

An Allure of Sable and Lace

A study of the Japanese Maid Obsession in Anime

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Maid Cafés abound in Akihabara. Every season at least one anime features maids in one form or another. Even popular strong feminine characters like Saber and Rin Tohsaka from Fate/ Stay Night or Haruhi Suzumiya from the Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya are featured in official artwork wearing the uniform of the humble maid. Horrifying as it seems even beefy guys sometimes appear in the skirt and aprons such as in the hilarious Kamen no Maidguy. This has overflowed into real life as many Japanese women are flocking to the possibility to relive the dress up games of their childhood by stepping into the role, no matter how temporarily of the maid. (Bone, 2006) The question is why?

The answer may seem simple, "Most Japanese men are repressed perverts you simp.", but like most blanket statements this does not cover every base. There are reasons that maids in particular have seized the Japanese mindset and these reasons even cross over into female territory as well. First off let us get some definitions out of the way.

**Maid:** A female dressed as a dedicated domestic servant. The standard maid outfit includes special headgear, a long dress like garment, usually black with white accents and a long, frilly white apron. The length and color of the skirt and apron can be variable, but most tend to be as above. For the purposes of this article a maid may LOOK like a female domestic servant, but is more than likely playing a role and does not actually have to be one.

**Butler:** Not just the male version of a maid, a butler is expected to either be strong, controlled and masculine or at least somewhat older and wise. Standard butlers' uniforms include formal wear and bow-ties usually in black and white. In all but the most extreme of cases butlers are always covered in as many layers of clothing as they can wear without interfering with their assigned duties. As with maids for the purposes of this article butlers may look the part of a domestic servant, but do not actually have to be one.

**Master:** (Goshujin-Sama in Japanese) A man who employs a maid, whether as a glorified waitress or as a permanent live in servant. Masters come in all shapes, sizes and uniforms.

**Lady:** (Ojou-Sama in Japanese) also called a "Princess" A woman who employs either maids or butlers. As with masters ladies can employ maids and butlers for varying lengths of time and are pretty varied in condition and dress.

These definitions out of the way let us look at the male side of the coin first.

While they are gaining more acceptance and attracting a wider variety of customer nowadays Maid Cafes were originally designed to serve that most demanding of clientele, the Japanese Otaku. Despite their semi-outcast status Otaku have money to spend and can, under the right circumstances be convinced to let go of a pretty good chunk of it in a single place. Maid cafes became a place where they could escape the humdrum realities of life, a quiet oasis where cute women would spend time with them and do everything they could to make them happy.

As hard as the maids in a café work to please their “masters” there is in most cases no sex or even the idea of sex involved. The most daring maid cafes tend to go is shoulder massages. (Japanese Lifestyle.com, 2010)The things that are involved are a lot of careful, cheerful effort and a vast attention to detail and the personal happiness of their customers as long as they are in the restaurant. (C, Wade, Violet, Amnell, & Teresa, 2010)

There is something for everyone as far as maid cafes go. There is even a café that features maids that have a bit more meat on their bones than the rail thin Japanese average. (Kosuga & Oishi, 2009) The strangest adaptation the maid café has made however is hopping the gender fence. Let us now look at “Princess Cafes” which are maid cafes for the ladies.

Princess Cafes, much like maid cafes are built around the illusion of servitude rather than sex. Unlike maid cafes however, princess cafes tend to hire foreign workers to act as butlers. (If you think you are handsome enough, this may be a good way to stay in Japan for a while.) They are slightly more ostentatious than maid cafes serving alcohols as well as the standard coffee and cake and providing much more lavish surroundings. These are not host clubs however and the fantasy ends when the patron hits the door. (Hughes, 2008)

So again the question may be asked? Why maids and butlers? If sex isn't involved why the focus on beautiful people in formal wear and what about all the anime and manga where sex ( or at least vast amounts of fanservice) is involved? I will have to say that sex is going to come up in any situation where one gender is perceived as dominant over the other. What it all comes down to is a wish for a small oasis

of peace in the hectic world of the average Japanese worker. In a society that has one of the highest suicide rates in the world (Gallagher, 2008) and where the average worker will never own a house or land of their own it can be a psychological relief to imagine, even for the briefest of time that you are the master of a house with a dedicated (and attractive) staff ready and willing to do their all for you.

In the end the allure of the maid isn't really about sex, but about tranquility and the relief of stress. The Japanese, in their own unique way have found techniques to cope with the increasing pressure of the world and a way to create an oasis of fun and relaxation in the desert of the world economic crash. Perhaps we here in the U.S. should be paying a little more attention.

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