Paper Title: Exploring popular culture in the post-capitalist society through minor culture

Name of Author: Rosa Lee

Institutional Affiliation: The University of Tokyo

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Abstract

Abstract text (no more than 500 words with no figures or tables)

In tune with the societal transitions and the emergence of alternative cultures, popular culture studies have transitioned its focus from a dominant mass culture to plural subcultures as popularly adopted means to address postmodern complexities. For Osawa (2008) and Miyadai (2011), the impossibility to determine reality has resulted in the rise of popular subcultures which diffuse signs of identity by consuming the real/fiction binary opposition. However the proliferation of “hybrids” fusing reality and fiction in post-capitalist societies question the relevance of real/fiction binary in understanding popular cultures. To reconsider contemporary popular culture, this study examines the current state of a culture belonging to the nondenumerable masses through a case study of Shinsengumi, a popular historical icon originally romanticised by a small number of Meiji commoners.

Despite its present popularity, Shinsengumi’s initial marginalisation from official history allows its definition to be unbridled by dominant discourses in contrast to national heroes such as Sakamoto Ryoma which remain bound to mainstream values. Nonetheless, the icon could also embody the mainstream culture unlike subcultures which define itself in opposition to mainstream and other counter cultures. Shinsengumi could simultaneously represent both ends of the spectrum due to the co-existence of its reality, i.e. its existence history, and the indefinability of its historical presence. That is, the absence of the truth renders all comprehensions into authentic personal interpretations of facts and fiction. As a result, Shinsengumi could be produced by recognising, instead of opposing, the differences between various interpretations, as well as between Shinsengumi and other cultures. In Deleuze-Guattarian sense, Shinsengumi rose into an icon of minor culture which delineates itself among the majority through perpetual self-description. Shinsengumi’s appearance in popular culture as personal romanticisations date back to as early as the Meiji period, but its transcendence into a minor culture could actuate as a result of the rise of a post-capitalist society where the expansion of knowledge and information-telecommunication technologies capacitiate nondenumerable individuals to archive and circulate information.

The opportunity to produce one’s individuality by acknowledging differences through minor culture provides free space for an individual to conciliate the multiplicities of their social realities and respond to their environment by producing a fluid identity known as “playing self”. In practice, individuals and communities construct their personal and collective imaginations of Shinsengumi by engaging in social interactions such as the Shinsengumi parade. These interactions are based on an appreciation of the
disjunctions and connections between individual romanticisations, as well as those between Shinsengumi, mainstream cultures and other subcultures. Through such reflexivity, actors claim their minor space within existing social terrains and thereby deterritorialise and redefine the status quo.

The opportunity to express individuality in minor culture suggests contemporary popular culture incorporates an alternative outlook to the existing binary of the central mainstream cultures and peripheral subcultures. In this light, social realities inherent in contemporary post-capitalist societies invite further explorations of minor culture belonging to nondescript individuals as a key to appreciating the plurality and possibility of popular culture.

Keywords: popular culture, minor identity, post-capitalist society