

A Girls' Literary and Cultural Studies' Best Friend

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'Gay men as women's ideal partners in Japanese popular culture: Are gay men really a girl's best friends?' was the title of the first article by Mark McLelland that I read.^[1] As it happened, his article featured in the same issue of the *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal* (17, 1999) as my own article on food and gender in contemporary Japanese literature. Coincidentally, just as we were receiving our respective copies by post, Mark arrived at the University of Queensland (UQ) to take up his UQ Postdoctoral Research Fellowship (2000–2003) at the Centre for Critical and Cultural Studies (CCCS), which was not too far from the then Department of Asian Languages and Studies, where I was teaching Japanese language and literature. The University of Queensland was lucky enough to have Mark for three more years, as he stayed at the CCCS as an Australian Research Council (ARC) Australian Postdoctoral Research Fellow (2004–2006) before moving to the University of Wollongong.

In our first meeting in either late 1999 or early 2000, Mark taught me the term *yaoi* or YAOI, which is 'an acronym meaning "no climax, no point, no meaning",' coined to signify commercial manga targeted at women with explicit sex scenes between beautiful boys.^[2] The topic of male homoeroticism as depicted by women writers such as Mori Mari (1903–1987) and manga artists such as Hagio Moto and Takemiya Keiko had interested me from my undergraduate days in the 1970s. Even though I published an essay on this topic in 1988, it was only in the 2000s that I had the opportunity and motivation to take up the topic again. Mark's arrival at UQ and his work played a key role in rekindling my interest in the literary and graphic representations of male homoeroticism targeted at a female readership.

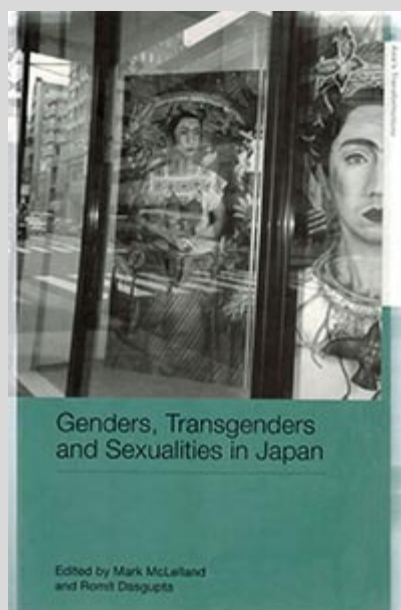


Figure 1. Cover of Mark McLelland and Romit Dasgupta (eds), *Genders, Transgenders and Sexualities in Japan*, Abingdon: Routledge: 2005, photograph by Vera Mackie.

To illustrate how far behind I was from studies of this particular topic in girls' and women's manga, I would like to mention another term that I learned from Mark in the early 2000s. It is *tōjisha*, which, to me, simply meant a person/party concerned or interested in some legal situation or accident. It was only through Mark's work, and the works of other scholars such as Ishida Hitoshi, whom he cited, that I realised that the term has a more specific meaning and usage to indicate those directly concerned in the debates and discourses regarding minority rights.[3]

It was a great pleasure to work with Mark and a number of other colleagues he introduced to me on several exciting projects, which resulted in edited volumes and special journal issues.[4] What I appreciated more than anything was Mark's genuinely welcoming attitude to researchers in fields that were different from his own. Since I work in literary studies, my main method is textual analysis, with special interests in intertextuality and socio-historical contexts as well as gender structures. On some occasions, I have received criticism of this approach from referees who are obviously in other disciplines and expect the methods and approaches that they are familiar with. In the interdisciplinary projects led by Mark, there was no fear of being ostracised or marginalised because of disciplinary differences. With mutual respect, scholars from a range of disciplines including cultural studies, cultural history, queer studies, sociology, anthropology and literary studies worked together.

Mark was also very helpful with grant applications. As I had a teaching and research position when Mark arrived at UQ, I had only limited experience of external grant applications. Although I cannot remember which grant application it was—perhaps an early draft of what was to become the ARC Discovery Project 'From *musume* (daughter) to *shōjo* (girl): Representations of young women in modern Japanese literature' (2005–2007)—he kindly read my application and commented along the lines of: 'It's a great project explained in a most boring way.' I cannot help smiling whenever I remember this episode. It is so like Mark, featuring as it does warm encouragement, useful help and frank words that were never hostile but communicative and constructive.

Compared with all the help and kindness he has given me, I am afraid I could return very little—perhaps responses to occasional queries on linguistic or other matters. I am rather embarrassed by the amateur 'calligraphy' of '*Kono sekai* or 'this world,' a reference to Japan's diverse queer community, which Mark asked me to produce. It appears on the frontispiece to his book, *Queer Japan from the Pacific War to the Internet Age*. [5] Now that Mark has departed from 'this world' to the next, I cherish the copy he gave me with his autograph on the title page. Mark was a dear, and very important, friend—indeed, the best friend of women's and girls' literary studies.

Notes

[1] Mark McLelland, 'Gay men as women's ideal partners in Japanese popular culture: Are gay men really a girl's best friends?,' *U.S.–Japan Women's Journal. English Supplemental*, 17 (1999): 77–110. For some reason, his name appears as 'McLelland' in this article.

[2] Mark McLelland, 'No climax, no point, no meaning? Japanese women's boy-love sites on the internet,' *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 24(3) (2000): 274–91, p. 277, doi: [10.1177/0196859900024003003](https://doi.org/10.1177/0196859900024003003). *Yaoi* is said to be short for '*Yama-nashi*, *Ochi-nashi*, *Imi-nashi*.' It has been traced to a panel discussion in 1979: Hatsu Akiko, Maru Mikiko, Kai Yukiko and Sakata Yasuko, 'Yaoi Taidan' (Roundtable discussion on yaoi), *Rappori Yaoi Tokushūgō* (Rappori special issue on yaoi) (December) (1979): p. 20.

[3] Mark J. McLelland, 'The role of the "*tōjisha*" in current debates about sexual minority rights in Japan,' *Japanese Studies* 29(2) (2009): 193–207, doi:[10.1080/10371390903026933](https://doi.org/10.1080/10371390903026933). While this article specifically

focused on sexual minorities, the term can be used by other minority communities (such as persons with disabilities) to refer to their political interests.

[4] See, for example: Mark McLelland and Romit Dasgupta (eds), *Genders, Transgenders and Sexualities in Japan*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2005, doi: [10.4324/9780203346839](https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203346839); Mark McLelland (ed.), *Japanese Transnational Fandoms and Female Consumers*, special issue of *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific* 20(April) (2009), URL: http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue20_contents.htm, accessed 26 May 2021; Mark McLelland, Kazumi Nagaïke, Katsuhiko Suganuma and James Walker (eds), *Boys Love Manga and Beyond: History, Culture, and Community in Japan*, Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2015, doi: [10.14325/mississippi/9781628461190.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.14325/mississippi/9781628461190.001.0001).

[5] Mark McLelland, *Queer Japan from the Pacific War to the Internet Age*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005.

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