The "Johnny's" Entertainers Omnipresent on Japanese TV: Postwar Media and the Postwar Family

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Introduction

What do Japanese people think of when they hear the name Johnnies? Perhaps pop groups such as SMAP or Arashi that belong to the Johnny & Associates talent agency? Or perhaps the title of specific TV programs or movies? If they are not that interested, perhaps they will be reminded of the words "beautiful young boys" or "scandal"? On the other hand, if they are well-informed about the topic perhaps jargon terms such as "*oriki*," "*doutan*," or "*shinmechu*" are second nature?

In this way the word "Johnnies" (the casual name given to groups managed by Johnny & Associates) is likely to evoke all sorts of images. But one thing is sure: almost no Japanese person would reply that they hadn't heard the name. If a person lives within Japanese society and they watch television even just a little, whether they like it or not they will come across Johnnies.

The performing artists managed by Johnny & Associates appear on television almost every hour of the viewing day, and they feature in all kinds of TV programs: music, drama, entertainment, news, live sports, education, and cooking. In Japanese society Johnnies are consumed as a matter of course and without need for explanation. They make up part of the background of everyday life.

The Johnnies were created in April 1962. That year, a group called "Johnnys" was put together composed of Aoi Teruhiko, Nakatani Ryo, Iino Osami, and Maie Hiromi. The same year, Johnny & Associates was founded. Since then a series of acts has debuted, such as Four Leaves, Go Hiromi, Toyokawa Joe, Kawasaki Mayo, Tanokin Trio (Tahara Toshihiko, Nomura Yoshio, and Kondo Masahiko), Shibugakitai, Shonentai, Hikaru GENJI, Otokogumi, Ninja, SMAP, TOKIO, V6, KinKi Kids, ARASHI, Tackey & Tsubasa, NEWS, Kanjani Eight, KAT-TUN, and Hey! Say! JUMP. We might say that since the 1960s Johnnies have rooted themselves in Japanese society with an image of non-stop reproduction.

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But outside of Japan, of course, Johnnies are not part of everyday life. As Nagahara Hiromu, who teaches Japanese history at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, told me: it is extremely difficult to convey an image of Johnnies to American students. That's because no category of professional entertainers equivalent to Johnnies exists in American society. In other words,

not only are Johnnies unknown in the United States, there is no cultural code that might enable Americans to understand Johnnies. Conversely, in East Asian countries such as Taiwan and South Korea, Johnnies are quite well known and in fact there is a well-established fan culture for certain performers. For example, in Taiwan fans come to the airport several times a year to greet Johnnies when they arrive, treat concerts as a kind of big event, and spend special time at the "Johnnies Café" where fans gathers. There is a stark contrast between the unfamiliarity of Johnnies to people in the United States versus their profile in East Asian countries.

The way in which Johnnies have become part of everyday life in Japanese society is closely linked to the highly distinct postwar history experienced by Japan in East Asia. In this article, taking the formation of the first Johnnies group (Johnnys) as a starting point, I will elucidate the relationship between restructuring of the Japanese media during the 1960s cultural cold war and the formation of a national consciousness.

Furthermore, although the first Johnny & Associates group, Johnnys, is sometimes called the "First-Generation Johnnies," that name was not used at the time of their formation and is not appropriate. Accordingly, I will refer to the first four-member group as "Johnnys" and Johnny & Associates entertainers in general as "Johnnies."

It all started at Washington Heights

In fact, it was America that gave birth to the Johnnies. A few minutes' walk from Harajuku Station in Tokyo is one of the few parks in the capital: Yoyogi Koen. This was once the location of a housing complex for the US military known as "Washington Heights." On the other side of chain link fencing were colorful roofs and fashionable houses with white walls. This American lifestyle amid trees and grass must have looked like a film set. The founder of Johnny & Associates, Johnny Kitagawa, lived here in Washington Heights.

Washington Heights was a huge development. Construction started in 1946 and the approximately 91.5 hectare site included public facilities such as a place of worship, theater, club house, elementary school, and post exchange, as well as 827 residences. These houses were built in line with the needs of American lifestyles and were known as Dependent Housing. They were equipped with electrical appliances unknown to Japanese at the time, such as refrigerators and washing machines. The American lifestyle provided for the residents of the Dependent Housing was to become an ideal that future Japanese would seek to emulate. Meanwhile, the electrical appliances were supplied by domestic manufacturers such as Mitsubishi Electric, Hitachi, Toshiba, and Matsushita Electric Industrial (National).

Johnny Kitagawa was born in Los Angeles in 1931 as a Japanese-American bearing a US passport. Following the Korean war he moved to Japan where he lived in a single-room apartment on the fourth floor of a lodging house within Washington Heights (later the National Olympic Memorial Youth Center accommodation block). While there, he worked as a member

of staff at the American Embassy Military Assistance Advisory Group.

At the same time as working at the embassy, Kitagawa had a private business coaching a youth baseball team. One day, while Aoi Teruhiko was enviously watching the Johnny's Baseball Team from the other side of the chain-link fence, Nakatani Ryo climbed over the fence with a friend to play with a radio-controlled airplane, and all were approached by Johnny Kitagawa. Because the site belonged to the United States, it was off limits, and strictly speaking Japanese people were not allowed to enter. But before 1957 local children were allowed to enter Washington Heights, and even afterwards many elementary and middle-school children would sneak in. Johnny Kitagawa made friends with these children and taught baseball in the playing fields of Washington Heights and Rikkyo University. For young boys of the time, baseball was a shining symbol of the new age, as described in Aku Yuu's novel *MacArthur's Children*.

Although Johnny's Baseball Team included members such as Hamada Mitsuo, and had strong links to the entertainment world via support from the wrestler Rikidozan and the actress Matsushima Tomoko, it wasn't initially formed with the intention of creating pop groups. What led directly to the formation of the Johnnys boy band was a trip by Johnny Kitagawa and the members of the baseball team to see "West Side Story" at the Marunouchi Piccadilly movie theater.

The boys were entranced by this musical about singing and dancing American street boys, and traveled to the theater day after day. Eventually, they started to imitate the dancing in the movie, and the four boys kept practicing: Aoi Teruhiko, Nakatani Ryo, Iino Osami and Maie Hiromi. Soon, the boys dreamed of performing in their own musical, while Johnny Kitagawa also wanted to put on a Japanese version of "West Side Story" and started work on writing his own musical called "Sometime, Somewhere (いつかどこかで)." Johnnys developed within the America-in-Japan of Washington Heights, and was born from the idealized America of the movies.

In order to develop a singing and dancing boy band, Johnny Kitagawa introduced the four to the New Performing Arts School managed by Nawa Taro, and to Watanabe Productions, where they received proper training. Before long the group appeared at the Drum in Ikebukuro, the ACB in Shinjuku and the Mimatsu in Ginza, and in January 1963 they were backing dancers for Ito Yukari at the 19th Nichigeki Western Carnival, which was run by Watanabe Productions. The Johnnys of this time was closely connected to Watanabe Productions.

While laying this groundwork outside of the talent management system, Johnnys started to appear on the "Let's Meet in Our Dreams (夢であいましょう)" TV show, which had produced such hit songs as Sakamoto Kyu's "Sukiyaki Song" and Azasa Michiyo's "Hello Baby (こんにちは赤ちゃん)." In August 1964 they first performed "Young Tears (若い涙)" (lyrics by Ei Rokusuke and music by Nakamura Yahiro), and in December that year made their recording

debut with the song. In February 1965 they successfully passed an audition for a motor sports themed musical called "Flaming Curve (焔のカーブ)" (written and starring Ishihara Shintaro, and also featuring Kitaoji Kinya). They played a group of young kamikaze-pilot-like young gang members who looked up to the musical's motor-racing hero.

Then, in 1966 they spent four months in the United States receiving intensive tuition and encountering show business in places like Las Vegas. On their return to Japan in 1967, however, they found that following the visit of the Beatles the Japanese entertainment world had been taken over by the rock music called Group Sounds. Although the Johnnys looked up to the Beatles and sang on stage, the boys weren't a rock band and there were relatively few opportunities for stage musical performers. The summer of that year they appeared in Kitagawa's musical "Sometime, Somewhere," then broke up after a final public performance that November.

Meanwhile, following "Young Tears," lyrics were written for Johnnys by Ei Rokusuke, Ishihara Shintaro, Iwatani Tokiko, Ema Shoko, Yasui Kazumi, and Yamagami Michio, while tunes were composed by Izumi Taku, and Dan Ikuma. The rights for the songs were managed by companies that included Watanabe Music Publishing and All Staff.

Televisions become a household item

The year 1964 of Johnnys' debut song, "Young Tears," was also the year of the Tokyo Olympics and a time in which television reached 90% of Japanese households. Washington Heights had fully returned to Japan, converted into an athletes' village for the Olympics, and preparations were already underway for the NHK Broadcast Center to move to the site. Japanese society was close to entering the true age of television, and visual media had come to dominate people's daily lives.

Televisions and other modern electrical appliances were essential items for the realization of an affluent and democratic American way of living, while wives/mothers were recognized as those in charge of this new lifestyle. In extolling the cutting edge technology of their home electrical appliances during the sixties, the engineers of Matsushita Electric Industrial and Japan's other electrical appliance makers asserted a self-image of "Japan."

Having been received into the home space, television now began to be watched by the modern family. And this modern family came with several distinctive features: husband and wife would marry for love; the husband would work outside the home while the wife would look after it; and children would be brought up with much love in a household consisting only of blood relations. Yet, this family set-up was not universal to humanity, and did not arise naturally; rather, it was born as a necessary basic unit of the nation state.

The idealized image of the modern family was a happy household gathered together. The television was a device to implement this ideal and make it real. Via the intermediary of the

television, families could give this image of the basic national unit actual form. That is, the television electrical appliance was a device that realized the new American lifestyle of the Dependent Housing, enabled the modern family as a national unit to take form, and gave birth to a national self-consciousness.

Meanwhile, the television programs that would be watched by households gathered together required popular performers who could give easy pleasure to parents and children alike. And in order for them to be popular, advanced singing ability or performing technique weren't essential conditions, nor did they need the stiff air of serious performing artists. In order to become popular TV stars, the performers needed the ability and quick wits to take on a wide variety of work as entertainers such as singing, dance, acting, presenting, and comedy. They also needed a pleasing appearance and freshness. Watanabe Shin and Watanabe Misa of Watanabe Productions had foreseen this new television age and had already started work on developing talent such as the Peanuts and School Mates. The latter-period Johnnys, under the instruction of Watanabe Productions, aimed to become popular household stars just as the curtain was rising properly on the new television age.

Acting "immature"

It was common for Johnnys to consciously bring an amateur-like "immaturity" to their performances. What made Johnnys so innovative within the entertainment world was not how they were sold as a singing, dancing group of young boys; there was also something amateurish about the group. Hirose Masaru, a journalist from the culture section of the *Nikkan Sports Newspaper*, wrote the following in a pamphlet issued for an August 1965 concert that took place one year after the Johnnys' debut. He described the Johnnys as a "new force in the entertainment world."

> *This is a unique combo. There are better vocal groups, and there are other cute stars like Funaki Kazuo and Kubo Hiroshi. But there is no group like Johnnys in terms of rhythm and the dynamic ability to move their whole bodies. They are a completely new force in the entertainment world [. . .]*
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> *There is something fresh about Johnnys. You feel like you can't easily tell whether they are students or entertainers; as if they only work after their lessons finish at 3pm, or as if they can only perform outside Tokyo during the holidays. When they say that they "want to absorb lots of experiences as if they were working in clubs" it demonstrates a fresh young vitality with no connection to whether or not they consider themselves professionals.*

Johnnys were a singing, dancing group of young boys distinct from vocal groups like the Duke Aces, or from the "big three" of Funaki Kazuo, Saigo Teruhiko, and Hashi Yukio. And

there was something unique about stressing they were still students, and developing their entertainment careers with the attitude of "club performers."

The group did attract criticism for being both students and entertainers, not devoted to their professional careers. Kitagawa himself described their performance as "like a student concert," but that wasn't necessary a weak point in the television age. Having interviewed Johnnys, the writer Hiraiwa Yumie attributed their popularity to "an amateurishness" that came from growing up in average middle-class families and a lack of urgency to their careers as entertainers.

Johnny Kitagawa worked to emphasize this student amateurishness, overturn entertainment industry common sense, and create a new force in the field. This was a fundamentally different image of students to, say, the Sun Tribe students (太陽族) in the novels of Ishihara Shintaro ten or so years before, or the students of the anti-war protests written about by Karoji Kentaro. In bringing this "immaturity" to Johnnys performances, Kitagawa wanted to focus on their "boyishness."

According to Egi Toshio of the Four Leaves (a group that came after the Johnnys), Kitagawa's criteria for employing young boys was that they had uncomplicated feelings and were completely focused on pursuing their dream. With just one look at their face he could determine whether or not they had the star qualities of a "Little Prince." For that reason, during his interactions with the boys Kitagawa himself ensured "that they didn't lose their childish hearts" at any time, and that they never "sensed anything of the adult world" while in the teaching space at his home. The arrangement known as "Johnny's Jr." functions as a system to develop and reproduce the next generation of performers, outputting an unending series of these "immature" and "boyish" idols, and could be described as the core of Johnny & Associates. Johnny's Jr. was formed early on, and was already active as a backing band for Johnnys.

The childlike "immaturity" with which the Johnny & Associates idols performed and their likable characters were created precisely with the television-watching modern family in mind. Although Johnnys appeared as pin-ups in magazines such as Margaret and had young female fans, Kitagawa also wanted parents to approve of them as wholesome idols, and for the band to become "idols to whose concerts the family might go together." By getting whole families on their side, "his goal was to ensure a continuous generation of fans." In fact, half of the fan letters to Johnnys came from adults. The songs were also composed to appeal to families, and some were praised as songs that anyone could sing.

Johnnies didn't just involve families, they called fans themselves the "family" and constructed a system for the idols to be consumed as products via this metaphor. Even today, the Johnnies fan club is called the Family Club, and the Taiwanese fans use the same name translated into Chinese. The Johnnies used the happy family, child-centrism, heterosexism, and other model features of the modern family in its production system. It was an unbeatable formula.

Johnnies in East Asia

At once "immature" and loved by the modern family, Johnnys' became the mold for the image of Johnnies that followed, and the origin of a cultural scene that would become deeply familiar to Japanese society. But deeply stamped on these new characters was the geopolitical features of cold-war Japan.

In 1953 when TV stations were set up in Japan and their broadcasting policy determined, the United States exercised enormous influence. The launch of television broadcasting coincided with a period in which Japan left the direct control of the United States due to the end of the occupation. The United States guided the launch of television in Japan as a means of realizing its anti-communist program in East Asia, and its psychological re-occupation plan for Japan. The CIA sought out cooperative individuals on the Japanese side such as Shoriki Matsutaro, and was indirectly involved in the setting up of television broadcasting in various ways, such as ordering the launch of private broadcasters, assigning broadcasting bands, organizing the broadcasting network, and providing funds. For the United States, the launch of television in Japan had a deep significance as a tool in its psychological and informational battle to ensure the continuation of a pro-American social structure in Japan after the occupation.

Alongside television, the United States rolled out a wide range of cultural diplomacy activities via the copiously funded USIS (United States Information Service). These included the production of Public Relations pamphlets, exchange of cultural envoys, and oversight of the American Center in Japan. Nevertheless, among all the various cultural, information, and media strategies — the framework of the cultural cold war that aimed to establish American hegemony — it was television that exercised particularly huge influence. Japan's television channels broadcast entertainment programs from the United States, and shows such as "Lassie Come Home," "The Adventures of Rin Tin Tin," "Father Knows Best," and "Disneyland" played an important role as pro-American propaganda. Johnnys sang the theme song for "Batman," which was shown on channels including Fuji Television.

Needless to say, the stage for this TV cultural cold war was the household space. The everyday life of households was indirectly but constantly connected to the United States via the intermediary of the television. And, in this environment, the Johnnys characters beloved of the modern family became necessary.

For the United States, the issue of making television part of everyday life in Japan was part of its overall strategy in East Asia. Buffeted by violent anti-communism at home, in East Asia the United States was desperate to create a structure that would contain the spread of communism. For that reason, from the mid 1950s, the United States deployed military bases in Okinawa, South Korea, Taiwan and the Philippines, and hoped for the Japanese mainland to become an economic stronghold in East Asia. Among these, South Korea received a huge amount (relative to the size

of its economy) of military aid, and its military might was built up for the nation to serve as a cold war outpost. The cold war in East Asia was built on the underlying division of military and economic roles.

Inevitably and unwittingly, the modern-family targeted Johnnys found itself demilitarized. Asked what they would do if a war occurred, or if they were ordered to go to war, the members of Johnnys replied: "I am against war," "No way," "I'll be careful the bullets don't hit me," and "I don't think war will happen in Japan." Although Kitagawa had initially set his self-penned musical "Sometime, Somewhere" on the battlefield of the Vietnam War and made its main characters American youths sent there, by the time it was performed he had changed the story to be about gangs of youths from Harajuku in Tokyo.

The "Johnnys" image of young men, however, could never have worked in South Korean society, which had military conscription and a development dictatorship. South Korean television started out as a propaganda organ of Park Chung-hee, who took power in a 1961 military coup, and employed a different kind of ideology to the household/citizen focused ideology in Japan.

What's more, this conscription-based military culture played a decisive role in the construction of masculinity in South Korean society. The military culture was built on strict awareness of hierarchy and a top-down command structure, stress was placed on a masculinity based on physical and mental toughness combined with a spirit of self-sacrifice, and women were peripheral. The military culture was a fundamental factor in the construction of South Korean masculinity, and that severity applied to entertainers as much as any male.

Comparing Johnnys & Associates with South Korean idols, Inohara Yoshihiko of the group V6 notes that, while Johnnies tend to be referred to with a Japanese word that emphasizes their youth (even if they have been with the company for a long time) this was not acceptable in South Korea. At the root of this is the difference between a masculinity based on military culture, and the "Johnnies" masculinity. Johnny & Associates was based on the culture of the home, and to express masculinity one of the areas it chose was sports, such as baseball, bicycle racing, and boxing. Johnny & Associates started out as a baseball team for boys, and even today in 2016 it holds an annual baseball tournament.

Conclusion

Johnnys were born from Washington Heights and in line with a model of the modern family that developed at a turning point for the media; that is, the dawn of the television age. Modern families in Japan looked towards the United States, established themselves as the units of the nation, and were set apart from the other societies of East Asia. Johnnys was made possible by the United States' cold war East Asia strategy, namely geopolitical conditions of division of economic and military roles. Of course, living in Washington Heights and working in the

American Embassy Military Assistance Advisory Group, Johnny Kitagawa can't have been completely unaware of the special situation in which Japanese society had been placed. And the success of Johnny & Associates must also have been due to his own exceptional abilities.

But, the production system and popular consumption of Johnnies images are social and cultural phenomena, and these cannot be explained simply by reducing the issue to one of personal qualities. In order to explain these social and cultural phenomena we need to focus on a broader structure, namely the production of a national self-image based on the value of "immaturity," and in which media technology and the modern family are linked together.

The historical origins of this structural relationship between media technology and the modern family originates in social changes in modern Japan of around the 1920s. This period was when the Japanese modern family first appeared, becoming the main players in Japan's burgeoning consumer society, and setting the direction for how the new media technology would be socially received. When we look at how Johnny brought "immaturity" into their performances, I believe that we can acknowledge this structural link between media technology and the modern family.

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