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Lovers and (Boy) Friends: Shifting Identities in Japanese BL Manga

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ABSTRACT

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As academic scholarship on the Japanese popular media genre known as Boys' Love has been focused upon the genre's fan culture and female readers, this thesis project aims to move away from the fans and to the texts in order to explore how the genre is in conversation with changes in societal understandings of same-sex sexuality in Japan. Following brief introductions of four portrayals of men that are commonly found in Japanese popular media, three contemporary manga titles are analyzed to explore how the authors negotiate the narrative conventions of the Boys' Love genre with the shifting understandings of same-sex sexuality vis-à-vis the visual appearance of the characters, the role of these characters in their fictionalized societies, and the settings wherein the narratives take place.

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I. Introduction

Boys' Love has been a genre of Japanese manga since the 1970s and has become increasingly globalized over its roughly five decades of publication. Analysis of the genre reveals how they reflect changes in cultural ideas since their initial appearance of the ideas of masculinity. Most academic scholarship on Boys' Love thus far has been focused upon the fan culture of the genre, or the female readers. In this thesis, I move away from discussions of fan culture and the female consumers to analyze what the text tells us about masculinity and male sexuality vis-à-vis the characters and narratives.

In order to understand the genre of Boys' Love in Japanese manga, I begin this introduction at the genre's roots in *shōjo* (少女) manga or girls' comics. Like other manga genres, *shōjo* manga boomed in the post-war period as a distinct genre grounded in storytelling. This particular characteristic of *shōjo* manga is often linked to Tezuka Osamu's manga *Ribon no Kishi* (Princess Knight, 1953) which was in turn inspired by the Takarazuka all-female theatre revue.¹ *Shōjo* manga is often characterized as being a female-oriented romantic story genre, characterized predominantly by flower and star filled backgrounds and female characters with large, sparkling eyes. Central themes are love, emotions in general, and the intricacies of human psychology.² Initially, *shōjo* manga was almost entirely

¹ James Welker, "A Brief History of Shōnen-ai, Yaoi, and Boys Love," in *Boys Love Manga and Beyond: History, Culture, and Community in Japan*, eds. Mark McLelland, Kazumi Nagaïke, Katsuhiko Suganuma, and James Welker (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015), 43.

² Kayo Takeuchi, "The Genealogy of Japanese Shōjo Manga (Girls' Comics) Studies," in *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal*, no. 38 (2010), 82.

conceptualized, drawn, and written by male artists. In the 1970s, in the midst of second-wave feminism, a group of young women entered the world of commercial manga publication and eventually took creative control of *shōjo* manga production. Referencing their approximate year of birth, 1949 or Showa 24, this handful of artists became known as the Year 24 Group. James Welker describes their emergence as follows:

In the 1970s, these artists, including Ikeda Riyoko, Hagio Moto, and Takemiya Keiko, expanded on those visual conventions developed in *shōjo* manga in prior decades, including further experimentation with the layout and shape of panels, which were sometimes dispensed with altogether. The effect was a continued emphasis on the development of the thoughts and feelings of the characters. They also borrowed widely from foreign and Japanese literature, film, history and myth.³

Later, these same artists produced the first titles of what would later become known as Boys' Love (ボーイズラブ) genre or BL. Coined in 1990s Japan to describe a category of works that typically feature two or more male characters engaging in romantic and/or sexual relationships emerged when the demand for stories about male-male romances had risen to such high levels of popularity that major publishing companies began to hire creators to produce original titles for the growing market. Today, BL can refer to any media that features male-male relationships for a female audience. In manga production, however, BL serves as umbrella term encompassing works that are categorized as *shōnen-ai* and *yaoi*.

³ James Welker, "A Brief History of Shōnen-ai, Yaoi, and Boys Love," in *Boys Love Manga and Beyond: History, Culture, and Community in Japan*, eds. Mark McLelland, Kazumi Nagaike, Katsuhiko Suganuma, and James Welker (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015), 44.

Shōnen-ai (少年愛), which literally means ‘boy love,’ encompasses BL manga that developed from the stylistic changes the Year 24 Group, many of whom are credited as writing the pioneer *shōnen-ai* titles, made to *shōjo* manga. Early *shōnen-ai* manga featured young male characters in same-sex relationships and were often set in somewhat fictionalized versions of Europe with non-Japanese characters. Subsequent *shōnen-ai* titles included partially or fully Japanese characters, most likely to link the narratives more intimately to their Japanese audience. *Shōnen-ai* removes the female character as the object of male desire in favor of pursuit of an intimate relationship with male characters. The focus of *shōnen-ai* manga is on the development of the characters and narrative, not on overtly erotic sexual scenes. For instance, neither oral nor penetrative anal sex are featured prominently. This is in dramatic contrast to *yaoi* (やおい) which, much like *shōnen-ai*, removes the female as the object of male desire but chooses to explicitly show depictions of sexual desire through visualized acts of both oral and penetrative anal sex. *Yaoi* is a term that was coined in the 1980s by amateur manga (同人誌 *dōjinshi*) creators as an acronym to refer to the storytelling techniques used in parody of popular *shōnen* manga (boys comics) works that had “no climax, no point, and no meaning,” or *yama nashi, ochi nashi, imi nashi* (ヤマなし、オチなし、意味なし).⁴ While *yaoi* manga can contain a narrative story, the stories are either minimized or vaguely constructed. Most of the pages in a *yaoi* manga are dedicated to the depictions of the sexual encounters between characters, so any narrative involved is mostly used to situate the contexts of the characters. Confusingly, outside of Japan and Asia, *yaoi* is often used as the umbrella term for the entire BL genre which has aided in the spread of works in the genre, but has in turn created inconsistency among

⁴ Akiko Mizoguchi, “Male-Male Romance by and for women in Japan: A History and the Subgenres of ‘Yaoi’ Fictions,” in *U.S.-Japan Women’s Journal* 25 (2003), 50.

scholarship as to how to address the genre of works. In this work I will use BL, rather than *yaoi*, to refer to commercialized manga featuring male-male romantic and sexual relationships as *yaoi* manga are more common in amateur production spheres and the manga I have selected for this project are commercial publications.

The backbone of the Japanese BL media sphere is the notion of what I am calling a “consumable masculinity.” By “consumable masculinity” I mean any form of portrayal of men in popular media and social culture that has been altered to cater to a specific audience, very often women. BL media in Japan capitalizes on several different forms of consumable masculinity, some of which are typically not directed towards an audience of heterosexual women that dominate the market of BL media. I have identified four forms of consumable masculinity in Japanese media, three of which are often found in BL. The fourth is more often found in *Gei* Comics rather than BL media. In the following passage, I briefly describe these forms of consumable masculinity to explain some of the narrative themes and visual portrayals in the manga and webtoons that I analyze in this thesis. The four consumable masculinities are “Fanservice,” “Herbivore Men,” “Men’s Men,” and “Beefy.”

The “Fanservice” form of consumable masculinity is most often found in industries designed to cater to the desires of women such as host clubs and the male idol industry. Both of these industries are able to thrive based on the concept of providing some type of service to female fans, or customers in the case of the hosts. It is difficult to define idols and hosts in concrete terms, as they are often considered pieces within larger industries, but for the purposes of this paper, an idol is a male or female individual that is trained, produced, and promoted as a singer, actor, model, or other public figure in entertainment by a company and whose popularity depends on dedicated consumption of goods created with the image of the

idol.⁵ A host is a man working within a nightclub whose job is to entertain customers through conversation, song, and dance, and often employ sex work as a means to retain wealthy customers.⁶ For idols, “fanservice” is often used as a means to assume a non-sexual identity to avoid confirming that they are adult men with desires of their own. Japanese host clubs are establishments where people pay to be entertained by handsome young men. The services these clubs offer vary by region and by individual club, but typically involve performances by and conversations with the employees to encourage patrons to purchase extravagant amounts of alcohol. The “fanservice” in this industry is based upon not only what the customers desire, but also how much the customers are willing to pay for these desires. The fanservice of both the idol and hosting industries relies on maintaining a near-yet-far distance between themselves and those financially supporting them.

The idol industry breaks down into two groups to determine celebrity: Idols (アイドル *aidoru*) and Talents (タレント *tarento*). While these two categories can overlap with one another as both idols and talents debut within the Japanese entertainment industry as singers, actors, and dancers, talents are often well-known people not specifically talented in singing, dancing, or acting⁷. Idols and talents tend to debut at young ages and continue working well into their adult lives. However, the idols and talents that have sustained long-term careers tend to have done so by participating in multiple forms of entertainment. Otherwise, one can expect an idol or talent to only be popular for a small number of years. Being supported by

⁵ Patrick W. Galbraith and Jason G. Karlin, “Introduction: The Mirror of Idols and Celebrity,” in *Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Culture*, eds. Patrick W. Galbraith and Jason G. Karlin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 2.

⁶ Akiko Takeyama, *Staged Seduction: Selling Dreams in a Tokyo Host Club* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 94-98.

⁷ Patrick W. Galbraith and Jason G. Karlin, “Introduction: The Mirror of Idols and Celebrity,” in *Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Culture*, eds. Patrick W. Galbraith and Jason G. Karlin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 6.

management companies (事務所 *jimusho*) can often help prolong these careers, however as there is a growing number of South Korean idols and idol groups being imported into Japan, long-term careers in the Japanese idol industry become an increasingly competitive market.

Japanese male idols, even when they become adults, are popular often for having a kind of boyish charm – an androgynous and youthful appearance and character that conceals that they are adult men. This is mostly due to fan fictionalizing these idols in a way that they are separate from the everyday working man and the expectations that go along with being a man in Japanese society. This also means that the worst kind of scandal, or major news story, that could happen to a male idol in Japan is one of sexual nature. Male idols who are discovered to be dating secretly or participating in other activities that can be understood as being sexual in nature will face significant damage to their reputations and lose the trust of their fans. One way to counter these scandals is for the male idols – which works particularly well for idols that are part of larger idol groups – is to perform homosexuality. These performances of homosexuality then create narratives of in-group relationships which are deemed as being more acceptable by fans than a heterosexual relationship. These created narratives in-turn fuel the creation of fan-produced content such as BL *doujinshi* that star those idols.

Japanese hosts could be considered talents, in that their marketable skill is the talent of seduction. The “Fan Service” masculinity as used by Japanese hosts is similar to that of idols as they play into the desires of those who pay for their services, unlike idols however, hosts are allowed to embrace their heterosexuality. The main purpose of a host is to cater to the specific emotional needs of a woman who enters the establishment as a client and to have these clients spend as much money in the establishment as possible. In order to achieve this goal, hosts will sing for clients, dance with clients, make conversation with clients, take

clients on dates outside of business hours, and even possibly have sex with clients outside of business hours – all of which is made possible by the copious amounts of alcohol being consumed by both host and client alike. In her ethnographic work on the hosting industry, Akiko Takeyama writes:

The seduction hosts engage in...involves not only evoking and manipulating the others' feelings to produce satisfaction but also potentially enticing the seduces to serve the ends of the seducers themselves. This subtle power to successfully manipulate the other allows male hosts to downplay their feminized emotional labor and instead highlight their masculine professional status.⁸

As Takeyama explains, since emotional labor is often attributed to female-oriented occupations or service work such as nurses, waitresses, or stewardesses, hosts must find ways to prove that their own emotional occupation is still masculine work. The clientele of host clubs in Japan, which is most often women, being successfully seduced by the hosts will often buy into the notions that their relationships with these hosts are legitimate and will financially support their 'boyfriend' as much as they can to prove that they care for these hosts. Some women even go as far as buying luxury items such as designer watches, designer clothes and foreign sports cars for hosts. However, such support can often be abruptly ended with the hosts "breaking up" with clients when they are able to rise into higher positions of rank and popularity.

In current literature on men in Japan, the term *sōshokukei danshi* (草食系男子) or Herbivore Men has begun to appear more frequently. The term is used in reference to the trend of young men in Japan who do not actively seek out romantic and sexual partners for dating or marriage and by extent, do not actively seek out means to "properly" join society

as a man. The trend of the herbivore man is often linked to the increasing number of male *freeters* (フリーター), men who have been unable to find permanent employment due to either economic trends against their favor or interest in pursuit of non-traditional occupation. The “Herbivore” form of consumable masculinity, as I will use it, refers to the fashion-conscious, beautiful man – another kind of herbivore man sometimes known as a *bishōnen* or *ikemen*.

Bishōnen and *ikemen* are both terms that are used to refer to good-looking men, however *bishōnen* tend to be portrayed as younger men compared to *ikemen*. A bishonen (美少年) is a term that translates literally as ‘handsome youth’ but is likened to the English language concept of a ‘pretty boy’. In Japanese media, the kinds of men that are called *bishōnen* tend to be *shōjo* manga characters, idols, or young male talents. Hosts can also potentially be called *bishōnen* depending on the kind of character image they are promoting themselves with. What distinguishes a *bishōnen* from an *ikemen* is their youth. The youthfulness of the *bishōnen* allows them to exist within a space wherein the man is allowed to participate in more feminine activities – such as cooking, wearing makeup, or dancing – without fear of social repercussion.

Ikemen (イケ面), translated as a handsome man, granted similar social leniency as *bishōnen* however, the *ikemen* participates in fewer femininely typed activities than the *bishōnen*. This is because whereas the *bishōnen* participates in these activities to be confirmed in his attractiveness by women, the attractiveness of the *ikemen* is judged and confirmed by other men. *Ikemen* in media are identified in Japanese media oriented towards men such as *shōnen* manga but can also be found in Boys’ Love media as well as in *shōjo*

⁸ Akiko Takeyama, *Staged Seduction: Selling Dreams in a Tokyo Host Club* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 74.

manga that feature character casts of predominantly men. *Ikemen* are typically fashionable, attractive men, that are recognized by other men as possessing – possibly in excess – both desirable masculine qualities and feminized features that are either uncommon or rare within certain environments. The appeal of the *ikemen* in media is that, similarly to the *bishōnen*, the *ikemen* is a man that can capture the affections and attentions of women but appeals to masculine sensibilities in ways that the *bishōnen* cannot.

On quite the opposite end of the spectrum from the idol, host, and bishonen of Japanese masculinities portrayed in popular media is the idea of the “Men’s Men”. The “Men’s Men” form of consumable masculinity refers to a characterization of a man that would be consumed primarily by men and exemplifies a male ideal of masculinity. One of the best representations of this idea is that of the Yakuza. Yakuza are often depicted in media as being intimidating, rough-types, and often violent men that are a part of the shady underbellies of Japanese political society – something akin to the Italian and Russian mafias. The modern yakuza can be traced back to the Tokugawa period to groups of gamblers and merchants known as *bakuto* (博徒) and *tekiya* (的屋), respectively. However, the word *yakuza* itself also refers to a losing hand of eight, nine, and three in the card game *hanafuda* (花札),⁹ but the point from when this negative reference was reappropriated is unclear.¹⁰

In stories that feature characters belonging to Yakuza organizations, the conflict often arises from tensions between the group and the individual such as “loyalty to the gang, conflicting with one’s personal feelings; having to choose between the woman one loves and

⁹ It would be a losing hand if the number of the sum of the cards ended in zero. Eiko Maruko Siniawer, *Ruffians, Yakuza, Nationalists: The Violent Politics of Modern Japan, 1860-1960* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2008), 192n58.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

obligation to one's seniors".¹¹ In the end the group is worth more than the individual, but it is that group loyalty that makes a fictionalized Yakuza appealing to Japanese audiences. They make oaths to the group and make decisions in the best interest of that group even if it comes with dangerous or fatal consequence to themselves. As these Yakuza groups are male dominated spaces, the choice made for the benefit or to preserve the honor of the group is seen as a masculine or 'manly' decision. As if one is able to become a 'true man' by placing others before himself.¹²

If the Yakuza reflects the image of a 'true man' in a heterosexual lifestyle, what does a 'true man' look like in a homosexual lifestyle? To answer this question, one can turn to the comic media produced by and for the Japanese gay community: *Gei Manga*. Publications for gay erotic illustrations in Japan can be dated back to the 1950s, but one of the earliest *gei* manga publications is the 1986 *Bara-Komi* by *Barazoku*.¹³ It is likely that it is from the *Barazoku* publication that the genre has come to be known as Bara in English – although the term 'Bara' has also become a term separate from the Japanese comic and art genre since its adoption into the lexicon.

The "Beefy" type of consumable masculinity is often featured in Japanese *gei* manga. These are men of larger body types than are typically found in BL manga. These body types can be sorted as "gacchiri (ガッチリ muscular), gachimuchi (ガチムチ muscle-curved), gachidebu (ガチデブ muscle-chub), and debu (デブ chubby)", which are often likened

¹¹ Ian Buruma, *Behind the Mask: On Sexual Demons, Sacred Mothers, Transvestites, Gangsters, and Other Japanese Cultural Heroes*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 182.

¹² *Ibid.*, 187.

¹³ Graham Kolbeins, "Glocalizing Gei Manga," in *Massive: Gay Erotic Manga and the Men Who Make it*, eds. Anne Ishii, Chip Kidd, and Graham Kolbeins (Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 2018), 32.

to the English gay slang terms like ‘Bear’ and ‘Cub’ that refer to gay men who are large, hefty, and hairy.¹⁴ The style in which the bodies are drawn in Gei manga are considered to be more accurate reflections of the kinds of physical builds gay men in Japan have – a stark difference from the thin, hairless body types found in BL manga. In recent years, some BL creators in Japan have been including male characters with muscular or large builds as romantic interests in typical BL narratives, however, there is often tension between the BL and Japanese gay community as BL is seen as a way for women to profit from gay experiences without ever involving themselves in the social issues faced by the gay community. In some cases, this tension has even transferred into Western spaces where self-identified non-Japanese *fujōshi* (腐女子)¹⁵ that consume BL media are criticized for fetishizing the LGBT experience and imposing it on non-LGBT identifying celebrities for personal gain. However, these claims would require further examination and study which my project, unfortunately, does not currently allow for.

The LGBT communities at large in ‘Western’ nations such as America have increasingly begun to move into digital, online spaces such as blogs, social media, community forums, and organization websites. Amateur artists who identify as LGBT and/or create content that contains non-heterosexual characters as the protagonists often utilize these online spaces to (informally) publish their art, promote their work, and gather an audience. LINE Webtoon provides one such space for these artists to publish their creative works.

¹⁴ Ibid., 34.

¹⁵ Literally meaning “rotten girl”, an in-group term used to refer to women who are fans of the BL genre.

LINE Webtoon¹⁶ is the digital hosting platform for comic artists globally predominantly using the long-strip comic format known as the webtoon. Webtoons, known outside of Korea as “webcomics” (in English), as a comic medium originated in South Korea in the early 2000s and are distributed and formatted for digital devices such as computers and smartphones wherein the scrolling feature is most heavily used¹⁷. LINE Webtoon was launched globally in July 2014 by South Korean corporation Naver as a digital publishing platform for both amateur and professional comic artists. For the amateur artists that use LINE Webtoon, their works are predominantly self-published via the Discover service.¹⁸

In this thesis I will analyze a small selection of manga titles to explore how these manga negotiate their genre conventions and the changing definitions, understandings, and interpretations of masculinity, male sexuality, and gender in contemporary Japan.

I will examine how masculinity and male sexuality is represented in a small sample of Boys’ Love work. I have chosen three Japanese manga which include: Enzō’s 2015 *Mother’s Spirit* (*Mazāzu Supiritto* マザーズスピリット), Junko’s 2012 *Under the Umbrella with You* (*Kasa no shita, futari* 傘の下、ふたり), and Munō’s 2016 *All Night Long* (*Ōru naito rongu* オールナイトロング).¹⁹

¹⁶ <https://www.webtoons.com/en/>

¹⁷ Dal Yong Jin, “Digital Convergence of Korea’s Webtoons: Transmedia Storytelling,” *Communication Research and Practice* 1, no. 3 (2015): 194.

¹⁸ <https://www.webtoons.com/en/challenge>

¹⁹ The year listed with each manga title correspond with the year the bound books were published, rather than with the year(s) the titles were published in magazines. Magazine publishing dates can often span over several months or years depending on the frequency in which the magazine is published and when initial publication began.

I chose the manga based upon the following: First, the title has been published between the years 2010 to 2018. Second, one or more of the male characters internally monologues their attraction to another male character, or one or more male characters verbally addresses their sexual identity. Thirdly, sexual intercourse (penetrative anal sex) occurs at least once within the narrative. And fourthly, the two main characters verbally agree to pursuing or further continuing a relationship after sexual action has been introduced. I chose single-volume manga instead of a multi-volume manga series to remove as much deviation from the main narrative as possible. Multi-volume manga tend to include ‘oneshots’ – one-chapter stories about characters detached from the main narrative in order to fill length requirements for publishing – or ‘side-stories’ which present multi-chapter narratives featuring previously minor characters to give readers (and the artist) a break from the main characters. I also chose these titles from prior personal interest and knowledge of the works and their respective artists.

By using these criteria in selecting the manga, I have created a sample of BL from Japanese artists that have portrayed non-normative identities in men in manga presenting male-male romances as exceptions to what would be considered normative behavior. What I will show in this project is that visual portrayals of masculinity and male sexuality in BL, are positioned between being a mirror of the contemporary society that has influenced the creators and a fantastical ideal of a society that could be. The manga present male-male romance and sexual interaction as a part of the everyday that meets little to no social conflict despite narrative awareness that such conflicts exist.

In this thesis I have separated my manga into three chapters. In the first chapter, I will analyze *Under the Umbrella with You* by Junko and explore how the manga presents common BL narrative conventions in a contemporary Japanese context. In the second

chapter I will analyze *Mother's Spirit* by Enzō and explore how this manga uses the idea of the foreign to distinguish the 'other' through body, practice, and speech. In the third chapter I will analyze *All Night Long* by Munō and explain how the narrative uses the public and private settings to create spaces of sexual exploration. I will conclude by drawing each of these manga together in order to show how the Boys' Love genre of manga have begun to shift to reflecting aspects of contemporary Japanese society while retaining their foundations as a female fantasy narrative genre for relationships idealized through male-male romance.

II. *Under the Umbrella with You: Conventions in a Contemporary*

Narrative

Junko's 2012 volume, *Kasa no shita, futari (Under the Umbrella, with you)*, is a coming-of-age tale divided into two parts across five chapters and an *omake* (おまけ), or extra chapter. Its focal characters begin their story as a high school student and college student, respectively, and conclude as working-class adults. The pages of this story are filled with drama and melancholy as two young men grapple with their own feelings toward each other across the passage of time and the symbolism of the rainy nights and a borrowed umbrella that progress their story forward. This manga, while presenting elements that reflect contemporary societal expectations of men in Japan, predominantly presents readers with an idealized version of society where non-normative relationships between men are able to thrive so long as they are able to fulfill some of their societal obligations, which, in this manga, is education and employment.

The manga opens with a nameless teenager taking shelter from the rain on the first floor of an apartment building. Hanging on the bars of a window is an unattended, black umbrella. As the teen reaches for it thinking he's just caught a lucky break, the male occupant of the apartment appears to seemingly stop the teen from taking what belongs to him. However, he hands over the umbrella to the teen with the instruction that there is no need to return the umbrella when the weather clears up and that he is giving the umbrella to the teen. When the occupant returns inside his apartment, the teen reads off the name on the plate next to the door, 柚木 [Yugi], and thanks him as he leaves.

Figure One: The first meeting of Yugi and Mio.



The teen doesn't remain nameless himself for much longer, as a small panel on the bottom of the volume's thirteenth page shows the nameplate at a home, 三尾[Mio], and someone calling the name 恵介[Keisuke].²⁰ Mio is being scolded by a female character one could assume to be his mother to return the umbrella to whomever it belongs. Although Mio tries to tell her that he was told to keep it, his mother insists it be returned and he carries it with him to school. Mio arrives to school with two nameless male friends and they spot a familiar female student. Mio smiles and waves to her but the girl grimaces and walks away.

²⁰ For this volume, as characters are usually referred to by their last names, I will also refer to them by last name.

When his friends question the girl's reaction and Mio responds that he "didn't do nothing"²¹, he friends claim that Mio is likely more troubled for failing to keep his girlfriends and getting dumped rather than outright rejecting those that ask him out.²² Mio ponders this statement as well as he wonders why that even if he goes through the motions of dating – phone calls, texts, going on dates, sex – he is being told repeatedly by his girlfriends that it doesn't feel as if they are truly dating. Yugi's face briefly appears in Mio's memory as he wonders if he should try dating someone older, which he refutes after a short pause, reminding himself that Yugi is a man despite the erotic feel about him.

Mio's remarks about the erotic air about Yugi here marks the first of multiple instances when Yugi is designated as an object of sexual desire, but it is also a moment wherein Mio presents readers with how he understands himself within the expected rules of relationships. Mio doesn't particularly feel anything romantically towards the girls who approach him but has no reason to turn them down, with the exception of the girls he finds particularly ugly.²³ The fact that it is implied that Mio been dumped multiple times by different girls gives readers a sense that he is popular amongst girls at his school most likely for his looks.

Mio's viewing of Yugi at this moment is an observation of his appearance in hindsight. When the two had their brief encounter over the umbrella, there was no sense in that moment that Mio found Yugi physically attractive. However, when Mio returns to

²¹ Rough translation of the phrase “なんもしてねえよ”. Junko ちゅん子. *Kasa no shita, futari* 傘の下、ふたり. (Tokyo: Kaihosh Publishing, 2012), 15.

²² “来る者拒まずな上に釣った魚にエサはやらないたいな Rather than not accepting ones who come, it's not giving bait to a caught fish, isn't it?” Ibid.

²³ “(よほどブスじゃなきゃ)断る理由もねーし. (Unless she's really ugly) I've also got no reason to refuse.” Ibid.

Yugi's apartment to return the umbrella, Mio appears to be more observant of how Yugi looks – especially so with the sudden entrance of Tachibana, one of Yugi's college friends whom is formally introduced after roping Mio in for a game of mahjong when they needed an extra player. Tachibana's push to have Mio join in for a game bothers Yugi who tries to stop him as Mio, a high school student, has no business hanging out with college students who would be drinking and smoking. Mio, however, accepts Tachibana's invitation upon seeing Yugi's bothered expression. Mio sweeps the game – thanks to some experience with his grandfather²⁴ – and amid being introduced to the group, reaffirms to himself that his observation of Yugi being erotic was no fluke.²⁵

After this, Mio continues to frequent Yugi's apartment noting that Tachibana is a regular sight in the apartment and that anyone else present varies by the day, but Mio categorizes the entire group at Yugi's apartment as “the gathering spot for no-good students with seriously too much free time”.²⁶ However, the more Mio is around Yugi, the more that he is perplexed by the erotic air about Yugi and the fact that a man has captured his attention in this way. One night as Mio goes to leave Yugi's apartment, he is loaned the umbrella again to shield himself from the pouring rain which Tachibana slightly protests as the umbrella actually belongs to him. However, since Tachibana is drunk and likely to spend the night at Yugi's, Mio is sent off with the umbrella anyway. Mio returns not long after as he realizes that he's left behind his cell phone and notices the window by the door is open. When he peers inside, he witnesses Tachibana and Yugi having sex. Shocked by the sight, he

²⁴ “死んだ爺さんが超一麻雀狂いでしこまれたんですよー My dead grandpa was a mahjong fanatic and he trained me.” Ibid., 21.

²⁵ “やっぱエロいわ Like I thought, he's erotic.” Ibid., 23.

²⁶ “マジでヒマをもてあましたダメな学生たちのたまり場だ”Ibid., 24

reasons to himself that the odd sensuality about Yugi was because of Yugi and Tachibana's sexual relationship.

Although Mio attempts to blackmail Yugi into having sex with him to keep silent about witnessing the sexual relationship with Tachibana and fails, Mio only seems to become increasingly interested in Yugi, even going so far as to quietly wish for Yugi to only look at him. It isn't clear how much time passes following this encounter, but one night in Yugi's apartment an announcement is made by one of their unnamed friends that Tachibana will be getting married to his girlfriend, whom Tachibana himself reveals is two months pregnant. Although initially shocked, Yugi congratulates Tachibana – much to the anger and confusion of Mio. Mio appears to have believed that Yugi and Tachibana were in a relationship with one another since he was aware that the two had been having sex with one another for some undisclosed period of time. This conclusion could make sense if it is assumed that Mio had only had sexual encounters while in relationships himself and, as noted in his earlier inner monologues, Mio considers sex as a routine part of what was expected in a relationship. Thusly, Tachibana to Mio would appear as a cheater for having romantic relationships with Yugi and another girl at the same time. However, Mio's knowledge of the situation was only limited to the small amounts of information provided to him by Yugi and his own observations of the group at Yugi's apartment.

At this point, Yugi explains that he was aware of the girlfriend that came as a bombshell announcement to Mio and that there was a sense of a mutual understanding between the two college students that their relationship was, in a sense, detached from something. This sense of detachment likely refers to a romantic connection between the two men as Yugi refers to their relationship as "something like sex friends" rather than calling Tachibana his lover. However, Mio can see that although Yugi claims there to be a detachment, Yugi was still

hurt emotionally by the announcement of Tachibana's wedding. In an attempt to both console Yugi and satisfy his own desires, Mio initiates sex between himself and the older student. However, Mio notices that his emotions are not reaching Yugi²⁷ and is overcome by so much loneliness²⁸ in the morning when he leaves the apartment that he doesn't return.

Mio stays away from the apartment long enough for the season to change to winter but is prompted to return when he is found by one of Yugi's friends. This friend tells Mio that Yugi is packing up his apartment to move back to his parents' home with the intention of not returning. When Mio runs to the apartment, Yugi has packed everything away into boxes except for the lone, black umbrella that belongs to Tachibana. When Yugi hesitates in responding to Mio's question of what his plans are for the umbrella, Mio breaks the umbrella by slamming it into the wall, yelling at Yugi for trying to save the item keeping him attached to Tachibana when he's tried to get rid of it before.

Yugi confesses that he had hoped the last he would have seen of the umbrella was the first time he gave it to Mio, but "as if it could see through my heart"²⁹, the umbrella Yugi tried to throw away returned. Yugi then confesses that he had continued to hold romantic feelings for Tachibana despite knowing their relationship would not work out. Mio, holding Yugi in a tight embrace, asks for Yugi to consider him as a romantic partner³⁰. Yugi rejects him and leaves, concluding the first part of the manga.

²⁷ “触って 入って 今体は確かに交わっているのに 視線も声も一度として交わらなかった I am touching him, I am inside him... Right now our bodies are certainly connected and yet our gazes and our voices haven't connected even once.” Ibid., 73-74

²⁸ “俺こんなに虚しくなったことないよ 好きな人抱いてこんなに淋しくなるなんてこと知らなかったよ I didn't know it would be empty like this. Having sex with the person you like...I didn't know that I would become lonely like this.” Ibid., 79-80

²⁹ “俺の心を見透かすみたいに戻ってきた” Ibid., 90.

³⁰ “俺じゃだめなの Am I no good?” Ibid., 92.

Figure Two: Mio and Yugi meeting again four years later.



The second part of the manga begins at the fourth chapter. Through an internalized monologue, readers learn from Mio that four years have passed since the ending of the previous chapter. He is 20 years old, working at a small company, and is popular among his female coworkers for being good-looking. When he goes to a project meeting with a higher-up from his office, he meets Yugi again, and becomes upset that just seeing Yugi – just when he thought he wouldn't – brings back the emotions he felt four years ago. However, whereas

Mio admits to being emotionally stuck in the past, Yugi claims to have forgotten about Mio in the time that has passed.

Later on, the two work more closely together when an issue arises with something Yugi is working on and Mio steps in to help. The two are in the office for a whole night to correct the issue, with Yugi appearing to be moved by how Mio has grown since they last saw each other. Mio starts to lean in to kiss Yugi but stops when he sees Yugi getting a call from Tachibana. Yugi claims that their contact is casual, but when Mio opens a subsequent text from Tachibana, it contains a request to meet in-person. Frustrated that Yugi is also emotionally trapped in the time from four years ago, Mio leaves the office. However, later, Mio shows up to the hotel where Tachibana plans to meet Yugi before Yugi arrives. He confronts Tachibana regarding his intentions for meeting Yugi considering how serious Yugi was about him four years ago. Although Tachibana initially resists telling Mio his circumstances, he explains everything when Mio admits having feelings for Yugi. Mio doesn't like how Tachibana frames the story, however claiming that Tachibana uses Yugi's consent of the circumstances as "justification to take advantage of Yugi"³¹.

Before Mio can get any angrier with Tachibana, Yugi arrives – even though he had been listening to the conversation while hiding behind a pillar. Yugi then tells Tachibana that he only came to tell him goodbye. Yugi then tells Tachibana that the umbrella he couldn't get rid of and was ultimately broken by Mio was the last thing that Tachibana could leave with him – that there was no longer a physical item keeping the two of them connected any longer. Tachibana accepts this goodbye with a slight smile and sends Yugi and Mio on their way. It is raining again, so the two share Yugi's umbrella. As they walk, Yugi admits that his past actions hurt Mio, who was only a child at the time and begins to say something about the

current situation but is interrupted by Mio. Mio then asks Yugi once again the same question he had asked of him four years ago: “Am I no good?”. Yugi and Mio’s story concludes with the pair kissing in the rain under the umbrella.

A. Social Groups

The first differing social group this manga tackles are the differences between high school-aged and college-aged students. Yugi’s age when he initially appears is intentionally vague, but readers can infer almost instantly that Mio is a high school student just based upon the uniform clothes he wears. In the entire first part of the manga, Mio is seen wearing his school uniform whereas if Tachibana had not explained that he, Yugi, and the rest of their friends were college students then there was nothing about their manner of dress to distinguish them as being more than adults of some vague age and employment status. The ages of the college students are further distinguished later in the first part when Tachibana is identified as a fourth-year student with Yugi and another reappearing friend as his *kōhai* (後輩), or underclassmen. Mio’s own age in the first part is also fairly vague as readers don’t have a clear idea of how old he is outside of a moment in the second part when his coworker explicitly mentions Mio being 20 years old. It can, from that point, be estimated that Mio was around 16 years old in the first part and likely a second year at school.

It could be inferred that Mio himself understood Yugi as being older considering he a) had his own apartment and b) appeared in Mio’s memory when he considered dating someone older rather than someone in his age group. It is at this point of recollection that sparks Mio’s initial interest in Yugi – even if he quickly refutes the idea based on Yugi’s perceived gender. Mio’s attraction to Yugi remains one-sided throughout the first part of the

³¹ “...あんたはそれを大義名分にして柚木さんにつけこんだんだろう” Ibid., 137.

narrative when he is a high school student, and it is unclear by its conclusion as to whether or not Yugi reciprocated any of these romantic feelings before leaving his apartment. Mio's attraction for Yugi is explicitly different from how he describes his own prior relationships with girls. In the relationships Mio had with girls, his actual feelings appeared to be disconnected from the 'actions of dating'. Towards Yugi, Mio is clear to himself that his pursuit of reciprocated affection is an emotional endeavor. This is shown through Mio's constant observation of Yugi, his possessiveness in wanting Yugi to turn his gaze away from Tachibana and towards himself, his anger concerning Tachibana's actions towards Yugi, and, most of all, how he was emotionally hurt when Yugi did not reciprocate his romantic feelings even after being sexually involved.

Tachibana plays a key role in Mio's inability to completely win over Yugi in the first part of the narrative and returns as the primary obstacle interfering with Yugi and Mio's relationship in the second part of the narrative. Tachibana speaks less in the first part than he does in the second part, but in place of speaking, readers can understand his character through his expressions. As readers do not learn of Tachibana's circumstances until the second part of the manga, Tachibana's expressions are the only means to assess his relationship to Yugi. A perfect example of this is when his marriage is announced. The announcement itself and the commentary by the array of unnamed and mostly unseen friends are filled with excitement demarcated by multiple exclamation marks and jagged speech bubbles to indicate heightened tones and emotions, however, Tachibana looks completely disinterested. He only smiles momentarily when he speaks in a mockingly effeminate manner when the others congratulate him, but when Yugi offers congratulations, his expression returns to its initial, disinterested state. Another example is in the moment Mio sees Yugi and Tachibana having sex through Yugi's window. Both Yugi and Tachibana's expressions show

their arousal, but as Tachibana is the *seme* (攻め), or the partner who would assume the male sexual role in a heterosexual relationship, his expression shows excitement in such a way that Yugi's cannot. The dynamic between the two in this specific scene, to put it bluntly, is that while Tachibana is being sexually satisfied through the sexual act itself, Yugi is finding sexual satisfaction in Tachibana's being satisfied by him.

When questioned by Mio as to why himself, Tachibana, and the others are able to waste so much time in his apartment, Yugi responds by saying that Tachibana is on a suspended sentence³², implying the short-term nature of their true relationship that both Mio and readers would learn of shortly after. However, when Yugi moves away at the end of the first part, readers could believe that it would also signal the end of the connection to Tachibana. However, as Tachibana's intentions and motives regarding Yugi were still unknown, it was unsurprising that he would return in the second part of the narrative as well.

At this point, Mio and Yugi are both office workers with Yugi likely employed by a larger, more formal firm than Mio's based upon their respective working attire. As they are reunited by their companies collaborating on a joint project, it could be assumed that the companies are within commutable distance from one another which would in turn lead to the assumption that Yugi has moved back into town. I would say it is more likely that Yugi would have moved over Mio as in Mio's opening monologues, he implies that he never expected to see Yugi again following the events in the years prior. Office jobs as salarymen would be the expected type of employment outcome for men in Japanese society as a sort of middle-class ideal. Mio, Yugi, and Tachibana always being associated either with being in students or with full-time work keeps them aligned with their expected societal roles.

³² 執行猶予, or 'Stay of execution'. Ibid., 29.

Working together also presents Mio and opportunity to try to spark a romantic connection between himself and Yugi, but he is once again thwarted in his efforts when he notices that Yugi is still in contact with Tachibana. Unlike Yugi and Mio, Tachibana is revealed to not be working in an office job in the second part of the manga. Instead, he has inherited his family's business that he assumedly now runs with his wife as he was the oldest son in his family.³³ When Mio learns this, along with learning that Tachibana would have inevitably returned to his family home upon graduation even if he didn't impregnate his at-the-time girlfriend, Mio remembers how Yugi referred to Tachibana as being on a 'suspended sentence' earlier. An important fact to note is as the girlfriend-turned-wife is only mentioned in passing, none of the three men seem worried about her feelings as it can be assumed that even in the first part she was left in the dark about how 'friendly' Yugi and Tachibana were. She potentially could have thought her husband headed to the city for work-related purposes or to meet an old friend without knowing that this 'friend' could be having sex with her husband.

Tachibana's wife aside, outside of the one scene early in the first part where Mio's mother appears, there is no mention of either Mio or Yugi's families and family backgrounds. It could be expected that should Mio and Yugi's relationship progress past the end of the presented narrative, their respective families could potentially become involved if they choose to disclose the nature of their relationship. If they would choose to not disclose their relationship, there is the potential that their families could push for heterosexual marriages that would yield natural children. In the case that this would be the outcome, Tachibana serves as a symbol of the inevitable return to the heteronormative expectations of men in society – married men in stable employment with a wife and children. As it is unclear

³³ Ibid., 135.

as to what Tachibana's intentions were for his union with Yugi on that particular day, if we assume it was intended to end in a sexual encounter, then Yugi and Tachibana's relationship would have been one of an adulterous nature.

B. Rain and Yugi's Apartment

For the first part of the manga, most of the story develops in and around Yugi's apartment. It is where Mio first meets Yugi by chance, where Mio meets Tachibana and the other college students, where Mio realizes he finds Yugi attractive, where Mio witnesses Yugi and Tachibana having sex, and where Mio and Yugi have sex for the first time. As long as the characters are within the space of the apartment, none can move forward in their lives. Thusly, when a character is forced to move forward, they also move away from the confines of Yugi's apartment. Mio is the first to leave the apartment after realizing that his romantic feelings for Yugi were not reaching the college student following their sexual encounter. He says in a monologue that he did not return to the apartment as he could not face what Yugi would or would not say about the night the two had sex.³⁴ As soon as he returns to the apartment when he learns Yugi is leaving, however, Mio becomes confined by his desire for Yugi and acts according to this desire in attempting to sway Yugi to returning his romantic affections. Yugi's purpose of moving out of the apartment is not entirely clear, although Mio and readers are told that Yugi is at a point in his academic career where he already has a job ready for him when he graduates, but Tachibana's marriage announcement seems to be playing a factor.

³⁴“あの夜のことについて彼が何を言っても言わなくても俺はきっと耐えられなかった Concerning the things of that night, what he would say and what he won't say, I certainly could not bear it.” Ibid., 82.

When the narrative resumes in the second part of the manga, Mio, Yugi, and Tachibana are all able to move forward as the action is no longer taking place in Yugi's apartment. Where they had been stifled into inaction by the apartment, the larger sphere of the city outside of the apartment allowed the group more freedom to act. Mio certainly took more actions in regard to confronting Tachibana about his 'using' Yugi's compliance to an unequal sexual relationship as a selfish and self-satisfying action, but Mio also for the first time verbalized his romantic feelings for Yugi. Mio and readers also hear Tachibana speak on his relationship with Yugi for the first time in the entire narrative once he is no longer associated with that apartment and group of friends that spent time there. Yugi is also able to allow himself to metaphorically close the door on the past that the apartment represented and move past the romantic feelings he once held towards Tachibana and possibly towards becoming more receptive towards reciprocating Mio's romantic feelings.

The narrative is set in some version of contemporary Japan in a modestly sized suburban city. Although the initial time of year is not clearly marked by means of words, it is marked by the weather and by clothes. In the beginning, everyone is wearing clothes such as short sleeves, layered shirts, cardigans, and cargo shorts, but by the end of the first part they're bundled in long sleeved shirts, thick coats, and scarves. From the change in clothes, it would be probable to imagine that the temperature has lowered which is most commonly caused by a change in season. Upon my reading of the manga, my estimate is that the first part of the story begins in late summer or early fall (late July to mid-August) and concludes after the beginnings of winter (late October to mid-November), with the second part of the story resuming in the beginnings of winter four years later. I choose these points in time as the rain showers portrayed in the manga do not appear to be preludes to more severe weather patterns such as typhoons which would have been indicators of early to mid-summer weather in

Japan, nor would the temperature be low enough for the rain to become snowfall as most likely in mid to late winter.

The rain in this manga is also an important part, not just as a narrative marker of time, but also as a narrative catalyst to push the story and characters forward. The scenes where it is raining are scenes where the truth of the situations of the characters become revealed. However, just as the rain reveals, the umbrella is positioned to conceal. The narrative can begin because Mio is caught in a rain shower and Yugi hands over his umbrella. Yugi's desire to get rid of the umbrella signifies his relinquishing of his shield to conceal something about himself. Although this isn't learned until much later, the umbrella served as a physical representation of Yugi's connection to Tachibana. Attempting to give away that connection meant that Yugi was not only trying to metaphorically detach himself from Tachibana but to also remove the means of concealing this relationship. However, because he is limited in action from his own apartment being the meeting place of his and Tachibana's friend group and he was unable to move past his romantic feelings toward Tachibana, the umbrella returns to him. The second time it rains, the umbrella once again leaves with Mio with Tachibana and Yugi remaining in the apartment. As the shield has once again been removed, Yugi and Tachibana's relationship becomes exposed. However, as Mio is in possession of the umbrella at the time, his reaction has become shielded as when he leaves, his expression is blank.³⁵ Tachibana's umbrella is broken by Mio as the first part of the narrative concludes which represents both Mio forcibly severing the connection between Yugi and Tachibana and Mio removing the means by which Yugi could hide his feelings for Tachibana. As soon as the umbrella is broken, Yugi tearfully confesses his feelings for Tachibana – feelings that he had kept hidden because he still had that physical representation of his connection to Tachibana.

³⁵ Ibid., 37.

The final scene where it rains follows the conclusion of the confrontation with Tachibana and Yugi has a new, lighter colored umbrella that he shares with Mio. While the rain reveals to Mio the opportunity to reintroduce the idea of himself as Yugi's lover, this new umbrella shields readers from the knowledge of whether or not Yugi will respond positively to this idea to allow the pair to begin the first steps toward a possible romance.

C. Conclusion

Junko's 2012 manga, *Under the Umbrella, with you*, presents readers with an idealized relationship of two male characters who conform to normative expectations reflective of contemporary Japanese society. Mio's pursuit of Yugi follows conventions of early boys' love narratives wherein male characters that are popular with women choose to romantically pursue men.³⁶ Although Tachibana follows this trope as well, it is only to a lesser extent as his relationship with Yugi is only sexual, and that he eventually chooses his wife and child over continuing to pursue a sexual relationship with Yugi. Mio's pursuit of Yugi was in line with how he believed romantic relationships developed – an arguably naïve understanding of relationships considering that Mio was initially unaware that one could engage in sex without being in a romantic relationship. However, at several points throughout the manga readers are reminded that Mio is an object of desire by women, even if he actively chooses not to pursue a normative relationship.

The manga reflects contemporary society in three ways: education, employment, and marriage. All of the characters begin at some level of education with Mio being in high school and the remainder being in college. Several the college students are also actively searching for jobs while they finish up the bulk of their university work. By explicitly placing

³⁶ Akiko Mizoguchi. "Male-Male Romance by and for women in Japan: A History and the Subgenres of 'Yaoi' Fictions," *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal* 25 (2003): 52.

the group as students, it gives some excuse to their constant presence within Yugi's apartment other than to just laze around as if they had nothing to do. The active job hunting – or in Tachibana's case, inheriting a family business – also solidifies some amount of value in following what is expected of them by society after their education is complete. Mio and Yugi both eventually end up working in office buildings in salaryman-typed jobs. As the salaryman is one of the ideal middle-class occupations in contemporary Japanese society, the fact that both Mio and Yugi were able to earn these jobs means that they could essentially move through society in any way they pleased as they have already fulfilled a major expectation in getting decent jobs. Tachibana is the only character to get married and have a child in this manga, but his marriage announcement serves as a recall to the social expectations of men in Japanese society. It was assumed that once the marriage was announced, Tachibana would be returning to his family's business to work and become the primary earner, or breadwinner, for his new family.

By positioning this narrative as both an ideal and a reflection, this manga contributes to the ideas of shifting identities by presenting a way in which the ideal can still succeed while in conversation with the normative expectations of society. Junko follows the conventions of Boys' Love manga through the romance of Mio and Yugi while presenting Tachibana as the representative of contemporary societal expectations that these idealized relationships could either choose to confront and challenge, or to submit to and follow along with.

III. *Mother's Spirit*: Usage of Foreigners and the Foreign

Enzo's 2015 volume, *Mazāzu Supiritto (Mother's Spirit)*, is set within the boundaries of a university. It presents readers with main characters that come from different cultural backgrounds but find common ground in love. The manga's strategic use of the 'foreign' – the foreign body, the foreign language and practice, and the foreign land – renders the story an idealized conception rather than a reflection of contemporary society. In this chapter I will describe how the usage of foreign in this manga is used as a means of distinguishing the 'other' or non-normative in an idealized society.

Tsutsuzuki Ryōichirō (筒月稜一郎) is a twenty-seven-year-old employee in Academic Affairs at Kōjō University tasked with hosting a special exchange student by the University's Board Chairman. Tsutsuzuki is told that the student hails from a small, isolated island village tribe called the Luta (ルター) that the Chairman finds to be 'excellent' due to their physical abilities, potential intelligence, and beautiful appearance.³⁷ Tsutsuzuki is asked to be the primary helper in the student's day to day life as the Chairman expects this student to have difficulty adjusting to Japanese society. Tsutsuzuki was chosen to take in the male student since he is currently single as the international department's staff – to whom the task of hosting exchange students would fall – is comprised of married individuals with daughters of marrying age.³⁸

³⁷“このルター族という人々は並外れた身体能力、潜在的知能さらにはそれはそれは美しい容姿をも兼ね備えたとても優秀な部族なのです The Luta people have and extraordinary physical ability, also potential intelligence that combined with a beautiful physical appearance are a superior tribe”. Enzo エンゾウ. *Mazazu Supiritto マザーズスピリット*. (Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten, 2015), 14.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

The student arrives in Japan during the late summer holiday. As per his instructions, Tsutsuzuki is expecting a 16 to 20 year old warrior named Qaltaqa³⁹ (カルタカ) who will become the tribe's next chief.⁴⁰ Although Tsutsuzuki doesn't have a photograph of Qaltaqa as he waits for him to arrive at the airport, he is able to identify Qaltaqa easily as he is tall and wearing what appears to be a tribal mask. As Tsutsuzuki tries to introduce himself, Qaltaqa suddenly embraces him in a tight hug. Struggling to free himself from the unexpected embrace, Tsutsuzuki accidentally knocks the mask off Qaltaqa's face – revealing the islander's handsome face which catches the attention even of those around them. Qaltaqa leans in closer to Tsutsuzuki, mumbles something in his native tongue, and collapses to the ground.

After struggling to bring Qaltaqa to his apartment, Tsutsuzuki is exhausted. He thinks about calling the Chairman to suggest changing Qaltaqa's arrangements, but right as he's about to do so, he notices the dictionary of the Luta language the Chairman had provided for him. Tsutsuzuki looks up the word he heard Qaltaqa say at the airport and learns that it means "scared".⁴¹ He realizes that Qaltaqa was likely afraid because the forms of travel Tsutsuzuki finds to be ordinary like flying in airplanes and driving in cars⁴² would be foreign

³⁹ This is how the name is spelled by the author. Ibid., 7 & 23.

⁴⁰“氏名カルタカ...恐らく 16 から 20...っておいおい狩りの腕は確かで村の若者達のまとめ役...ルター族次期首長として名高い誇り高き戦士... Name Qaltaqa...Age Unknown...Perhaps between 16 and 20...hey hey... I am certain he has hunting skill and is the mediator of the village's young people... The next chief of the Luta celebrated as a proud warrior...” Ibid., 21.

⁴¹ Ibid., 32.

⁴²“彼からしたらあんな大きな乗り物に乗せられて突然空を飛んだり箱に入れられて街中をすごいスピードで走ったりそりゃ混乱もするか... For him to ride on a big vehicle and suddenly fly in the sky or getting into a box and travel through town at amazing speeds, of course confusion happens...” Ibid., 33.

to someone who has never experienced them. Qaltaqa begins to wake up from where he had been resting on the couch, and Tsutsuzuki attempts to introduce himself again only to realize that Qaltaqa has been unable to understand him this entire time in either Japanese or English. Tsutsuzuki decides to do his best despite the language barrier but worries if he will be capable of handling the task set before him. This is especially the case since he wakes up with Qaltaqa in his bed despite giving him a futon in another room, the bidet function of the toilet scares Qaltaqa into running out of the bathroom naked, and Tsutsuzuki has to initially bathe Qaltaqa himself to teach him how to work the shower.

The university sets aside a special class for Qaltaqa to learn English and Japanese prior to the official start of the school term. However, Qaltaqa seems to refuse to speak to Tsutsuzuki in Japanese despite being willing to speak in English with the Japanese man. Tsutsuzuki thinks Qaltaqa may hate him, but later learns from the Chairman that Qaltaqa spoke no Japanese because “he thought it impolite that he could not do the exact pronunciation”⁴³ of Tsutsuzuki’s name as names are important in Luta culture and wanted it to be his first spoken Japanese.⁴⁴ The Chairman is also the one to explain to Tsutsuzuki that Luta sleep together with their families and suggested that Tsutsuzuki move Qaltaqa’s futon at least to the same room as Tsutsuzuki’s bed.

Three months after Qaltaqa arrives, the weather begins to become cooler which Tsutsuzuki learns is uncommon on the islands Qaltaqa grew up on.⁴⁵ While Qaltaqa watches

⁴³ Ibid., 66.

⁴⁴ “初めて話す日本語は世話をしてくれる君の名前がいいと言ってね それで他の日本語を口にできなかったですよ He asked for help for your name to be his first spoken Japanese. He would not speak any other Japanese.” Ibid., 67.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 77-78.

the television, he sees a couple kissing and Tsutsuzuki explains that it is a way of showing affection to a person you like.⁴⁶ Qaltaqa then demonstrates to Tsutsuzuki how the Luta show affection through offering one's soul to the other person by kissing the palms of their hands before kissing Tsutsuzuki on the lips. Tsutsuzuki tries to tell Qaltaqa that men don't kiss each other to show affection, but Qaltaqa takes a liking to the action and refuses to heed Tsutsuzuki's request. It is unclear as to why Qaltaqa enjoys the act of kissing as his only verbal justification of doing so is that he wants to do so with Tsutsuzuki.⁴⁷

Figure Three: First appearance of Aqnam



⁴⁶ "...好きって意味だよ!!大切な人や好きな人にするんだ It's meaning is to like.// You do it with an important person or person you like." Ibid., 83

⁴⁷ Ibid., 99.

One night, as the two are leaving the university, Tsutsuzuki is startled by someone standing in front of his car. It turns out to be another young man named Aqnam (アクナム)⁴⁸ from the Luta. Aqnam declares that he has come to Japan to find Qaltaqa a wife⁴⁹ as there are very few women remaining in their village. Aqnam, also invited to the university by the Board Chairman, begins his efforts of wife-hunting by inviting Qaltaqa out sightseeing with a group of female students. However, Aqnam doesn't find any of the female university students suitable to be a wife for Qaltaqa.⁵⁰ Aqnam also notices Qaltaqa's interest in Tsutsuzuki. When he brings that up with him, Qaltaqa responds that being near Tsutsuzuki reminds him of the earth, wind and waves of their village⁵¹, and that he finds his trip to Japan worthwhile since meeting Tsutsuzuki.⁵²

The next day, Aqnam confronts Tsutsuzuki, claiming the Japanese man is “in the way” of his efforts to find Qaltaqa a suitable wife.⁵³ Tsutsuzuki feels Aqnam is too focused on the wife-hunting while Qaltaqa wants to stay focused on his studies, but Aqnam feels that studying is pointless and that the Luta should actually remain the way that they are instead of

⁴⁸ Unlike Qaltaqa's, Aqnam's name is never written out by the author so this is only an estimate of how his name may be spelled.

⁴⁹ “ワタシはカルタカが一番のお嫁さん探します I find for Qaltaqa the best wife.” Ibid., 106.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 131-132.

⁵¹ “不思議とな傍にいと故郷の大地や風いだ波風のおい It is strange to be near him. Like the earth of our native land and the smell of wind and waves, I am calmed.” Ibid., 135.

⁵² “あいつに会えただけでも遠い二ホンへ来た甲斐があったと思えるものだ Even if I just met him, I thought it worthwhile to come to far away Japan.” Ibid., 136.

⁵³ “リョーはジャマと思ひマシタ I think Ryō is in the way.” Ibid., 143.

learning about foreign cultures.⁵⁴ However, Tsutsuzuki disagrees saying Qaltaqa's hard work has been for the sake of all of the Luta.⁵⁵ Although both Aqnam and Qaltaqa leave their village for Japan to help their people prosper, they have differing ideals as to how to do so. Aqnam believes that the Luta can continue to grow by literally growing in size by means of bringing in women to give birth to children. Qaltaqa, similarly to the Board Chairman who invited him, believes that learning about other cultures and technologies can help the Luta find new ways to survive in the changing world.

Later that night, Qaltaqa thanks Tsutsuzuki for standing up for him by kissing him again. Tsutsuzuki protests again saying that Qaltaqa should kiss girls that he finds cute and wants to be with⁵⁶, but for Qaltaqa all of those descriptors fit how he feels about Tsutsuzuki.⁵⁷ While they are kissing, Tsutsuzuki notices Qaltaqa has an erection and he proposes that the two have sex. Sometime afterwards, Qaltaqa decides that he will return to the island with Aqnam. Tsutsuzuki, despite being saddened by the events understands and sees Qaltaqa and Aqnam off at the airport. There, Tsutsuzuki kisses Qaltaqa's palms when they part following the Luta custom and Qaltaqa kisses Tsutsuzuki goodbye. As Tsutsuzuki watches the plane leave, he admits to having fallen in love with Qaltaqa. Tsutsuzuki resigns himself to let go of those feelings as he believes he will not have the chance to see Qaltaqa again.

The season changes to spring and Tsutsuzuki is frightened when his boss, the Board Chairman, and Qaltaqa all appear in the office wearing Luta masks. Seeing that Tsutsuzuki is

⁵⁴ Ibid., 146-147, 150-151.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 154-156.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 164.

⁵⁷ “可愛い一緒にいたい好き全部お前だ Cute. I want to be with you. I like you. All is you.” Ibid., 165.

confused, the Chairman explains that Qaltaqa simply returned to the village to begin arrangements for a support group and would be returning to the school since the procedures for this support group have been started.⁵⁸ Tsutsuzuki is almost immediately embarrassed by his actions at the airport, admitting that he had prepared himself to give up on his feelings for Qaltaqa. Qaltaqa, however says that he wants to marry Tsutsuzuki and has told the other Luta that he cannot be the village chief as he will live in Japan for now.⁵⁹ Qaltaqa asks Tsutsuzuki to return to the island with him once his studies are completed⁶⁰, and despite knowing that it may be difficult for him to adapt to a foreign land, Tsutsuzuki agrees asking Qaltaqa to allow him to become his wife.⁶¹

A. The University and the Luta Islands

Kōjō University in Japan serves as the primary location for the narrative of this manga. The Luta island is the second location, but it is never shown, only referred to as Qaltaqa and Aqnam's place of origin. Hence, readers only able get to see the people of the Luta Islands, never the islands themselves. Although the university would appear as an ordinary setting to most readers, Japan and this particular Japanese university are drawn as dramatically foreign and strange places for Qaltaqa. The land that should be familiar to readers becomes an object of 'foreign'. This is because it is likely that readers, much like Tsutsuzuki, have never questioned the kinds of technologies used in their everyday lives.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 197.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 200.

⁶⁰“あの地でいっしょ生きるあの地で死ぬしたいお前とオレといっしょ帰ろうリョーイチロー In that place, we will live together. In that place I want to die with you. Return with me Ryōichirō.” Ibid., 202.

⁶¹ “...君のお嫁さんにしてください ...Please allow me to become your wife.” Ibid., 206.

One of the first times readers experience the setting as foreign is in Tsutsuzuki's reflections on Qaltaqa's reactions to the various forms of transportation the Luta warrior had experienced.⁶² Tsutsuzuki realizes that what he considers ordinary would be unbelievable to anyone who had never experienced these things before.⁶³ Most of Tsutsuzuki's internal reflections following these incidents tend to be more focused on Qaltaqa's actions on their own rather than Qaltaqa's reactions based upon the change in environment which were discussed in the previous section. However, when the temperature turns colder, Qaltaqa does provide more information in how Japan is different from the Luta Islands.

The Luta weather is constantly warm and has many beaches, mountains, fish, animals, and other pretty things.⁶⁴ Qaltaqa tells Tsutsuzuki about these facts after seeing a television broadcast about a beach in Japan. This differs from Japan as it is implied that seasonal changes are marked by means other than the temperature or not at all. As Qaltaqa is unfamiliar with the changing temperature, he is unaware that it is necessary to wear more or less clothing as appropriate for the season. Tsutsuzuki does not find this aspect of the Luta Islands strange as he does desirable as he expresses interest in visiting the Luta following learning about the weather.

When Aqnam comes to visit Japan, readers learn in a flashback that the tribe of Luta that Qaltaqa and Aqnam come from has more men than women which is causing an issue in the continuation of their village. Although the exact number is unclear, it appears that the Luta

⁶² See note 42.

⁶³“自分にとっては当たり前の物だったけど彼にとっては信じられない出来事ばかりだったのか... For me that was an ordinary thing, but for him nothing but unbelievable incidents have happened...” Ibid., 34.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 78-80.

would be a cultural race of people made up of several tribes across several villages. Qaltaqa and Aqnam's village is also apparently one of the last that have not utilized modern advancements.⁶⁵ However, Aqnam brings up the question of whether changing the Luta's current way of life vis-à-vis Qaltaqa's studies in Japan will truly inspire growth and prosperity for their people. Aqnam believes that finding Qaltaqa a wife to have children with will be sufficient enough for their tribe to continue on, however Qaltaqa believes that the two of them "should not continue with the ordinary just for the sake of the Luta" and that a "new wind" must be found in order for their village and the Luta to continue to prosper.⁶⁶ Aqnam's concern mirrors that of contemporary Japan where news of a decrease in population raises concerns over continuation of the Japanese nation, but is paired with the idealistic proposition that studying another culture could bring about an answer to such concerns rather than just importing women to give birth to children.

⁶⁵“他部族に目を向けるとわかる普通の生き方を続けているのは今やもう我らくらいのものだ Look toward the other tribes and understand. Even right now we still continue the old ways of life as before.” Ibid., 140.

⁶⁶“...ただ存続するだけではルターのためにはならない母なる魂を継いでいくには新しい風が必要だ... ..We should not continue with the ordinary just for the sake of the Luta. To inherit the Mother's spirit a new wind is necessary...” Ibid., 158.

B. Luta Bodies



Figure Four: Front cover art featuring Qaltaqa and Tsutsuzuki

As readers see Tsutsuzuki and the other Japanese university members first, these Japanese characters become situated as members of the normative group. By establishing them as members of the normative group, introducing the ideas of exchange students and the people of the Luta are instantly separated as being ‘foreign’. Tsutsuzuki is depicted as having dark colored hair and eyes, pale skin, does not appear to have any muscular build or tone, and appears to be tall in comparison to his boss and the University’s President – both of whom who are short chubby elder men. Although Tsutsuzuki’s hair could be assumed to be black, the coloring of his hair is lighter at the top which would make it more likely that his hair is dark brown in color rather than black. He is first seen wearing a white button-down shirt with

the first button unfastened, grey slacks, and a dark-colored lanyard with what is likely some form of identification attached.

The first introduction Tsutsuzuki and readers have to the people of the Luta tribe come from the Board Chairman. Although the art shows a small panel with two male-appearing figures that could be Luta persons, the exact appearance is unclear to Tsutsuzuki who has never met anyone belonging to the Luta. The president calls the intelligence and physical abilities of the Luta people “並外れた” which translates as “uncommon” or “extraordinary”, indicating that the Luta’s mental and physical capacities are beyond what the Board Chairman had expected of any human persons.⁶⁷ A reader could assume that the Luta people are likely physically active to the extent that it builds up muscles and are knowledgeable about their island home and environment, but not knowledgeable to the extent that they are aware of the goings on beyond their island communities. Here the Luta are presented as physically superior to the Japanese people but lacking a means to grow in intellect. The Luta people are likely physically fit to suit the demands of their island environment, but without exposure to other cultures they are intellectually stifled by the boundaries of their villages.

Prior to Tsutsuzuki seeing what Qaltaqa looks like, from the description provided by the Board Chairman, readers can estimate that Qaltaqa would likely be fairly muscular and good-looking. When he is first seen at the airport in his mask, he appears significantly taller than Tsutsuzuki and the others in the airport around him, including two supposed ‘foreigners’. With the mask on, Qaltaqa is identified as the foreign Luta – inaccessible to the culture of Japan. When Qaltaqa’s mask falls off, revealing his face, the faces of Tsutsuzuki and two female characters in the background flush with color – indicated by diagonal stipes – and the

⁶⁷ See note 37. *Ibid.*, 14.

character for beauty is written in the frame.⁶⁸ While still being physically perceived as foreign, removing the barrier of the mask allows Qaltaqa to begin to be accepted by the Japanese people around him. Qaltaqa's position as being 'foreign' is introduced as a kind of spectacle of something abnormal, or outside of what one expects to see in a public space. However, whereas seeing a tall figure in a mask creates feelings of unease and confusion, seeing a particularly handsome man standing tall in a crowd would draw feelings of surprise and attraction.

This attraction is further shown by the crowds of female students that would gather around Qaltaqa. These students are attracted by Qaltaqa's (and later Aqnam's) handsome features and often swoon over simply hearing Qaltaqa say the word *suki* (好き) or 'like'.⁶⁹ In the case of Tsutsuzuki, Qaltaqa's attractive features often cause Tsutsuzuki to be unable to protest Qaltaqa's actions such as when Qaltaqa sleeps in the bed with him⁷⁰ or the number of times⁷¹ when Qaltaqa kisses him (prior to the confirmation of their feelings for one another). Tsutsuzuki considers Qaltaqa's beautiful features as a thing to be feared, as just seeing Qaltaqa smile can cause his face to flush red.⁷²

For most of the narrative, Tsutsuzuki wears a button-down dress shirt and slacks as his work attire at the University. He only is drawn wearing a tie in the scenes where he meets Qaltaqa at the airport, and he is seen in sweaters, coats, and cardigans when the weather changes to cooler temperatures. While in his apartment, Tsutsuzuki wears a t-shirt or long-

⁶⁸ Ibid., 27.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 94.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 43 & 60.

⁷¹ Ibid., 87, 92, 100 & 163.

⁷² “美形怖い... A beautiful form is scary...” Ibid., 74.

sleeved shirt and loose pants. Qaltaqa, is almost always seen in a fitted black tank top and white cloth pants that are held up by a rope-belt. When the weather changes, Tsutsuzuki is the one to make him wear a sweater to keep warm. After that, his wardrobe remains the same with only one additional layer of a jacket or cardigan depending on if he is outside or in Tsutsuzuki's apartment. During the time Aqnam is in Japan, he is only seen wearing a shawl-like cloth and white pants. While the decision to limit their outfits could be an artistic choice since the narrative only lasts for one volume, it also divides the characters between those who are Luta and those who are Japanese. The clothes worn by Aqnam and Qaltaqa are less restrictive than those worn by Tsutsuzuki, the Board Chairman, and other Japanese characters. The clothes worn by the Japanese characters that are given focus are business attire that more likely inhibit a free range of movement that would be necessary in the Luta village. The clothes worn by Qaltaqa and Aqnam in Japan are worn for the sake of assumed modesty as in the small glimpses we receive of standard male Luta dress the men are topless with only cloth skirts wrapped about their waists.⁷³ If the standard Luta dress had been worn by Qaltaqa and Aqnam in Japan, their characters would have been much more sexualized which could have done harm to Qaltaqa's intention on focusing upon learning about the Japanese culture. For Qaltaqa to learn, he would have to be able to somewhat blend into a crowd and only wearing a cloth skirt would only draw more attention to himself and his body.

⁷³ Ibid., 140.

Figure Five: Example of Luta clothing



C. Marking the Foreign

Within Mother's Spirit, distinct lines of foreignness are drawn between the Luta and Japanese characters through language and action, or practice. However, within each of these groups, there are also markers of hierarchy in social positions. Qaltaqa, Aqnam, and Tsutsuzuki are the three characters that best highlight these separations and positions. For Tsutsuzuki, he is initially listed as a "staff" of Educational Affairs and of the University staff persons shown, is at the bottom of the chain of power. Above him is the head of Educational Affairs, then the University's President, and lastly the Board Chairman at the top of the

power chain. It is partially because of this power chain that Tsutsuzuki is chosen. The other reason he is chosen is because he is a single male staff person and the department that would typically house exchange students has staff persons who are married with daughters of marrying age.⁷⁴ Tsutsuzuki's higher-ups decided that it would not be a good idea to have a single male student in a home with available women and thus entrusted the job to their single, male staff member.

Whereas Aqnam travels to Japan to follow Qaltaqa, Qaltaqa is chosen by his village to represent the Luta and study in Japan. This is likely because as he is expected to become the village's next leader, it would be more of a diplomatic choice for Qaltaqa to leave rather than anyone else. In this way, once he learns the things he is able to in Japan, Qaltaqa would already be in a position to more readily implement change for his village. Aqnam, although his position in the village is more unclear, would likely not have the power and support to enact change if his motives had been the same as Qaltaqa's. IN fact, Aqnam's motives of finding Qaltaqa a wife among the women of Japan is motivated by a necessity to increase the number of children born in the village due to an overall lack of available women. However, by the end of the narrative, Qaltaqa ends up asking Tsutsuzuki to be his wife despite knowing Tsutsuzuki is male. It would seem that his usage of the term 'wife' would simply mean any marriage partner rather than specifically a female marriage partner.

Within the narrative, although characters such as Qaltaqa and Aqnam are speaking Japanese so that readers and other characters can understand them, the author uses a lot of katakana in place of certain words. Usually katakana is used for foreign loanwords in Japanese but has increasingly found usage as ways to identify non-native speakers of Japanese in literary dialogue in texts such as manga. In the case of Qaltaqa and Aqnam, the

⁷⁴ See Note 38.

Katakana is used in their speech to identify sounds in the Japanese language that are not used by the Luta. The rest of their dialogue is written in hiragana and kanji. However, there are some inconsistencies in which sounds are difficult for Qaltaqa and Aqnam to pronounce as occasionally the kanji or hiragana for a word will be used where previously a katakana character had been used. When Qaltaqa and Aqnam use the Luta language around Tsutsuzuki or other Japanese characters, the author has inserted some symbols or lines to symbolize that the Luta language is being spoken. It should also be noted that when Qaltaqa and Aqnam and other Luta members are speaking to one another in their native tongues, the amount of katakana used in their dialogue decreases significantly.

In addition to the language, the Luta characters are also deemed as foreign based upon their actions. The first of these being Qaltaqa's confusion with flying, driving, video calls from cell phones, and showering. His confusion stems from the fact that he has never been exposed to these technologies while growing up in his village on the island. Qaltaqa's primary reaction usually consists of him yelling loudly at the object or action causing his confusion as well as at Tsutsuzuki so that the Japanese man can explain to him what was happening. Primarily, however, Qaltaqa is seen as foreign in continuing to follow cultural norms of the Luta. Two times before asking a reason why, Tsutsuzuki wakes up in the same bed as Qaltaqa.⁷⁵ The Board Chairman explains to him later that sleeping in the same area is a custom of the Luta, and Tsutsuzuki changes the sleeping arrangements so that Qaltaqa is at least sleeping in the same room with him rather than in a separate space.⁷⁶ Another example is in the instance when Tsutsuzuki asks Qaltaqa about how Luta show affection following Qaltaqa asking about the kiss he saw on the television. Qaltaqa tells Tsutsuzuki about the

⁷⁵ Ibid., 43 & 60.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 71-72.

“passage of the soul”⁷⁷ of the Luta where one gives their soul to the person they desire to be with by kissing the palm of the other person’s hands.⁷⁸

D. Conclusion

In *Mother’s Spirit*, the foreign is established and molded in a few different ways. The use of foreign is merely a means of highlighting the non-normative through means of the body, speech and practice, and land. If the setting used in this manga were read as being an idealized conception of society then it could be potentially fair to assume that there is no present fetishization or colonial intent in the narrative. However, the apparent fetishization of the foreign body is shown not only in the desire of the female students to be seen out and about with Qaltaqa and Aqnam, but also in how Qaltaqa is artistically designed. Qaltaqa (and Aqnam) are both dark-skinned with markings on their faces resemblant of stereotypical tribal paint designs. Although Aqnam wears clothing that covers most of his body during his stay in Japan, Qaltaqa is most often seen in a tight-fitting tank top and cloth pants that stop a little below his knees and is held on his waist by a rope. Even when the narrative makes note of the temperature lowering, the most Qaltaqa wears is one jacket over his usual outfit. In addition to this, the Board Chairman’s concept of ‘civilizing’ an entire culture of people would read as a form of colonization if this manga were intended to be a reflection of society. Clothes, language, action, and location can either align one with the majority of people around them or isolate them as being an ‘other’. If this othering is for means of spectacle it could further isolate those who are considered ‘others’ or ‘foreign’. If one wishes “to inherit

⁷⁷ “魂の通り道ってやつかな” Ibid., 84.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 84-86.

the mother's spirit",⁷⁹ as Qaltaqa wants for the Luta, influence into – or from – the 'foreign' is necessary.

⁷⁹ “母なる魂を継いでいくには新しい風が必要だ...手を貸してくれアクナム To inherit the mother's spirit a new wind is necessary...Lend me your hand Aqnam” Ibid., 158.

IV. *All Night Long*: Public and Private Spaces

Muno's 2016 story, *Ōru Naito Rongu* (*All Night Long*), is about two college students using each other in order to explore their own understandings of romance and sexuality. The two main characters explore these understandings by establishing an open relationship with each other that eventually leads them both to their first monogamous relationship with each other. Through this open relationship, one character hides his rejection from his peers due to his sexual identity through acts of purely sexual encounters while the other character tries to find a new place in society by openly exploring the pursuit of a male sexual partner. Where in previous chapters the setting of the university has functioned as an object of observation, in this chapter the university setting dominates both the public and private spaces as a location of exploration. In this chapter I will be using the change in the relationship between the main character to explore how the larger university setting allows the kinds of explorations of the self that the two focal characters undergo to understand changes in themselves and in their social positions in order to define or redefine themselves as it relates to their sexualities.

This manga opens with Akashi Noboru (明石昇) confessing to his two friends before the beginning of a class that he has been wondering if he might be homosexual.⁸⁰ Akashi is concerned about this after feeling out of place despite having dated women as he feels is appropriate for college students his age.⁸¹ As Akashi tries to figure out a cause for his

⁸⁰ “俺ホモかもしれないんだけど どう？ I think I may be a homo but, what do you think?” Muno ムノ. *Ōru Naito Rongu オールナイトロング*. (Tokyo: Ichijinsha, 2016), 8.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 5 & 7.

potential change in sexual interest, they take notice of an *ikemen*, or good-looking male, classmate seated in front of them because of his cell phone disrupting class.⁸² One friend recognizes that other student as an upperclassman from his high school who was rumored to be a homosexual and who had never denied those rumors.⁸³ Akashi's friend suggests that Akashi should try getting into a relationship with their *ikemen* classmate if Akashi truly wishes to determine if he is indeed a homosexual.

Akashi decides to follow his friend's suggestion and approaches their classmate, Yagi Tomohiro (八木智宏). Yagi, thinking he recognizes Akashi, takes Akashi into a small room and kisses him.⁸⁴ When a confused Akashi explains to Yagi that the two have never met⁸⁵, Yagi realizes that he's 'outed' himself because of his mistaking Akashi for a different man he was going to meet.⁸⁶ Once the misunderstanding is cleared up, Akashi confesses to Yagi his concerns over being gay himself and says he wants to try being with another man.⁸⁷ Despite

⁸² Ibid., 8-11.

⁸³“先輩があの人に告白されたとか他にえげつない噂もあったけどホモだっというのは本人も否定してないらしいよ Such things as confessing his love to an upperclassman and other nasty rumors existed but it seems that the person himself did not deny being a homo”. Ibid., 13.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 17-18.

⁸⁵ “あ八木さんとは初対面ですけど Ah, this is my first-time meeting Yagi-san, however”. Ibid., 18.

⁸⁶ “うっ...こんな形で大学の奴にゲイバレするとか... Ugh...so this is the way I come out to some college guy...” Ibid. The term used in the manga is “ゲイバレ *geibare*” which is likely a newer slang term for being outed as gay due to one's own actions. I have not found any clear definitions of the term and have only found it used on blog-like websites (See References). However, I have translated it here as “come out” as at the point the statement is made Yagi is unaware that someone else informed Akashi of his sexuality.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 21-22.

initially protesting over being perceived as someone who would have sex with anyone who asks⁸⁸, Yagi agrees to becoming sex-friends (セフレ) – something akin to “friends with benefits” in English, or a purely sexual relationship – with Akashi.⁸⁹

Once their relationship begins, Akashi is called to Yagi’s apartment twice per week in what Akashi thinks of as an “indulgent sexual relationship”.⁹⁰ However, Yagi appears to be avoiding any potential romantic development in his and Akashi’s relationship as he kicks Akashi out of his apartment as soon as they have finished having sex – sometimes even without giving Akashi enough time to finish dressing himself.⁹¹ Akashi finds that this arrangement makes him feel lonely, but is unable to discuss his relationship to Yagi with his friends as he promised to keep Yagi’s sexuality and their relationship a secret.⁹² While trying to avoid his friends’ suspicions, Akashi comes across Yagi on campus. Yagi’s friend, who later introduces himself as Nomura Junichi (野村淳一), appears and asks if Akashi and Yagi are friends as he recalls seeing Akashi from the first time he called out to Yagi. Yagi denies that he and Akashi are friends and leaves, later sending Akashi a series of text messages warning him not to speak to him at school.⁹³

⁸⁸ Ibid., 23.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 26.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 35-36.

⁹¹ Ibid., 38-39.

⁹² Ibid., 24, 40-41.

⁹³ “校内で/話しかけんなっただろ/二度と/許せいぞ Within the school/I told you not to talk to me didn’t I/Never again/Will I forgive you” Ibid., 44.

That night, Akashi goes to Yagi's apartment when invited, deciding to himself that he will tell Yagi that he wants to pursue a "more ordinary" – or more romantic – relationship⁹⁴, but is unable to resist Yagi's sexual advances.⁹⁵ Unlike previous times, Yagi does not rush Akashi out of his apartment which Akashi finds odd. Instead, Yagi apologizes for his earlier behavior by explaining to Akashi how his crush on a *nonke*, or straight, upperclassman in high school led him to be careful about exposing his sexuality to other straight men.⁹⁶ It is during this conversation that Akashi realizes his feelings for Yagi, however, he also realizes that Yagi likely only sees him as a sex-friend and decides not to confess his feelings for Yagi.⁹⁷ Instead, Akashi tries distancing himself from Yagi by not going to meet with him as often, but this doesn't last long after Akashi's curiosity in seeing Yagi at his part-time restaurant job propels Akashi to meet with his sex-friend again.⁹⁸ The scene that follows at Yagi's part-time job is short, as its focus is to bring attention to the potentially high and diverse ages of Yagi's previous sexual partners. However, for Akashi, it appears to give him additional personal validation for seeking a romantic connection with Yagi to distinguish himself as being different from Yagi's previous sexual partners.

⁹⁴ “セフレじゃなくてもっと普通の— Not sex friends but (something) more ordinary” Ibid., 48.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 51-54.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 56-57.

⁹⁷ “好きだって気づいたのに/好きと言えないのか 八木さんにとって/俺はただのセフレなんだった Even though I realized I liked him, I can't possible say that. As far as Yagi-san in concerned, I'm just and ordinary sex-friend” Ibid., 62.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 72-73.

Figure Six: Yagi at his part-time job



At school, Akashi's two friends invite him out for drinks as they notice Akashi is worried about something again and assume his worries to still be concerning his sexuality. Akashi is then suddenly called out by Yagi's friend, Nomura, who wants to speak to Akashi about Yagi. Nomura asks Akashi if he has noticed Yagi acting strangely as Yagi has no other friends Nomura could speak to.⁹⁹ Akashi tells Nomura he would try to contact Yagi but feels uneasy about telling Yagi about speaking to Nomura. Akashi believes that Yagi's previous

⁹⁹ Ibid., 101-102.

rude behavior towards him at school, as well as Yagi's claim of having "had enough with *nonke*" – or straight men – at Yagi's apartment, had to do with Nomura.¹⁰⁰ Realizing Yagi may have feelings for Nomura, Akashi rushes to Yagi's apartment. When Yagi appears to be worried when Akashi mentions having spoken to Nomura, Akashi asks Yagi outright if he has feelings for Nomura. Yagi tells Akashi that Nomura is only a friend, to which Akashi confesses his romantic feelings for Yagi. Akashi demands Yagi explain how he feels about Nomura, but Yagi refuses and Akashi leaves.

Depressed by the possibility that Yagi does not think much of him¹⁰¹, Akashi ends up missing a class the next day.¹⁰² His worried friends ask if it had to do with Yagi, to which Akashi admits having confessed his feelings to Yagi and it being "no good".¹⁰³ Suddenly Yagi appears in the classroom and pulls Akashi away to go speak with Nomura. Akashi, believing that Yagi is only bringing him along to watch him tell Nomura that he likes him, begins to cry calling Yagi "cruel".¹⁰⁴ Yagi, in an attempt to stop Akashi from crying, says he also likes Akashi and that he wants to make the distinction between Akashi and Nomura clear.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 58, 106.

¹⁰¹ “八木さんにとって俺はなんでもなかったのかな こんなのを考えてた中で一番恐れてたこたえだ To Yagi-san was I of no concern? Out of all of such predictions, I am most afraid of that answer” Ibid., 117.

¹⁰² Ibid., 118.

¹⁰³ “好きって言ったんだ八木さんにでもだめだった I said, ‘I like you’ to Yagi-san, but it was no good” Ibid., 119.

¹⁰⁴ “酷い” Ibid., 132.

¹⁰⁵ “だからけじめつけに行くんだよ That's why I am going to make a clear distinction” Ibid., 135.

They find Nomura outside, and Yagi tells Nomura that he had been hiding his feelings for him but that he is giving up on those feelings. Nomura admits to having had noticed but kept quiet since he has a girlfriend. Nomura also explains to Yagi that he would not stop being his friend just because he learned about Yagi being interested in men.¹⁰⁶ After talking with Nomura, Akashi and Yagi go back to Yagi's apartment. The manga concludes with Akashi and Yagi discussing how their new relationship with each other is the first time either of them are in love.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ “なんでそんなので友だちやめるんだよ～ Why would I abandon a friend for something like that～” Ibid., 141.

¹⁰⁷ “俺にとっては初恋みたいなもんです For me this is something like a first love” Ibid., 150.

A. Character Visualizations

Figure Seven: Mio and Yagi



Akashi has brown hair and stands at likely slightly above average height. However, there is no indicator within the narrative of the manga that Akashi's looks are distinctly noteworthy. Akashi also tends to dress fairly plainly throughout the narrative wearing predominantly solid-colored shirts under sweatshirts, coats, and cardigans with jeans or light-colored bottoms.

This is contrasted with Yagi who, despite also dressing plainly, draws more attention for his looks than Akashi. Yagi has black hair that's long enough to be pulled into a short

ponytail¹⁰⁸ and stands shorter than Akashi. Akashi and his friends refer to Yagi as an *ikemen* early on in the manga, but while *ikemen* are expected to be more fashionable, it appears from the reactions of Akashi and his friends that attractive features are the most important factor in other men acknowledging another man as an *ikemen*.

The only other reoccurring characters are Akashi's two friends and Nomura. Akashi's younger sister also appears but only briefly, likely as some sort of means to establish that Akashi hails from a normative household whereas there is no mention of Yagi's family. Akashi's two friends appear to serve a similar purpose as Nomura later notes when he is concerned over not being able to contact Yagi that other than Akashi, Yagi has no other known friends at the University.¹⁰⁹ This could indicate that despite Yagi's attractive features, he doesn't make any efforts to be popular and maintains only the necessary social contact with others at the University. Yagi appears to be significantly more social outside the University as his coworkers mention being surprised at the number of friends that come to see Yagi at his part-time job.¹¹⁰

B. Public and Private Spaces

The University as a setting dominates all other physical settings within this manga as well as each of the characters. As the characters are university students, they conduct their lives in ways rather predictable for university students. However, the university is also a space wherein the students can define, or redefine, who they are as individuals. The manga uses sexual orientation as the subject that can be defined and redefined by those who occupy

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 75-76.

¹⁰⁹ “他に聞けそうな人いないしなあ There is no other person I can ask” Ibid., 102.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 76.

a place at the university. However, Yagi's apartment also serves as a space of definition in a way in that it is the primary location where sexual contact is made between Yagi and Akashi, and where Yagi is questioned about and explains his behavior at the university. Yagi's apartment has limited access to those Yagi allows inside and becomes a private space in comparison to the public space of the university.

The manga opens with Akashi's thoughts about feeling out of place at how he has dated women despite feeling indifferent towards them since becoming a college student.¹¹¹ However, when posing the idea that he might be gay to his two friends, one of them calls his concern "a one-time journey to pass through for men in puberty"¹¹² despite the fact that all three are in their late teens or early 20s. I cannot say if the friend's explanation for Akashi's concern is a socially accepted one for Japanese young men, but it does bring an interesting parallel between the ages of adolescent puberty (roughly from ages 12 to 16) and the ages when most teens and young adults enter college for the first time (roughly from ages 18 to 20) in that both ages are times to question one's own social position. In this case, it is the social normative expectation that men should be romantically and sexually interested exclusively in women that is called into question.

It is implied that Akashi has dated women exclusively up to the beginnings of the manga's narrative, however his dating life appears to be less driven by personal interest than social expectation. When Akashi notices Yagi for the first time and remarks at how attractive he finds him, Akashi still doesn't find his reaction to Yagi's attractiveness anything out of the

¹¹¹ Ibid., 5.

¹¹² “男なら思春期に1回は通る道だろ” Ibid., 8.

ordinary.¹¹³ As a positive reaction to Yagi's attractiveness is ordinary, this causes Akashi to doubt that his sexuality needs redefining. In this case, it is in learning that Yagi is a homosexual that gives Akashi the motivation to pursue a relationship out of personal interest rather than social expectation. Yagi's acceptance of Akashi's pursuit then allows the possibility of Akashi redefining himself as a homosexual as well.

In redefining himself as homosexual, Akashi has the desire to be openly romantic Yagi. However, Yagi refuses to be seen with Akashi while at the university so all of Akashi's explorations of non-normative sexuality occur within Yagi's apartment. This is, of course, with the one exception of when Yagi goes to Akashi's house because Akashi's train stop is closer than his own.¹¹⁴ It is within Yagi's apartment where all of Yagi and Akashi's sexual encounters happen at least eight times in a month as the two meet twice per week.¹¹⁵ There is no specific reason given to this specific arrangement however, keeping in mind that Yagi and Akashi are university students, it could possibly be that their individual personal schedules only overlap twice per week.

Their relationship remains strictly sexual in nature with hardly any time for the two to socialize outside of sex as Yagi almost always promptly removes Akashi from his apartment once the two are done having sex. Akashi tends to lament this lack of socializing as he desires a more romantic relationship that cannot be realized by remaining as Yagi's sex-

¹¹³ “でもそれじゃただのミーハーぽくない？ But isn't it just an ordinary, poser-like (reaction)?” “だろー？ だから分かんないんだよねえ Right-? That's why I don't understand.” Ibid., 10.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 80.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 33.

friend.¹¹⁶ So where Akashi can explore his definitions of the self by sexual means at Yagi's apartment, he has to search for his social definitions outside of Yagi's apartment and at the university. Akashi is also limited in how much information regarding his sexual relationship with Yagi he can discuss with his friends, so much of his exploration is done through internal monologue. In rare instances, Yagi does socialize with Akashi inside his apartment, but only does so when explaining his actions at the university in order to keep his and Akashi's sexual arrangement on good terms. In this case, despite still being attached to the University, Yagi has created an additional exploration space within his apartment that is limited in that those sexual and social interactions do not cause attention to be drawn to himself at the university.

C. Terms of Identification

As Yagi and his apartment have created a limited space of exploration outside of the university, it would be appropriate to measure how normative or non-normative characters are by viewing them in comparison to Yagi. Interpersonal relationships are the predominant ways in which characters can be considered normative and those relationships tend to center around either romantic or sexual desire – particularly when it comes to the relationships involving Yagi. One of the ways to distinguish normative versus non-normative is distinguishing the 'homo' from the '*nonke*'.

The term homo is used mostly by Akashi and his friends to refer to men who are attracted to other men. Their understanding of such an attraction appears to be a type of physical attraction but is not inherently sexual. Instead, the physical attraction was linked to emotions such as romantic desires as indicated by Akashi's statements of no longer feeling "excited"

¹¹⁶ “初めて出会いからその後特に改善の余地もなく There also wasn't particularly room for improvement since after the first time we met” Ibid., 35.; [See also Note 94]

¹¹⁷ by girls as he does when he notices Yagi for the first time.¹¹⁸ However, it should be noted that Akashi's usage of 'homo' instead of 'gay' implies a social distinction in the terms. In work by Mark McLelland, he finds that Japanese media entertainment industries often discuss homosexuality alongside topics such as transgenderism. Whereas transgenderism does not appear explicitly in this manga, the use of the term 'homo' would bring such images to the minds of Japanese readers. However, in McLelland's research he notes that a Japanese magazine calls the term 'homo' offensive.¹¹⁹

Yagi is the only character in the narrative to use the term 'gay' and he only does so twice: once to highlight Akashi's nervous demeanor in approaching him¹²⁰ and once when confessing his orientation and feelings to Nomura.¹²¹ As Yagi has already presumably accepted that he is only attracted to men, it would make sense for him to use the term 'gay' to refer to himself. In this sense, 'gay' becomes an in-group way of identifying oneself as homosexual. This is instead of using the offensive term 'homo' that is used by Akashi and his friends. Thus, Akashi's use of the term 'homo', although offensive, is to identify himself to others like Yagi as someone who is not homosexual. This is reinforced by Yagi using the

¹¹⁷ "...なんか気持ちがり盛り上がらないんだよなあ ...it's something like I didn't feel excited, you know?" *ibid.*, 8.

¹¹⁸ "ああいうイケメン見てるとドキドキする！ When I look at that Ikemen my heart pounds!" *Ibid.*, 10.

¹¹⁹ Mark J. McLelland, "Is There a Japanese 'Gay Identity'?" in *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 2, no. 4 (2000), 461.

¹²⁰ "あんなゲイみたいにモジモジしながら寄ってくんじゃねーよ！ Don't approach me while fidgeting like some gay (person)!" *Ibid.*, 19.

¹²¹ "ゲイなんだ" *Ibid.*, 138.

term ‘homo’ to refer to Akashi as well.¹²² From Yagi’s perspective, Akashi and Nomura belong to the group of ‘*nonke*’.

Nonke, as used in this narrative, is a gay slang term for straight men.¹²³ Yagi is the only one in the narrative to use this term, and he tends to use it in a negative way. To Yagi, a *nonke* is the kind of man he does not want to deeply concern himself with emotionally after having been harshly rejected by one in high school.¹²⁴ However despite not wanting to concern himself with a *nonke*, Yagi did harbor romantic feelings toward Nomura for some time, and even told Akashi that he would not give up their sexual arrangement even if Akashi is straight after all.¹²⁵ The decision to continue their arrangement appears as Yagi’s selfish desire, but also seems to allude to the idea that Yagi also desires a monogamous relationship. Even if Akashi considered himself straight, it is possible for a sexual relationship to continue between him and Yagi as it is not uncommon for straight characters in Boys Love titles to engage in sexual relationships with men while being romantically involved with a woman (similarly to Tachibana in Junko’s *Under the Umbrella with You*).

Yagi and Akashi’s differing views on relationships is a central point of conflict in the narrative. Whereas Akashi’s interest is in pursuing a romantic relationship with Yagi, Yagi appears only interested in a casual and sexual relationship. However, Yagi does have issue

¹²² “そーいやお前は自分がホモかどうか知りたいただけだったな Which reminds me, you only wanted to know if you were a homo or not, right?” Ibid., 68.

¹²³Mark J. McLelland, "Is There a Japanese 'Gay Identity'?" in *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 2, no. 4 (2000), 461.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 56-57.

¹²⁵ “仮にお前がノンケだったとしてもまだやめてやらないよ Even if for argument’s sake you were a *nonke* I won’t stop” Ibid., 68.

with being perceived as someone who will have sex with just about anyone.¹²⁶ We learn more about the potential high number of sexual partners Yagi has had when Akashi visits him at work and two of Yagi's female coworkers mention that Yagi has had all kinds of friends come to see him, likely since the restaurant is far from the college campus.¹²⁷ Yagi even mistook Akashi for one such casual partner at their first meeting. It is likely that his high school rejection caused Yagi to swear off romantic relationships in favor of casual sexual encounters, whereas Akashi has likely only been in formal relationships and therefore is made uncomfortable by the lack of emotional connection his relationship with Yagi presents.

D. Conclusion

In *All Night Long*, the main characters Yagi and Akashi come out of their past experiences into a relationship that comes about because they were part of a larger social location that allows them to redefine who they are by means of sexuality. In the case of Akashi, he questions his prior social position as a member of normative society and searches amongst the non-normative to find a new position where he no longer feels 'out of place'. Yagi, firmly situated as being sexually non-normative, finds difficulty in aligning his 'public' social life as a university student with his 'private' social life where he engages in casual sexual encounters with other men. The two were able to meet as they are both students of the University, however as Yagi keeps his social lives separate, Akashi must learn how to come

¹²⁶“俺どんだけ軽く見られてんだよ/何か？お前ホモなら誰とでも寝ると思うってんの！？ Am I being seen as easy/ or something? Do you think if you are a homo you can sleep with anyone!?” Ibid., 23.

¹²⁷“つまりここは大学からも遠いし安心して今までのセフレにもこうやって迎えにこさせてたってことか In other words, it's far from the university so it is safe to invite sex-friends to meet here” Ibid., 77.

to redefine himself while keeping his explorations a secret. Yagi, as a character, stands as the representative to reflect a social experience many LGBT persons may face in that keeping one's sexual or romantic preferences as a private and casual matter is less likely to cause conflict with the normative masses. Akashi is the one who represents the ideal experience: his friends accept that he is attracted to men immediately and assist him in finding a partner, his partner (Yagi) is accepting of a sexual relationship despite Akashi being unsure if he is attracted to men or not, and he is able to enter into a romantic relationship with his first love that has also never experienced a mutually romantic relationship. As readers follow the narrative from Akashi's perspective, they are given the visualizations that so long as someone is in the right place at the right time, redefining oneself through their sexuality is not only possible but also leads to a happy ending.

V. Conclusion

In each of the manga analyzed, the narratives conclude with a happy ending wherein the main pair of characters enter a romantic, monogamous relationship with one another – a typical conclusion for a romantic story. Romantic narratives like those found in Boys' Love manga create idealized fantasies of the formation of intimate relationships between two individuals. As the majority of consumers of Boys' Love manga are women, these relationships are written to fulfill the interests and desire of this female audience despite that the characters in these relationships are both men. It is through the narrative conventions such as that two men fall in love with each other despite the presence of and popularity amongst female characters that has enabled Boys' Love to grow into its own distinct genre. However, as understandings of sexuality and masculinity have changed over time, the genre of Boys' Love has also shifted to adapt to these changes while still bearing in mind the conventions that the genre is founded upon.

Junko's *Under the Umbrella with You* presents these foundations more openly through the development of the relationship between Mio and Yugi. Mio, who is popular with women in his teenage and adult years, finds himself pursuing an initially one-sided romance with Yugi who is older than him by some undisclosed number of years. While Mio and Yugi's developing romantic relationship serves as the foreground of the narrative, their romance appears only able to progress when both have accomplished the social expectation of being employed in salaryman-typed jobs. Junko begins the shift in changing the Boys' Love genre in creating Mio and Yugi's relationship as the idealized Boys' Love romance that thrives only in being able to conform to the expectations of contemporary society.

Similarly to Junko's Mio and Yugi, Tsutsuzuki in Enzo's *Mother's Spirit* has conformed to societal expectations of employment, however, Tsutsuzuki does not follow any known Boys' Love conventions. Instead, these conventions are applied to the foreign character Qaltaqa. Similarly to Junko's Mio, Qaltaqa is popular amongst the female characters but chooses to pursue a relationship with a man. However, such Boys' Love conventions are not as prominent in Enzo's text. Instead, Enzo chooses to focus on Qaltaqa's status as a foreigner in Japanese society. Fully or partially foreign characters are not uncommon in Boys' Love narratives, however Enzo's usage of foreign characters like Qaltaqa is to distinguish a difference between the Japanese and the 'other'. This means of 'othering' characters like Qaltaqa potentially fetishizes the foreign as a spectacle, but as Qaltaqa is designed as this idealized foreigner rather than a representation of an actual non-Japanese race the society in which Qaltaqa exists is not meant to accurately reflect contemporary Japanese society.

Muno's *All Night Long*, comes the closest to being a reflection of contemporary Japanese society out of the three manga selected for this project. The narrative conventions of Boys' Love are more loosely used here than even in Enzo's work. Akashi would be the likely representative of the Boys' Love conventions as being the only main character that has had experience in romantic relationships with women, he is the only character amongst the three titles that publicly expresses that he believes himself to potentially be homosexual. Yagi is also the only character out of the three manga that is explicitly open about his exclusive attraction to men. As the only manga to use terms such as 'homo' and 'gei' to identify characters' sexualities, Muno's work is closest in conversation with the changes in understandings in masculinity and male sexuality. Muno also poses the exploration of

identity as an ordinary part of life that, for those like Akashi, can potentially lead into happy endings in new romantic relationships.

As the Boys' Love genre continues to grow globally, it becomes increasingly important that the artists of the genre can adapt to how society changes in its understandings of masculinity and male sexuality. These three manga are examples of how the shift has begun amongst some Japanese artists as they attempt to be in conversation with the current societal understandings while maintaining the conventions that makes the Boys' Love genre its own distinct narrative form. For the ways in which other societies understand masculinity and male sexuality through male-male romance narratives as inspired by the Japanese Boys' Love genre, it will be the duty of the artists of those countries to use the Boys' Love genre as the foundation to create their own narratives of male-male romance as reflective of their contemporary societies.

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