Censorship within Japanese Media

and what it represents about Japanese society

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Introduction

Many societies have differing standards on what should be considered "okay" for their members to consume in terms of media. In some countries, violence is heavily censored; in others it's allowed but behind an age rating such as the ESRB, PEGI, or The Motion Picture Association. Looking deeper into what a society will count as "suitable" for certain audiences, we can glean what values said society is trying to uphold and which they are trying to enforce. My project looked at the censorship of Japanese media both in the Japan of modern day, but also in anime exported to America soon after World War II.

4 Finger Issue

Within Japan, the visual of 4 fingers is a large taboo in most media. As shown in the examples above, the presentation of covers and characters within video games have to be changed in order to be compliant with Japanese standards. This is due to an organization known as the *Burakumin Liberation League*. Representing a historically oppressed Japanese underclass, the *Burakumin*, the work to make sure that the imagery of 4 fingers is not used to further oppress this people. Where as most content would not be seen as "offensive" per se, the investigation process of the BLL is quite lengthy and invasive, therefore most companies work to try and avoid these issues entirely by censoring their content for Japanese audiences.

Though, there are loopholes in the way the BLL conducts investigations. For example, if you pay proper "reparations", your content does not need to be censored. In the case of Disney, they have plenty of money to spare to pay these reparations and keep their content identical to it's American branding.

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Anime Censorship in America

Post World War II, America was looking for easy and cheap entertainment to supply the societal boom. Starting with putting Godzilla in theaters, they eventually decided to start airing anime on television as a type of Saturday morning cartoons. This version of anime was heavily censored and Americanized. For example, there was removal of Japanese text in almost every instance of it, being replaced with English and same with any Japanese food being referred to as an American version.

There was also a lot of heavy changes made to the names of characters or locations that referenced religion. For example, in *Yu-Gi-Oh!*, the quite notorious "Shadow Realm" was an invention of the company the localized the show. The orginial concept within the anime was that the souls of the loser got trapped inside of a card. But this was deemed "too dark" for the American youth, and thus changed to a more ambiguous "Shadow Realm".

About Adult Content

One odd thing about Japanese content, is both manga and anime have content that is aimed at every demographic, hitting boys, men, girls, and women's shelves and televisions. With this in mind, there's also the more *adult* side of manga.

A lot of adult manga doesn't just contain heavier violence than that aimed at younger audiences, but it also contains a lot of more taboo topics such as rape or sexual harassment. And while in the US this would probably be seen as an issue as a whole, there has actually been a decent decrease in sexual assault cases within and post 20th century.

This is more than likely due to allowing people to live out fantasies free of judgement, and even being able to look at the consequences of doing these taboo things without any real world consequences. Which allows them to grow and mature from seeing potential horrendous results of these situations.

Manga Localization

There have also been plenty of times where censorship goes "backwards" in a way. Where in the American version is more open about the meaning of certain translations, but in the Japanese version certain wording is changed to not give the same allusions. For example, within a certain panel of *My Hero Academia*, where in the American version it refers to test subjects as *maruta* which was a pejorative towards the victims of Japan's infamous unit 731. But within the Japanese version, they use a much more toned down version of *Garaki Kyūdai.* And this was eventually retroactively changed in the online English publications to match the Japanese wording.

Conclusions

While there is a lot of things that as Americans may see as weird, Japanese society has a reason for censoring the things they do and allowing others.

In cases like the 4 finger issue, it may be seen as a representation of allowing to erase history with just the right amount of money. Or the case of censoring things like the cover of *Abe's Oddysee* but not wanting any of the in-game content changed even though the game itself is a direct commentary on the *burakumin* themselves.

Most of these issues seem to stem from the homogenous culture of Japan, that everyone wants to be seen as the same and standing out can make things more difficult for one's life. Being able to not be seen as lesser, to be able to vent your taboo desires to not let them be shown in public, or to make sure people aren't reminded of potentially horrific events that hit to close to home. There are differences in between the ideas of censorship of America and Japan, but none without their won reason.