, dormitory rooms, or with their families. It would be deemed an improper intrusion into private space in Japanese culture. Takahashi explains that there is a 'much more distinct line drawn in Japanese society between private or family space on the one hand and public or non-family space on the other' (2010, p. 79). Takahashi was able to enter private homes because

she was researching families and not single young people. She was also Japanese, the same nationality as her participants, and this no doubt reduced the 'alien' nature of her presence once families had grown used to her being among them. I doubt I would have obtained useful data as a foreign professor in the private or family space of my research participants. I settled for the neutral setting of my office or a private seminar room in the library. However, I was able to test and follow up findings in my interviews in my daily classroom interactions with students, in my lessons, and with my three sons, who are the same age as my university student participants and share the same experiences of Japanese school and social life.

### ***Descriptive validity and triangulation***

Maxwell (1992) outlines additional criteria to evaluate validity in qualitative research. I shall measure my research procedure against them. First is *descriptive validity*, which refers to the factual accuracy of the researcher's account. All other validity categories are dependent on this. It is based on what the researcher has personally experienced plus what has been inferred from the data. Maxwell suggests that to ensure this validity it is advisable is to use multiple investigators to collect and interpret data (investigator triangulation). This was not possible for my own small-scale project. Instead, I have discussed my findings and interpretations with a number of adults who have been able to advise me on cultural and linguistic matters. These include my Japanese husband and several Japanese colleagues with overseas experience and long-term non-Japanese residents.

Other researchers view triangulation differently. According to Ritchie and Lewis: 'Triangulation involves the use of different methods and sources to check the integrity of, or extend, inferences drawn from the data' (2010, p. 43). While this is seen as one way to validate qualitative research evidence by some, others point out that different types of data may not corroborate each other. Triangulation offers greater security through providing a fuller picture of the phenomena, but

not necessarily a more certain one. I also used this form of triangulation by keeping notes about class discussions and student work, such as students' media diaries, research reports on YouTube, and summaries and analyses of music videos that students in my seminar course on British and Japanese media have produced. This was in addition to presentations and reports produced in a separate music video analysis course. Most importantly, I combined a quantitative style survey of over 500 students to check that my qualitative findings were not distorted, but reflected general truths about the extent to which Western popular music is consumed and the use of YouTube to access Western music.

### ***Interpretive validity and theoretical validity***

Maxwell's (1992) second criterion for good qualitative research is *interpretive validity*. This refers to the quality of the portrayal of the participants' perspectives and resembles what Lewis and Ritchie refer to as 'internal validity' (2010, p. 273). Both they and Maxwell recommend discussing findings with participants to ensure such validity. I have done so by asking focus group members to confirm my understanding of sections of their discussions by email and face-to-face. I have also asked a student who took my music video course and who has now graduated to comment on my interpretations of student presentations and reports for that course.

The third criterion is *theoretical validity*, which means that the researcher's account needs to include a suitable level of theoretical reasoning that explains or describes a phenomenon. I have endeavoured to integrate theory from various fields, such as popular music, media and audience studies, as well as anthropological work on Japan and Japanese culture.

### ***Generalisability***

Maxwell's (1992) fourth criterion is *generalisability*, which means that the findings of the study can be extended to people, times, or settings other than those in the

study. There is, however, much diversity among qualitative researchers in the meaning attached to *generalisation* and whether qualitative research findings are capable of supporting wider inference. This is largely because perspectives on generalisation are strongly influenced by epistemological and ontological orientations. As a consequence, there is not a clear and agreed set of ground rules for the conditions under which qualitative research findings can be generalised, or what this process involves (Ritchie and Lewis, 2010). Takahashi (2010) says that this is an unreasonable expectation for much ethnographic research and Corbin and Strauss (2008) insist that generalisation is not the purpose of qualitative research. In their view, the aim is to gain understanding of some phenomenon and this can be achieved by study of one organization or even one individual because the researcher is looking for concepts and their relationships. These concepts can then be applied to other organizations and individuals although the specifics might be different. Ritchie and Lewis (2010) provide clarification: 'Generalisations are assertions which are context-free, and their value lies in their ability to achieve prediction' (p. 267).

Maxwell suggests that a useful strategy to examine generalisability is to include in the qualitative account the participants' own judgments about the generalisability of the targeted phenomenon. This, however, is something I did not do because I felt that the world knowledge and experience of my young participants were inadequate to provide useful feedback. For me, a better test is to allow readers with knowledge of Japan and other cultures to judge whether my findings based on the young people in my sample in urban Western Japan apply elsewhere.

### ***Evaluative validity***

Maxwell's (1992) fifth criterion is *evaluative validity*, which refers to how the researcher evaluates the phenomenon studied in terms of its usefulness, practicability, and desirability, and how accurately the research account assigns

value judgements to the phenomenon. I will have to let my readers evaluate that quality of my work in this respect.

### ***Reliability***

Reliability is generally understood to concern the replicability of research findings. The concept of replication in qualitative research, however, is seen as naive because the phenomena being studied and the impact of context are so complex (Ritchie and Lewis, 2010). Takahashi elucidates the issue when she says: 'While any two researchers can analyse the results of a survey and obtain the same results, the ethnographies of two researchers using qualitative methods of analysis would be unlikely to arrive at the same interpretation of the data' (2010, p. 70). Owing to such concerns, seeking reliability in qualitative research is often avoided. Instead, researchers discuss similar issues using terms such as 'confirmability', 'trustworthiness', 'consistency' and 'dependability' of findings that are felt to have greater resonance with the goals and values of qualitative research (Ritchie and Lewis, 2010, p. 270).

### ***Reflexivity***

Confidence that the results of a study represent reality, and that the research is relevant and useful can be measured through the levels of both triangulation and reflexivity in the study (Takahashi, 2010). Reflexivity is the process by which researchers ensure awareness of the ways in which power relations existing between them and the informants or their situation influence data collection and interpretation and therefore the results of the study. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) point out that all researchers are inevitably part of the world they study. Therefore self-reflexivity must be part of ethnographic research. This approach incorporates the researcher's own presence and objectives in doing the research. Researchers should clarify their values, interests, beliefs and affiliations to various cultural or social groups, all of which will shape the aims, theoretical framework, design, methods and interpretation. I will clarify my background and role in the collecting and interpreting of my data in the following

section. In later chapters, I also reflect on decisions I made that influenced the research process.

### **Outline of my research procedure and discussion of issues that arose**

I have been teaching English language and British culture in the Department of English at a private four-year Japanese university for 24 years. When I started teaching media and popular music studies in my seminar classes for third and fourth year students about 15 years ago, I found that many students had a good knowledge both of current and older UK and US pop music and were familiar with a range of music videos from the early days of MTV broadcasting to contemporary works. I was curious about how they were accessing these videos, given that MTV has not been widespread in Japan (Manabe, 2008, p. 86) and music video DVDs were very expensive to buy. Most students had used YouTube links for their class presentations rather than DVDs and so my hunch was that YouTube was used for this purpose. The first aim of my research, therefore, was to gain a better understanding of the ways in which Japanese students use YouTube to access Western pop music. I was also curious to find out more about their consumption and interpretations of what they see and hear. When asked to summarise the storyline of music videos, their summaries would sometimes vary considerably and also differ from my own understanding. I wanted to try to find out what they focused on when watching a music video and how this affected their enjoyment and interpretation.

### **Background to the sample population**

To find out how Japanese young people are using YouTube in their daily lives, I chose Japanese undergraduate students as my respondents partly because of the ease of access I have to such a sample population, but also because 57.7% male and 56.0% female Japanese 18-21 year-olds are engaged in full-time tertiary education (Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and

Technology, 2012). Over 95 percent of new students are Japanese 18 –19 year-olds who have recently graduated from high school. The private middle-ranking university where the research was carried out is located in a large city in Western Japan. It has nine faculties covering a broad range of fields: economics, business administration, law, foreign languages, cultural studies, science, engineering, computer science and life sciences. The total number of undergraduates was about 13,000 at the time of the study and represents a reasonable cross-section of the average Japanese university student population for the reasons explained below.

When the Japanese state introduced its modern education system in the Meiji era (1868–1912), great effort was invested in developing and maintaining the ideology that it was an egalitarian society with few class differences or ethnic tensions. Great efforts were also made to minimize regional urban and rural diversity and the underlying philosophy of the system was that anyone could succeed if they tried hard enough (Goodman, 2011). As a result, national and prefectural four-year universities were established throughout Japan and there is a heavy concentration of both public and private universities in the major cities to cater to the denser population. There has nevertheless always been a hierarchy among tertiary-level institutions with graduates from the top-level public and private institutions sought after by top-level companies and governmental bodies. Private universities receive about 10 percent of their income from government sources. The other 90 percent comes mainly from student fees. National and public institutions of higher education receive most of their money from the central or local government and fees paid by students are consequently less than half those of private universities.

At my university there are students from all 47 prefectures in Japan although the greatest number come from Western Japan. Students tend to go to universities near home for personal and financial reasons, but many choose institutions far from home for academic or personal reasons. A false hierarchy persists: the elite institutions, apart from the top-level private universities (such as Waseda and

Keio), are the far less expensive public universities (for example, Tokyo University and Kyoto University) and they are much harder to enter for students from lower income brackets because passing their entrance exams requires special exam preparation that is not provided in the public school system but through private cram schools or private high schools. (Only 7 percent of middle schools and 30 percent of high schools are private.) This results in students from quite a mixture of financial and social backgrounds attending a middle-level private university like mine. There are those who were recommended to aim for this institution because practice entrance exams and their school grades indicated that it is a suitable academic level for their abilities. There are others who failed to get into a more prestigious public or private institution, but who have the financial resources to pay private university fees. Others have come through the university's affiliated private high school and so have the means to pay for private high school and university education. And there are others for whom there was no choice as they were unable to pass entrance exams to public institutions and for whom the burden of private university fees is considerable. Many such students work part-time to contribute to their own tertiary education costs.

I prefer not to try to categorize these different groups of students by social class because there is still a strong tendency for Japanese people to identify themselves as middle class. When the Office of the Prime Minister began collecting data in the late 1970s, it showed that 80–90 percent of Japanese people classified themselves as middle class. One reason was thought to be that the stability of employment and rapid rise in living standards in the postwar years resulted in a homogeneity of lifestyles and class identities (Slater, 2011). There was a political rhetoric of Japanese uniqueness and social harmony that was drawn upon to explain Japan's economic success and these ideas persist, in spite of the economic downturn, thanks to the images created in school text books and the popular press. The student population of my university represents reasonably well the current range of financial and social situations that comprise

Japan's contemporary middle class, especially as they hail from rural as well as urban regions around Japan.

### **First survey in February 2010**

This survey was to test my hunch that Japanese young people were using YouTube to access Western music videos. Manabe (2008, p. 85) reports that as many as 98% of the Japanese university students she surveyed first heard new music on terrestrial television, on programmes dedicated to pop music or as theme songs to other programmes or commercials. Her findings suggest that television not only dominates the means of introduction of new Japanese music and artists, but also showcases predominantly Japanese musicians. So I was curious to find out how and why my students had acquired a surprisingly broad knowledge of music from other countries. Was it because my students were majoring in English and therefore had a greater interest in Anglo-American culture than their peers in the general population? Or was this interest in Western popular music more widespread than Manabe's results suggested?

I surveyed 2,217 male and female undergraduates at the end of their first year of study in February 2010. The survey was in Japanese and was carried out at the end of an English language exam which only students majoring in English were exempted from. My results were significantly different from Manabe's 2006 survey of 100 female students at a junior college. A much smaller percentage (17%) of my sample population used television as their main media platform to listen to music, while 18 percent used YouTube. Moreover, 18 percent used YouTube mainly to listen to a mix of Japanese and Western pop, while 10 percent used YouTube mainly to listen to Western music. (Japanese pop music clearly dominated with 37% listening exclusively to J-Pop on YouTube, while 35% of others used YouTube to watch non-music videos.) This survey suggested that my hunch was right and that YouTube was playing an increasingly important role in providing access to a wide variety of music videos, but it also raised more

questions. The data revealed that there was no significant relationship between the gender of the students or their level of English and whether they were watching Western music video. I was left wondering why they were interested in Western music video, how they were using YouTube, and how they interpreted the Western videos they accessed. Crucially, it was not clear which kinds of music video these students categorized as 'Western' because the Japanese term for Western music 洋楽 (*yōgaku*) used in the survey is ambiguous (as was explained in the Introduction). Moreover, the survey results indicated a high level of interest in Korean music, which I had not anticipated at that time. These questions could not be adequately explored using surveys.

### **Semi-structured interviews 2011–2012 and focus groups 2015–2016**

Qualitative research methods start with the researcher's questions and allow them to be developed and guided by insights gained from the participants' contributions and the issues that emerge. Building an understanding of the viewpoint of the participants is central to a qualitative approach. The participants are relatively few in number but are selected because they have experience in or knowledge of the research topic. The researcher aims to glean an in-depth understanding of the social world of the participants through thorough, open-ended questioning and to interpret and re-present the insights gained. Accordingly, I made a research proposal and after obtaining approval from the research ethics committee at my university, I carried out semi-structured interviews in 2011–2012 with 51 students from a wide range of faculties at my university (females = 29, males = 22).

Dörnyei says '... the main goal of sampling is to find individuals who can provide rich and varied insights into the phenomenon under investigation so as to maximize what we can learn' (2007, p. 126) and this is best achieved by 'purposeful' or 'purposive' sampling. In other words, we need some principled decisions on how to select our respondents. In addition, sampling should be open so that after initial accounts are gathered and analysed, additional

participants can be added to fill in the gaps in the initial description, to expand, or even challenge it. This cyclical process of going back and forth between data collection and analysis is called 'iteration'. Iteration should ideally continue until we reach 'saturation' (the point when additional data do not develop the concepts any further and simply repeat what previous informants have already revealed.) At this point, researchers can be empirically confident that they have all the data needed to answer their research question. In reality, data collection often stops when researchers run out of time or money. In my case, I was reasonably satisfied that I had reached saturation with regard to the use of YouTube as a music platform. However, I would have liked more time to watch music videos with focus groups as I feel sure there are aspects of the Japanese music video viewing style or approach and interpretation that could be further uncovered.

I decided to interview students from a wide range of faculties, not just English majors, so that I could hear views from young people with a variety of interests and who would be representative of the total sample population of young Japanese at my university. I sent out a written bilingual call for volunteers through teachers who taught compulsory General English classes in the General Education Department and recruited students in the English Department (who do not take these required classes) with the help of colleagues. The request explained in English and Japanese the aim of my research, the format the interviews would take, the fact that they would be recorded on a digital voice recorder, that their privacy and identity would be protected at all times, and that they would be compensated (¥1,000) for their hour-long interview. The participants therefore knew that they needed experience in using YouTube and an interest in listening to popular music from different countries.

Although I used a pre-prepared set of questions as a guide for myself, the interviewees were invited to elaborate on issues raised. Following the advice of Jane Lewis (2003), I encouraged interviewees to come in friendship pairs to help them relax and give them thinking time while the other spoke. Being part of a pair

or group also allows participants to reflect on, and draw comparisons with, what they hear from others (Ritchie and Lewis, 2010). Furthermore, I believe that Japanese students feel more comfortable in a group setting rather than alone with an authority figure in the form of a teacher they do not know. Interestingly, many of the interviews in which students shared the most personal and insightful information were with the relatively few students who were or had been in classes of mine. In her study of American teenage girls, Zaslow (2009) discusses her awareness of the structure of power that is always present in the research process. 'Power is always imbalanced in an interview situation but especially when the interviewer is an adult and the participant is a child or adolescent' p. 49). Like Zaslow, my research relationships were imbalanced in terms of age and educational experience, socio-economic status, and were challenging due to differences in race between my participants and myself. Zaslow comments that as a white, middle-class adult academic, she had significantly more social, cultural, and political capital than the majority of the participants in her study and was aware that 'participants may be more cautious about sharing their thoughts and feelings if they imagine that they are being judged on their answers or if they believe that they can get the answer "wrong"' (p. 50). I was also aware of this power dynamic throughout the research process and tried to be open with participants so that they spoke honestly and did not just give me answers they thought I wanted to hear. Of course, the participants who were my students probably felt under greater obligation to please me, not necessarily because they thought this would affect their grades, but out of a sense of loyalty or simply a wish to help in my research.

Although I have lived in Japan for over twenty-five years and can bring knowledge of Japanese culture to my research, I cannot claim to understand the mindsets of young Japanese or always to read their responses accurately. This is especially true for researchers from low context cultures like myself, whose research subjects are from high context cultures where 'communication between members is implicit, and meanings are interpreted primarily from the context and

from nonverbal cues. Often, these cultural norms and expectations complicate matters and make it difficult for outside researchers who do not share the same cultural values' (Liamputtong, 2010, p. 93). There is a world of difference between being aware of and sensitive to cultural issues and to being completely in tune with one's research subjects.

### **Insider/outsider perspectives**

According to Crang and Cook (2007) the researcher is always seen as an outsider and this is reflected through appearance and manner as well as language. Even a proficient speaker of the language of the researched will sound like an outsider if they do not speak in the local accent/dialect. James Banks (1998) developed a typology of cross-cultural researchers. The first category is the 'indigenous insider', who is seen as a legitimate member of the community and who can speak with authority about it. Second is the 'indigenous outsider', who is socialized within the target community, but has assimilated into an outside culture and holds values, beliefs, perspectives and knowledge that are similar to those of that outside community, and so is seen by the local people as an outsider doing research. Third is the 'external insider', who is socialized within another culture but acquires the beliefs, values, behaviours, attitudes and knowledge of the culture with which they are carrying out the research. Because of this unique experience, the researcher often rejects many of the values, beliefs and knowledge claims of their original culture and is seen as an 'adopted insider' by the local community where the research is being undertaken. Fourth is the 'external outsider', who is socialized within a community which is different from the one in which they are undertaking research. The 'eternal outsider' has partial understanding of and little appreciation for the values, perspectives and knowledge of the research community, which can lead to misunderstandings about values and behaviours of that community and comparison with values and behaviours of their own community.

Although I aspire to be an 'external insider', I acknowledge that I still have an 'outsider' perspective, even after all these years living in Japan. I therefore need to question my interpretations of the ideas and behaviours of the people I research and be cautious about how my writing represents the voices of my participants. Moreover, from my 'outsider' perspective, I want to know how my participants interpret cultural artefacts (music videos) of my 'outside' culture. Some researchers have argued that being an outsider can bring some advantages. Banks (1998), for example, says that being an outsider can help researchers scrutinize certain problems more closely, instead of seeing them as common phenomena or not even seeing them at all. In my case, my physical appearance as an 'outsider' allowed me to ask questions that require more detailed explanations than participants may have expected and even been prepared to give to a Japanese researcher. I was therefore able to use my cultural difference to advantage at times.

### **Japanese communication style**

An additional factor highlighted by Takahashi (2010) and which was of concern to me was 'the general style of Japanese communication and the restrictions it creates on information seeking and giving between researcher and informant' (p. 80). This is because Japanese do relatively less talking and more guesswork in communication than Europeans. I learned that I needed to allow plenty of time and encouragement for my informants to formulate their ideas and responses in an explicit manner and not let them assume that I could read their non-verbal signals. I was also very conscious of my status as both teacher and researcher during the one-to-one and pair interviews when the participants tended to wait respectfully for me to ask questions before offering information. During the focus group discussions, however, I was often able to ask a question which the participants would discuss freely among themselves, even asking their own questions of each other and occasionally asking me. Sometimes when I did not understand a concept that students were trying to explain, or when I wanted them to be more precise or concrete, I would use my status as an outsider to

Japanese culture to push the informants into explaining in multiple ways. This was a very useful strategy in unravelling the concept of *kawaii* (cuteness).

### **The impact of the use of recording devices**

I explained verbally that I would be recording the interview on a digital voice recorder, that I would be the only person listening to this, that I would use the recording for analysis, and their identity would remain anonymous. This was also explained in Japanese on the written research participant agreement, which they read and signed before the interview began. They were also paid their ¥1,000 compensation before the interview started. I made it clear that they could use whichever language they wanted and we would generally switch between Japanese and English. An effective way to help them relax was to encourage them from the start to take out their phone or portable music player and use it to talk about the music they listen to. In this way they soon forgot about the digital voice recorder or camera or waiting for me to ask a question before they spoke. Having an interview guide to refer to insured that I asked the same questions of all interviewees, but not necessarily in the same order, or with the same wording.

Anthropologists have encouraged awareness of the power of recording devices to impinge on and influence interview outcomes (Takahashi, 2010). In my case, the students showed awareness that they were being recorded or filmed, but this did not appear to prevent them from making confessions about illegal actions (such as sharing music files through the Internet), as will be seen in later discussions of my findings. Generally, their approach was trusting and light-hearted. It may be that they were displaying the Japanese quality *sunao* (which will be explained in detail below) and trusting their university professor not to report them to the authorities. They had also read and signed the research participant agreement in Japanese that guaranteed protection of their privacy and I took care to remind them of this during the interviews when such occasions arose.

### **Transcription, translation and analysis**

Transcription was done soon after each interview, as much as possible, while the interview was fresh in my mind, and so that I was aware of emerging themes and issues. At busy times, however, transcription needed to be postponed to non-teaching weeks. Language is a fundamental tool through which qualitative researchers endeavour to understand human behaviour, social processes and cultural meanings. It is central to the research process, to the resulting data and its interpretation. Working in and with the Japanese language has been the greatest difficulty I have faced. I needed help to understand and transcribe all that my informants told me. I chose to work directly with the data myself and check my understandings with my university-age sons rather than use a translator. Edwards (1998, quoted in Liampattong, p. 147) explains that translators are like gatekeepers who have the power to elicit, clarify, translate, omit or distort messages. They can influence research by interpreting the meaning of the data, adding their own slant. Even for experienced translators, translating from one language to another can be problematic when cultural equivalents do not exist or when subtle nuances and cultural connotations need to be captured. Translating concepts often becomes a question of culture rather than simply a matter of words. The researcher and translator should therefore focus on concept equivalence between the two cultures so that the materials have the same meaning in both cultures. For these reasons, I followed the advice of researchers who recommend transcribing the data in the original language, but followed Liampattong's (2010,) advice and only translated participants' words into English if I used them in my writing.

I coded my data using my own system of flagging themes and creating computer files with excerpts from interviews that illustrated the themes, adding my own thoughts and questions and notes from books and articles that were relevant. I could use this very personal system because I was working alone and not as part of a team of analysts. I followed the recommendation of Corbin and Strauss

(2008) to start analysis straight after the first interview and found that, as they predict, information, concepts and topics to pursue further arose from the outset and I was able to follow these up in subsequent interviews to see what patterns started to emerge. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) explain that the process of analysis should not be seen as a distinct stage of research, but as a reflexive activity that informs data collection, writing and further data collection. I therefore integrated this into my research design and data collection procedure.

### **Semi-withdrawal from the field 2012–2015**

I was obliged to interrupt my study because I was involved in a completely different 3-year research project that was being funded by the Japanese Government. This allowed me time to reflect on what I had found out so far. Our curriculum also changed and this gave me the opportunity to teach a new course offered to international exchange students together with Japanese students on music video analysis. This allowed me analyse in more detail the responses of Japanese undergraduates to Western music video and also to observe the greater difficulty that Japanese students have in applying theory and critical thinking skills to the analysis of a music video compared with European and North American students, for whom this is normal academic practice.

### **Focus group work**

I decided to work with focus groups in the next stage. This time there were 31 different informants, but one of the young men and five of the young women participated in more than one group (females = 18, males = 13). Dörnyei (2007) says that the dynamics of the focus group have been found to work better with homogenous samples. Therefore, in order to obtain a wide range of information, the usual strategy is to have several groups made up of similar people, which as a whole are different from each other. There were several factors that I believed needed to be taken into consideration regarding the composition of focus groups in order to generate useful data. First, I wanted a representative sample from different faculties (heterogeneity), but they needed to know and trust each other

(homogeneity) if they were going to relax and open up. Secondly, I had found that some of the earlier interviews had generated the most data when the students already knew me as their teacher and appeared to be more relaxed and open. I decided therefore to ask for volunteers among the roughly 140 members of the university English Studying Society (ESS). This is one of the biggest clubs in the university, and although the name suggests the members are diligent students of English who choose to study as a spare time activity, it is a very sociable club where the members get to know each other well and the emphasis is mainly on enjoyment and friendship. I have been the advisor to this club for over fifteen years and so the members know me. There are three sections: tour guides (who offer their services to foreign visitors), discussion (the most earnest members who research and discuss global issues), and conversation (whose members focus on building their English conversational skills). The club members meet in their sections or as a whole club every day, both in the lunch break and after classes, so they are a very close-knit unit that comprises members from all faculties in the university.

Three of the groups were not ESS members. They were female fourth year English majors who had been in my classes since their first year and so knew me very well. I asked them to be my first two pilot groups and also to be one of the groups that watched a small selection of music videos because I knew they were very interested in music and music videos. Also, they were especially relaxed with one another and with me (possibly for the reasons explained above).

I spend an hour each week with the conversation section where I move around the room joining in their group conversations on a theme set by the leader, and when that topic has been exhausted, whatever else they choose. The group members are moved around each week, but the groups always comprise a mix of students from different years. Through this activity I have gained many insights into their lives and values because they are remarkably frank and trusting with each other and with me. Although the guards of new members are up at the start

of the year, by the middle of the first semester, they have relaxed and join in the conversation with enthusiasm. One of the most extraordinary aspects of this activity is that there is a strictly observed but unspoken rule that, during this hour of conversation, only English should be used. English does not contain the hierarchical nuances that are embedded in correct Japanese usage. This could well account for their feeling of freedom to express their opinions and to even disagree with each other and to ask me for my opinions. Interestingly, the notion that Japanese people can say things in English that cannot be said comfortably in Japanese also arises in discussions about the use of English in song lyrics in a later chapter. The members of the conversation section, whether consciously aware of this phenomenon or not, appear to experience freedom to talk on personal topics with disregard to the hierarchies that form their Japanese identity when they function in English. This can also explain why the ESS members and other students seemed to prefer using English in interviews and focus groups. They possibly felt they could say things in English that they would find harder to talk about in Japanese. I do not think that it was merely a matter of wanting to practise their English. The issues of hierarchy and expressing one's true opinion in Japanese society and their impact on my research will be explained more fully below.

Many more volunteered than I could interview, so the participants were narrowed down to those who had a free hour in their schedule at the same time as I did. Generally, they knew each other through the club, but in some groups there were participants who were close friends in the same year, same department and same ESS section, while other members were older or younger, in a different section, or in a different department. In these ways they were homogeneous to a certain extent, but heterogeneous at the same time. This difference can be significant in Japan as will be explained below.

I have already mentioned that three of the groups were not ESS members. They were female fourth year English majors who knew me well as a teacher, but had

never participated in research projects of mine. I asked them to be my first two pilot groups and also to be one of the groups that watched a small selection of music videos not only because of their interest in music and music videos, but also because I was nervous about how to handle a focus group and decided to practise with participants I felt relaxed with. Corbin and Strauss (2008) warn that participants can sense the mood and attitude of the researcher and this can influence their responses during observations and interviews. Much of this reciprocal influence can happen at an unconscious level. This worked well and I felt far more at ease and confident about how to handle both the focus group discussions and music video viewing after my experiences with these students.

The first seven focus groups discussed their music listening habits and tastes, their use of YouTube and shared favourite music videos with each other. The last three groups watched and discussed music videos that I had selected.

The focus group work took place in a seminar room in the library rather than in my office mainly because I needed space to set up a video camera comfortably. The room is very private and quiet and none of the participants had been in the room before. So the setting was not like a regular classroom for them. I decided to record the focus groups on video camera so that I could see clearly who was speaking. I was concerned, however, that a video camera would be more intrusive than a digital voice recorder, but this was not the case. A further advantage of making a video recording was that when the participants were watching a music video, I could observe and compare the different levels of engagement and reaction to the music and visuals. This provided additional evidence, beyond their verbal responses, to the impact of the music video. The video recordings were also easier to transcribe and provided richer data than the audio recordings because I could note the participants' gestures and facial expressions and be certain who was speaking.

## **Second survey in 2015**

I felt it was necessary to update and verify my findings from the interview and focus group work so that I could say with confidence that Western music was widely listened to by Japanese young people at this university and that YouTube was the main platform through which popular music was accessed. In addition, I wanted to confirm the relative popularity of different Japanese and English-language music genres and to know where and when these young people were listening to music in order to generate a rich description of the music listening practices of these young Japanese people. Moreover, I wanted to know how popular music videos were and how much of the time these young people's eyes were on the screen when a YouTube video was playing.

I needed a sample size larger than the membership of the ESS club, so I asked teachers in the General Education department to administer the survey in their compulsory English lessons with students from all nine faculties. Over 511 students responded. I input the data myself and the full results are in the Appendix. The findings will be discussed in later chapters.

### **Additional information sources**

I realized that in order to understand all aspects of YouTube and its role and uses, I needed insights from people working within the popular music industry and making their own music videos. I have known a brother and sister who are professional singer-songwriters raised in Japan since they were teenagers. I was lucky to be able to interview them using a digital voice recorder. I interviewed the sister face-to-face and the brother over Skype. They provided me with plenty of insight into the difficulties faced by independent musicians even though they can broadcast themselves on the Internet. These issues are discussed in Chapter 4.

As mentioned above, I started teaching a course on music video to Japanese and international students. This had not been part of my original research plan, but it has provided me with an opportunity to observe the comparative ease with which students from a Euro-American educational background can apply theory

to a media text, such as a music video, while for Japanese students this is a new and foreign concept. At the end of the course, each student made a presentation analysing a video of their choice and then wrote up their analysis in the form of a report. I made notes on my observations during lessons and kept all the reports that students submitted as data to draw on.

### **Issues that are specific to ethnographic research in Japan**

Aoyagi (2005) had native competence in Japanese language and grew up in Japan and so had no problems in understanding and speaking Japanese on a day-to-day basis. However, he encountered problems communicating on a cultural level. 'A typical Japanese attitude, taken by the majority of my informants, was for one to act with ambiguity, reservation, indifference, or what Japanese would more precisely call "professed intention" (*tatemae*), which cloaked one's "true intention" or "real feeling" (*honne*). Personal reservation was often due to a strong cultural emphasis on protecting everyone's face in public interactions' (p. 39-40). Aoyagi had difficulty in conducting conversations with many of his informants and could not be sure that they really meant what they said unless he eventually got close enough for them to reveal their feelings. To overcome this problem, he contacted the same informants many times, tried to build rapport and asked the same questions in different ways and checked points that had been made before to compare answers.

For these reasons, it was helpful to use informants who already knew me to some extent, but I knew that I could not expect them to share their true feelings from the outset. Japan is a very hierarchical society and this sense of social strata is developed from the earliest years of a child's life in the home and in relations with family members. Hendry (2013) explains the fundamental notion of *ie* (home and house), which is the first and most important social unit a Japanese person belongs to. Family members are part of the same *uchi* (a close group of people) and non-family members are *soto* (outsiders or belonging to the outside). Within the family there are hierarchies that need to be observed and they are

marked in the language. The most important relation is *oyabun/kobun* (parent/child), but this also applies to teacher and pupil, master and apprentice. In Japanese, there are different words for older brother and sister and younger brother and sister and children are taught to address their elder siblings using these terms, and not their given names. In this way, both awareness of one's place in a hierarchy and the respect that must be shown to one's seniors are constant. This same concept applies to members of other *uchi*, such as clubs. The senior members are always addressed by their juniors as *senpai* (senior) and the juniors are referred to as *kōhai* (junior). Students also tend to think teachers should be respected because of their age, experience, and superior position. They do not criticize or talk back to teachers and wait to be asked before they address a question or comment.

Japanese people belong to various *uchi* as they operate within Japanese society and the largest of these is their nation, Japan. This explains why we so often hear Japanese refer to themselves as '*wareware nihonjin*' ('we Japanese') and why Japanese people view themselves as distinct from other nations. There is an expectation of homogeneity in every *uchi*, which could explain why my participants expressed disapproval of Japanese people behaving in a Western (or even Korean) way. According to Hendry, this Japanese perception of homogeneity is 'no doubt aided by the almost universal influence of television, newspapers, magazines and the internet' (p. 41), although there are regional variations and differences based on social status and occupation. I would include the national education system and school curricula as being of great influence in this universal discourse of Japanese homogeneity.

In this way, the Japanese distinguish people as insiders or outsiders in daily life, and identify subtle levels of 'insidership' and 'outsidership' as they move from one social setting to another. Foreigners are always considered outsiders (*gaijin*), no matter how long they have lived in Japan or how well they speak Japanese. Although this distinction can be seen to some extent in every human society, it is

fundamental in Japan because the concept of *uchi/soto* has such a great influence, especially in terms of human relations (Davies and Ikeno, 2002).

Both respect and loyalty to one's *uchi* are expected at all times. This can be seen in the ways that Japanese people distinguish between *tatemae* (public behaviour) to be shown when one is *soto* (outside) or interacting with people who are categorized as *soto*. In contrast, *honne* (one's real feelings) can be shown when one is inside (*uchi*) or interacting with people who are also insiders. This explains why Aoyagi needed to wait patiently until he was accepted as a member of his informants' *uchi* before he could be privy to their true feelings.

It is important to understand that these distinctions are dichotomies only at an ideological level. In practice, there is a range of levels of politeness, which can vary depending on situations, as well as a variety of relationships, and various degrees of closeness. This can explain the ESS members' acceptance of an older foreign professor as a free and frank conversation partner in the context of the ESS conversation section activity, and the higher level of formality and deference with which they treat me on occasions outside this context.

The Japanese are seen as difficult to understand because they hide their true thoughts. As explained above, Japanese people do this for many reasons and often they are simply being polite. If they disagree with someone, they will listen quietly and then later express their contrary opinion in a roundabout way. This is the polite way to disagree in Japan because if you go against someone and create a bad atmosphere, your relations may break off completely (Davies and Ikeno, 2002). For all ethnographic researchers, it is challenging to encourage group participants of most cultures to express divergent opinions because of the human tendency to feel pressure to conform to a socially acceptable viewpoint. This pressure is even greater in Japan, where consensus seeking and conformity are the norm, and where it is considered good manners to express a publicly

acceptable point of view (*tatemae*) in order to preserve the harmony of the group, and to keep one's true opinion (*honne*) private.

Silence can, however, be highly ambiguous. For the Japanese, silence indicates deep thinking and is seen as good: too many words make them feel pressured and ill at ease. Generally speaking, in daily conversations, business meetings, and classrooms, silence is more common and is of longer duration in Japan than in Western countries. There are two reasons for this. The first is that silence is seen as similar to 'truthfulness' and is treated as a virtue. Japanese expect each other to possess the ability to communicate without using words: implicit, nonverbal, mutual understanding is highly valued and a sign of maturity in Japanese communication. The other reason why Japanese are often silent among other people is their strong group consciousness. Davies and Ikeno (2002) explain: 'In Japanese society, where people usually identify themselves primarily as members of certain groups, not just as individuals, silence has played a very important role in creating harmony and in avoiding direct conflict' (p. 53). A person who insists on their opinion before the group has reached a consensus is seen as selfish. Also, showing off one's ability or knowledge creates a bad impression. Such people are seen as thoughtless, impolite and immature. Many people in Japan think it is better to adopt a deferential attitude and say nothing than to cause misunderstandings or trouble. Ritchie and Lewis (2010) draw attention to a common criticism of focus groups, which is that 'the group exerts a pressure on its participants to conform to a socially acceptable viewpoint and not to talk about divergent views or experiences' (p. 188). This tendency is potentially even stronger when working with Japanese people for whom consensus seeking and conformity are the cultural norm.

Takashi (2010) explains the behaviour and attitudes of Japanese people in terms of the Japanese emic concept of *sunao*, which means showing a deferential and humble attitude. It is seen as a positive characteristic and children are praised for behaving in a *sunao* way. In her research into Japanese media audiences,

Takahashi noted the common lack of critical or reflective thinking about what is reported in the news media, especially by housewives, and related this to a willingness to comply with authority, an aspect of Japanese culture that is important to understand. According to Takahashi, many Japanese people prefer to believe everything that experts on television say because they identify as *sunao*. This means that they do not doubt or question and are not cynical. This quality is esteemed in Japan because it demonstrates dependence on and trust in the judgement of one's seniors and superiors, rather than independence and belief in one's own judgement. It is a characteristic that I also noticed in some members of focus groups in certain situations and which I will also discuss later with regard to the role of a storyline in music videos and comments made and read on the YouTube website. We can see in *sunao* the primacy of the Japanese hierarchical system of social relationships.

An undesirable side of this characteristic is that it can lead to an unquestioning attitude to media texts and a readiness to accept what is given at face value. Westerners may well see *sunao* as undesirable because independent thinking and scepticism are highly valued and someone who is *sunao* might be seen as simply naïve. As will be seen, not all my informants exhibited a *sunao* attitude: the young women who reacted very negatively to the sexual exploitation of the female idol group AKB48 in their music videos showed a highly critical attitude to the video producers that was not *sunao* at all. Adopting a deferential attitude can therefore be seen as related to the social expectation not to disclose one's true feelings, but that the personal control required to conform in this way can break down when overridden by emotion or when among members of one's *uchi*.

Once the concepts of *uchi/soto*, *sunao*, *honne* and *tatemae* are taken into account, the group dynamics at play in some of the focus groups can be more easily understood. The students in focus groups with whom I had little previous contact tended to wait for me to ask them a question before they spoke and maintained greater distance and privacy about their lives, their thoughts and their

responses to the music videos we watched together. They were mainly students in the ESS guide and discussion sections and were not in the English department. The focus groups consisting of students in the conversation section, or who had taken my classes, were generally more relaxed and open. I felt that I was seen as part of their inner circle (their *uchi*) and so they could trust me and reveal their true thoughts (*honno*) in my presence. These students engaged in far livelier discussions in the focus groups and provided me with more insights than those who felt more constrained by their perception of me as an outsider, their elder and superior.

There was another level of group dynamics also at play. Owing to the need to form groups of students who were free at the same time as me, some of the groups consisted of a mix of students from different sections of the ESS, different school years and departments. Looking back on their interactions, I became aware of the lead being taken by the older students and the deference being shown by younger students to their elders. ESS members from the same section were more relaxed with each other than with members of other sections and even the difference in department could affect the relationship if all other factors were equal. There were multiple *uchi* that my informants were highly sensitive to and which regulated their behaviour. It is regrettable, in retrospect, that I was not more aware of the degree to which such mixing would inhibit some participants. My data may have been richer if I had been able to organize more compatible groups. However, this only affected four of the groups and it was most noticeable at the start of the group discussion. The other groups were willing to share honest and spontaneous thoughts and reactions as well as a lot of laughter and I am grateful to them for their trust and for making the process enjoyable for us all.

## **2 Western music in Japan: Its Influences on Popular Music Consumption from 1854–1989**

This thesis examines the consumption and reception of English-language music video by young Japanese adults. Given the size of the Japanese domestic recorded music industry (the second largest in the world), it may be surprising to some that there is such a strong interest in music from Europe and America, especially in view of Japan's focus on popular cultural exchange with its East Asian neighbours in recent decades (Iwabuchi, 2002; 2011).

This chapter will therefore explore briefly the early role of Western music in Japan, the reasons why it was imported then assimilated into the Japanese soundscape, and how it has contributed to the evolution of popular music genres that young Japanese audiences consume today. Starting with Japan's earliest sustained encounters with Western music when it was forced to open its doors to the US and European nations in the mid-nineteenth century, I will discuss how various music genres have remained an integral part of the contemporary Japanese soundscape. The aim of this discussion is to show how Western music (*yōgaku*) has been both absorbed into Japanese music (*hōgaku*) and remained a continuous presence, even after sales of Japanese music records overtook sales of Western music records in 1967 (Condry, 2011). This discussion serves as background to the focus of my research: the active consumption of English-language popular music by young Japanese today.

### **The arrival and adoption of *yōgaku***

It is well documented how the arrival of four American steam ships under the command of Commodore Matthew Perry on 8<sup>th</sup> July 1853 in Tokyo Bay ended Japan's almost 250 years of isolation. The United States wanted to engage in trade and the Japanese were forced to sign a euphemistically titled "Friendship & Amity Treaty". Commodore Perry returned the following year with gifts to demonstrate to Japan's military leaders how important it was for them to trade

with the West. It was during this second visit that Japan's earliest known contact with popular Western music took place. White sailors performed a minstrel show for Japanese dignitaries. They sang plantation songs and were accompanied by guitars, a tambourine, a flute, a castanet, a banjo, and a triangle. The performance was repeated in two other places and entertained the Japanese delegations on each occasion (Atkins, 2001; Cope, 2007; Mitsui, 2014).

The musical performances in 1854 were not, in fact, the first time Japanese people had heard Western music. Sacred choral music and music for organ and harpsichord had been introduced in the 16<sup>th</sup> century when Jesuit missionaries were active, but had been banned by the Tokugawa regime in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Galliano, 2002). However, during the Tokugawa era open-minded nobles in southern Japan had seen that Western military music performed an important role in the martial arts and formed their own wind and percussion bands following the example of the Dutch troops stationed in Nagasaki. Military bands were then introduced into the armed forces in 1839 and into the navy in 1855. From 1860, when many foreign delegations were established in Yokohama, the performances of brass bands were greatly enjoyed.

Through contact and trade with America and Europe Japan underwent a major transformation of identity as its people encountered new technologies and ideologies. This led to the Meiji Restoration in 1868 when Emperor Meiji was figuratively restored to power, ending the rule of the Tokugawa regime. The Japanese started reforming their political system, their education system, and business, legal, and military practices in line with ideas from Europe and the US. Western products from food to fashion were eagerly consumed and Japan became a modern, industrialized, military power very quickly (Milioto Matsue, 2016).

Western music was also imported. In 1869, a group of about 30 men were sent to Yokohama to study military music with the instructor of the British band, John

William Fenton, and in 1874, all court musicians, teachers and students were ordered to study Western music. Japanese educators, policy makers, and intellectuals saw an interrelation between the ideology of modernization and the music of the West. As a result, Western music, Japanese traditional music, and a blend of both have coexisted in Japan since the late nineteenth century. Traditional instruments, such as the transverse bamboo flute (*shinobue*) were modified to make it easier to play Western music and new instruments were introduced together with Western brass band music, military songs, and folk tunes. Christian missionaries also introduced choral singing and group harmony. There was both a political and an aesthetic motivation behind this rapid adoption of Western music: importing Western culture and technology were a means to achieve parity with the Western nations in order to prevent the exploitation that was happening in Africa and other parts of Asia and to renegotiate unfair trade treaties (Atkins, 2001; Galliano, 2002).

### **The introduction of school songs**

The new Meiji government decided that Western music should be introduced to the whole population through the newly established primary school system and sent Izawa Shūji to the USA in 1875 to research and implement this plan. After his return, a new school subject called *shōka* (school songs) was introduced (Tsurumi, 1987). Izawa oversaw the compilation of three textbooks containing a total of 91 songs published from 1882–84. He adapted European melodies for use with his own Japanese lyrical compositions. The European melodies included “Auld Lang Syne”, “Haidenröslein”, “Coming Through the Rye”, and hymns. Some of these traditional Western melodies are still learned in Japanese primary schools today. New songs were also composed by Japanese songwriters who used staff notation for the first time. The melodies of these songs were composed mostly in the pentatonic-major scale. This tonal scale was a blend of the Western diatonic major scale and the pentatonic scale that had been used in Japan since before the Meiji era. There were also some songs in triple time that had been hitherto unknown to the Japanese. Thus the teaching of

school songs contributed 'to the formation of new Japanese musicality' (Mitsui, 2014, p. 4) and Western music scales, rhythm, and form have been familiar to young Japanese people for 140 years.

Instrumental music was introduced into school music education after World War II. This program was fully in place by the 1950s and the main instruments learned were the keyboard harmonica and recorder (and this continues today in primary schools). Although they continued to teach songs selected since the pre-war era, around 1990, popular songs from Japan and elsewhere started to be included. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was a reappraisal of Japanese traditional music and Japanese folksongs (*min'yō*) were taught as well as Japanese traditional instruments (*wagakki*) from middle school (Kitagawa, 2009). These days, a wide range of music is included and even contemporary Western and J-pop songs have become part of the school music curriculum.

The Japanese love of choral singing for entertainment and to celebrate group solidarity no doubt owes a great deal to the inclusion of singing throughout the school curriculum. Primary, middle and high schools, universities, clubs, and companies all have their own song, which is sung to mark special occasions. My university has a Japanese song and the ESS Club at my university has two songs: a Japanese song and "We Shall Overcome", a song which became an anthem of the American Civil Rights Movement and which will be discussed later in this chapter.

### **Military music and brass bands**

Military music has been very influential in Japan and it is thought that the first widespread popular song of the new Meiji era was influenced by the proliferation of military bands. "Miya-san" (also known as "Ton'yare-bushi") was sung by soldiers of the anti-shogunate army as they marched to Edo in early 1868 to restore the emperor. The tune is based on a Japanese folksong scale, but it has

a lively marching rhythm unknown to folksongs, which was probably influenced by a fife and drum band (Mitsui, 2014).

When the Japanese military saw the effectiveness of Western martial music on raising morale, they made great efforts to exploit the emotional effects of this music by performing the first public concerts of Western music for Japanese audiences. The first civilian brass band, formed in 1886 by retired musicians from military bands, was the Tokyo City Music Band. Some of its members left and formed the Kobe City Band in 1892. In this way, Western music was performed increasingly widely for public entertainment and these retired musicians from military bands became the originators of Japan's jazz bands, providing music for social dances (Hosokawa, 1991; Atkins, 2001; de Ferranti & Tokita, 2013).

The popularity of brass band music is still very high these days and integral to the lives of Japanese young people. Most secondary schools and universities have a brass band that performs regularly at school events, such as school concerts and entrance and graduation ceremonies. They compete annually at regional and national levels and the standard of the annual competitions is extremely high. The bands play not just marching music, but also classical, jazz, and contemporary pop music and give public performances at venues like stations and the City Hall as well as for official school occasions. According to the RIAJ Yearbook 2015, the classical album with most unit sales in 2014 was *Nekketsu Buraban Shoujyo* by Seika Girls High School Marching Band (RIAJ Yearbook 2015, p. 19).

### **The integration of Western music into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Japanese soundscape**

There was mass production of Western-style melodies in the pentatonic scale, many of which were performed first in Western costumes in a Western setting in the popular musical theatre called 'Asakusa Opera'. Those that proved popular

would be made into a recording or used in a film (Fujie, 1989). The Japanese public was also exposed to Western-style music through professional brass band musicians who performed in the streets advertising all kinds of products. They were later replaced by leading department stores' youth troupes. The department stores trained young men and then employed them to perform in and around the store to attract custom, a practice that was also taken up by restaurants. Many jazz players started their career in these troupes before going on to employment in hotel ballrooms or salon orchestras aboard ships (Atkins, 2001).

Young women also performed Western-style music for advertising and entertainment. The Takarazuka Girls' Opera was established by the Hankyū railway company in Osaka in 1914 with the aim of attracting visitors to travel by rail to the nearby hot spring resort. The revue genre was introduced from France in the 1920s when the Takarazuka Company started to experience difficulties and the Takarazuka Revue Company continues to thrive today with its own training school, established in 1919, for dancing, singing, and acting (Mitsui, 2014).

In the 1910s, American popular music forms started to spread when shipping companies hired salon orchestra musicians to entertain passengers on liners sailing from Japan to America, the Philippines, Hong Kong and Shanghai. Japanese musicians working aboard ships learnt as much new American music as they could whenever they were in American ports, brought music scores and recordings into Japan, and performed the new music for Japanese audiences at high-class hotels in Yokohama and Kobe (Atkins, 2001). Cargo ships also brought phonograph records, which were used in social dance schools as well as for private consumption.

European classical music and American popular music and dance were popular among all social classes during the Taishō (1912-1926) and early Shōwa (1926-1989) eras. The term jazz was used in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to refer to a wide

range of popular music styles. The increasing popularity of social dance helped to introduce and popularize jazz to the Japanese general public. Both the music and social dance flourished until the political climate started to change leading to growing concern about the corrupting influence that the dance halls were seen to have on the morals of the young and, in 1927, dance halls were ordered to shut down.

In addition to the dance halls, Japanese people could listen to jazz music at the unique jazz tea or coffee houses called *jazu kissa*. They are still common today and some hundreds operate throughout Japan (Hosokawa, 2014). They allow clients to listen to jazz recordings on expensive audio sets. The music is not played quietly as background music, but loudly for the full attention of the customers. Most *jazu kissa* have been owned by people as a hobby and are not run for profit, but for the pleasure of sharing their record collections with other jazz aficionados (Hosokawa, 2014).

One reason why *jazu kissa* flourished in the 1920s –1930s was the restriction on live music performances in cafés and other venues. European and American music could only be performed live at licensed venues, such as stage and movie theatres and public halls or dance halls. Another reason was that swing music spread in Japan in the mid-thirties and jazz was no longer considered as dance music (Hosokawa, 2014). Musicians as well as fans learnt from the latest records they could hear at *jazu kissa* as well as from the increasing number of books and magazines about jazz published in the 1930s (Atkins, 2001). Discographies were compiled, which helped *jazu kissa* owners to develop their collections of high quality and rare performances. During the war, when it was very difficult to import new recordings from America, it was proposed that each *jazu kissa* specialize to maximize the total collection in Tokyo available to the public. This demonstrates how highly some sections of Japanese society valued music from outside Japan (Hosokawa, 2014, p. 124). Jazz enjoys enduring popularity with young and older Japanese audiences today as will be seen in Chapter 3.

## The early days of the mass media and music industry

The rapid spread of all genres of Western music in Japan in the 1920s was stimulated by the setting up of national radio. This began in 1925, with the opening of three radio stations in Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya, which the government ordered to be amalgamated in 1926 as the Nihon Hōsō Kyōkai (NHK, Japanese Radiophonic Company). Over the next 2 years, more stations were set up across the country and reached almost all levels of society. All broadcasts were controlled by the central government and programming was limited to Japanese and Western classical music at first (Galliano, 2002).

Both commercial recordings and live studio performances of music were broadcast. The first phonograph had arrived from America in 1886 and for the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, all recordings were made by British or American companies. The Japanese recording industry began its activity in the late 1920s and as a result of Japanese affiliations with European and American companies, the shops were stocked with recordings of American light music, jazz, and optimistic popular songs (Galliano, 2002).

A new production and marketing strategy was introduced when American Victor encouraged Japan Victor to increase sales by releasing new songs rather than relying on songs that were already popular. This development in the 1930s led to the introduction of a new term, *ryūkōka*, to refer to music that was industry-made to create profit (Stevens, 2008). Another song classification on record labels at that time was 'jazz songs'. This category included all kinds of songs from North and Latin America, Europe, Tin Pan Alley tunes, 'symphonic jazz', tango, rumba, *chansons* (popularised through French films), and Hawaiian music. The Japanese lyrics were usually romantic, impressionistic, and moody (Atkins, 2001).

Some people started to prefer the term *kayōkyoku* because it did not seem as vulgar as *ryūkōka*, which meant songs that are in vogue or broadly favoured. The two terms were used interchangeably for 40 years until *ryūkōka* began to sound out of date (Mitsui, 2014). The term *kayōkyoku* is now used in record retail and rental shops to refer to 20th century popular music in a Western style.

This wave of popular music from America and Europe and Japanese songs in a Western vein was abruptly halted by the rapid spread of nationalism at the end of the 1930s when the extreme right wing managed to gain control (Galliano, 2002).

### **Western music during the war**

When the Pacific War began on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1941, the government prohibited jazz and music with guitar accompaniment that were seen as Western influenced, and promoted other genres, such as nationalistic *ryūkōka*, *min'yō* and *gunka*. Mitsui points out the irony that the music designed to boost national prestige was 'noticeably in a Western vein except for the language' (Mitsui, 2014, p. 8).

Although there was to be a total shutting out of Anglo-American music, especially American jazz, there was not a single enforceable jazz ban throughout the war years and there was clearly noncompliance with government directives (Atkins, 2001). In reaction to complaints about disregard for the ban, a list was published in 1943 of one thousand American and English songs. Possession, sale and performance of the designated records were prohibited. Records were to be voluntarily handed over and sheet music of all Anglo-American music was also banned. Many familiar tunes, however, were of uncertain origin and it is interesting that Prime Minister Tōjō Hideki was in shock when he heard that "Light of the Firefly" (sung to the tune of "Auld Lang Syne") was to be forbidden. He was angry and insisted it was Japanese because it was sung by everyone from childhood. This shows how the assimilation of Western melodies into the

Japanese soundscape had been taking place for so long that in the 1930s a Scottish folk melody sounded Japanese to Prime Minister Tōjō. “Light of the Firefly” was to all intents and purposes a Japanese song to those of his generation. This is still true today of a number of tunes taught in primary schools (including “Auld Lang Syne”) and illustrates the complexity of the issues of ownership and classification of music as either Japanese or Western.

### **The post war years and growth of the Japanese music industry**

General Douglas MacArthur arrived in Japan 2 weeks after its surrender in August 1945 to establish the headquarters of the occupying army. The US requisitioned land and buildings throughout Japan and clubs were built as entertainment facilities for the occupying forces. Japanese were not allowed into these clubs. However, cabarets and dance halls, modelled on the clubs, were opened by Japanese managers (Tōya, 2014).

Few American performers came to Japan in the early years of the Occupation, so the musical entertainment was supplied by Japanese musicians. They had to play a variety of music, such as big band and small combo performances of jazz, swing, and current American popular songs. At the officers’ clubs dance music in the style of Glen Miller and Guy Lombardo was required, while bebop or rhythm and blues were requested mostly at the clubs for the black enlisted men.

Sometimes knowledge of ‘hillbilly’ or country and western style was needed (Atkins, 2001). When the Occupation ended in 1952, the withdrawal of most of the troops led to the closing of many clubs. Many former club performers, and middlemen went on to play a large role in developing post-war Japanese popular music culture by performing to Japanese audiences the American popular music they had absorbed in the off-limit clubs, as well as *kayōkyoku*: Japanese songs in a Western vein that were the collaborative work of a composer, lyricist, singer, and recording company (Tōya, 2014). The Japanese musicians who worked in

the clubs during the Occupation had absorbed American music and later turned it into the foundation for new styles of Japanese music.

The Occupation forces quickly took control of NHK radio programming and broadcasts were filled with democratic propaganda blended with American music (Atkins, 2001). Also, when the American armed forces station WVTR started broadcasting American popular music to the Allied Occupation forces in September 1945, Japanese lovers of Western music tuned in to the radio station to hear the latest American country, pop, and jazz music. So music from outside Japan once more blended into the Japanese soundscape.

Although the latest American music could be heard through radio broadcasts, most Japanese people were listening to *kayōkyoku* during the Occupation. There were several very popular performers, such as Misora Hibari and Kasagi Shizuko, and songwriters like Hattori Ryōichi who wrote many of Kasagi's greatest hits. *Kayōkyoku* was performed live in small theatres before the arrival of television. However, in the 1950s, dramatic changes in the marketing of singers and songs affected almost every aspect of the Japanese popular music world (Fujie, 1989). The creation of private broadcasting companies in 1951 and the development of television in 1953 stimulated the growth of artistic production companies. Until then, record companies had controlled the composer, lyricist and singer in the production of a record. From the 1950s, production companies controlled every aspect of the production of a new *kayōkyoku*. They planned, selected the song, and negotiated with record companies, radio and TV stations on behalf of their singers. Some companies had total control over all production aspects and one of the most powerful was Watanabe Productions (*Nabepro*) that controlled the contracts of its singers, composers and musicians and held the copyrights of all songs produced by their employees. The *mochiuta* system that linked a song with one singer was introduced, which gave rise to the modern star system. The main object of music consumption became the record (with a photograph of the singer on the sleeve), rather than sheet music (which featured

the composer and lyricist above the performer's name). This change solidified the connection between the song and the singer's image, which was strengthened by developments in music television programming (Stevens, 2008) and further reinforced by the later spread of music video.

The *mochiuta* system made it very hard for singers to become independent. If they left the production company, they had to build up a whole new repertoire of songs alone because the production company held the rights to all their previous work. This situation lasted until the 1970s when television companies took over some of the former duties of production companies and began to take on an important role in the creation of hit songs. The production company system has influenced the development of the *aidoru* (idol) management companies that are still flourishing and dominating record sales today (Fujie, 1989; Stevens, 2008, Bourdaghs, 2012; Milioto Matsue, 2016).

### **New genres of popular music for young audiences**

'The predilection the Japanese have for absorbing foreign music, imitating it, and then producing their own unique musical culture based on this experience is a recurring cycle in Japanese music history' (Fujie, 1989, p. 207). In the 1950s and 60s *yōgaku* (music imported from the West and Japanese music in the Western style) dominated sales and was thought to possess the right qualities for the new era. It was seen as bright, light and modern. In addition to conventional singers and songs, numerous other genres started to grow in popularity with younger audiences and will be introduced briefly.

#### **'Rockabilly'**

'Rockabilly' was the name given to music known as rock-and-roll in the English-speaking world. 'Rockabilly' singers covered American hits originally sung by a range of artists like Elvis Presley, Gene Vincent, Paul Anka, and Little Richard for teenage audiences. Shimizu (2014) says that the Japanese singers saw

'rockabilly' as a means to distinguish themselves from others by adopting a specific appearance or musicality as part of their identity. These developments show how a new youth culture, focusing on teenagers, was emerging in Japan in response to Japan's increasing affluence, and influences from outside Japan.

In 1958, the first Nichigeki Western Carnival was organized by Watanabe Misa of Watanabe Productions, the powerful talent management agency. The show ran for a week in the Nihon Theatre in Tokyo, bringing together many 'rockabilly' artists, and attracting 45,000 fans (Bourdagh, 2012). The popularity of the Carnival, especially among female teenagers, led to its being held several times a year until 1977 (57 Carnivals in all). It also made several people famous: Hirao Masa'aki, Mickey Curtis, Yamashita Keijiro, and Sakamoto Kyū. Later, female stars such as Connie Francis and Helen Shapiro led to the start of female cover artists in Japan, although American rockabilly artists were 'almost exclusively male' (Bourdagh, 2012, p. 101).

One of the main reasons for the large number of covers of American hits was that it was easier to get permission to use these than to use songs under the control of domestic copyright holders. Also, producers and artists could exert 'creative control' through the arrangement and through the way the lyrics were translated. It was common for the original lyrics to be alternated with Japanese translations. Furthermore, there were two ways to translate the lyrics. One was to apply words faithfully to the original tune, and the other was to arrange the tune so that it would fit the wording in Japanese. One difficulty in translating is that the Japanese language requires more syllables than English. This limits what can be expressed in Japanese when following the original melody strictly. So there is a tendency to abbreviate the original lyrics and add newly devised words (Shimizu, 2014).

These musicians transformed Western popular music through incorporation into their own aesthetic. They appropriated and re-presented it in a form that their

Japanese audiences could understand and relate to. Born and Hesmondhalgh (2000) discuss how appropriation of the musics of others, which has more commonly occurred in the reverse direction (i.e. non-Western music has been sampled and copied by Western musicians) has brought about a new stage in the transnationalisation of sound. The resulting complexities and ambiguities have led to important debates on appropriation, difference, diversity, and dialogue in music and given rise to a new discourse based on, and celebrating, notions of musical hybridity and syncretism. We should not, however, overlook the question of meaning and where this resides. Does it reside in the intentions of the original composer, regardless of whether these intentions are recognized and understood by listeners? Or does meaning always reside in the interpretations of audiences? Japanese lyrics provide a clearer message than lyrics in English, but the audience may not know if they convey the original message. Moreover, is it important to retain an original message that the local audience may not be able to relate to? Is it not, in fact, better to retain the spirit of the song by adapting it to the situation of the local audience? These were debates that arose repeatedly in the twentieth century as other genres of music arrived in Japan.

Although covering American hits assured 'rockabilly' artists of success, the small number of American hits meant there was fierce competition and it was difficult for artists to differentiate themselves from each other. Moreover, the audience would lose interest hearing the same song on stage many times. This problem was solved when Hirao Masa'aki released "Hoshi-wa Nandemo Shitte'iru" (Stars Know Everything) in 1958, which was the first original song released by a 'rockabilly' performer. Western music continued to influence popular music in Japan, but the influence became less visible 'as it changed from something direct to something that was indirect' (Shimizu, 2014, p. 117).

### ***Ereki* and Group Sounds**

The 1960s brought both rapid growth in the Japanese economy and many new influences to the Japanese popular music scene, such as television shows featuring *wasei* pop (Western-style pop made in Japan), films which introduced new singers, and an increase in the number of Western musicians visiting every year (Mitsui, 2014). Minamida (2014) says that music became a vital part of youth culture and ‘there was a full-scale acceptance of Western musical scales and rhythm, and also a diversification of genres’ (p. 122).

Japanese musicians interested in instrumental music discovered the British group the Shadows, and in 1961, Tokyo country-and-western star Jimmie Tokita had a hit with his cover of the Shadows’ “Apache” (Cope, 2007). Shortly after, an American group called the Ventures became extremely popular. Soon a home-grown version called the Adventures began to make *ereki* (electric guitar sound) records and there was a boom of *ereki* music produced by a wide range of musicians, both amateur and professional, made possible by the mass production of electric guitars by Japanese manufacturers (Bourdaghs, 2012).

The *ereki* sound began to shift towards Group Sounds (GS), with vocals added to the guitar sound, around 1964 when bands started to hear the music of the Beatles and other Merseybeat groups. The Spiders became famous for their Beatles covers, which they mastered very quickly so that they could perform new Beatles releases as they rose up the charts. By 1965, other *ereki* groups and Japanese teenagers were all aware of the exciting new music sound coming out of the UK when the Beatles and other beat groups occupied the top places in the US Billboard charts and it was clear that the *ereki* boom was coming to an end.

As has often been the pattern, GS groups covered songs by the British groups at first, but soon a second generation of GS bands came to the fore. The most well known are the Tigers (from Kyoto), and the Tempters (from Saitama). They played cover versions of Western hits as well as their own original compositions. They also grew their hair longer and wore flamboyant clothes. A third wave of

Group Sounds arose in 1968 when groups started to feel dissatisfied with the manufactured image they were required to present. A mood of rebellion was expressed through unconventional behaviour and a harder, psychedelic sound in their music. Two of these groups were the Mops (from Tokyo), and the Golden Cups (from Yokohama). The Mops participated in the first experiment to combine symphonic music with rock in 1968. This event was the brainchild of experimental musician Ichiyanagi Toshi, pupil of John Cage and first husband of Ono Yoko. The Mops played with the Japan Philharmonic Orchestra and were conducted by the renowned composer Takemitsu Tōru (Bourdagh, 2012; Cope, 2007).

Social changes that started taking place in the late sixties led to the disappearance of GS in the 1970s. Bourdagh (2012) explains that since the 1950s, teen culture had been focused on the pleasures of consumption, monogamous love, and the family. However, it started to give way to youth culture, which was 'politically rebellious, sexually liberated, and openly dismissive of the strictures of domestic life' (p. 114). The social functions and uses of popular music started changing against a background of political unrest in high schools and on university campuses. Borrowing 'the world view of protest folk' (Bourdagh, 2012, p. 117), rock musicians did not want to be seen as teen idols playing to crowds of girls. In their view, rock music should be creative, express the ideas and personalities of the artists, and above all, be non-commercial. Many GS groups broke up when some members allied themselves with this new rock aesthetic. Some moved on to new careers in acting or music production, while others turned to the folk scene (Cope, 2007).

## **Folk**

Pop-folk music sung by American groups such as the Kingston Trio, the Brothers Four, and Peter, Paul, & Mary was popular among college students, especially in the Tokyo area. A music scene called 'college-folk' started. Students in Osaka and Kyoto were more politically radical and so more attracted to translated

versions of protest songs by American singers like Joan Baez, Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, and Bob Dylan. Some of these musicians started to feel that singers were treated as commercial objects by both the mass media and recording companies and that the special relationship between the song, the singer and the audience was being overlooked. So they started writing their own music to 'close the gap between singer and song' (Fujie, 1989, p. 208). Such political and socially committed acoustic protest songs soon spread through the country from around 1966 (Mitsui, 2014) and were an important part of the protest movement against the Vietnam War, the US-Japan Security Treaty (AMPO), and the construction of Narita Airport (Bourdagh, 2012).

My own university was founded in 1965 during these years of student unrest. The ESS club, from which I drew some of my research participants, has two anthems which are both sung at club gatherings: an original composition in Japanese by one of the founding members, and the folk song "We Shall Overcome", which is sung with the English lyrics used by Joan Baez. I have asked several generations of members over the last few years why this is a club anthem, but they know nothing about the song and have never explored this. I had to inquire further afield. One of the administrative staff is a former ESS member who joined the club in 1979. He believed that it was a Negro spiritual song related to slavery and a call for freedom from oppression. He had no idea, however, about why it had been chosen as the ESS anthem and he contacted one of the founding members of the club. Luckily, the founding member's institutional memory is excellent and he explained that at the time the university was founded in 1965, one of the members loved the music and lyrics of Joan Baez and included her songs in club activities. This song was chosen as an anthem not because the ESS club members sympathized with the American Civil Rights and other protest movements, but because some of the lyrics seemed to express their spirit of determination to "overcome" obstacles to improving their English skills and to support each other ("hand in hand") in this struggle. Their strong sense of purpose and unity in striving towards the goal of using their English skills to

become effective global citizens led them to adopt this song. I myself had not realized that it was a gospel hymn in its very first incarnation and that it was later adapted and adopted by the folk /protest music movement (Pete Seeger) and brought to greater prominence by Joan Baez. This song's history illustrates how complex the notion of musical ownership is and how the meanings of songs and the uses to which they can be put are unpredictable and infinitely variable.

### **New Rock**

Although oppositional folk music was anti-commercial, some superstars emerged. The most radical of the folk rock bands were the Jacks, who were part of the underground (*angura*) scene. They blurred the boundary between folk and rock, between commercialism and the anti-capitalist underground scene, and they received wide coverage in the music press where the term 'new rock' (*nyū rokku*) was coined (Bourdagh, 2012; Cope, 2007).

The new rock bands that emerged in the 1970s strived for 'authenticity' as opposed to commercialism. Some sang in English because they believed this was the 'authentic' language of rock. Others sang in Japanese. *Happii Endo* (Happy End) released their first album in 1970 and set the standard for rock music sung in Japanese. Their music represented a new style, but they also introduced a new production process in which Japanese artists could compose, perform and produce their own music.

### **The English versus Japanese lyrics debate**

When songs were imported from the West, decisions had to be made about which language to perform them in. Should it be in the original language that the audience would not understand, or in Japanese, which may not fit the music in terms of sound or ideology? As we have seen already, a compromise was often made by combining the original English with Japanese. This issue was debated among Japanese musicians through much of the twentieth century (Milioto Matsue, 2016).

New rock bands in the early 1970s were divided into two factions: the hard-rock bands, who sang mainly in English, and the folk rock bands, who wanted to sing their own words to a rock beat and sang exclusively in Japanese. English was generally thought to be better to convey the rebellious rock aesthetic, but Japanese was better for folk and folk rock, where the meaning of the songs was central. Condry (2000) highlights the paradox of the fact that the groups which used English also used more traditional Japanese elements in their music, such as *taiko* drums, bamboo flutes, and so forth, while the bands singing in Japanese adopted a more straightforward Western rock-and-roll sound.

Uchida Yūya of the Flower Travelin' Band belonged to the English-only rock faction and his aim was to reach a world audience by singing in English. Uchida, in discussing the need to use English lyrics said that this was the best way for Japanese people to appreciate rock music and that understanding the lyrics was unnecessary. He believed music had a universal power to persuade and had great confidence in the intuitive power of 'new rock' musicians 'to catch sound in a sensitive manner' (Minamida, 2014, p. 127).

According to Kitagawa (1991), in the 1980s, Japanese audiences became accustomed to 'sound-oriented' listening. For example, Kuwata Keisuke of the Southern All Stars used to compose his melodies using English-sounding nonsense words. Once the melodies were complete, he added Japanese lyrics. The literal meaning of the lyrics was less important than the overall effect of the sound. Stevens (2008) confirmed this tendency from her personal experience of translating lyrics for a band. She found that 'sound standards overruled the English meaning, which convinced me that use of English was more about image and sound than meaning' (p. 144). My own research indicates that understanding the lyrics of English songs is not always important for young Japanese people. They are attracted initially by the rhythm, melody and atmosphere of Western music, which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

## **New music**

From the mid-1970s, a loosely defined genre called 'new music' (*nyū myūjikkū*) was developed by Western-style singer-songwriters and rock musicians. One of the pioneers was Arai Yumi (later known as Yūming). Influenced by British and French poetry, she created a sophisticated style. The special characteristic of new music was that, regardless of whether it was rock, folk, or pop, it was written and performed by the artists. New music musicians attached importance to the whole sound of a recording as a personal expression, and especially to the instrumentation. New music was introspective, focusing on the frustrations of everyday life and expressing this in everyday language. Although mainly considered a sophisticated urban sound, new music occasionally incorporated Japanese traditional instruments (Fujie, 1989). Other changes that new music introduced were the replacement of the hit single with the album as the unit by which artists were judged, and a power shift away from recording companies and promoters towards the artists and their management agencies.

New music grew very popular, and in 1980, sales of singles by new music artists accounted for 50 percent of all single sales (Mitsui, 2014, p. 13). They used television and radio in new ways to achieve commercial success, notably through the tie-up song and the complementary relationship between music, television and product advertising industries was born (Stevens, 2008). Gradually, the 'new' of new music disappeared in the late 1980s and Mitsui (2014) observes there was a shift as 'an increasing number of younger Japanese musicians began to consider those acts formerly bundled as New Music as their artistic roots instead of Western artists' (p. 13). Western-style music was so fully assimilated that it was no longer seen to be the source of new Japanese popular music.

## **Western music influences in the 1970s–1980s**

Nevertheless, new influences continued to arrive from outside Japan, such as the British and American punk movements (Minamida, 2014), and the many world-class foreign musicians who performed other music genres in Japan: Free and Led Zeppelin in 1971, Emerson, Lake and Palmer, and T. Rex in 1972, David Bowie in 1973, and Eric Clapton in 1974. It had been anticipated that the performances by these big names would undermine Japanese rock, but this was not the case. Instead, popular omnibus-style concerts with both Japanese and foreign artists began to take place in the early 1970s. Events like Rock Carnival drew as many as 35,000 people, but the Japanese acts were seen mainly as warm-up acts, which shows how, despite the flourishing of the Japanese new music and rock scenes, the categorization of music as Western versus Japanese still remained strongly entrenched (Nagai, 2014).

## **Conclusion**

Japanese culture has been shaped by intercultural exchange and hybridity for hundreds of years with the circulation of language, music, religion and governance systems between China, Korea and Japan. The Japanese have also adopted and adapted foreign musical genres and instruments to create new and unique music. With the sudden massive exposure to Western musical forms and ideas that accompanied the Meiji period, Japanese people saw the potential of Western melodies and rhythms to raise morale and as a means for Japan to participate in the modern world. When Japanese political aspirations changed, and Western music was seen to symbolize the enemy, it was officially banned during the Second World War, but nevertheless remained present. Following their defeat, imported Western music was imposed on the Japanese while under the Allied Occupation. However, it was listened to with enthusiasm because it represented a break with the past and looked towards the future. When the Occupation ended, Japanese people continued to produce and enjoy Western-flavoured popular music and various styles were developed, usually influenced from abroad. Through this process, distinctions between Japanese and Western

popular music have become blurred much of the time. Mitsui (2014) explains this when he comments that 'Western elements in Japanese popular music have already become so assimilated or hybridized that the Japanese themselves have long tended not to consider them particularly Westernized' (p. 13).

The flourishing of Japan's popular music industry has not stopped the consumption of English-language pop. Japanese people are able to appreciate imported *yōgaku* and domestic popular music (*hōgaku*) simultaneously, and for different reasons. Stevens (2008) explains that *yōgaku* has represented 'international sophistication and authenticity and imparted social status on the listener'. In contrast, *hōgaku* is 'culturally immediate' and addresses 'the audience's emotional needs' in ways that *yōgaku* cannot' (p. 63). This contrast can be more fully appreciated through the words of young Japanese audiences as they explain their attitudes to contemporary Japanese and Western music in the following chapter.

### **3 Popular Music Consumption by Young Japanese Audiences in the Heisei Era (1989 to the Present)**

The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the kinds of music that young Japanese people are currently listening to and the role that English-language music from outside Japan plays in their overall music consumption. It shows how some music genres from outside Japan have been adopted and adapted to the tastes and needs of Japanese audiences and how both the Japanese and non-Japanese versions of many styles co-exist with audiences enjoying both.

When Emperor Akihito acceded to the Japanese throne in January 1989, Japan was on the cusp of the Internet revolution, which would have an enormous impact on access to music and music listening practices. However, the economic boom of the 1980s was ending, and a prolonged economic slowdown was to follow. The events of the current Heisei era have influenced all aspects of the Japanese music industry and music consumption in Japan. These influences have come from both within Japan and from outside, as a result of developments in communications technologies, the move by Western media corporations into Asian markets, and the emergence of Pan-Asian media flows. This has given rise to cross-fertilization between the Western, Japanese, and other Asian popular culture and music industries with the same media products and popular culture circulating in many parts of Asia.

The popular music scene in Japan had grown significantly during the bubble economy years of the early 1980s, partly by exploiting domestic marketing strategies developed by the idol industry, and partly by the diversification of performance spaces. Large venues like Tokyo's Budōkan regularly featured leading pop stars from overseas and Japan while small clubs and discos provided a lively underground scene that followed Western trends in punk, new wave, reggae, and rap music (Condry, 2011).

Despite the slowing of the economy, the 1990s saw a dramatic increase in sales of Japanese popular music. One reason was the emergence of new super stars like Utada Hikaru, who set a new record with over 9 million sales of her debut album *First Love*. Other reasons included the success of the super-producer Komuro Tetsuya, who helped propel the Avex record company into the major label scene, creating techno-flavoured dance music as well as producing hits for Okinawan-born Amuro Namie. The increase in singles sales in the 1990s was also driven by the growth of karaoke after venues first appeared in 1986. Women in their early twenties became the main consumers of CD-singles and songs accompanying prime-time TV dramas were the most popular because they recalled the taste of the drama and were easy to sing along to, especially with friends at a karaoke box (Condry, 2006). This is one example of transmedial flow, a process which would gain in importance and complexity over the coming decades when new technologies provided new platforms. Hip-hop and Japanese R & B grew in the late 1990s, and Japan's reggae scene expanded in the early 2000s, (Condry, 2011). These days, Japanese music sales are the second highest in the world and, owing to specific marketing strategies, they are dominated by idol groups.

In spite of the success and dominance of the domestic music industry, the Japanese public continues to listen to and be influenced by music from outside Japan. The first part of this chapter will therefore discuss the reception and consumption of both Western and Japanese music drawing on both published research and my own findings. My data are based on a survey of 511 students conducted at the private university where I am employed in July 2015. (Please see the Appendix for the full results.) In addition, I will refer to information obtained from interviews with students at the same university (conducted in 2011-2012 and 2015-2016). Additional references will be made to research done by students in my classes and to my observations at a large local CD and DVD rental store called Tsutaya and a branch of Tower Records, the largest music retail store in my city.

Miyairi (2015) characterizes the current music scene in Japan as having increasingly blurred genres. While this may be true, for practical reasons I will discuss the main genres of the Japanese popular music scene as they have evolved over recent decades. I will begin, however, by revisiting the issue of the role of English lyrics in Japanese popular music because it is a topic still discussed by Japanese young people today.

An overarching theme of this chapter is the influence of media globalisation. Globalisation is the process by which relatively separate areas of the globe intersect (Hall, 1995). Connections are made through trade, travel, colonization, markets, and the flows of labour, goods and profits. Globalisation is not a new phenomenon. It has taken place throughout the history of Western imperialism and could be seen in operation in the previous chapter in the way music from Europe and America spread to Japan and elsewhere. The process of globalisation has not, however, led to a uniform Westernisation of the world. Instead, the appropriation of modernity in the non-West has produced many different local versions of modernity (Iwabuchi, 2002). Moreover, globalisation is multi-directional. It has given rise to flows of goods from the non-West to the Western world and, especially since the spread of digital technologies, has facilitated both the circulation of Japanese popular culture in Asia and the flow of Asian popular culture into Japan.

The previous chapter showed how Japan sought to become a modern power in order to prevent colonisation by Western powers. To do so, it assimilated Western culture, underwent rapid industrialisation and militarisation, and then saw itself as rising above and separate from other Asian countries when it invaded them. At that time, the term *Japanisation* meant the assimilation of people of other ethnicities (Ainu, Okinawans, Taiwanese and Koreans) into Japanese imperial citizenship. *Japanisation* also meant the domestication of Western culture, expressed in the slogan *wakon yōsai* (Japanese spirit, Western

technologies), which demonstrates a desire to balance Westernisation with *Japanisation*. After the war, only the second meaning was retained. Moreover, the emphasis changed from 'imitating', which connoted Japan's inferior status, to 'appropriating', which emphasized the active agency of the Japanese. Although the Japanese prided themselves on their skill in domesticating Western cultural products, such cultural hybridization is not unique to Japan. It is common to all subordinated nations (Appadurai, 1990). It wasn't until the 1990s that the rise of Asian economic power persuaded Japan to reassert its Asian identity after its long retreat following defeat in World War II in order to sell its cultural products (Iwabuchi, 2002).

The rise of an affluent Asian middle class coincided with the development of communication technologies, which made the circulation of numerous kinds of media information, images and texts possible on a global scale. The circulating cultural products (television shows, films, music, etc.) are better described as *transnational* rather than *global* (Iwabuchi, 2002) because *transnational* implies that the conception of culture is not limited to a 'national' framework but allows for cultural mixing and indigenisation. Iwabuchi calls this process of mixing the foreign with the local to produce new cultural diversity *transculturation*. The origins of transnational cultural images and commodities are subsumed by the local *transculturation* process and the products are eventually seen as local.

Although the transnational flow of media is now commonplace, there is, nevertheless, the perception of cultural distance: audiences are thought to find pleasure through consuming cultural products that are from supposedly culturally similar nations. As will be seen in this chapter, young Japanese are eagerly receptive to music and music videos of Western and Asian origins, but have a sense of closer affinity with Asian performers and different expectations of standards of dress and behaviour for Asian and Western artists. They apply different sets of values for Japanese, Korean and Western performers.

## The Use of English Lyrics in Japanese Popular Music

The debate over whether English or Japanese should be used arose once more in the 1980s, during the early days of the hip-hop scene. In contrast to rock musicians of the 1970s, few Japanese hip-hop artists imagined appealing to an English-speaking market. However, like the rock musicians, many thought at first that the Japanese language was not suited to the rhythm and style of their genre.

There were some early experiments in mixing the two languages to create interesting rhyming effects, but soon Japanese prevailed. In fact, one of the key factors in the growth of hip-hop in Japan was the realization that the Japanese language could be cool. More importantly, 1990s emcees had notions of language and aesthetics that revolved around the ideology that one must 'represent' oneself (express who you are and where you are from). This meant acknowledging one's uniqueness and expressing it in the Japanese language. To be hip-hop meant to speak from one's own position, prove oneself in the *genba* (performance space) of nightclubs, and rework the Japanese language within the context of hip-hop poetics (Condry, 2006). Consequently, English-language hip-hop by Japanese artists remains quite rare, apart from a few bilingual rappers, such as Shingo2, A-Twice, and Verbal (of M-Flo).

In the 1990s underground scene (*angura*), many musicians were using a mix of Japanese and English, called 'Japanglish'. They used this mixed language to distance themselves from the mainstream Japanese popular music, which was sung in Japanese (Milioto Matuse, 2016). The use of English in Japanese popular music is also related to aesthetics and sound and there is a variety of terms employed: 'Japlish', *wasei-eigo* ('made-in-Japan English'), 'Pidgin Japanese', or *giji-eigo* ('pseudo English') to describe this phenomenon (Stevens, 2008). This is not the product of poor English skills, but is the emergence of a hybrid language, which is perfectly comprehensible to in-group interlocutors, and interpreted within a shared symbolic framework. Ugaya (2005) explains that the

use of English by Japanese musicians is to give them an 'international' image within Japan rather than to promote them overseas and that this use of pseudo-English connects them with their listeners and forms an in-group language that native English speakers would not understand (pp. 138-139).

The fusion of foreign languages into Japanese pop music can therefore be understood to combine aesthetic ideas regarding sound and image. Japanese lyrics (except in rap) do not have to rhyme. There are sound similes created by the fact that Japanese verbs end with the same sounds, and some sentences can be carried from line to line. Lyrics in Japanese rap, however, rely on puns and word play in Japanese and using Japanese combined with English rap expressions. For example, 'Yo!' is used in American rap and in Japanese it is used as a sentence-ending particle that adds emphasis, so when Japanese rappers call out 'yo!', there are two meanings at play. In rap, the addition of English tags or endings can help with rhyme as well as add an authentic feel (Condry, 2006).

Stanlaw (2000) discusses how Japanese women singers and songwriters, in particular, are using English to avoid some of the restrictions that the Japanese language places on women. One of my own female students recently gave an interesting presentation on the prevalent use of the English expression "I love you" in Japanese popular songs. She explained that the four Japanese expressions, (*suki* = like), (*daisuki* = like a lot), (*ai* = love), (*koi* = love), have different connotations for Japanese people. In pre-Meiji times, the Japanese word *ai* was used to apply to a love from a superior to an inferior, whereas *koi* referred to physical attraction. Missionaries used the word *ai* to translate the concepts of God's love for man and man's reciprocal love for God, and this has become extended to indicate the relations between lovers (Hendry, 2013). According to my student, Japanese people have traditionally avoided saying *aishiteiru* (I love you) because it is felt to be unnecessary. Japan is a high context culture where people show their feelings through their attitudes and actions and

to say or be told *'aishiteiru'* makes Japanese people feel uncomfortable and embarrassed. Moreover, *aishiteiru* conveys the meaning of everlasting love when used in J-pop. To convey the feeling of strong affection, to avoid discomfort, and to sound “cool”, Japanese lyricists and artists use the English expression “I love you”. This is similar to the way some Japanese lyricists use other English expressions as a “short cut” to enhance meaning.

Sometimes an English phrase with fewer beats is used for practical reasons to economize on syllables, or to add information, or a certain atmosphere. The singer/songwriter Yūming includes English to give a song a fragrance of Western culture, which adds elegance. She uses not only English, but other European languages, too.

Some artists, such as Utada Hikaru, make their ability to sing in English a major part of their image ‘to distinguish themselves both musically and ideologically from other artists in the densely crowded music scene’ (Stevens, 2008, p. 144). The use of English is now seen as ‘cool’ and no longer a vexing issue. In fact, English lyrics can be seen as part of the whole promotional package by functioning in the same way as the CD cover design (Stevens, 2008).

### **The role of Japanese and English lyrics for young Japanese audiences**

A student interviewed in 2012 talked about one of the “problems” that Japanese lyrics can pose because of the differences in male and female speech styles. He prefers listening to male artists because he also likes singing at karaoke. (He goes to a karaoke box 3–4 times a week with friends, or alone to practise.) The lyrics of women’s songs use female language and so he felt they were unsuitable for a man to sing. For other students, however, this was not seen as a problem and they sing songs recorded by both female and male artists at karaoke.

The students interviewed showed a strong tendency to focus on sound rather than meaning, as Stevens (2008) observed. Melody and rhythm were often their

top priority, especially when listening to music in the background when engaged in other activities. This applied to Western, Korean, and Japanese music. A male student interviewed in 2012 explained that his favourite music video was Justin Bieber's "Baby" because he liked the sound of Justin Bieber's voice, and the sound of words like "amazing" and "crazy". Many students interviewed in 2012 and 2015 said that for them, the rhythm and melody of the music they listen to is more important than the lyrics, and they feel no need to understand the lyrics. Here is how one young man explained this: "*Ongaku wa ... ore wa jibun no konomi wa sono kashi mo ii kedo ichiban rizumu to merodi ga yokunai to haite konai to. Sore ga ii kyoku ga iin desu.*" (For me, the lyrics are not so important. If the rhythm and melody are not good, I can't get into the music. That's what makes a good song for me.)

In contrast, some female students said they pay attention to and look at the lyrics of female J-pop singers because they can relate to them. A student explained why she likes the lyrics of Nishino Kana "*Kyōkan dekiru bun ga oi* (I can share her feelings a lot)"... "*Onna no ko no uta no kanji* ([I can share] the feeling from a girl's song)". On the other hand, some girls reported paying little attention to the lyrics of boy bands because they like just looking at the group and enjoying the sound of their voices "while using their imagination".

Students who pay attention to the lyrics of English-language songs do so for a variety of reasons. Many want to know what the English lyrics are and search for the lyrics online when they listen to a song sung in English. They generally look for a Japanese translation to make sure they understand what the singer wants to say. This is very quick and easy to do. Japanese mobile phone service providers have such websites with the Japanese translation under each line of English lyrics. Also popular are the videos people upload to YouTube with the lyrics of songs. Students with lower levels of English ability and confidence rely heavily on Japanese translations. Even students with a high level of English ability find the meaning of many song lyrics difficult to grasp and so look for

Japanese translations. There is a general awareness that the Japanese versions of English lyrics can vary from the original. One student commented that “Japanese and American meaning is a little different” and that the Japanese version is sometimes not so deep. A couple of students gave as an example the Japanese version of the hit song “Let it Go” (2013) from the film *Frozen* in which the nuance of the Japanese version is very different from the original English. Some students feel that original English lyrics are “cooler”, but the Japanese translations can be useful. If they want to internalize the meaning, rather than just memorize the English lyrics, then it seems that the Japanese translation is essential as was explained by a student in the following way: “If I want to remember the lyrics, I watch only English, but if I want to remember and understand, it’s both.”

Students said that watching a music video can help them to understand the general meaning of a song in English most of the time and then they do not feel the need to look for a translation. If the lyrics appear on the screen they can read as they listen. This works well unless the lyrics are too fast for them to read and understand. The students knew the English lyrics and would spontaneously sing along to the very popular music videos (such as Taylor Swift’s 2008 video “You Belong With Me”). However, one student explained that very visually exciting videos, such as Taylor Swift’s “Bad Blood” (2014), prevent her from understanding or being able to focus on the lyrics “because I have to concentrate on the video”.

The students interviewed who belong to the university’s English Studying Society (ESS) or English Language department have more motivation than others to practise their English skills. It is therefore not surprising that they use English language lyrics to study the language of English speakers in daily life—“the kind of English that you don’t learn in the classroom”. Students in the ESS who do voluntary work as tour guides train their English listening skills in the lunch breaks by trying to catch English song lyrics. This is a very challenging activity,

but I was told that the students are very motivated (“*seito no kanshin takai*”). “I think everyone likes listen to the Western music so it’s a very good activity to improve the hearing.” In fact, several of the students I interviewed said that this was their introduction to Western music and that they started to enjoy listening to Western music as a result of this activity.

## **Japanese Popular Music**

### **Hip-hop and rap**

Rap music is a genre which has been introduced to Japan from the United States and which makes use of English lyrics, but which has developed into a unique Japanese style. The evolution of the hip-hop scene in Japan shows how new cultural styles can emerge and evolve simultaneously at both local and global levels.

Awareness of hip-hop in Japan started to grow when *Wild Style* was shown in Tokyo in October 1983. Many of the performers, who were the first generation of American rappers, deejays, and break-dancers, came to promote the film. For Japanese audiences, the film was shocking and confusing, but the break-dancing and graffiti art had a strong appeal and they could appreciate it even if they found it hard to understand. Japanese audiences were attracted by the newness of hip-hop and felt curiosity and a desire to participate even though they did not understand initially the movement’s roots in New York and African American culture (Condry, 2006).

The first era in the history of hip-hop in Japan (1984-1994) was focused on discovering the nature of hip-hop. Soon after *Wild Style* was shown in cinemas, break dancers started to gather in Yoyogi Park in Tokyo and before long they were performing on television. Other US films (*Breakdance* and *Breakin’ 2*) were shown in Tokyo later in 1984 and more break-dance groups started to perform in Harajuku. When the pioneer Crazy-A began calling his group the Tokyo B-Boys, Crazy Legs of the New York-based Rock Steady Crew (RSC) noticed this and

invited them to join a world network of groups. This is how Rock Steady Crew Japan was started.

Hip-hop also emerged in Japan through the rap scene with rappers performing in discos and clubs. The first club devoted to the hip-hop genre opened in Shibuya in 1986 and rap started to have more airplay on the radio. A breakthrough came in 1994 with the hit '*kon'ya wa buugi bakku*', written by Ozawa Kenji and performed by the rap trio Scha Dara Parr. Music magazines heralded the arrival of the Japanese rap scene with this hit song, and it marked the start of the second era of Japanese hip-hop from 1994 to 1999.

There were two broad styles within the Japanese hip-hop scene at that time: the commercially successful cute J-Rap/party-rap style and the more oppositional underground style. Generally speaking, the light-hearted party rappers attracted more women and had more radio and TV exposure, while the underground rappers drew more men. However, there was not simply a two-way divide; there were factions within the party and underground rappers. There were debates between the party-rap and underground factions about which style was the better representative of Japanese hip-hop. The underground purists used American artists such as Public Enemy, Rakim, and Big Daddy Kane as gauges of realness. In their view, if the lyrics offered no opposition to mainstream society's injustices, they were not real. Meanwhile, the party rappers saw the street toughness of the underground rappers as a pose. In their opinion, the light-hearted rap was more appropriate to Japanese teenagers. Condry (2006) emphasizes the importance of the underground scene in the success of hip-hop in Japan by using the image of an expanding pyramid 'with those at the top breaking into mainstream media coverage, while the base of the pyramid expanded as well, though largely unnoticed by people removed from the scene' (p. 14). In other words, strong record sales represent an entertainment company's definition of value and do not represent an accurate reflection of the tastes of the overall public.

Since 2000, Japanese hip-hop has entered its third era. Diverse regional scenes have grown up in Nagoya, Osaka, Sapporo, Okinawa, Yokohama, and Tokyo, and hip-hop has become more mainstream with rap easy to find in record stores and karaoke bars. Club imagery started appearing in TV dramas and performers started making music videos. No one seems to be asking anymore what makes hip-hop *Japanese*. While today's Japanese rappers understand of the origins of hip-hop in African-American culture and of the ideals of self-emphasis, they are increasingly using traditional Japanese instruments, mimicking the vocal style of narrators of traditional Japanese theatre genres (*kabuki* and *bunraku*) and promoting imagery of samurai, ninja and geisha. Japanese rap has established its own hybrid Japanese identity.

The 2015 survey of my university students highlights some interesting issues and contrasts with Condry's view from within the hip-hop scene ten years earlier. The survey question was how much the students listened to different genres of music and so implied listening to recorded music rather than attending live performances. The results showed that 26.7 percent reported listening to J-rap sometimes and 7.1 percent listen to J-rap often (total J-rap audience = 33.8%). It is actually slightly less popular than English-language rap, which 22.6 percent listen to sometimes and 11.7 percent listen to often (total = 34.3%). This is surprising because much of the enjoyment of rap comes from understanding the lyrics and identifying with the issues discussed in the songs, which is hard for Japanese people listening to rap in English. This could be a further example of how young Japanese audiences tend to focus on the overall sound and rhythm of the music and pay less attention to understanding the meaning of the lyrics. Another interesting fact is that at my local Tsutaya rental shop twice as much shelf space is given to J-rap CDs than to American rap. This may indicate that while the Japanese music industry wishes to promote the domestic product, there is a residual feeling among the young generation that authentic rap is from the USA and this is what they prefer to listen to.

## **Rock music, live houses, concerts, and festivals**

While the hip-hop scene was developing, the late 1980s also saw a rise in rock bands with many amateur groups able to get mainstream attention through the television show *Ikasu Bando Tengoku* (Cool Band Heaven). It was commonly called *Ikaten* and was aired by TBS from 1989-1991 (Stevens, 2009). This new band boom from the 1980s to early 1990s turned rock into a major music form in Japan. It occurred at the same time that the bubble economy reached its peak, which helped bring about an evolution in the live performance space. J-rock is still a very popular genre among the young people surveyed in 2015 with 73 percent reporting that they listen to J-rock either often or sometimes. It is only slightly more popular than English-language rock (70.6%), but much more popular than other genres close to J-rock, such as 'Visual Rock' called *Visual-kei* (23%), Heavy Metal (19.6%), and Punk (23.6%).

In the late 1990s *Visual-kei* had great chart success. The sound was not new, but the artists made a new visual impact using eye-catching hairstyles, makeup and costumes. Groups like X-JAPAN and Buck-Tick were able to move from indie labels to major labels, but were still considered to be alternative because they were too flamboyant and too hard in style to appeal to the mainstream market. Groups with a softer sound and image were able to break through. Some of them were Shazna, L'Arc-en-Ciel, LUNA SEA, and GLAY (Stevens, 2008). Even so, the 2015 survey data show that *Visual-kei* these days is a genre that has only niche appeal.

The mid-1980s–1990s saw an increase in both the number and capacity of live houses and a diversification of concerts. The live houses provided alternatives to the music industry, which had become very commercialized and put on highly controlled concerts. One of the reasons why live houses attracted attention at this time was the Tokyo Rockers movement, which was influenced by the British punk rock scene. Punk and new wave grew independently in Japan, ignoring the

existing frames of the music industry, and were called 'Indie' (Nagai, 2014). A survey carried out in 1990 asked college students to identify the music they liked (Condry, 2006). The majority of listeners were attracted to singers who wrote their own songs and played their own instruments, which was an ethic shared by Japanese rockers and the 'new music' artists of that time. Most popular was 'new music' that was self-made and self-produced (31.2%). Rock was more popular than pop at that time (21.8% compared with 15.4%).

It is only comparatively recently that outdoor rock festivals have come to be held regularly in Japan. The 1997 Fuji Rock Festival is widely recognized as the event that made outdoor performances commonplace. There are practical explanations for this development. First, the know-how for managing concerts needed to be acquired and this grew with experience from the 1950s to the 1970s. By the 1970s and early 1980s, more foreign artists toured and larger events, as well as solo tours, became commonplace. Nowadays, many live outdoor performances (festivals and other events) are held and audiences have been growing in size: from 430,000 in 2001, to over 1.5 million in 2006 (Nagai, 2014, p. 139). Outdoor performances, including large-scale events such as the Fuji Rock Festival and Summer Sonic, now account for ten percent of the total concert market (Nagai, 2014, p. 139).

Music companies that specialized in the management of live houses were created and corporate-managed live houses started to open. Even companies that had no connection with music began getting involved in the live scene as managers or sponsors. This also happened at outside events where companies became organizers or sponsors of popular music concerts. When the band boom faded in the 1990s, poorly managed live houses started to lose customers. However, some very large live houses were built enabling all-standing live shows to take place, along with mosh pits and stage diving that had not been possible in smaller places with fixed seating.

The majority of the young people I interviewed in 2011 and 2015 had been to a live performance at a live house, or a large concert space, or an outdoor festival. Several said they go to live events regularly. Ticket prices vary according to the fame and popularity of the musicians, but they treasure the experience and atmosphere of such live events and are prepared to pay ¥10,000 (£62) or more to see their favourite artists.

### **CD sales boom and pop music tie-ups in the 1980s-1990s**

The introduction of CDs in 1982 helped the music industry to grow, especially when recording companies re-released back catalogues in CD format, which boosted sales. The music industry also started to strengthen connections with private companies by making tie-up songs for television commercials and dramas. By the 1990s, this practice was so widespread that 'in 1994, only two of the top 50 songs of the year were not tie-up songs' (Stevens, 2008, p. 94). Of the top three singles annually from 1990 to 1998, only one of the 27 singles was not associated with a drama or a TV commercial (Ugaya 2005, p. 77). Record companies have encouraged their artists to take television tie-up contracts because they remove the need for separate promotional campaigns. This explains to some extent why comparatively few music videos are made in Japan. Those that are made are aimed primarily for a fan-supported DVD market (Stevens, 2008). In the case of a tie-up hit single made for a TV drama, it cannot be known for sure whether it is the song that is popular in its own right, or its association with the drama that gives it a strong appeal. Either way, such songs do not stay at the top of the charts for long because of the short duration of television dramas, which explains the short life span of many Japanese pop hits.

There was a boom in the karaoke industry in the 1990s, which combined with the introduction of single CDs to create millions of hit singles. People would hear tie-up songs in variety shows, dramas, and commercials over and over again and so they could remember the melody naturally and sing it at karaoke. If they wanted to sing it better, they could buy the CD with the karaoke version included and

practise at home. Previously, fans of an artist bought a record because it was by that artist, but in the 1990s, people became fans of songs they liked in dramas and commercials and bought single CDs that enabled them to sing the songs at karaoke (Miyairi, 2015). 1995 was the peak of karaoke in Japan and 60.4 million people went to karaoke that year. It dropped to 33.6 million people in 2013. The leisure market as a whole was worth 90 trillion, 907 billion yen in 1996, but in 2013 it had dropped to 60 trillion, 206 billion yen, owing to the economic slow down (Miyairi, 2015).

Going to karaoke is very popular among the students I interviewed. They go with friends, classmates and people from their club or social circle. Some even go alone to practise. They usually sing Japanese songs, unless with others who have a special interest in English or Korean-language music, but this is rare. Songs by idols are popular because the lyrics and melody are easy to remember and sing along to. Going to karaoke, for Japanese people, is an occasion for forming close bonds among friends or colleagues. It is for participating together and not for individuals to show off singing skills to impress others. Everyone is expected to participate, regardless of how well they can sing. In this way it serves a very different function in Japan, compared with European and North American contexts, where individual prowess is prized rather than collective, community effort. Nevertheless, there are Japanese students who told me that they did not like to going to karaoke because they are not good at singing and the fact that several said they go alone to practise, or practise at home using YouTube videos, suggests that there is a certain amount of personal pride and anxiety about loss of face involved.

### **Pop idols (*aidoru*)**

The term *aidoru* was coined in the 1960s to refer to young performers who sing, dance, pose for photos and appear in diverse media such as magazines, print advertising, TV commercials, and TV variety shows and dramas. Pop idols have become a key component of Japanese media culture. An idol's identity is

constructed through appearances on many media platforms and through hundreds of websites, some of which are owned and managed by the idols' promotion agencies, while others are constructed by fans. They enjoy wide appeal among many different segments of the population. While idol culture aims primarily to socialize young people (Aoyagi, 2005), the fans of male idols include not only teenage girls, but also middle-aged women who nurture motherly feelings towards them (Karlin, 2012), and young mothers and housewives who create their own alternative world to escape into through fan activities (Takahashi, 2010). Among the fans of female idols are teenage girls, who see them as role models, as well as teenage boys and older men who are attracted to their pretty appearance and pure youthful image.

When idol pop performances first emerged in Japan in the late 1960s, they were included in the general category of popular music called *kayōkyoku*. A difference soon became apparent because, unlike the singers of earlier forms of pop music, which touched on mature subjects, idols represented adolescence. Although adult critics scorned idol performances, describing them as 'artless', 'fluffy', or 'bubblegum', this did not discourage Japanese youngsters from active participation in idol consumption (Aoyagi, 2005, p. 5). Idols began to be 'mass produced' on TV shows like *Sutā Tanjō!* (Birth of a Star!) from 1971-1983 and it is estimated that about 700 idols debuted in Japan between 1971– 1974 (Galbraith & Karlin, 2012, p. 5). The *aidoru* boom of the 1970s and 1980s coincided with Japan's rapid economic growth period when Japanese society became organized around information and consumption. Idols play a crucial role in this system because they help to create fan communities in the market, which allows predictable patterns of viewership and consumption.

The 1980s have been called the 'golden age of idols'. As many as 40 or 50 new idols would appear in a year and they had an especially big impact on the television industry. They appeared so regularly in people's homes that they were seen almost as part of the family by many Japanese audiences (Galbraith &

Karlin, 2012) and television genres started to change with seasonal dramas, variety shows, talk shows, and music shows that featured idols becoming increasingly popular. Tie-ups between pop songs and products in television advertising became widespread. Idols appeared in commercials and provided the 'image' songs that played during commercials. Popular idols were also used by corporate sponsors to brand their products and thereby gained even more media exposure. By the 1990s, super idol groups like Morning Musume and SMAP held centre stage in the media (Galbraith & Karlin, 2012).

Following a slump in the idol industry in the early 1990s, there has been a renewed surge in popularity and today they dominate not just the popular music industry, but also the whole Japanese popular culture industry. There are a number of reasons for this dominance. One reason is that they continue to be used to market the products of the fashion, cosmetic, and publishing industries and are an integral part of the Japanese economy. Life as an idol, however, is not as empowering or glamorous as one may imagine. They are managed by agencies called *jimusho* who control all creative output and collect the majority of profits. The idols themselves receive a salary and have little personal or artistic freedom. The female idols in particular are not allowed to smoke, or drink alcohol, or even to be seen in the company of men (Galbraith & Karlin, 2012). The reason is that most of the revenue idols generate comes from advertising so they need to maintain a stable and positive image because their value lies in their being accepted in living rooms as one of the family.

In order for fans to feel as if they know their favourite idols on a personal level, in addition to regular media exposure and maintaining an appealing image, it is essential to create the impression that there is little difference in level of ability between the idols and the audience. While female idols are expected to serve both as role models to female fans and objects of desire and pleasure to male fans, male idols are styled and presented mainly for female fan consumption.

The main function of all idols, however, is to sell products and so both male and female idols are under the strict control of their *jimusho*.

### **Female idols**

Female idols appear solo, in groups, or even in huge teams such as the AKB48 franchise started by Akimoto Yasushi in 2005. In Aoyagi's view, the public persona of adolescent female idols is determined by the *jimusho* and 'signified as "cute", "pure", "modest", and "full of promise"' (2005, p. 3). Apart from promoting the sale of consumer goods, they perform a social and cultural role by contributing to 'the ongoing construction of ideal images of adolescent selfhood' (ibid.). They do this by informing their viewers about appearances and personal qualities that are considered fashionable and socially appropriate. However, it should not be assumed that these qualities are endorsed by Japanese women in general and that the female style represented by idols is female-led. Japan is a male-dominated society and idol producers and corporate decision makers are almost exclusively men (Aoyagi, 2005). Moreover, female idols perform for men as well as women, and the representations of cute idols are 'overwhelmingly framed by men and imposed upon performers to please the male audience' (Aoyagi, 2005, p. 88).

### **Post-idols**

By the late 1980s, idols were no longer expected to just sing and were commonly seen as actors, comedians and talk-show hosts. One result was the increase in the number of idol-like personalities and the shift in the use of the term 'idol' to refer to any performer, professional or amateur, who appeared cute. This led, in turn, to a demand for more expert and unique performers who projected a powerful, more mature and sensual image. A new category of idols emerged called *dansu-kei idoru* (idol dancers) or *posuto aidoru* (post-idols). They marked a new era in which idols would no longer attract the public simply by being cute. Body-Wave Agency (B.W.A), founded by Mukai Yoshinori, was the agency behind this new trend. Well-known post-idols include Amuro Namie (debut 1995),

Chinen Rina (debut 1996), the groups MAX (debut 1995) and SPEED (1996–1999).

For Mukai, the essential characteristic of his performers is purity rather than cutesy. He claims that his concept of purity is not a form adolescent femininity that is designed primarily to serve the interests of male audiences. Rather, 'to be pure is to enable one's energy to flow from within, without any external constraint. It enables the actor to act from the bottom of her heart and her soul' (Aoyagi, 2005, p. 115). According to Mukai, 'cute' idols put on a childish act in order to attract the attention of boys and to be marketable to them. In contrast, his performers have to rely on their own senses, develop their own beat and be true to themselves. He does not want to provide his trainees with a designed *kata* (form in which they were expected to mould themselves).

It is doubtful, however, that the students at B.W.A. (aged between 8 and 22) can be said to experience 'purity' in Mukai's terms. They are clearly affected by the influences of media images that surround them and aware of the current model of femaleness that their agent and audiences expect them to perform. Aoyagi (2005) observed in Mukai's trainees 'an expression of vibrant sexuality that incorporated quick, sharp, and even aggressive body movements that mimicked the style represented by various black American hip-hop artists or American pop singers such as Janet Jackson and Madonna' (pp. 118-119). Moreover, Amuro Namie, a performer managed by Komuro Tetsuya who debuted at the age of 17, was clearly being used as a role model for the younger girls. Amuro's image was very different from the 'cute' image of the early 1980s. She wore heavy make-up and tailored suits with platform shoes and had an air of confidence. Her music style was influenced by Eurobeat at first and then a more US-rooted hip-hop sound. With her crotch-grabbing gestures and preening in an overtly sexual way, together with her dress style, she represented the *tsuyoi josei no jidai* (age of strong girls or girl power).

When Aoyagi asked some of the young B.W.A. students how they felt about performing in an overtly sexual way, they admitted that they felt ashamed, but also found it fun and liberating or empowering. An older woman, a dance instructor who had been a cute-style idol in 1988, told Aoyagi that the cute character she had played was not genuine and she had to suppress her individuality. However, the sexiness she could express now through her dance came from within her and she now had control over her identity. Sexualized performances for her were self-affirming. She appears to have overlooked the fact that she was old enough by then to genuinely experience such sexual feelings and to be able to make an informed choice about the way she represented her femaleness. These young girls, on the other hand, felt ashamed probably because they had not yet experienced strong sexual feelings but were being encouraged to emulate role models like Amuro and knew that this would be favourably received. Mukai's insistence that his young students should not hide their sexuality if it is important to them and part of who they are suggests that he was overlooking the way that gender is socially constructed and that we learn to be women and men by watching repeated impressions of femininity and masculinity in our everyday lives and through media representations (Butler, 1990). Moreover, girls (and especially those at B.W.A) learn from a very early age that female sexualized behavior and appearance are often rewarded by society and they learn to sexualize themselves and to see themselves as sex objects. Furthermore, they are encouraged to see this as their own choice and as a declaration of empowerment and liberation. Lieb (2013) observes that the same process takes place in America where young female performers and girl groups are sexualized from the start 'in order to court little girls, who want to be like them, and little boys, who just want them' (p. 93). This is in contrast to boy artists and bands (such as Justin Bieber, the Backstreet Boys) who are presented as non-sexual so that young girl fans will not feel threatened by boys that are too sexy.

The shift towards a more sexual female idol performance style could, however, be seen as a sign of young Japanese female artists breaking away from traditional gender roles and becoming more self-assertive. They may have been influenced by the third-wave feminism movement and the musicians who have been associated with feminism since the 1990s and who have employed discourses of empowerment in their music. The 3 genres of popular music that third-wave feminism has embraced are Riot Grrrl punk and alternative music, hip-hop feminism, and mainstream pop music (Keenan, 2015). The third wave emerged at a time of conflicting views about what feminism should be, whether it should even exist, and if so, who it was relevant to. It was a rupture between generations and the greatest difference between the generations was the third wave's criticism of the second wave's lack of inclusion of the issues of race, class and a broad view of women's sexuality.

Riot Grrrl, which started in 1991, was a coalition of young women disillusioned by the male domination of the punk scene (Zeisler, 2008). The movement was based in Olympia, Washington DC, and London. They used low-cost DIY technologies to spread their messages through rap sessions, self-produced records, homemade zines, garage bands and guerrilla theatre. This young feminist subcultural movement is seen as both the start and centre of the third wave and is associated with bands like Bikini Kill, Bratmobile, Excuse 17, Heavens to Betsy, and the British band Huggy Bear. The term 'girl power' was coined by the Riot Grrrl underground movement.

The raw emotion of the Riot Grrrls was re-packaged by the British group the Spice Girls that had been put together by Simon Fuller (Zeisler, 2008). They advocated 'girl power' which attempted to combine feminist sensibilities with feminine styling. They believed they should be treated as equals to their male peers, in control of their body, able to support themselves financially and to determine their futures. Girl power came to be seen as an individualistic stance rather than a collective achievement. The Riot Grrrl movement's radical message

about the need for structural social and political change was watered down by the mainstream media through their focus on image and style. Although girl power celebrates girls' independence, girl power media culture does not show girls how to work collectively to bring about social change so that they can enjoy greater equality of opportunity (Zaslow, 2009).

From Aoyagi's (2005) account of the trainees at B.W.A., it is the message of 'girl power' that reached mainstream Japan and was translated into the openly sexual post-idol style. Some alternative Japanese post-idol groups have been active, and gained media attention. In 2010, the female solo performer Pour Lui formed the alternative idol group Brand-new idol Society, known as BiS. She selected the original four members herself and they released their eponymous debut album on an indie label. One member left, but the group went on to release more singles and videos, including the notorious video for "My Lxxx" in which they play naked in a forest and lake. BiS was signed to the major label Avex Trax in 2012 and changed their line-up again. In addition to producing punk and metal-style music and videos that are 'un-idol', they have made a horror film and performed live around Japan. They also became the first noise idol band, known as BiS Kaidan (BiS 階段), when they formed a collaboration with the noise band Hijokaidan (非常階段). Their live performances were loud and chaotic as they carried out shocking stunts on stage. The blend of the BiS girls' singing with the distorted guitar work and screams of Hijokaidan was unlike anything heard before in the Japanese alternative scene.

Another band has been gaining attention with an equally unlikely sound and line-up. This is BABYMETAL, a combination of three pre-teen girl vocalists backed by male heavy metal musicians. The group was formed by the Tokyo-based entertainment company Amuse and has been very successful both within Japan and overseas. They have appeared on American television and in live performances and at festivals alongside many world-famous artists. The girls are now teenagers, but continue to wear cute outfits and dance in an energetic but

non-sexual way. The juxtaposition of their vigorous but cute-style idol performance and the sound and energy of the music clearly has strong commercial appeal, but their powerful performances cannot be equated with the messages of the Riot Grrrl movement. They are part of the commercially oriented 'girl power' legacy and their image of powerful new femaleness has been designed and supervised by male producers. The image directs girls to find female subjectivity and creativity within their current social roles rather than outside them and this perpetuates the male domination of gender and sexuality.

### **Male idols**

Male idols are dominated by one agency (*jimusho*) called Johnny and Associates, or simply Johnny's (founded and run by a Japanese-American called Johnny Kitagawa). Male idols mainly perform in groups and it is the unity of the group, rather than the individuality of each member that is paramount because it is believed to be attractive to female fans (Nagaike, 2012). Furthermore, it is thought that different types of boys need to be integrated in a group to maximize their overall appeal. For example, there should be an older-brother type, an honour-student type, a naughty-boy type and a son-of-a-good-family type. Many idol groups in Johnny's are based on this formula. Even though the idols do not promote themselves as individuals, members of the same group enjoy different degrees of popularity and most fans claim to have a favourite (Nagaike, 2012). Indeed, when students I have interviewed or taught say that they like an idol group, they are invariably asked by others which member of the idol group is their favourite.

Karlin (2012) explains that the idols who belong to Johnny's are produced 'with the aim of achieving affective identification by appealing to the female audience's desire to support and to foster the success of their favourite male idol' (p. 80). Johnny's recruits young boys and trains them in singing and dancing. After this training, they become members of Johnny's Jr. and work as back dancers for the older members until they are ready to debut in a group. Once a new group has

officially debuted, it will release singles regularly and receive the full promotional support of the production company. The production company is closely attuned to the fan community and organizes the members of Johnny's Jr. into groups that are supported by the idols' fans. This creates a system that sponsors and supports the groups with the close involvement of fans from the start, and resembles the relationship that exists between a mother and her child, with the fans feeling a sense of propriety over their protégés. In fact, Johnny's fans strongly believe they know the true personality of the idol and reject the view that these stars are artificially produced.

It is very important for male idols to retain a youthful image even though many members of the most popular groups are now in their thirties or forties. According to Nagaike (2012), one of the most frequent words used by both women and men to describe male idols is *kawaii* (cute) and my interview and focus group work has confirmed this. The Japanese word *shōnen* that is also used to describe them implies both youth and androgyny. A *shōnen* is a man-to-be and so his identity cannot be considered on the same basis as that of a mature man because the *shōnen* is not yet a man in the symbolic realm. *Shōnen*, with their lack of mature masculinity, do not possess many sexual connotations, which makes them unthreatening to teenage fans (as is the case with Western boy bands mentioned above). Like Lieb (2013), Glasspool (2012) speculates that 'the attraction of this young and pretty type, particularly for adolescents, may be that it provides a "safer" form of masculinity' (p. 119). The image of an immature male also enables female fans to transform the idols into fantasies, which can possibly be interpreted as 'a subconscious female denial of the patriarchal, masculine male' (Nagaike, 2012, p. 104).

For these reasons, avoidance of sexual scandals and overtly sexual images is of utmost importance among male idols. Those who are married tend to do so after they have passed the peak of their popularity. An exception is the very popular idol Kimura Takuya of the highly successful group SMAP who married at the

height of SMAP's popularity. He has been able to maintain his image as a *shōnen*, even after the birth of two daughters, by never making any reference to his family and by the other members of SMAP acting as if he is not a married father. Fans can believe he is still a *shōnen* because this is what they want to believe. Female fans create their own narratives about their favourite idols and often appoint themselves as the fan 'in charge of' that idol (*tantō*). Moreover, they refer to them as *uchi*, which implies a member of their family like a husband, a boyfriend, or a son. Such feelings of closeness to and familiarity with their idols are essential to fans.

### **The functions and duties of idols**

Whereas most stars in Western countries are popular because of their outstanding personal attributes, Japanese idols typically depict images that are fairly standard in terms of appearance, ability and charm. They should be only a little above average so as not to alienate the audience. In Japanese, this characteristic is referred to as *tōshindai* (life-sized), which means they can perform as familiar personalities, close to the audience, and not as remote and outstanding stars. They function as companions for adolescent fans by emphasizing the importance of interpersonal relations over personal achievements. They also provide an imagined sense of intimacy and a confirmation of interconnectedness. Idols are instructed never to reject those who approach them as long as the relationship is professional in nature. Idols are also encouraged to share their youthful visions and efforts with their audiences to create a feeling of peer solidarity that they are growing up together.

To build up this feeling of intimacy and solidarity with their fans, Japanese idols perform the following duties:

- Participating in handshaking ceremonies
- Attending get-togethers with fans
- Being models for photo shoots for fan amateur photographers

- Corresponding with fans
- Attending autograph signing ceremonies
- Recording messages for hotlines
- Providing material for websites
- Chatting online with fans through the Internet
- Functioning as spokespersons on adolescent lifestyles, values and social issues (drugs, using public transportation)

### ***Jimusho***

All of these activities are organized and controlled by the *jimusho*, which are small in size, and do not have access to a great deal of capital, but have great influence over entertainment market. The *jimusho* system is a closed network of small companies, most of which have a long history in the entertainment industry. Most of the senior people working today helped produce *enka* and *kayōkyoku* singers in the 1960s and 1970s (Marx, 2012). Three key factors contribute to the power of the *jimusho*: their close control over their performers, their ownership of associated copyrights and, above all, their organization into hierarchical *keiretsu* (business groups). Although there appear to be a lot of small companies working in competition, the reality is that the *jimusho* at the top of a *keiretsu* makes the decisions about which celebrities work on which projects and so the affiliated companies operate as a single corporate entity. Operating through this structure of loosely related small companies allows the main company to avoid paying high taxes or attracting too much attention from the authorities. It also means audiences are unaware of how centralized their control is.

The Japanese entertainment industry is an oligopoly because only the top *jimusho* are able to place talent in high-profile work. There is not an open casting system. If the media do not want to use a new star suggested by the *jimusho*, the agency can threaten to withdraw all of its idols from use by those media (Marx, 2012). Moreover, the top management companies have the greatest power because they control the celebrities who are most in demand. This means that

TV production teams have to ask these *jimusho* which of their stars they want to appear on a show rather than picking the performers and asking for their participation. An additional factor that increases the power of many of the oldest and most powerful *jimusho* in Japan is their apparent connection to the world of organized crime (Aoyagi, 2005; Marx, 2012).

The extent of the *jimusho*'s control over the idols under contract to them can be seen through the long list of different duties the *jimusho* perform. They scout new performers, train them in singing, dancing, acting, and modelling. They schedule their performers' daily activities, book TV appearances, negotiate contracts with record labels and other media organizations, run fan clubs, carry out PR work, and coordinate live shows and concert tours.

The idols work as full-time employees and receive a fixed monthly salary regardless of the profits they generate. While trainees who do not show long-term potential are dropped, successful performers can negotiate a higher salary when they renew their contract. Since the *jimusho* invest money in their trainees without initial returns, the wage-like strategy does not pay off until the performers become profitable. Most performers, however, do not become profitable and the *jimusho* take a big chance when they start to train adolescents. The *jimusho* also face the risk that trained performers who become very popular will want to leave because the *jimusho* business model relies on long-term proprietorship to recover the costs of training. To discourage early departures, contracts include high financial penalties for early dissolution. There is also widespread use of blacklisting which leaves such renegade performers unwelcome in the entertainment industry. This prevents other management companies from signing up the newly available idol. Other firms seem to respect the blacklisting decision out of sympathy or 'for fear of encouraging *jimusho*-switching among their own performers' (p. 48).

### **SMAP as a case study**

The extent of *jimusho* control over its stars can be illustrated through the story of SMAP (Sports Music Assemble People), one of the most famous male idol groups belonging to Johnny's. They were formed in 1998 and had a fresh, young, clean, and healthy image. The youngest was only 11 at that time and the average age of the group members was fourteen. As the members of SMAP matured, they have been able to attract a wide range of fans over the years, from school children to middle aged women. They are presented not just as singers, but also as dancers, and as media celebrities. They use talented songwriters and their first major hit in 1998 was "*Yozora no Mukōni*" (The Other Side of the Starry Sky) with lyrics written by Suga Shikao and music by Kawamura Yūka. Their 2003 hit "*Sekai ni Hitotsu Dake no Hana*" (Only One Flower in the World) was written by Makihara Noriyuki. The lyrics of both of these songs projected a mature emotional image. "*Yozora*" looks back wistfully on the early days of a relationship and "*Sekai ni Hitotsu Dake no Hana*" expresses the post-bubble sensibility when the group sings that it is fine not to be number one (Stevens, 2008).

SMAP were in the news at the end of December 2015 when it was suddenly announced that the band, now well into their 40s, was breaking up and then again in January 2016, when they appeared on their weekly show dressed in black and bowed deeply in apology for trying to leave their agency. 'The apology was not only addressed to their fans, for rumours that they were considering splitting up, but also to the founder of the agency, 84-year-old Johnny Kitagawa, one of the most powerful and controversial figures in Japan's entertainment industry' (Oi, 2016). Kitagawa was behind 232 Number 1 Singles between 1974 and 2010, which gives an indication of the virtual monopoly he has had on the creation of Japanese boy bands. The SMAP members, trapped in this situation, have been likened to Japan's corporate employees, who are unable to disobey or leave their employers. Japan has a very high level of media saturation through its huge newspaper circulation, large number of magazines, and daily TV viewing

and Japan's idols and celebrities are central to these media. Performers such as SMAP 'offer the means of organizing the audience to consume the products of their sponsors' (Karlin, 2012, p. 88) and so they are caught up in this business web spun by their *jimusho* and corporate interests.

### **Ways in which the *jimusho* generate profits**

The *jimusho* retain control of master and publishing rights by paying for the song writing and recording for their artists, which also gives them control over the work's duplication and third-party use. By holding all the rights, they are directly entitled to the profits from record sales, which is a significant source of revenue. Some *jimusho* (such as Johnny's and Up Front Agency) have formed their own record labels to prevent the large record labels from profiting from their artists. Ownership of publishing rights allows the *jimusho* to receive additional income from the karaoke business. The relationship between the *jimusho* and the karaoke industry has become mutually beneficial. Aoyagi (2005) explains: 'Socialization in *karaoke* bars has become an essential part of leisure-time activities in Japan, especially among young people, thereby contributing to the transmission and thus popularization of idol songs' (p. 7). Meanwhile, the ratings of songs requested at karaoke plazas are closely monitored by the *jimusho* to evaluate whether their performers should be promoted further or not.

The most lucrative activities of idols, however, are corporate and product sponsorship and promotion. An appearance in an advertising campaign for a major corporation or retail chain will bring in a high income for the *jimusho* for a relatively small amount of work compared with the amount of work and investment that goes into making a music hit. Because advertising work is so profitable, *jimusho* do not allow their performers to be 'controversial, unattractive or disruptive' (Marx, 2012, p. 51). *Jimusho* stand to lose a lot if one of their stars is involved in a scandal and no longer has a 'clean' image.

## **Intertextuality**

If an idol or celebrity is publicly disgraced, this has particularly far-reaching consequences in Japan where idols and celebrities 'create an intertextual web of meanings that link forms and content together to form new meanings. In film, television, music, and advertising, meaning is contained not within individual texts, but rather across a network of textual relations' (Galbraith & Karlin, 2012, p. 10). This high degree of intertextuality is achieved by idols performing across genres and platforms in the entertainment industry. To enjoy Japanese television, the audience needs to recognize the relations between texts or past performances, and such knowledge of past roles contributes to the interpretative process. When both the real and onscreen selves of idols are known to audiences, their televisual pleasure is enhanced, and their desire for more information about the private lives of celebrities becomes a means of increasing publicity. The dense intertextual nature of the Japanese media world also makes it difficult for non-Japanese audiences to appreciate Japanese media to the same extent as Japanese audiences.

This characteristic, however, is far from unique to Japan. Henry Jenkins (2006) has called the flow of content across multiple media platforms transmedia entertainment. It is part of a cultural shift that he describes as convergence culture: an amalgamation of media convergence, participatory culture, and collective intelligence. This is a new aesthetic 'that has emerged in response to media convergence—one that places new demands on consumers and depends on the active participation of knowledge communities' (p. 21). Moreover, consumers are expecting more from popular culture than ever before as they learn how to participate in such knowledge cultures and 'to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content' (p. 3). While intertextuality places greater demand on popular culture consumers (through the complexity of transmedia entertainment), consumers are also placing greater demands on media through their hunger for complexity and enjoyment of being part of a community (p. 259).

### **Multiple CD purchasing and fan exploitation**

Since the late 1990s, CD sales, and especially singles, have declined in Japan. This is largely due to the worldwide transition to digital distribution. The success of idol groups like AKB48 and Arashi is therefore surprising, but can be explained by the way in which AKB48 are promoted as 'idols that you can meet' (Galbraith & Karlin, 2012, p. 20) through their daily performances at the AKB48 Theatre in Akihabara and other branches in Japan. In this way, they have been able to establish a loyal fan base around the country.

The practice of selling the same product multiple times has also contributed enormously to their CD sales success. They have sold CDs that come with a variety of posters and this has encouraged fans to buy multiple copies of the CD in order to collect a set of posters. However, there has been criticism of this practice as it is seen to be in violation of Japanese antitrust laws. Other CD promotion campaigns have included 'handshake events' in which fans who buy a CD can shake hands with one member of the group. If they want to shake hands with more than one member, they have to buy more CDs. This manipulation of the affection of fans aims to persuade them that they are demonstrating their love through purchasing CDs. According to Oricon (2016), AKB48 and its branches dominated the singles chart in 2015 for the fifth year running. The top three CD album sales were by male idol groups, but AKB48 took fourth place. The high sales figures demonstrate AKB 48's commercial success, but with fans buying multiple copies, CD sales may exaggerate the popularity of the group. CD sales are not an accurate measure of the number of people actually listening to their music. These fan practices are not exclusive to AKB48; they are common in the Japanese music industry. The male idol duo Kinki Kids also had a lot of chart success that many experts think is due to fans buying multiple copies of their CDs. Interestingly, the fans of AKB48 typically describe themselves as 'supporters' rather than 'fans' (Galbraith & Karlin, 2012, p. 21).

Another unusual practice carried out by AKB48 is the organization of elections in which fans vote for the most popular member. Again, fans have to purchase a CD in order to get a ticket that allows them to vote. Fans can also vote multiple times if they buy multiple CDs. In 2011 it was found that the system was being abused by people bulk buying CDs and organizing sales of voter tickets through online auctions. This revelation has led to fans questioning the fairness of the system and insisting on one vote per person. Some argue that the system allows fans to express their love for their favourite idol by buying many votes. However, this logic reinforces the materialistic and commodified nature of human relations in such a system where love is expressed through money.

Johnny's has also been criticized for exploiting fans. When tickets for a live show were limited, fans had to pay for a ticket in advance then wait to see if they had been chosen in a lottery. If they were unlucky, their money was refunded only after they paid a fee. People also had to pay to join the official fan club before they could apply for the lottery and many complained to the Consumer Affairs Agency about the unfairness of this system.

### **Reasons underlying the appeal of idols**

Japanese culture regards adolescence as a life stage during which individuals are expected to explore themselves as they socialize with peers. Idols represent this life stage through their images and narratives. They develop social and emotional ties with their fans by projecting themselves as companions and not as super stars. Idols gradually transform their images from innocent novices to experienced actors and adolescents can grow up together with their favourite idols through consumption of idol performances and idol endorsed goods, services, and media products (Aoyagi, 2005).

To become a socially competent adult, one has to accept and adapt to culturally defined roles and establish one's position with respect to gender, class, status and nationality. Japanese gain a strong sense of self by approximating ideal role

models, joining groups, and by positioning themselves in relation to others. This is because of their orientation towards the cooperative aspects of relationships. Because Japanese put emphasis on group conformity, they focus on keeping up with others rather than trying to stand out. Group harmony is of utmost importance and so personal differences are framed on the basis of interpersonal similarity. Herein lies the strong appeal of male and female idol groups.

### **Current attitudes of young Japanese to idols**

In terms of music genre, the music performed by idol groups can be subsumed under the category J-pop. In music stores like Tower Records, however, there are separate sections for CDs by Johnny's groups and by large female idol groups, such as Akimoto Yasushi's AKB48 and its Japanese sister groups (HKT48, SKB48, NMB48). The music of male idols that do not belong to Johnny's, such as EXILE and J Soul Brothers, can be found in the J-pop sections. In the Tsutaya rental shop, all current idol group music is classified as J-pop, with no distinction for Johnny's or female idol groups. There is, however, a small separate section for idols from the past that includes famous singers like Matsuda Seiko.

Significantly, none of the 82 students interviewed about their musical preferences (48 female and 34 male) was devoted exclusively to one idol group. All of them enjoyed other artists and genres of music in addition to idols. There had been a shift in preferences over the three-year interval, which reflects the speed with which the pop music industry changes in Japan. This section will begin by reporting the most popular idols at the time of the interviews in 2015 and 2012, and then move to discussion of the concept of cuteness and other factors that influence the appeal of idols to Japanese young audiences.

Several female and male students interviewed in 2015 said they liked the two most popular male idol groups at that time, the 19-member EXILE Tribe and their

7-member spin-off group 三代目 (Sandaime) J Soul Brothers. These vocal and dance groups are independent, not part of Johnny's, which is part of their appeal for several of the students. The leader of EXILE is Hiro. Although he retired from performing in 2013, he is still the group's producer. Another group that is currently popular with both females and males belongs to Johnny's and is called KIS-MY-FT2 (*Kisumai* or Kiss My Two Feet). It has two sections: the cool section and the *busaiku* (plain and clumsy) section, which will be discussed in more detail below.

No students admitted to being fans of AKB48 at the time of the interviews carried out in 2015, but one boy had been a fan when he was in middle school (12-15 years old) and another when he was in high school (15 -18 years old). They each had their favourite AKB48 member at that time and the weekly television show hosted by AKB48 members helped them get to know the individual members. However, they clearly felt they had outgrown AKB48 fandom now they were university students.

AKB48 had been far more popular when I interviewed students in 2012. One of the more devoted AKB48 fans was a male student who said that he liked listening to female voices because they helped him to relax. He especially liked AKB48 and his favourite performer was Takahashi Minami because she was so cute and tried hard. He had bought AKB48 DVDs to watch the group perform. He also liked to sing along to AKB48 songs and had learned the lyrics. He was interested in reading the comments that others wrote on YouTube about AKB48. He said that about 50 percent were positive and 50 percent negative, so it seems that YouTube public opinion was divided over AKB48 at that time.

Another male student interviewed in 2012 enjoyed AKB48, but he preferred Korean girl idol groups like Kara and Girls' Generation because, in his opinion, they were sexier owing to their fashion style (tight-fitting costumes and very short skirts). Two girls interviewed in 2012 liked watching videos of idol groups, such

as Arashi, EXILE, and AKB48, in which the members dance. Watching AKB48 on video was particularly fun for one of them because she was the same age as the members, and she thought they performed well, and they made her happy. Also, their dance steps were good to memorize and practice, which shows how their skill was not seen as beyond the reach of their fans. She was not the only student to mention how AKB48's dance steps were fun to learn. Another enthusiastic fan of AKB48 liked them the most of the three female idol groups she followed. Her reasons for liking them were that she thought their music and songs were very good, but mostly it was that they were so cute, and she liked "very cute girls". However, she said that if she sees them, she wants to be like them and she feels she has to try to diet. (This was a very slim young woman, who laughed as she said this, but who appeared to be genuinely dissatisfied with her body shape when she compared herself with the members of AKB48.) The other female idols she followed were members of an older group called Morning Musume, and Perfume, a technopop group who she considered to be the best artists. The most enthusiastic fans of AKB48 that I heard about in 2012 were undoubtedly the male friends of an interviewee who would go to an AKB48 concert four times a month to shake hands with the members, and presumably purchase CDs in advance each time in order to do so.

Another female student interviewed in 2012 explained that she admired female idols because she liked "cute females". She was also a dedicated fan of Morning Musume and had recently gone to a concert to mark the "graduation" of one of the members. She was attracted to the group because she liked their dancing, their performance, and the expressions on their faces. This student was unusual in that she wrote and posted comments on YouTube. Of all the 82 students I interviewed, only two (this young woman and a young male fan of the Backstreet Boys) had posted comments on YouTube. Both wrote about a group they felt strongly attached to or moved by. In the case of this young woman, she started to write comments after watching a particularly moving documentary about AKB48 on YouTube about which people had written "some bad things". Other

people had written good comments and so a battle had taken place. She felt strongly enough to join in the debate and wrote comments of her own. She experienced a thrill at being part of an international online community that supported AKB48 and Morning Musume. (Morning Musume were more popular with the online international fans than AKB48 at that time, according to her experience.) In her opinion, fans of AKB48 tended to be new fans and so younger and less mature than fans of Morning Musume. This could be seen from the ways that AKB48 fans sometimes wrote bad things about Morning Musume, but Morning Musume fans, who had probably been fans for longer, did not write bad things about AKB48. Her favourite member of AKB48 was Oshima Yuko, who is “very funny” and “not very feminine and her performance is so great”. Interestingly, she said that she didn’t like idols who were “feminine and ... too cute”.

The appeal of idol groups like AKB48 is clearly very broad. Some young women admire the cute appearance of members while others do not find this appealing. Some think they are very talented performers, while others are busy learning the dance moves and songs and so see them as not beyond their own skill level. Being part of a community of fans also seems to bring its own rewards.

The top-selling Johnny’s male idol group in 2015, called Arashi, was mentioned in one discussion as an example of an idol group whose videos are controlled by their management agency, not as a group whose performance or music they liked. Arashi was also mentioned by two female students in 2015 as a group they could not take seriously because everything about the group was under the control of their agency. Groups like EXILE and J Soul Brothers were seen as more independent than groups belonging to Johnny’s. Arashi had been more popular in 2012, when many male and female students said they liked them, especially for their dancing, their cool style, and their cute appearance. Another popular male idol band was Mr. Children. One student reported in 2012 that her mother paid for tickets for them to attend Johnny’s groups live concerts together

twice a year. This shows how different generations of female fans could indeed derive pleasure from these young male idols from a motherly perspective as well as a potential girlfriend perspective, as was described above.

When members of idol groups like EXILE get older (about 40 in the case of male groups, but much younger in the case of females), they are expected to 'graduate'. This means that they move on to other activities such as acting or being a DJ or a TV host. The term used in Japan is *sotsugyō*, which is the verb used for completion of university, high school and even elementary school and kindergarten. The students I interviewed confirmed that for Japanese people graduation means that the group members who leave are moving on to another stage in their career. They are not simply giving up the group or getting too old. Use of this verb adds positive connotations and there are ceremonies held to mark the occasion with dignity. There is also a sense of continuity that can be derived from the way that a group like EXILE can continue to exist after members have left. The name and the *jimusho* remain even though the performers change. There is both regeneration and continuity.

The students interviewed also explained how Japanese people like to watch the process of celebrities and idols becoming more beautiful and professional or polished performers. For example, when new AKB48 members are first recruited, they are not particularly beautiful, but as they do more work, such as modelling for a magazine or making commercials for an apparel brand, people enjoy seeing them getting better at their work until later they are ready to 'graduate'. Japanese people derive pleasure from watching this process of idols being moved on to new work after they have served their apprenticeship and done their job. Observing this process is made possible by the cross-platform ubiquity of Japanese idols in the media and enhances feelings of intimacy and familiarity with idols and celebrities.

The transmedial presence of idols can work in multiple directions. A male student explained how he became a fan of Kisumai when his attention was drawn to Fujigaya Taisuke who acted in a TV drama called *Risō no Musuko*, aired in January-March, 2012 on NTV. Fujigaya played the role of Mifune Kengo and came across as very cool. When the student searched for information on the actor and found he was a member of Kisumai, he started to follow the group because he likes the style of the members as well as their music.

Kisumai belongs to Johnny's and has seven members, but four of them are called *busaiku*. This expression means plain, homely, awkward, or clumsy, and not so cool. These four members are not as cool or as good looking as most Johnny's idols, but they are popular because they try hard to do their best. Japanese people like to support people who try very hard. They admire and respect their persistence and hard work. The female students who liked Kisumai explained that the three members who are not *busaiku* are usually the centre of attention. Although all seven members look similar in that they are young, sophisticated and smile a lot, the four *busaiku* members perform as back dancers and they wear different outfits and are seen as second-class. Their music is fun and they dance very hard and they win hearts in this way.

The respect shown to the *busaiku* is related to the very powerful and pervasive concept of *gambaru* in Japanese society. This is a fundamental Japanese value. Trying and working hard is admired more than innate skill, talent, or beauty. This notion came up in discussion of Western as well as Japanese artists. For example, Ed Sheeran was admired for the way he worked hard to learn to dance for his video "Thinking Out Loud" (2014). A female student explained: "He tries to dance very well like he practised a lot, and he's not perfect, but it's good ... it moves". A Japanese group that drew respect in a similar way was E-girls, the sister unit of EXILE, who were seen as very good dancers whose style is modern and *hageshii* (energetic). They are very athletic and put all their energy into their performance. These performers serve as examples for others to emulate. Their

level of performance is seen as within the reach of everyone who is prepared to put in the same level of effort.

### **Japanese idols' dancing style**

The most popular idol groups among the students interviewed were those that dance as well as sing. EXILE and J Soul Brothers were considered very skilful, especially when dancing in formation, and this was the main attraction of their performances. Interestingly, K-pop dance music videos were said to have a lot of “awesome”, highly synchronized dancing, but it was thought that this was to impress audiences and sell videos. Whereas K-pop dancing is only for audiences to watch, Japanese idol dance is for ordinary fans to imitate, and learning through imitation of a master is central to both Japanese fine and martial arts.

Students explained how Japanese people use mainly the top part of their body when they dance and there is a lot of hand and arm movement, whereas Westerners use the whole body when they dance, especially their hips, so the image they create with their body is different. Examples that students shared to illustrate this point were a video of EXILE's dancing for a Pocky commercial, where the audience all perform the arm movements together with the group. The students participating in the interview all knew and performed the arm movements spontaneously, too. The same was true of the J Soul Brothers' “Share Happi” video. Female groups, like Perfume, were also said to use their arms a lot.

One other important aspect of idols' dancing is the image of masculinity or femininity that dancing can project. EXILE were seen as masculine when dancing because they were “very good performers”. E-girls, who have the same producer, and were generally acknowledged to be very good at dancing, were described as “really professional”, but beautiful and cute, at the same time. Japanese notions of masculinity, femininity, cuteness, beauty and coolness are very fluid and more

complex than they may appear at first. They will be examined in the following section.

### **The Japanese concept of *kawaii* (cuteness) and its relationship to *bijin* (beauty) and *kakui* (coolness)**

During the course of my interview and focus group work, I came to appreciate the breadth and complexity of the notion of *kawaii* in the aesthetic values of my student informers. The word *kawaii* is uttered spontaneously in a wide variety of situations. It was one of the most frequently uttered exclamations and qualifiers during the interview and focus group discussions. Students were usually surprised when I asked for clarification of the meaning of *kawaii* when it was used in different contexts. They explained how so many things can be described as *kawaii* in daily life by giving examples, such as a small animal, a pair of shoes or boots, a delicious-looking sponge cake, or even a small girl falling over. As the term *kawaii* has spread internationally through Japan's exporting of *anime*, *manga*, pop idols and teen fashion, it is important to emphasize that it cannot be adequately translated as cuteness, which has connotations of childishness in Western cultures. The following section will therefore explain the multiple facets of its meaning and the role it plays in Japanese appreciation of music artists and their performances. The words "cute" and "pretty" are used in this discussion because the students used them as a translation of *kawaii* when they were speaking in English. As will be seen, however, *kawaii* encompasses a far broader spectrum of meaning and plays an important role in the aesthetic appreciation of popular music performances.

For young women, one basic meaning of *kawaii* is an attractive young woman that they can be like and that they want to be like. The woman should not be so beautiful or skilful that it is impossible for them to be like her one day. The actress Ichihara Satomi was given as an example. They concurred that, with respect to Western women, Katy Perry is "*kawaii*" and Angelina Jolly is "*bijin*". AKB48 were seen to be "only cute" because they are not such professional

performers (compared with E-girls). In fact, some students believed that AKB48 members try not to be too professional in order to maintain their cute image. One female judged them to go too far and described them as childish (*osana*), while a male described them as “cute” rather than “sexy”, unlike foreign artists who are “sexy”. For others, the style of cute idols like AKB48 is one that makes the public want to protect them (which was demonstrated as wanting to put their arms around them). Students were shocked and upset when shown the opening scenes of the AKB48 video for the song “Ponytail *to shushu*” (2011), where members of the group are naked, getting showered and changed in a girl’s locker room. It is filmed in a way that borders on the pornographic. This was not how Japanese idols should behave, or rather, be treated in their view. And this is not the way they behave on stage and when greeting their fans. Watching Western female artists behave in overtly sexual ways was expected and not shocking or upsetting, but for Japanese idols to be shown in this way was beyond the pale because *kawaii* contains the notion of purity and innocence.

For the women, some foreign artists can be both *kawaii* and sexy. Rita Ora was described as both “cute” and “sexy” when a group of four female students watched her for the first time. Other Western female artists that students considered to be *kawaii* are Ariana Grande, Carly Rae Jepsen, and Avril Lavigne. Katy Perry is very well known and was described as having “very cute eyes”. Her video “Roar” (2013) was described as “cute”. “California Gurls” (2010) uses a lot of colour and Katy Perry wears pop-style short skirts, which are very colourful, and so the effect is also seen as cute. Taylor Swift in her video “Shake it Off” (2014) was also described as “pretty” and “girlie” (*ona no ko rashii*). Curiously, Lady Gaga was described as *kawaii* when she plays the role of a young man in the video “Yoü and I” (2011) where she “looks really like a boy”. This recalls the earlier discussion of the appeal of *shōnen*, androgynous young men.

To understand the range of connotations that the Japanese notion of cuteness encompasses, it is helpful to trace the origins of the word and the culture of

cuteness that has developed in Japan since the 1970s. Richie (2003) explains that cuteness is important in the Japanese value system and is considered a virtue. One reason for this is that there is less pressure on Japanese youth to grow out of childhood and rush into adulthood than in the West, owing to the tendency to regard a childish spirit as more virtuous than a mature one. This attitude is derived from Confucianism, together with the Japanese insistence on goodness, integrity and purity of spirit. Whereas in the West maturity is linked to independence and the rights of the individual, in Japan, following the Confucian model, it is seen as the ability 'to cooperate well in a group, to accept compromises, to fulfil obligations to parents, employers, and so on, and carry out social responsibilities' (Kinsella, 1995, p. 242-243). This explains why teenage rebellion in Japan takes the form of childish fashion styles and behaviour in resistance to adulthood and the restrictions on freedom that adult life entails. Cute fashion seeks to perpetuate childhood because it is seen as a place of individual freedom unattainable in adult society. Botz-Bornstein (2011) comments: '*kawaii* seems to remain the option for women who have decided to remain children' (p. xii).

Thus, in contrast to Western young people, who act in a sexually provocative way to demonstrate their maturity and independence, Japanese youngsters act in a pre-sexual and vulnerable way to emphasize their immaturity and inability to carry out their social responsibilities. This explains the students' disapproval of female Japanese idols dressing, dancing, or behaving in overtly sexual ways and their acceptance and lack of negative judgement of Western artists' overt sexual behaviour. This was further illustrated in a group discussion of the dance version of Justin Bieber's video for "Sorry" (2015). Students said that the female Western dancers are acceptable and fun to watch, but it would not be acceptable for Japanese female dancers to perform the same style of hip grinding dance.

Kinsella (1995) lists the qualities that the Japanese word *kawaii* celebrates: 'sweet, adorable, innocent, pure, simple, genuine, gentle, vulnerable, weak, and

inexperienced social behaviour and physical appearances' (p. 220). Cute style saturated the media in the 1970s–1980s and by 1992, *kawaii* was the most widely used and habitual word in Japanese. *Kawaii* is a derivation of a word that meant 'shy' or 'embarrassed' and secondary meanings were 'pathetic', 'vulnerable', 'darling', 'loveable', and 'small'. The modern meaning of *kawaii* still has the nuance of 'pitiful' and the word *kawaisō*, which is derived from *kawaii*, means 'pathetic' and 'pitiable'. This explains why the example of a child falling over is seen as *kawaii* by the students I interviewed and the appeal of the *busaiku* members of Kisumai.

The modern meanings of *kawaii* and the associated cute culture emerged at about the same time in the 1970s that a cute handwriting craze swept Japan started by schoolgirls using round chubby characters. Small cartoon hearts, stars, and faces were inserted in the text and despite being banned in schools, this new writing style spread in the 1980s as it was adopted by Japanese magazines, comics, computer software, product packaging and advertising. Soon all kinds of cute loveable goods were produced and characters were created and used under license to sell goods and services. The aim was to give personality and presence to otherwise meaningless consumer goods, making them more attractive to buyers.

Hjorth (2003) explains how this use of *kawaii* features to familiarize new commodities and technologies has been common practice in the material culture of post-war Japan. With the introduction of the *keitai* (mobile phone), use of *kawaii* features extended into cyberspace, which has become colonized by cute characters. Moreover, cute capital has spread into various localized forms in the Asia-Pacific region, where the use of cute characters to domesticate new technologies has become popular among young and old (Hjorth, 2008).

Idols, especially, were expected to be cute. During the 1980s, most idols, male and female, were launched when they were between the ages of fourteen and

sixteen. Fuji Television's programme *Yūyake Nyan Nyan* (Sunset Kittens) is thought to have started this trend in 1985. The programme was hosted by schoolgirls called the Onyanko Club (Kitten Club) and consisted of games, music, and competitions for schoolgirls to become new hosts. Akimoto Yasushi, their producer, later created AKB48 along similar lines.

Other important attributes of the cute aesthetic are frailty and vulnerability. Because physical weakness and defencelessness are a part of both childhood and old age, the elderly can be just as cute as infants. This explains why in the 1990s, the 100-year-old twin sisters, commonly known as Kin-san and Gin-san, became famous nationwide for their television appearances and were seen as both *kawaii* (cute) and *kawaisō* (pitiful). This throws further light on why the students' attitude to the *busaiku* members of the group Kisumai is one of indulgence and support.

By the 1990s, the cute style had lost its appeal as a form of rebellion and a new image of adolescent femaleness emerged in the 1990s. This was the *gyaru* (gal), a figure of an assertive and self-centred young woman who is in no hurry to get married and who has a number of different boyfriends (including older men) who service her various needs. The notion of cuteness has not disappeared, however, and serves as a standard by which other qualities are evaluated. For example, when discussing whether a performer is beautiful (*bijin*), a group of female students explained that it is useful to make comparisons based on a scale. They gave the following example: if a woman were to be given a score out of 100 for the attractiveness of her face, she will score about 60 if she is *kawaii*. She would need to score 90 to be considered *bijin*. At the same time, if she scored 90, she could not be considered *kawaii*. Whether a woman is *bijin* or not, according to this same group of young women, has a lot to do with the shape of the nose (which should be straight), she should also be slightly above average height, and with upright body posture. Moreover, *bijin* is a word used for adults with a mature, curvaceous figure. They agreed that Beyoncé is *bijin*, but Carly

Rae Jepsen is *kawaii*. A student demonstrated the broad meaning of *kawaii* by making a circle in front of her with her arms showing that it encompasses many things. Something or someone that is *kawaii* inspires maternal feelings, a desire to protect (*bosei o kusuguru*). It pulls at your heartstrings (*kokoro ga hikareta*). It can also be something small and adorable that you want to hold close to your chest in both hands.

These very positive connotations extend to young men who are described as *kawaii*. For example, the very popular Korean boy band SHINEE members are attractive and “cute” because they have nice-shaped faces with big round eyes. EXILE member Takahiro is *kawaii* because female fans want to mother him. *Kawaii* men are not cool, but they are attractive because they are not too tall, have very big eyes, a cute smile, and are always smiling. Their manner and mannerisms are cute and speaking in a local dialect can add to their appeal. Although they look like girls, they are not seen as gay or camp, just pretty and natural (with no cosmetics). In other words, they are *shōnen* who are attractive because they seem so young and unthreatening.

Male idols who are not *kawaii* are *kakui* (cool) and tend to be admired by the boys more than by the girls. Examples of cool groups that boy informants gave are the bands B'z and UVERWorld, whose “lyrics, rhythm, face, everything is *kakui*”. They sing about finding courage and about young people’s troubles (*nayami*). For the young man who said this, and for other idol fans, identifying with the music and lyrics is just one factor. Their “cool” appeal lies in the whole package of their manner, views, physical appearance and fashion style. Cool individuals that were mentioned were Fujigaya, one of the three members of Kisumai who are not *busaiku*, and a member of another Johnny’s group called NEWS, who has “a lovely face” and is not “a wild type of man”. He says cool things, he’s a “narcissist” (meaning he is self-centred), he’s fun, and he wears very colourful *hakama* (traditional Japanese-style men’s clothing). Male idols clearly serve as role models for these Japanese young men in the same way that

female idols serve as role models for young Japanese women, a point that seems to have been overlooked by the other scholars cited.

### **Virtual Idols and the Vocaloid Hatsune Miku**

Hatsune Miku (初音ミク) is currently the most popular Japanese idol performer ever, having released over a hundred thousand recordings and even reaching number 7 on the US iTunes charts with “World is Mine”. She is also an outstanding example of transmedial flow in and beyond Japan. Her first appearance in the US was on *The Late Show With David Letterman* in October 2014, and she was the opening act for Lady Gaga’s spring tour in 2014. Her success is amazing in view of the fact that she does not even exist. She is a 3-D hologram and a type of vocal synthesizer software (developed by Crypton Future Media, Inc. using ‘Vocaloid’ technology produced by the Yamaha Corporation).

Hatsune Miku is not the first of her kind, however. Yuki Terai was a virtual idol who appeared in 1997 and was commodified through conventional consumer products like CDs, music videos, DVDs and in print. She was also sold as the digital data used to produce these consumer products. Kutsugi Kenichi created Yuki Terai in Shade, a 3D modeling package published by eFrontier. The company marketed Yuki not only as a virtual idol in conventional media, but also ‘sold’ her as a package for use in Poser, an application designed to produce realistic 3D images and animations of simulated bodies (Black, 2012, p. 216). Consumers were able to buy the raw digital data they needed to produce their own versions of her. In this way, a virtual idol became a form of merchandise.

This introduced a new way for audiences to interact with the entertainer. They became prosumers by producing, modifying and personalizing media. Black (2012) emphasizes the connection between idols and *otaku*. The term *otaku* is used to refer to people (usually male) who are reclusive and follow certain interests obsessively. An *aidoru otaku* is an idol fan who shows excessive loyalty to the idol of his choice (this relationship is generally between male fans and

female idols). Virtual idols satisfy the several common *otaku* fascinations: computer and animation technology, femininity, and the recycling of media fragments (Black, 2012).

However, virtual idols appeal not only to *otaku*, they have wide appeal among idol fans in general as can be seen in the case of Eguchi Aimi, who caused excitement and amusement when she was suddenly introduced into the AKB48 troupe in a TV commercial in 2011. It was revealed soon after that her creation was a publicity stunt. The virtual idol was created from actual AKB48 members: her hair, body shape, face shape, eyes, eyebrows, and nose were selected from AKB48 members and mapped on to Aimi's face and she was given the voice of another AKB48 member. A website was created that allowed visitors to create their own virtual AKB48 performer by combining physical features from AKB48 living members. Living idols supplied the database from which the virtual idols could be created.

Hatsune Miku differs from these earlier virtual idols in several ways. Her voice is more flexible than that of Eguchi Aimi, because it is based on samples of the voice actress Saki Fujita and Vocaloid 3 software, which enables her to sing in both Japanese and English. Vocaloid is a software synthesizer that allows a library of generic voice recordings to be shaped into words, which can be matched to notes to produce an original vocal performance by manipulating a user interface. When the original Vocaloid software was improved in 2008, its popularity increased and Crypton Future Media, a Japanese company, started offering the "Vocaloid Character Vocal Series", which presents Vocaloid voices as manga-style characters, the most famous of which is Hatsune Miku.

Hatsune Miku was therefore originally depicted on a software package as a blue-haired manga character created by the manga artist Kei Garō, not a real person like Eguchi Aimi, and this image continues to resonate with fans today. Her name means "first sound" (初音 read as *hatsune*) and "future" (未来 read as *miku*). She

is attributed an age, height, weight, and musical tastes. She gained popularity in Japan largely through users of Nico Nico Dōga (a Japanese video sharing website), who started posting videos of songs made with her sound bank. Fans use Miku as a 'collaborative hub' for their shared creativity which also explains the large number of songs and videos posted on "Piapro", a website that Crypton created in order to allow the creative work to flourish and be shared.

In addition, Hatsune Miku has bridged many genres by singing theme songs for *anime* series, appearing in a video game, and performing 'live' in front of large audiences. However, her fame and financial value are based mainly on user-generated content. The software has sold well and the Internet has been flooded with fan-produced Miku performances. One fan has created a software application called 'MikuMikuDance', which allows users to create music videos by choreographing a 3D Miku model (Black, 2012). Fans who own these two packages can make Miku sing a song and dance a dance that have never been performed before because Miku can be controlled by each of her fans individually.

In view of her popularity and widespread virtual presence, both nationally and internationally, Hatsune Miku can be considered an additional example of how idols, both real and virtual, function as intertextual media within Japanese popular culture. In a live performance, Hatsune Miku's image is projected in front of the audience while the pre-recorded music is played back. Audiences consisting of Japanese and non-Japanese fans find these 'live' performances in front of huge crowds very exciting and this is a rich area for research into the appeal of a non-human image and the pleasure derived from the suspension of disbelief that is required when going to a show to 'meet' Hatsune Miku, and when sending fan mail, as reported by Yoshimura (2015).

## **Animation songs**

Another genre that has been gaining popularity is songs sung by animation voice actors, which is abbreviated as *ani-son* (animation songs)<sup>1</sup>. Many voice actors today are engaged in singing as part of their professional career and their songs rank high in the charts. Voice acting is regarded as an established occupational category in Japan where voice actors can have a full-time career in voice acting. There is a system to train professional voice actors for three years at specialized institutions. After graduation they audition for a contract with an entertainment-production firm engaged in the voice-acting business. In a similar way to young trainee idols, they begin as an apprentice with minor voice roles for about four years. Once they pass an internal audition, they are able to belong officially to the production firm and to be recognized as a professional voice actor.

In addition to this training system, there are other similarities between singing voice actors and idols. First, they are promoted as 'products' and their material is written for them by professional composers and lyricists. Next, their record sales are promoted in similar ways by the addition of certain privileges to CDs, such as selling the same song with different jacket covers, or selling a CD with an application form for a fan meeting allowing the CD purchaser to meet the artist(s). These privileges encourage fans to buy multiple CDs and this probably inflates the apparent popularity of this music genre among the general population. Although students reported liking to watch animation song clips, and listening to video game background music was popular with some of the young men, only two of the students interviewed, a female and a male, said they were fans of *anime* songs and singers. When she was in high school, the female had enjoyed *K-ON*, a successful TV *anime* series about a girls' high school pop band (aired in 2009-2010) that produced many CDs. The same student liked LiSA, a

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 2 for shelf space allocated to this genre at Tsutaya and Tower records.

singer/ songwriter who had made her breakthrough when she performed songs in the TV *anime* series *Angel Beats!* (2010). The male liked *Suppuration-Core* by Kotoko and music and vocals by I've Sound, a band with many members and female vocalists which specializes in cartoons and game music.

The main difference between idols and singing voice actors is that the latter can be seen as having additional value not shared by idols. They have their acting career in addition to their singing, and they attract fans of both their *anime* characters and of their singing voice performances. Successful *anime* singers are now releasing albums under their own name and have entered the J-pop market. Also, since the mid-1990s, many J-pop artists have offered their tunes to *anime* shows as tie-in promotional strategies. The earliest and most successful television *anime* to use this strategy was *Case Closed* (known as *Detective Conan*.) It has featured popular J-pop artists like B'z, Deen, Kuraki Mai, and others. Following this initial success, a number of other J-pop artists have contributed to *anime*, such as L'Arc-en-Ciel and Gackt (Mōri, 2016). There is now a blurring of genres between idols and *anime* and also between *anime* and J-pop, which perhaps explains why so few of the students interviewed mentioned *anime* songs or singers as a specific type of music they listen to. It is seen as part of J-pop.

### **What is J-pop?**

With this current blurring of genres in contemporary Japanese popular music, many people are examining the broad category called J-pop, a term that has been in use since the end of the 1980s to refer to technologized, mass-marketed, mainstream popular music that is written and performed by Japanese artists.

The term J-pop was first coined by the FM radio station J-WAVE on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1988 and had become widespread in general society by 1993 (Miyairi, 2015). It was introduced because the radio station was broadcasting *yōgaku*, which, at that time, meant both music imported from the West, and Japanese music in the

Western style. They wanted a term that would distinguish Japanese produced pop from Western produced pop and J-pop was short and clear. The *yōgaku* music that J-WAVE was playing at that time was bands like the Southern All Stars and solo artists like Matsutōya Yumi (popularly known as Yūming), Yamashita Tatsuro, and Sugi Mari. These artists were chosen because the songs they produced could be compared with Western music, and the influences of Western musicians on these artists are very clear. Nearly thirty years later, J-pop now appears to include a wide range of genres: pop, folk, rock, new music, heavy metal, punk, techno. J-pop is used as an umbrella term covering a wide range of music styles that are popular in the current Heisei era (Miyairi, 2015).

Some of the music that the term J-pop encompasses is now part of the school music curriculum. These days, Japanese university students have learnt about J-pop in primary, middle and high school because school textbooks include J-pop in Japanese language lessons as well as music lessons. Examples are “Tegami” (Letter) by Angela Aki, “Progress” by Sugashi Kao, and “Niji” (Rainbow) by YUZU. In fact, students experience J-pop in school more than classical music or choral music these days because J-pop has come to be viewed more favourably by the Education Ministry and no longer considered to have only short-lived popularity (Miyairi, 2015). It is interesting to compare the situation one hundred and forty years ago, in the Meiji era, when the melodies of school songs were first adopted and adapted from Europe and America, while the lyrics were Japanese. These days, for the young generation, songs they learn in school are made-in-Japan pop in all respects because the sounds and rhythms of J-pop are just as Japanese as the lyrics to the ears of Japanese audiences. As has happened in the evolution of popular music in the West, Japanese musicians have assimilated many music styles from outside and turned them into their own local hybrid version (J-rock, J-punk, J-reggae, J-hip-hop, etc.).

For this reason, in the minds of Japanese young people today, who were born after the term J-pop was coined, the ‘J’ in J-pop represents Japan. This current

meaning of 'J' was probably influenced to some extent by the renaming of the national railway company in April 1987, when it became partially privatized and known as Japan Rail (JR). In 1985, Japan's tobacco industry had started using the initials JT (Japan Tobacco Corporation). In this way, 'J' spread in society as a symbol of Japan, but probably the decisive moment for the spreading of 'J' was when the football league competition, J-League, began in 1993.

As a result of this renaming of Japanese-produced *yōgaku*-style music, a generation gap has opened. For those who were fans of popular music in 1988, their image of J-pop is the Southern All Stars, Yūming, and Yamashita Tatsuro, who were artists performing when J-WAVE coined the term. The image of their music was urban, refined and *oshare* (elegant and fashionable). But for young people these days, J-pop includes all current music, such as idols, *anime* songs, vocaloid, J-rock and all kinds of J-genres of music broadcast on radio or TV, on TV music channels and the Internet.

For the young, J-pop is not a fixed genre but one that is continuously splitting and regenerating. Because they connect the 'J' with Japan, for them J-pop refers to any song in the Japanese language, made by Japanese, and performed by Japanese. It is Japanese music, and Japan's unique music, or a music that you can only hear in Japan (Miyairi, 2015). Earlier commentators, such as Ugaya (2005), say that the 'J' of J-pop refers not necessarily to Japan, 'the nation', but to concepts that are associated with contemporary Japanese lifestyle and culture, and this lifestyle is not limited to Japan's geographical boundaries. The prefix 'J-' illustrates the construction of a new transnational Japanese identity based on Japan's participation in globalisation through marketing its own cultural products overseas and opening its own markets to imports from Asia as well as the West. The 'J' claims Japanese music genres as 'Japanese'. Their Japanese identity is no longer hidden, or *mukokuseki* (having no nationality), or 'odourless' (Iwabuchi, 2002). They are also easily distinguishable from non-Japanese products for Japanese consumers. Although the speed and scale of the

transnational flow of people, capital and media has been intensifying, the significance of 'national' identity has not been reduced. In fact, its continuing relevance can be seen in the use of the term 'transnational' itself, which retains the notion of nation.

Today, in record stores and rental shops, like Tower Records and Tsutaya, there are many sections using the prefix 'J-' to distinguish them from imported music of the same genre. There are J-pop, J-rock, J-reggae, J-rap, J-jazz, J-hip hop, J-club, and J-punk. Imported recordings can be found in sections labelled Soul/R & B, Rap/Hip Hop, Jazz, Blues, Gospel, etc. The J-pop section is the biggest section by far. In a survey of the area of shelf space devoted to each genre carried out by the author at a Tsutaya rental shop and Tower Records in Kyoto in September, 2015<sup>2</sup>, J-pop occupied by far the greatest amount of shelf space. In Tsutaya, J-rock/punk and *anime* occupied about half that amount of space, J-hip-hop and J-reggae both occupied about a quarter of that. In comparison, Western Rock & Pops occupied slightly more space than J-rock/punk, R & B/Soul and current Best Ranking albums each occupied the same amount of space as J-reggae and J-hip hop. Jazz occupied twice as much shelf space as these four genres and interestingly is the only genre where Japanese and Western artists are mixed on the shelves. This gives a rough indication of how popular music is categorized for rental customers and which genres are probably the most commonly rented today.

This survey complements to some extent Stevens' (2008) research that showed that Japanese artists have been more prominent on the Japanese radio airwaves since the mid-1990s. In the early 1990s, J-WAVE's airplay consisted of 95 percent foreign music, but by the 2000s, the station's top 100 featured many Japanese artists in the top six spots, demonstrating the maturity and independence of the Japanese pop industry since the mid-1990s.

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 2 for details.

The term J-pop also encompasses marketing strategies that use a variety of mass media that were unavailable to many consumers before the mid-1990s, such as the Internet and the mobile phone. By using these technologies, J-pop became a part of the global music scene, without its audiences ever having to travel overseas to listen or buy the music (Stevens 2008). 'Without the Internet, the global presence of J-pop would not have reached its current level of moderate penetration in general audiences and high penetration in niche audiences' (Stevens, 2008, p. 116). The introduction and spread of the Internet in Japan and its influence on music consumption is the focus of the next chapter.

Results of the survey I carried out in 2015 show clearly how overwhelmingly popular the music that falls within the category J-pop is with young Japanese audiences. Only 7.3 percent of the students surveyed said that they never listen to J-pop, while 61.3 percent listen often and 31.4 percent sometimes listen. A similar survey of college students was conducted in 1990, before the term J-pop had become widespread (Condry, 2006; Miyairi, 2015). The survey asked these students to identify the kind of music they liked, whereas I asked students to indicate how often they listened to different genres of music. The percentages are therefore greater overall in my survey, but it is worthwhile comparing the general trends that the two sets of data show. The results of the 1990 survey showed that the most popular genre at that time was 'new music' (self-made, and self-produced music) with 31.2 percent saying that they liked this, while 21.8 percent liked rock. Pop and *kayōkyoku* were seen as different genres at that time with 15.4 percent liking pop and 7.5 percent liking *kayōkyoku*. Next was classical music at 5.2 percent, followed closely by black contemporary soul which 4.5 percent liked, while less than 4 percent liked each of the genres house, jazz, fusion, heavy metal, and folk.

These days, a larger percentage likes J-rock than in 1990 with 73 percent reporting that they listen to J-rock either often or sometimes. These days, folk

music is less popular than many other genres (22%), but jazz is more popular than many might expect with almost 30 percent of students saying they listen to it. These different results may not reflect a change in tastes as much as a shift in the perception of genres. For example, these days, 'new music' is included in the broad category J-pop, along with pop and some softer rock. The difference between rock and pop was not clear to several students, and occasionally there were discussions among the focus group members about whether bands like Back Number and Black Horn are J-rock or J-pop.

The main appeal of J-pop for the young people I interviewed is that they can relate closely to the topics and issues that the artists sing about. Two male bands that are popular among the young men are GReeeN, who sing about a wide range of topics in a variety of music styles, and UVERworld, who sing about personal problems, about persevering and not giving up when you have self doubts. Their image is very sincere as they write and sing about young people's problems (*wakamono no nayami*). Interestingly, this group is seen as an idol group as well as a J-pop group by the students, which shows how blurry, or even non-existent such a distinction is. GReeeN is also popular with young women, and Radwimps, whose lyrics are deep and difficult to understand the first time you hear them.

Many young women tend to identify closely with solo female performers, such as Superfly, Ayaka, Yui, and Aiko because they can feel their "soul" in their music and it encourages them. For one girl, singers like Nishino Kana are "too feminine". She is "very cute and smiley", but her songs are hard to relate to. Meanwhile, another student said that Nishino Kana's lyrics were especially meaningful for her. A female J-pop artist that the student informants thought would be hard for non-Japanese people to understand and appreciate, but who they know and like, is Kyary Pamyu Pamyu. She has a unique, childish voice, strange-looking eyes created by coloured contact lenses and heavy makeup, and an extreme fashion style (she has been named "Kawaii Harajuku Ambassador")

by the mayor of Shibuya) with colourful, weird, extreme *kawaii* fashion costumes that she changes frequently throughout her music video performances. We watched “Mondai Girl” (2015) her hit music video at that time as an example. It is significant that the students were unaware of the international attention that Kyary Pamyu Pamyu has garnered. They saw her as uniquely Japanese and did not appear to make connections between her style and that of Lady Gaga, to whom she has been compared, or to Katy Perry, who she has cited as an influence. The reason could be that they were not serious fans of Kyary Pamyu Pamyu and so their knowledge of her activities was only very general, but nevertheless probably close to that of the general Japanese public.

It is not always the youngest and most recent artists who are popular. Older groups like Ikimono Gakkari and solo singers, such as Kuwata Keisuke were still popular with the students interviewed. I was shown a video of a live performance of the favourite Japanese artist of one student who was 48 and had been performing over 20 years and, in the opinion of the student, was getting better! His name is Fukuyama Yoshiki and he sings songs by Queen, which lift the student’s mood. The all-female rock band SCANDAL was popular among female students in 2012 while several male bands had maintained their popularity from 2012 to 2015. These included B’z, Arashi, Mr. Children, Spitz, and YUZU, which are popular with males and females.

Has the dominance and popularity of J-pop and the size of the J-pop industry led to a reduction in interest in Western music among young Japanese audiences? The final section of this chapter will discuss my findings through the survey and interviews I conducted.

### **Western Music Consumption in Contemporary Japan**

It is natural that the main focus of popular music scholars in Japan is on Japanese music. However, it is misleading if there is no acknowledgement of the

popularity and widespread influence of non-Japanese music in contemporary Japan. I was dismayed to come across a finding reported in a recently published scholarly book (Miyairi, 2015) that Japanese young people do not often listen to *yōgaku* (Western music) these days. Shobi Gakuen University's Hiyama Research Laboratory interviewed 3 male students and 1 female student on October 31, 2014, and 3 male and 3 female students on November 28, 2014 (total 10 students). They found that these university students listen to Western music not often or not at all. The way they listen to music these days is to listen only to their favourite music or favourite artists. They are more selective (Miyairi, 2015, p. 178).

Miyairi appears to accept this finding, although it is based on such a very small sample, and says that this may be related to *yōgakubanare* (distancing from Western music) that you hear about from Japanese scholars and journalists quite often nowadays. He draws attention to the 2014 audio software sales figures (Miyairi, 2015, p. 162) and compares the volume of sales of Japanese and non-Japanese music. The figures show that the ratio of Japanese to non-Japanese sales in 2013 was 83 percent to 17percent.

I have discussed above, in the sections on idols and anime singers, the unreliability of record sales data in indicating how much young people are actually listening to different types of music. University students do not generally buy a lot of CDs. They rent them, borrow them, and as will be seen in the next chapter, download music (legally and illegally) and stream it freely from websites such as YouTube. There is little incentive to buy CDs unless they are a fan of the artist(s) and want access to the many privileges that come with CD purchases in Japan today.

Miyairi (2015) admits that such data can be misleading and the thinking that young people are introverted or distancing themselves from Western music could be misguided. However, he casts doubt on the notion that young Japanese

people are actively listening to Western music using an example from a conversation on Twitter that drew a lot of media attention. It was about music that was used as BGM for a canned coffee commercial that was broadcast in October 2014. The Twitter exchange went as follows:

‘Just now on the commercial I thought I’ve heard this before, and it was ONE OK ROCK’s “To Feel the Fire”.

‘Seriously, ONE OK ROCK’s “To Feel the Fire” is used in a coffee commercial’.

‘How come an unknown foreigner is singing this?’

‘Seems like Stevie Wonder is a copycat of ONE OK ROCK’ (p. 164).

Miyairi confirms that although this Twitter exchange may seem like a joke or a skit, this is not the case. “To Feel the Fire” is a song that Stevie Wonder wrote for the same TV commercial in 1999 and the J-pop band ONE OK ROCK covered the song in 2011. Miyairi says that the people who tweeted this must belong to a generation that does not know Stevie Wonder or this song. For youngsters like these, J-pop has existed since before they were born. It is therefore natural that J-pop is perceived by them as having a Japanese origin. They do not know that J-pop has referred to and borrowed from Western-style music. Miyairi does not blame these youngsters and points out that ‘behind the social environment of today called “globalisation”, J-pop has taken on the image of something domestic by itself or having evolved in Japan as if it were an island in the Galapagos, with a unique environment. This sort of reality may be causing people to say that youngsters are distancing themselves from Western music’ (Miyairi, 2015, p. 165).

Miyairi goes on to say that it is not true that youngsters do not listen to Western music and backs up this claim by quoting a radio host who manages his own CD shop. The shop owner said in a newspaper column that his young part-time workers, who aren’t really music fans, quite ordinarily listen to James Blake and

Flying Lotus, so the theory that young people are distancing themselves from Western music is not based in reality (Miyairi, 2015, p. 165).

I am puzzled why Miyairi, a university professor, has not carried out more extensive research among his own students rather than relying on such thin evidence reported in the media to support his argument. I believe that my survey of 511 university students and interviews with 82 students can be said to provide substantial evidence that Japanese young people are not distancing themselves from Western music at all. In the survey, I used the term 'English-language' to avoid the ambiguity surrounding the term Western, and asked: 'How much do you listen to English-language pop/rock/rap?' The respondents could choose between 'Never', 'Sometimes', and 'Often'. The results show that 76 percent listen to English-language pop often or sometimes, 61 percent listen to English-language rock, and 34 percent listen to English-language rap.

In order to get a more detailed picture of the image that Japanese young people have of Western music and the role it plays in their lives, I asked them in the interviews what they understand by the terms 'Western music' and its Japanese translation *yōgaku*, the ratio of Japanese to non-Japanese music that they access, and about the different kinds of music they listen to.

A group of four students interviewed in 2015 were surprised by my asking what they understand by the term *yōgaku* and what music they would include in this, but in the course of their discussion they came to see how complex an issue this can be. One replied immediately that *yōgaku* is music from Canada, America, and the UK, but another suggested that everything apart from Asian music was *yōgaku*. It is interesting that music from countries as diverse as Korea, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Taiwan is now seen as belonging to the same category as Japanese music by some young Japanese and demonstrates the notion of cultural proximity discussed by Iwabuchi (2002) and how Japanese people now identify more strongly with Asia than with the rest of the world. For

another student, the image of *yōgaku* is English-language music: “*Yōgaku no imeji* is only English”. However, a student who goes to a bar where Spanish music is played said her image is that Spanish music is included in *yōgaku*. This comment led to a discussion about the traditional music of countries like Switzerland or India and the students decided that *yōgaku* applies only to modern pop music that uses electronic instrumentation, not traditional music. When one student asked the others in the group about jazz, they came to the conclusion that jazz is in a category of its own: “Jazz is jazz.”

Students interviewed in 2012 also found the term ‘Western music’ confusing, as can be seen in this typical response: “I don’t have many information about Western music so because I always listen to Japanese music and sometimes listen to foreign music, but I decide to listen [to] some foreign music but I don’t know [if] that music is Western music or another music... I don’t know. So recently I hear Lady Gaga and Michael Jackson. What is this music?”

Ten students defined music as Western by the names of the artists, in the same way that this young man did, in the end. Others based their judgement on the physical appearance of the artists. However, this would not necessarily exclude Japanese artists who are of mixed heritage (‘half’) such as Ciel and Angela Aki. The students who discussed this decided that they were Japanese and not Western and that foreign people who sing in Japanese are not Japanese (such as Jero, an African-American *enka* singer who has Japanese ancestry). To overcome this problem of mixed national, cultural and ethnic identity, one student suggested that Western artists are all those who do not have a name written with Chinese characters (*kanji*). However, he was overlooking the fact that the names of most J-pop and J-rock artists and bands are written in roman letters.

Several students identified Western music by genre, such as folk, rock, pop, rap, R & B, and rock’ n’ roll. For many others, English-language lyrics identified music

as Western, but they did not consider that use of English lyrics by Japanese artists made the music of these artists Western.

The students were generally unaware of and unconcerned about the nationality of non-Japanese singers and many of them assumed that all the foreign famous artists were American: “American music is the image of Western....” One student explained why the term Western is confusing for her as a Japanese person. The countries west of Japan are Europe. “My world map is Japan is centre of world so America is east.” Consequently, she thought that Western music referred only to European music.

Although trying to unravel the meaning of the terms Western music and *yōgaku* was challenging, the students I interviewed were all very familiar with Western artists. They listen to and watch them and know their past and current hits even if they tend to consume more Japanese music overall. The reasons for such familiarity are that Western music is an integral part of the Japanese urban soundscape. It can be heard in shops, shopping malls, and other public spaces. It is broadcast on radio, sold in music shops and rented out. Most students find out about new Western stars through television appearances, especially on the morning variety-style news shows where overseas artists are interviewed at the start of a Japan tour. They often appear in TV commercials as well as dedicated music shows. Moreover, modern technology allows young people to identify music and artists they hear through smart phone applications and to find the music and artist quickly on the Internet. The traditional means of human communication, by word of mouth, is still perhaps the most important source of information, with many students reporting that it was a parent, a teacher, a sibling, or a friend who introduced them to Western artists and music.

Western music is one of the *ubiquitous musics* in Japan. This term was coined by Kassabian (2013) to refer to musics that come out of our walls, television, video games, computers, phones, and that we listen to without primary attention. Such

music is everywhere in workplaces, shops, homes, cars, buses, trains, restaurants, clubs and while we listen to some ubiquitous musics through our own choice, others are heard without our sanction or control. Kassabian argues that for most of us in the industrialized world, a day without such music would be highly unlikely and that listening as a simultaneous or secondary activity has profound implications because this kind of listening (or rather sensory input) produces affective responses and bodily events that lead in part to what we call emotion. Moreover, now that music is everywhere, many young people in both Kassabian's and my own research say that they cannot imagine life without it in the background. Although they are often not paying attention to the music, they want it to accompany their routines and activities.

Kassabian questions the routine distinction that is made between listening and hearing in which hearing is regarded as physiological and passive while listening is conscious and attentive. She insists that all listening is physiological and that many kinds of listening take place over a wide range of levels of consciousness and attention. Her findings on the ways in which ubiquitous listening modulates attentional capacities are especially relevant to discussions of ways in which my informants use Western music streamed through YouTube in Chapter 6.

### **Evidence of broad musical tastes of Japanese young people**

The evidence I have gathered through my survey and interviews contradicts the view expressed above by Miyairi (2015) that Japanese young people have narrow tastes and restricted listening habits. I asked 34 students in 2012 and 2015 to estimate the ratio of Western to Japanese music that they listen to. Several of them listen to Korean music as well as Japanese and Western music. They are listed separately below the table.

Table 1. The Ratio of Western to Japanese Music that Students Listen to

No. of students	% Western music	% Japanese music
4	100	0
2	90	10
2	80	20
3	70	30
1	60	40
3	50	50
4	40	60
2	30	70
5	20	80
1	10	90
3	0	100

One student:	Japanese 90%	Korean 10%	
One student:	Japanese 80%	Korean 10%	Western 10%
Two students:	Japanese 40%	Korean 60%	
One student:	Japanese 5%	Korean 5%	Western 90%

These results are in stark contrast to the findings of Shobi Gakuen University's Hiyama Research Laboratory mentioned above. While 15 students reported listening to more Japanese music than Western, 12 students said they listen to more Western than Japanese music and 4 students listened to Korean music. The survey I conducted also showed the large percentage of students who listen to a range of Japanese and Western music genres that I judged to be the most popular. Further evidence of the eclectic music tastes of the current young generation can be seen in answer to the survey question: What other music do you listen to? The following genres were listed: hard rock, sound track, movie soundtrack, *anime* music/songs, fusion, vocaloid, game BGM, instrumental,

English-language country, dance music, electronic dance music (EDM), club music, techno, UK hardcore, trance, French pop, Russian-language rock, Spanish-language pop, classical, brass band.

Evidence of such wide-ranging musical tastes was supported by findings from the interviews. Only a couple of students said they listened mostly to one genre, but even they were familiar with and liked the music of several Western artists. Many said they were attracted to new music initially by the melody and the rhythm and that the lyrics were not very important. If they liked the music and felt curious enough to find out the lyrics, they could do so, but understanding the language was not so important, especially when they could easily watch a music video which could help explain the meaning of the song. For the young generation equipped with smartphones, consumption of Western music is easier and cheaper than ever before and is often an audio-visual experience carried out by means of mobile phone technology, topics discussed in the following chapters.

## **Conclusion**

These days, young Japanese clearly have cosmopolitan tastes and enjoy a wide range of music that is now easily available to them. This includes Western and non-mainstream Japanese music, even though the music, advertising, and broadcasting industries privilege Japanese pop music and agencies dominate the entertainment industry.

J-pop and the other J-genres of Japanese popular music have evolved into Japanese forms of popular music that have their roots in both Western and Japanese music traditions, and owe their existence to this dual heritage. While the 'J-' of J-pop stands for Japan in the minds of young people today, it does not necessarily evoke strong nationalistic feelings. It can be seen as recognition that Japanese popular music is one of many kinds of popular music and the 'J-' is a

prefix that distinguishes it from other kinds, such as K-pop (Korean-pop), or C-pop (China-pop).

Modern technologies have been enabling increased transmedia flow within Japan as well as throughout Asia. This can be seen in the appearances of idols across genres and platforms in their multiple roles as live show hosts, back dancers and lead performers, recording artists, music video stars, TV hosts, actors, and product endorsers. Past performances in previous roles are referenced, adding nuances to their new roles. Genres are becoming blurred, especially between idol and *anime* performances and between *anime* and J-pop. Anime voice actors who perform J-pop and J-pop artists who write for anime bring their own cachet to the new genre.

Music consumption in Japan these days is still largely measured through the purchase and rental of CDs and DVDs, although the number of Internet downloads has been increasing. Concert attendance is high even though ticket prices are also high (¥3,000 – ¥4,000 for Japanese artists, ¥10,000 –over ¥20,000 for famous non-Japanese artists) and live clubs are active in spite of the continued recession. Live performances build up a relationship and feeling of closeness with and loyalty to performers. Dance clubs are popular, as well as karaoke, but music is consumed generally more in a private, personal capacity than publicly. This change has been brought about by developments in recording and playback technologies. The next chapter will therefore focus on this aspect of music consumption in Japan.

Although there is a current of opinion in Japanese scholarly and media circles that Japanese young people are more introverted than in the past, my research indicates that many are very open and receptive to a wide range of music, and this includes Western music. The ways in which they are able to access this music and the role of YouTube and the music video in the consumption of Western music in particular will be examined in later chapters.

## 4 New Media, Digital Technologies, the Mobile Internet and Popular Music Consumption

Popular music consumption in Japan today is ubiquitous and highly personalized thanks to the small, lightweight, affordable platforms that modern technological advances have provided. The machines and their operating systems, however, form only part of the overall picture. For a full picture, it is necessary to examine the ways in which the hardware and software are used by consumers in order to appreciate how unanticipated uses often lead to further developments. An example of this is the way Japanese teenage girls appropriated the pager (originally designed for business purposes) for their personal communication needs. Their ingenuity showed the manufacturers new potential uses for their product, which eventually evolved into the modern smartphone.

The development of the ring tone into paid for music downloads to mobile phones was also driven by Japanese teenage girls using early ring tones in ways the producers had not originally intended, or even imagined. Thanks to such innovations, inspired by young Japanese consumers, the Japanese music industry has been able to adapt and even thrive through the recent years of economic recession. The focus of this chapter will therefore be on the technological developments, and the changes in practices and customs that have accompanied them, in order to explain the current situation in which most Japanese young people carry their personal music collection around in their mobile phones (*keitai*), an iPod, or a Walkman, in the form of MP3 and MP4 files, or playlists streamed through the Internet via Wi-Fi.

Groggin and M. Mc Lelland (2009) warn how it is all too easy to adopt an Anglo-American-centric view of the role and history of the Internet and wireless mobile communications given the great amount of research that has been carried out and reported in Anglo-American academic circles. We should not simply assume that the same pattern of use has evolved around the world. Although the Internet

is called the World Wide Web, research at local levels soon reveals how networks of users create their own Internet culture. It is therefore important to investigate Japanese Internet users and to share these findings to obtain a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which popular music consumption in Japan has been influenced by new media, digital technologies, and above all, the mobile Internet. This chapter will therefore combine discussion of developments in the fields of new media, digital technologies, and popular music, with a description of how young Japanese are using current media technologies to access and consume popular music based on my own survey and interview data.

Many of the current cultural practices and assumptions about music 'ownership' date back a generation to the youth of my informants' parents when audiocassette tapes and recorders were introduced, followed by the Sony Walkman. These innovations allowed music collections to become personalized and portable. The issues of ownership and copyright are integral to any discussion of media consumption and have become critical since high quality replication has been made possible through the introduction of digital technologies. These new technologies have led to the introduction of new legislation concerning copyright and have caused the recording industry to reorganize their business model. The impacts of these changes on young musicians wishing to publish their own material on the Internet and the attitudes of Japanese consumers to file sharing and downloading and to copyright issues will therefore be presented.

### **'New media' and digital technologies**

The term 'new media' denotes a wide variety of recent developments in the fields of media and communications and is useful for my own line of inquiry because 'it encompasses not only new forms of media delivery, but also new convergences between media technologies and new ways in which people use, and interact with, media texts' (Osgerby, 2004, p. 193). The term emerged to capture a sense

that, from the late 1980s, the world of media and communications rapidly began to look quite different. The mass media had been in a state of technological, institutional and cultural change for some decades, but the nature of the new change was so different that it needed to be distinguished from what had come before. The new media are associated with the following social, economic and cultural changes: 1) a shift from modernity to postmodernity; 2) intensifying processes of globalisation; 3) The replacement in the West of an industrial age of manufacturing with a post-industrial age of information; 4) a decentring of established and centralised geopolitical orders (Lister et al., 2009, p. 10-11).

The 'new' of the term new media suggests that new is better. It also carries the meanings of 'cutting-edge' and associations with 'forward-thinking' people. These positive connotations are derived from a modernist belief in social progress that is delivered by technology. The term 'new media' is also useful because it is inclusive and avoids emphasis on a purely technical or formal definition, such as 'digital' or 'electronic' media. In addition, it avoids stress on one quality that may be controversial, such as 'interactive media', or being limited to one type of machine or practice such as 'computer-mediated communication'.

In these ways 'new media' is a very general and abstract term that can be used to refer to a range of phenomena. The term 'digital media' is preferable to some people because it specifies digital binary code as the means of registration, storage and distribution of information. However, using the term 'digital media' alone suggests an absolute break between analogue and digital, which has not, in fact, occurred. For this reason, I prefer to use it in conjunction with 'new media'.

In a digital media process, all input data are converted into numbers then processed, stored and output as numbers from online sources, or on digital discs, or memory drives. It is then decoded and displayed on screens, or sent through telecommunications networks, or output as hard copy. The difference

between digital and analogue media is that all input data in analogue media is converted into another physical object. The term analogue refers to the way that the input data, for example, the live sound of someone singing, and the coded media product (the grooves on a vinyl disc) stand in an analogous relation to one another. The analogous physical form then undergoes technological and cultural coding that allows the original properties to be 'reconstituted for the audience' (Lister et al., 2009, p. 17).

In the 1980s and 1990s, the digital encoding of data shifted from exclusive mainframe use by the scientific community, the military, and corporate establishments to use by communications and entertainment media. The consequences of the shift from analogue to the digital domain are that:

1. Digital media texts are separate from their physical form as a book, photo, tape, etc.;
2. Data can be compressed into very small spaces;
3. Data can be accessed at very high speeds and in non-linear ways;
4. Data can be manipulated far more easily than analogue forms.

The scale of the change in the amount of data that can be stored, accessed and manipulated is so great that it has brought about a qualitative change in the production, form, reception and use of the media. Whereas analogue media tend to remain fixed as physical objects, digital media are mutable. This has facilitated the editing of media texts because it can be done precisely and on the specific parts that need to be altered. Moreover, any part of a digital text can be given its own data address, and if it exists only on computer servers and not in any physical form, it can be changed and circulated freely. This means that it is free from authorship and ownership as well as physical limitation. In other words, the formerly well-established notions of 'author and reader, performer and spectator, creator and interpreter become blurred and give way to a reading writing continuum that extends from designers of the technology and networks to the final recipient, each one contributing to the activity of the other – the

disappearance of the signature' (Lévy, 1997, p. 366 quoted in Lister et al., 2009, p. 19).

Digital technology has had an enormous impact on the ways in which people can access and enjoy music these days. Portable MP3/4 players, iPods, and mobile phones with media players have taken the integration of music in daily life to a higher level than ever before. Bull (2007) says that the iPod (or any other portable digital audio player) liberates users from 'the linear grind of daily life' (p.147). iPod time represents time away from others, schedules and obligations and can provide free time anywhere. Users can create playlists and the technology allows them to live their whole day with a seamless soundtrack as they use the player with headphones when on the move, and plugged into a sound system when they are at home or, the car audio system when driving. 'Dead' time becomes transformed into pleasurable time when they listen. Mundane activities can be made enjoyable. Users can also continually adjust their music to suit their mood by flicking from one track to another on their playlists. Bull notes that iPod users organize their playlists not by genres, as radio stations do, but by mood. Or they can use the shuffle option to introduce an element of spontaneity.

Bull also discusses the negative aspects of dependency on iPods to structure their day. Freed from the structured regime of the media, they end up listening to the iPod almost the whole day. They seem to depend on experiencing the world and their daily lives through the sounds of their iPods. 'Tolerance of experience unadorned, of time unmediated, is low. Many iPod users come to fear unmediated experience – of being left to their own devices' (2007, p.155). This is true not only of the Westerners in Bull's study, but also of young people in Japan, such as the younger brother of one of my Japanese informants in 2015, a high school student who spends his whole day accompanied by YouTube streamed through his mobile phone and earphones.

Bull (2013) found that the imaginations of the North American and European iPod users he investigated are mediated through the sounds emanating from their devices. This music often inspires them to construct an aesthetic narrative to the city and they often describe their city experiences in filmic terms. They experience the world as a movie script, which they can control by selecting music that suits their mood or their surroundings, and this can alter or enhance their mood and the way they relate to their surroundings. For example, a street can look sunnier, feel calmer, less threatening or uninteresting if a suitable soundtrack accompanies them as they pass through it. They re-create the world using music that matches their mood. They bring the world in line with their own cognitive predispositions rather than paying attention to or trying to understand and appreciate 'otherness'. One respondent imagines the people around her on public transportation singing lines from the songs she is listening to and this can be very entertaining. She describes this as like being in her own music video. It is interesting that most of my own informants do not watch music videos on their phones or iPods when on public transportation because they prefer to do so in greater privacy. Creating one's own music video using the music and a live cast in front of one's eyes suggests that for some iPod users, the world can be seen in terms of music video as well as film. It could be said that the world is becoming more cinematic in their imaginations through the influence of screen media.

Bull based his study on the iPod and regarded the mobile phone as a communication device from his Western perspective in 2007. For Japanese young people nowadays the *keitai* (mobile phone) is primarily an entertainment and information platform. The unique path that the development of mobile phone technology took in Japan will be explained in this chapter. Before that, however, the changes to copyright brought about by new technologies will be discussed and the attitudes of Japanese young people to copyright will be presented.

## **Copyright, cassette tape recorders, early prosumers, and mobile listening**

Since the days of sheet music in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the viability of the music industry had depended on the legally enforceable right of the originators of musical texts to be recognized as the only people who were allowed to make copies of the original work. Companies were created based on the business model of buying and exploiting copyrights. With the introduction of sound recording, music publishers and record companies followed the same business model and bought the rights of songs and recordings from their originators and sold copies of them. Music became a commodity 'exchanged for the universal commodity, money' (Eisenberg, 2005, p. 20). Venues that offered music as a source of entertainment or to enhance enjoyment of their services (theatres and later radio, films, bars, hairdressers, etc.), had to pay a licensing fee and royalties for the use of songs and recordings owned by the music companies (Jones, 2012).

When Emil Berliner invented the gramophone in 1887, people could listen to music without having to be present at the performance. This changed the concept of music from 'a performance and a service' and 'a dynamic and interactive experience' to a fixed product (Kusak and Leonhard, 2005, p. 12). Eisenberg (2005) laments the loss of interaction once the 'musician need never see the working man behind the money; the listener need never see the working musician behind the vinyl' (p. 20). Moreover, for the consumer, it has often become the buying of the record that counts. 'The desire to buy does not always coincide with the desire to hear music. If we want to hear music, we can find something on the shelf or on the radio to satisfy us. If we want to hear a certain record, we can borrow it' (p. 20). People buy a record often to satisfy other needs, such as a reward for hard work or consolation when facing disappointment.

At the same time, those who owned a phonograph enjoyed a new freedom to use music for whatever they chose, 'in cheerful contempt of the composer's intentions, cultural conventions, and the sacred *Geist* or spirit of the music' (Eisenberg, 20015, p. 39). They could also listen to music while they carried out other activities. It was convenient and could be started and stopped at any time, but such listening practices could also be seen to devalue music as art. On the other hand, when phonograph owners wanted to listen actively to a piece of music, they could do so more easily at home than in a concert hall. At a live performance, the musicians are in front of our eyes and we are surrounded by people in the audience and conscious of the conventions of concert hall behaviour. We cannot lose ourselves in the music and let our imaginations transport us in the same way that we can when alone and listening to a recording. Clearly, the phonograph brought many changes in attitudes and behaviour towards music as a commodity and its consumption.

Another new concept brought about by music recording is that only a recording can ensure consistency. Even 'an immaculate live performance will differ in some degree from the last immaculate performance. Only a record never varies' (Eisenberg, 2005, p. 42). Audiences became used to there being definitive versions of musical creations and live performances could disappoint if perceived as inferior. However, as will be seen, some of my informants prefer the variations that live performances provide and new technologies that provide listeners with the means to alter recordings show that this attitude is changing.

The music business as we think of it today, however, barely existed when vinyl records came on to the market in 1915. Music was for playing, singing, dancing and listening to at cabaret and band concerts. 'People didn't "own" music, they listened to it, experienced it, and enjoyed it' (Kusak and Leonhard, 2005, p. 37). During the next 100 years, music and musicians were turned into 'products' that were created and sold and consumers were persuaded that they had to own music in order to enjoy it. We have now moved from the 'Industrial Age' into the

'Information Age' and ownership of media texts has been replaced by access to them. As Kassabian (2013) points out, the development of recording technologies in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have disarticulated performance space and listening space. You can listen to opera in the bath and arena rock on the bus. It is this disarticulation that has made ubiquitous listening possible.

The start of this shift can be traced back to the introduction of cassette tape in the mid-1960s by the electronics manufacturer Philips in Holland. Cassette recorders proved to be highly lucrative and pre-recorded cassettes were faster and cheaper to produce, and easier to transport and store than vinyl. The problem was that cassette recorders and tapes stimulated illegitimate use, or rather 'raised the issue of what constituted "legitimate" use where copyrighted music was concerned' (Jones, 2012, p. 179). Jones points out how the music cassette was 'a pivotal, transitional device for the fundamental reasons that, culturally rather than legally, it gave music users a defining sense of control over, and with it ownership of, music' (p. 179).

Inexpensive cassette recorders spread in Japan in the 1970s and this new technology affected the ways in which Japanese consumers listened to music (Kitagawa, 1991, Stevens, 2008). People could compile their own mixes, based on mood or theme. By re-editing and mixing, they were changing their role from passive consumer to active prosumer as an ordinary listening style and the music exchange culture came into existence in Japan as it did elsewhere (Arditi, 2014). The cassette tape cases were also personalised with stationary stores helpfully selling blank cassette labels with decorated borders and artistic lettering. Such cassette tapes were not only used for personal consumption but also as gifts. Stevens (2008) notes: 'The personalised tape played in a personal stereo (often a Sony Walkman) created the ultimate statement in privacy and personalised consumption, but the frequent practices of creating these tapes as personal gifts also allowed them to symbolise human connection as well as solitary enjoyment' (p. 113).

The original Sony Walkman was provided with two headphone sockets so that two people could listen together. However, it soon became clear that the Walkman would be used more individualistically, especially outdoors when people were on the move. With the Walkman, personalised and portable music became the 'new normal' for the generation who are parents of the students I interviewed. So when compact disc (CD) technology was introduced in 1982, Sony quickly brought out the first portable CD stereo Discman in 1983, followed by the portable MiniDisc (MD) player in 1992. MDs improved the sound quality and allowed greater storage per gram of weight. However, MDs were not very popular and were soon replaced with MP3 files. Walkman sales in Japan suffered greatly after the introduction of the iPod in 2001, but Walkman soon introduced an MP3 player and then tied up with the mobile phone maker Ericsson, which allowed them to expand into the digital music market through phones with MP3 capability (Stevens, 2008). Many students interviewed use a digital Walkman music player these days.

### **Copyright legislation in Japan**

The other 'new normal' notion that began to take hold after the introduction of home recoding technology was that once an album was purchased, it became the property of the owner who had the right to edit and copy it for their own pleasure. This was at odds with the understanding of copyright as it had originally been created in the days when copying a piece of music was beyond the means or capabilities of the individual. In the case of a CD, it is bought in a shop but what one actually owns is only some plastic and paper. The information encoded on the CD is protected. One purchases the right to use it; one does not own it. The same is true of an MP3 download or a streamed file. Even though it is digital, one does not own the IP. The right to use the IP is strictly limited. For example, one cannot play it to other people, one cannot copy it, or sing it, only play it on specific machinery, and in some cases only in specific legal territories. One pays a fee for this right and it is a right that the originator can withdraw at any time

(Pratt, 2016). This common misunderstanding of music ownership leads people to the false idea that they can choose what they do with any music that they 'own'. Moreover, if they separate the music from the material it is stored on, they are liberating it. This is contrary to what the legal framework outlines.

Japan, with strong encouragement from the United States, had become a signatory to many international treaties concerning copyright in the post war era. This was to protect the rights of foreigners selling products in Japan as well as the rights of Japanese sellers overseas. Japan introduced a new copyright law in 1971, which, with various amendments made over the years, provides the constitutional standard today (Stevens, 2008). This law defines copyright in two ways: authors' copyright (ownership of an original work of music by the composer and lyricist), and neighbouring rights, which secure ownership of sound recordings to the producing company and recording artists. In other words, copyright belongs to the composers, who may or may not be the performers, while neighbouring rights belong to the musicians (including the backup musicians) who make the recording. Neighbouring rights also include the right to reproduce and broadcast the music and these belong to the recording companies and broadcasting organizations. The Japanese Society for the Rights of Authors, Composers and Publishers (JASRAC) protects composers and musicians from exploitation and collects royalties, but takes a percentage of the record's sale as payment for these services.

Japan's Copyright Law provides specific purposes for which copying is allowed. These include library, news, or education use. In addition, Article 30 of the Copyright Law allows copies to be made for private use, for private enjoyment and for circulation within a limited circle. Article 30 has been amended over the years to keep up with changes in technology and maintain a balance between copyright industries and users (Mehra, 2013).

There exists a tension between the need to develop and promote new technologies while protecting the rights of owners of copyrighted material. In Japan, copyright law has tended to protect the manufacturing and copyright industries rather than support user rights. For example, in 1971, when electromagnetic audiotape was introduced, the right to make copies by mechanical or chemical means was extended in order to enable use of this new technology. This change allowed consumers to make copies of albums on reel-to-reel and cassette tapes for personal use and producers could develop a new industry selling recording equipment. With the arrival of digital audio formats and private digital audio recording capabilities, such as digital audiotape, the private use right was supplemented with a private recording levy from 1993. This levy was extended to MDs and blank CDs and JASRAC was authorized to distribute the proceeds to copyright holders (Mehra, 2013).

This system, based on cooperation between copyright holders, electronics and hardware manufacturers, users, and the government, was disrupted by the emergence of the Internet and new computer memory formats. The subsequent amendments to Japan's copyright laws will be explained later in this chapter.

### **The introduction of digital media: CD file sharing and rental**

Cassette tapes and CDs co-existed through the 1980s and into the early 1990s, but the CD rapidly became the dominant platform for recorded music. The introduction of the CD led to the unprecedented growth of the music recording industry and the peak in its sales worldwide in 1998. The boost to sales came largely as a result of people replacing records with CDs (Wikström, 2009). Record companies worldwide enjoyed huge profits by re-releasing vinyl catalogues in the new CD format at minimal cost and by overpricing the CD albums (Jones, 2012). From 2000, there has been a decline in CD sales worldwide and a rise in the use of the Internet. In Japan, however, sales of CDs

have remained high for reasons explained in the previous chapter, in addition to those which will be explained below.

One of the great advantages of digital media is that material can be copied multiple times with no degradation in quality. The degradation of image and sound when analogue material is copied was a barrier to wholesale illegal reproduction. With digital technology and the hardware for ripping and burning CDs built into personal computers (PCs), that problem was eliminated. The potential for infinite reproduction could be exploited through MP3 file-sharing networks like Napster, a software application developed by teenager Shawn Fanning in 1999, which enabled the free distribution of music files between Internet users (Goldsmith and Wu, 2008). The Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) soon found Napster and filed a lawsuit, which made Napster a media sensation, and soon millions of users were trading music on Napster. Napster was found illegal in court and was shut down. However, new peer-to-peer (P-2-P) file sharing sites and businesses arose (Osgerby 2004; Goldsmith and Wu, 2008; Lister et al., 2009).

The increase in online piracy has been identified by the music industry as one of the main reasons for the drop in sales revenues since 1999. It is difficult to establish a causal link between online piracy and falling sales, but it is clear that unauthorised file sharing over P-2-P networks that do not remunerate artists, composers, producers and rights holders violate copyright laws and throw into question the existence of the traditional music business model.

In Japan, P-2-P communication enabled the unauthorised transfer and copying of copyrighted recorded music and other content. Computer hard disks and flash memory lowered the cost of storing large amounts of data, such as digitised musical recordings, and the levy usually collected by JASRAC did not apply to these new formats. Large-scale unauthorised sharing of copyrighted files could not be prevented because attempts to use digital rights management (DRM)

technologies failed and attempts to extend the digital copying levy to computer storage, MP3 players, iPods and smart phones also failed (Mehra, 2013).

However, during the early years of file sharing (1999-2002) there was relatively little online music piracy in Japan despite high levels of Internet usage. The main reasons are that broadband Internet came rather late to college campuses, and the preferred means of accessing the Internet by young people was through the mobile phone, which was not suited to file sharing at that time. Moreover, Japanese consumers have had the option to rent CDs and legally make copies for personal use for a fraction of the cost of purchasing the CD (Condry, 2011).

Unlike many other capitalist economies, where CD prices can fluctuate considerably, there is a unique Japanese resale price maintenance system whereby prices are fixed by record companies and there has been little noticeable change in prices for over ten years. A full-priced new CD album costs between ¥2,500 – ¥3,000 (£15 – £19). According to RIAJ (2016), Japan has the highest CD sales in the world and this was reflected in the high percentage (70%) of the students I surveyed in 2015 who reported that they buy CDs sometimes (57%) and often (13%). A young man interviewed in 2012 expressed a view shared by other informants both in 2012 and 2015 when he explained that he buys CDs out of a sense of loyalty to and respect for the artists he admires: “Hmm... Japanese OK? *Yappari okane haratte katta jibun no fan no kashu datara yappari katta hō ga ii.* (Paying money to buy the music of people I am a fan of is best)... Er... *Yappari suki na kashu wa tadashi hōhō de kau beki.* (Of course, we should purchase the music of singers we like in the correct way.)”

Many Japanese consumers, however, choose to rent CDs rather than buy. The rental system began in 1980 when college students in Tokyo set up their first shop and the idea was enormously successful (Hosokawa, 1991). Over 3,000 rental stores were established near train stations and opened long hours offering a wide selection of CDs and DVDs at a very reasonable price for a week

(Manabe, 2009). It still costs only ¥250 to rent a CD and ¥1,000 for five at a time. 'Lending rights' in Japan were established in 1984, in response to the proliferation of rental record and CD shops in that period and the need for copyright protection. The length of record protection, since 1990, is thirty years; record copying is permitted for personal use in Japan and the original rights holder is paid a compensatory fee (Stevens, 2008, p. 117). To offset CD sales losses for recording companies, new releases cannot be rented for a fixed period. This system provides consumers who are prepared to wait with a more economical alternative to purchasing CDs. It also discourages widespread illegal file sharing, along with public information campaigns that raise awareness of the losses incurred by artists and recording companies when copyright is infringed (Stevens, 2008). There are 2,304 legal record rental shops in Japan according to the Recording Industry Association of Japan (RIAJ), but the number has been declining steadily, especially since 2012 (RIAJ CD rental data, 2016). The shops rent DVDs and game software as well as CDs and pay a use fee to recording companies in accordance with their contracts and, according to the RIAJ website's F.A.Qs page (2016), the system is working smoothly. Rental CDs for Japanese artists are available 2 weeks after release, but for Western artists there is a one-year wait (Condry, 2011).

Renting and dubbing CDs is very common with about 75 percent of the respondents in my survey saying that they did this either often (12.5%), or sometimes (62.1%). Students interviewed said that the rental cost was reasonable, but that if they wanted to hear a single track immediately and often, then they would purchase it online regardless of the additional cost. Interestingly, CDs with promotion videos (music videos) included are not rented. Also, DVDs with video clips can only be purchased from record stores and are expensive to buy compared with audio CDs. A surprising number of students interviewed buy DVDs, especially of artists that they are fans of. Also, the videos of J-pop artists and idol groups are generally unavailable on YouTube because the copyright belongs to the management agencies (like Johnny's), which do not allow them to

remain uploaded to YouTube. My survey of students also showed that 53 percent of students buy DVDs (45% buy them sometimes, and 8% buy them often). For many young people, the free alternative of watching music videos on YouTube is the more attractive or the only viable option.

One advantage of purchasing or renting a CD as opposed to streaming music through YouTube was explained by a student in 2015: “You don’t need CDs if you watch on YouTube, but you get a more lasting impression if you use a CD”. In addition to purchasing new CDs and renting, students use the second-hand CD market, and some are able to borrow CDs (both Western and Japanese music) for free from public libraries, such as the local library of a student interviewed in 2015 in Nishinomiya in Hyogo Prefecture.

### **The Spread of the Internet in Japan**

When discussing the Internet, it is important to remind ourselves that it is more than ‘a global network of hardware and software which stores and transports information from a content provider to an end user’ (Mewton, 2001, p. 18). The Internet is also a site of an immense variety of cultural practices. Ito, Okabe and Matsuda (2005) emphasize that technology is not independent of social and cultural setting. In contrast to the American model, where PC-based broadband is the typical means of access to the Internet, in Japan ‘ubiquity, portability, and lightweight engagement form an alternative constellation of “advanced” Internet access characteristics that stand in marked contrast to complex functionality and stationary immersive engagement’ (Ito, Okabe, Matsuda, 2005, p. 6).

The Internet was first introduced in Japan in 1984 with the launch of the Japan University/Unix NETwork (JUNET), a research network that linked Keio University with the Tokyo Institute of Technology and the University of Tokyo. In 1988, the Widely Integrated Distributed Environment (WIDE) project aimed to develop network technology with the participation of the private sector. However,

these networks were maintained by government agencies and research institutes for their own use and private and commercial use of the Internet in Japan did not begin until 1993 (Gottlieb and McLelland, 2003).

Following the launch of the World Wide Web in 1991, the Internet started to spread. In 1993, Mosaic and the WWW browser in the USA introduced a user-friendly graphical interface that could be used on a variety of platforms. This meant that users no longer needed a high level of technical knowledge and Internet use increased rapidly around the world (Gottlieb and McLelland, 2003). In Western countries, most people accessed the Internet through a PC and their phone line. The situation in Japan was very different for a number of reasons.

Internet use spread slowly at the outset because landline phone calls were very expensive and there was conflict between Ministries over policy. Moreover, it was not easy to develop a programming language that could handle the large amount of data required for Japanese with its three different scripts (Groggin and McLelland, 2009). When the Japanese market was opened to American computer companies in 1992, the comparatively low price of American machines encouraged a rapid increase in the purchase of computers and by 2000, Japan was thirteenth in the world for Internet household penetration rate (Gottlieb and McLelland, 2003).

There has been a rapid take-up of wireless technology, partly owing to the high cost of landline calls. In 1999, the national telecommunications company NTT DoCoMo launched its i-mode service that allowed users to access the Internet through their mobile phones. Other carriers soon started to offer this service and by April 2002, there were almost 70 million wireless Internet (Wi-Fi) users in Japan. In 2014, 90.6 percent of the Japanese population used the Internet (The World Bank, 2016).

Japan is a world leader in mobile Internet technologies. In 2001, a survey at Rikkyo University in Tokyo found that while only 35 percent of students had personal computers, 92 percent had mobile phones. The university therefore collaborated with DoCoMo to create a website that students could access on their Internet-capable mobile phones which enabled them to check lecture cancellations, communicate with staff, and view missed lecture material (Gottlieb and McLelland, 2003). Most universities now have such websites where all such information and material is accessible by phone. At my own university students can register for classes and perform all kinds of administrative operations using only their phone. In our newest building, classrooms are equipped with six or eight large screens which mobile phones, and other Internet-capable portable devices can be connected to for students to share presentations, photos, videos, or web sites in small groups.

My 2015 survey showed that 92 percent of the students used their smartphone to access music, while 50 percent used a PC, and 45 percent used a portable music player. Only 5.8 percent used a tablet. Although a far greater percentage of students have their own computers these days, for some students interviewed in 2012 and 2015, switching on and sitting in front of their computer was too much trouble. They preferred to use their phone, which was always switched on, and which they could use while relaxing on their bed as well as when engaged in other activities. For such students, the computer is seen as a tool for study and writing assignments, not as an entertainment platform. A student in 2015 confessed that he had a PC, but did not know how to use it to copy CDs or download music from the Internet. He knew how to use his phone, but he did not know how to use his computer for importing data, only for writing reports and for watching You Tube.

Another factor affecting the choice of platform is the sound quality. While some students were content with the sound quality provided by their computer speakers when in the private space of their room, others preferred to listen

through their headphones connected to their phone, or use Blue Tooth and separate speakers, or their television's speakers to connect to their phone. For others, however, the bigger screen of the computer is an important factor in enhancing their music consumption experience, the reasons for which will be discussed in a later chapter.

Sean Cubitt (2013) and Will Straw (2013) compare the use of the small, handheld 'third screen' of the mobile device in public space with their larger counterparts, the large public display screen and the intermediate television and computer monitor. Whereas the large LCD screen has high resolution and often displays live events or sports competitions as well as advertising, Cubitt points out that viewers have little chance to interact with and no control over the content. In contrast, the small screens of mobile devices are low resolution. They display recorded commercial material, such as films, games, TV shows, music videos and advertising, but users can also port their personal photos, videos and share these with others through social networking sites. Moreover, they can speak, text, manipulate, and create their own new material. Laptops bridge the gap between private and public space with their portable high-resolution screens, but unlike third-screen devices, they cannot be used on the go. They also provide great intimacy when used with headphones. Third screens therefore act at the level of the individual, rather than large groups or crowds and interaction with them is far more personal and interpersonal. The popularity of handheld devices means that 'the sightless gaze of those lost in conversation or fantasy is now ubiquitous in public space' (Cubitt, 2013, p. 79). The meaning of public space has changed. The public is rarely addressed publicly. Instead, everyone is engrossed in private consumption and private networks.

Straw adds an extra dimension to Cubitt's observations by highlighting the contrast in the audiovisual content displayed on large screens and third screens. Whereas large screens tend to show live content that demands attention and responses, and may therefore feel vulgar and of little cultural value, third screens

lend themselves more easily to the viewing of self-contained television episodes, videoclips, or feature films. Unlike the consuming of 'live' audiovisual messages in which the user's attention is constantly required, downloaded and streamed material can be stopped, paused and rewound at the convenience of the user. Moreover, the third screen is able to provide professionally produced content, 'curated and archived by its owner' (p. 94). These are among the many reasons why the mobile phone is the preferred means for accessing the Internet and consuming music in both public and private spaces. Additional reasons specific to the Japanese context are explained in the following section.

### **Technological and social developments in mobile telephony**

Mobile phones (*keitai*) are now indispensable for daily life in Japan. Everyone is automatically assumed to own one and to use it as the primary means of communication. Young people cannot even sign up for part-time job agencies without a mobile phone number and mobile phone email address.

Mobile communications technologies in Japan have been driven not by the business elite, but by teenage girls and their initial adapting of pagers to suit their communications needs. In fact, the ways in which the Japanese music industry is organized and develops and markets its products have been strongly influenced by the practices of teenage girls.

The first mobile phones introduced in 1979 in Japan were car phones. Shoulder phones followed in 1985, and the first handheld cellular phone and pager in 1987. These machines were not used widely because of the high subscription costs and they were generally leased to companies or organizations. Employees would take a set outside the office as necessary. For this reason, they were associated mainly with businessmen and were seen as a binding medium that tied employees to their company (Okada, 2005), and therefore 'uncool' and 'tasteless' (Matsuda, 2005, p. 23). The way in which this image has radically

transformed demonstrates how 'the role of the consumer is absolutely critical' (Okada, 2005, p. 41).

In the 1990s, young women started to use pagers for personal purposes when NTT introduced the display-type pager, which showed digits and letters on the terminal's liquid crystal display and identified the caller to the receiver. 'This function changed the pager from a medium limited to receiving calls from one specific individual or location to one that could respond to calls from various sources such as the office, home, and friends' (Okada, 2005, p. 44). Young women used the numeric display on the pager screen to exchange short messages in which sequences of numbers and codes were assigned to words. In this way, the pager evolved into a medium of interactive text communication. In response, pager manufacturers added a new function that converted numbers into phonetic symbols enabling users to send messages that were readable by anybody. When subscription charges were reduced, increasing numbers of young people, especially female high school and college students, started to adopt pagers for personal communication. In 1993, 80 percent of new subscribers were in their teens and early twenties (Okada, 2005, p. 44). Youth pager uptake rapidly expanded further in 1995 when carriers started selling rather than renting sets and released a new pager that could receive text messages.

*Keitai* adoption by young people grew in tandem with adoption of pagers as costs were reduced. 'Around the year 2000, the negative image of *keitai* as a medium uniquely tied to youth began to shift' (Matsuda, 2005, p. 32). This was due to the spread of 'i-mode' (*keitai*-based Internet services) across the broader population, first introduced by NTT DoCoMo in February 1999. It is considered a 2.5 technology because it is 'something halfway between mobile telephoning and full-fledged mobile Internet' (McVeigh, 2003, p. 20). Third-generation (3G) phones were introduced in 2001. These devices had cameras for photos and videos, could be used as an audio player, and could play video clips or even films. McVeigh lists many uses of the 3G mobile phone apart from talking to

someone: information, services, navigation, shopping, recipes, melodies, images (downloaded and used to signal the arrival of mail), games, fortune-telling, entertainment, local and regional information, and ordering tickets. This research was carried out before the arrival of YouTube and the iPhone, not to mention the abundant applications that are available these days.

Japanese phone carriers introduced 3G *keitai* offering broadband Internet access in 2001, three years before the US. It gave rise to a whole new style of mobile phone usage among Japanese young people and by the end of 2002, 79.2 percent of *keitai* users subscribed to the Internet. By 2001, having a *keitai* had already become a 'social necessity' (Matsuda, 2005, p. 31) and young people were spending a large part of their income on financing their *keitai* use. By March 2006, 3G accounted for 53 percent of all mobile subscribers in Japan (Ito et al. 2005). It is unsurprising that Manabe (2009) comments that when the iPhone was introduced in 2007, it already seemed 'so yesterday' (p. 316) when compared with what Japanese people had been doing with their phones for some time already.

'The *keitai* Internet attracted attention not only because it boosted revenue for DoCoMo but also because it represented a new model for e-business, which had stagnated in Japan because of security concerns' (Matsuda, 2005, p. 32). Japan had been undergoing a prolonged recession after the economic bubble of the 1980s burst, and it saw IT as a key component in its economic recovery. Introduction of the i-mode was targeted at general users rather than the business community and it immediately boosted Internet penetration in Japan. *Keitai* Internet also made access to the Internet both possible and easy for people without IT skills. 'The barriers of technical knowledge and pricing that inhibited PC Internet adoption do not apply to the *keitai* Internet, and many Japanese first connected to the Internet through *keitai* (Matsuda, 2005, p. 33).

Standard PC websites were converted to i-mode reception and convenience stores saw the advantages of using the mobile Internet to sell tickets for concerts and other events for young people. The sites that are accessed most in Japan are those run by the ISPs that offer (for a fee) downloadable chimes, ringer melodies and cute characters which customers can use to customize their Internet-enabled mobile phones (Gottlieb and McLelland, 2003, p. 14). The Internet in Japan is big business because of this system for charging for all information downloaded (Gottlieb and McLelland, 2003).

Wi-Fi networks started to grow with Wi-Fi hotspot services being introduced in transit stations, hotels, fast food chains, and cafés. The success of Wi-Fi had a big effect on the adoption of 3G and 3G mobile communications (Kohiyama, 2005). Also, with the increase of bandwidths and the growing demand for streaming videos, the need for a new generation of mobile phones led to the introduction of the 4G iPhone in Japan in June 2010, followed by the iPhone 5 in September 2012, and the iPhone 6 in September 2014. When the iPhone was launched in Japan, Softbank was the only carrier to offer the iPhone to its customers (Apple Press Info., 2008). Before long, all the major phone providers in Japan were offering iPhone as well as Android services (KDDI au started in 2011 and DoCoMo in 2013). The iPhone is now the most commonly used *keitai* in Japan among the student population at my university and fourth generation (4G) mobile phone technology was introduced with the iPhone 4 in 2010, along with its Android competitors.

### **The relationship between *keitai* and popular music consumption**

Downloading music is becoming a more common practice these days as can be seen from the 2016 RIAJ data for 2015. Digital music sales increased 8% in 2015 to 47.1 billion yen on a value basis. This marked a second consecutive year-on-year increase, and was boosted by a steep rise of 58 percent in subscription services. While single tracks declined 5 percent year-on-year on a unit basis,

album sales increased 9 percent on a unit basis (RIAJ Yearbook 2016). The data show that downloads to mobile phones are mostly singles rather than albums (40% compared with 20% of the share of sales). Interestingly, record companies and retailers still tend to focus on albums because they seem more economically viable. Artists also see albums as an opportunity to make an artistic statement or to experiment with ideas that are perhaps not suitable for a pop single hit.

It is getting ever easier to make a spontaneous purchase now that phones are able to identify music playing around them using a free application called Shazam. If the consumer wants to purchase the music, they can do so immediately by downloading or buying the CD online. Thirty to forty percent of such searches result in a download, according to KDDI (Manabe, 2009, p. 326). Students I interviewed also use the Shazam application regularly to identify music that attracts their attention.

For a number of reasons specific to the Japanese context, downloading music files directly is still not as common as in Western countries. To understand why, it is necessary to look at the role that ringtones have played in the online music business in Japan. Ring tones (*chaku-mero*) are a key element of the early multimedia capabilities of *keitai* and signal the arrival of a message. Royalties have to be paid for use of a song download and so ring tones became an important commodity for Japan's music industry.

Although melodies had been used for ring tones from the days of the pager and the landline phone (Okada, 2005), they were first offered by NTT DoCoMo as pre-set ring tones in May 1996. In September, IDO (now KDDI au) offered a phone that would allow the programming of one's own original ring tone by inputting it into the keypad and this way of personalizing one's *keitai* soon became popular. In 1998, a book on how to program melodies was very successful and karaoke companies started to develop ring tones. The quality of sound and complexity of the melodies that could be played increased rapidly and

by 1999 the 'ringtone rage was on' (Manabe, 2009, p. 319). It was seen as useful to identify the ring tones of different callers or of different types of messages, but the pleasure that could be experienced when hearing music one liked was an important factor in the popularity of ring tones.

In December 2002, the provider KDDI au introduced their *chaku-uta* (ring song or master tone) service, which allowed users to take music directly from a CD. These clips were set up as 30-second ring tones that cost 100 yen each to download. Ring tone portal sites discovered that the ring tones were being used by young people for listening pleasure and for listening privately with earphones, or with friends. Young people also downloaded ring tones to keep up with the latest hits, or as a trial purchase before buying the CD. In response to this, KDDI au launched its *chaku-uta full* service that allowed customers to download the whole track for 300 yen in November 2004. (This was actually more than it cost to rent a CD album.) In the first 13 months, the service downloaded 30 million songs, and KDDI's service went on to download about four million songs a month (Manabe, 2008, p. 89). In the same year, KDDI au offered its flat rate for data packet transmission services, which greatly reduced the total cost of downloading. This proved very popular and grew fastest among KDDI au's content offerings. Leadership in these music-related applications helped KDDI au to increase its market share by 2007 and it was the first carrier to convert its subscribers to 3G. Storage capacity on mobile phones was also increased from 20 songs to over 1,000 songs with a 2GB flash card by 2007, which also stimulated demand (Manabe, 2009).

This service quickly became very popular. The attraction came from being able to hear their choice of music anytime, anywhere (Okada, 2005). Given the popularity of the ring tone, it is easy to see why the *keitai* has evolved into the main music platform for the vast majority of the students I surveyed in 2015 (92.2%).

When Manabe (2009) surveyed 100 mostly female junior college students in 2006, she found that 80 percent acquired ring tones by downloading them through their phones. About half were using *chaku-uta* (master tones) for listening pleasure rather than as ring tones. Although most of them preferred listening to albums on iPods or MD players, nearly 80 percent used their phones to listen to music for short periods, 'often for the instant gratification of listening only to song hooks' (Manabe, 2009, p. 321). It will be seen later that this style of sample listening is still common among my own informants when streaming music videos from YouTube.

When KDDI au made a Google-run search engine available on its mobile service in 2006, there was an increase in free *chaku-uta* sites. Although many of these sites were legal, gaining revenues from advertising or point systems based on users introducing other users, illegal *chaku-uta* sites also increased, and usage was especially high among 12- to 15-year-olds (Manabe, 2009).

Record companies became keen to exploit *chaku-uta* as a promotional device for new albums and started releasing a *chaku-uta* to a portal before the release of a new album as a promotional strategy and offered a free *chaku-uta* to customers who bought an album. Ring tones and mobile marketing soon became the means by which people heard new songs for the first time. According to the Record Industry Association Japan (RIAJ) annual report in 2016, the peak in master ring tones was in 2007 and there has been a steady decline since then. Indeed, no students reported using ring tone services to access music in either the survey I conducted in 2015 or in the interviews I carried out in 2012 and 2015.

### **The iPod and iTunes and other MP3/4 players**

Ring tones and other music downloads to mobile phones 'are part of a major industrial transformation where the telecommunication industry is moving closer to the music and entertainment industries' (Wikström, 2009, p.113). The portable

music player has also adapted to the changes in technology and ways of acquiring, storing, and playing music. In fact it was Steve Jobs of Apple who found a way to facilitate the legal acquisition of music for portable music devices.

Following the furore caused by Napster and other file sharing networks in the early 2000s, Steve Jobs saw that a legitimate online music site could succeed if it functioned as a store. Jobs forged a deal with the major labels in the recording industry in 2002 and iTunes was launched on April 28, 2003. By June 2005, iTunes had grown as popular as the major P-2-P services (Goldsmith and Wu, 2008) and dominated the more than 500 digital music services that sell recorded music online (Wikström, 2009). In 2011, 'iTunes sold 38.23% of the retail music market' (Arditi, 2014, p. 417) and with over 13 million songs available for download, it has the largest collection of all the online music stores and so consumers are likely to look first on iTunes for a song they want.

The situation in Japan was different at first to that of countries with early high levels of PC penetration. In spite of high rates of broadband diffusion, the legal ripping of music from rental CDs or the illegal downloading from shared MP3 files to a PC was only one-tenth of the amount of downloads to mobile phones. One reason is the media attention given to high profile cases of people arrested and convicted for developing illegal download sites. The other reason is that many young people did not own their own PC. This, in turn, affected ownership of digital audio players such as iPods. Sony recognized this problem and introduced the Walkman S digital audio player in 2006, which recorded music directly from CD and MD players (Manabe, 2009). Japanese record companies initially showed little interest in the downloading market and, as explained above, charged high prices for single-track (*chaku-uta*) downloads. When iTunes entered the Japanese market in August 2005, however, Japanese online music stores lowered their prices to match those of iTunes. One other problem with downloading to PCs was that young people did not have credit cards. If they downloaded to their phone, the cost would be added to their monthly bill. iTunes

now sell pre-paid cards at convenience stores, so that problem has been solved and Japanese record companies have gradually made their catalogues available to iTunes and so there is now greater choice for those wishing to pay for their music. The cost of a J-pop single track on iTunes these days is ¥250 (the same price as renting a CD album for one week.)

### **The attitudes of young Japanese to illegally downloading and sharing music files**

In 2010 an amendment to Article 30 of Japan's Copyright legislation made it illegal to knowingly download unauthorized digital content. This has made users afraid to download content for fear of punishment. Article 30 does not specify the punishment, but leaves the public feeling vulnerable to overzealous law enforcers (Mehra, 2013). This could explain why the very first student I interviewed in 2011, an economics major, believed that he would be breaking the law by watching videos uploaded to YouTube. Such nervousness no longer exists, and students freely admit that they disrespect copyright law on a daily basis.

It is unfortunate that Manabe (2009) does not explain why illegal ring tone sites were especially popular with 12-15 year-old Japanese teenagers. One could speculate that this is related to their high level of curiosity about all the music that is available, combined with insufficient spending money to satisfy that curiosity, a sentiment that was often expressed by my informants in 2012 and 2015. One such example is a young woman interviewed in 2015 who was aware that sharing data with friends was "bad", but there was so much she wanted to hear that she could no longer buy or rent it all.

Knowing how much emphasis there had been in Japan on public education about the illegality of sharing copyrighted materials, I was initially surprised by the number of students in 2012 who said that they shared music files with friends using applications they could download to their phones, in spite of the high level

of awareness that this was against copyright. One young man (S) explained to me (A):

S: I don't buy in iTunes.

A: OK.

S: All my friends send.

A: Send you files? Right. I won't tell anybody! (Laughter)

S: Er.... And the iPhone has the application... it's free to get the music so I recently I use the application.

A: Ah, OK.

S: But it's not good.

A: Why is it not good?

S: Because the *chosakuken* (copyright).

The next part of our conversation illustrates the dilemma that this young man and most of the students I interviewed face:

A: You feel it's better to pay some money.

S: Yes. But I have no money.

A: Oh, OK. All right.

S: But I know to get the music free so it's very easy to me.

A: Right. So it's easy to get music free, but you know it's not good.

S: Yes.

A: It's difficult, isn't it?

S: Yeah (laughs).

Another reason why students feel they have little choice but to share files among friends is when they are fans of music genres or artists whose CDs are only available in limited regions. A young man I interviewed in 2012, who is a fan of Japanese reggae from his hometown, was unable to buy these CDs in Western Japan and so relied on friends sending him files of the latest CDs. His friends

also sent him files of an American artist they all like. In fact, it turned out that all the music on his iPhone had been sent by friends. The conversation ended with laughter and he even apologized.

A: And where do you get the music from?

S: Er... friends! This music is all friends. (Laughter)

A: OK, you've got very good friends, haven't you? OK, but I will not tell anyone.

This is secret.

S: Sorry.

In the case of this student, his receiving music from his friends back home while he is away at university is a way of socializing with them, or 'hanging out' through sharing the same music. Horst, Herr-Stephenson and Robinson (2013) say that, 'One of the most common ways that kids hang out together with media is listening to music, a practice that stands as a source of affinity among friends' (p. 41). They are discussing American teenagers, but it seems that certain teenage practices are common among Japanese young people, too. They go on to quote a sixteen-year-old girl who says, 'I use like the iTunes store, but I don't have any more money, so I just go over to my friends' houses and plug in to their computer and get songs off there' (p. 41). This attitude to sharing, particularly when a lack of money prevents them from buying the music they want, is also very close to what the Japanese students said about not being able to afford to buy all the music they want to hear. Arditi (2014) explains the underlying cultural logic shared by these young people from Japan and the USA: 'File sharing was developed out of the same cultural logic as creating mixtapes. People who collect music tend to enjoy listening to and talking about that music with friends; if a person's friends did not have the means to purchase music, the person with the music would create mixtapes for the others' (p. 413.)

Another student in 2012 confessed he downloaded music to his Walkman free from a website. Instead of apologizing, he thanked me when I reassured him that I would not reveal his secret.

A: And ... so you ... to get the music on your Walkman, do you ...er ... get it from CDs or from iTunes, or...?

S: Computer site (laughs)

A: Computer site ... hmm...

S: But it is ...

A: File sharing?

S: Yes.

A: Ah, OK. This is secret. I'm not going to tell anyone.

S: Thank you. Thank you.

A female student in 2012 explained her frustration with the way music videos are frequently taken down by YouTube at the request of the copyright holders. She is content to watch what she can for free, however, and does not purchase any music online. Recording companies may be disappointed to know that rather than providing an incentive to buy the music, a music video that can be watched for free on YouTube obviates the need to purchase the music for this young woman.

S: If someone uploaded new video, and no *chosakuken* (copyright) and the video has no *chosakuken* then YouTube deletes it. So my favourite videos are deleted many times.

A: Right.

S: You know I put on my favourite list.

A: Yes.

S: The next day I was going to watch but it was gone.

A: Right. Erm right and this happens a lot in Japan, doesn't it, because the music companies, the recording companies check?

S: Yeah.

A: So do you think ... erm... the music companies are losing customers by doing this or ... because they are obviously worried about getting money from *chosakuken* (copyright).

S: If we watch their music videos, we don't think we want to buy.

A student interviewed in 2012 seemed to speak for many at that time when he declared "free is best".

The most popular social networking site among young Japanese at the time of writing is called LINE. It can be used to share MP3 and MP4 files very quickly and easily. When a student interviewed in a focus group in 2015 said that he received data from friends through LINE, although he knew it was bad, others in the group all agreed this is wrong and warned him about what he was saying by pointing to the video camera recording their discussion. However, this was all said and done in a light-hearted and joking way.

There is clearly a consensus among the students I have interviewed most recently that, in principle, they should pay for their downloads because the artists should be paid. They feel especially guilty when artists make a song for charity and think they should not download these for free. They also appreciate artists who put their songs on YouTube so that people do not have to pay to listen to them.

Phone service providers, such as DoCoMo, are trying to discourage illegal file sharing by providing a service that offers a big selection of commercially made music videos (Japanese and Western), films and dramas for a small extra monthly charge (¥500). Other large companies (KDDI au and Softbank) have the same service. Some students subscribe to this and feel the small extra charge is reasonable and the selection available is adequate for their needs.

Nevertheless, there is a widely shared attitude that downloading for free from YouTube is acceptable if they do not have enough money to pay for CDs, especially when it is Japanese material, such as from *anime* series shown on TV that were quickly taken down from YouTube at the request of the rights owners. These fans feel guilty about downloading because it is “not good”, but do so because they know that the music they enjoyed may soon get taken down from YouTube and they feel they have little choice, especially as the number of CD rental shops is decreasing.

In 2010 and 2011, it was easy to download videos from YouTube, but it got harder in 2012 when the sites that facilitated this were regularly closed down. The main drawback to legally accessing a lot of video material on mobile phones, however, is the amount of data this uses. Several students in 2015 complained that the data limit (*dēta-seigen*) on their phone provider contract discourages this and that their phone bills become very expensive if they increase their data capacity. One student often finds her phone service has been cut off because she has exceeded her monthly limit. Some students reduce the problem of limited data capacity by using an old phone that still holds their music collection as a music player and buy a new phone for their other telecommunication and Internet access needs. They also use their PC and not their *keitai* if they want to watch YouTube. There are new applications available on mobile phones that the students showed me, such as Clip Box, which allows videos to be streamed, not downloaded to the phone’s memory. One student in 2015 said that he uses a free application to download all his music to his mobile phone (J-pop/idol music and foreign music). He said that it’s “too easy”. He clearly shares the free-spirited thinking of many other pioneers and commentators that if the technology allows this, business needs to catch up, not simply block the use of technological advances that improve the quality of life.

## Japanese artists' websites and social networking

Nowadays, Japanese people have easier access to the Internet through the spread of broadband, the increase in PC ownership and the steady (but still patchy) spread of Wi-Fi in addition to their *keitai* service providers. This has had an influence on music consumption, not only in terms of purchasing music, but also in a variety of other ways. From the point of view of information exchange, introduction of the Internet for private and commercial use in Japan in 1993 soon led to the setting up of official web sites (*kōshiki saito*) to promote artists and music. The official websites enabled idols to have regular and direct contact with fans, making the idols easily accessible, an essential aspect of the idol's image (Aoyagi, 2005). Unofficial sites were also created by fans wishing to build on-line communities. The official sites differ in that the artists participate in their design and content, and any music files and photographic images of the artists that may be accessed there are copyright protected (Stevens, 2008). Some official sites are hosted privately through a named server. For example, Imawano Kiyoshirō's site is <http://www.kiyoshiro.co.jp>, while other sites are hosted by record company servers. Matsutōya Yumi's "Yuming's Sound Library" is at <http://www.toshiba-emi.co.jp/yuming/>, while SMAP's site is through Victor Records (Stevens, 2008). This means of promotion is ongoing with sites becoming ever more attractive and sophisticated, providing background information on the artists and upcoming performances, access to music videos, an online store for music and other goods, and special privileges for those who sign up as members. Just one example is the site of the band Goose House (<http://goosehouse.jp/>) that started by posting covers on YouTube, but who have now released CDs, been on tours, and gained a following.

Another very important development facilitated by the Internet is the launching of social networking sites that allow the sharing of listening choices and confirm a much deeper level of connection between friends. 'Listening builds commonality and difference' (Brabazon, 2012, p. 16). Social networking sites perform another

very important function and that is enabling musicians to embed their music, and for potential future producers to discover it, along with fans. Ole Mjøs (2012) describes the important pioneering role MySpace played in the promotion of musicians and explains the reasons why Facebook and YouTube have overtaken MySpace as the leading social networking and video sharing sites worldwide. Japan has its own social networking site called Mixi, which used to be popular among the young women I interviewed in 2012, but these days, the most widely used social networking services among Japanese young people are LINE and Facebook.

Japan also has its own video-sharing website called Nico Nico Dōga (ニコニコ動画). The site is in Japanese and people can upload music videos and send comments that are displayed across the screen in real time while the videos are playing. It is popular with amateur musicians wanting to showcase their work and demonstrates how active amateur production and audience participation are now part of the daily lives of young Japanese. However, this site is not as popular as YouTube because the comments rolling across the screen detract from the viewing experience for some young Japanese users and, according to my student informants, it has also developed an *otaku* (nerdish) image. The main means of access to music these days is YouTube, which will be the focus of the next chapter.

### **Using Web 2.0 to publish music and build audiences**

Web 2.0 is a term used to denote a family of web-based services which enable users to socialize with friends and family, store and edit photos and videos, build websites, listen to, remix, record and upload music and videos. Thanks to the combination of the reduced costs of musical instruments, recording hardware and software, and the existence of Web 2.0, one of the most important characteristics of the music economy in the new media era is the ability for amateurs to express their creativity by making and publishing music online. 'The

distance between the amateur and the professional artist has been reduced' (Wikström, 2009, p.118). However, the playing field is far from level, even given the advantages of the long-tail economy environment that the Internet can provide. Only a limited number of people are able to make a decent living as a creative force in the music industry these days.

Wikström (2009) explains how Western music firms have reduced their marketing budget and concentrated their marketing resources on a limited set of prioritized artists with wide audience appeal and these artists have to be continuously profitable to avoid being dropped from their company's roster. Moreover, major Western firms no longer seem interested in investing in and developing new talent. This contrasts with the emphasis in Japan on training idols and new artists in management companies discussed in the previous chapter. Nevertheless, the situation for independent musicians in Japan, who do not fit the management company mode, is as tough as in the West.

In the winter of 2015, I had an opportunity to interview two professional musicians (a brother and sister who I have known since they were in their early teens) struggling to make a living through writing and performing music. They work independently most of the time, but also collaborate on video productions and at gigs when opportunities arise. They are the children of non-Japanese missionaries and were born and raised in Japan. They sing in both English and Japanese and their audiences are of mixed national and ethnic backgrounds. They have both graduated from Berklee College of Music. (The brother was at the main school in Boston and his sister studied at branches in Brazil and Australia. She also sings in Portuguese and Spanish.) Their experiences illustrate that although the Internet allows them to reach a wider audience, they need to invest first in cameras and sound recording equipment, sometimes pay for a recording studio and backing musicians, as well as learn how to use the different platforms effectively before they can expect their music published privately on the Internet to generate any income.

When I asked the brother if he had made any money from YouTube, he replied, “If I have, it must be a very tiny amount”. He explained that musicians only make money by posting their own content. Cover songs are not their own content and are flagged for copyright. “If you do cover stuff you really have to have a huge following so that the advertisers can see how much money they can potentially be making off you and then you can make money”.

The sister explained how she has posted one of her songs that was recorded with professional backing musicians in a hired studio for sale on her own website. She decided to let people pay what they liked, but when someone purchased it for 2 dollars, he emailed her to say that she should change that option not only because of the costs incurred by the video production, but also because she was undervaluing her work. However, she is undecided about the best approach because she does not want to put up barriers that may prevent people from listening to and buying her song. Speer (2016) discusses similar dilemmas faced by London-based rappers and characterizes the tension artists experience between using their creative talents and the need to be business oriented as the need to develop ‘cultural entrepreneurship’.

In addition to creating their own websites, there are many social networking sites that musicians can use to disseminate their work. My informants pointed out how important it is to use these sites in a carefully considered way, and that musicians cannot simply upload the same video recording to different platforms and expect it to have the same impact. In fact, doing this may create a negative impression, as the brother explained:

... (if) you have (your logo) in the corner, but it gets cut off on Instagram, it just looks lazy. But on YouTube, it looks great and on YouTube you can actually put (a) “click the box” link here. That’s the other thing, ... but YouTube mobile doesn’t have it yet. So again, ... is most of your audience going to be watching it on mobile or are they going to be watching it on desktop? If watching on desktop great, use the link, but if you do that on mobile, you look kind of

stupid and ... then if you do that on Facebook video, you look even more stupid.

In addition to awareness of their target audience and the platforms they use, musicians need to take into consideration whether they want a video to have a longer shelf life and join their archive of work, or attract attention for a few days and then fall out of circulation. He compared posting his work on YouTube and Facebook. On YouTube he has his own channel “so there’s more weight carried with each video that you put up” and he therefore has to be certain that he wants people to see it. Whereas with Facebook, he can take risks “knowing that it won’t disappear, but it will kind of have its shelf life for one or two days, maybe a week ... and then it’s gone and people can still get access to it, but it’s not going to pop up unless they really actively go hunting for it”.

His sister made the point that even though musicians post their work on a social networking site, there is no guarantee that even their friends will listen to it. “It’s really hard to just get people to actually play. And I know sometimes with some of my friends I see they’ve uploaded a new song and sometimes I feel I might not click, but unless ... maybe if they have a video or something ... I’d like to see what they’re up to”.

Young musicians like these need to learn not simply how to produce a music video, they also need to understand the different platforms, and the system of tagging used on sites like YouTube to catch the attention of audiences and potential sponsors. However, there were no courses in these skills offered at their college.

Two examples of Japanese independent artists who have caught the attention of production companies through their uploads to YouTube, and who now have their own CDs on sale at Tower Records, are Kobasolo, a young man who performs all the vocals and instrumentals on his covers of Western and

Japanese hits, and Goose House (mentioned above), a singing song writing group who specialized initially in covers of Japanese hits.

Both musicians I interviewed see that video blogging (vlogging) can be very helpful in building an online presence and have started learning this new skill. The role of the visual, and the ways in which it plays an integral role in musical promotion on the Internet, will be explored below and in the following chapter.

An example of a musician with already established popularity who uses the Internet to promote his own music independently and to have a direct relationship with the audience at the same time is Trent Reznor, a.k.a. Nine Inch Nails ('nin.com'). Wikström (2009) describes how Reznor released his studio project *Ghosts I-IV*. 36 instrumental songs recorded in the autumn of 2007. He used the band's website ('nin.com') as the distribution channel and released the songs under a license which allowed fans to remix and redistribute the work in a multitude of different formats. Reznor also launched an Internet-based 'Film Festival' on YouTube where he invited fans to create and upload their visual interpretations of the songs. This was very successful. By the end of 2008, fans had uploaded over 2,000 videos and a large number of user-generated remixes had been posted to 'remix.nin.com'. There were also various product packages offered ranging from a '\$5 Download' to a '\$300 Ultra Deluxe Limited Edition Package'. During the first week, 781,917 transactions generated \$1,619,420 in sales revenue. The '\$5 Download' was released on Amazon MP3 Downloads and remained one of their top-selling albums in March-April 2008. This is remarkable knowing that the album was no doubt available for free through illegal file-sharing networks and services.

Wikström (2009) uses this example to illustrate the state of the Anglo-American music industry a decade after Shawn Fanning released Napster and peer-to-peer file sharing changed the music industry. The fundamental structure of Reznor's project was shaped by digital technologies. It shows how the music industry has

evolved from the 20<sup>th</sup> century when vertically integrated multinational music companies could control how, when and where their albums were released, promoted and distributed. According to Wikström (2009), the core of Reznor's project is not the 36 songs he recorded, but his relationship with the fans and the thousands of remixes, videos, comments and blog posts uploaded to nin.com, YouTube, ninremixes.com and a host of other places '... in the Cloud'.

Wikström uses the term '... in the Cloud' to emphasize how the music industry, in less than a decade had 'completely shifted its centre of gravity from the physical to the virtual – from the Disk to the Cloud' (p.4). In the past, the young music audience used to play a CD during a party, but now it is also less common that they play MP3s stored on their computers or iPods. Increasingly, they listen to music from YouTube or another Web-based music service, or download a party mix from a file-sharing network. 'Music is no longer something the mainstream owns and collects – Music is in the Cloud' (p. 4). Although the situation in Japan is not exactly the same for all the reasons outlined above, it is shared to a large extent.

### **Media convergence and its effects on media consumption practices in Japan**

Digital formats, which allow a much greater compression of data than analogue, make it possible for broadcast systems to carry many more times the volume of information, and this has enabled media convergence. Now that text, images and sound can be easily combined in one service, there is greater compatibility between different delivery platforms, resulting in a greater degree of media intertextuality and marketing synergy.

Karlin (2012) discusses how blogs and social media have become the main means by which information about products is shared in Japan, thanks to the diversity of media platforms now available. Television is no longer the main

medium through which awareness of new products is raised. With media convergence these days, Japanese consumers are more active in their relationships with media companies.

With media convergence, there is not only a change in technology but also a shift in the relationship between the producer and the consumer. The consumers under the old system were predictable and stationary, but new consumers are seeking greater interaction and connection (Karlin, 2012, p. 84).

In Japan, audiences are not abandoning television, but they are developing 'a digital lifestyle of new social practices. Television viewers are increasingly multitasking or watching while engaged in other activities (*nagara shichō*), particularly while accessing the Internet on PCs or mobile devices' (Mizushima, 2008, 152 quoted in Karlin, 2012, p. 84). Evidence for this is the way that the key search terms for popular search engines and trending topics on social network sites and blogs in Japan often reflect closely what is on TV. Such practices have been confirmed by my students who tell me that they and even their parents watch television with their *keitai* in their hands, following up or reacting to what they see and hear on the TV. In this way, television and the Internet have become closely intertwined and are not evolving as separate domains.

In addition to the practice of using the Internet while watching TV, after a broadcast, viewers will share and watch content online that they have recorded using sites like LINE, Facebook, and YouTube. Digital recording devices are very widespread: 73 percent of households in Japan had a digital recording device in 2010 (Karlin, 2012, p. 85). Typically, Japanese broadcasters ask for the removal of such content from the Internet because it violates copyright, but this happens only after thousands of people have already shared and watched it online. The fans of idols derive pleasure from watching commercials and shows that their favourite idols appear in multiple times. A student I interviewed in 2015 confirmed that she loves to watch recorded TV interviews with her favourite idol group (Kisumai) again and again. The appearance of idols in commercials generates a

lot of activity on fan blogs and websites and fans also go to the websites of the products being advertised to watch the CMs. Karlin (2012) explains how the pleasures fans derive from repeatedly watching and 'reading' their idols have been enhanced through media convergence and increased access to the Internet:

The ineffable quality of affective identification with idols or celebrities compels the fan to want to convey the experience to others ... with the spread of online video sharing, including commercials, these experiences can now be collected, shared, and discussed by fans in a way that was not possible earlier (p. 83-84).

### **Visual communication about music**

Brabazon (2012) discusses how 'computer-mediated environments are transforming the relationships between sound and vision. The screen has become a new space for a visual communication about music' (p. 21). The link between sound and vision has always existed (performers and DJs are seen at live music venues, magazines and album covers have presented performers and the music visually), but Brabazon says that the iPod, iPhone and iPad have created different relationships between visibility and music. 'Moreover, social networking sites confirm that music is not only visible, but also that screens are preserving and disseminating new histories of sound' (Brabazon, 2012, p. 21).

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has traced the historical developments that have ushered in the age of new media both at a global and local level. It is important to pay attention to the unique ways in which new media technologies are used by consumers in different cultures and the ways in which these varied uses drive further developments. The role of the mobile phone in Japan has influenced the ways in which Japanese people access the Internet and has driven the development of new mobile phone capabilities. It is the main entertainment platform for Japan's

youth today and their prime music platform as well as an educational tool in university classrooms.

Innovations by Sony have driven the notion of personalised listening from the development of the transistor radio in 1955 to the Walkman in 1979 and its current fourth generation digital models. The parents of my student informants could create personalized playlists on cassette tapes and cocoon themselves within their own soundscape and so it is unsurprising that young Japanese today can be seen listening to music through headphones in the street, on public transportation, and even in the library when studying.

For the younger Japanese generation, music is not necessarily a commodity to be purchased. It is often seen as something that can be obtained freely and shared freely with friends. In spite of a very keen awareness that music artists have a right to be paid for their creative work, when Japanese young people do not have the money or the means to obtain the music they want legally, it is so easy to obtain it illegally that no serious remorse is felt. This universally shared attitude signals a need for the music industry to find new ways to market their products and ensure that their suppliers receive fair compensation for their creative work.

Another change resulting from the compression and containment of data and the increased storage on portable devices made possible by digital technology is that personal music collections have grown immensely (Lange, 2016). One student interviewed in 2016 showed me that he had 2035 songs on his phone and had used only 76 percent of his storage space. Digital technology has also brought about increased media convergence allowing audiences to access multiple platforms concurrently and media texts can consist of combinations of visual images, sounds and written words. The focus of the next chapter will therefore be on the role of the visual in recorded music consumption.

## 5 Contemporary commercial music video: its roles and aesthetics

### What is a music video today?

Bente Kristiansen (1985, quoted in Korsgaard, 2013) proposed a definition of a commercial music video in its MTV heyday that includes five features that many other scholars highlight. They are: 1) brevity, 2) a combination of visuals and music, 3) the music is pop and rock music, 4) the song precedes the visuals, 5) they have a dual purpose as both commercials and entertainment. Korsgaard (2013) suggested two additional features, which are that the song is not altered and its length determines the video's length, and that the image illustrates features of the song in order to sell it. Nevertheless, even with these additions, this definition does not encompass the full range of commercial music videos circulating today. Music videos have started appearing as apps for smart phones and tablet computers. Some are similar to video games, while others are interactive music videos. Some music videos are even actual games that need to be completed before the song ends (Korsgaard, 2013). Interactive music videos, together with the proliferation of user-generated clips that are uploaded daily to social networking platforms, are blurring the lines between corporate produced music videos and miscellaneous others that my informants accessed through YouTube and classed as "music video".

Carol Vernallis (2013<sup>b</sup>), observes that the commercial music video used to be defined as 'a product of the record company in which images are put to a recorded pop song in order to sell the song. None of this definition holds any longer' (p. 208). Individuals as well as companies can post videos on YouTube or other platforms and many prosumers do not expect to make any money. The images can be taken from many different sources and the song may be recorded afterwards. The song may not even be a pop song, or it may be a mashup, remix, cover or parody. Vernallis therefore offers a new and simple definition, which she acknowledges as perhaps too broad: 'a relation of sound and image

that we recognize as such' (p. 208). In order to strengthen the definition somewhat, she adds the requirement 'that the images seem engaged with showing off the soundtrack to some extent' (p. 209). This broad definition covers the all types of music video that will be discussed in this chapter.

The concept of music video has its roots in the earliest days of audiovisual media. There is a case to be made that the Phonoscènes of the early 1900s were a form of music video as they provided entertainment in the form of visuals accompanying a pre-recorded piece of music that promoted the artists and the music. It could even be said that the Soundies and Scopitones played on Panoram and Scopitone jukeboxes in the 1930s-60s provided a closer experience to consuming modern music videos on internet-connected platforms because audiences could select what to view and when. The promotional film clips that were used on television in the 1960s –70s may look more like music videos of later decades in that they were not all simply performance-based and were more experimental, but audiences had no direct access to them. It was during the early MTV era in the 1980s that such clips came to be called music videos and this coincided with the introduction of music video recording and playback technology that allowed audiences to record their favourite videos to watch when they wanted. Music video is now in a post-televisual period. Many new types of video have appeared via mainstream satellite services and online. While some are similar to traditional music videos, others push the boundaries of the medium, such as interactive music videos, which not only allow audiences to manipulate images and sound, but provide a tactile as well as a visual and audio experience. Moreover, many of the new interactive music video types are not short, the song does not necessarily come first, and the advertising function is not always straightforward. This brings us back to the question: what is a commercial music video today?

In order to retain a focus on the aim of this thesis, this chapter will discuss the features of the kinds of music videos that my informants were consuming, which

were mainly corporate produced blockbuster music videos. The questions and views of the informants will therefore form the basis of this discussion. For example, a young man suddenly asked this question in the middle of a focus group discussion in 2015: “What is the purpose to making a music video?” He explained that he usually listens to music and does not feel the need to watch music videos, but knows that sometimes you can buy a CD that has a video as well as the audio track. Another student suggested that it is for name recognition (*chimeido*) for the artists, and that music videos help to popularise a song. She gave examples such as music videos with dancing or “drama-type” videos. A third student said that music videos create an atmosphere (*funiki*) around a song. If a good quality video is made, and if people think it is a good video, the music is more highly evaluated. She gave Katy Perry’s videos as an example and the others agreed.

A little later, however, the group disagreed about the extent to which Japanese artists are involved in “making” music videos. One student said that artists ask music video companies to make a video to go with their song and another agreed, saying that the artists tell a video company how to make the video. A third student said that very big artists don’t make videos themselves. They ask a “proper video company” to make videos for publicity to make the record sell. She also thought that the band tells the company how they want the video. A fourth student disagreed. In her opinion, the “top level people” (company executives) are in control of making videos because they are the ones who sell the records. The artists are “lower level people” and have no control. The others agreed that in the case of Japanese idol groups like Arashi, the management company controls everything. They all thought, however, that independent artists, like the Japanese band YUZU, have artistic control.

The above discussion provides a glimpse into the role that English-language and Japanese music videos play in the eyes of young Japanese people today and shows their uncertainty about the music video production process and the

question of who has artistic control. In fact, when we look back at the history of the music video, we can see that all these students said is true now, and has been true in the past. This chapter will therefore examine the types of music video that my Japanese informants are familiar with paying attention to their purpose and aesthetics. The consumption practices of young audiences, their interpretation and the uses they make of them will be discussed in later chapters.

## **The purpose of music video**

### **Promotion of the song and artist**

Although there have been many different forms of commercially produced music video over the last century, and new styles are emerging all the time as production and playback technologies improve, music videos past and present have shared three main aims: to showcase the artist(s), to promote the song, and to provide visuals that enhance appreciation of the sound track. Music videos combine screen media and popular music, a relationship that can be traced back to the earliest days of the visual and audio industries (Mundy, 1999; Keazor and Wubbena, 2010). In the 1880s and 1890s popular music publishers had new songs performed against a background of specially painted curtains or a series of photographic slides. The slide shows included up to one thousand slides and were very expensive to produce. They demonstrate, however, that music publishers were already aware of the promotional value of providing visual images in the commercial exploitation of popular music. The French film pioneer Alice Guy combined moving pictures with sound recordings of musical and other types of performance in her Phonoscènes in the early 1900s. She would play a pre-recorded musical performance on a gramophone while filming, and singers would lip sync to the audio recording, a practice that continues today. In cinemas, the audio and visual tracks were played and projected on two synchronized machines, called a Chronophone. They proved to be excellent promotional tools, presenting performances to audiences far and wide, increasing the income and

fame (*chimeido*) of the performers and their producers in the same way “promotion videos” (as music videos are called in Japan) still do today.

The modern music video, however, is consumed by my informants in very different ways. It is freely available through their smart phones and computers, viewed mainly on a small or medium-sized screen, usually in a private setting and whenever they choose. The music is heard through headphones or their computer or television speakers. Moreover, music video watched on YouTube is not a major entertainment event, rather an entertaining means to pass the time, to aid their focus, to discover new artists and music, or enjoy current or old favourites.

### **Performance and authorial voice**

The majority of commercial English-language music videos showcase the artists and use the artists’ performances to enhance the viewing and musical experience. In the case of female artists, it was noted by my informants, they are often highly sexualized. Hawkins (2013) says that music videos are designed to excite the viewer as well as promote the artists. When we see an artist performing a song on video, this provides a new interpretation of the audio recording influenced by the mannerisms of the artist’s body. He demonstrates how, in the case of Rihanna’s performance in her video “Umbrella” (2007), the aesthetics are based on a process of transformation in which the essentials of the artist’s look, her erotics, and her sex appeal are heightened cosmetically by the characteristics of her sound. Moreover, the visibility of the artist’s body is intended to encourage multiple viewings and is based largely on the gaze of the (predominantly white male) director who controls the artist’s body when in performance mode. This raises questions of the artist’s agency and the way that displaying the body can control the audiovisual space.

Many scholars have discussed the issues of female artist sexualisation, agency and authorial voice (Lewis, 1990; McClary, 1991; Cook, 1998; Vernallis, 2004;

Zaslow, 2009; Benson-Allott, 2013). Hawkins indicates that Rihanna freely agreed to comply with the suggestions of the director (Chris Applebaum) and concludes that although Rihanna's overtly sexy performance belongs to a long tradition of older men directing young women, there is something consistent in Rihanna's own authoring that affords her authority, despite the great range of songs and videos she has recorded.

Lewis (1990), McClary (1991) Cook (1998), Vernallis (2004), Railton and Watson (2011), and Benson-Allott (2013) acknowledge the authorial voice of Madonna in her music videos. In his discussion of the multiple roles Madonna plays in "Material Girl" (1985), Cook explains that performance shots usually give the viewer direct access to the artist and represent a means of identification with the star. In the case of "Material Girl", this is complicated by the fact that there are two Madonnas: Madonna 1 is the music video star who is making this video and Madonna 2 is a fictional character performed by Madonna I. The many Madonnas in the video show that the singer-Madonna and the actor-Madonna are creations of the author-Madonna who we never hear or see, but who is always in charge.

Benson-Allott (2013) discusses how Madonna and Lady Gaga make use of the glitch (a stutter or gap in the video) to remind the viewer that they are watching a video image: the missed beats and dropped frames interrupt the choreography as well as the viewer's pleasure and "fantasy of mastery" (p. 127). Planned and simulated glitches highlight the artist's ambivalent relationships to patriarchal video culture and provide opportunity for critical reflection. By foregrounding technological and temporal distances, Madonna's video "Don't Tell Me" (2000) shows the audience that desire for a video performer must be understood as telerotic, an illusion. Lady Gaga uses the glitch also in some of her most popular videos, such as "Poker Face" (2008), "Paparazzi" (2009) and "Telephone" (2010) to create her own technological and temporal look. In "Poker Face", a freezing and skipping effect is used to create fleeting impressions of movement in still

images of Gaga with a male admirer. These shots are mixed with long shots of Gaga's highly sexualized choreography while scantily dressed. In this way, the erotic tableaux can be seen only briefly and never gazed upon, demonstrating that Lady Gaga is beyond the control of her audience. These intentional glitches remind the viewers of the incompleteness of the image. In other words, the object (the video star performer seen in the video file) was always already absent and unobtainable.

### **Promotion of the song without the artist**

My informants showed how aware they were of the function of the music video to promote the artist when they expressed surprise at the complete absence of Justin Bieber in both of the videos promoting his 2015 hit "Sorry". One is a lyric video with the song lyrics appearing on everyday objects as the young woman who Justin Bieber is apologising to tries to go about her daily life. The other is an energetic dance routine by girl dancers. The informants liked the dance version a lot because "their dance really matches Justin Bieber's music". When one of them observed that "Justin Bieber's lyrics and their dancing don't match", another explained that "the rhythm and the dance is really matching so his rhythm dum, dum, dum ... so dance dum, dum, dum (gesturing the beat with her arms) so I really exciting with that music so I like dance in music video." Although this student had never studied musicology or taken a course in media studies, she knew from instinct and experience that the visuals of music videos do not need to match the lyrics of the song for a music video to be engaging and effective. She sums up in her own words and actions the concept of *parallelism* borrowed from Gorbman's (1987) work on sound in cinema by Negus (1996): 'Parallelism has been most apparent in music video when the images have been merely following and "illustrating" the lyrics of a song, or when the visuals have paralleled the rhythm, timbre, or melody of the music' (p. 90).

Musician and producer Wilkinson also does not appear in his own videos, three of which ("Breathe" (2015), "Dirty Love" (2014), "Afterglow" (2013)) I used for

focus group work. Sometimes when performers appear in their video, but not in a clear musical performance role, they are not recognised as the artists. This happened when Japanese informants were shown Clean Bandit's 2013 "Rather Be" video before "Real Love" (2014), in which they are shown as a band performing live on stage. Without knowing the identity of the foreigners who appeared in the "Rather Be" video, the students were puzzled by the repeated appearances of foreigners in the young Japanese female protagonist's life. Only two informants were able to read the clues in the video and unravel the puzzle. On the other hand, once other students understood the role of the artists in the video, they were keen to watch it again. Tricks, gimmicks and puzzles are used a lot in music video these days to encourage repeated viewings. Large budgets and grandiose sets are no longer the keys to a successful video as they used to be in the days of MTV. With the heightened competition of the cyberspace environment, novelty and surprise often take precedence.

### **Foregrounding of music and the role of dance**

Many informants said that they enjoyed dance sequences in music videos and many pop videos include dance movements to assist continuity and draw the viewer's attention to the music (Hawkins, 2013). Dance movements can vary greatly, from strict lockstep and full synchronization to a freestyle that moves away from tracking the rhythm. Many elements define dance so it is difficult to distinguish between standard learned step routines and physical movements made simply in response to sound. Music videos seldom contain full-length choreographed dance sequences. Instead, they have multiple short sequences, often in different settings. Interestingly, videos with a range of dance styles appealed to my informants for a variety of reasons that will be seen later. They included Ed Sheeran's "Thinking Out Loud" (2014), in which he and a female dancer dance together slowly throughout the song, and the highly synchronized dancing of Korean artists that has a strong appeal to many of my informants. Very little has been said in the literature on music video about the role of dance, and why it is such an important and attractive element of music videos. To gain

understanding of its role, it is helpful to consider the ways in which the visual and audio tracks of music video work together.

### **Music video as multimedia**

#### **Cross-media interaction: the role of attribute transfer**

Why is watching others dance to music on a screen so exciting? Cook (1998) explains how multimedia texts with combined visual and audio tracks operate as more than the sum of their separate tracks. He cites an experiment carried out with 3 geometrical shapes in animated film (p. 67). The shapes take on personalities that most people recognize in the same way. Two types of music are played to accompany the shapes in action. One piece was more highly evaluated when listened to before being played with the film than the other, but the other was more highly evaluated when accompanying the film. This experiment demonstrated that music affects how we experience film. Also, that when music is evaluated in the context of a film, one of the relevant criteria is how well it fits the pictures. This is an emergent property and cannot be predicted by individual evaluation of the music and the film separately. It also showed that the music intensified different characteristics of each of the geometric protagonists.

Cook suggests metaphor as a model for cross-media interaction. The precondition of both cross-media interaction and metaphors can be called *enabling similarity*. 'The meaning of the metaphor, however, does not lie in the enabling similarity; it lies in what the similarity enables, which is to say the *transfer of attributes* from one term of the metaphor to the other' (p. 70). But what does an enabling similarity look, sound, or feel like when music is synchronized with moving pictures and words as happens in a music video? Cook explains that this depends on our quasi-synaesthetic responses. Synaesthesia is 'the extensively documented tendency for an input in one sensory mode to excite an involuntary response in another' (p. 25) and is a phenomenon of psychology as

well as of art and cultural history. Some people see colours when they hear musical notes and words as having colours. They can be called synaesthetes. However, most people experience quasi-synaesthesia. A well-known example is the way a nonsense word like 'maluma' is matched by most people with a round shape while a word like 'takete' is matched with an angular shape because one word 'sounds' round and the other sharp. Multimedia depends heavily on quasi-synaesthetic correspondences: most people, not just synaesthetes, agree that a flute sounds 'brighter' than a tuba and that a tuba sounds 'bigger' than a flute. Brightness and size are the two most common examples of cross-sensory correspondence (p. 74-76). This recognition is owed to our enabling similarity by transferring the attributes of sound to shape and can be seen as iconic.

The most fundamental iconicity between music and other media is body movement. It is 'an intuitively plausible proposition' to say that music embodies movement because listening to it prompts 'that kinetic excess which overflows into anything from the tapping of a foot to the most frenzied dance' (p. 78). Any alignment of music and moving images that reaches a certain level of similarity between the two will bring about a transfer of kinaesthetic qualities between the two. Cook identifies different types of kinesis. One type, which is common in music videos, is the kinesis that results from the combination of rhythm, harmony, dynamics, and other musical elements in a given musical context. It is a music-picture relationship with a straightforward iconicity of process like the dance movements in Justin Bieber's "Sorry" that match the rhythm of the music. Another type could be called a 'kinesis of genre' (p. 79), such as the conventional dance types of classical music in which a music-picture parallelism is achieved through the pictures conforming to the overall kinetic quality of the dance movement, rather than as a result of moment-to-moment synchronization. This could apply to the dance performed by Ed Sheeran and his partner.

## **Synaesthesia and musical visuality**

The term synaesthesia is used in different ways by music video scholars, but the underlying principle is fundamental to an understanding of how multimedia like music videos function. Williams (2003) describes synaesthesia as 'the consciousness of cross-sense modalities: seeing sounds, tasting smells and hearing colors are examples' (p. 11). He suggests that 'sights and sounds interpenetrate creating a third expressive domain' that he calls 'musical visuality'. 'Sight becomes musical and what you listen to is visualized. Seeing, then, becomes a nonlogocentric experience, a sensuous (indeed, cross-sensual), tactile, sonorous, and visual activity' (p. 13). In describing music videos consumed on MTV, Williams says that 'MTV invites us to hear with our eyes and see with our ears. MTV invites the body to become engaged and absorbed in its mood, in its sonority, and its look and sound' (p. 36). Later he talks about how he dances when he turns on MTV, maybe only with his fingers on the table, or with his eyes as he follows the bodies on the screen: 'the body moves and grooves as the video and body mutually attune' (p. 171). He says he resonates with the music video and that this is 'the lived significance of the synesthetic experience' and underlines the 'relevance of embodiment in both originating and apprehending the musical-visual style of music video' (p. 172).

Williams clarifies this by explaining how perception is synaesthetic. It is not experienced as the sum of discrete senses: 'all of our senses are modalities of perception and, as such, are co-operative and intercommunicable' (p. 182). Williams gives the example of being able to see texture because the sense of sight is pervaded by the sense of touch. Smell is cooperative with taste and taste with sight. Even if we are focused on one of our modalities, the other modalities are usually in sympathy. The senses intercommunicate, such as when we get shivers down our spine at the sound of fingernails on a blackboard. He argues that, if the phenomenon of synaesthesia is a matter of perception, it need not be limited to this field. It can also become a phenomenon of expression and music video makes the intercommunication of the senses the grounds of its aesthetic.

The sounds register across all the senses and the colours and movements of the bodies reveal the intensity of the song even with the sound turned down. He can see the tempo and intensity of rhythms. Both the sounds and the visuals can be described in tactile, visual and other sensual terms.

Andrew Goodwin (1992) also discussed synaesthesia in relation to the visualisation of music in music video. He defines synaesthesia as 'the intrapersonal process whereby sensory impressions are carried over from one sense to another' (p. 50). Although Goodwin does not fully develop a theory of synaesthesia, he observes that the synaesthetic relationship between vision and music in music video increases pleasure because the music is 'made visual' (p.70). This is what Williams calls 'musical visuality' and which he says is 'the video-logic of music video's synaesthetic aesthetic' (p. 185).

### **Conformance, complementation and contest in multimedia**

Cook (1998) outlines 3 basic models of multimedia in order to explain the ways in which different media can relate to one another: conformance, complementation and contest (p. 98). Conformance begins with an ordinary meaning, which is located within one medium or spread among them all. It 'tends towards the static and essentialized' (p.103). Contest, on the other hand, ends in meaning and is 'intrinsically dynamic and contextual' (p. 103). Complementation is the mid-point between these two extremes. The difference between the constituent media is recognized, but conflict between them is avoided because each is assigned a separate or complementary role.

Cook describes the moments when the component media of multimedia are consistent with one another as an instance of multimedia (IMM). Such intermedia relationships can be of three types: *triadic*, *dyadic* and *unitary*. A triadic form of conformance is when 'a colour corresponds to a sound inasmuch as both correspond to an underlying emotional and spiritual content' (p. 101). Dyadic conformance means that one medium corresponds directly to another. It means

that there can be a direct pair-wise relationship between each medium and each of the others, not that there can only be two constituent media. Unitary conformance means that one medium predominates and that other media conform to this. Instances of unitary conformance, however, are exceedingly rare. In fact, Cook says that 'conformance is much less frequently encountered category of IMM than the existing literature might lead one to suppose.... The importance of conformance, in other words, is not so much as an overall model of multimedia, but as a model of the relationship of constituent media within an IMM' (p. 102). Cameron (2013) provides some examples of electronic music videos which demonstrate conformance. Aoki Takamasa's 2006 video "Mirabeau" has "clean tones and glitchy rhythms" that are "mirrored precisely by Kurokawa's abstract black and red shapes, which pulse and contort in time to the music" (p.757). (Ryoichi Kurokawa is a multimedia artist.) The abstract shapes are made up of fine lines that resemble musical waveforms and so the video looks like an automated audio visualization program, such as iTunes "Visualizer". This video explores the mutual digital origins of the music and the visuals by using visuals that resemble musical data graphs. The video for Autechre's "Gantz Graf" (Alex Rutterford, 2002) is less abstract, but shows a strong degree of conformance. Although very interesting, they are not music videos that my informants had seen.

Contest lies at the opposite extreme from conformance. It occurs when different media are competing and attempting to impose their own characteristics on the other(s). Cook gives Madonna's "Material Girl" (1985) video as an example 'which superimposes fully elaborated cinematic diegesis upon a previously released song' (p. 103). Examples of videos with a visual narrative that conflicts with the lyrics and mood of the music that were selected for my own research include Clean Bandit's "Rather Be", and Wilkinson's "Afterglow".

In contrast to music video, where the song is the ordinary medium, in the classical Hollywood film, the film was virtually complete before it was passed to

the composer for scoring. The composer's job was to complement what was already there in the words and pictures. This is consistent with the assumption that music is a servant art. In song, there is a similar idea that the addition of music to an existing poetic text corresponds to the idea that words and music have complementary functions although there is less agreement about which is more dominant. This kind of successive production, that is dependent on a number of people, is also characteristic of the contest model. The visuals of music videos are generally superimposed upon existing songs. 'The difference is that, in the contest model, the emphasis is more overtly on the point of reception rather than that of production' (p. 105).

There is another kind of complementation, which Cook describes as contextual rather than essentializing. Different media are seen as occupying the same terrain but conflict is avoided by the existence of mutual gaps. For example, when music is added to pre-existing text to create a song, there is a conflict of media in some cases that results in the emergence of new meaning. Reader-response criticism, however, sees all texts as characterized by gaps that allow readers to fill in the missing aspects and interpret the text in the light of their own experience and inclination. This concept is similar to what Goodwin (1992) called *amplification*, which will be discussed in Chapter 7.

### **The role of lyrics in music video**

Cook (1998) demonstrates how, from the time of Plato, the text has held primacy over music: harmony and rhythm must follow the words and not vice versa. Cook discusses whether music has primacy over text in opera because audiences cannot understand words that are sung in a foreign language and they are covered up by the orchestration. However, a common way of listening to opera is reading the libretto at the same time. We think we are hearing words, which are in fact being fed to us through our eyes, not our ears. This shows how the verbal input contributes to the experience of listening 'and that contribution must necessarily be located in the difference between the music and the words' (p.

113) and illustrates the reciprocal interweaving of signification the two media that characterizes Cook's notion of complementation. The importance of understanding the meaning of song lyrics will be discussed in Chapter 7 where it will be seen that my respondents feel they are missing a vital element of the song if they are unaware of the meaning of the lyrics.

Cook concludes that it is a mistake to identify one medium as the origin of meaning and to use it as a measure of other media through a series of par-wise judgements of similarity or dissimilarity. Such an approach cannot locate the emergence of new meaning. For this reason, a theory based on attribute transfer and the structural framework within which such transfer takes place is needed. The concepts of synaesthesia, or Cook's quasi-synaesthesia, provide a basis for such a framework. However, when Williams (2003) describes music video aesthetic as 'an aural-visual aesthetic in which the synesthetic interpenetration of sight and sound, music and dance, have replaced illustration, description, narrative, and realism' (p. 172), he is overlooking many of the facets of music video that attract my Japanese informants. The next section will therefore explore music video style which foregrounds the music.

### **Music video style**

New ways of filming pop song performances were pioneered in the 1960s. Richard Lester's film *A Hard Day's Night* incorporated a variety of odd camera angles, images, cutaways, and quick-paced scenes unified by the soundtrack. This film anticipated the editing style of music video and showed that audiences would accept a quick-cut, multiple-image style (Williams, 2003). In the documentary *You Can't Do That: The Making of "A Hard Day's Night"* (1994), the film's producer Walter Shenson explains how challenging but amusing it was at the time to persuade the United Artists executives in Hollywood that their unconventional effects, such as tracking around Paul McCartney and pointing the camera at an arc light during the song "And I Love Her" were not only planned,

but also very difficult to achieve. The same tracking and light effect is still commonly used today and can be seen in the 2014 music video “Real Love” by Clean Bandit that is discussed later.

Chion (1994) describes music videos as ‘visuals edited together with a song’ that come ‘in all shapes and sizes, budgets, and degrees of quality’ (p. 165). They can be inventive and creative and the music video genre ‘has invented and borrowed an entire arsenal of devices; it’s a joyous rhetoric of images’ (p. 166). He says that critics of music video who dislike the effect of rapid editing are mistaken because they are judging the editing according to cinematic criteria that apply to linear narrative. The music video is altogether different because it does not involve dramatic time. Music video editing does not serve to advance action. Instead, it returns repeatedly to the same motifs, typically playing on several basic visual themes. Moreover, the rapid succession of shots creates a sense of ‘visual polyphony and even of simultaneity, even as we see only a single image at a time’ (p. 166). In television and film, the soundtrack mixes layers of words, noise and music during one visual image. However, the screen is rarely split to show more than one image simultaneously. This is frequently done in music videos, especially now that digital technology facilitates such visual effects.

### **The influence of digital technology on music video effects**

The split screen was used by Michael Jackson in his 1982 video “Billie Jean” and was seen as very exciting then. These days it is used especially by a cappella artists to showcase the individual contributions of each performer and by single performers who perform all the vocals and instrumentals on their tracks to showcase their performance. Steve Barron, the director of “Billie Jean” also used screens inside screens, slow-motion and speeded up film, freeze frames, visual pastiche, atmospheric lighting, and a mixture of black-and-white and colour film. The paving stones lighting up in pink as Jackson walks on them add to the colour and visual effects (and the same effect was used by Wilkinson in “Dirty Love” (2014) discussed later). By making the shots last only a few seconds and using

rapid editing, the images capture the tempo and pulse of the music. This music video was 'self-consciously innovative for the time' (Creeber, 2013, p. 56). Interestingly, Michael Jackson's music videos are among the most well-known and popular music videos watched by the Japanese students I interviewed. Their originality and freshness have not faded in over thirty years.

Vernallis (2013<sup>a</sup>) draws attention to the way that music's plurality was already being shown through effects such as the video trail, kaleidoscope, stamped multiples, and sinusoidal designs used in the eighties (e.g. David Byrne's "Once in a Lifetime" (1980), Prince's "When Doves Cry" (1984)), or earlier, such as Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" (1975).

Other visual elements of music video that Vernallis discusses are camera work, including the use of shot length, angle and tracking, which are markedly different from narrative film. Long establishing shots are used far less frequently and close-ups far more so. The singer's face is a hook that is often returned to as the visuals track the cyclical form of the song. Low angle shots are very common as they reflect the point of view of the audience looking up to the performer on stage. These days, however, the use of cranes and drones is common to obtain a dramatic visual effect. OK Go's "I Won't Let You Down" (2014) filmed in Japan with hundreds of schoolgirl dancers, who appear like a computer screen flashing a digital message from the drone's vantage point overhead, is a particularly spectacular example. The tracking shot supports the music's pace in relation to the video's environment. It also provides a contrast with rapid editing.

A lot of time is spent in post production work such as enhancing and pinpointing colour. These days, with digital intermediate (DI) colour can be controlled precisely allowing a wide range and great detail. Colour flows everywhere in Coldplay's "Every Teardrop is a Waterfall" (2011) and the drinks and lemon slices turn lurid colours in Wilkinson's "Dirty Love" (see Chapter 8). Some directors like Jonas Åkerlund spend a lot of time retouching and adding detail (such as

changing eye colour and finger nail polish). DI can also separate objects from the background, bringing some objects close and leaving others in the distance. They remain visible, however, thanks to strong colour demarcation. Colour is often symbolic or thematised, such as in Stromae's "Tous Les Mêmes" (2013), where the male Stromae is located in green surroundings and the female Stromae in pink. In Åckerlund's "Paparazzi" (2009), the use of colour pushes the video into a sort of hyper-dreamland. The same technique is used in the Smashing Pumpkins' "Try, Try, Try" (2011) where bright colours indicate the hallucinations that the female protagonist experiences under the influences of heroin.

Korsgaard (2013) lists other common tropes used in music videos that have been facilitated by digital technology. These include use of images-within-the-image, frames-within-the-frame, double exposure, digital compositing, rear projection, and a wide range of digital imaging effects, such as morphing, kaleidoscopes, and data-moshing. He explains that the proliferation of image layers makes the image as multifaceted as the music and this is a visual means of remediating the music. In fact, every video can be said to function through a specific kind of audiovisual remediation because all videos operate by visually remediating music. They re-present a pre-existing, pre-recorded song visually. At the same time, they musically remediate the image by structuring the image according to the musical logic.

### **The role of narrative**

When Williams (2003) said that the synesthetic interpenetration of sight and sound, music and dance, had replaced narrative in music video, he clearly made too sweeping a statement. A narrative dimension undoubtedly exists and is highly valued by many audiences, but it needs to be considered in relation to music video's other modes, which are "underscoring the music, highlighting the lyrics and showcasing the star" (Vernallis, 2004, p.3).

Music videos follow the song's form rather than recount a well-developed story and a song's form tends to be cyclical and episodic rather than sequential. Not many narrative videos develop a story fully. However, a favourite of my informants in both 2011 and 2015 was Taylor Swift's "You Belong With Me" (2008) because the story was not only romantic, but easy to follow without even understanding the song lyrics. Katy Perry's "Part of Me" (2012) and "Roar" (2013) are other popular examples. Can they be said to be true narratives? Do they include Aristotle's key ingredients: characters with defined personality traits, who have goals and a sense of agency, and who encounter obstacles and are changed by them? Are there identifiable character types according to Propp's (1968) categorizations? These music video narratives are clearly incomplete although they tell a story with an exposition, a complication, rising action, a climax and a resolution (certainly in the case of Taylor Swift and her new boyfriend). Vernallis (2004) points out that if the purpose of a music-video image is to draw attention to the music, the video-makers should not become too concerned with character and plot development, otherwise the audience will pay more attention to the visuals and the music will recede to the background.

Most videos therefore only hint at a narrative and let the song take precedence. Vernallis (2004) uses Madonna's "Cherish" (1989) as an example of how many videos develop peaks of interest but not a plot. The surprising (human/dolphin) imagery implies developments in the story that never happen, but keeps our interest as a result. The visual narrative of "Breathe" by Wilkinson that I used for my focus group work is another example of how the narrative follows the flow of the music with periods of intense action on screen as the music picks up tempo followed by a slowing down and a return to normal as life goes on. The visuals for Wilkinson's video "Afterglow", however, tell a story that distracts attention from the music as will be seen in Chapter 8.

### **Music videos as visual or soundtrack only**

In spite of all the care that goes into the creation of the visuals in music video, Chion (1994) points out how MTV assumed a 'radiophonic nature' in the 1980s, 'with its program slots that offer a bloc of music videos you can follow along with as you continue working or reading, as if you were listening to a pop radio station but have the option of glancing over and looking at the images too. The image here no longer touts itself as the essential ingredient; no longer stage centre, it's more like an unexpected gift' (p. 165).

In contrast, Prato (2010) observed that while MTV indeed broadcast music videos around the clock like a radio station, young people were not always listening. They would have it on for company and turn the sound up when a song they liked was being played, and they would invite friends around for an MTV party, but play their own music with MTV switched on for the visuals. Or they would watch with no sound and comment on the musicians and the videos.

Temporal (2008), however, says that MTV provided a soundtrack as much as a visual track and that MTV was meant to be left on all day with the sound turned up as background to other activities, which both fits Chion's radio model of consumption more closely, and is a common way in which music videos on YouTube are commonly consumed by my young Japanese informants.

Kassabian (2013) explains that in order to hear certain features of a recording in the way the producer possibly intended, it has to be in the audio foreground so that it can rise to the attentional foreground. However, the majority of music we hear these days is heard as auditory background, even if the music industry considers it foreground music. Kassabian says that reception can be conscious but inattentive and asks if attention can sometimes be not fully conscious. We need to think of attention as including a wide spectrum of activities that range between two extremes: fully attentive and fully inattentive. Kassabian discusses whether there is a specific background mode of listening and wonders whether

we 'hear' or 'listen to' background music. Hearing is commonly thought of as more passive than listening and consuming background music is considered passive. However, Kassabian prefers the term 'listening' because 'hearing' implies merely sense perception: the conversion of sound waves into electro-chemical stimuli and their transmission along nerves to the brain. She suggests there is a mode of listening to background music, but we are so used to the presence of music as an accompaniment to other activities that we forget we are listening because we listen below a fully conscious level. Some people use music in this way as an anchor to keep their mind from spinning off in various directions while they are working on something.

Many of my informants reported listening to music in this way while studying and doing homework. Putting on a YouTube playlist at low volume as BGM and not looking at their computer or phone screen while studying is a common practice. One young woman in 2015 illustrated what Kassabian says: "When I start, I listen to music, then I get motivation and I'm into it and concentrating. I turn off the music. If I don't listen to music when I start, I don't feel like doing it (*yaruki ga nai*)". She finds that the music helps her to get into the right frame of mind and to find her focus. Another said that she also uses music to get into studying, but she only listens to music she knows, not new music. If she listens to new music, she stops concentrating on her studies and starts paying attention to the music because she notices it at a conscious level. Several students in 2011 and 2015 made the same point. Another common choice of music to accompany studying is non-Japanese music because the lyrics are difficult to understand and therefore do not disturb their concentration. "I don't listen to Japanese music because I care about the lyrics. I understand the lyrics in Japanese so I tend to listen to Western music or K-pop". It seems that both familiar music and music with non-Japanese lyrics can be listened to in a conscious and productive, but inattentive way by my informants and perform the same role as Muzak to help focus attention, alleviate boredom and increase productivity in the workplace.

Kassabian's informants and my own report leaving the radio and /or TV on so that they are never without music and share the desire to fill their home with music so that it doesn't seem uncomfortably empty. These days the silence is also filled with music from smartphones, MP3 players, or PCs and listened to through headphones. Audiences for the modern-day equivalent to Muzak seem to share the same sense of listening as a constant, grounding secondary activity as long as the music does not draw attention to itself too strongly. Interestingly, none of the students I interviewed mentioned using the visuals with no sound on YouTube. They clearly prioritise music over visuals in certain situations.

### **Music video's new platforms and modes of consumption**

Music video is now disseminated through digital media and wireless communication devices connected to the Internet. Nearly every artist and band has a website and these websites are home to music videos. Every record label, from indies to multinational corporations, features videos on its website. MTV also has its own website where it features thousands of video clips. There are dozens of websites and applications that offer access to music videos and the increasing availability of broadband and Wi-Fi have made streaming and downloading music videos quick and easy for millions of people around the world. There has been a renewed upsurge in music video production globally as result of the advent of alternative technologies for the dissemination of music video (Beebe and Middleton, 2007; Vernallis, 2013<sup>b</sup>). Korsgaard (2013) makes the point that many new-style videos that come as an app that can be accessed by iPhone or iPad, such as Bjork's app album *Biophilia* (2012) are selling Apple products as well as the music. Such music videos now promote new technologies as well as the artist and the song.

### **Consumers and prosumers of music videos**

Nowadays, viewers can select, deconstruct, edit and reassemble videos on easy-to-use software, and then redistribute and re-circulate their new products. These

vary immensely in style and content from elaborate parodies, such as those of Weird Al Yankovic, to simple lip-synched performances that nevertheless go viral, such as Gary Brotsma's "Numa Numa Song" (2004). The new term, prosumer (producer + consumer), reflects this new participatory role of the consumer.

These developments have happened quickly, but not overnight. The introduction of digital cameras, camera phones, webcams and cheaper bandwidth started to make the web rich with moving audio-visual images. Nevertheless, it was still difficult to share images with others online, until video sharing sites started up, such as BlogTV, Flickr, Daily Motion and Google Video. With the arrival of social networking sites such as MySpace, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram in the 2000s, interactivity became enhanced and the top-down hierarchies upon which the old media were founded were rapidly dismantled. After a century of media broadcasting, the consumer was able to become a content provider. YouTube's original byline was "Your Digital Video Repository", but now it is "Broadcast Yourself" which reflects far more accurately the user-based practices that define Web 2.0.

### **Music video on the Internet**

Music videos are now made primarily for the Internet, where there is often less focus on technical quality and budget, but greater focus on novel ideas. An interesting example of ways in which a combination of original ideas and active audience consumption of an Internet music video have been combined is the 2008 R.E.M. track "Supernatural Superserious". R.E.M. invited fans to re-edit cuts for the video. By providing the visual tracks for the fans to manipulate, the band was able to retain some authorial control over the final output, unlike the case of entirely user-generated music videos. Nevertheless, the band's extending of this invitation to their fans to collaborate illustrates the new expectations of both musicians and fans that music videos can be for sharing and need not have one single version. As Sibilla (2010) says, these days there

can be as many versions of a music video as there are users who have worked on it. Although this kind of music video can be said to be 'new' in these respects, it still shares the same general goals of promoting the image and music of the band as the 'old-style' mass media broadcast era music video.

These days, music video is present on both broadcast media and the Internet, but in digital space it is a 'viral marketing tool'. That is, it relies on (digital) word of mouth advertising. Moreover, in digital space, whether musicians like R.E.M. are giving their fans the opportunity to remix and manipulate the music and visuals starting from the master-footage of the original material, or whether fans simply use the editing software now available to alter videos without such an invitation, many videos become remixes of the original version that can stimulate repeated exposure to the song.

One further notable aspect of the digital age is that there is a big divergence of screen sizes from huge flat-screen televisions to portable gadgets like mobile phones and iPods. 'The success of the first generation of the Video iPod has demonstrated an interest in "pocket" music videos. Within the first 20 days following the release of the Video iPod, the iTunes store already counted one million clip downloads' (Wetzel and Jegl, 2010, p. 264). Artists are already taking this into account and making videos to be watched on a phone. A couple of examples are "Video Phone" (2009) by Beyoncé and Lady Gaga, and "Golden Touch" (2015) by the Japanese artist Amuro Namie. Like Justin Bieber and other artists recently, she does not perform the song on screen. Instead, the viewer is instructed to keep their finger pressed to the centre of the screen where a series of amusing animations playfully interact with the finger as an accompaniment to the music. Given such amusing innovations, it is unsurprising that audiences these days are enthusiastic about watching music videos on their phone screens. Computers and phones have moved the screen closer than ever before, from the far end of the cinema theatre, to the corner of the living room or bedroom, to a few inches from our face (Creeber, 2013).

### **Video clips that Japanese informants include as music videos**

It was interesting to see the wide range of YouTube clips that my informants considered as forms of music video. They included lyrics videos made by fans and user-generated slide shows that accompany recordings by others. Covers of popular songs by famous artists performed by singers who did not appear to be amateurs were also quite popular. Most popular of all were clips from Disney animations, Glee, High School Musical, and clips from Japanese animated TV series. This suggests that for them any clip of a song performance, whether corporate-generated or homemade, is a music video.

### **YouTube and music video**

YouTube is among the most visited sites on the Internet. Although there is a huge variety of video clips available on YouTube, statistics show that music videos are one of the types most watched. This has been made possible by the corporate support of several record companies who joined together to make the site Vevo that is also housed within YouTube. YouTube can provide exposure and generate income, so it is in the interests of recording companies to invest in music videos making them once again 'a key driver of popular culture' (Vernallis, 2013<sup>b</sup>, p. 207). Moreover, music video is well suited to the global markets of the Internet because it is only loosely tied to language and so can easily cross national borders (Vernallis, 2013<sup>b</sup>). YouTube and its content are far more complex than simply providing access to corporate-produced music videos. It will therefore be discussed in greater depth in the next chapter.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated the commercial purpose of music videos and the aesthetic features which enable music videos to achieve their aims to promote the music and artist and enhance enjoyment of the musical performance. Music video is fundamentally different from film and television dramas because it

foregrounds the music. In most cases the song has already been recorded and the visuals serve the audio track. This can work effectively because perception depends on multiple sensory input. The visuals in a music video (or other visual medium) enable us to transfer attributes of what we hear in the music to what we see, while at the same time, the music influences the way in which we perceive the visuals. It is not always the case, however, that music video audiences pay attention to the visuals. Music video has been listened to as a secondary, background activity and this radiophonic role of music video has been common both during its MTV and Internet eras.

Discussion has focused mainly on commercially produced pop music videos as these are the main types of music video that my informants watched and discussed with me. These days, however, there is an enormous range of types of video clip available on the Internet and audiences can watch interactively and create their own videos with material supplied by the artists or using their own material. These audience-produced videos can be original works, covers, parodies, or simply extracts recorded from television or another source. Although my informants watched these non-commercially produced video clips, creating and posting them was not an activity that any of them undertook.

Jenkins (2006) stresses that younger media audiences expect greater influence over the media they consume than has been possible before. The generation born after the mid 1970s has never known a world without cable TV, the VCR or the Internet and has grown up with a 'what I want when I want it' attitude to media. This has come about largely because the technology of the Web 2.0 era means that anyone with a device that can connect and upload to the Internet can belong to any number of communities. This freedom of choice means that audiences have control over the music they listen to and watch and in this way consuming music videos on an Internet-connected device is fundamentally different from consumption through television or radio.

Through the activities of Internet-connected consumers and media companies, music videos of all eras have acquired cultural longevity. They no longer simply come and go with the release of a new song. 'Indeed, the new and the old, the classic and the contemporary, increasingly circulate, and are re-circulated, alongside one another in the present moment of the screen' (Railton and Watson, p. 6). This is illustrated by the fact that young people in Japan discover, admire, and watch the work of the Beatles, Michael Jackson, and other artists of their parents' and grandparents' generation, thanks mainly to their accessibility through YouTube's archive and recommendation system.

Music video has always been seen as leading innovation, experimenting with new techniques and has influenced cinematic and advertising style, especially as leading directors often work in all these different media. One of the questions my informants raised was the matter of who has artistic control. They tended to think that this depended on how important the artist was. While this certainly seems to be true, in the case of many female artists it is a challenge to establish an authorial voice in a medium still controlled largely by older white men. Some artists, such as Lady Gaga and Madonna use visual techniques to interrupt the gaze of their audiences and to remind them that what they are seeing is simply an image, and not one that they have complete control over.

There is a growing body of literature about music video aesthetics based on textual analysis, and this chapter has only skimmed the surface. The reason for this is that far less has been published about audience reception and interpretation. How much attention is given by audiences to the visuals, the ways in which the visuals enhance the listening experience, and whether they do so in the ways that analysts suggest and musicians desire are issues that will be addressed in the following chapters.

## 6 Music video consumption on YouTube

YouTube performs multiple roles as a music broadcaster, promoting music produced by major artists signed to major companies, while simultaneously providing a broadcast platform for individuals to upload their own user-generated video material. It also serves as a social networking site, a repository for all kinds of media material, and a database that enables advertising companies to identify their target audiences, which provides income to Google, the owner of YouTube.

While these multiple roles will be explored to some extent in this chapter, the focus will be on YouTube as the main means by which young Japanese people access Western music video. Results from the survey I conducted in the summer of 2015<sup>3</sup> show that 98 percent of the respondents use YouTube to access music videos. Although there are applications that can be used to download music videos from the Internet, only 27.6 percent of the respondents reported using these. Furthermore, the percentage using the Japanese video sharing website Nico Nico Dōga to access music video is only 26 percent, while 2.6 percent use the Chinese video sharing site Tudou. These statistics were confirmed through the interviews I conducted where students consistently reported that they go first to YouTube to find new music, especially Western music, and to access old or current favourites. As one young woman said in 2015: “For Western music, YouTube is the strongest.”

Although streaming music from YouTube using Wi-Fi and a smart phone is clearly the most common way of accessing music videos among Japanese young people, YouTube is not simply a broadcast platform. Indeed, scholars are finding it a challenge to explain the role of YouTube. Burgess and Green (2009) say that to understand YouTube it is not helpful to simply take the top-down view of YouTube as a player in the commercial new media landscape or the bottom-up view of YouTube as a site of ‘vernacular creativity and lawless disruption’ (p.

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 1 for details.

37). To understand YouTube's cultural and social impact, it is necessary to place the audience at the centre and to take into account the ways people use media in their everyday lives. They also say that in order to contribute to an understanding of YouTube, one must deal with both specificity and scale, which presents epistemological and methodological challenges. The methods of cultural and media studies (based on anthropology) are good at close, contextualized analysis of the local and the specific, and the findings can be related to cultural theory. However, the scale on which YouTube is used means that, from the perspective of cultural studies research, it is necessary to get beyond the level of particular examples or themes and try to gain some perspective on YouTube as a mediated cultural system.

Patricia Lange (2008) adopted an anthropological approach when she carried out a 2-year ethnography with 54 members of the English-speaking YouTube community and gained useful insights into the ways YouTube operates as a social networking site for certain participants. This study shows the uses of YouTube as part of daily life and as part of the mix of media her informants use each day. Although Lange enriches our understanding of ways in which people participate in the YouTube community, her study does not include non-English-speaking participants or those who make use of the website for its promotional capacity, such as professional and semi-professional media producers, and it does not take into account the vast majority of people who use YouTube simply as an entertainment platform and not for its social networking facilities.

Burgess and Green (2009) approached analysis of YouTube through a compromise between a large-scale quantitative analysis and a qualitative approach by combining the close reading of media and cultural studies methods with a survey of 4,320 videos calculated to be the 'most popular' on the website between August and November 2007. This content, consisting of the video clips that had received the greatest number of responses and comments, provided them with a relatively large body of raw material, and enabled them to identify

patterns across the sample as well as to investigate clusters of individual texts using qualitative methods.

Their survey showed that just over half of the most popular content was user-created video material. However, almost 42 percent of the sample of most popular material came from traditional media sources, frequently taken from TV or a DVD, 13 percent of which were music videos 'which came mostly from the US Top40 artists' (p. 44). About 60 percent of these most popular videos 'seemed to have been uploaded by people outside established, mainstream media companies' (p. 45) while only 8 percent were uploaded by traditional media companies. A significant proportion of content from traditional media sources (mainly television) was the Most Viewed and the Most Favourited, while a greater proportion of user-created content was Most Discussed and Most Responded to.

The Burgess and Green study provides an overview of the shape and scope of YouTube's 'common culture', and the ways in which it represents the co-evolution and uneasy co-existence of the 'old' and 'new' media industries, their forms and practices. However, by focusing mainly on the 'most popular' as opposed to the 'most viewed' YouTube content, they overlook the enormous number of YouTube users who access the website in order to watch and listen to the latest commercial hit music. This is a substantial omission, especially now that the popular music industry is supplying a significant amount of YouTube's 'most viewed' content.

This chapter focuses on how YouTube is being used by Japanese young audiences, by combining my research data with what has been reported elsewhere. The chapter will begin with an overview of YouTube and a description of the YouTube interface and how Japanese young people are using the site. Next are discussions on advertising and copyright and the students' attitudes to

these issues. Discussion of their consumption and interpretation of Western music videos follows in the final two chapters.

### **Overview of YouTube**

The story of YouTube's rapid growth and purchase by Google in 2006 is well documented and so I will not dwell on this. Jenkins (2006) attributes YouTube's success to the fact that it was the first website to enable participation to occur at three levels: production, selection and distribution. Not only does it provide a platform for anyone to upload material, it also offers a vast selection to choose from and the option of sharing material with others through other social networks.

YouTube is clearly both user and industry driven. For example, while music videos dominate the 'most viewed' category, they are marginal to the site's overall content in terms of the number of clips uploaded (Snickars and Vonderau, 2009). In comparison to industry-produced music videos, the long tail of content generated by amateurs seems to be almost infinite and it is the content that is the 'most discussed'. YouTube's management knew that 'the platform's "community value" derived from the exponentially growing number of videos generated by amateurs, but it also knew that professionally produced entertainment would increase traffic and solidify the binary rule that on the Web, money tends to follow users' (Snickars and Vonderau, 2009, p. 11).

Although YouTube is celebrated for its creative and grassroots potentials, according to the so-called '90-9-1 rule', (90 percent of online audiences never interact, nine percent interact only occasionally, and one percent do most interacting) most YouTube users do not see themselves as part of a larger community (Snickars and Vonderau, 2009, p. 12). This applies to the Japanese YouTube viewers who participated in my research who use the site mainly to access videos. Very few feel they are part of a YouTube community. In fact, only two (one male and one female) out of a total of 82 students interviewed have

written comments and participated in online discussions on YouTube. The most common reason given for not writing comments was that to do so they would need to make a YouTube account and they did not want to go to the trouble. For them, YouTube was just a website to access music and not one they used for social networking. The two exceptions were enthusiastic fans of certain artists (Backstreet Boys, Lil Wayne, AKB48, and Morning Musume) and it was their strong attachment to these artists that pushed them into a participatory role on YouTube. Both said they enjoyed the excitement of participating in an international discussion.

A characteristic feature of YouTube, for those who wish to share a video, is that the URL code for any clip can be embedded in other sites and can be easily accessed from any online location, and the video will bear the YouTube logo. It is officially not possible to download YouTube videos to your hard drive (although applications like Clipbox available from iTunes Apple in Japan allow users to create a playlist of YouTube videos). If they do not download, users must return to the site each time they want to watch the same video clip, which means that the content will always be YouTube-branded and that users will be exposed to advertising. This is the business model used by YouTube to generate income.

### **The YouTube interface**

The YouTube interface is very user-friendly with its standard search facilities and social networking functions. In contrast to this apparent simplicity, Gurney (2011) draws attention to the complexity of the *paratext* of a YouTube clip: 'the cluster of accompanying elements that are found on the clip's main page, including various sorts of peripheral information, with which the YouTube interface allows, or even demands its users/viewers to interact through comments and/or video responses' (p. 32).

The name of the website, YouTube, draws a clear analogy with television. However, the user interface is far more obviously mediated than a television

screen. When entering the site at the home page, there are dozens of 'Recommended' videos displayed as screen-capture thumb nails. The recommendations are based on the user's viewing history that has been recorded and calculated by YouTube using their search algorithm. Below each image is the title of the video clip, a category (name of artist or YouTube uploader, or genre such as 'Global Talents'), the current number of views, and how long ago the clip was posted on YouTube. There is also the 'Trending' link at the top of the page that takes the user to the currently most viewed videos in the user's global location.

When the user selects a video clip and clicks on that link, the main focus of the page is the video window. This can be enlarged to fill half the screen or the whole screen. The video immediately starts playing when a user enters the page. The video control bar is clearly visible at the bottom of the video window and allows the viewer to pause, stop, fast forward, view the elapsed time in relation to the total duration, adjust the volume, or mute, and change the screen size. The controls are visible and are part of the whole image 'acting as a paratextual component that defines the textuality of a YouTube clip as something open to manipulation' (Gurney, 2011, p. 38).

On the right of the video window there is a scrolling list of screen-capture thumbnails of suggested clips with the label 'Up next'. If the user does not select a clip, the top clip starts automatically. The 'Autoplay' function can be switched off with a single click. There are often advertisements on the page and their content is based on the profile of the user from data that YouTube has collected about the user's location, viewing history, and preferences. The videos which play automatically have search terms associated with them which are similar to the main clip's search terms. Eves (2016) explains that YouTube determines how high in the search results a video will rank by the amount of time people have watched the video already. YouTube values watch time over other factors, such as how well the video's metadata (titles, captions, tags, descriptions, etc.) relate

to the search query. For YouTube, the amount of watch time determines how valuable the video is. There are also 'Promoted Videos' posted here which YouTube is paid to post arbitrarily on the page and which have nothing to do with the featured video, but their presence contributes to the overall 'textual fabric' (Gurney, 2011, p. 41).

### **Students' reasons for choosing the small window or full screen**

There was an interesting split of opinion among students interviewed over the choice of window size. Many students said they prefer the better quality of the image of the small window: "For a while I use big screen but big screen is not clear." Another important reason for not enlarging the window to full screen was that they pay little attention to the video and like to look at the rest of the YouTube paratext while the video is playing. Some read the comments under the video window. Others look at the suggested clips to choose what to select next. Many are not even looking at the YouTube window at all. Like the young woman in the extract below, they are engaged in other activities such as homework, email, and social networking sites while the music plays in the background.

A: ... when you're watching YouTube videos, do you like watching on full screen or small screen?

S: Small screen.

A: Small screen is OK?

S: Mm because I want to do other things (laughs)

A: Ah, so what do you do when you're watching?

S: Ah, watching just one video only but I want to check email and ...

A: Ah, OK. So you have ... you open another window and then you're checking your email while you're watching. Ah, OK. And Facebook and Mixi?

S: Facebook.

A: Do you have lots of accounts for social networking?

S: Yes.

A: So do you have a Facebook account?

S: Facebook. And Mixi and Twitter.

Creeber (2013) explains how such simultaneous media use is now commonplace. Media are no longer used in sequence, but simultaneously with each other (texting while watching TV, using Twitter while in the cinema, checking Facebook while listening to a podcast, etc.). The environment is now multiplatform and normal behaviour is to be multitasking and 'the traditional boundaries between discrete media forms are dissolving' (Creeber, 2013, p. 84).

Another student explained why he sometimes switched from small to full screen.

S: When I'm feeling really excited, I expand the screen, but generally I watch ... I watch the screen on normal size.

A: On the small window, normal size. Do the other links or advertising that are on the computer screen, do they ... do you take much notice of them? Do they bother you? Or...?

S: No.

Others that choose the full screen option do so to immerse themselves in the video to be in "just my world". They say that it is more impressive or dynamic ("*sugomi ga aru kara*"). These students give the video their full attention. Another important reason why some students (usually musicians) select the full screen is to watch the techniques of the musicians shown in the video as closely as possible. Those whose hobby is dancing also watch on full screen to be able to study the dance moves. The third category of students who prefer full screen are those who watch recordings of live performances. Such young people are seeking a different type of pleasure, that of virtual participation.

### **Students' use of other YouTube interface facilities**

When deciding what to watch, many students interviewed in 2011-2012 ignored the recommended videos and used the search facility. The majority started by

inputting the name of an artist or band they liked or had heard about from friends. Some then selected the video with the greatest number of views. If a commercial started that they could not skip, they would quickly try an alternative video from the list of suggestions that their search had produced. Students also made use of the suggested links:

A: ...when you've watched enough of that, how do you decide what to watch next?

S: Erm... just link.

A: You look at the links down the side of the page?

S: Yes.

S: And if I'm interested in one, I just click it.

A: Right.

S: And then see more links.

Watching YouTube in this way can lead to exciting new discoveries.

S: ... When I am free, I can spend all day on YouTube!

A: Oh, right! So what are you doing all day on YouTube? What kind of videos do you watch?

S: Er, I recently found a group, a cappella group, called Pentatonix, and I like their ... how their songs...

A: Pentatonix? I think my kids and I have listened to them, too.

S: They are amazing.

A: Yeah. Really good.

S: And I found that group when I was look at the video of the song sung by another singer that I know and then they cover the song and I started to listen to them, their other cover songs.

A: Right. So YouTube is really good for this kind of lucky find, isn't it?

S: Yes.

Students interviewed in 2015-16 reported that the ranking system on YouTube is helpful to find new music. A female interviewee explained in 2015: “YouTube has a ranking. Recently ranking in Japan, or in whole music or pop music. So there are a lot of categories. So I found the recent and listen to it.” There is, however, little awareness of how the ranking system works.

Students nowadays often use the free application Shazam on their phone to identify a piece of music they hear and like and then use the search function on YouTube to find and listen to it. Students also reported discovering new artists like Rita Ora and Ariana Grande by inputting the search term “hit song” into the search function. Another approach a young woman uses is to choose the “top 50” as background music when studying. If there is a song she likes, she notes the title and then looks for it again later. Other students go straight to one of the playlists they or others have already made and a few subscribe to channels and often go to them first.

In addition to viewing, YouTube users can satisfy the powerful urge to share something that excites them by sending the URL of the clip to others using the ‘share’ button. Interestingly, almost all my Japanese informants said that they prefer to recommend videos to friends by word of mouth and not through social networking. Only one female, who is an avid YouTube user, said that she uses the share facility.

A: Do you have a YouTube account?

S: Yes. But no friends.

A: You don’t send links?

S: I share YouTube on Facebook.

A: Ah, OK.

S: Sometimes my friends send me a link for YouTube.

YouTube users can show approval or disapproval by clicking on the ‘thumb up’ or ‘thumb down’ buttons. YouTube records and makes available a list of all the videos a user has indicated they ‘liked’. A clip can also be marked for easy retrieval later using the ‘watch later’, ‘add to’ (a playlist) or the ‘subscribe’ functions. If a clip has potentially unsuitable/inappropriate content, users can use the ‘flag’ function to alert YouTube staff. Users can also see the comments that have been posted, which (as explained above) form part of the paratext of the clip. They may be opinions, thoughts, concerns, and may be complimentary or derogatory, and frequently lead to a conflict of opinions. The relative anonymity that YouTube users enjoy (by using names that hide their true identity) makes it easier to post inflammatory comments. Although others tend to censure the makers of negative comments and follow this up with positive comments, the potential for conflict is always present in the comment area. This is an aspect of YouTube that made several Japanese students that I interviewed feel uncomfortable.

### **Japanese students’ views on the YouTube comments function**

One student said that reading harsh comments made him feel sad: “*Komento to ka miru to chotto kitsui komento aru kara jibun no kimoichi ga sabishii...* (If I read harsh comments, I feel sad).” Another male student explained how he dislikes the anger expressed when I asked him if he reads the comments.

S: Yeah, I read, but it is very many opinion and it ... this song isn’t good. But I don’t read these comments because if I read this music is bad other people is angry.

A: Oh

S: I don’t like this situation.

A: OK, right. Mm ... so you don’t like negative comments?

S: Yeah.

A: Yeah, the anger that they generate.

S: Ah yeah.

There is a strong preference in Japan to keep one's personal opinion private. A female student in 2011 explained it this way: "A thought and feeling is different each person so I don't want other people to share my feeling. Let private."

The fact that English is the main language used in YouTube comments on Western music videos, and that much of it is in abbreviated text-style form, means that many young Japanese people feel inhibited. One young woman commented:

S: So YouTube is almost English words

A: Right, yes. Take your time, carry on.

S: So maybe some Japanese ... so don't want to write in English. I think so.

And the one young man who posts comments on YouTube said:

S: ... so when I see comments on YouTube, sometimes someone uses 2 for t-o.

A: The number two, yes. U R for You are ...

S: For example, me2.

A: Yes, mmm.

S: And I often see l-o-l, laugh out loud.

A: Yes.

S: When I first saw that I thought it is a 'lot of laugh'

The students interviewed acknowledged that although they do not write comments, many other Japanese people feel uninhibited to write in Japanese about Japanese artists and the students appreciate the comments for a number of different reasons.

S: Sometimes I agree with these comments. But, I can't agree with some.

A: Right, so sometimes you agree and sometimes you don't agree. Do you think it's a good idea to have comments?

S: Ah yes, because I can *kyoyuu... kyoyuu dekiru* (I can share/ understand their feelings).

Several students said that the comments helped them understand songs better, both Japanese and Western. The following extract is from a group of three female students:

A: Yes, so if you liked a video and there was a negative comment, your liking went down?

All: No.

A: You didn't like a video and there was a positive comment and your liking went up?

All: Sometimes.

A: That happens, OK. All right. So something in the comment helped you to understand?

S1: Sometimes.

A: Something you missed? In the video ... right. Does that happen with Japanese music or Western music or both?

All: Both.

Davies and Ikeno (2002) provide an insight into why Japanese young people may be more reluctant than their Western counterparts to engage in forthright online discussions or simply to read negative opinions. Ambiguity (*aimai* 曖昧) has become a defining characteristic of Japanese communication style. The need for strong emotional unity has resulted in an inability to criticize others openly, and the development of ambiguity, with its quality of compromise, is indispensable for maintaining harmony in Japanese life. 'The Japanese carefully weigh the atmosphere that they share with others. People learn to become aware of one another's thinking and feelings instinctively, which is required in order to

know who is taking the initiative. Ambiguity protects people in this sense and is regarded as socially positive because it is a kind of lubricant in communication' (p. 11). Nevertheless, a young woman who felt strongly enough about the Japanese female idol group AKB48, overcame her inhibitions and started participating in an online argument:

S: But I forgot when I start write some comments but maybe when I watched some Japanese idols' movie.

A: Yeah.

S: I was very moved.

A: Right.

S: So then I wrote.

A: Right. OK Right. So it's kind of... you were moved SO much...

S: Yes. (Laughs)

A: That it was the tipping point ...

S: Yes.

A: Ah...OK. And then you started. And then you started to get responses?

S: Yes.

A: Ah, so that was exciting?

S: Yes.

A: Ah, right. And so then did you respond to the responses?

S: Yes.

A: Ah, OK. Right. Erm which video was ... do you remember which one it was that you found so exciting?

S: Err... maybe the documentary of AKB48?

A: Ah ... OK.

S: Erm ... some people write some bad things so ...

A: Right. Wrong, bad comments?

S: Yes.

A: Right! And these were in Japanese?

S: Yes.

A: Right. Mmm.

S: So other fans of AKB48 write some good things and fight ... fight (?) with ...

A: Fight ... (laughs) ... an argument in words?

S: Yes.

A: Right. Yeah. Mmm. And so you took part in that?

S: Yes.

A: You felt strongly.

S: Yes.

She went on to explain that this discussion was among people from Japan and many other countries (Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Europe, Russia and America) in a mixture of Japanese and their own languages. She is also a fan of another, longer established female idol group called Morning Musume. I asked if she also joins in discussions about them.

S: Yes. Because... fans of AKB48 sometimes write some bad things about Morning Musume.

A: Ah!

S: But I think fans of Morning Musume don't write bad things about AKB48.

A: Ah... (laughs) That's interesting. Have you got any ideas about why that is?

S: Er... mmm... because ... some fans of AKB48 is new people? But fans of Morning Musume like Morning Musume from long time ago?

A: Ah, OK. Because Morning Musume have been going for much longer.

M: Yes.

A: Mm. I see so the Morning Musume fans are maybe older, more mature as fans?

M: Yes.

A: Yeah... more tolerant?

M: Yes.

A: (Laughs) But AKB fans are younger and newer and have got strong ideas?

M: Yes!

It seems from this discussion that passion and immaturity can override the urge to keep one's opinions private or ambiguous among some Japanese young people. However, the main reason that most students gave for not writing comments was simply that one needs a YouTube account to do so and they do not have one. Many said that they already had a lot of online accounts and did not feel the need to have a YouTube account as well. They were content to use YouTube as a broadcast platform only.

### **Additional functions of YouTube**

The YouTube site provides a lot of information in addition to the main video clips page. To find out the latest news from YouTube, there is a link to the separate 'Trending' page. Links at the bottom of a YouTube page take users to explanations of YouTube/Google's terms, protection of privacy, policy and safety, copyright as well as information for creators, advertisers and developers. It is clear that YouTube is a database of user behaviour as well as a media platform and an open-source archive.

Vernallis (2013<sup>b</sup>) emphasizes the crowd-sourced and crowd-curated role of YouTube: 'YouTube provides a reservoir of materials for practitioners and viewers. One could imagine it playing a role like Wikipedia's' (p. 16). Kessler and Schäfer (2009) describe YouTube as like a library because it does not preserve original documents as is done in an archive, but makes copies available to the public. It is important to keep in mind, however, that YouTube offers its services based on commercial interests, rather than public interests.

YouTube is nevertheless more than a lending library or a crowd-sourced repository of video clips. Kessler and Schäfer (2009) describe YouTube as 'a "hybrid interaction" where humans and machines – users and information management systems – are inextricably linked' (p. 279). Most users, including the students I interviewed and teach, are unaware that every click they make

feeds into the YouTube database and every interaction generates statistics. Their participation is 'the backbone of the entire operation' (Kessler and Schäfer, 2009, p. 285).

### **Advertising on YouTube**

YouTube depends on revenues from advertising, and measuring user behaviour and engagements is the new method of audience analysis used for targeted web advertising. The technology used by Google allows advertisers to know how long a user hovers over an ad, whether they click or not, how long they spend on a page, and if they click for further brand information. All this information can be collected and sold to advertisers in a sophisticated package (Lister et al, 2009). First, YouTube needs content that will attract viewers so that advertisers will be willing to pay to advertise. When users upload copyrighted content which is owned by major media companies, YouTube is accused of copyright infringement. For this reason, YouTube needed to gain permission from major media companies to use their attractive content. Deals were made with NBC TV, Warner Music Group, UMG and Sony BMG in 2006. Through these deals, YouTube gained access to music and music videos from three of the four major global music companies at that time and the volume of advertising has been growing since these deals were struck.

There are different types of advertisement that appear on YouTube. Short promotional videos are activated when the user clicks the play button on the video they have searched for. The user can 'skip' some of these commercials after 5 seconds, but others cannot be skipped. There are also banner advertisements in the form of static display advertisements, which users can click on to get more information from a site hosted by the client advertiser. From August 2007, 'InVideo' ads were introduced. These semi-transparent overlays pop up at the bottom of the window while the video plays and open up to a full advertisement if users click on them. They can be closed by clicking on the top

right corner (if the viewer wishes to make this effort). Invitations to subscribe to a channel or website or access more information also appear on the video screen, and can be closed by clicking in the same way. 'Annotations' are the text boxes that pop up and that can take you to another video if you click on them. This can increase the uploader's views on the other video. Video uploaders can choose to include advertising or not and can select the type of advertisements that can be added, or they can declare that the video contains a paid product placement (Eves, 2016).

For the majority of my student informants, who are mainly listening to the video tracks and whose eyes are not on the YouTube screen, the advertising that consists of visuals only is not intrusive. In fact they hardly notice it at all.

A: On the YouTube screen there is often advertising. What do you think about that?

S: I don't like.

A: You don't like it. Mmm... You don't take much notice? You don't pay attention?

S: Mmm...

A: *Mimasen?* (You don't look at it?)

S: Oh, yes.

However, the video commercials with a sound track interrupt the stream of music. Here is what another student said:

S: Er... when I listen to music, commercial ... come ... and then I need to click.

A: Yes, wait and then click and so if you're doing something else, you have to stop and click.

S: Yes, mm ... I don't like it.

The students interviewed dislike the commercials with sound on YouTube because they are in Japanese, which they understand and cannot shut out easily. They are especially intrusive when students are listening to foreign music. Occasionally they watch commercials featuring Japanese artists or actors they like, but most say that they pay no attention to the commercials and skip as soon as they can. I observed how they deftly minimize the YouTube window and mute the sound to look at something else on their phone during these commercials. Another way in which they say that they can avoid the commercials is by subscribing to the channel of the artist they like. They reported that there is no advertising (that they are aware of) on these channels.

### **Music video on YouTube**

Since the start of YouTube, the music video genre has been using the website for its own benefit. Of the current twenty most viewed videos on YouTube, only two are not commercial pop music videos, and only two are not in English (Top Trends, 2016). Music and music videos are seen as ‘an ideal form of content for YouTube, which has built its library around a range of short-form video presentations of two to three minutes duration, serving what Jordan Hoffner, YouTube’s director of content partnerships, has described as “Clip culture” (Andrejevic, 2009, p. 394).

In recent years, YouTube’s role as a distribution network for commercially produced professional content has expanded, especially since record companies and multinational video hosting services like Vevo have signed up<sup>4</sup> as content

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<sup>4</sup> Sony Music Entertainment Group (Sony MEG) and Universal Music Group joined to make Vevo (originally VEVO) in December 2009 and Vevo and Google share the advertising revenue. The third big music production company, Warner Music Group formed an alliance with Viacom Media Networks. The aim was to stream videos to attract high-end advertising. It also makes money through selling goods on its site and referral links to music purchasing sites Amazon Music and iTunes.

partners that post their own videos and authorize the use of their music library by users making their own content. Advertisers want their commercials to be placed together with high quality content and are happy with such an arrangement. In addition to the exposure and reach that YouTube affords, there are strong financial incentives for content partners because income from any advertising accompanying music videos or user-generated content using licensed music is divided between YouTube and the partner. This reciprocal arrangement works to the advantage of YouTube, its partners and the advertisers. From the business point of view, YouTube needs to distribute commercially produced professional content that will generate the advertising income necessary to cover the costs of running the site and to create profits (Andrejevic, 2009).

### **YouTube and copyright issues**

In October 1998, the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) was passed to modernize intellectual property law in the US. To provide a 'safe harbor' for online service providers, the law said that they would not be held liable for infringing material that is available over their services if the provider has no knowledge that the material is available, does not gain any direct benefit from the material being available, and removes infringing material once notified that it has been identified as such. The responsibility lies with the copyright holders to inform the online service providers about infringing material and issue a takedown notice.

In the autumn of 2007, YouTube introduced content-identification technology to try to tackle the problem of copyright infringements. A media company provides YouTube with what are effectively 'digital fingerprints' of its content (Wasko and Erickson, 2009, p. 381) so that YouTube can track that content when it is posted on its site. YouTube then informs the owner, who can claim that content and run advertising with it and split the revenue with YouTube, or instruct YouTube to take it down. The person who posted the content receives a message that the

content owner has claimed copyright and that the video has been taken down or that viewers may see advertising on the video. “It is estimated that 90 percent of copyright claims made in this manner are converted into advertising opportunities” (Wasko and Erickson, 2009, p. 381). YouTube is required to take down infringing content if requested by the copyright holder, which explains the unstable nature of the YouTube repository. Popular videos that disappear usually reappear on YouTube with a new title or on other video-sharing platforms. This rather anarchic and accidental practice of users copying and re-uploading videos results in redundant storage, but creates a degree of stability in the digital repository (Kessler & Schäfer, 2009). Users, however, feel frustrated, as can be seen in this interview extract with a female student in 2012.

S: If someone uploaded new video, and no *chosakuken* (copyright) and the video has no *chosakuken* then YouTube deletes it. So my favourite videos are deleted many times.

A: Right.

S: You know I put on my favourite list.

A: Yes.

S: The next day I was going to watch, but it was gone.

.....

A: So it's very frustrating when the videos disappear. Yeah. Does someone else put it up again soon after?

S: Yes. But it also deleted.

A: It disappears again. Right. So it's a kind of continual battle between ...

S: But so they change their titles.

A: Right.

S: First they title “Perfume (??)” but if it deleted, next time they just title (??)

A: Oh, right.

S: So the music company can't find them.

A: Right.

S: But it's also difficult for *me* to find them! (Laughter)

In order to secure a video that they like, YouTube users have been able to use a variety of websites to download clips unofficially. Although these websites would often disappear in 2011-2012, causing frustration, there was usually an alternative to be found on the Internet, as this student explains:

S: So when I found it, when I found that YouTube Fire wasn't working, so I got angry. What, why it happened?

A: (Laughs) Yeah.

S: So I just search a way to download musics from YouTube so I just found YouTube hyphen mp3.

Since the introduction of Clipbox in 2011 by Apple's iTunes store in Japan, YouTube users can easily download and make playlists of YouTube videos for their phones and PCs. A student interviewed in 2016, who used to buy CDs when in high school, said there is no need to buy any now because he can access all he needs free through YouTube and Clipbox. He does not buy music files on iTunes because he is afraid of losing the data if something happens to his phone or computer and he does not have the data backed up, in which case, he will have to pay for everything again. Moreover, friends of his share the same fears. For him and his friends, downloading from YouTube is not only the most economical way to access music, but also the safest.

In fact, many commercial rights holders have chosen to ignore the violation of their copyright because YouTube 'often functions as a publicity machine for their programming' (Prelinger, 2011, p. 271). They have decided that, 'if you can't beat the enemy, you have to become its friend and have opened "official" channels on YouTube where they post their own material' (Sibilla, 2010, p. 228). Apart from advertising revenues, little or no money can be made from the video clips

themselves these days. They serve as publicity for the artists who rely increasingly on live shows and sales of related goods for income.

This has changed the approach of many artists who 'are producing music videos now solely for YouTube, following different standards than in the case of clips intended for TV' (Sibilla, 2010, p. 229). The focus is less on photographic quality and more on originality in order to attract and keep viewers and to start a word of mouth process. However, there may be a turning of the tide against YouTube in some parts of the world. A BBC report on July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2016 says that Drake's "One Dance" owes part of its chart success to the fact that it is not available on YouTube:

"One Dance" owes much of its continued success to its popularity on streaming sites. The song received 4.33 million streams this week - equivalent to 43,300 sales. It has also been boosted by its absence from YouTube, which has prompted music fans to download or stream the song in order to hear it. Cover versions of the song are available to listen to on the video sharing website, but Drake's original version has yet to be uploaded by his official account (BBC, 2016).

## **Conclusion**

There is little knowledge, understanding, or interest in most of the aspects of YouTube discussed above among the young people I interviewed and those I teach. They have used YouTube for as long as they have been using a computer or mobile phone and so take it for granted. It is an integral part of their daily life. They use it as a hobby, for relaxation, to learn musical skills, to discover new artists and to listen repeatedly to old favourites. Yet they do not know when it started up or who owns it, give little thought to why there are so many advertisements and why videos are so often taken down. The next chapter will explore in more detail how they use YouTube to consume popular music and music video.

## **7 Western music video consumption by young Japanese**

This chapter explores the consumption of Western music video, accessed through YouTube. There are many studies of music video (Kaplan, 1987; Goodwin, 1992; Negus, 1996; Dickinson, 2007; Richardson, 2012; Vernallis, 2004; 2013<sup>a</sup>, 2013<sup>b</sup>) and of media audiences (Morley, 1980; Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998; Takahashi, 2010; Nightingale, 2011; Sullivan, 2013), but few of music video audiences (Lehnerer, 1987; Roe and de Gust, 2001; Kinskey, 2014), and none of Japanese audiences of Western music video. I will discuss how Japanese young people interpret music videos that were popular at the time of my research with reference to some of the aesthetics of Western music videos that have been highlighted in Chapter 5. This discussion will be combined with observations on the ways in which young Japanese people watch music videos often by 'glancing' rather than 'gazing' at the screen (Ellis, 1982; Cauldwell, 1995) while they are engaged in media 'grazing' (Creeber, 2013).

### **YouTube as a free source of background music**

The most common use of YouTube among my informants is to access music free of charge to listen to while engaged in some other activity. Many Japanese students commute long distances to their university each day, or to a part-time job. My survey data showed that students spend most time listening to music while commuting on public transportation and in the street, using YouTube as their music source. However, they rarely look at the screen for a number of reasons. First, it is uncomfortable and tiring, and often impossible, to hold their phone or iPod/Walkman screen in front of them on a crowded bus or train. Next, viewing YouTube videos is felt to be a private activity. Students do not like other people to see what they are watching.

Those who live alone listen to YouTube when they are doing household chores in their small one-room flats. Some attach their phone to speakers or use the TV screen and sound system. Others carry the phone in their pocket and use earphones. Some have attached a stand to their phone so that it can balance safely on a flat surface. One student has even fixed a net in his kitchen so that he can use YouTube while cooking. Although they are accessing music videos, their eyes are rarely on the screen in these situations.

The third most common use of YouTube is to provide BGM when they are doing homework or studying at home or in the university library. They put YouTube on Autoplay or use playlists while studying, but look at the screen when something new or interesting catches their attention. YouTube also provides background music when they are using their computer or phone for other activities, such as email, social networking, or tedious work like filling out job application forms.

### **The role of the screen in the consumption of music through music video**

This style of music video consumption has, in fact, been the norm since the days of MTV. Music video, like other types of television viewing, has mostly been in a domestic setting where other activities are happening concurrently, and the eyes of the viewers are often not on the screen (Collett and Lamb, 1986; Morley, 1992). Negus (1996) suggests that 'music video can become an element of audio-visual furniture' (p. 94) that provides either silent moving images or an audio soundtrack in a domestic setting. In the case of Japanese students, the computer or mobile phone has replaced the television set and YouTube has replaced MTV, but the uses to which music videos are put have not changed. Negus suggests that, given the fragmented way in which music videos are consumed, what audiences get 'in many circumstances are bits and pieces that have been put together in a deliberately decorative and multi-layered way' (p. 94). Video directors and recording companies have identified hooks that combine visual, lyrical and musical elements that can be produced throughout a video. These recurring hooks act as 'repetitive semiotic particles', which can make us

remember important parts of the song and of the singer and his/her performance even if we only catch snatches of the music video while busily engaged in other activities. According to Negus (1996), the commercial aspect of music videos is subtler than most people assume because the 'repetitive semiotic particles' can catch the attention of distracted audiences and provide pleasure through repeated encounters. Through repetition, music video audiences can build up understanding of a video over time. Music videos can maintain their appeal by providing renewed pleasure and generating new meanings through the recurring hooks that audiences partially see and hear.

The students in my study clearly prioritise the soundtrack over the visuals in a music video much of the time. Creeber (2013) emphasises how television, although thought of as a primarily visual medium, has always had to rely on the soundtrack to bring the eyes of its audience back to the screen. He reports research by Palmer (1986) that found that children watched TV with a wide range of degree or mode of attention, from total absorption, with the child very close to the screen, to a loose monitoring, often with the back to the screen, and turning to look when something on the soundtrack caught their attention. This behaviour is remarkably similar to that reported by my informants when using YouTube. Creeber (2013) describes how the smartphone is the 'new intimate screen' that has taken the small screen out of the home and into almost every aspect of the waking lives of users.

Ellis (1982) made an important distinction about how audiences for TV and the cinema may engage with the screen differently. He argued that 'TV's regime of vision is less intense than cinema's' (p. 137). It is 'a regime of the glance rather than the gaze. The gaze implies a concentration of the spectator's activity into that of looking, the glance implies that no extraordinary effort is being invested in the activity of looking' (p. 137). This argument has since become known as the 'glance theory': while a captivated cinema audience sits and gazes at the big

screen, TV viewers tend only to glance at the small screen and are easily distracted by the domestic activity around them (Creeber, 2013, p. 22).

The glance theory as applied to television has been criticised by Cauldwell (1995) who calls it 'a surrendered gaze', but it draws attention to the importance of sound and music in the early years of television and seems to be relevant to YouTube users who do not feel the need to keep their eyes fixed on the screen at all times. Cauldwell (1995) argues that television may not be watched all the time, and may be just 'issuing-forth in the background' (p. 26), but that this does not mean that television is always watched in this way and asks: 'Why not use an engaged and entranced viewer as the example upon which to build a theory of viewership?' (p. 26).

When comparing television and computer screens McCarthy and Zuazu (2013), say that the YouTube interface 'tends to encourage a surprisingly focused listening practice' and that 'the presence of a video alone tends to command attention, perhaps even more so when placed on a computer screen rather than on a television where content can quickly dissolve into the background as a kind of audiovisual wallpaper' (pp. 538-539). My findings suggest that this is not necessarily true. When students wanted to focus on the video they would put it on full screen to allow themselves to become immersed in the audiovisual experience. Yet, much of the time, they would disregard the video screen and listen to the music with the visuals also running in the background while they got on with other things in other windows open on their computer screen. The YouTube video can easily become audiovisual wallpaper, too. I will therefore outline first the situations in which students watch music videos with greater levels of engagement.

### **Situations in which Japanese students' eyes are fixed on the screen**

There are many occasions when Japanese young people focus on the YouTube screen. Common times are when watching YouTube alone, relaxing in front of

their computer with nothing else to do, or lying on their bed with their phone before going to sleep, or in the bath, and using their computer or phone when they are eating.

Several students said they like to watch music videos on YouTube as a social activity with their friends on campus during breaks. They can make use of the large university computer monitors and share their new discoveries with each other. They joked that they have the same schedules, but not the same music tastes. A student in 2012 explained how she and her sister and father enjoy YouTube sessions on the family computer at weekends, and that her father has introduced her to a lot of Western and Japanese music from his youth. She and her sister have, in turn, introduced their father to more contemporary music.

Groups of friends are also content to watch together on their phones. They can discover not only new music this way, but also the latest fashions. Young Japanese women pay a great deal of attention to the fashion, hair and make-up styles of Western as well as Japanese artists. Interestingly, one young man explained that common knowledge of the scenes in a music video help him and his friends to talk about moments in the song that they like because the visuals are easier to describe than the audio track.

Another kind of video clip that is watched closely and that also demonstrates a unique and valued attribute of YouTube, is a recording of a live show that is not available on DVD, or that is too long for the entire performance to be shown on television. Students say they can also find videos of live shows with bands that can only be heard performing live and it is especially exciting to watch the video of a live concert they have been to. One student commented in 2012 that sometimes she could relive a concert she had just been to because it had already been uploaded by the time she got home. Recordings of live shows are felt by some to be more powerful than promotional videos because they have the atmosphere of the audience being there, even though the sound quality is often

not good. For these students, each live performance varies and so the atmosphere is different. They can see many sides of an artist when they watch multiple live performances, whereas music videos always show the same performance. These students enjoy the variety and unpredictability of live music clips more than promotional video versions of a song. As one young man commented in 2012, he watches the promotional music video at first, but then loses interest in it once he knows the song and video and prefers to watch something else while the song plays. He reassigns the video from the foreground of his audio and visual attention to a background role.

For other students, however, being able to watch their favourite videos closely and as often as they like is a big attraction of YouTube. A popular video among four young women I interviewed in 2015 was Ed Sheeran's "Thinking Out Loud" in which he is dancing alone with "a beautiful lady". They can watch this again and again because it is very romantic with just the two of them dancing and they all agreed when one of them said, "I want to dance with him". Videos by Katy Perry, Taylor Swift, Lady Gaga, Carly Rae Jepsen, Ariana Grande, Selina Gomez, Avril Lavigne, Back Street Boys, Michael Jackson, Maroon 5, and One Direction were not only popular and well known, but the students interviewed were able to describe the action in some detail, indicating close attention to the visuals, but not always a very clear understanding of all they saw.

In addition to professional corporate produced videos by artists like those mentioned above, Japanese students listened to and watched a lot of covers on YouTube and appreciated the way that YouTube offers this option. They tended to pay attention to the screen when watching covers because they admired the musical skills of the cover artists, and the musicians among them watched closely to learn from the cover artists' techniques. They also appreciated the personal and original interpretations of songs. A female student in 2015 talked about Leroy Sanchez, who covers songs by many pop musicians. She said that he looks good and sings well-known songs with his own interpretation. She liked

it when cover artists change the lyrics a little to match their own situation or interpretation because “we can feel sympathy”. Another student commented that there are many covers of Sam Smith songs by people who “do not seem like amateurs”. Other professional-sounding cover artists mentioned covered songs by Ariana Grande and Jason Mraz. In 2011-2012, covers of songs on *Glee* and *High School Musical* clips were especially popular.

Students also liked the fact that people who make covers can become popular and are aware that this is how artists like Justin Bieber have been discovered, as well as Japanese artists like Goose House. For one focus group in 2015, a good point of YouTube is that it is always “open door”, so you can listen to artists who are not so popular and it is good for the promotion of young groups as well as for finding recent releases before they are popular or famous enough to be found in rental shops.

Goodwin (1992) said: ‘Successful music videos also circulate on an international scale and are generally unhindered by language barriers (English being the international language of pop lyrics, which are in any case less important, in the video age, than they ever were)’ (pp. 41-42). This does not appear to apply to many of the Japanese undergraduates I interviewed, who showed great interest in the lyrics of English-language songs they liked and often chose user-generated song lyric videos to watch closely. The lyrics appear on the screen in time to the music so that audiences can listen and read, or sing along. Singing is sometimes done with others and sometimes alone. Some young women interviewed in 2012 explained:

S1: When I want to sing, I find the video with lyrics.

A: Right.

S1: Without music video.

A: Yes.

S1: Some people have uploaded only the lyrics.

A: Yes, that's right. My family, we watch this too.

S1: Really? So I can find what the songs mean, like love song.

A: Right.

S1: And if it's easy to remember, I remember it.

S2: Ah, yes, or when I want to sing along, I spend one hour or ...

A: Ah, you sing along? Do you watch the videos with the lyrics?

S2: Ah, yes, and sometimes it's a ... there is the lyrics on the screen.

A: Yes. Right. So singing along, is this for your personal enjoyment or ...?

S2: Yeah.

A: It is. How does... what's great about singing along?

(Laughter)

S2: I like to sing and I can practice the pronunciation.

A: Right. Mm. So you do this when you're watching YouTube and not when you're just listening on your iPhone?

S2: If I remember the lyrics.

A: So YouTube, having the YouTube screen there helps.

S2: Yes.

This student would, in fact, take her phone into the bathroom to sing in the bath. Another student explained how useful these lyrics videos are when she wanted to practice before going to karaoke. I asked her if she was interested in singing while reading the song lyrics.

S3: *Uta no renshu mitai no?* (Like practicing the songs?)

A: Yes.

S3: So. (That's right.)

A: *Suru?* (You do that?)

S3: Yes.

A: Ah, OK.

S3: *Nanka karaoke to ka so iu taipu ga ii na.* (So if they are a good type of song for karaoke.)

Japanese and Western videos with a strong story line tend to be popular and watched attentively for a number of reasons. First, they can enhance the emotional impact of the song, as this student in 2012 explained.

S: *PV mecha suki nandesukedo.* (I really like promotion videos.)

.....  
A: Why do you like the PVs?

S: *Mitara sutori ga omoshiroi.* (If you watch them the story is interesting.)

A: Ah, so it's like a mini movie?

S: Mm.

A: You like the PVs with a story?

S: Yes.

A: Not all of them have stories, do they? Some of them are just the singer singing but ... are there any favourites that you can think of? That you like a lot?

S: *O-ki ni iri no?* (Ones I like?)

A: *Mm. Eto... inshōtekina PV* (Impressive Promotional Videos)

S: *Ah GRreeN no uta. GRreeN no "Kisseki". To Funky Monkey Baby's no uta zentaitekini suki* (GRreeN's song "Kisseki" and I like all of Funky Monkey Baby's PVs)

A: Ah, *kono* (this) GRreeN and Funky Monkey Baby's videos are all good?

K: Yes.

A: Can you explain? *Dōshite suki?* (Why do you like them?)

K: *GRreeN wa mecha kando suru* (I feel very moved by the Greeen video).

It was commonly said by my respondents that music videos offer insights into "the story behind the song", the true meaning or message of the song, and that they found this helpful with Western as well as Japanese songs. This interview extract with a female student is from 2012.

A: Right. Do you actually watch the videos much? The music videos, the promotion videos much?

S: I always watch, yeah.

A: You do? Is there any... why?

S: Why? Because I want the image of the song.

A: Ah, OK. You find it helps you to understand the meaning of the song?

S: Mm. So Katy Perry, her music videos are really marvelous. *Inshōteki?* Impressive.

A: Yes, impressive.

S: Do you know “Part of Me”?

A: “Part of Me”? No. Is it a new song?

S: The music video is like er... heartbreaking.

A: Heartbreaking? Ah.

S: She wants to be strong so *guntai* (army) ...

A: Right, she joins the army.

S: Yeah.

A: So you say this is really heartbreaking. Can you explain what it is about it? Do you feel you kind of support her in doing this? Or shock that she wants to do this?

S: I can agree with her.

A: Oh you can agree. You can share her feelings?

S: The boys is *warui* (bad). She feels that women are strong.

A: Right. So physically strong or strong in other ways?

S: *Seishintekini* (mentally).

A: Right. Strong in spirit?

S: Mm.

For Japanese young people like this young woman, a powerful and moving visual narrative is clearly an essential aesthetic quality of a “good” music video, one that she is willing to watch multiple times and to recommend to others. Many of the

music videos by Taylor Swift were talked about in the same way (especially “You Belong With Me”).

Katy Perry’s music videos were still among the most popular music videos watched, especially by my female respondents in 2015. One of the focus groups discussed “Roar” and how the video helped them understand the meaning of the song. There were five students, but only three talked in this excerpt: two females (S1, S2) and one male (S3) and myself (A).

S1: If a good quality video is made, if people think it’s a good video, the music is more highly evaluated. For example, Katy Perry.

A: So a good quality video gives you a good image of the artist?

S2: The image of the song is easy to understand.

S1: “Roar” is an example.

S2: Yes, ‘wild’.

S1: They use animals, too ... ‘wild’ ... ‘jungle wild’.

S2: It’s not connect with lyrics, but it’s good. If the video is different from the lyrics, when you are listening to Western music, even if you don’t understand the lyrics, watching the PV you can understand, can’t you? (The others agree.) You get more of an impression.

A: What is the meaning in the story of the song “Roar”?

S2: If you are just looking at the PV, she doesn’t need the man. She’s a strong woman.

S3: She shows her strength.

S2: Are the song lyrics saying that?

(S1 and S3 agree.)

S1: Yes, I think it’s like that.

S2: It’s easy to understand, isn’t it?

S1: It’s a PV that can be seen all over the world. It makes the meaning of the song easy to understand.

S2: When you hear the song, you remember.

S1: Yes, you remember the PV. The image remains.

This music video is, in fact, an example of Goodwin's (1992) concept of *illustration* (when the visual narrative tells the story of the song lyrics). The song lyrics talk about the singer finding the courage to stand up for herself and to fight back against unfair (misogynist) treatment. The video storyline creates a concrete (tongue in cheek) interpretation in which Katy Perry finds the courage to fend for herself in the jungle after her self-centered male companion has been killed by a tiger. She goes on to tame and befriend the tiger, along with an elephant and a monkey. For these students, the video explains the meaning of the lyrics in a visual way that they can relate to. It is notable that two of the students were familiar with the song lyrics, but were probably unaware of the origin and the meaning of the famous words of Muhammad Ali, who said that he could "float like a butterfly and sting like a bee", which Perry borrows for her lyrics. For these students, these words add to the images of "jungle wild" and "animals" associated with the video's visual narrative and enhance the students' sense of satisfaction at understanding "the image of the song". In fact, the Katy Perry videos that were very popular among the students interviewed all use illustration ("Part of Me", "Firework", "The One That Got Away"). The visual narrative provides an interpretation of the song lyrics that less engaged (or distracted) viewers, and those for whom English is not their first language can understand. As was discussed earlier, music videos rarely follow a cohesive narrative. There are many reasons for this, some of which will become apparent in the following discussion.

An artist who was very popular in Japan in 2011-2012 was Lady Gaga following her support of Japanese people in the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami that struck in March, 2011 (CCTV, 2011). Many students interviewed at that time were interested in her music videos, but found them very hard to understand. These female students (S1, S2) explain their interpretation of "Born This Way".

A: ... Are there any other music videos that are very impressive or memorable?

S1: Lady Gaga.

A: Yes! Which Lady Gaga videos are impressive?

S1: All.

A: All of them?

S1: "Born This Way". First part.

A: Yes it's erm... yeah! (Laughter) What do you understand from that video?

S1: Her feeling?

A: About?

S1: Hmm about? It's not like human. (Laughter)

A: It's not like human ... mm.

S1: Mm the reason she used her message (?)

A: Can you explain what you think the message is? *Nihongo demo kekko desu* (You can use Japanese.)

S1: Bad woman *dokutoku...* *renai shiteita keredomo ... romansu ga atta kedo kedo zenbu kuzureteshimau ... hakanai ai mitaina...* (She's a bad woman ... unique ... she was in love, she had a romance, but it all fell apart ... it was like an ephemeral love affair.)

A: So it expresses how upset you can feel when it starts off well but then goes wrong.

S2: Yeah. Because the last part of the music video is Lady Gaga burns her boyfriend.

A: Mm. Yeah ... very shocking.

S2: So kind of jealous?

A: Yes. Kind of jealous, mm. Angry. She's certainly very angry. Upset.

S1: Her music video is not happy. They end like bad end?

In fact, they had conflated two of Lady Gaga's songs and music videos. The song's story outline that S1 provides (possibly from some knowledge of the lyrics) and the video ending S2 refers to with Lady Gaga having apparently burned her boyfriend describe "Bad Romance". Clearly, the graphic opening

scenes of “Born This Way”, where Lady Gaga is seen giving birth to a race of good beings and then to an incarnation of evil, had left a lasting impression on these young women. Their confusion could arise from the fact that this scene takes place before the music and Lady Gaga’s performance of the song “Born This Way” actually begin. In fact, the visual style of both of these music videos is similar, once the song is underway, with Lady Gaga singing and dancing in a variety of fantasy settings with a strange assortment of characters. Like ‘most corporate music videos (they) intercut rudimentary narratives with dance sequences, close-ups, and direct appeals to the camera that interrupt any pretense of coherent temporal structures or organized landscapes’ (Benson-Allot, 2013, p. 131).

Another female student in 2012 commented on the meaning of the lyrics of “Born This Way” and showed a good understanding of the song (with a little help from her friend).

S: Mm. *Mecha Lady Gaga no kashi wa kekko suki.* (I really like Lady Gaga’s lyrics.)

A: Ah, what is it about Lady Gaga’s lyrics?

S: “Born This Way”.

A: What is it about “Born This Way”? What’s the song about?

S: Er... *donna kyokutte* (What kind of song is it?)

A: So (That’s right) “Born This Way” *no hanashi wa nani?* (What’s the story of “Born This Way”?)

S: *Nanka hanashi ka?* (What’s the story?)

A: *Imi ga, meseji ga?* (The meaning, the message?)

S: (After a short discussion with another student) *Jibun ni jishin wo motteiru.* She is saying, “I have confidence in who I am”.

A male student interviewed in 2012 also knew and liked a lot of Lady Gaga’s songs and videos. He liked the sound of her voice and watched the videos

although he could only catch some of the lyrics and did not understand them exactly. He found “Born This Way” difficult to understand as well as “Paparazzi”, “Bad Romance”, “Judas”, and “Telephone”. Her “difficult behaviour” in particular, was hard for him to understand. I am not certain what he meant by “difficult behaviour”, but it seems likely that he was referring to her burning, poisoning, and other disrespectful treatment of people (especially men) in these videos.

Students looking for a storyline in Lady Gaga’s videos that will illustrate the meaning or message of her songs are unsurprisingly confused. Goodwin (1992, p. 88) uses another term, *disjuncture*, for music videos in which the imagery has no bearing on the lyrics. “Paparazzi” and “Telephone” fall into this category. According to Benson-Allott (2013), “All of Gaga’s videos employ characters, situations, and psychologically motivated responses while subordinating them to logics other than narrative” (p. 131). The narrative frame of “Paparazzi” begins after 45 seconds of static establishing shots with Lady Gaga’s lover trying to seduce her in front of a paparazzo. In her struggle to resist, she falls from a balcony and is seriously injured and disabled. However, she recovers and takes revenge by poisoning her lover and informing the police of this. As a result, she becomes a front-page celebrity once more. This narrative clearly does not illustrate the song’s lyrics, which describe a female paparazza who is obsessively stalking a male pop star.

Similarly, the video narrative of “Telephone” bears no relation to the story behind the song lyrics. The song is about how annoyed the singer is by being frequently called on her phone while she is out clubbing and in no mood for thinking or talking. The video narrative begins with Lady Gaga arriving in prison and then being released on bail by Beyoncé. Together they poison Beyoncé’s disrespectful boyfriend and the entire clientele of a diner. The only time when the visuals seem to illustrate the song lyrics to some extent is when the song actually starts and Lady Gaga is trying to receive a phone call in prison, but is frustrated by the bad reception. Benson-Allott (2013) observes that: ‘On its own, this story

provides few satisfactions, especially since it offers neither the narrative closure of parable nor the psychological insight of realism, but it does provide something for the musical sequences to interrupt' (p. 136). Benson-Allott also explains in detail the role of the glitch, a visual and sound stutter frequently used in contemporary music videos, in order to underline the mediated nature of music video at a level of sophistication well beyond the awareness of the Japanese undergraduates I interviewed, who had no background in media studies and scant opportunity to engage in critical thinking.

Goodwin (1992) was writing long before Lady Gaga was making music videos, and addressing early critics of music video, such as E. Ann Kaplan (1987), who based their analyses of music videos on the conventions of cinema. He nevertheless made important observations that apply equally to Japanese students who tend to assume that the role of the video's visuals is to illustrate the meaning or message of the song. 'When music videos are read as silent mini-movies whose narratives might be understood in isolation from the music and its wider significance in pop culture, the result is enormous confusion about how audiences might actually make meaning from the video clips' (p. 4). He points out that the music is not simply a sound track that illustrates the images. In fact, the reverse is true: the images illustrate the music. This is certainly the case in the videos of Lady Gaga and aligns with Benson-Allott's comment above.

### **The reciprocal roles of audio and visual elements in music video**

In Chapter 5, I explained the concept of synaesthesia or quasi-synaesthesia (Goodwin, 1992; Cook, 1998; Williams, 2003) and how it can be applied to the experience of music video viewing/listening. Goodwin was the first musicologist to discuss how this 'intrapersonal process whereby sensory impressions are carried over from one sense to the other, for instance when one pictures a sound in one's "mind's eye" ... is key for understanding music television since video clips build on the sound track's visual associations' (1992, p. 50). Although

others, such as Michel Chion (1994) may call this process by another name (such as synchresis), they all agree that it involves the 'forging of an immediate and necessary relationship between something one sees and something one hears' (p. 5) and that this phenomenon of added value is especially at work in the case of sound/image synchronism.

Schutz (2008) explains from a psychological point of view how the process of hearing is affected by seeing and that visual information plays an important role in shaping the musical experience. For this reason, elaborate staging and lighting are used at live musical performances. 'In addition to increasing overall excitement and interest performers use it strategically, harnessing its communicative power to supplement and augment their acoustic output. Therefore, rather than a distraction, it is actually a tool useful for musical communication' (p. 83). Psychologists are exploring the processes through which the human brain combines visual and auditory information and how visual information can influence the perception of a sound or the conscious evaluation of a sound. Research has shown, for example, an 18% increase in the understanding of the lyrics of a song when the singer's lip movements can be seen (Schutz, 2008, p. 86). In this case, the visual information affects the perceived clarity of the auditory information. Perceptual influences like these occur prior to our conscious experiences of the sound and they cannot be overridden or ignored.

Richardson (2012) clarifies this process further by drawing on the concept of embodiment: 'the assumption that thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are grounded in bodily interaction with the environment' (Meier et al., 2012). For Richardson, sound enhances visual understanding: 'Sound more than moving images draws the audience-viewer into an embodied understanding of audio-visual experience. Sounds give substance and multidimensional depth to two-dimensional screen images' (Richardson, 2012, p. 21). We also need to bear in mind that a pop song is a multi-layered text that can be heard in a great variety of

ways depending on where we place our aural attention: the rhythm, the voice, the backing, the lyrics, etc. The visual structure of video clips reproduces this separation of elements. This explains the apparently disorganized or fragmented nature of music videos. Some visual elements illustrate lyrics, and others represent the voice, the rhythm and various aspects of the music.

As explained in Chapter 5, pop music videos do not follow the conventions of a classic realist narrative text with its sequence of disruption-action-resolution. They mirror instead the features of pop music with which audiences are very familiar. Pop songs are based on the cyclical repetition of elements such as the verse and chorus and on the repetition of lyrics, chord progressions, riffs and rhythms (Goodwin, 1992). The chorus or refrain acts as a hook that is repeated to compel the listener to want to hear the song again and again. Music videos also employ visual hooks. Goodwin identified 3 kinds of visual hooks that are still common today: 1. Close-up shots of the pop stars' faces, which are often repeated during a song's chorus or refrain. 2. A hook that uses the male scopophilic gaze in which images of women that employ the classic techniques of objectification are placed throughout the clips to encourage viewers to keep watching. 3. A combination of these two types of hook, which is used in many videos featuring female musicians (1992, pp. 90-92). Such hooks are used because music videos seek to provide pleasure, to keep viewers watching, and to encourage repeated viewings. One further point made by both Goodwin and Richardson is that 'music videos commonly paraphrase the conventions of live performance' (Richardson, 2012, p. 51) and so it is natural for the singer to be seen to address the audience directly through close-ups of the performer's face looking into the camera lens.

Although my informants often expected music videos to illustrate songs, such an expectation can be problematic for the above-mentioned reasons and because metaphors and tropes cannot always be made literal. Many music videos therefore aim to signify a mood rather than tell a story. The song lyrics, when heard and understood, also tell the audience that the music will make them feel a

certain way, or make them want to dance, and dance is often used to demonstrate the feelings of the singer. The young women who were hooked on Ed Sheeran's "Thinking Out Loud" demonstrated the effectiveness of such a technique.

There are music videos, of course, where the artist is totally absent, as has been discussed in Chapter 5. These videos rely on other attention-grabbing visuals, among which, dance had a particularly strong appeal to my informants.

### **The role of dance in music videos**

The music videos that hold the attention of my informants the most are those that include dancing. Japanese male groups like EXILE and J Soul Brothers and female groups like E-Girls and AKB48 are especially admired for the dance routines on their music videos. These videos are watched closely and repeatedly and the dances learned and executed by the many amateur dance groups that can be seen practicing and competing on campus. This female student in 2012 explains:

S: *AKB no dansu oboeiru toki ni YouTube...* (I use YouTube when I want to remember AKB's dances)

A: Oh, right. So you like to watch them on YouTube ... erm ... because you like watching the dance?

S: Yes.

A: Right, so for listening you like Nishino Kana but you like watching AKB. Exciting?

S: Exciting.

Particularly admired, however, are the male and female Korean groups who dance because their dancing is highly synchronized, very powerful and dynamic.

These videos are so impressive that the students want to watch them many times.

A: Yeah, so which K-pop groups do you like?

S: Er... Girls' Generation, Kara, Big Bang?

A: Yeah. What's different about K-pop to J-pop?

S: K-pop ...erm...K-pop are very cool. They can dance very well.

A: Right.

S: So if I watch, on YouTube, I can watch their music videos too. If I watch Japanese idols' music video, I only watch their faces.

A: Ah...

S: But when I watch K-pop, I watch their dance as well.

A: Right, I know what you mean.

S: K-pop is like this (Laughter as she demonstrates energetically)

A: Yes, very high energy! They kind of don't stop. They're on the move...

S: Yeah.

Another young woman in 2012 said that without seeing the music videos you cannot know how unique the Korean dancing is. So the music video is very important as well as interesting. It is the close coordination of both the K-pop group dance routines and their appearance that are especially impressive, as another female student explains:

S: Er... the Korean dance is very *sorotteiru* (well coordinated). They ... how do you say *sorotteiru*?

A: *Sorotteiru*?

S: *Chotto matte* (please wait a moment). My dictionary. *Sororeru* ... ah... same

A: OK, so they are dancing together.

S: Together, yes. In same clothes.

A: In the same clothes, right, so I understand. Yes, so it's very good because they are all dancing at the same time.

S: And they perfect!

Part of the attraction of the highly synchronised performances of the Korean dancers could be explained to some extent by the tradition of synchronised mass dance displays by school children on sports days in Japan, from elementary to senior high, and by the popularity of brass band marching and the daily exercise routines that are carried out to music in schools and the workplace and even in public parks. This kind of performance is culturally engrained, and when the performance is of a high standard, it generates great pleasure in the viewer.

Interestingly, the Korean dancers are seen to be too highly skilled for ordinary young Japanese people to emulate. The following two extracts are from a 2016 and a 2015 focus group. In the first a male student is speaking, and in the second two females.

A: What was different about the Koreans?

S1: They dance professional.

A: They dance professionally, OK, right.

S1: Japanese groups like Johnny's, AKB, no.

A: They're not so professional?

S1: No.

A: It's the idol style of dancing?

S1: Yes.

A: They mustn't look too good?

S1: (Nods)

A: So you say their dancing is awesome. How is it different from Japanese idols' dancing? So ... EXILE are famous for dancing, so ...

S2: Japanese idol dance is *mina de dekiru yatsu ... ippan no fan mo mana dekiru you na dansu dakara te no ugoki to ka ga oi ... kedo hoka no hitotachi nanto iu no wa ureru tame ni nanka sugoku dansu wo shiteiru kanji ga suru ... apīru suru*

... (So everyone can do Japanese idol dances together. It's the kind of dancing that ordinary fans can copy. So there is a lot of hand and arm movement and so on. But other people, to sell a lot, they do amazing dancing, to have strong appeal. )

A: So K-pop dancing is ...

S3: Only watching.

There is also awareness that the Japanese and Western styles of dancing are very different and that Western-style dancing is not seen as suitable for Japanese people. The video "Sorry" was referred to when a group was discussing differences between the dance styles of Japanese and Western music videos. The young man in the group commented that if the Japanese female idol group AKB48 performed a dance like that in Justin Bieber's video for "Sorry", it would be seen very differently. The young women agreed with him that it would be seen as *gehin* (vulgar), but with Western dancers it is *kakui* (cool). A female student explained, "Japanese dancer *imeji* (image) use upper part (she gestures from her waist up) so like a *bonodori* (Japanese traditional summer dance), but in the Western music video, all the body use (she gestures from head to toe) *dakara karada ga tsukau imeji chigau kara chigau* (so the image of the way of using the body is different, so it is different.)"

Vernallis (2004) expresses a Western scholar's point of view towards the role of dance in music video '... dance is essential to music video because it teaches how the music is to be experienced in the body' (p. 71). This is strikingly similar to what these Japanese students said. Moreover, they would probably concur when Vernallis says that the imagery of background dancers is often 'highly sexualized' in Western music video and that '... one could say that the body, music, and pleasure have always been closely linked and that pop music has always dealt with transgression and does so powerfully through race and sex' (p. 71). But for some Japanese young women, like this student in 2015, overt sexual expression is off putting. "Sometimes some kind of Western music videos so

sexy ... so I don't watch". According to Vernallis (2004), it is 'almost invariably African-American women' (p. 71) whose bodies are exploited in this way in American music videos. However, these young Japanese people include African Americans with all foreigners (i.e. non-Japanese). A young woman from a 2015 focus group said that if a foreign woman is beautiful, and she has a very good figure, it is considered acceptable by Japanese people for her to display her figure. But it is not acceptable for Japanese women to do so. She says there is slight prejudice (*jakkan na henken ga aru*) in the attitudes of Japanese people. Another female student explained that it is prejudice, but not discrimination and that each country is different and that Japanese and foreign sensibilities are different.

Goodwin, back in 1992, lamented the continued paucity of scholarly inquiry into dance and quoted Angela McRobbie (1984) 'Of all the areas of popular culture, it remains the least theorized, the least subject to the scrutiny of the social critic' (pp. 130-131). This is still the case, with very little having been written on this subject, even by the most prolific music video scholars like Vernallis (2004) who, having insisted that dance is necessary in music video because it demonstrates how the music can be experienced through the body, goes on to observe that: 'The characters' dance in music video also instructs us how we should feel about our bodies within a certain cultural epoch' (p. 71), and that styles of dance change from one decade to the next. She wonders how the highly sexualized imagery of female dancers affects the perceptions, beliefs, and imagination of the many different racial and social groups that comprise American society and sympathizes with African-American women 'because the imagery so stridently argues that their bodies are for ogling and sex' (p. 72). In Japan, it seems that dancers and dance routines in music videos are perceived in the same way, the difference being that not just African-American women, but all non-Japanese women are categorized as sexy and to be ogled.

## Different standards of acceptable dress and behaviour for Japanese and Western (and to some extent Korean) female artists

It is not just differences in dance styles that my informants drew attention to, but also in clothing and behaviour. There was a common perception among both male and female informants that Korean female dancers were sexier than their Japanese counterparts and that it was more acceptable for them to wear very short outfits to show off their long legs. Japanese female idols, however, should retain a cute (*kawaii*) or childish (*osanaï*) image and so dress and behave accordingly. The same difference in standards exists between European and Japanese female performers as this young woman explains:

Sometimes when I see the music video and so the girl have a very sexy, dynamite body ... so *fuku no haiin ga sugoku semai* (very tight-fitting clothes). So I think that if the European girls so wear that things, oh very sexy, but if Japanese wears the same things, I think *gehin* (vulgar).

When I asked if this difference comes from Japanese culture, she explained that Japanese culture expects women not to show their body so much, like when they wear a kimono that covers everything because the image of *yamato nadeshiko* still remains these days. Yamato is the old name of Nara, a former capital city of Japan, but it refers to the whole country before it became known as Japan. *Nadeshiko* is the name of a flower known as a 'fringed pink' in English. It is a small, common, but easily distinguishable wild flower. The original meaning refers to a young woman who is so adorable that she makes you want to sit her down and *naderu* (pat or stroke) her all day long. The expression *yamato nadeshiko* is used nostalgically to praise the purity and modesty of the quintessential Japanese woman, who maintains this image by modestly covering her body with a kimono and through her good manners, dignity, strength of character and spirit, and by obeying and assisting figures of authority, such as her father, older brothers, and husband, as well as women more senior to her.

The Japanese women's football team has been affectionately called Nadeshiko Japan since the name was chosen by popular public vote in 2004.

The prevalence of this concept explains the shock that the young women in another focus group mentioned earlier expressed when they watched the popular girl idol group AKB48 perform "Ponytail and *Shushu* (hairband)". There is a very teasingly sexy opening scene in the girls' locker room. The performers are naked but hidden just in time by people and objects moving between them and the camera. There is a voyeuristic dog in the locker room, which the students immediately identified as representing the typical older male gaze. These students explained that they were shocked because Japanese girl idols are supposed to be cute and sing songs, not sexy and naked in this way. Another focus group discussed the AKB48 video "Heavy Rotation" in which the idols are cuddling and kissing in a huge bed, wearing only lingerie and cat's ears. The girls in the focus group thought this is *kitanai* (dirty) because they are idols and so they should not perform like this. Interestingly, the young man in the group disagreed with the girls' opinion. For him, the "Heavy Rotation" video was not in bad taste. In his opinion, foreign performers are sexy, but AKB48 are cute, even when performing in this way.

Clarke, Dibben and Pitts (2010) explain that 'Japanese beliefs about modesty require that the self remains inconspicuous, and so *haji* (the emotion elicited by behaviour which is immodest) is more prominent in Japanese than in British life' (p. 85). Nevertheless, these female students said that it is acceptable for Japanese artists, like Amuro Namie, who want to express themselves in a sexy way, if the music and music video match. Clearly, there are different standards in their mind for idols and artists.

Generally speaking, however, Japanese music videos are far less sexy than Western music videos. A young woman in 2012 expressed the difference in the following way:

A: OK ... are there, among Western musicians, are there some promotion videos that you enjoy a lot? Can you think of any that ...

S: Sometimes I watch the PV, but I always just listen, but very different to Japan.

A: The promotion videos are very different, aren't they?

S: Especially, mmm Japan is very ... *jinsui*. (Laughs and checks dictionary) Ah, pure!

A: Ah, yes.

S: My image is Japan is very pure.

### Conclusion

These days, the Internet, and especially a website like YouTube, does not encourage the user to 'glance' or to 'gaze' but rather to 'graze'. The most-watched online content is that which 'adapts best to a multimedia environment where the audience is continually digesting small amounts' (Creeber, 2013, p. 123-124). While the 'glance' of TV audiences suggests a certain passivity, and the 'gaze' of cinema audiences suggests an almost hypnotic entrancement, 'grazing' means actively choosing what to consume from a vast selection and continuously chewing on small amounts from various locations, sometimes simultaneously.

Vernallis (2013<sup>a</sup>) describes how enhanced and aesthetically accelerated media are now integral to our lives at the same time that the pace of work is speeding up and multitasking has become the norm. Human attention spans are limited: after short periods of hyperfocus, the brain needs a rest which task switching and daydreaming can provide before engaging again in a period of very productive work.

This is therefore an age of "media snacking" (Creeber, 2013, p. 123) where people like short 'bite-size' cultural products (Tweets, Flash micro-games, viral

videos). Corporate music videos are an ideal component of a contemporary media diet, thanks to their brevity and 'repetitive semiotic particles' (Negus, 1996) that catch the attention of audiences and enhance pleasure through repeated viewings. These multi-layered tasty morsels whet rather than satisfy the appetite, keeping audiences receptive for the next small bite. YouTube users can return to them with ease on a regular or a random basis because the site provides a particularly suitable delivery platform for corporate music videos with its vast up-to-date collection, search function, playlists and recommendations.

YouTube users have the options of sound or vision only, or sound with vision, depending on whether the music video is accompanying a commute, a tedious task, or a stretch of free time spent alone or with others. For many young Japanese, sound only is the default mode because they are unable to watch their mobile device screen or do not wish to be distracted by the visuals. These quick snatches of audio and/or audio-visual entertainment can relieve tedium by adding a degree of pleasure to mundane activities. The arrangement of the visuals of a great many corporate music videos follows that of the song itself: the visual hooks tend to follow the audio hooks, so regardless of whether the eyes of the viewer are on the screen or not, the visuals, once familiar, are often replayed in the mind's eye of the video consumer. Music videos can also be interrupted when the need arises (arrival at one's destination, completion of a task, or an unexpected interruption such as a new message on a social media network.) Whether temporarily put on pause or saved for later, the YouTube music video is readily accessible when the user is ready to return and consume it some more. According to Ngai (2012), our modern aesthetic categories are smaller and more varied than they were two hundred years ago. The most prevalent these days are the cute, interesting and zany, and they certainly apply to the characteristics of music videos popular among Japanese young people.

The concept of media snacking also explains the students' common behaviour during group interviews when they would frequently show just a little of a video to

others and expect them to be content with that snippet along with their recommendation to “check it out”. At first, I thought they were simply inattentive or easily distracted or even incapable of watching a music video all the way through. I have since come to realise that they are skilled in the art of light and frequent music video consumption on YouTube, presaged by the earlier preference for ring tones that play just a hook of a song that Manabe (2009) noted. Moreover, they are ready and willing to indulge in a binge YouTube music video session from time to time when the pace of life allows this.

Although music videos in the digital age can exploit the enhanced colour, clarity, visual trickery, rapid cuts, and slick editing that digital technology allows, it is striking that the reasons Japanese young people watch Western music videos on YouTube in the present age are fundamentally the same as those of American teenagers uncovered thirty years ago in the analogue age during the heyday of MTV. Roe and de Meyer (2001) report on an early study of the American MTV audience in 1986 by Sun and Lull in which they identified the importance of the visual aspect combined with a generalized attraction to the musical content of MTV as central to the appeal of music videos. The main motives for viewing were: entertainment, information, social interaction (talking about videos with friends) and the fact that videos helped with the interpretation of lyrics. Another study by Brown, Campbell and Fisher in 1986 demonstrated that videos had already become an important part of the American adolescent’s pattern of media use. In addition to entertainment and social interaction, their study revealed that the other reasons for watching were to fill in time and to receive instruction on how to dance and what to wear to be fashionable. A study of Flemish adolescents by Roe and Cammaer in 1993 found that most MTV use was ‘unplanned and erratic with viewers “zapping” in and out of the channel on a regular basis’ (Roe and de Gust, 2001, p.36). The strongest motive for viewing was ‘to hear the music’ followed by ‘relaxation’, ‘to relieve boredom’, ‘for information’, ‘to be able to talk to others about it’. It is fascinating that music video

is consumed by Japanese youngsters on YouTube these days for the same reasons and in much the same way.

It is important to note, however, that early studies also found that there were significant gender and racial differences in attitudes to music videos and it was clear that different adolescent subgroups used videos for different reasons. Brown and Schulze (1990) reported that 'audience interpretations of music videos vary according to race, gender and fandom' (Roe and de Gust, 2001, p. 36). To gain a better understanding of the ways in which Japanese young men and women interpret Western music videos, I invited focus groups to watch and comment on a small selection. The findings are reported in the next chapter.

## **8 Japanese students' appreciation and interpretations of Western music videos**

This chapter comprises two sections. In the first I discuss the responses of three focus groups and one English language class to a small selection of music videos and identify some factors that influence their interpretation and appreciation of these videos. The second part discusses my observations on the academic skills that Japanese undergraduates are able to apply when thinking critically about music videos. The discussion is based on my classroom experience in teaching media studies for over fifteen years and a course in music video analysis for seven (15-week) semesters. The latter has given me the opportunity to compare the analytic skills of Japanese students with those of the exchange students from European, North American, and other Asian countries with whom they study.

### **Focus group responses to a selection of Western music videos**

In order to gain a clearer idea of how Japanese young people watch, listen and respond to Western music videos, I wanted to analyse the responses of a number of students to a selection of music videos. The first problem was how to choose these videos. I was aware of the pitfall outlined by Goodwin (1992) who explains how a researcher in 1987 went to high schools in America and showed pre-selected videos to teen audiences and demanded feedback. Their responses depended on 'situational variables' such as whether the artist was hot, had appeared locally, or had a fan in their class. Such 'situational variables' are, in fact, part of the content. 'The meaning of a given clip may lie precisely in prejudice, fandom, competence, expertise, familiarity, and fashion generated beyond the limits of the music video "text"' (p. 14). Interpretation of a music video depends also on exposure to other media texts, such as songs, films, TV shows, live performances, and other music videos. How was I going to choose Western music videos that would be reasonably accessible to Japanese undergraduates?

I considered asking the focus group members to choose a video each that they would like to discuss with the group. Choosing their own videos would mean that my influence was removed, but I would need to check that we did not have two or more students choose the same one. They would need to let me know in advance their first and second choices. They may view this as a homework assignment in which they had to impress me and/or the other members of the group. I could not be sure of the reasons why they would choose certain videos and not others. Moreover, if only one or two are familiar with a video already, the others might feel at a disadvantage when discussing it. But the situation would later be reversed when the time came to discuss their video choice. Besides, I wanted to explore a little more their responses to videos that they may perceive as acceptable for Western artists to perform in, but not Japanese artists. I was doubtful that they would choose even a mildly shocking video in such a situation. Assigning videos myself would mean I could include a balance of genres, styles and other aspects that I would like to explore and this is the decision I made.

The next question was should they watch all the videos in advance and come prepared with their own ideas? The drawback to this was that they might do some research, which could affect their opinions, but then they might do this anyway when they come across a new video that captures their interest. The focus group would then function like a workshop, which is a form used by researchers. However, my aim was not to work through a problem or to train the focus group participants in critical analysis of music videos. I wanted to record their spontaneous responses to a selection of videos and to observe the foci of their attention.

Naturally, I could not hope to replicate the way they consume music videos in their daily lives, especially when relaxing at home, but the insights I gained from the interviews reduced my anxiety about this to some extent. I knew that young Japanese don't watch music videos very closely in general, or even right the way through each time. So showing the chosen music videos only once, or in some

cases twice, would be as close as I could get to replicating the way they watch such videos in daily life, even though they were watching as a group on a large screen in a classroom, or on a laptop screen. I wanted to capture their initial reactions, comments, observations, and questions to elicit attitudes to a variety of Western music video styles by a small number of artists.

When choosing the artists and videos, I decided to take the lead from the students themselves. In one focus group, the videos of OK Go were well known by most of the students. Especially memorable for them was “I Won’t Let You Down” filmed in Japan in 2014 with thousands of Japanese girl dancers. One young man exclaimed, “That was really amazing! I was really excited. *Kando shimashita!* (I was moved!)” The group went on to talk about other music videos by Western artists that have been made in Japan. A young woman said, “Top groups, top artists come and we are happy – it’s our country.” The young man gave the example of One Direction who had made a video in Tokyo: “Watching that and I feel happy.” A young woman added that it gives a favourable impression (*kōkan ga aru*).

In the class I teach on ways to analyse music video, a Japanese student had chosen to give a presentation and write a follow-up report on her analysis of the music video “Rather Be” by Clean Bandit, which had been filmed in Tokyo and starred an Anglo-Japanese actress, Haruka Abe, and local Japanese fans as extras, as well as featuring the British band members. The video is entirely the band’s own concept and tells a story, but it is unrelated to the song lyrics. The only tenuous connection between the song and Japan is the mention of Kyoto in the lyrics. In her conclusion, the student expressed the same feeling of happiness that a foreign band had chosen to film their video in Japan.

In conclusion, these days Clean Bandit has attracted attention people all over the world and this song and the music video is also famous all over the world. In addition, I am glad that people can know about the Japanese style house or food through this video so if they are

interested in Japan. Therefore, I want to watch this video people all over the world. I am also happy that the musician who is foreigner took the music video in Japan. I love this music video and lyrics and also Clean Bandit.

One of the students in this focus group knew the video and showed the first few minutes to the rest of the group. I had heard the song being played on the radio on campus and knew that Clean Bandit had appeared on Japanese television when they came to make the video, so there was a chance that more than one student was already familiar with the song and the group. In fact, the young man recognized the song as having been covered on *Glee*. They had not seen the video before, however, and this was their reaction. S1 is the young man and the other students are all young women<sup>5</sup>.

S1: Eh!

S2: *Sugoi!* (Amazing!) It's really Japan and this cat is interesting. Look this really *jun nihonjin* (a pure Japanese person).

S3: It's *udon!* (Japanese noodles) In a case like this, are these things that are different ... has it been made by a company?

S1: Is this being shown around the world?

A: Yes.

(S1 is clearly impressed.)

S3: Is the idea of the people who made the song? Or does a PV company make this kind of video?

S2: I don't know. Look, it's Tsukiji (the famous fish market in Tokyo).

S1: This looks a bit different.

S2: (Had seen the video before and points out the male members of Clean Bandit who suddenly appear in the Japanese pub.)

S4: I want to watch this video!

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<sup>5</sup> There were actually four young women in this group, but one was two years the junior of the other students and remained silent throughout most of the discussion. She only spoke when she was invited to offer her opinion. The reasons for this will be explained later in this chapter.

(S2 stops the video at that point.)

S4: *Omoshiroi!* (Fun/interesting!) Did it become popular in Japan?

S1: That's great that it's overseas.

The interest and reactions this video generated gave me the idea to use it for closer watching in later groups. It occurred to me that Western music videos set in Japan might be more accessible than ones with a Western setting and characters. It was through another student that I came across a second video by a British artist that was set in Japan. In an English language class, a student chose the video "Afterglow" by Wilkinson to show the class as an energiser to start our lesson. It generated a high level of interest, but I thought that maybe the video for "Breathe" by Wilkinson would be easier for Japanese young people to relate to. The video shows a variety of young Japanese people at work in various locations, or on a bus, who look tired and bored, but are energized by the song "Breathe" when they hear it played over the radio. In order to see whether my hunch that a Japanese setting would facilitate understanding and enjoyment of Western music video, I chose two other videos with a Western setting and in a very different style, by these British artists: "Real Love" by Clean Bandit and "Dirty Love" by Wilkinson. "Real Love" is a performance-style video, which clearly showcases the band, and interweaves scenes of couples from around the world embracing. The music is up-tempo dance music. "Dirty Love" is also dance music, and like all of Wilkinson's videos, the artist does not appear. It uses a lot of visual techniques such as the glitch, lurid colouring, rapid sequences of shots, and is erotic but not explicitly sexual. These four very different videos were shown to three focus groups (consisting of 6 males and 4 females) and I also asked for feedback on "Rather Be" from 14 students in a class called "English Through Music" when I substituted for their teacher who was hospitalised.

By chance, earlier in the semester, a student had chosen to play the a cappella cover of "Rather Be" by Pentatonix to another class at the start of a lesson. The band members are clearly in Japan, but not in such iconic and easily

recognizable locations. They are seen in a street market, with traditional paper lanterns in the background, with a skyline scene behind them, in a closed shopping mall, and in some noodle restaurants. The class enjoyed this video. When I asked the class (of 28 students) if they knew the original, most had not seen it, so I asked if they would mind watching this too and afterwards telling me what they thought of it. They readily agreed. Afterwards, many said they liked the original better even though it was scary, but they liked the Pentatonix version, too. Because this was an English-language lesson with a fixed curriculum, I could not dwell on this for too long. So I decided to show the Pentatonix version to two focus groups to get more detailed feedback on their reactions.

### **“Rather Be” by Clean Bandit ft. Jess Glynne – a brief synopsis<sup>6</sup>**

“Rather Be” has a clear narrative line (if the audience is aware that the foreigners who appear are the members of Clean Bandit). It follows the daily life of an ordinary Japanese young woman living with her family in Tokyo. She is a fan of Clean Bandit and works as a cook at a Japanese *izakaya* (pub) and she buys fish daily at the famous fish market called Tsukiji. She sings the song all the time and we see her lip-syncing the song lyrics. She also appears to have hallucinations as she sees members of Clean Bandit appear and disappear in front of her eyes. She gradually falls into greater panic and distress and wakes up in a hospital bed to see her father sitting at her bedside. However, he peels off his face to reveal that he is really a member of Clean Bandit (Jack Patterson) beneath a mask. It is playful, but the situation is not resolved or explained. For fans of the group, it is fun to spot the group’s logo that appears in many places throughout the video. There is another example of self-referential intertextuality when a scene from another of their videos is shown on a TV screen that the girl’s father is watching. The music is mainly non-diegetic, but there are moments when the band members appear singing, dancing and playing as they interact

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<sup>6</sup> The brief synopses are not intended to provide a detailed analysis of each music video, but to provide the reader with enough information to appreciate the main points that emerge in the ensuing discussion.

with or are observed by the protagonist. At one point we see them performing live in a nightclub. Other characters sing the song, apart from the protagonist, such as the customers in the pub. The music track is also made 'visible' through the way the young woman walks along in time to the music's rhythm and the band members and others dance to the music on a train and on a beach. The song lyrics, however, bear no relation to the story of the video. They are a romantic declaration that the singer is happy, no matter where she is, so long as her lover is there with her. Clean Bandit make their own videos, so the concept was entirely their own, as were the setting, story, camera work and editing decisions.

**Group 1** (*4 boys, all second-year students, one International Relations major (S1)<sup>7</sup> and three Economics majors (S2~4). They are all members of the ESS club, but not in the conversation section.*)

I told them Clean Bandit is from the UK and the song was a big hit the year before. I did not show them the song lyrics. There was very little reaction on their faces as they watched motionless. Afterwards they were curious about the group and wanted to confirm that they were British and famous. When asked if there was anything interesting or strange that they noticed, they smiled, looked uncertain, and said nothing at first. Only one student (S3) acted as spokesperson for the group.

S3: Really strange. I can't understand. Why is it Japan? (They all had no trouble in recognizing this was set in Japan.)

When I asked what they understood of the story, what was happening, the same student responded.

S3: So this woman feels panic.

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<sup>7</sup> This student contributed far less than the other three to the discussion. The possible reason for this will be explained later in this chapter.

A: Right.

S3: So many Japanese changed foreigner.

A: Right.

S3: If I was this woman, so I would panic, too.

A: You would feel panic, too. Yes, strange things happen. (They all agree and laugh.)

This first introduction to the work of Clean Bandit through this particular music video possibly directed their attention away from the music and more towards the story being played out before their eyes. If they had heard the song without the video during the focus group session, or on the radio or as BGM in a shop or other public setting, they would have focused more on the music, but the lyrics would be mostly incomprehensible. By introducing the song for the first time through the music video, I was directing their attention to the meaning(s) of the song rather than to the music. This underscores the different mode of reception (i.e. audiovisual) that music video encourages compared with audio only where the listeners' imaginations supply images they may see in their 'mind's eye' while they listen. They may have focused on the melody, song structure, instrumentation, texture and rhythm. The video images, however, suggest a meaning or story behind the song, that possibly lies in the lyrics, but which is unrelated to the visuals in this case.

I realized afterwards that showing them the video one time only was insufficient for them to take it all in, although it was probably closer to the way they may encounter it either on television or on YouTube. Also, by not sharing the song lyrics, I was providing the kind of experience they would have if watching for the first time under normal circumstances, but also withholding from them one of the important elements of the music video. In the case of this video, however, where the lyrics of the song bear almost no relation to the narrative played out on the screen, these Japanese first-time viewers were not at such a great disadvantage compared with English speakers.

**Group 2** (*Four females, 4<sup>th</sup> year English majors who had been in my seminar class for nearly two years and had taken other language and lecture classes with me.*)

We had studied British mass media for one year together and the history of Japanese and Western popular music for another year, but this did not include music video analysis. Three of them had participated in a focus group already and they were far more relaxed and responsive to the video than Group 1 for reasons discussed in the Methodology section of Chapter 1.

One student (S1) knew a little about Clean Bandit already. They had been on Japanese TV in a programme featuring that band because “that song was filmed in Japan”. She thinks she watched their interview. She remembers there were four members and they played the violin and cello. “It’s not like rock band. More classic.” She gestured playing a cello. I asked if their music is classical, but she was not sure how to classify the style and suggested tentatively that it was pop. It was interesting to see that Clean Bandit’s hybrid pop/dance sound played on instruments associated with classical music was difficult for students to classify. They seem to rely on instrumentation to identify genres/styles. (A member of Focus Group 1 also expressed the same confusion when they watched the band perform in the second video “Real Love”.)

This time I gave the focus group a bit more background information about the band and told them that they make their own videos and that they invite vocalists to perform on their songs. They all watched intently with S1 and S2 moving to the beat. S1 was almost singing along at some points. Although they were responding physically to the music, their focus was clearly on the visuals and trying to make sense of the story without understanding the lyrics, which can be seen from their responses below.

A: Any comments?

S4: Strange.

A: Very strange. Your first feeling is very strange. What is strange about it?

S4: Because this film is like a really ordinary Japanese girl's life, but sometimes Western people were in the film, but all of them are wearing traditional Japanese clothes. I couldn't understand what the singer said, all of, but I just get the singer tried to tell us, like relate Japanese culture and like Western culture?

A: Right. Yeah. So you couldn't quite see the point of it?

S4: Mm.

A: You say "strange". Was it ... did it make you feel uncomfortable?

S4: No.

A: No? It's just bizarre?

S4: Mm

A: Strange, peculiar, odd *okashii*?

S4: *Okashii* (They all nod in agreement)

A: Right. It depends how well you know the group, yeah, as to how much you see and recognize in this video. But just watching this for the first time without knowing who the group is, it's strange.

(They all agree.)

I decided to play "Rather Be" a second time after they had watched the second video "Real Love", which showcases the band. This allowed the students to become familiar with the style of music and the faces of the group members and helped them make more sense of who the Westerners were that they saw in "Rather Be". They were far more responsive than before. This time S2 and S3 were also rocking from side to side with the rhythm. S1 and S3 pointed out things such as the band's logo on the bed covers and light shades. S4 pointed at the screen and laughed when the TV weather reporter changed into a band member. They also laughed when the advertising on the side of a truck changed to a band member and back. They clearly enjoyed the video far more once they had recognized this recurring trope. There was a big reaction by all of them to the scene in the pub when the three male band members appear as customers.

They even continued singing and bouncing to the rhythm after the video has finished.

S1: *Kawaii!* (Cute!)

A: So you obviously recognized the band.

S1: Yeah!

A: And the band logo? (All agree.) Yes, it appeared everywhere, didn't it? Yes, so that's their logo and it appeared on her bed cover and lamps ...

S4: Eye

A: And the keyboard artist's eye.

S4: And the fish.

They all agreed that the young woman is going crazy and that it is scary but fun once you know who the Western people are. They were still uncertain how to classify the music and suggested "modern" or "mix" or "pop".

A: Oh, there was one other question. Did you recognize the places in Japan where "Rather Be" was filmed? Did you recognize where it was?

S2: Tokyo, Shibuya, Shinbashi.

A: So you recognized the different parts of Tokyo. They are kind of famous, iconic places.

S1: Very Japanese.

A: Very Japanese. And the fish market?

All: Tsukiji!

A: Yeah. So they chose very famous places that Japanese people would immediately recognize. So none of you are from Tokyo, are you? (They all say no.) (They are from 4 different places in Western Japan.) You're all from completely different places but you recognized the famous Tokyo places, right.

**Group 3** (*Two males in their second year. S1 is studying German and has spent time in the USA. S2 is studying Indonesian. They go clubbing together every Friday night.*)

Two students do not really make a 'group', but owing to scheduling constraints, only two students were free at the same time as me. The fact that they were close friends and that S1 was in the ESS club meant that they were very relaxed and open and luckily provided me with rich data.

S1 knew the song "Rather Be" and the band Clean Bandit from American radio (that he listens to daily) and said it was a famous song. He had seen the video and knew there was "an Asian woman" but had forgotten the details. S2 said he had never heard of the band or the song and had not seen the video, but he recognized the song when it started.

I explained that we were going to watch the original video first and that Clean Bandit created their own video company so they are in complete control of their own videos.

S1 laughed at the Japanese translation of the band's name Clean Bandit that appears against a typical Japanese background of water flowing from a decorative stone pipe into an ornamental pond, where Japanese carp are swimming. The translation of the band's name is *seiketsu na tōzoku*, which literally means hygienic/very clean thief or bandit. This is followed by a Japanese phonetic rendering of the song's title "Rather Be" in Japanese katakana ラーザ・ビ, not a translation into Japanese. This title would have little meaning for Japanese people with little or no English and they may not even realize that the title is originally English because the Japanese katakana symbols represent the closest Japanese approximation to the sound of the original syllables (*raaza bi*). This scene fades into the girl's bedroom where she is woken up by her cat and the story begins.

S1 clearly enjoyed the song, knew the lyrics and was singing along and swaying to the music. S2 was immobile and watching the screen intently. They both smiled spontaneously at the same point when the Japanese businessmen in the pub are singing along with hand gestures to the song together with the Japanese woman. S2 also smiled when the violinist (Neil Amin-Smith) plays as he is driven through the market on the back of a motorized goods transporter. They both smiled when Japanese people and the band members are dancing on the beach, and they both looked stunned by the last scene in the hospital. S1 exclaimed “Oh!” and then grinned.

A: OK, can we just talk about what you thought about that video?

S1: She’s really into the song.

A: She’s into the song. Right.

S1: But she’s really like ... she really likes Clean Bandit so she sees people in Clean Bandit.

A: Ah ... right. So it’s in her imagination? The members of Clean Bandit?

(S2 nods in agreement.)

A: And so you recognized that they were members of the band?

S1: Yes.

A: Could you guess that from the video story?

S1: Story?

A: Or did you know that before you watched this time?

S1: I didn’t know the story.

A: You didn’t know that? Right. Do you know what Clean Bandit members look like?

S1: I didn’t. (S2 nods.)

A: But you could work out ... (S1 nods and smiles) Oh, very smart!

S1: They are smart (points to the screen to indicate Clean Bandit).

I asked them about their response to the last scene in the hospital as I had heard S1 say “*kowai*” (scary) and he confirmed that he “got scared”. They agreed that that for students who do not know the band it must be a “strange” video, but they had clearly spotted the clues that helped them make sense of the story unaided. They had realized that the violinist and the piano player were members of the band, especially after the scene where the band is seen performing in a club.

### **The responses of Group 3 to the “Rather Be” cover by Pentatonix**

S2 did not know Pentatonix, so I asked S1 to explain who Pentatonix are and he did so in Japanese mentioning that they are professional. S2 smiled at the opening scene when a male member of the band appears to be lip-syncing to the female singer’s vocal. S1 was moving to the music again while S2 was less mobile. S1 was very impressed by the fact that Pentatonix “make this song with only their voices”. S2 agrees that their skill is amazing but he prefers the original. (He had said earlier that he did not like cover versions.) I asked why they thought Pentatonix chose to film their cover version in Japan and S1 responded: “Why? Because original one is.” They told me they did not understand any of the lyrics of the song and so they had no basis on which to decide whether Japan was a suitable location for the cover version. I offered my own explanation that for American people Japan is a very exotic, foreign place. The lyrics are about being away from comfortable surroundings, but if the other person/ people are there, too, this is fine. There’s no place they’d rather be. So it’s suitable that Pentatonix filmed themselves together, far from home in Japan. The two students showed they understood by laughing.

### **Substitute English language lesson using videos for “Rather Be” by Clean Bandit and Pentatonix**

I substituted for a teacher who was in hospital. Fourteen students attended from the European and Asian Language departments (French, German, Italian, Chinese, Korean, Japanese). They were low English-level students and this was their eighth lesson, but three lessons had already been cancelled. This was the

first time I had met any of the students. Only one of them had heard the song “Rather Be” before and none had seen the video.

This was a chance to combine a language lesson with collecting more data for my research, so I had to structure my approach accordingly. I therefore began the lesson with work on the song lyrics and played a live performance video so they could see the band members. I explained the meaning of the lyrics as much as I could (I do not understand what “turn up the batteries” means in the context of this song and I told them this.)

They watched the Clean Bandit video and talked in pairs afterwards about where it took place, what happened to the young woman, and if they liked the video. They also had to write down their ideas after talking. Three students recognized it was set in Tokyo, and one knew the name of the fish market (Tsukiji). Only two students understood the story in the way Clean Bandit intended. One student summarized well saying that the woman likes the band and sees hallucinations of the band members. The general reaction to the video was that it was hard to understand the story. Also, having gone over the lyrics first, one student said that the song and the video story did not match and she did not like it for this reason. (This reflects the expectation voiced by other students that the visuals of a music video with a narrative line reflect the message of the song.) A boy said that the video made him feel “*fuan*” (uneasy). Another thought the young woman would die, but some liked the mysterious atmosphere. One student said he knew the song already and liked it.

Next, I explained who Pentatonix are (no students knew them). We watched their cover. Some students thought this was also filmed in Tokyo. Another thought it was in Osaka. Most students (11) liked it better than the Clean Bandit video (only 3 preferred that one). They said it had a happy atmosphere and was fun. It did not tell a story that was unrelated to the lyrics, and you can see the singers as they sing. It matched the mood of the music better for them. It clearly made a

difference to their response that they were aware of the meaning of the lyrics before they watched both videos and that the meaning of the lyrics had influenced their evaluation of the video.

Interestingly, they did not seem to think it was so special that these videos were filmed in Japan whereas Western artists choosing to film in Japan had clearly impressed other students.

### **“Real Love” by Clean Bandit ft. Jess Glynne – a brief synopsis**

This music video blends documentary-style scenes of many types of couples in different locations and settings with the band performing in a recording studio (during the opening and each verse) and at a live performance (during the chorus). The couples are of different ethnicities, ages, and sexual orientations and express their love for each other through embracing and kissing. The Clean Bandit fans are also shown expressing their love for the band through their enthusiastic reactions to the music and band’s performance, and the band seems to show their reciprocal love for their fans. The filming of the band’s performance uses a mixture of low and high angle and tracking shots around the performers, with the camera facing into the light and creating a silhouette effect (an effect that was pioneered by Richard Lester in 1964). The studio shots are warm-coloured gold, orange, brown and red tones while the stage show lighting is dark but with flashing lights that actually do not match the pulse of the music. While the studio scenes are mostly played back at natural speed, the performance shots are often in slow motion. There is no narrative line and the visuals clearly illustrate the theme of the song’s title and lyrics. The music is fast-tempo dance music, featuring the band’s unique blend of acoustic string instruments (violin and cello), piano, electronic and acoustic drums. In the lyrics, the singer confirms that she recognizes that her partner genuinely loves her and that this is the emotion she has been searching for and waiting to experience. The visuals can therefore be seen as amplifying the meaning of the lyrics. The vocalist is Jess Glynne (who also performed on “Rather Be”).

## Group 1

They watched the video with no expressions on their faces again. However, this time they all joined in the follow-up conversation, unlike the brief discussion of “Rather Be” where S3 had acted as the sole spokesperson for the group. S3 spoke first, but S4 quickly joined in and both agreed that they liked this “up-tempo song”. The confusion over the music style of Clean Bandit that Group 1 had expressed arose again. Interestingly, this performance-style video with no narrative focused their attention on the music itself.

S2: This music contains a variety of kind ... because I think this music, this musician use the drum but rock band use the drum, but rock band don't use the grand piano. And ...

A: Cello?

S2: Yeah, and cello (laughs)

A: And violin.

S2: Yeah and I listened to this music is dance music ... so many, they have so many version.

A: So they are mixing dance music, classical music?

(He agrees.)

This group was shown the first video “Rather Be” only once, which could explain their surprise at the instrumentation, which was clearly featured in the second video. To check on this I asked about their impression of the band.

A: ... when you watched the first one, did you have any impression of the band? The band members, who they were, or the instruments they played? The first one?

S1: No, only the second one.

When I asked for their comments on the differences in style of the two music videos, S4 said that in “Rather Be” the young woman is featured for a long time

but “in the second story, in the second song, so many people are appeared.” They all recognized that all these people were “in love” and S4 said: “When I watch this one, I feel warming.” Curiously, S4 went on to say that he did not catch the meaning of the video and the others appeared to agree with him. I probed a bit more and found that S3 had, in fact, observed very closely and understood very well, and that S4 understood as soon as he heard his friend’s summary, as can be seen below.

A: Does anybody have an idea of what the second one is about?

S3: Second one is so ... this *tema* (theme) is love?

A: Yes.

S3: So very ... many couple ... so men and women but men and men ...

A: Yes.

S3: So in the world, so many couple.

S4: Oh, I catch!

A: You missed that?

(All laugh.)

S4: Yes.

A: You were a bit further from the screen and he’s wearing his glasses (joking).

And how about the ages of the couples?

S3: Oh, very young and old.

A: Yeah, and the race?

S3, S4: Race?

A: Ethnic type.

S3: Oh!

A: White and

S3: Black

A: And Asian as well. There are many different racial types, yeah, and one or two cross-racial couples, too. So a darker person and a lighter person. Yeah, so all kinds of love.

S4: Ah.

## **Group 2**

This was shown straight after watching “Rather Be” for the first time. They all watched intently. S1, S2, and S3 moved to the beat of the music. They all agreed that this video was easier to understand than the first. S1 said: “It’s about “real love” and they all nodded in agreement. S2 added that they were “real couples” and they all agreed that they were genuine people, not actors. S1 said the video showed “many kinds or varieties of love. There’s not only man and woman, but like lesbians and gay, like all of love” (using an encompassing gesture with her arms). S2 noticed that the couples were “different colours” (races) and they agreed that there were couples of different ages. All of them (except S3) were positive that they knew what the band members looked like after watching this video and were eager to watch “Rather Be” again now that they knew this.

## **Group 3**

Neither of them knew this song or video and they hardly reacted physically this time, but just watched silently. S1’s first comment was that he liked the singing voice of Jess Glynne. He went on to say: “It’s not that story taste. They’re playing and sometimes people are kissing”. When I asked if they noticed anything about the kinds of people they filmed kissing, S2 said: “Boyfriend and boyfriend”. S1 commented on the clips of their concert and agreed that these showed the audience’s love for the band. S1 noticed the variety in the ages of the couples (“young to old”) and they both recognized the different racial types that appeared. When asked if they preferred this style of music video to one that told a story, S1 answered: “I like telling a story” and he went on to elaborate that he liked videos in which the story is related to the song lyrics. He gave the example of Katy Perry’s “Firework”, which he said is about “courage”, and in his opinion showing a lot of stories in the same video means that “people can get it”. He gestured bringing something big towards him as he explained this.

### **“Breathe” by Wilkinson ft. Shannon Saunders – a brief synopsis**

This track is dance music and the video is set in urban Japan in the evening. We see and hear people listening to the radio as they go about different jobs: taxi driver, bookshop assistant, cook, cleaner, supermarket shelf stacker, bus driver, and a young woman travelling on the bus. They all look tired, but when the radio DJ announces that the next song is Wilkinson’s “Breathe” and the music starts, they respond energetically, moving and dancing to the music, especially as the tempo builds. There is a slower section in the middle of the song, but then another build in tempo and the movers and shakers come to life again. The song winds down and everyone returns to the way they were earlier, except the bus passenger who alights from the bus. The lyrics suggest an invitation to intimacy while the singer and the other person are alone.

#### **Group 1**

While S1 and S4 were motionless throughout, S3 seemed to be smiling while he listened and watched. S2 was more into the music and the music beat. When I asked for their reactions, S3 said: “I like this video.” He explained, “It looks like lively.... So many workers, so sweep ... cleaning and shop ... Yeah, yeah, I like those scenes and lifestyle”. When I asked who they thought the young people in the video were, S1 answered: “I guess they were workers at part-time job”. He agreed that they were probably students: “Yeah. They look young”. They all agreed that they could identify with the young people in the video, but seemed confused at first when I asked if the video tells a story. S3 then demonstrated he understood the simple story line when he commented: “The up-tempo on radio? The young people is working, so they’re tired. This song, they listen to this song, so they feel lively and so dancing. I like that.” The others were again content for S3 to act as their spokesperson.

#### **Group 2**

This group was again more overtly responsive to the music and the music video than group 1. When I told them the title “Breathe”, they all breathed in and out

deeply and I confirmed that it indeed meant *kokyū suru* (breathe). This time they all got into the rhythm of the song, especially when it started to speed up and they all laughed at certain points, such as when a young man dances with a broom. I was therefore surprised, when I asked if it was easy to understand or to relate to and they did not look sure about this and did not say yes. In fact, S3 shook her head. Like group 1, they had no trouble in identifying that the young people in the video were students doing part-time jobs even though they said that none of them actually do the same kind of job. For S4, the video showed “Japanese life” and she added “real life”. S1 commented: “Their job and the music, they don’t really relate and like working at a book store, they are kind of quiet and they listen to that music and like dance”.

When S4 asked: “Does he say something about Japan or something?” I explained that as far as I know he does not, but that this video interested me because he chose to use Japanese people and a Japanese setting. When I asked them if they found it interesting and whether they would watch it again, they all agreed it was interesting. I wanted to clarify whether they found it interesting because it showed Japanese people or if the meaning of the response of the young people to the music would have been less clear if they had been British students. S1 spoke for the group when she said:

S1: I feel like we are related to that music.

A: You can relate to that music?

S1: To those people.

### **Group 3**

Although these two young men go clubbing every week, they had not heard of Wilkinson. They swayed to the music and S2 moved his legs while S1 moved his head and upper body. When I asked if the music video had a story, S1 made us all laugh when he replied: “He shows us he is famous in Japan”. He summarized the video storyline in the following way (which S2 agreed with): “They’re working.

They work every day. They're tired, but when they listen to this song, they will get power".

It seems that this very simple storyline and the Japanese setting makes the video easily accessible to young Japanese audiences. The next video that was shown is by Wilkinson, but in a very different style. It contains Japanese elements, but the setting and the atmosphere are clearly not Japanese.

### **"Dirty Love" by Wilkinson ft. Talay Riley – a brief synopsis**

This video uses a lot of visual effects that match the rhythm, the tempo, and the mood of the music. It opens with a brief panning scene of an urban night view skyline, then moves inside a modern building where a man in a suit is walking along a corridor. The carpet changes colour under his feet as he walks along it (reminiscent of Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean"). There is a brief stutter effect as the scene changes, and we see a woman in a black top lying on her back and moving seductively. There is a suggestion that she is waiting for someone (maybe the man). Slow motion is used as the man pushes open a door and enters a room where there are large hanging balls, which a hand touches gently. In the room we catch glimpses of trendily dressed women with primary-colour makeup and men in suits. Both the men and women are wearing sunglasses with brightly-coloured frames. A lemon is cut in half. It has blue skin. Later we see other unnaturally-coloured fruits that are used in the various cocktails that these women and men are drinking. There is a fast sequence of shots of the nightscape, daytime water scenes, and a couple kissing when the tempo of the music speeds up. Split screen shots are also used featuring whole people and body parts juxtaposed. The screen often breaks up into digital blocks. A woman walks slowly holding a fluorescent plate with sushi. There are more visual stutters with drinks flickering in bright colours, as well as dominoes, a can, and later a kind of pole that looks like a pole for pole dancing which is lying horizontally while the woman in the black top embraces it. We also see her repeatedly moving provocatively on her hands and knees on an armchair. The people stare at each

other. There is no conversation, but clear smouldering mutual sexual interest. The first man reappears and seems to be looking for someone. The straps of the seductive woman's black top flicker with bright colours. We see then that she is kneeling over the man who is now seated in the armchair. In the closing moments she undoes the straps of her top as the singer sings for the final time "Come a little closer, Maximum exposure, Like a roller coaster, About to go down." The other lyrics repeat the same few lines: "Drop that dirty love, I just can't get enough, Begging for the bass line, Dancing til it's daytime, Heard it through the grapevine, We want it now".

One of the reasons I chose this from among other Wilkinson music videos was that it is representative of a common style of non-Japanese music video that is overtly sexual and I was curious about the kind of responses it would elicit in view of comments made in interviews and focus group discussions that Western videos are "sexy" and Japanese videos "pure".

### **Group 1**

I was surprised to see their apparent lack of reaction either to the music or to the visuals as they watched this video. It became clear, however, that they had been controlling their *honne* (true private feelings) and displaying their *tatemae* (public face) until I tentatively asked:

A: OK? How about that one? Any comments?

S3: Sexy!

(They all laugh.)

A: Very sexy, yes! Do you like that style of video?

S4: So-so.

S3: Erm...

(All laugh.)

A: Is it more sexy than Japanese videos, do you think? Like AKB videos?

S4: Ah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

S3: I don't know.

A: You don't know? You don't watch that kind of video! (Laughter)

I asked them for their impressions of this video and S4 said: "I think this movie is so dark image ...." I asked him to clarify and he explained: "And so I think she's a bad girl ... so she likes ... I think she likes many people ... er, many men."

When I asked about the setting and visual effects, S3 said, "It looks like not realistic, but it is ... but I think it is very nice to use colour CG." They all noticed the blue lemon and laughed about it. S2 commented, "I think why actor eats sushi? In this music video. Why sushi?" I asked the group what they thought and S1 suggested: "They are rich so they can eat sushi." They had nothing else to add about this video, but I was very interested by the response of S4 when I asked if they would watch the videos by Wilkinson again. He checked the pronunciation of Wilkinson's name and then said: "So I'm going to listen to other videos by him." He clearly liked the music, but did not feel the need to watch the visuals.

I commented on and recommended a few of the other videos by Wilkinson, the thumbnails of which were displayed on the YouTube window. S2 then commented: "Maybe Wilkinson like many culture. Because various culture in music video. So Japanese people and black people, white people, and act in many places." I was very glad that this rather reticent member of the group volunteered this insight and I hope he went on to enjoy other Wilkinson videos, with or without paying attention to the visuals.

## **Group 2**

When I told this group that we were going to watch a music video called "Dirty Love", S4 covered her face with her hands in mock shock while the others looked and sounded surprised. S1 and S2 again responded to the music by swaying to

the rhythm and they all laughed in places. When I asked for their reaction to the video, their response was exactly the same as the boys.

A: So how about that one?

S2: Sexy! (They all agree and laugh.)

A: That was the first word when I showed the boys that “sexy”.

(They all laugh again.)

None of them found it easy to understand, but when I asked about special effects, they had all noticed the “strange lemon” and the sushi. S4 also spotted the use of Japanese a serving dish (*chawana*). They were surprised by my question when I asked them why Japanese things are shown in this video. S4 suggested, apparently jokingly, that they want Japanese to watch the video, and everyone laughed at this. They had all spent time overseas, so I asked them if they had ever been given the impression that people abroad think that Japan and Japanese culture is cool. S1 and S2 agreed but S3 and S4 were non-committal.

This group was so responsive and interested to watch more videos that I decided to see how much of Wilkinson’s “Afterglow” they could understand and relate to.

### **“Afterglow” by Wilkinson – a brief synopsis**

This is the first music video by Wilkinson that was introduced to me by a student in class. It is another dance music track and the lyrics talk about it being late at night, after the dancing has finished, but the singer insists the night is still young and that they are ready to continue to enjoy themselves, to enjoy the afterglow (the good feeling that lingers after a night of dancing and strong sexual attraction.) The video consists of a series of short video footage sequences and still photos with captions in English. They tell the story of a couple called Paul and Dana, who have been living together for five years, using facts and figures and a lot of wry young adult humour. Some of the language of the captions is colloquial, informal and joking. The style resembles social networking

communications, such as blogs, or Facebook pages, where people post personal photos, videos and comments.

## **Group 2**

I explained both the literal meaning of “afterglow” as the lighting effect across the sky after the sun has set and the metaphorical meaning of the warm feeling experienced after something nice has happened to you. They watched attentively and reacted a lot, laughing, looking both surprised, and mildly shocked at some of the jokes. To my surprise they all said that this music video was easy to understand and agreed that they could understand eighty percent. There was some language that they did not know but they could understand the pictures.

Another surprise was that they all said they could relate to the situation of this couple to some extent even though they were too young to have been in a long-term relationship like that of the couple. When I asked if they could imagine a similar video being made with a Japanese couple, they were surprised at the suggestion and agreed that they could not. They all agreed that they felt comfortable and laughed because the couple are European-looking. This was another example of different cultural expectations for people of other ethnicities. Beng Huat (2008) explains that among Asian people there is a shared sense of being Asian ‘and therefore “alike”, against an unsaid, “we are not like non-Asians.” This generates and affirms a sense of “Asianness”’ (p. 107). Iwabuchi (2002) conceptualizes this idea of ‘being Asian’ as ‘cultural proximity’. For this reason, the young women in the focus group perceived a lack of cultural proximity between the European protagonists in the “Afterglow” video and a Japanese way of expressing such intimate aspects of a long-term heterosexual relationship. They could identify with the emotions and events, but could not imagine Asian protagonists performing these in a music video.

### Group 3

The two young men in this group had shown a keen interest in the videos I was showing and a good level of English, so I asked them if they would like to watch this video by Wilkinson. They readily agreed and watched attentively, reacting and smiling in places, especially when Paul is trying to put on Dana's bra. As soon as the video finished, S1 offered his response before I had a chance to ask.

S1: Interesting! (Both are laughing) So they express their life with numbers.

A: Right.

S1: So impressive.

A: Were you able to understand the English captions?

Both: Yes.

A: So your vocabulary is very good then! (S1 laughs) Well the photos illustrate – yes! Was it funny for you?

S1: It was interesting.

In Japanese, the word *omoshiroi* means both interesting and funny. When I asked if they thought it was “*omoshiroi*”, S1 confirmed that it was indeed “*omoshiroi*”. S1 also said that he could not understand the song lyrics and I admitted that until then I had always been so focused on the images that I had not paid attention to the song lyrics and that all I remembered was “Afterglow”, which is the song title. They had not heard Wilkinson's music in their nightclub or on the radio and when I suggested that Wilkinson is not yet famous in Japan, S1 laughed and predicted that he will be.

I was very glad that I showed this music video to these two groups because it contradicted my expectations that the humour and situation of the couple would not translate across cultures and that the language would be a barrier. I should have paid more attention to the fact that it was a Japanese student who had introduced me to this British music video in the first place. It also underscored how the visuals take clear precedence over the music in certain kinds of music

video. Although this is a dance number, in contrast to when the previous music videos were shown, both groups of students watching this video were static and did not move in time to the music. I presume that this is because their attention was focused on the visual images and the English-language captions. This may well be a video that they choose to watch again rather than to listen to, like those of OK Go and “Golden Touch” by Amuro Namie (discussed Chapter 5) that feature attention-grabbing visuals.

### **Discussion of focus group responses**

The focus group and class discussions show that my assumption that a Japanese setting would aid understanding of a Western music video was only correct to a limited extent. Although the sample number was small, these students indicated that when a video storyline is straightforward, like that of “Breathe” by Wilkinson, the Japanese setting helped them to identify with the situation and feelings of the Japanese people depicted in the video. The students were unaware of the lyrics as they listened and were given no explanation about the lyrical content of the song and so they were watching with a minimal amount of background information and therefore in a way that they might watch a Western music video for the first time on YouTube. Their attention was focused on the ebb and flow of the tempo of the music and the way in which this was mirrored through the actions of the people depicted.

However, when a storyline is more complex, it can be confusing when unknown foreigners appear in a Japanese setting, such as in “Rather Be” by Clean Bandit. Moreover, Western settings do not necessarily make music videos more difficult for Japanese audiences to understand. In fact, videos with Western settings and protagonists can even be more comfortable for Japanese people to watch if the videos are at all risqué and sexy, owing to a commonly shared attitude that such behaviour is acceptable for Westerners, but not for Asians, and especially not for Japanese. This is an example of the way in which the concept of *uchi* and the related importance of homogeneity in the standards of propriety of public

behaviour influences Japanese expectations. Japanese people belong to many different *uchi* but the largest of the all is their nation, the commonly shared values of Japan. It seems that Goodwin's observation that the meaning of a music video may lie 'in prejudice, fandom, competence, expertise, familiarity, and fashion generated beyond the limits of the music video "text"' (1992, p. 14) still holds true a quarter of a century later and among Japanese audiences of Western music video.

Although several students clearly derive feelings of pleasure and pride that Japan has been chosen as the location of a video by Western artists, there is not a high level of awareness that Japan has a cool or exotic image overseas, especially among students who have spent little or no time abroad. In addition, the strong preference of many of the focus group and substitute class students for a video storyline to illustrate the lyrics of a song reconfirmed the same finding in earlier interviews and focus group discussions. A possible explanation for this will be discussed in more detail below.

Finally, while most music videos will probably be listened to more often than watched by Japanese audiences, there are clearly some that may keep the audience's eyes focused on the screen for longer than others. It seems, however, that the novelty of the visuals of videos like "Afterglow" by Wilkinson distracts audiences from the lyrics and music. (Here I am speaking for myself as well as from evidence from the students.) Nevertheless, this video achieves many of the other aims of music videos, such as making the song and the name of the artist memorable, and above all, encouraging multiple viewings on YouTube that will translate into profits for those who produced and promoted the music video.

## **Discussion about why Japanese undergraduates have difficulty in analysing Western music videos**

This research project was prompted by my curiosity about the ways in which Japanese students in my British media seminar class interpreted Western music videos. In April 2013, I had the chance to create and start teaching a new 15-week course to Japanese and exchange students in which we would look at ways in which to analyse music video as a media text. The students are evaluated on their participation in class discussions and on a presentation, which is later written up as a report, on a music video of their own choice. The aim of the presentation and report is to demonstrate their understanding of the theory we cover in class and their ability to apply it in an analysis of their own. When giving their presentation, they are encouraged to include pre- and post-viewing discussion activities and to invite the opinions of their classmates, which they can incorporate into their report.

In the first two semesters, the exchange students had not been informed about this new course and only Japanese students enrolled (eleven students in the spring semester and twelve students in the autumn). Many of them were first-year students. It was disheartening to see that at the end of a semester in which various approaches to analysing music videos (based on the work of Goodwin, 1992; Negus, 1996; and Vernallis 2004, 2010, 2013<sup>a</sup>, 2013<sup>b</sup>) had been presented, discussed and practised with multiple examples, the students were not able to apply the theory to their own analysis. Most simply presented background information about the artists and then summarized their own interpretation of the video story and message with no explanation as to how they derived these meanings.

I assumed that my teaching had been ineffective until the next year when many exchange students started taking the course. From April 2014 – July 2016, I taught a total of forty-eight students, thirty of whom were from countries as

diverse as Germany, Iceland, Finland, Poland, France, Italy, Czech, Russia, China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, the USA and Canada. The presence of the international students made a big difference to class discussions, which became far more active, although dominated by the international students. Most striking of all was the ease with which the international students could grasp the concepts and apply them to their own video analyses. In many cases I felt that I could not have made a better presentation or written a better report myself.

It was clear that having such excellent role models in their international classmates helped some of the second year Japanese students in the top level class in the English department to grasp what was required. However, most of the other Japanese students showed little understanding and made little effort to apply theory to their analyses in the ways that the international students had so competently demonstrated. For them, it was perhaps too steep a learning curve because media studies are not taught in Japanese schools and one semester was insufficient time for them to acquire the necessary academic and critical thinking skills.

I have reflected on, read about, and talked with Japanese and non-Japanese students and educators about the reasons why it is so much harder for Japanese university students to be able to think critically and analyse a media text in this way. The explanation is to be found in the Japanese education system possibly combined with some fundamental Japanese practices and values. Takahashi (2010) discusses three key Japanese emic concepts, two of which are pertinent to this discussion: *uchi/soto* and *sunao*. *Uchi* refers to family members, one's home, and to the many other social groups that Japanese people belong to, while *soto* refers to others and places outside these close circles. *Uchi* and *soto* do not, however, contain the antagonistic connotations that the expressions 'us' and 'them' contain. Japanese traditional cultural values expect homogeneity among *uchi* members and a feeling of mutual trust that allows them to show their

true feelings and inner thoughts (*honne*) and not need to protect these by adopting a public face (*tatemae*) (Hendry, 2013).

Japanese people can therefore feel a certain level of awkwardness when they are with others who form a close-knit *uchi* to which they do not belong. This can explain why the students who were younger or in a different department than the others in their focus group were far more reticent. While the rest clearly felt relaxed to share their opinions, they felt themselves to be outsiders to some extent and showed deference to the *uchi* unit through not expressing their opinions too often. It also explains the discomfort and confusion that Japanese students feel when expected to participate in a discussion with a group of students they do not know and especially when those students are from overseas. Japanese people have a reputation for being “shy”, but this depends entirely on the context. Students who are highly vociferous and outgoing in their regular class (their *uchi*) become silent observers when part of a class with students of mixed ages, departments and nationalities.

The second concept *sunao* means meek, obedient and docile, but also has the implications of being honest and frank. A *sunao* attitude reflects the Japanese hierarchical system of social relationships, which is based on trust in and dependence on the judgement of one’s superior, rather than rash independence and arrogant belief in one’s own judgement. According to Takahashi (2010), a *sunao* attitude explains why many of her Japanese informants were so willing to trust and believe social authorities and media broadcasters in general. I have also been aware of the same tendency in my seminar students who study the mass media and who expect the mainstream mass media to report “the truth”. By extension, this can also explain why Japanese students are reluctant to express their own opinion about the meaning of a music video and how it is communicated. They tend to believe that the “true” meaning resides with the senders of the media text (the creators who are seen as the experts and who are usually identified as the performers) and not with the receivers (the inexperienced

audience). It can also explain why they have such a strong preference for the visuals and storylines of music videos to illustrate the lyrics because this reassures them that they have received the “correct” message. This expectation is also unsurprising given that media studies are not taught in Japanese schools, which means that the concept of the role of the audience in constructing meaning, and the idea that meaning can be negotiated and contested are unfamiliar to many young Japanese people.

*Sunao* behaviour can also explain why Japanese students are reluctant to express their opinions or ask questions, especially in large classes. They may not wish to appear to be acting out of place or above their station or to be seen as showing off. It is especially difficult for them to adjust to the situation of being in a group with people from a variety of other countries, most of whom behave in a decidedly non-*sunao* way. In contrast, however, when they are in small peer group discussions where they all belong to the same *uchi*, they are very open and willing to express disagreement with one another because they trust and respect each other as equals.

It is unwise to overgeneralise, of course, as Takahashi (2010) demonstrates using examples from her research where oppositional interpretations to media texts were expressed. Nabe (2012) also describes how the attitudes and viewing behaviour of Japanese television audiences have changed over the last four decades. It was usual for viewing audiences to watch with concentration and appreciation in the 1970s. However, a new style of television viewing emerged in the 1980s. The audience started decoding the messages from the broadcasters using its own framework, creating new meanings that the senders had not intended. An example given is a drama that was acted so badly that viewers treated it as a comedy. It seems that Japanese television audiences, since the 1980s, had recognized that the reality created by television was ‘fiction’ and had learned ‘the fun of daring to sport with “fiction”’. According to Nabe, television viewers now recognize and respond to television reality knowing that all

television is contrived to some extent (2012, p. 117). Evidence from my focus group work shows how very aware young women are of the role of the male gaze and the objectifying of women when they criticised the way members of the idol group AKB48 had been filmed for the opening scene of their video “Ponytail to *Shushu*”. Clearly a *sunao* attitude is only a partial explanation and it does not apply to all Japanese young people in all situations.

In my discussions with students about comments written on YouTube, it was noted that a variety of interpretations of music videos are expressed by Japanese YouTube users. Interestingly, the students interviewed had not written the comments themselves, but had accepted the comments of others as the “correct” meaning. The YouTube comments had shown the students that multiple interpretations of music videos are possible, but they deferred to the opinions of these unknown “authorities”. This is probably because the students I interviewed were still young and inexperienced and had just been through the Japanese high school education and university entrance systems, which will have had an effect on their readiness to question others, trust their own judgement, and to accept that more than one interpretation is possible.

The difficulty that Japanese university students experience in thinking critically can be related to the high school education and the university entrance exam systems. Compulsory education is from the age of six to fifteen and it is based on the principle of equality for all. Children are socialised through primary education in ‘a rather uniform way’ throughout Japan (Hendry, 2013, p. 76). Since 2002, when the government introduced *yutori kyōiku* (pressure-free education) in compulsory education, the ability of students has no longer been assessed relative to others, but according to an absolute scale. However, 98 percent of students go on to high school (Sugimoto, 2010), where the system is based on meritocracy and is fiercely competitive, the level of the high school a child enters having been determined by entrance tests. University entrance is likewise determined by tests, most of which are multiple-choice style. Since the launch of

the National Centre Test for University Admissions in 1990, university applicants are required to take nationally administered tests in several subjects in addition to the tests or other admission requirements set by each individual university. The Centre Tests are multiple-choice style (National Centre for University Entrance Examinations, 2016).

Sugimoto (2010) explains that, on the pretext of avoiding subjective evaluation, the criteria for assessing students' knowledge 'give priority to the supposedly objective appraisal of pupils' capacities to memorize facts, numbers, and events and solve mathematical and scientific equations' (p. 130). Moreover, little importance is attached to 'the development of creative thinking, original problem formulation, and critical analysis in the area of social issues and political debates' (p. 130). Furthermore, the competition is so great and the levels of questions on the Centre Tests and other university entrance tests are so high that students need to train to succeed in these tests. A thriving 'shadow education' system (Stevenson and Baker, 1992 quoted in Sugimoto, 2010, p. 131) has become indispensable. Students go for extra test preparation classes to cram schools called *juku* at night, at weekends, and during holidays. Those who do not get the grades they need in their final year of high school generally spend a whole year preparing again for the tests in specialized cram schools called *yobiko*. This parallel education industry has become so important that universities hire *juku* and *yobiko* staff to advise and provide feedback on their entrance test questions.

As a consequence of this style of testing, Japanese students have a good knowledge of basic facts, but no training in critical social thinking and arrive at universities very poorly prepared to undertake academic inquiry, research independently, write any kind of extended essay or research paper, or even to think for themselves and be willing to express an opinion. Many university professors and departments require and teach these skills, but compared with students who have a Western educational background, Japanese students face a steep learning curve. Clearly, a substantial number of undergraduates adapt to

and thrive in an environment of academic inquiry and go on to become researchers in all academic fields. My interviews and focus group discussions of music videos also demonstrate that Japanese undergraduates have ideas and opinions that they are willing to express freely and frankly in the right circumstances.

This overview paints a bleak picture and sadly it seems unlikely to improve in the near future unless the whole education system undergoes radical change. The government indicated a small step in a new direction in June 2015 when it announced that the Centre Tests would undergo changes from 2019. The Japan Times reported: 'To check students' ability to think and express themselves, the new exams will have questions using long sentences, while answers will require long written answers instead of the multiple-choice questions common in the current system' ("New university entrance exams to test ability to think", June 19, 2015). This is a very ambitious undertaking given the enormous number of exam scripts that will have to be marked. In January 2016, 559,132 students sat the Centre Tests<sup>8</sup> (National Centre for University Entrance Examinations, 2015 Fiscal Year, p. 11). Moreover, it remains to be seen whether universities will respond with a similar change in the style of their own entrance tests and whether there will be a positive backwash effect on the style and content of teaching in high schools and cram schools.

The discussion has strayed quite far from the topic of young Japanese people accessing Western music videos on YouTube. It nevertheless provides important information on the context of this audience and the attitudes and expectations that they bring to their consumption of this type of media text using this media platform.

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<sup>8</sup> Although the fall in birth rate has reduced the number of high school graduates from about 1,800,000 when the Centre tests were introduced in 1990 to 1,070,553 in 2016, the number of students taking the Centre Tests has remained constant throughout this period.

## Conclusion

My original intention was to find out what kinds of popular music ordinary Japanese young people, like those who attend my university, are listening to and whether Western pop music is among their favourite genres. The findings from my surveys and interviews revealed that while J-pop is by far the most listened-to genre, their tastes are eclectic and Western music is, in fact, listened to far more than record sales alone indicate. For the generation of young people I researched the 'J' of J-pop signifies Japan and distinguishes Japan-made pop music from its local Asian counterparts, Korean and Chinese pop music. There is no doubt in their minds that J-pop is thoroughly Japanese although its roots are of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century European and American origins. The way it has evolved into a home-produced product that Japan now exports internationally back to the West and to its closer Asian neighbours illustrates how fluid the notion of origins, sources, influences and ownership of cultural products can be. Western music styles, which have their own multiple sources and influences, have been imported and assimilated into Japan where they have been adapted to create new hybrid Japanese versions. Alternatively, they have been adopted in their original form but with a new meaning of their own for their Japanese performers and audiences, as is the case with the English-language ESS anthem that unites the members in their struggle to overcome, hand in hand, the obstacles they face to become fluent English speakers and useful global citizens.

Should this enjoyment of Western pop music be so surprising? My informants' interest in Western music can be related to many factors. First of all, it is familiar and can be heard as ubiquitous background music broadcast on our university campus every lunch break and at the bus stops, and off campus in shops and restaurants and other public spaces. Famous musicians regularly tour Japan and are introduced to the Japanese public through entertainment news shows. Western music is introduced to young people in school. Not only is it part of the

school curriculum, but also enthusiastic English teachers introduce it in their classes and enthusiastic ESS members use it for listening training during their lunch breaks. These days, many students spend a few weeks while in high school or university on a study and homestay programme in an English-speaking country where they are introduced to the local and national popular music. Without even knowing the long history of Western music consumption in Japan, it is clear that Western music is an integral part of the lives of my young Japanese informants today, whether they choose to listen to it attentively or not.

The arrival of Internet access and mobile technology has brought music directly to the ears of young people, wherever and whenever they wish to listen. The video-sharing site YouTube has also made a vast archive of music freely available to them. YouTube provides them with a stream of music to accompany them as they go about their daily activities and Western music is often their choice when they want music that will motivate them and help them stay on task when studying. It is often an advantage not to understand the lyrics because they can let them flow over them as part of the overall melody, rhythm and texture of the music, and simply enjoy the sounds of certain words. YouTube gives them the option of checking out the song lyrics if they are curious, or want to understand or even learn or sing along whenever they have the time and opportunity.

YouTube accessed through a mobile phone is very well suited to the music-listening style that young Japanese people on the go seem to favour. It is with them all the time in their pocket or bag and they can access it quickly when they have a few minutes to fill, or need to take a short break. A track can be started, stopped, or put on pause then picked up again when the next opportunity arises. It can be rewound and fast-forwarded to favourite moments and favourite tracks can be quickly found through the search function and the creation of playlists. Audiences have never before had such a wide choice of music freely available to them and such extensive control over what they listen to or the means to

discover an endless amount of new music through the recommendations that YouTube provides. It is also ideal for sharing and recommending new discoveries to friends through word of mouth, by showing the screen, or sending links through social networking.

It is interesting that YouTube, a video-sharing site, provides such a rich resource of musical entertainment, but audiences do not necessarily feel the need to watch the visuals playing on the screen. Does this mean that music videos are redundant? It seems that while they are an option for some, they are the main attraction for others, at least when they have the time to sit or lie on their bed quietly and focus their attention on the screen. Those who watch music videos in this way clearly derive a lot of pleasure from the audiovisual experience and showed some awareness of the ways in which interaction between the music's tempo and rhythm and the images can heighten their enjoyment of the music.

Vernallis (2013<sup>a</sup>) draws on neuroscience to explain the stimulation that we experience when we see moving media that has a human form. Mirror cells in our brain are activated and replicate the patterns and shapes we see on the screen. For example, if you see someone perform a gesture onscreen, your mirror cells replicate the action in your brain. You go through the motion inside your head without performing the external gesture. This could help to explain why watching dance on video is so popular. The physical movement onscreen combined with the synaesthetic effect of the matching musical rhythm and tempo stimulate multiple senses and our mirror cells. The fact that highly synchronised dance is especially pleasurable may have a cultural as well as a neurological explanation. Tight synchronisation is highly valued in Japan. As has been seen, marching bands have been important since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and neighbours, co-workers, or classmates join synchronised exercise sessions in parks, factories and schools. The highlight of school sports days is when the whole school dances together and many large dance groups as well as the university

cheerleaders can be seen practicing to achieve perfect unison around my university campus.

Other pleasures that are derived from attentive gazing at the screen are an imaginary escape into the world of the video scene to dance with Ed Sheeran or a favourite Japanese idol. Or if the video has a strong, clear narrative, viewers can find themselves immersed in the story, swept up the emotional flow of the music and narrative. Videos that provide such heightened pleasurable experiences certainly seem to be fulfilling their function of promoting a positive image of the artist and a high evaluation of the song. They also provide aesthetic pleasure in showcasing *kawaii* performers and goods that have a particularly strong appeal to Japanese audiences. However, it seems that such focused viewing of music videos is less common than more casual viewing.

The Japanese youngsters I worked with have grown up in the screen culture age, where televisions, PCs, smart phones and a variety of other screens in public spaces are integral to daily life. It is ironic that in this screen age, looking at a screen is so often optional and occasional. Researchers have shown how commonly a visual medium like television has been used for background noise and the same is true of the music video platform YouTube. Music emanating from a radio, or television or even speakers attached to a smart phone fill an emptiness or help people to focus on a task with simultaneous subliminal attention to the background sounds. It seems that in this age of portable music many people are addicted to continual musical accompaniment as it makes their world appear more exciting. It could be said that the world is becoming more cinematic in their imaginations through the influence of screen media. Although they are not looking at the screen while they listen to music, they imagine that they are in a music video or a film and that the music is providing the soundtrack.

The pace of life is faster than ever before and multi-tasking is completely normal for young people. It is rare for them to immerse themselves in a whole music

video because there is continual pressure to be checking social media networks and emails as well as rush from home to class to a part-time job or a club activity. It is even common for their parents to be switching their attention between the TV screen and the Internet and their phone screen, so it is only natural that the same practice is carried over to YT consumption, which is something they do while communicating with others online. Significantly, very few of my informants chose to communicate with strangers through the YouTube comments. They preferred to remain within the security of their friendship groups, their *uchi*.

The swift pace of modern life is accompanied by fast developments in technology and the new entertainment platforms it provides. YouTube has been with us only a dozen years, but it may soon be superseded by other platforms. Although my informants found the advertising on YouTube only mildly intrusive and irritating, others are turning to music streaming services for an uninterrupted listening experience, preferring to pay for music free from advertising. YouTube is the main platform used by my informants at the time of this research, but they do not show strong loyalty to the YouTube brand and have little curiosity about how it functions as a commercial enterprise. For them, it is easy to access and use and by far the biggest free entertainment resource they have for now. They may move on to an alternative platform when they feel the need for a higher quality audiovisual experience and have the money to pay for this.

I am sure that many researchers lament missed opportunities once time has run out on a research project. I am left with a lot of questions and issues I would like to follow up. There is so much that I would like to understand better. For example, is the strong preference for a storyline in music videos related to the way so many Japanese hit pop songs are tie-ins to TV dramas? If there is an expectation that a song will illustrate the theme of a drama, is this expectation transferred to the visuals of a music video?

Or is the wish for the music video to explain the meaning of the song related to the fact the younger informants have just come through the Japanese high school system where a teacher will tell them what to study and how to answer the test questions? They have not yet experienced the need or gained the maturity and confidence to think for themselves. In retrospect, it was the older informants who showed a greater tendency to use their imaginations and think critically. What influence do three years of tertiary education in Japan have on the responses of young Japanese media audiences?

If I were to carry out this project again, I would ask the focus groups who watched the selection of music videos with me to come back again a week later. My aim would be to find out which of the videos they saw that one time were memorable and why. If they heard just the soundtrack of each video as one of a short collection of sound samples, would they recognize it? Would they recall the visuals? Would the blue lemon and bad behavior of the woman in “Dirty Love” have made a strong enough impression on the informants that they remembered the scenes and the music a week later? Would they begin to understand and enjoy the puzzling scenes in “Rather Be” during a second viewing in the way that one group were able to do? Would “Real Love” and “Breathe”, with their very straightforward illustrative styles, be more or less memorable than the shocking and challenging visuals of the other two videos? This may provide insight into how effectively the visual track can help recall of the aural track. And if they had watched the video again of their own accord, this would indicate that the video had done its job of promoting the song. Such a follow-up session possibly would provide rich insights into how well the different styles of music video promoted the music they accompanied. And this is what I plan to do next.

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## Appendix 1

### Glossary of Japanese terms

*busaiku* = clumsy, awkward members of a group

*chimeido* = name recognition, fame

*gagaku* (雅楽) = ancient court music (literally elegant music)

*gaijin* = outsider and/ or foreigner

*gunka* = military songs

*hōgaku* (邦楽) = traditional Japanese music

*honno* = one's real feeling or true intention

*jimusho* = pop idol management agency

*joho kodo* = Information behaviour

*joho shakai* = Information society

*kayōkyoku* = a broad term for Japanese popular song that originated when record companies started to market songs. It refers to the middle ground between 'pops', which have strong Western characteristics, and 'enka' ballads which have strong Japanese characteristics. (It is used as the label of this genre in Tsutaya rental shop)

*kōhai* = someone in a junior position

*min'yō* = Japanese folk music

*mochiuta* = a system that linked a song with one singer

*oyabun/kobun* = parent/child, but also applies to teacher/pupil and master/apprentice

*ongaku* (音楽) = music

*popurā myūjikkū* = popular music and is commonly used these days in place of the more old-fashioned *kayōkyoku*

*ryūkōka* = commercially produced recorded songs (*ryūkō* = to be popular, in vogue). This term was used interchangeably with *kayōkyoku* until it started to sound out of date.

*sempai* = someone with seniority

*soto* = outside, outsiders, people from outside a family or close-knit group

*sunao* = showing a deferential and humble attitude

*tatemae* = one's professed intention (used to protect everyone's face in public interactions)

*uchi* = inside, insiders, members of a family or close-knit group

*wasei pop* = made in Japan pop

*yōgaku* (洋楽) = Western music (洋) = from overseas/outside Japan (楽) = music and also joyfulness or happiness

*zokkyoku* (俗曲) = popular music

## Appendix 2

### Summer 2015 Survey on Music and Music Video Consumption

Total number of survey responses: 511

Students surveyed were in years 1 – 4 at a middle-level private university in Japan

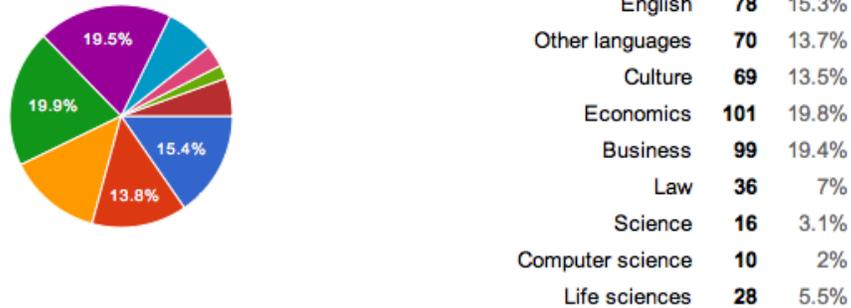
Question 2 was age: This ranged from 18 – 21.

The sample was random in that 5 teachers who were teaching required General English lessons to classes with students from all faculties were asked to conduct this in their lesson.

#### 1. Sex



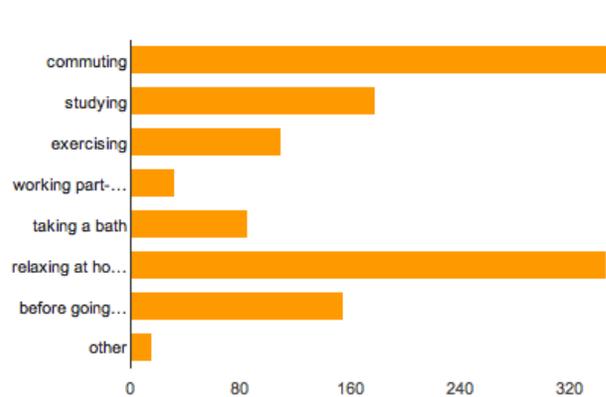
#### 3. Department



#### 4. How many hours do you listen...

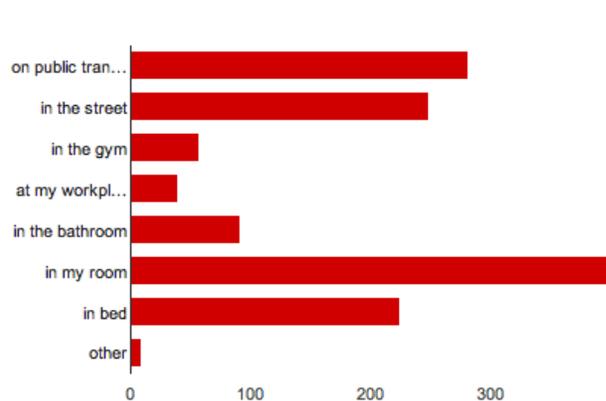


### 5. When do you listen to music?



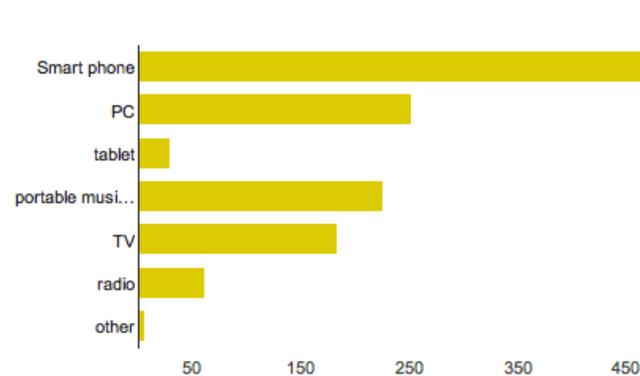
commuting	<b>353</b>	69.1%
studying	<b>178</b>	34.8%
exercising	<b>110</b>	21.5%
working part-time	<b>32</b>	6.3%
taking a bath	<b>85</b>	16.6%
relaxing at home	<b>346</b>	67.7%
before going to sleep	<b>155</b>	30.3%
other	<b>15</b>	2.9%

### 6. Where do you listen to music?



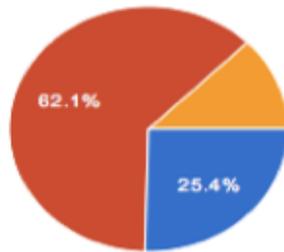
on public transportation	<b>280</b>	55.6%
in the street	<b>248</b>	49.2%
in the gym	<b>57</b>	11.3%
at my workplace	<b>39</b>	7.7%
in the bathroom	<b>91</b>	18.1%
in my room	<b>403</b>	80%
in bed	<b>224</b>	44.4%
other	<b>9</b>	1.8%

### 7. Which of these do you use?



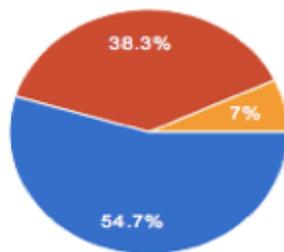
Smart phone	<b>464</b>	92.2%
PC	<b>252</b>	50.1%
tablet	<b>29</b>	5.8%
portable music player	<b>226</b>	44.9%
TV	<b>183</b>	36.4%
radio	<b>61</b>	12.1%
other	<b>6</b>	1.2%

**8. Do you rent and dub CDs?**



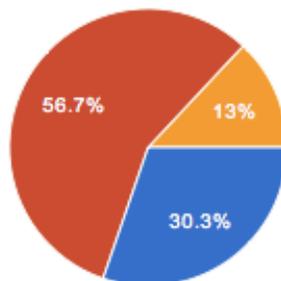
Never	<b>128</b>	25.4%
Sometimes	<b>313</b>	62.1%
Often	<b>63</b>	12.5%

**9. Do you buy music online?**



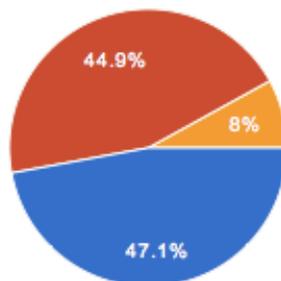
Never	<b>274</b>	54.7%
Sometimes	<b>192</b>	38.3%
Often	<b>35</b>	7%

**10. Do you buy CDs?**



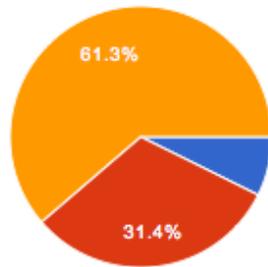
Never	<b>151</b>	30.3%
Sometimes	<b>283</b>	56.7%
Often	<b>65</b>	13%

**11. Do you buy DVDs?**



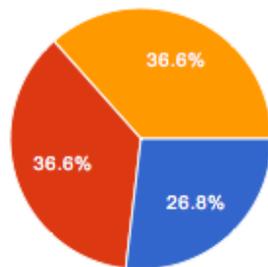
Never	<b>235</b>	47.1%
Sometimes	<b>224</b>	44.9%
Often	<b>40</b>	8%

**12. a) How much do you listen to J-pop?**



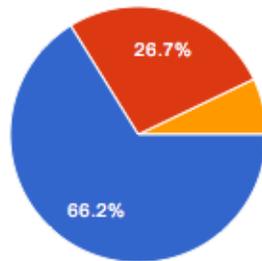
Never	<b>36</b>	7.3%
Sometimes	<b>154</b>	31.4%
Often	<b>301</b>	61.3%

**12. b) How much do you listen to J-rock?**



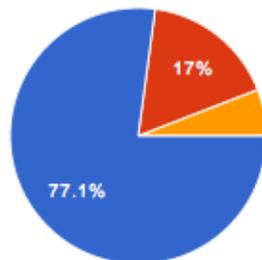
Never	<b>127</b>	26.8%
Sometimes	<b>173</b>	36.6%
Often	<b>173</b>	36.6%

**12. c) How much do you listen to J-rap?**



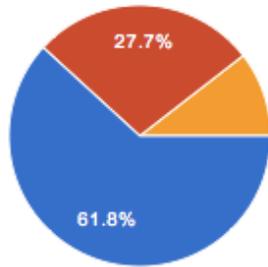
Never	<b>307</b>	66.2%
Sometimes	<b>124</b>	26.7%
Often	<b>33</b>	7.1%

**12. d) How much do you listen to Visual kei?**



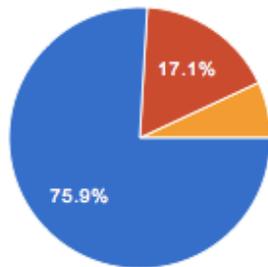
Never	<b>354</b>	77.1%
Sometimes	<b>78</b>	17%
Often	<b>27</b>	5.9%

**12. e) How much do you listen to K-pop?**



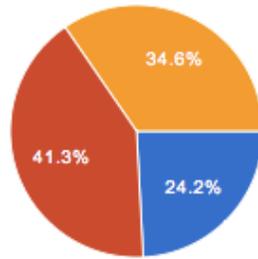
Never	<b>288</b>	61.8%
Sometimes	<b>129</b>	27.7%
Often	<b>49</b>	10.5%

**12. f) How much do you listen to Reggae?**



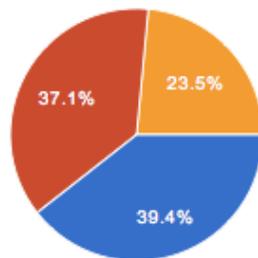
Never	<b>350</b>	75.9%
Sometimes	<b>79</b>	17.1%
Often	<b>32</b>	6.9%

**12. g) How much do you listen to English-language pop?**



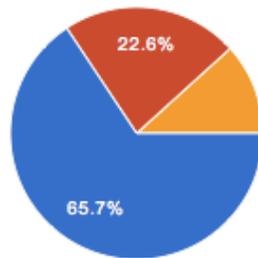
Never	<b>116</b>	24.2%
Sometimes	<b>198</b>	41.3%
Often	<b>166</b>	34.6%

**12. h) How much do you listen to English-language rock?**



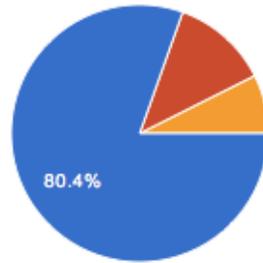
Never	<b>186</b>	39.4%
Sometimes	<b>175</b>	37.1%
Often	<b>111</b>	23.5%

**12. i) How much do you listen to English-language rap?**



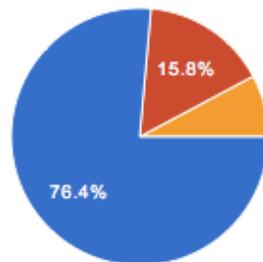
Never	<b>308</b>	65.7%
Sometimes	<b>106</b>	22.6%
Often	<b>55</b>	11.7%

**12. j) How much do you listen to Heavy metal?**



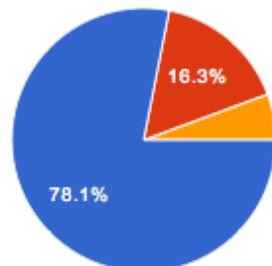
Never	<b>370</b>	80.4%
Sometimes	<b>56</b>	12.2%
Often	<b>34</b>	7.4%

**12. k) How much do you listen to Punk?**



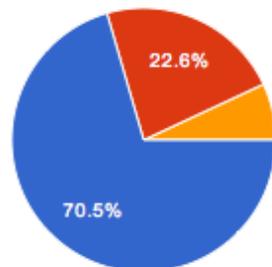
Never	<b>353</b>	76.4%
Sometimes	<b>73</b>	15.8%
Often	<b>36</b>	7.8%

**12. l) How much do you listen to Folk?**



Never	<b>360</b>	78.1%
Sometimes	<b>75</b>	16.3%
Often	<b>26</b>	5.6%

**12. m) How much do you listen to Jazz?**

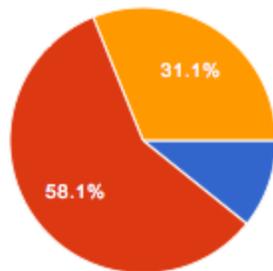


Never	<b>325</b>	70.5%
Sometimes	<b>104</b>	22.6%
Often	<b>32</b>	6.9%

### Question 12. n) What other music do you listen to?

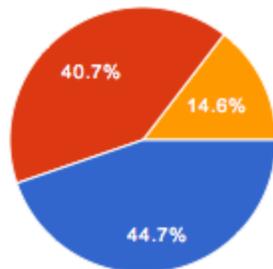
Hard rock, sound track, movie soundtrack, anime music/songs, fusion, vocaloid, game BGM, instrumental, English-language country, dance music, Electronic Dance Music (EDM), club music, Techno, UK hardcore, Trance, French pop, Russian-language rock, Spanish-language pop, classical, brass band.

### 13. Do you watch music videos?



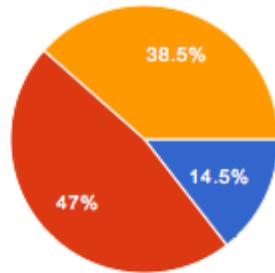
Never	<b>53</b>	10.8%
Sometimes	<b>286</b>	58.1%
Often	<b>153</b>	31.1%

### 14. Do you download music videos?



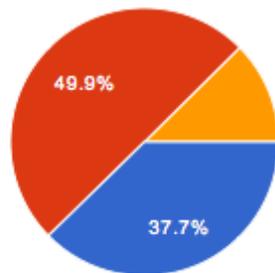
Never	<b>221</b>	44.7%
Sometimes	<b>201</b>	40.7%
Often	<b>72</b>	14.6%

**15. a) Do you watch commercial/official videos?**



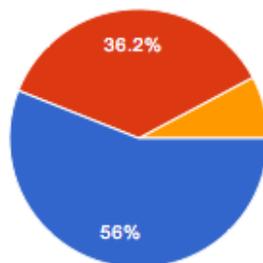
Never	<b>70</b>	14.5%
Sometimes	<b>227</b>	47%
Often	<b>186</b>	38.5%

**15. b) Do you watch covers (professional)?**



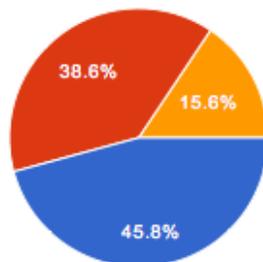
Never	<b>179</b>	37.7%
Sometimes	<b>237</b>	49.9%
Often	<b>59</b>	12.4%

**15. c) Do you watch covers (amateur)?**



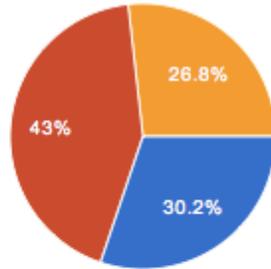
Never	<b>266</b>	56%
Sometimes	<b>172</b>	36.2%
Often	<b>37</b>	7.8%

**15. d) Do you watch song lyrics?**



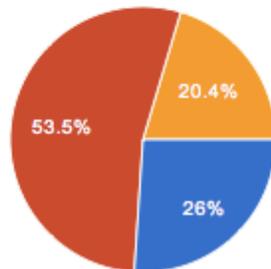
Never	<b>217</b>	45.8%
Sometimes	<b>183</b>	38.6%
Often	<b>74</b>	15.6%

**15. e) Do you watch live performance recordings?**



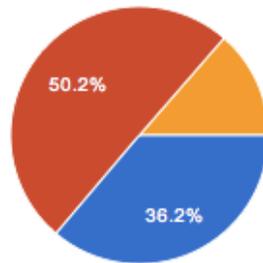
Never	<b>143</b>	30.2%
Sometimes	<b>204</b>	43%
Often	<b>127</b>	26.8%

**15. f) TV shows?**



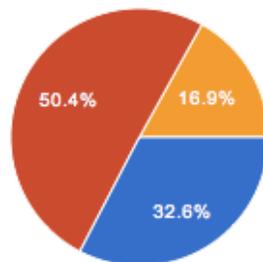
Never	<b>125</b>	26%
Sometimes	<b>257</b>	53.5%
Often	<b>98</b>	20.4%

**15. g) Do you watch movies?**



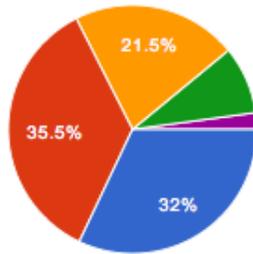
Never	<b>173</b>	36.2%
Sometimes	<b>240</b>	50.2%
Often	<b>65</b>	13.6%

**15. h) Do you watch animation?**



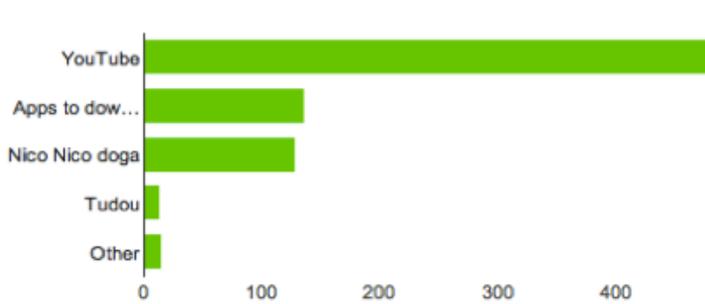
Never	<b>156</b>	32.6%
Sometimes	<b>241</b>	50.4%
Often	<b>81</b>	16.9%

**16. How much time are your eyes on the screen?**



0% - 30%	<b>149</b>	32%
30% - 50%	<b>165</b>	35.5%
50% - 70%	<b>100</b>	21.5%
70% - 90%	<b>41</b>	8.8%
100%	<b>10</b>	2.2%

**17. Which of the following do you use to access music videos?**



YouTube	<b>482</b>	98%
Apps to download music	<b>136</b>	27.6%
Nico Nico doga	<b>128</b>	26%
Tudou	<b>13</b>	2.6%
Other	<b>15</b>	3%

**Others:** Amitude, 56.com, vophon, mp3, Daily motion, Vine, DVD, Blue-ray , CD, Pandora TV, FC2, Pure tune (?), UST, twicas, Sound cloud

### Appendix 3

Data collected by the author from Tower Records and Tsutaya CD and DVD rental store in Kyoto on September 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>, 2015

#### Tsutaya Ranking order (by amount of shelf space allocated)

1. J-POP	17
2. Rock & Pops (Western)	10
3. J-Rock/Punk	9
4. Anime	8
5. Best ranking J-POP	5
6. Jazz	4
7. Western best ranking/Omnibus/ Kids	3
8. Japanese Hip Hop	2
9. Japanese Reggae + Reggae	2
10. Variety	2
11. R & B/Soul (Western)	2
12. World Music/ Relaxation	2
13. Classical	2
14. Lounge	2
15. Dance	2
16. Folk/New Music	1
17. Idols from the past	1
18. Kayōkyoku	1
19. Enka	1
20. Visual(-kei)	1
21. Cover	1
22. K-POP	1
23. Hard rock/Heavy metal	1
24. Hip Hop	1
25. Soundtrack (Western films)	1
26. Soundtrack (Japanese films)	1

#### Tower Records Ranking order (by amount of shelf space allocated)

1. J-POP	72
2. Rock/pops (English)	60
3. Classical	41
4. Hard rock/metal (English)	21
5. Jazz (English)	18
6. K-POP	17
7. J-POP (DVD/Blu-ray)	14

8. R & B	12
9. Club (English)	12
10. World music	11
11. J-jazz	10
12. Hip hop	9
13. Rock/pops (English)(DVD/Blu-ray)	8
14. Johnny's (male idols)	8
15. Female idols	7
16. J-punk & hardcore	6
17. Anime/soundtrack	4
18. Visual-kei	4
19. J-hip hop	4
20. Blues	4
21. Reggae	2
22. J-reggae	2
23. Relaxation	2
24. Folk/Bluegrass	1
25. Country/gospel	1
26. J-club	1
27. J-hard rock/metal	1

### Research at Tower Records on September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015

J-pop CD costs ¥1,500 (+ tax) ~ ¥3024 (+ tax)

J-pop CD+DVD costs ¥4860 (+ tax) for same CD that costs ¥3024 (+ tax) with no DVD

Price range for DVDs for Japanese and K-pop Idols

E.g. AKB48 2 CDs + DVD = ¥3,500 (+ tax) or 2 CD set = ¥ 2,800 (+ tax)

K-pop DVDs = ¥4, 790 ~ ¥5,000 (+ tax)

T-ARA single + DVD = ¥1,800 (+ tax)