Another Half and/or Another Individual: Representation of Twins in Manga

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Abstract: Who am I? Is there anyone who loves me as I am? A quest for ‘individual identity’ is a major topic in manga (and anime) texts, which combine visual art forms with strong narrative-driven structures that portray a diverse range of social phenomena. This paper examines the characterisation of ‘twins’ in manga and anime, paying particular attention to ‘identical twins’ in girls’ manga, in terms of the following: the fashioning of self and the individual’s quest for / negotiation of subjective forms of agency through their struggles with actual and/or internalised pressures for social conformity. As De Nooy (2005) claims, tales of twins figure as a significant motif in contemporary culture and these narratives continuously evolve to respond to the place and the period of their (re)telling, often representing an account of an ambiguous self and/or ‘other self’ in relation to issues of gender and sexuality. Twins in manga (and anime) are the same, yet such characters are often created by female artists for female readers as embodiments of personal, psychological struggles for individual independence rather than as a gendered girl, unlike western novels, plays and films. Perhaps reflecting the general impression of ‘twins’ as the identical, Japanese twins in manga (and anime) are generally limited to the identical (same sex) or male/female twins with similar appearances. Male/female twins tend to represent the strong, affectionate, (mythic) bond, with incestuous overtones. It can deconstruct pre-determined gender roles but only lightly, as exemplified by the first twin manga, Tezuka Osamu’s ‘Futago no kishi’ (Twin knights) from 1958. In contrast, tales of identical twins often focus on their rivalry and their conflict, where jealousy plays a critical role. It explores psychological issues, in which the twins may be interpreted as dramatisations of the self and the mirrored self, the split and fragmented self, and the internal conflict between unconsciousness and the social self or the ego and the super-ego. Many identical twins narratives in manga revolve around deep-seated anxieties and uncertainties about individual identity, especially that of girls. As Fujimoto (2001) sums up: twin tales in the 1950s demonstrate a recovery of lost wholeness, which end with the happy reunion of twin girls who grew up separately, followed by darker and more suspenseful stories, entwined with jealousy, rivalry and conflict between twins with contrasting nature (e.g., the good and the bad). From 1985, along with a general interest in ‘identity’, twin narratives of both girl twins and boy twins flourished, with a specific focus on psychological issues, such as inner conflict; conflict between the self and the expected self, which also closely related to other narratives (e.g., clones, multiple personalities and reincarnations), all of which relate to issues concerning individual identity. In recent manga publications twin tales are increasingly characterised by playfulness, lightness and positive tones in their depiction of identical twins’ development of independence - from the double to two individuals as exemplified by Minako Narita’s Cipher.

Keywords: Twins, Manga/Anime, Individual Identity, Social Conformity, Hierarchical Order

Who am I? Is there anyone who loves me as I am?

Quests for ‘individual identity’ are a major topic in narrative-driven manga and anime texts, particularly in shōjo (girls’) manga.¹ The medium features individuals struggling to ‘step outside’ culturally assigned personae and attain a ‘true’ sense of self by setting the key protagonists up as twins, clones, other selves (bunshin) and multiple personalities. Such narratives are polyphonic and problematise an essentialist’s concept of ‘self’ as a single, solid, integral, unchangeable entity. They are a perfect arena for Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895-1975)’s dialogism: ‘individual subjectivity is intersubjective’ and ‘(t)he “other” constitutes a position of outsidedness needed to complete the self’ (Robyn McCallum 1999, pp.70-71).

Twins are far more visible and more colourfully depicted in manga/anime than in novels in Japan. This is natural due to the importance of identity issues in manga/anime, particularly to their adolescent readers/audiences. It is also due to the suitability of the medium, i.e., ‘iconographic’ illustrations, which are clearly identifiable and easily copied, reproduced and modified (Yomota Inuhiko, 1999). Not only in manga/anime but also as character goods (e.g., Hello Kitty and Mimmy), images of twins are conspicuous in the everyday environment of contemporary Japan. However, research on twins narratives is strikingly scarce. This paper will look into the characterisation of ‘twins’ in manga works, paying particular attention to ‘identical twins’ in shojo manga, in terms of the individual’s quest for subjective agency through their struggles with actual and/or internalised pressures for social conformity.

Reflecting the general impression in Japan of twins as identical, representations of twins in manga/anime are characterised by identical twins and male/female twins with similar appearances, unlike Western filmic and literary depictions. Male/female twins tend to represent affective (mythic) bonds, with incestuous overtones. In contrast, tales of identical twins, which are the focus of this paper, stress their rivalry, where jealousy plays a critical role. Due to their physical sameness, their psychological dissimilarities are highlighted and their unsettling experiences of intersubjective polarisations between ‘unity’ and ‘rivalry’ are explored in depth. To use McCallum’s terminology, when these identical twins are portrayed, ‘the double, or doppelgänger, is used to represent intersubjective relationships between self and other as an internalized dialogue and the internal fragmentation of the subject—the split subject’ (op.cit., p.68).

Identical twins have been a fertile source for a fascinating range of thematic motifs in the storytelling of many cultures. Why are they so intriguing? John Lash (1993, p.6) offers the following insight:

Twins pose all manner of conundrums and inner contradictions. Ponder it as we will, the dynamic interfusion of Twins never lends itself to a clear-cut exposition… By a broad-based definition, Twins are the special case of duality in its mode of self-contradiction, the non-resolving dyad. Since they are not ‘polar opposites’, they will not resolve into a final and harmonic unity. Twins are parity and disparity, but equality—never… Twins are a duo who look as if they should coincide and complement each other, but never actually do. Or, never quite do.

Given such poignant ambiguity and metaphoric visualisation, the imagery of twins has been prominent in contemporary societies in general. Juliana De Nooy (2005, p.1) notes that twin tales are told and retold with astonishing frequency in contemporary culture and have continuously evolved to respond to the place and period of their (re)telling, often representing an account of an ambiguous self and/or ‘other self’ in relation to issues of gender and sexuality.

Japanese tales of twins in manga have evolved with shojo manga since the 1950s. It is significant that shojo manga originated with Tezuka Osamu’s androgynous Sapphire in Ribon no Kishi (Princess Knight) in 1953, followed by his Futago no kishi (Twin knights) from 1958, both of which visualise the fragmented self, although in a comical and light-hearted manner. Moreover, the increased visibility of twins in manga from the late 1950s suggests the influence of the popularity of identical female twins in the late 1940s in Western literature and films, particularly light-hearted children’s literature, such as Erich Kästner’s Das doppelte Lottchen (1949).
The stories often involve long-lost twins of distinctively different personality traits and upbringing, their reunions and the confusion caused by their resemblance to each other. The differences in personalities do not generally imply moral embodiment (e.g., good and bad conviction and actions), but behavioural qualities such as gentle/passive and assertive/active, e.g., the shy, cautious Lotte and the rough, tomboyish Louise in Das doppelte Lottchen. This formula has been diversified with different personalities and upbringings, producing many manga works, including a number of works by Watanabe Masako.

As Fujimoto Yukari (2001) observes, earlier tales of twins focused on the recovery of lost wholeness, ending with the happy reunion of twin girls who grew up separately. But from 1965, stories of suspenseful rivalry between girl twins with contrasting natures (e.g., good and bad) have increased. From the mid-1980s, along with general interest in ‘identity’, narratives involving both girl twins and boy twins flourished, with a specific focus on psychological issues, e.g., the dynamic of inner conflict, the fragmentation of the self between the intrinsic, unique self and the expected self. They are also closely related to other narratives involving multiple selves (e.g., clones, multiple personalities and reincarnations), all of which (re)staged issues concerning the formation of individual identity. Sharing the same trends seen in all other manga/anime works, identical twins have become increasingly characterised by playfulness, lightness and positive tones in the depiction of the development of their independence - from the double to two individuals, as exemplified by Narita Minako’s Cipher (1985-1990).

Typically, the identical twin characters are mostly teenagers and the stories, implicitly or explicitly, depict their existence as a site of conflicts such as between the internal and the external, the individual and society, unity and rivalry, trust and doubt. The narratives function as devices for interrogating issues concerning the construction of self identity and subjective agency through ongoing negotiation via intersubjective relationships. John Stephens’ observation concerning the nature of children’s literature equally applies here: “Arguably the most pervasive theme in children’s fiction is the transition within the individual from infantile solipsism to maturing social awareness…” and “all development paths are ideologically constructed, involving conformity to social norms” (1992, p.3). Identity is ‘always socially located’, as Kath Woodward notes (2002, p.2). The tension between an individual and society is particularly acute in Japan, where constituents are meticulously distinguished and ranked in a hierarchical order (Nakane Chie 1967/70) and are constantly subjected to sociocultural pressure to play appropriate roles according to gender, seniority and their specific situation, often requiring the yielding of one’s idiosyncrasies and personal preferences (e.g., Takie Sugiyama Lebra 1976, 1984; Sugimoto Yoshio 2003). With the internalisation of such unrelenting demands for ‘role-playing’ in varied circumstances, an individual’s desire to maintain their integrity is often perceived as ‘selfish’. Self-conscious people are thus likely to experience the pain of inner division through their effort to be ‘docile bodies’ (using Michel Foucault’s term, 1975).

Twins narratives, especially those involving identical twins, deal with such deep-seated anxieties and uncertainties about identity. They have largely been created by female artists for female readers, teenagers in particular, and characteristically portray individual struggle for independence. This is because such a quest has historically been more pressing and complicated for girls in Japan, who are expected to be motherly, self-sacrificing caretakers, with a strong sense of responsibility for others (for both males and younger persons), and are granted limited autonomy (e.g., Lebra 1984).

Despite their ambivalent interrelationship, the strong bond between twins is the most resonating feature of these manga/anime narratives, whether or not the twins are identical, suggesting the Japanese preference for social harmony. The strength of their bond is frequently exemplified by their possession of empathetic, even telepathic, feelings for one another. For instance, Rumi and Ruka in Shinohara Chie’s Umi no yami Tsuki no kage (lit. Darkness of the Sea, Shadow of the Moon; hereafter Umi/Tsuki), Akira and Tōru in Ōtani Hiroko’s Shōko no jikenbo (lit. Shōko’s file) and Jay and Roy in Narita’s Cipher, all mutually experience pain and premonitions when the other twin is endangered. The frequency of these depictions is high, becoming a kind of generic convention indicating, and even serving to embody, a mythic and/or fatalistic bond and/or a humanistic desire for an ideal unity.

The twins’ bonds and sense of mutual respect normally remain intact despite turbulent scenarios which often end with the reestablishment of the twins within their new social environment and with their reconnexions with themselves and others around them as forms of mutual recognition of who they really are. Their final reintegration may be depicted either as the twins’ reconciliation and/or a twin’s disappearance (e.g., death). In either case, it is not a straightforward and clear-cut unity or loss, but an intense and continuously unsettling negotiation between opposing vectors – separation and wholeness; one’s external and internal selves. Such closure is therefore read as an integration of conflicting selves (e.g., one’s superego and the unconscious)
and the acceptance of ‘who I am’ within one’s surroundings, as a part of ongoing self development.

The depth and complexity of twins’ bonds and their interdependency is often revealed through the death of a twin, either real or symbolic. The death of a twin is fairly common and forms an essential element in narratives involving twins. A twin’s death is likely placed in the early part of a narrative or at the conclusion. In the case of the former, death occurs as an accident (e.g., hit by a car in order to save someone else) for which the other twin is neither responsible nor possesses the ability to prevent from happening. This facilitates the sad, yet convenient exit of a twin to facilitate the other’s development as an individual. The suppression of subjective agency is lifted through the twin’s absence and their development is justified and encouraged as a heroic fulfillment of the deceased’s desire. This can be read as a transition from a passive stage of childhood reliance to a more autonomous developmental stage. In Adachi Mitsuru’s Touchi (1981-86), for example, Tatsuya’s avoidance of competition with his twin brother Kazuya prevents his own development and as a narrative strategy, Kazuya’s exit through death is inevitable.

In contrast, a twin’s death at the closure suggests an ultimate reconciliation and reintegration of conflicting selves. The battle between Rumi and Ruka (in Umi/Tsuki), for example, ends with Ruka shooting Rumi to fulfil Rumi’s request – “You have a responsibility to end what I started.” Ruka responds, “I’ll do it, not because it’s my duty but this is what I want you to do if I were in your place.” At the moment of the fated shooting, their happy memories recur, as does their mutual affection. The story focalises Ruka and in the closure, she feels Rumi’s presence deep within herself and says, “Rumi, let’s go together towards a normal morning after the strange night” - the liminal sphere in which a rite of passage is staged.

With their physical sameness, identical twins are often psychologically polarised. This is particularly evident in female twins with contrasting personalities. They may be positioned within a ‘good girl’ vs. ‘bad girl’ dichotomy, not necessarily in terms of sexual and moral issues (virgin/whore) as Western representations often do, but in terms of their behaviour. The avoidance of explicit sexual depiction is a conventional feature of shōjo manga so that the story can focus on an ordinary girl’s inner world (e.g., Ōtsuka Eiji 1991). Furthermore, the narratives are often structured to manifest scepticism about a clear-cut good/evil dichotomy, by shifting and/or obscuring the borders between them, e.g., “bad” may mean ‘assertive’, ‘active’ and ‘independent’, as often seen in Japanese literary expressions in general. This is often achieved by depicting an evil act as an unredeemable, yet momentary, act of selfishness by an immature person, rather than a calculating action perpetrated by a fully wicked person, regardless of the resulting level of devastation, as exemplified by Takahashi Rumiko’s horrific Ningyo no Mori (1987). Consequently, the manga stories generally leave scope for the twin’s potential reconciliation.

Moreover, Japanese identical twins are doubly tied to society. They are not only dichotomised, but also positioned vertically. The hierarchical imperative posits an inviolable order between a pair of twins in terms of one being elder or younger. This implies the ascription of seniority and priority and means twins are never represented as equal entities or agents. The differentiation is demanded as part of the function of the koseki (family registry), which positions a person in Japan as a family member within a hierarchy, rather than as an individual possessing their own rights. Similarly, there is no commonly used word in the Japanese language to designate one as simply ‘sister’ or ‘brother.’ Instead, Japanese uses the terms ane (elder sister), imōto (younger sister), ani (elder brother) and otōto (younger brother). Consequently, an expression such as futago no imōto (‘younger’ twin sister) is commonly used, underpinning the verticality of the relationship. This hierarchy permeates everyday life and affects each twin’s positioning, identity and interpersonal relationships, even to the extent of potentially perceiving the elder as the original and superior versus the younger as the spare and inferior – which of course relates to narratives involving doubles and clones.

Despite the definite impact of the hierarchical order on each twin’s life, the determination of this social status has been rather arbitrary. Traditionally, the first-born baby was regarded as the younger one, but in 1874, the Meiji government ruled that the first-born would be regarded as the elder. Either way, the upbringing and psychological development of Japan-

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6 This setting is narratively essential, as it is impossible to set the positive and smooth self-development of a surviving twin who already has a strong sense of guilt over his/her survival, if he/she is directly or even indirectly responsible for his/her twin’s death and suffers massive, irrational remorse (as detected by Elizabeth M. Bryan [1984]).

7 Western representations often typify the ‘good girl’ as passive, self-sacrificing, sweet, demure and truthful, while the ‘bad girl’ as a femme fatale – sexy, deceptive, competitive and bold. It is only recently that such texts have begun to depict what amounts to the synthesis of the irreparably divergent nature of twins, combining moral rectitude with a sexual appetite, in order to become whole (De Nooy, pp.50-1).

8 The koseki records an individual’s birth, death and marital status etc. and manifests itself as the most fundamental registration for recognising an individual’s presence in Japan. It is equivalent to the status accorded to individuals in Western countries through legal certificates (e.g., birth, marital, death). This system started in 1871 and has constituted the nation’s ethical sense of ‘family’ and suppressed individualism (Ninomiya Shihiei, 1996).
ese twins has been strongly influenced by social position and perspective. In a patriarchal system, therefore, it was possible for an elder brother to possess everything as the family head, whereas his younger twin brother was positioned as more lowly and subordinate, or discarded as a threat. This inequality was legally abolished by The Constitution of Japan promulgated in 1946, which declared as inviolable an individual's human rights (including a sibling's equal right of inheritance). However, various socio-cultural and legal practices underpin a patriarchal, hierarchical system and this implicitly constitutes the basis of an individual's sensitivity and perception of his/her place in the family, even between twins born a few minutes apart. Such situations naturally lead people to fatalism and/or relentless questioning – e.g., Why not me? Who am I? If this is a place for him/her, where is mine? – which are the major themes of identical twins narratives, and girls’ manga in general.9

Naturally, the twins’ relationship is depicted as ambivalent and unbalanced. They are constantly negotiating between their individual needs, their social positions and their sensitive feeling for one another. Their differentiated positioning and upbringing is often expressed via the elder’s sense of responsibility towards the younger, although if the elder twin is incapable of independence and is reliant on the younger, the sense of responsibility belongs to the latter. They are often focalised and their emotional wavering is exposed to, and shared by, the readers. The elder/stronger’s attitude is exemplified by the young Saki’s utterance, “(I didn’t cry) as I’m an elder sister” (in Tachibana Yutaka’s Hajimari no Junmon, 1991). In Sōryō Fuyumi’s Mars (1996-2000), Rei, the elder twin, suffers a strong sense of guilt and responsibility over Sei’s suicide. Rei confesses his desire for Sei’s ‘disappearance’, due to his uncontrollable frustration over Sei’s passivity and righteousness, and his inability to protect Sei (from bulling etc.), as requested by their deceased mother. Rei portrays himself as dominant and aggressive, although Sei perceives Rei’s hardship to be appropriate to the experience of the elder/stronger twin – “Rei cannot cry as always I cry first”.

The elder/stronger’s sense of responsibility for the other sometimes puts him/her in a self-imposed handicapped position in which the twin must give up, or at least hesitate to pursue, his/her own happiness. The pain of their suppressed desire adds further tension to an already complicated situation, preventing the twins’ equal play in rivalries.

In Shōji Yōko’s Seito shokan! (1977-84), the demand for the stronger twin’s self-sacrifice is embodied in Nakkie (Natsuko)’s unreciprocated and suppressed rivalry for her twin elder sister, Māl (Mariko) who is weak, mentally disabled and has only a short life expectancy. The story opens when the hyper-active, multi-talented and independent Nakkie enters junior high school and forms a close-knit group of friends. It transpires that her hyper-activity and intimate friendships are partly due to her need to deal with her loneliness and to maintain her identity. The innocent Māl admires and relies on Nakkie. However, her condition inevitably deprives Nakkie of what she deeply longs for – her mothers’ love and her first love, Tobishima. By being stronger and more mature, Nakkie has to suppress any expression of true feelings and desires. Her situation is acutely dramatized at the time of Māl’s death, when in confusion, her mother calls her Māl. As Fujimoto claims, this is Nakkie’s gravest identity crisis, as it reveals her mother’s unconscious obliteration of Nakkie.

Although a milder representation, Touch also deals with an elder twin’s reservation. In the story, both Tatsuya and Kazuya love Minami, the girl next door and their childhood best friend. They become baseball players to please her, although Tatsuya quits baseball to allow the diligent and respected Kazuya (the ace pitcher) the chance to fulfil Minami’s dream. Tatsuya resumes his baseball and pursuit of Minami only after Kazuya’s accidental death. This suggests that Tatsuya’s reluctance to compete with Kazuya indicates his sense of guilt towards Kazuya, as Minami seems to have feelings for Tatsuya. In short, Tatsuya’s sensitivity as his ‘elder’ brother inhibits him from bettering Kazuya, though it may be his self-centred perception and disrespect for Kazuya’s resilience and integrity, as it is Kazuya who prefers fair competition.

The border between the elder/stronger’s sense of responsibility and (unconscious) desire to control the younger/weaker twin is ambiguous and easily shifting. In fact, it is often the case that the younger/weaker twin exhibits more psychological stability and ultimately independence. Rumi in Umi/Tsuki, Akira in Shōko’s jikenbo, Jay in Cipher, and Nazuna (the younger/stronger) in Ichijō Yukari’s Romantic kudasai (1988) participate in these scenarios and the seemingly stronger/elder twin reveals his/her unconscious reliance on the younger/weaker’s dependence as a caregiver.

Saeki Kayono’s Poison (1991-2) offers an example of the efficient yet problematic interdependency experienced by girl twins with contrasting abilities and personalities. Seira, the eldest, is gifted, intelligent and ambitious, yet physically incapacitated with a short life expectancy, whilst Sara is healthy,

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9 For example, Miuchi Suzue’s Nanairo no kanaria (Seven coloured canary, 1973-4) is about Akiko who tries to be a peacock and fails. From her jealousy, Akiko murders her arrogant, young twin sister, who has been adopted by a wealthy family, and takes her place. This story is however, psychologically rather simple, as it does not stress the twins’ bond.
yet ordinary. When Sara is talent-scouted to be a model, Seira decides to achieve her dream to be a popular singer through Sara. Being fully reliant on Seira’s detailed instructions, Sara enjoys her role as a singer. However, this only deepens her sense of inferiority and jealousy over Seira’s talent and other people’s love and respect for her. At first glance, their relationship appears complementary and Seira’s manipulation of Sara is masked as the elder/stronger’s assistance for the younger/weaker. However, in the reality, it seriously deprives Sara of agency and autonomy. Sara’s self-confidence slips away as her external identity as a successful singer devolves into her being Seira’s puppet. This story is incomplete, yet it evidently reveals a widening fissure between the twins and their conflicting feelings towards one another through alternating focalisation between them.

Takahashi Rumiko’s Ningyo no Mori exemplifies a more extreme tragic inter-bondage of girl twins, instigated by the younger twin’s selfish manipulation. In the story, Sawa (the younger) deceivingly coaxed the dying Towa into drinking mermaid blood, on the pretext of saving her life, when in fact Sawa was testing its power to gain eternal life. The result is disastrous and Towa has to live with a painful, mutated arm, whilst keeping her youthful features. She lives only to have revenge against Sawa, now an old woman, by making her eat mermaid meat. When she fails in her attempt at retribution due to Sawa’s death from a heart attack, she commits suicide as she has no reason to live without Sawa. Towa’s intense anger derives from her trust in Sawa. Their intricately tangled, indivisible interdependency is suffocating and can be read as a warning of the danger of solipsism, by dwelling on an irredeemable past and isolating oneself from people and society. A common and classical representation of twin rivalry is of course competition for the same love object or interest, who is generally able to distinguish their differences, i.e., their individual identity, and reposition them as two individuals in a social context. His/her role is significant as a catalyst for the twins’ separation and a focal point for the reader to develop an understanding of the psychological dynamic between the twins. With such presence as an instigator and a focal point, such narratives are powerful apparatuses for unpacking the processes involved in maturation, in growing up.

Umi/Tsuki contains multiple sets of identical twins, and explores the richness of twins narratives by delineating the inseparability of their bond, their ambivalent conflicts instigated and witnessed by a third person, and the ambiguity of the good-evil dichotomy. The story begins with Katsuyuki’s confession of love for Ruka, followed by Rumi and Ruka’s infection by an ancient virus and their resultant development of supernatural, but opposing powers. Rumi possesses untamed monstrousness due to bitterness and jealousy, in contrast to Ruka’s power as a neutraliser of Rumi’s poison. The tale utilises the conventional dichotomy of the evil, sensuous girl versus her good, sensitive, younger sister and their relationship to the same man who desires the latter. Furthermore, it subverts the narrative strategy by portraying the genuine, intimate and relatively equal sisterhood (e.g., they call each other by their first names) of the active Rumi (the elder) and the shy Ruka, prior to Katsuyuki’s confession. In this context, he is an intruder into their relationship and the catalyst for their separation and independence. This suggests that Rumi’s resentment does not only lie in her jealousy over Katsuyuki, but also and perhaps more importantly, her difficulty in accepting Ruka’s independence, toward whom she has a sense of initiative and responsibility, and possibly even possession. Her disappointment over losing Ruka is expressed in her ambivalent attitude – persistently trying to kill Ruka but rescuing her from other potential murders.

In spite of Rumi’s capacity for spectacular destructiveness, the narrative also questions her evilness. The constant shift in her mental state is depicted by the shapes of her eyes, displaying her evilness with frightful cat-like eyes. This suggests that her wickedness is not necessarily intrinsic, but derived from her jealousy, bitterness and loneliness inflated by the virus. As the story progresses, it demonstrates Rumi’s struggle with her evil power and emphasises the twins’ strong bond through their alliance in the fight against their enemies, particularly the ambitious genius, Jean, and his twin cousins, Chris and Ian. The twins fully recover their joint powers and abilities when their elder sister is killed by Chris and Ian to avenge the killing of Jean. In the ensuing conflict, Chris is killed to protect Ian. Ian’s intense grief and resentment towards Rumi and Ruka is explosive. Nevertheless, they acutely sympathise with his emotions since they know how devastating it would be for one twin to lose the other.

In Ōtani’s Shōko’s Jikenbo, the story of identical male twins, the role of the catalyst is played by Shōko. It features contrasting and complementary male twins: the extrovert, realistic and cynical Akira (the elder) versus the shy and sensitive Tōru. When Akira sends Tōru’s novel to a publisher with the penname, Inui Kazuma, and wins a prize, they decide that Akira should play the role of the author in public. This causes a fatal confusion for Rui, who loves Tōru but has a relationship with Akira, mistakenly believing he is Tōru. The pregnant Rui falls from her apartment balcony and dies. The twins only realise the fatal outcome of their playful act, when her younger sister, Shōko, comes to question Tōru about Rui’s death. This encounter ironically connects
Shōko and Tōru who then develop a stable love and home. The story reveals that contrary to Akira's perception of Tōru as innocent and vulnerable, characteristics which are the source of Akira's determination to keep him from greedy people, Tōru shows his inner strength - emotional stability and faith in human goodness. Shōko is insightful and has never mistaken Tōru and Akira. The story depicts Akira's gradual transition from an egotistical, playboy-like persona to a person with an innate personality as warm, cheerful and caring, who never expressed his love for Shōko. Akira's change demonstrates a rite of passage: separation, liminality and re-integration, through his awareness of his emotive reliance on Tōru and his integration of internal conflicts, the split self, via his dialogue with Tōru, his other self, and Shōko, who is the representation of the hope of external worlds and his potential partner.

Similar to the above pair, in Narita's Cipher, Jay (with Shiva as his stage name) and his twin younger brother, Roy (Cipher) share the persona of Shiva. The story well exemplifies a ‘rite of passage’, starting when the twins’ cocoon-like containment from the world is ruptured by their new, tomboyish girlfriend, Anise. Cipher opens with her dream of Cain’s murder of Abel, which signifies her intervention in the twins’ anticipated stagnation and/or fatal confrontation. When she discovers that ‘Shiva’ is a persona projected by the twins, Roy instigates the competition for her to distinguish between them within three weeks, for which she is allowed to stay in their apartment. Her asexuality and sincerity relax them and break their self-sufficient, suffocating interdependency – which is what the twins unconsciously desired. While developing an intimacy with Roy, Anise inadvertently permits the twins to show individual qualities as well as coming to terms with their deep-seated jealousy for one another in their childhood. Jay is sensitive, intellectual and introverted, whilst Roy is active, friendly and extroverted. They share a traumatic experience, yet differently, of their father’s suicidal death in the mountains where only Roy accompanied him. The tormented Roy clings to Jay. This gives Jay his self-worth, but it isolates them from their mother and society. After his recovery from drug abuse, Roy is only able to participate in school life as ‘Shiva’. This sharing of an identity continues, increasing their sameness, until Anise steps into their lives. Their gradual separations reveal that Jay’s dependence on Roy is more profound, whilst Roy is more ready to part from his brother, but continues to play out his explicit dependence on Jay from his affection, gratitude and sympathy towards him.

The stronger the bond, the more painful the separation becomes. Their crucial separation arrives with the accidental death of a girl, who interests Jay but who herself expresses love toward Roy without knowing about the presence of two ‘Shivas’. After this tragedy, Roy gives up Anise as his self punishment and moves to Los Angeles where he pursues his acting career and develops a close friendship with Hal. Meanwhile, Jay follows his life and gains a best friend, Alex. Through soul-searching, for the first time, they are free from each other and individually examine who they are. Roy realises his sense of superiority toward Jay, since conquering his drug addiction, which in fact was made possible only by his witnessing Jay’s despair. Jay also recognises his mental dependence on, and envy of, Roy’s naturalness at expressing emotions. Alex (for Jay) and Hal (for Roy) respectively play the same significant role, to love the twins as they are. Unlike Jay’s façade as cool and serious, Alex perceives him as shy and artless and enables Jay to show his natural self including his weak and comical parts. Similarly, Hal realises Roy’s difficulty in expressing himself, as he is an innate actor of ‘natural, emotional expressions’. When finally the twins reunite, Hal and Alex meet the other twin and find the twins different. This closure ensures that Jay and Roy are now two independent individuals. By delineating the complexity of the twins’ feelings towards each other, this story presents the significance and difficulty of self-acceptance in a positive light.

Sooner or later, each twin should pursue his or her own individual life, independent from the other. Manga/anime narratives also explore cases where physical separation is impossible. The profound, yet ambivalent affective ties to each other are exemplified by Hagio Moto’s Hanshin (Half-god, 1984). This is a story of conjoined twins, Yudy and Yucy, narrated retrospectively by the adult Yudy, the elder and the survivor. Although they are identical, Yudy is depicted as ugly and emaciated, yet intelligent, in contrast to the retarded Yucy, whose angelic charms capture everyone’s attention and isolate the jealous Yucy. Yucy cannot take nutrition from food and so is parasitical on Yudy. Moreover, Yudy is expected to take care of Yucy who possesses a normal sized body. When Yudy’s body has reached the limit for supporting both bodies, they are separated and Yucy dies after the surgery. Yudy’s joy at long dreamed-for freedom is however short-lived, replaced by her wondering who has died, as the dying, skeletal Yucy is like the previous Yudy herself. Later, in a mirror, Yudy finds her face looks exactly like that of Yucy before the separation. Yudy’s realisation of her profound bond with Yucy is poignantly expressed in the utterance, “Was that me…? Well, then, what am I now? Did half of me die that day...?” (Hagio/Thorn, 2005, p.199). What does Yucy represent? – an innocence, childhood dependency, socially expected femininity, unconsciousness? The images of the two
faces side by side suggest that Yucy, Yudy’s half body (hanshin) and ‘half god’ (hanshin), is in Yudy.

The death of one of the conjoined twins for the other’s survival presents an unsettling picture. Watanabe Masako’s suspenseful Futago-za umare (1973) depicts Hilda, who was separated and died, but persists in protecting her younger, twin sister, Maria, by killing potentially harmful men. In Hagio’s Aylos (1975), Lucas communicates via a mirror with Ayros, his twin brother, who died at birth. His amicable co-existence with the intelligent, aggressive and selfish Ayros ends when the bodiless Ayros takes possession of Lucas’s body and causes harm to others. After Lucas’s shooting of Ayros in the mirror, the survivor’s smile is that of Ayros. Is Lucas’s subjectivity entirely overtaken by Ayros or have they merged to form a new unity? Similarly, Nada Shi-gemi’s Watashi no mune ni kao ga aru (1976) features the enduring aftermath of the separation of conjoined twins – the gentle Lily and the cruel Daisy. The survivor is Lily. However, Daisy’s face later appears and begins to take over her body, even attacking Lily’s lover. Are these manifestations, as Lily’s doctor explains, just hallucinations arising from her sense of guilt over surviving Daisy? The suspicion remains in the form of a Daisy-like smile that Lily wears.

Furthermore, Pinoko in Tezuka’s Black Jack and Harry in Toba Shōko’s Akuma to Odore (lit. Dance with demons) are twins who failed to grow and were absorbed into the other twins’ body. Pinoko is given her own life when her fragmented body parts are collected from her twin’s body and reconstituted by Black Jack. These discourses commonly question the ambiguity of one’s self; Otherness inside oneself. Harry gains a chance to embody himself only when a tiny remaining part is extracted from the body of his twin brother, Alex. Harry appears like Alex’s alter ego when Alex is asleep or unconscious, thus the narrative is somewhat similar to those of multi-personalities (e.g., Miyawaki Akiko’s Yanusu no kagami [lit. Mirror of Janus]).

Following the above cases of two souls sharing one body, our final example is a typical vision of one’s ultimate integration of the other self, offered by Mizuki Wakako’s mythological fantasy, Itihāsa (1986-97). Tōko, who possesses shamanic powers, experiences several dream-like visitations. These portray herself being pursued and caught by strangers; being enjoined by a voice to take pleasure in the killing of a bird in her palm; and being rescued by a girl, exactly like herself. Tōko is then told that the girl is her twin sister, Yōko, now her enemy, and if one of them is injured, the injury also appears on the other’s body. When the twins eventually meet and fight, Tōko is killed and her body is buried. However, her soul, memory and personality overtake Yōko’s body, seemingly due to Yōko’s self-hatred for enjoying killing. Later, Tōko consciously fuses Yōko with herself to become a new personality with awareness of both human goodness and evil. With her holistic capacity and profound insight into the ambivalence of human nature, she becomes the key person for a new human era. Her changes thus represent the passage of an individual’s maturation through the integration of conflicting selves.

This paper has examined diverse representations of identical twins in manga/anime, especially in shōjo manga, in terms of identity and the fashioning of a sense of self through struggles with actual and/or internalised pressures for social conformity. This study also shows that the Japanese language, with its insistence on use of expressions emphasising the vertical relationship between older and younger twin, and the presence of the koseki system at the core of Japanese legal identity, reinforce an awareness among Japanese readers of manga of the socio-cultural implications of the strong dichotomy between younger and older twin, compared to readers in the West. This vertical hierarchy permeates everyday life in Japan and affects each twin’s positioning, identity and interpersonal relationships, even to the extent of potentially perceiving the elder as the original and superior versus the younger as the spare and inferior.

The popularity of this sub-genre of manga/anime is not a direct reflection of twins in reality but is an effective dramatisation of struggles to overcome and reconcile inner conflicts, and tensions between social personae and the inner-self. The emphasis on the twins’ bonds and their hierarchical constraints be-stows socio-cultural and psychological dimensions onto the twin narratives to embody Japanese youth’s maturation, while ensuring that the narratives follow “the metanarrative of personal development – from self-involvement to altruism” (Stephens and Ken Watson, 1994, p.52). Demonstrating the importance of an individual’s self acceptance of who he/she is, and their link to the outside world, these stories chart the development of one’s subjective quest and dialogues with an outside world as well as an inner Other.

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