

Female Empowerment and Objectification in Contemporary Japanese Anime

Anh, Nguyen Thi Lan¹, Cuc, Pham Thi Thu²

^{1,2}Hanoi University

ABSTRACT: Anime today is filled with women who command battles, outthink opponents, and carry major parts of the story. Yet something uneasy remains beneath that visibility. The more capable female characters become, the more insistently their bodies are turned into spectacle. Intelligence, leadership, and combat ability coexist with exposed costumes, voyeuristic framing, and scenes clearly designed to attract visual attention. In many mainstream Anime works, empowerment does not displace objectification; it is packaged together with it. Many participants did not reject these representations outright. Several respondents appreciated female characters precisely because they were capable, decisive, and difficult to ignore within the story. At the same time, those same viewers often described fan-service scenes as excessive, distracting, or unnecessary. This tension appeared repeatedly throughout the survey responses. Female characters were admired, but the way they were visually framed often produced discomfort rather than empowerment. The findings therefore suggest that contemporary Anime increasingly turns female strength itself into part of the spectacle.

KEYWORDS: Japanese Anime; Female Empowerment; Objectification; Male Gaze; Gender Representation; Fan-service; Visual Culture; Japanese Popular Culture; Media Literacy; Audience Reception

INTRODUCTION

Anime is no longer something consumed mainly inside Japan. Over the last two decades, it has become deeply embedded in global youth culture through streaming platforms, online fandoms, clips shared on social media, and fan translation communities. For many viewers, especially younger audiences, Anime is encountered constantly rather than occasionally. Characters, visual styles, and narrative tropes circulate far beyond their original cultural context, shaping everyday forms of media experience in ways that are difficult to separate from broader discussions of identity, emotion, and gender (Napier, 2005; Cavallaro, 2006).

At the same time, the position of female characters inside mainstream Anime has changed quite noticeably. Women are no longer confined to supportive or secondary roles to the same extent as before. In many recent works, female characters fight, command, strategize, and influence the direction of the narrative itself. Characters such as Usagi in *Sailor Moon*, Mikasa Ackerman in *Attack on Titan*, and Yaoyorozu Momo in *My Hero Academia* are difficult to dismiss as merely symbolic companions to male protagonists. Their visibility reflects broader shifts in how women are represented within Japanese popular culture, although those shifts remain uneven and sometimes contradictory (Orbaugh, 2003; Shamoon, 2015).

Yet the expansion of female agency has not necessarily changed how female bodies are visually treated. In many mainstream Anime works, women who appear intelligent, powerful, or narratively important are still framed through exposed costumes, fragmented camera shots, exaggerated body proportions, and fan-service scenes. Strength and objectification frequently appear together. What makes this contradiction difficult to ignore is that the visual framing often pulls attention away from the character's decisions or subjectivity and redirects it toward spectacle instead. This tension closely resembles what Laura Mulvey (1975) described as the "male gaze," where women are positioned less as subjects within the story than as bodies to be viewed.

The tension becomes difficult to ignore in contemporary shōnen Anime. Female characters are increasingly written as tacticians, fighters, or leaders, yet the camera often treats them very differently from their male counterparts. *My Hero Academia* offers a particularly visible example. Yaoyorozu Momo is repeatedly described within the story as one of the most intelligent students in Class 1-A, but scenes involving her frequently rely on exposed costume design, chest-centered framing, and slow visual emphasis on the body. What stands out is not simply the presence of sexualization itself, but the way competence and spectacle are folded together within the same character. The series asks viewers to recognize Momo's intelligence while simultaneously directing visual attention elsewhere.

Female Empowerment and Objectification in Contemporary Japanese Anime

A similar contradiction appears in scenes involving Mineta Minoru. His voyeuristic behavior is rarely treated as genuinely threatening or disturbing inside the narrative. Instead, it is absorbed into exaggerated humor, reaction shots, and comic timing. Repetition matters here. The more these scenes appear as jokes, the easier it becomes for intrusive behavior to feel normalized rather than questioned.

Japanese scholars have long pointed out that Anime cannot be separated from the commercial structure surrounding it. Ōtsuka Eiji (2010) discusses how character consumption became central to modern manga and Anime culture, while Azuma Hiroki (2009) argues that contemporary otaku culture increasingly encourages attachment to characters themselves rather than narrative coherence alone. Under this logic, characters circulate not only through stories, but through merchandise, visual branding, online fandom, and affective consumption. Female representation is shaped inside that economy.

Research on women in Anime often moves in two different directions. One group of studies focuses on the emergence of active heroines and reads this as evidence of expanding female empowerment within Japanese media culture (Napier, 2005). Another concentrates on fan-service, sexualization, and visual objectification as extensions of gender inequality in popular media (Mulvey, 1975; Allison, 2006). The problem is that contemporary Anime rarely separates these tendencies cleanly. Female characters are not simply empowered or objectified. More often, they are constructed through both at once.

This study examines that overlap through selected scenes from *My Hero Academia* and audience responses from Vietnamese university students. Rather than treating empowerment and objectification as opposites, the study approaches them as intertwined forms of representation shaped by commercial spectatorship, character consumption, and contemporary Anime aesthetics. In many cases, female characters are granted visibility, authority, and narrative importance precisely through forms of representation that also make them visually consumable.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Female Empowerment in Contemporary Anime

The position of women in Japanese Anime has changed noticeably over time. Earlier works often placed female characters around the emotional world of male protagonists. They appeared as caretakers, companions, or symbolic sources of support, while the movement of the story itself remained centered elsewhere. Their presence mattered, but usually in relation to somebody else.

That pattern has become harder to maintain in more recent Anime. Women now appear far more frequently as fighters, tacticians, commanders, or characters whose decisions directly shape the narrative. The shift can already be seen in the popularity of the “magical girl” genre during the late twentieth century. *Sailor Moon* is often discussed as an important example because it linked femininity with collective strength rather than passivity alone. Emotional attachment, friendship, and combat ability were not treated as opposites. Napier (2005) and Orbaugh (2003) both note that these changes opened wider possibilities for female representation within Japanese visual culture.

The tendency becomes even more visible in recent action-oriented Anime. In series such as *Attack on Titan* and *My Hero Academia*, female characters are not pushed to the narrative margins in the same way as before. They fight, strategize, command military units, and at times carry major parts of the story itself. What matters here is not simply that women appear stronger, but that authority and competence are no longer presented as exclusively masculine traits.

At the same time, these changes unfolded alongside larger shifts in Japanese media culture. Azuma Hiroki (2009) argues that contemporary Anime increasingly encourages attachment to characters themselves rather than to narrative coherence alone. Ōtsuka Eiji (2010) makes a similar point when discussing the growing importance of character-centered consumption within manga and Anime industries. Characters circulate through merchandise, online fandoms, visual branding, and affective attachment long after individual stories end. Female characters are shaped inside that economy as well. Their narrative importance cannot easily be separated from their commercial visibility.

As a result, female empowerment in contemporary Anime increasingly develops within commercial systems of visual consumption rather than outside them. Female agency is not simply tolerated by contemporary media industries; it is actively incorporated into marketable character design. Strength, intelligence, emotional resilience, and leadership become commercially valuable attributes when attached to visually desirable characters capable of sustaining fan attachment, merchandise circulation, and transmedia consumption. Under these conditions, empowerment itself becomes aestheticized and commodified rather than functioning as a direct challenge to gendered spectatorship. As Gill (2007) points out, contemporary media culture often presents female empowerment through forms of visibility that remain closely tied to appearance and bodily display. Anime reflects this contradiction quite clearly. Female characters may lead battles, make strategic decisions, or carry major parts of the narrative, while the visual framing continues to draw attention toward spectacle, attractiveness, and consumption.

B. Objectification and Commercial Visual Culture

Discussions of female representation in visual media often return to the idea of the “male gaze,” first proposed by Laura Mulvey (1975). Mulvey argued that mainstream visual culture tends to position women less as subjects within the story than as bodies

Female Empowerment and Objectification in Contemporary Japanese Anime

arranged for visual attention. Camera movement, framing, editing, and spectatorship all play a role in producing that hierarchy of looking.

Although Mulvey developed this argument through cinema, the same logic appears repeatedly in animation and digital media. In Anime, objectification rarely depends only on explicit sexual scenes. Objectification in Anime does not always appear through overtly sexual scenes. Quite often, it emerges through repetition. The camera lingers on certain parts of the body longer than necessary. Clothing becomes increasingly impractical. Fan-service scenes interrupt moments that otherwise have little to do with sexuality. Over time, these patterns begin to shape how female characters are looked at, regardless of how important they are to the story itself. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) describe this process as one in which women gradually become associated more with appearance and visibility than with subjectivity.

What makes Anime more complicated is that these patterns frequently exist alongside female competence rather than in opposition to it. A character may be intelligent, strategically important, or physically stronger than most male characters in the series, yet the visual framing still returns insistently to the body. Strength remains visible, but so does spectacle. Gill (2007) notes that contemporary media culture frequently presents women as empowered subjects while continuing to tie visibility and value closely to attractiveness and bodily display. The same contradiction appears throughout mainstream Anime. Female characters fight, command, and strategize, but the visual framing repeatedly returns to the body.

Japanese scholars have also connected these patterns to larger changes in otaku culture and media consumption. Saitō Tamaki (2011) argues that Anime characters are often consumed through fantasy, affective attachment, and stylized desire rather than realism alone. Lamarre (2009) similarly points out that Anime spectatorship is shaped through visual structures that organize movement, framing, and attention in highly specific ways. Under these conditions, female characters circulate not only as narrative figures, but also as objects of emotional and commercial investment.

This becomes especially visible through fan-service. Objectification in Anime is not always obvious. Sometimes it appears in the way the camera refuses to leave the body alone. A scene pauses slightly too long. The framing shifts downward for no narrative reason. Fan-service enters moments that otherwise have nothing to do with intimacy or desire. After a while, these choices stop feeling accidental. Female characters may dominate battles, solve problems, or carry major parts of the story, but the visual attention directed toward them often moves elsewhere. The body remains constantly available to the viewer, even when the narrative is trying to emphasize intelligence, authority, or emotional depth. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) describe objectification as a condition in which women become increasingly associated with visibility and appearance. Anime frequently reproduces that tension, especially when female competence and visual spectacle are made to coexist within the same character.

C. Audience Reception and Negotiated Consumption

Anime audiences are often discussed as if they simply absorb whatever appears on the screen. Cultural studies research has challenged that assumption for decades. Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model, for example, suggests that viewers may accept some meanings, reject others, or move uneasily somewhere in between. That instability becomes especially visible in the case of Anime, where audiences encounter Japanese media from very different cultural and social contexts.

Responses to female representation in Anime are rarely straightforward. A viewer may admire a female character for her intelligence, emotional resilience, or combat ability while feeling uncomfortable with the way the same character is visually framed. Fan-service does not always provoke strong reactions immediately. Quite often, viewers simply absorb it as part of the atmosphere of Anime itself. A joke passes quickly. The camera lingers for a moment too long. A scene interrupts the narrative just to expose the body again. Some viewers laugh at it, some barely notice it, and others feel uneasy without fully knowing why. Reactions are rarely consistent, even within the same audience member. A person may criticize the sexualization of a character and still remain emotionally attached to that character at the same time.

Anime fandom complicates this further because viewers do not encounter characters only inside the original series. Characters continue to appear everywhere else: clips on social media, fan edits, cosplay events, online discussions, figures, posters, memes. Jenkins (1992) describes fandom as a space where audiences constantly reshape and recirculate meaning rather than merely consuming media passively. By the time viewers return to the Anime itself, their relationship with a character has often already been shaped by many other forms of exposure surrounding it. Ito (2012) notes that otaku culture encourages long-term emotional investment in fictional characters across interconnected media environments. By the time viewers return to the Anime itself, their perception of a character has often already been shaped by many other forms of circulation surrounding it.

This matters because viewers are not responding only to stories. They are also responding to images, character designs, memes, clips, merchandise, and fan discourse that constantly reshape how characters are perceived. Emotional attachment and critical discomfort can therefore exist at the same time.

Within Vietnam, Anime has become deeply familiar among university students and online youth communities, yet discussions of Japanese popular culture often focus more broadly on fandom or cultural influence rather than contradictions within representation itself. Relatively little attention has been paid to how Vietnamese viewers respond when female empowerment and visual

Female Empowerment and Objectification in Contemporary Japanese Anime

objectification appear together inside the same character. That gap becomes increasingly important in a media environment where global popular culture circulates rapidly across digital platforms.

This study approaches Anime not simply as entertainment, but as a space where spectatorship, character consumption, and gender representation continuously overlap. The focus is not only on how female characters are constructed, but also on how viewers interpret, justify, question, or negotiate those constructions.

METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study combines textual analysis with audience survey data in order to examine how female characters are represented and interpreted within contemporary Japanese Anime. The research is less concerned with measuring direct psychological “effects” of Anime consumption than with looking closely at contradiction inside representation itself. The central question is not whether Anime simply empowers or objectifies women, but how both tendencies are made to coexist within the same visual and narrative environment.

The study therefore approaches Anime not only as entertainment, but also as a commercial visual culture shaped by spectatorship, character consumption, and media circulation. Attention is given not just to plot or dialogue, but to framing, costume design, camera movement, fan-service, and recurring visual patterns that shape how female characters are seen. Audience responses are included because these representations do not produce identical meanings for all viewers. Interpretation shifts across cultural background, emotional attachment, and individual viewing experience.

B. Selection of Anime Works

The analysis centers on three widely recognized Anime series: My Hero Academia, Attack on Titan, and Sailor Moon. These works were chosen not simply because of their popularity, but because they place female characters in positions that are difficult to dismiss as secondary or decorative. Women in these series fight, lead, make strategic decisions, and at times carry the emotional and narrative weight of the story itself.

The three series also represent noticeably different parts of Anime culture. Sailor Moon is closely associated with the magical girl tradition and discussions of female solidarity and empowerment. Attack on Titan presents women within a darker militarized world where physical survival and combat authority become central. My Hero Academia, meanwhile, provides a particularly useful case because moments of female competence and moments of visual sexualization often appear side by side within the same narrative environment.

The study does not attempt to represent all Anime genres or all forms of female representation. Instead, these series were selected because they repeatedly reveal the tension at the center of this research: female characters are granted visibility, authority, and narrative importance while simultaneously remaining subject to commercialized forms of visual framing and fan-service aesthetics. Despite these empowering characteristics, the selected works also contain scenes frequently discussed in relation to fan-service, visual sexualization, or gendered representation.

Among these works, My Hero Academia functions as the primary case study because it presents particularly visible tensions between female empowerment and visual objectification. Characters such as Yaoyorozu Momo simultaneously embody intelligence, leadership, and strategic competence while also being framed through highly gendered visual aesthetics. In addition, comedic scenes involving Mineta Minoru provide useful examples for examining how sexually intrusive behavior may be normalized through humor and narrative framing.

C. Textual Analysis

The textual analysis focuses on selected scenes involving female characters, visual framing, and gendered interaction. The aim is not to produce a comprehensive reading of entire Anime series, but to examine moments where female empowerment and visual objectification appear at the same time or move uneasily alongside one another.

Several analytical dimensions are emphasized:

- character agency and narrative role;
- costume design and bodily emphasis;
- camera movement and framing;
- visual fragmentation of the female body;
- dialogue and interpersonal positioning;
- fan-service and comedic sexualization.

Visual framing is especially important in this study because narrative meaning and visual meaning do not always move in the same direction. A female character may be described within the story as intelligent, authoritative, or strategically capable while the camera simultaneously redirects attention toward the body instead. That gap between narrative agency and visual treatment appears repeatedly in contemporary Anime and forms one of the central concerns of this analysis.

Female Empowerment and Objectification in Contemporary Japanese Anime

The discussion draws primarily on theories of the male gaze and visual objectification associated with Laura Mulvey, while also considering later work on spectatorship, fandom, and media commodification. At the same time, the study does not approach Anime through a simple opposition between “progressive” and “oppressive” representation. What matters more are the contradictions themselves: moments where female visibility, authority, commercial spectacle, and objectification become difficult to separate from one another.

D. Survey Participants

To examine audience perception, the study conducted a questionnaire survey with 300 students at Hanoi University. Participants were between 18 and 24 years old and included students both from the Japanese Department and from other academic majors. Of the total participants, 151 students belonged to the Japanese Department, while 149 came from other faculties. Female students accounted for the larger proportion of respondents.

The survey focused less on measuring media effects in a strict psychological sense than on understanding how viewers themselves respond to female representation in Anime. Questions explored viewing habits, preferred genres, perceptions of female sexualization, reactions toward fan-service scenes, and opinions about why these forms of representation remain common in mainstream Anime.

The questionnaire included both multiple-choice and open-response items, but what became noticeable during the analysis was not simply agreement or disagreement. Some participants answered very directly. Others hesitated, shifted positions, or expressed mixed feelings toward the same type of scene. A respondent might criticize fan-service in one answer and later describe certain female characters as appealing precisely because of the same visual elements. Those inconsistencies were treated as part of the data rather than as problems to be removed. For that reason, the analysis focuses mainly on recurring tendencies and patterns in audience response instead of statistical prediction or causal modelling.

E. Data Analysis

The survey responses were read descriptively in order to identify recurring tendencies in how students reacted to female representation in Anime. Attention was given to patterns that appeared repeatedly across the responses, particularly moments where participants mentioned sexualization, discomfort with fan-service scenes, or the sense that certain forms of representation existed mainly to attract attention and increase commercial appeal.

What mattered during the analysis was not simply whether participants “approved” or “disapproved” of these scenes. Many responses were more unstable than that. Some students criticized excessive sexualization while still expressing strong attachment to particular female characters or series. Others described fan-service as unnecessary but also as something they had gradually become accustomed to seeing in Anime. These contradictions were treated as meaningful rather than inconsistent.

For that reason, viewers are approached here less as passive consumers than as people constantly negotiating what they watch. The audience analysis is therefore read together with the scene analysis rather than separated from it. The aim is not only to examine how female characters are visually constructed in contemporary Anime, but also how those constructions are interpreted, normalized, questioned, or emotionally negotiated by viewers watching Anime outside Japan.

FEMALE EMPOWERMENT IN CONTEMPORARY ANIME

A. Reconfiguring Female Agency in Contemporary Anime

Female characters in Japanese Anime no longer occupy the same narrative space they once did. Earlier works often placed women around the emotional needs of male protagonists. They appeared as caretakers, romantic interests, supportive classmates, or symbolic figures associated with kindness and domestic femininity. Even when they were important to the story, that importance was frequently relational. The narrative moved through male action, while female characters remained close to the emotional background surrounding it.

That structure has gradually shifted. In many contemporary Anime series, women now fight, command, strategize, and influence the direction of the narrative itself. The change became especially visible through the rise of the magical girl genre during the late twentieth century. Sailor Moon is often discussed as a turning point because it connected femininity with collective strength rather than weakness or passivity alone. Usagi Tsukino and the Sailor Guardians do not abandon emotional sensitivity in order to become heroic. Friendship, compassion, and emotional attachment become part of their power instead of something opposed to it. Napier (2018) similarly argues that contemporary Anime increasingly allows female characters to occupy emotionally and narratively complex positions that move beyond older stereotypes of passivity or dependence.

More recent action-oriented Anime push this shift further. In *Attack on Titan* and *My Hero Academia*, female characters occupy spaces traditionally coded as masculine: military structures, combat systems, strategic leadership, physical survival. Characters such as Mikasa Ackerman or Yaoyorozu Momo are not treated simply as symbolic companions standing beside male heroes. They participate directly in decision-making, conflict, and narrative progression.

Female Empowerment and Objectification in Contemporary Japanese Anime

At the same time, contemporary Anime does not move neatly from “traditional femininity” toward straightforward gender equality. Female empowerment often appears unevenly distributed and commercially shaped. Some characters are granted visibility and authority while still being expected to remain emotionally accessible, visually attractive, or highly marketable. In that sense, contemporary Anime does not completely reject older ideas of femininity. More often, it reorganizes them into newer forms that can coexist with action, visibility, and commercial appeal.

B. Female Agency and Intellectual Competence

One of the more noticeable shifts in recent Anime is the growing number of female characters associated with intelligence, tactical thinking, and leadership rather than emotional support alone. Women are no longer present only to stabilize the emotional world around male protagonists. In many contemporary series, they solve problems, formulate strategies, and influence the direction of conflict itself.

Yaoyorozu Momo in *My Hero Academia* reflects this change quite clearly. The series repeatedly emphasizes her analytical ability rather than physical aggression. Her Quirk, “Creation,” depends less on brute force than on calculation, planning, and technical knowledge. Other characters often turn to her during moments requiring strategic judgment, and the narrative consistently positions her as one of the most intellectually capable students in Class 1-A. What matters here is not simply that Momo is “strong,” but that intelligence itself becomes central to her authority within the story.

A similar shift appears in *Attack on Titan* through Mikasa Ackerman. Mikasa is not framed primarily through emotional fragility or romantic dependence. She survives because she is disciplined, physically overwhelming, and militarily effective inside an environment built around violence and instability. The series treats her less as symbolic support for male characters than as somebody necessary to survival itself.

These portrayals complicate older assumptions about gender roles in Anime. Leadership, combat ability, and strategic thinking are no longer reserved almost exclusively for male characters. At the same time, this does not mean contemporary Anime has moved beyond gendered representation altogether. Female competence often exists alongside visual framing that continues to emphasize attractiveness, bodily visibility, and spectacle. Characters may gain narrative authority while still being positioned as objects to be looked at. That overlap becomes one of the central tensions running through contemporary Anime representation.

C. Expanding Gender Roles and the Reconfiguration of Femininity

The growing diversity of female representation in Anime also reflects broader changes in the cultural understanding of femininity itself. Contemporary Anime no longer confines women to a single idealized model of behavior. Instead, female characters increasingly occupy multiple and sometimes contradictory identities: warrior, student, strategist, caretaker, rival, leader, or comic figure. This plurality distinguishes contemporary Anime from earlier forms of representation that relied more heavily on fixed gender expectations.

Importantly, many recent female characters do not reject femininity entirely in order to become “strong.” Rather, Anime often combines traditionally feminine characteristics with forms of physical or intellectual competence. Female characters in contemporary Anime are also difficult to place into older gender categories neatly. A character may appear emotionally vulnerable in one scene and overwhelmingly capable in the next. Strength is not always presented through masculinity alone, and femininity itself is not necessarily treated as weakness. Many female characters move back and forth between these positions rather than remaining fixed inside one role.

Saitō Tamaki (2011) points out that Anime characters often operate less as realistic social figures than as constructions shaped through fantasy, desire, and emotional attachment. That observation becomes important here because female characters in Anime are rarely built around a single representational function. The same character may simultaneously appear empowering, idealized, emotionally comforting, and commercially marketable. These elements do not cancel one another out. More often, they overlap.

This overlap helps explain why discussions of female representation in Anime remain so divided. Contemporary Anime clearly gives women more narrative visibility and authority than many earlier media forms did. Female characters now fight, lead, strategize, and influence the direction of the story itself. At the same time, that visibility is still tied very closely to spectacle, attractiveness, and consumption. The issue is not simply whether female characters are “strong” or “weak.” The issue is how that strength is packaged visually.

For that reason, female empowerment in Anime cannot be treated either as entirely superficial or as straightforward evidence of gender progress. Contemporary Anime more often reveals a situation where empowerment and commodification become difficult to separate from one another.

OBJECTIFICATION AND VISUAL COMMODIFICATION

A. Fan-Service and the Commercialization of Female Bodies

Even in Anime works where female characters are presented as intelligent, capable, or narratively important, the visual treatment of the body often follows a different logic. Fan-service makes that tension especially visible. Scenes involving exposed clothing,

Female Empowerment and Objectification in Contemporary Japanese Anime

accidental intimacy, voyeuristic humor, or exaggerated bodily framing appear so frequently in mainstream Anime that they can begin to feel routine. Yet their repetition is not incidental.

Fan-service does more than interrupt the narrative with sexual humor. It helps sustain attention. Certain characters become memorable not only because of their role in the story, but because specific visual elements continue circulating around them. A character design becomes recognizable. A screenshot becomes a meme. As Tsugata (2014) argues, visual recognizability itself has become one of the defining strengths of Japanese Anime culture, particularly within character-driven media consumption. A short clip spreads online. The body turns into part of the character's marketability.

This circulation extends far beyond the Anime itself. Female characters reappear through figurines, posters, cosplay, edited videos, social media clips, and fan merchandise. Steinberg (2012) argues that contemporary Anime culture increasingly operates through a "media mix" system in which characters circulate across interconnected commercial platforms and media forms. Emotional attachment and commercial visibility begin feeding into each other. The more recognizable a character becomes, the more valuable that character becomes commercially. Under these conditions, female bodies function not only inside the narrative, but inside a much larger economy of attention and circulation surrounding Anime culture.

Because of this, fan-service should not be treated simply as harmless comic exaggeration added to otherwise unrelated stories. It is tied closely to how contemporary Anime industries maintain visibility, audience engagement, and character consumption across interconnected media environments.

In many contemporary Anime series, fan-service is woven directly into the way characters are designed and remembered. A female character may be strategically important to the story, yet the visual emphasis surrounding her often returns insistently to the body: exposed costumes, exaggerated proportions, camera angles that interrupt action in order to linger elsewhere. These moments rarely feel completely separate from the larger commercial environment surrounding Anime culture.

Azuma Hiroki (2009) argues that contemporary otaku culture increasingly privileges attachment to characters themselves over narrative coherence alone. Characters circulate across merchandise, promotional images, online fandom spaces, collectible figures, and short-form digital content. Under these conditions, visual recognizability becomes commercially valuable. Female characters are not only written into stories; they are also designed to remain visible, memorable, and continuously consumable across different media environments.

This becomes especially noticeable in shōnen Anime. Female characters may occupy positions of authority, intelligence, or combat leadership while still being framed through eroticized visual aesthetics clearly directed toward audience attention. The contradiction matters because empowerment does not interrupt the commercial logic of spectatorship. In many cases, it becomes part of it. Strength itself turns into something visually marketable.

Responses from Vietnamese students reflected an awareness of this dynamic as well. Many participants associated fan-service less with narrative necessity than with attracting viewers and sustaining popularity. Sexualized representation was often understood not simply as artistic style, but as part of a broader commercial strategy surrounding Anime production and consumption

B. The Male Gaze and Visual Fragmentation

The objectification of female characters in Anime often works through the camera itself. Attention shifts away from what a character is thinking, deciding, or experiencing and moves instead toward how the body is being displayed. Laura Mulvey (1975) described this structure as the "male gaze," where women become positioned primarily as objects of looking within visual culture. In Anime, this gaze frequently appears through fragmentation. A scene isolates parts of the body rather than presenting the character as a complete presence within the narrative. The camera pauses on the chest, legs, or hips. Framing cuts the body into pieces. Slow panning movements interrupt otherwise serious moments. After repeated exposure, viewers are encouraged to look at female characters in a very specific way before the narrative itself has even fully unfolded.

My Hero Academia provides a particularly visible example through Yaoyorozu Momo. Inside the story, Momo is repeatedly recognized for intelligence, strategic thinking, and leadership potential. Other characters rely on her judgment during moments requiring planning or tactical decision-making. Yet the visual treatment surrounding her often pulls attention elsewhere. Her costume design exposes the body heavily, and scenes involving her frequently rely on chest-centered framing or lingering camera movement even when the narrative emphasis is supposed to be intellectual competence.

What becomes noticeable is the gap between narrative authority and visual treatment. Momo is presented as intellectually capable, but the camera rarely allows that intelligence to exist independently from spectacle. Her authority remains tied to a visual economy that still depends heavily on attractiveness, exposure, and audience attention. In this sense, female competence in contemporary shōnen Anime does not replace commodified femininity. Quite often, it becomes absorbed into it.

Several scenes place unusual emphasis on Momo's body through costume design and camera movement. Her hero costume exposes a large portion of her chest under the justification that her Quirk requires physical contact with exposed skin in order to create objects. While this explanation appears narratively functional, the visual direction repeatedly exceeds what is necessary for narrative clarity. When Aizawa praises Momo's tactical thinking, the scene appears to emphasize intelligence and leadership. Yet the camera keeps drifting back toward the body. Slow upward shots and cropped framing place unusual visual weight on her chest

Female Empowerment and Objectification in Contemporary Japanese Anime

even while the dialogue is discussing strategy. Male characters in comparable scenes are rarely filmed this way. Their competence is usually allowed to stand on its own. This difference demonstrates how visual hierarchy operates even within supposedly empowering moments. Importantly, these visual choices do not simply “contradict” empowerment; they reorganize it. Contemporary Anime increasingly permits female competence, but such competence remains embedded within systems of spectacular femininity designed for continuous visual consumption. Empowerment therefore becomes inseparable from display. Female authority is made culturally visible precisely through representational forms that preserve desirability, circulation value, and affective attachment within commercial Anime industries.

Importantly, objectification in these cases does not erase empowerment entirely. Momo remains an intelligent and influential character throughout the series. However, her competence becomes entangled with a visual system that repeatedly redirects audience attention toward bodily consumption. Empowerment and objectification therefore function simultaneously rather than sequentially or exclusively.

C. Empowered but Still Objectified

One of the most striking characteristics of contemporary Anime is that female empowerment and visual objectification are no longer presented as opposites. Earlier feminist critiques of media often distinguished between “strong female characters” and “sexualized female characters” as if the two categories were mutually exclusive. Contemporary Anime complicates this distinction considerably because many female characters are simultaneously constructed as capable subjects and eroticized visual objects.

What changes in contemporary media culture is not simply that women become “stronger” on screen. The conditions surrounding that strength change as well. Female characters are increasingly allowed to fight, lead, and dominate narrative space, but visibility still depends heavily on how well the body can attract attention. Strength remains present, yet it is constantly folded back into spectacle and desirability.

In this sense, objectification in contemporary Anime does not necessarily rely upon portraying women as weak or passive. On the contrary, many female characters are admired precisely because they combine competence with attractiveness. However, this combination also creates a representational paradox. Female agency becomes visible, yet the visual conditions under which that agency is displayed remain shaped by commercialized spectatorship and gendered aesthetics.

This contradiction partly explains why Anime representation often generates divided responses among audiences. Viewers may genuinely admire female characters for their leadership, resilience, or emotional complexity while simultaneously recognizing the excessive emphasis placed upon their bodies. Such ambivalence emerged clearly within the present survey data, where many participants acknowledged both the positive evolution of female roles and the persistent oversexualization of women in Anime.

Rather than interpreting empowerment and objectification as entirely separate representational modes, contemporary Anime suggests that the two increasingly operate together within the same commercial media environment. Female characters are empowered, but that empowerment is frequently packaged through visual systems designed for consumption.

D. Humor and the Normalization of Gendered Harassment

Objectification in Anime does not appear only through visual framing. Quite often, it is built into humor itself. Voyeurism, intrusive comments, or sexual embarrassment are repeatedly turned into comic moments rather than treated seriously.

My Hero Academia provides a clear example through Mineta Minoru. Across the series, Mineta repeatedly spies on female characters, makes sexually suggestive remarks, and invades private spaces. Yet these scenes are rarely framed as threatening. Exaggerated reactions, comic timing, and humorous sound effects quickly turn harassment into entertainment.

Humor changes how these actions are received. Because the scenes are played for laughter, discomfort becomes secondary to comedy. Mineta is presented less as harmful than as ridiculous or immature, and repetition gradually makes this behavior feel routine inside the series.

Several survey participants expressed unease toward this kind of humor, especially when intrusive behavior appeared repeatedly without meaningful consequences. At the same time, some respondents described these scenes as “normal” or simply “part of Anime culture.” That contradiction appeared throughout the responses. Viewers often recognized the problematic nature of the scenes while still accepting them as familiar elements of mainstream Anime.

VIETNAMESE STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN ANIME

A. Awareness of Sexualization and Objectification

The survey responses suggest that Vietnamese university students are highly aware of the sexualization of female characters in contemporary Anime. Most participants recognized that women in Anime are frequently presented through revealing costumes, exaggerated body proportions, or scenes designed to draw attention toward the body. Nearly four-fifths of respondents agreed that female characters are often excessively sexualized, while only a very small number rejected that idea entirely. Objectification, in other words, was not something viewers failed to notice.

Female Empowerment and Objectification in Contemporary Japanese Anime

What appeared most frequently in the responses was not explicit sexual content itself, but visual design. Many students pointed first to costume exposure, body shape, camera focus, or the overall appearance of female characters. This suggests that viewers respond not only to isolated scenes, but to repeated visual patterns that gradually shape how female characters are perceived across an entire series.

Several participants also associated objectification with interactions between male and female characters, especially scenes involving voyeuristic humor, accidental physical contact, or exaggerated embarrassment. For many viewers, the issue was not simply “sexual content,” but the way these interactions repeatedly turned female discomfort into entertainment.

One result stood out quite strongly: more than ninety percent of respondents reported feeling uncomfortable at least occasionally when watching excessively sexualized scenes in Anime. The intensity of that discomfort varied, but the finding itself is important because it challenges the assumption that audiences automatically accept fan-service as harmless or unproblematic.

At the same time, discomfort did not necessarily lead viewers to reject Anime altogether. Most participants continued watching Anime regularly despite criticizing aspects of representation they considered excessive or unnecessary. This contradiction appeared throughout the responses. Viewers often recognized objectification clearly while continuing to enjoy particular stories, characters, or series. Enjoyment and criticism were not experienced as opposites. Quite often, they existed together.

B. Negotiated Reception and Audience Ambivalence

The survey responses rarely reflected complete acceptance or complete rejection of Anime representation. Much more often, participants moved somewhere in between. Students frequently praised female characters for being intelligent, independent, or capable of leadership while criticizing the same series for excessive fan-service or unnecessary sexualization. Admiration and discomfort appeared together throughout many responses.

Characters such as Mikasa Ackerman from *Attack on Titan* or Yaoyorozu Momo from *My Hero Academia* were often mentioned positively because they challenged older expectations surrounding female passivity. Participants appreciated seeing women occupy central narrative positions rather than functioning only as emotional support for male protagonists. At the same time, several respondents questioned why characters presented as intelligent or powerful still needed to be framed through revealing costumes or repeated fan-service scenes.

These responses resemble what Stuart Hall (1980) described as a negotiated reading. Viewers do not simply absorb media messages passively, but neither do they reject them entirely. Instead, they move back and forth between enjoyment, criticism, attachment, and discomfort depending on the scene, the character, and the context.

This ambivalence becomes especially important outside Japan. Vietnamese audiences encounter Anime within different cultural discussions surrounding gender, sexuality, and media representation. As a result, the meaning of particular scenes does not remain fixed once the Anime circulates internationally. Viewers interpret what they watch through their own experiences, values, and cultural expectations. Hall (1997) similarly argues that representation does not simply reflect reality, but actively produces cultural meaning through systems of signs, images, and interpretation.

Many respondents also recognized the commercial logic behind sexualized representation. Fan-service was frequently associated with attracting attention, increasing popularity, or maintaining audience interest rather than contributing meaningfully to the narrative itself. Several students described these scenes as something added “for viewers” rather than for the story.

What emerges from these responses is not passive consumption, but constant negotiation. Participants were often fully aware of the contradictions inside contemporary Anime culture. Female characters could be admired for their strength and independence while still being recognized as products shaped through commercialized visual appeal.

C. Media Literacy and Critical Engagement

The survey responses suggest that many students were already engaging with Anime critically rather than consuming it unreflectively. Participants often recognized contradictions inside the same series or even within the same character. A female character could be admired for intelligence, courage, or leadership while the visual framing surrounding her still produced discomfort. Viewers seemed increasingly aware that enjoyment and criticism could exist at the same time.

This point matters because media literacy does not necessarily mean rejecting popular culture altogether. Most respondents continued to enjoy Anime despite recognizing problematic patterns of representation. What changed was not consumption itself, but the level of awareness surrounding it. Students frequently identified fan-service, exaggerated body design, or voyeuristic humor as deliberate parts of commercial media culture rather than neutral storytelling choices. Potter (2018) argues that media literacy involves recognizing how media industries, visual conventions, and systems of representation shape audience perception rather than consuming media content uncritically.

At the same time, the findings also suggest that contemporary Anime cannot be reduced to a single ideological position. Some series clearly expand the range of female representation by placing women in positions of authority, strategic importance, and narrative centrality. Other moments within those same series continue relying heavily on spectacle, bodily exposure, and gendered visual framing. The contradiction remains unresolved.

Female Empowerment and Objectification in Contemporary Japanese Anime

Several participants described this tension quite directly. They appreciated strong female characters while questioning why those characters still needed to be sexualized so heavily. Responses like these indicate that viewers are not simply absorbing representation passively. They are negotiating it, sometimes comfortably and sometimes uneasily.

In that sense, media literacy becomes less about separating “good” representation from “bad” representation and more about recognizing how contemporary media culture allows empowerment, attraction, consumption, and objectification to overlap continuously within the same visual environment.

DISCUSSION

A. Empowerment Does Not Necessarily Eliminate Objectification

One of the clearest patterns emerging from this study is that empowerment and objectification no longer appear as clean opposites in contemporary Anime. Female characters are increasingly allowed to occupy positions of authority, intelligence, and combat leadership, yet those forms of agency remain closely tied to visual spectacle and commercial appeal. Strength becomes visible, but so does the body.

Characters such as Yaoyorozu Momo from *My Hero Academia* or Mikasa Ackerman from *Attack on Titan* illustrate this tension quite clearly. Both characters possess narrative importance and strategic competence, but the conditions surrounding that visibility are very different from those applied to most male characters. Female authority is often packaged through attractiveness, bodily exposure, or visual stylization designed to sustain audience attention.

This reflects a broader shift within contemporary media culture. Entertainment industries increasingly recognize the popularity of “strong female characters,” yet strength itself becomes commercially valuable only when it remains visually marketable. Characters circulate not only through stories, but through merchandise, clips, fan edits, cosplay, social media, and online fandom economies. Under these conditions, empowerment becomes difficult to separate from commodification.

Contemporary Anime therefore does not simply reproduce older forms of objectification unchanged, nor does it move neatly beyond them through progressive representation. What changes is the form objectification takes. Female independence, intelligence, and combat ability are increasingly absorbed into systems of visibility and consumption rather than positioned outside them.

B. Anime as a Site of Gender Negotiation

The findings of this study suggest that contemporary Anime cannot be described easily as either “progressive” or “sexist.” Quite often, both tendencies appear at the same time. A series may present women as tactically important, emotionally complex, and central to the narrative while still relying heavily on voyeuristic humor, fan-service, or fragmented visual framing.

Part of this contradiction comes from the nature of Anime itself. Anime is not only artistic expression; it is also commercial entertainment shaped by audience attention, merchandise circulation, and market competition. Under these conditions, representation becomes unstable. A female character may be written as intelligent or authoritative while the visual structure surrounding her continues to emphasize attractiveness and bodily spectacle.

Yaoyorozu Momo from *My Hero Academia* reflects this tension quite clearly. Within the narrative, she represents intelligence, rationality, and leadership. Yet the camera repeatedly redirects attention toward her body through costume exposure and framing choices. Neither side fully cancels out the other. She is not simply empowered, but neither is she reducible only to objectification.

A similar instability appears in scenes involving Mineta Minoru. Many viewers may recognize voyeuristic behavior as uncomfortable or inappropriate, yet the series continues to frame these moments through humor and exaggeration. Laughter softens the intrusion. Repetition gradually normalizes it.

Looking at Anime this way makes the contradictions harder to simplify. Contemporary Anime does not fully preserve older gender hierarchies, but it does not completely escape them either. Instead, it becomes a space where empowerment, spectacle, commercial appeal, and gendered expectation keep colliding with one another.

C. Commercial Media Culture and the Persistence of Fan-Service

Another pattern that emerged quite clearly from the survey concerns the relationship between fan-service and commercial media culture. Many Vietnamese students did not interpret sexualized representation simply as “artistic style” or random humor. Instead, they connected it directly to audience attraction, popularity, and commercial strategy. Fan-service was often understood as something designed to keep viewers engaged and characters memorable.

This perception becomes important because contemporary Anime no longer exists only inside the narrative itself. Characters continue circulating through streaming clips, merchandise, cosplay, social media edits, online fandom spaces, and recommendation algorithms. Visibility has economic value. The more recognizable a character becomes, the more commercially useful that character becomes as well. Galbraith (2019) notes that contemporary otaku culture increasingly depends on emotional attachment to fictional characters circulated across interconnected consumer and media environment.

Female Empowerment and Objectification in Contemporary Japanese Anime

Under these conditions, fan-service functions less like an optional addition to the story and more like part of the larger media environment surrounding Anime culture. Female characters operate simultaneously as narrative figures and marketable images. Their bodies become tied to circulation, attention, and repeat consumption across multiple platforms.

This helps explain why objectification continues even in series often praised for strong female representation. Empowerment alone does not disrupt the commercial logic surrounding visibility. In many cases, female strength itself becomes easier to market when combined with visual attractiveness and spectacle.

At the same time, audience demand should not be treated as something entirely natural or fixed. Expectations surrounding femininity, desirability, and entertainment are shaped gradually through repetition. Viewers become accustomed to certain visual patterns because those patterns appear constantly across media culture. Commercial logic and audience expectation therefore reinforce one another over time.

The issue becomes even more complicated once Anime circulates globally. Viewers outside Japan encounter these visual conventions within very different cultural discussions surrounding gender and representation. Some audiences normalize them, others criticize them, and many move uneasily between enjoyment and discomfort depending on the context.

D. Media Literacy and Critical Consumption

One of the more interesting findings of this study is that many Vietnamese students were already approaching Anime with a degree of critical awareness. Participants rarely responded through simple approval or rejection. Instead, they often recognized contradictions within the same series or character. A female character could be admired for intelligence, courage, or leadership while the visual framing surrounding her still produced discomfort or criticism.

This suggests that contemporary Anime audiences are not simply passive consumers of media representation. Many respondents appeared fully aware that fan-service, voyeuristic humor, and exaggerated body design were tied closely to commercial media culture rather than existing only as neutral artistic choices.

At the same time, critical awareness did not necessarily reduce emotional attachment to Anime itself. Most participants continued watching and enjoying Anime despite recognizing problematic representational patterns. Enjoyment and critique therefore operated together rather than canceling one another out.

These responses point to the growing importance of media literacy within transnational digital culture. Media literacy here does not mean dividing Anime neatly into “good” or “bad” representation. Contemporary Anime is far more unstable than that. The same series may simultaneously expand female visibility while continuing to rely on older forms of spectacle and objectification. For that reason, discussions of Anime and gender representation require more than simple moral judgment. What matters is understanding how empowerment, attractiveness, commercial visibility, and audience pleasure increasingly overlap within contemporary media culture. The contradiction itself may be one of the defining features of modern Anime representation.

E. Spectacular Femininity and Transnational Consumption

The coexistence of empowerment and objectification in Anime becomes even more complicated once these characters begin circulating globally through digital media culture. Female Anime characters no longer remain confined to the original narrative or even to Japanese audiences. Condry (2013) argues that Anime culture increasingly develops through transnational networks of circulation, participation, and fan engagement extending far beyond Japan itself. They travel constantly across streaming platforms, short video clips, memes, fan edits, cosplay culture, online fandom spaces, and recommendation algorithms.

Under these conditions, characters are consumed not only as parts of a story, but as endlessly reproducible images. Visibility itself becomes valuable. A character who attracts attention visually is more likely to circulate widely, generate emotional attachment, and remain commercially recognizable across different media environments.

This helps explain why objectification persists even in Anime works often praised for progressive female representation. The issue is not simply whether female characters are “strong” or “weak.” The issue is that contemporary media culture increasingly organizes visibility through spectacle, circulation, and repeat consumption. Female authority and visual attractiveness therefore become tightly connected rather than easily separable.

For viewers outside Japan, these representations are encountered within entirely different cultural conversations surrounding gender, sexuality, and media consumption. As Anime moves transnationally, its visual conventions do not remain fixed. They are reinterpreted, normalized, criticized, or negotiated differently depending on the audience watching them. McLelland (2017) similarly notes that Japanese popular culture increasingly faces global debates surrounding gender, sexuality, ethics, and media representation as Anime circulates internationally.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how contemporary Japanese Anime represents female characters through the overlapping dynamics of empowerment and objectification. The findings show that women in recent Anime are increasingly placed at the center of the narrative. Characters in *Sailor Moon*, *Attack on Titan*, and *My Hero Academia* are no longer limited to passive or supportive

Female Empowerment and Objectification in Contemporary Japanese Anime

roles. They fight, lead, strategize, and influence the direction of the story in ways that would have been far less common in earlier periods of Anime culture.

At the same time, greater visibility does not necessarily free female characters from objectification. Many of the same characters celebrated for intelligence, authority, or combat ability continue to be framed through spectacle, bodily exposure, and fan-service aesthetics. The contradiction appears repeatedly across contemporary Anime: women are allowed to occupy positions of power, but that power remains tied closely to visual attractiveness and commercial visibility.

The audience responses gathered from Vietnamese university students reflected a similar tension. Most participants clearly recognized the sexualization of female characters and many expressed discomforts toward excessive fan-service or voyeuristic humor. Yet criticism did not automatically lead to rejection. Students often continued to admire particular characters and enjoy Anime itself while remaining aware of problematic representational patterns. Enjoyment and critique frequently existed together.

These findings suggest that contemporary Anime cannot be understood through simple oppositions such as “empowering” versus “sexist.” The relationship between gender representation and spectatorship has become more unstable than that. Female agency increasingly operates inside systems of commercial media culture where visibility, attractiveness, emotional attachment, and marketability are deeply interconnected.

The study also points to the growing importance of media literacy within transnational digital culture. As Anime circulates globally through streaming services, social media, fandom communities, and algorithm-driven platforms, viewers encounter representations shaped simultaneously by storytelling, commerce, and visual consumption. Critical engagement therefore becomes increasingly necessary, not in order to reject Anime entirely, but in order to recognize the contradictions embedded within contemporary media culture itself

Several limitations should also be acknowledged. The survey focused mainly on students from Hanoi University and therefore cannot represent all Vietnamese Anime audiences. In addition, the study concentrated on a limited number of Anime works rather than the full diversity of contemporary Anime production. Future research could expand across genres, audience groups, or transnational fandom communities in order to examine how different viewers negotiate female representation within global Anime culture.

Ultimately, contemporary Anime reveals a cultural moment in which empowerment and objectification no longer function as clearly separate categories. Female strength, intelligence, and independence increasingly circulate through the same commercial systems that continue to aestheticize and commodify the female body. This contradiction reflects broader transformations in contemporary Japanese gender culture, where empowerment and commodified visibility increasingly operate together rather than separately (Coates et al., 2020). The contradiction is not accidental. It has become part of how visibility itself operates within contemporary popular media.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to express sincere appreciation to the students at Hanoi University who participated in the survey and shared their perspectives on Anime and gender representation. Their responses contributed significantly to the development of this study. The author is also grateful to colleagues and researchers in Japanese Studies and media culture whose discussions and academic insights helped shape the direction of this research.

REFERENCES

- 1) Allison, A. (2006). *Millennial monsters: Japanese toys and the global imagination*. University of California Press.
- 2) Azuma, H. (2009). *Otaku: Japan's database animals* (J. E. Abel & S. Kono, Trans.). University of Minnesota Press.
- 3) Cavallaro, D. (2006). *Anime intersections: Tradition and innovation in theme and technique*. McFarland.
- 4) Coates, J., Fraser, L., & Pendleton, M. (2020). *The Routledge companion to gender and Japanese culture*. Routledge.
- 5) Condry, I. (2013). *The Soul of Anime: Collaborative Creativity and Japan's Media Success Story*. Duke University Press.
- 6) Fredrickson, B. L., & Roberts, T.-A. (1997). Objectification theory: Toward understanding women's lived experiences and mental health risks. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 21(2), 173–206. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.1997.tb00108.x>
- 7) Hall, S. (1980). Encoding/decoding. In S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe, & P. Willis (Eds.), *Culture, media, language* (pp. 128–138). Hutchinson.
- 8) Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. Sage.
- 9) McLelland, M. (Ed.). (2017). *The end of cool Japan: Ethical, legal, and cultural challenges to Japanese popular culture*. Routledge.
- 10) Mulvey, L. (1975). Visual pleasure and narrative cinema. *Screen*, 16(3), 6–18. <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/16.3.6>

Female Empowerment and Objectification in Contemporary Japanese Anime

- 11) Napier, S. J. (2005). *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing contemporary Japanese animation*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- 12) Orbaugh, S. (2003). Busty battlin' babes: The evolution of the beautiful fighting girl in 1990s visual culture. In J. Mostow, N. Bryson, & M. Graybill (Eds.), *Gender and power in the Japanese visual field* (pp. 201–228). University of Hawai'i Press.
- 13) Ōtsuka, E. (2010). *Monogatari shōhiron kai* [A theory of narrative consumption revised edition]. Kadokawa Shoten.
- 14) Patrick W. Galbraith. (2019). *Otaku and the Struggle for Imagination in Japan*. Duke University Press.
- 15) Potter, W. J. (2018). *Media literacy* (9th ed.). Sage.
- 16) Saitō, T. (2011). *Beautiful fighting girl* (J. Keith Vincent & D. Lawson, Trans.). University of Minnesota Press.
- 17) Shamoon, D. (2015). *Passionate friendship: The aesthetics of girls' culture in Japan*. University of Hawai'i Press.
- 18) Steinberg, M. (2012). *Anime's Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan*. University of Minnesota Press.
- 19) Susan J. Napier. (2018). *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation* (Revised ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.
- 20) Tsugata, N. (2014). 『日本のアニメは何がすごいのか』 [What is remarkable about Japanese anime]. Shodensha.