

POPULAR

INQUIRY

The Journal of Kitsch, Camp and Mass Culture

Volume 1 / 2020

**AESTHETICS OF JAPANESE
CONVENIENCE STORES:
FROM THE POINT
OF “EATING ALONE”**

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Abstract

Convenience stores in Japan have a history of over 40 years. It is thought that they have greatly influenced Japanese ways of life. However, convenience stores are rarely the subject of research in aesthetics. This may be because convenience stores are bright and transparent, incompatible with traditional Japanese aesthetics of shadow in close proximity to light. They are also accused of selling so-called "convenience food," one of the causes of unhealthy "solitary eating," or "eating alone." From this point of view the food comics *Hitori Gohan* (Eating Alone) sold at convenience stores is interesting because the subject of solitary eating is the exact problem of convenience stores. Does *Hitori Gohan* show darkness or shadows of convenience stores? My hypothesis is that *Hitori Gohan* contains light, not just darkness of solitude. After testing this hypothesis directly against the manga and its readers, I conclude what the aesthetic stance is in today's Japanese convenience stores in comparison to *sabi*, a Japanese traditional aesthetic value, and its contemporary version, *mabusabi*, which closely relate to the solitude.

Keywords

Japanese convenience stores, shadow aesthetics, food comics, eating alone (solitary eating), *mabusabi*

1. Introduction

Convenience stores in Japan have a history of over 40 years,¹ and the current number of users is said to be 1.4 billion every month.² Therefore, it is thought that it has penetrated the lives of people living in Japan and has greatly influenced their ways of life. However, convenience stores are rarely the subject of research in aesthetics. This may be because convenience stores are incompatible with traditional values, as seen in some accusations directed them. Through analysis of manga sold at convenience stores and its readers, this study attempts to reconsider two of these accusations (lack of shadow aesthetics and food culture) and suggest contemporary aesthetics in Japan.

1.1 Convenience stores in Japan

In Japan, people can buy almost anything at convenience stores: daily necessities such as food, underwear, detergents, stationery, medicine, and smartphone-related products including battery charger, Google Play Card, iTunes Card; luxury items such as tobacco and alcohol; in addition, newspapers, magazines, comics, and related goods such as Dragon Ball character figures, etc. However, this merely scratches the surface. At convenience stores, users can receive various products from Amazon or other home delivery companies. Furthermore, using the store's so-

called “multi-copy” machine, not only can users make copies, but they can also receive various kinds of tickets (including traffic tickets and for entertainment, such as concerts and amusement parks) from ticket-selling companies. There is also a bank ATM. Wi-Fi is available in the store, so one can work while having lunch at the dining space inside it. Numerous kinds of people visit convenience stores day and night to satisfy their needs. To meet that demand, most stores are open 24 hours a day,³ shining brightly at the night through the transparent glass exterior.

1.2 The absence of shadow aesthetics

Regarding such a Japanese convenience store, Masayuki Qusumi, a famous Japanese original author of manga, criticizes as follows:

"That strange brightness. You can see everything from the outside, always renovated, shiny, completely artificial odorless space from which shadows and darkness are completely eliminated."⁴

It is interesting to note that Qusumi states the shadows and darkness are completely excluded from convenience stores. This is because shadows and darkness have been instrumental in architectural spaces based on traditional Japanese aesthetics. Famous Japanese novelist, Jun'ichiro Tanizaki, wrote the essay *In Praise of Shadows* (1933), which expresses the aesthetics. He said, “As a general matter, we find it hard to be really at home with things that shine and glitter.”⁵ A group of researchers extracted some aesthetic features that appeared in architecture from the essay as follows:

- a) Light passing through a *shoji* creates softness that does not clearly define the boundaries between objects.
- b) Darkness exists in close proximity to lighting or light.
- c) There is a shadow indicating slight movement in static darkness without motion by *Rosoku* (candle).⁶

Certainly, this aesthetics seem to be excluded from convenience stores. In that sense, traditional Japanese aesthetics and convenience stores are in opposition. This is what Qusumi is accusing. However, do convenience stores indeed eliminate the darkness?

1.3 The lack of food culture and the darkness of convenience stores

Convenience stores are not only criticized from this perspective. It is also accused of selling so-called “convenience food,” one of the causes of unhealthy “solitary eating,” or “eating alone.” A convenience store where people can easily buy anything is especially convenient for busy single

people. Therefore, when they return home from work, they buy ready-made dishes and junk food at convenience stores and eat alone at home late at night.

Eating alone is not only prone to unbalanced diets, but also lacks the communication with others that comes with co-eating.⁷ Solitary eating of convenience food might harm your health and your relationship with others. It seems to be a dark spot in a bright convenience store. Convenience stores exclude darkness as architecture, but do they contain darkness in the form of solitude?

1.4 Comics *Hitori Gohan* and the procedure of this paper

If so, the comics *Hitori Gohan* (Eating Alone) sold at convenience stores is interesting because the subject of solitary eating is the exact problem of convenience stores. Does *Hitori Gohan* show darkness “in close proximity to” the light of convenience stores? To think about the aesthetics of contemporary Japan that have emerged at convenience stores, I would first like to answer the following question.

Hereinafter, the following steps will be taken. In Chapter 2, I introduce some previous studies and briefly mention why there are only a few related studies and why we must consider comics sold at convenience stores. In Chapter 3, I reintroduce a food comic, *Hitori Gohan* (Eating Alone), in more detail and explain the story common to each episode. From this, I propose the hypothesis that *Hitori Gohan* contains light, not just darkness of solitude. Chapters 4 and 5 test this hypothesis directly against the manga and its readers. In Chapter 4, I compare *Hitori Gohan* with other food comics, especially other solitary eating comics, such as *Kodoku no Gurume* (Solitary Gourme). Through this comparison, the solitary darkness of *Hitori Gohan* is revisited. Chapter 5 uses reader comments to clarify the social nature of *Hitori Gohan*, comparing the sociality of the readers of *pachislot* manga magazine—called *Panic 7*—that is also sold at convenience stores. Through this consideration, I aim to confirm that *Hitori Gohan*’s darkness is not simply darkness but is to see the light that can only be seen after withdrawing from society. In the last chapter, I would like to mention *sabi*, a Japanese traditional aesthetic value, and its contemporary version, *mabusabi*. *Sabi* closely relates to the solitude and, thus, can assist in clarifying this paper’s findings. Finally, I would like to suggest what the aesthetic stance is in today’s convenience stores.

2. Related Studies: What is manga, and what role does it play in popular culture?

There is, of course, a huge amount of research on manga. Some research on food comics has recently appeared, for example, Kei Sugimura’s *Gurume Manga 50 Nen Shi* (Fifty Years of Gourmet Manga),⁸ and Nobunaga Minami’s *Manga no Shokutaku* (Tables in Manga).⁹ However, there is no analysis of food comics sold at convenience stores. Furthermore, there is almost no specialized research on the comics sold at convenience stores, except for Yoshimura (2018),¹⁰

which will be discussed later. The reason research is lacking relates to preconceptions about “what manga is” and “what role manga plays in popular culture,” which have made comics sold at convenience stores invisible.

Most of the manga specialists in Japan continue to believe that comics sold at convenience stores as so-called “disposable manga,” which is inferior to manga published in full-fledged magazines of the genre. They consider that such disposable comics are not worthy of serious research.

However, as previously mentioned, comics sold at convenience stores that are used daily by a huge number of people are thought to have many general readers, not just enthusiastic manga fans. Therefore, when contemplating contemporary Japanese culture, comics sold at convenience stores cannot be ignored. They are inevitable to the study of popular culture in Japan.

3. *Hitori Gohan* (Eating Alone)

I reintroduce *Hitori Gohan*, a food comic (comics that deal with foods and meals) sold at convenience stores.

3.1 *Hitori Gohan* and its related manga

Comics sold at convenience stores are called *Conbini-comics* (hereinafter abbreviated as CC); that is, they are not sold at bookstores. The manga *Hitori Gohan* (the title means “Eating Alone”) is one of the CCs bi-monthly releases by the Japanese publishing company, *Shonen Gaho Sha*. As of January 2020, the 28th issue has appeared.

Besides *Hitori Gohan*, other food comics are issued by the same publishing company, including *Omoide Shokudo* (Memorial Dining Hall), *Tokimeki-Gohan* (Heart Fluttering Meal), and *Min-na no Shokutaku* (Dinner for Everyone). Except *Hitori Gohan*, they all address meals with family and friends.

3.2 The structure of *Hitori Gohan* and the stories common to each episode

Hitori Gohan consists of around 20 short episodes made by different cartoonists. Each episode depicts a female protagonist, normally a young girl, who eats her meal “alone” for some reason. The protagonist, in most cases, is tired of something; for example, she has troubles with work, family, or friends. However, when the protagonist eats a meal, usually a common food,¹¹ she recalls memories of co-eating with her family during a meal or intimate fellowship with friends. At other times, that meal provides her with new discoveries and insights. Furthermore, it offers her a new interpretation or awareness of her memories. Finally, that memory or new discovery encourages and empowers her to try harder in the future. These are the stories common to almost all manga in *Hitori Gohan*. Sometimes, the protagonist cooks, and sometimes she only eats. In any case, protagonists or other characters often describe the meal preparation.

In the following, I aim to confirm that *Hitori Gohan* does not merely contain darkness but has light and darkness within it.

4. Features of *Hitori Gohan*

I would like to start by considering the manga genre. What are the characteristics of such *Hitori Gohan* compared to other food manga? In addition, how is it different from other “solitary-eating” manga? This is discussed below.

4.1 Comparison with general tendencies of food comics

A Japanese manga researcher, Kei Sugimura, organizes the reasons food comics are attractive into the following seven points:

- a) They are faithful to our appetite for food.
- b) They satisfy intellectual curiosity.
- c) They provide a useful introduction to foods.
- d) There are elements of conflict.
- e) They are also “growing-up” stories.
- f) They offer recipes for numerous dishes.
- g) They stimulate our five senses using various means, such as onomatopoeia and exaggerated expression.¹²

For each aforementioned point, I would like to introduce Sugimura's explanation in more detail.

1) Because appetite is one of the most fundamental desires for human beings, comics dealing with appetite cannot be boring (but it is not easy for us to agree with this view because so many people suffer from eating disorders, such as anorexia). 2) They teach us about unknown cuisine. 3) You can learn the etiquette of the dish and how it is eaten. 4) The protagonist fights against the chefs (competitors) of the business-enemy through cooking, acquires various items, and cultivates friendship and romantic feelings. Finally, the protagonist wins. Like many RPGs, this story invokes the readers' empathy. 5) As the protagonist grows from an apprentice to a chef, readers also grow up together. 6) Recipes and tips on cooking are provided. 7) By skillfully incorporating onomatopoeia and exaggerated expressions into manga, which is a visual medium, it is possible to also stimulate taste, tactile sense, smell, and hearing. The meal is made more delicious by inserting useful information about the food (rarity, value of ingredients, etc.).

I do not deal with 1). Of these, 2), 3), 5), 6), and 7) will be easily found in *Hitori Gohan*. Because, as already mentioned, *Hitori Gohan* is a story where the protagonist gains new awareness through eating and develops as a character. If she is a beginner in cooking, she also gains new knowledge and knowledge about foods, such as recipes and food manner. In addition, in

scenes where she eats meals, onomatopoeia (“pu ha” after drinking beer, “zuzzu” when sipping miso soup etc.) and expression of taste (the main character’s flushed cheeks, objects like flying soap bubbles, etc.) are used to make the reader realize the meal’s deliciousness.

The circumstances are different with 4), because *Hitori Gohan* is a story that shows the protagonist overcoming her own weakness while eating a meal alone, switching her mind to the task of working hard from tomorrow forward. Therefore, she does not confront enemies but persists with a bearish self.

From the above discussion, we can see that *Hitori Gohan* generally shares many of the characteristics of food comics. However, its uniqueness is that the protagonist confronts herself through the act of eating alone. The story seems to be contained within the protagonist.

4.2 Comparison with other “eating alone” manga

In this section, I compare *Hitori Gohan* with other manga where the protagonist eats a meal alone. Through such comparison, I aim to confirm the characteristics of *Hitori Gohan* in more detail. The masterpiece of this genre in Japanese manga is Qusumi and Taniguchi’s *Kodoku no Gurume* (Solitary Gourmet). The motto that forms the root of this comic is spoken directly from the mouth of a male protagonist. “When people eat, they must be free, not being disturbed by anyone, and ...how to say... they must be saved, alone, quiet and rich.”¹³

What is decisively different is that the protagonist of *Kodoku no Gurume* is male, enjoying his meal in the diner of an unfamiliar town that he visits on business. He pays much attention to the town and the people living there. His interest is attracted by not only meals, but also by the people and the societies in which they live. This characteristic is not seen in *Hitori Gohan*. Furthermore, while eating, the protagonist of *Kodoku no Gurume* wants to be free, but it does not mean that he eats only what he likes. The protagonist is often forced to order something he does not want to eat for various reasons and, consequently, eats too much. Yet, such accidental events are something that does not exist in everyday routine work; therefore, he enjoys it. In this sense, he is free and rich while eating.

In addition, interactions with society and other people are described. Indeed, the remark of the protagonist quoted above (“When people eat...”) comes from his anger for being hindered from his pleasure by a chef of the dining hall. Furthermore, the protagonist of *Kodoku no Gurume* does not evolve through eating. He simply eats something before him and observes all of his surroundings.

Truthfully, *Kodoku no Gurume* does not satisfy 1) to 6) of the seven characteristics of the aforementioned food comics. For that reason, it is different not only from *Hitori Gohan* but also from any other food comics.

Nonetheless, the comparison with *Kodoku no Gurume* highlights that the protagonist in *Hitori Gohan* is not disturbed by anyone when she is eating, and she has a taste of bliss. Therefore, comparing the two leads to the following questions: Where is the social nature of *Hitori Gohan*? In the next chapter, I will compare this point with *pachislot* manga, which is one of the representatives of CC. If *Hitori Gohan* really lacks sociality, it will only represent the darkness of solitude in convenience stores. There will be no coexistence of light and darkness. Is that indeed the case?

5. Sociality of *Hitori Gohan*

Next, I would like to consider the social nature of *Hitori Gohan*. This time, I consider from the reader's perspective. In this chapter, I compare *Hitori Gohan* with *pachislot* manga *Panic 7*, one of the representative comics sold at convenience stores. *Panic 7* is not only closely related to the reader's life, but it also has a strong social nature in connecting readers with each other by using various media. It may have a shadow concerning gambling but escapes the darkness of solitude by connecting readers. Here, it is questioned whether *Hitori Gohan* also escapes the mere darkness of solitude and enables the coexistence of light and darkness.

5.1 A *pachislot* manga *Panic 7* and its readers

Panic 7 is a manga magazine set against the backdrop of the *pachinko/pachislot* industry that is worth 30 trillion yen sales in Japan, and it is sold at convenience stores alongside other comics such as *Hitori Gohan*. Its goal is to provide information to win the *pachislot* through manga and the DVD of the appendix. As of 2016, it has sold 100,000 copies. According to Japanese manga researcher, Kazuma Yoshimura, the following four strategies are responsible for such high sales:

- a) Bold pricing
- b) Sales at convenience stores
- c) Effective issue format
- d) Community formation

These are sales strategies that cater to the lifestyle of the *pachislot* practitioners, called “slotters.”

1) The reason why the magazine can be sold at a high price is because it is quite natural for readers who aim to win through *pachislot* to invest money (usually about \$8 USD, while *Hitori Gohan* is about \$4.50 USD) for information on *pachislot*. An appendix DVD containing a movie showing in which the writer actually practices *pachislot* is also attractive. 2) It is reasonable for slotters that *pachislot* manga is sold at convenience stores because slotters are too busy pursuing *pachislot* from early morning until late night, so they cannot go to book stores within normal business hours. Therefore, when buying other daily necessities, they purchase *pachislot* manga

at a convenience store. *Pachislot* manga is a tool that will heal them as entertainment and offer them useful information toward the next slot game. 3) There are three kinds of *Panic 7* (normal, special, and gold): the magazine released on the 7th of every month, a separate volume released on the 17th, and a gold released on the 26th. Popular manga characters appear across all three magazines, and popular *pachislot* models are featured in each of the three magazines. Therefore, readers are enticed into buying all three magazines. 4) In addition, the publishing company hosts fan meetings in big cities, inviting prominent manga artists and writers who contribute to *Panic 7*, and it holds meetings with local readers at regional *pachislot* stores in cooperation with *pachislot* TV programs. In addition, the publishing company forms communities across the region using SNS, such as Twitter, and presenting or selling various kinds of cartoon characters' goods to keep the readers' interest.¹⁴

From the above consideration by Yoshimura, it can be understood that the *Panic 7* closely relates to the reader's life and strongly connects readers through various media.

5.2 *Hitori Gohan* and its readers

In comparison with *Panic 7*, what is the relationship between *Hitori Gohan* and the readers? I would like to reference *Panic7*. As stated in 1) and 2), *Panic7* was closely tied to the life of the readers (the slotters). How does *Hitori Gohan* compare?

There is no official website or Twitter created by publishers for *Hitori Gohan*. Therefore, the reader's tendency cannot be inferred from these. Instead, each issue has a "postcard" at the end to post comments or apply for a gift. Around 10 comments are introduced in the next issue. Therefore, it is considered that the reader's tendency can be understood to some extent from the comments written on the postcard. Of course, it is up to the publisher to decide which postcard is introduced, and it cannot be denied that the publisher may have chosen the postcard arbitrarily. Therefore, it should be noted that the following considerations are only to some extent valid.¹⁵ The 239 comments are examined. The attributes of the 239 respondents are as follows. The first is age.

Under 17-years-old: 5
 18–22-years-old: 6
 23–29-years-old: 26
 30–39-years-old: 80
 40–49-years-old: 63
 50–59-years-old: 41
 60–65-years-old: 12
 66–69-years-old: 6
 70-years-old or more: 0

The ages between 18 and 22 years roughly corresponds to the age of Japanese university students. *Hitori Gohan* includes episodes in which a student from a region comes to a city such as Tokyo eats alone because she has no acquaintances. However, few readers are of that age. The reason for separating the age of under 65 from the age of 66 is that, in Japan, the 65-years-old is one measure of retirement. However, few readers who may be enjoying their meals alone appear to be over 65.

Gender is considered next. Postcards do not have a gender column. In addition, there is no need to fill in the name as most of them want to be anonymous, and the gender cannot be inferred from the name. Therefore, I can only say that most readers are from 30s to 50s. It can be said, however, that—regardless of gender—the generation is busy at work or home. According to the statistical research by Seven-Eleven Japan, the largest numbers of convenience store users are from 30s to 50s.¹⁶ In that respect, the results of the postcard may not be so arbitrary.

I classified the 239 comments examined as follows. The total number exceeds 239 because one postcard may include multiple factors.

About each episode . . .	65
Impression on the episode overall . . .	14
About the characters in each episode . . .	16
About the ways of depiction . . .	28
About the story of each episode . . .	7
About the effects of each episode on the readers . . .	232
On the action of the readers . . .	112
On the feelings of the readers . . .	103
About the cartoonists . . .	9
Others . . .	8

"About each episode" is a reader's impression of episodes. "On the episode as a overall" is simply a comment that "the episode was fun." "About the character" means, for example, "the character's costume was wonderful." "About the ways of depiction" includes "the way of depicting food is quite real." "About the story" is a comment that predicts the next story development.

On the other hand, "about the effect of each episode on the reader" is divided into "about the action of the readers" and "about the feelings of the readers." Among them, "the action of the readers" means "I read the episode and I wanted to go and eat the dishes introduced there" or "I also tried to make the dishes." On the other hand, "about the feelings of the readers" include "I sympathized with the contents of the episode," "When things are not going well, reading the episode makes me cheerful," "I read and tears came out. Anyone can shine," and "I feel warm

after reading the episode." About the cartoonists is a message to the author such as "I like this author" or "Please do your best." Others are irrelevant to the episode or author.

It is too naive to say something about the relationship between *Hitori Gohan* and the life of the reader from these results. However, the result I show above is the only clue (I could never know the thoughts of many readers who have not applied for postcards). At least the following can be said. In the previous chapter, I highlighted that the protagonist is immersed in eating, compared to other food comics and other solitary eating comics. However, from the postcard's results, the closed act of the protagonist does not mean the closed act of the readers. From *Hitori Gohan* they receive some knowledge about food. Additionally, they want to eat the food and make it. More than that, they gain courage by sympathizing with the protagonist, seeing the protagonist overcome difficulties, and being healed by a warm story of "co-eating" with memories of her family. In this sense, *Hitori Gohan* is connected to the reader's life.

Another survey may indirectly tell us the link between *Hitori Gohan* and the readers' life. The publisher sometimes uses postcards to conduct a survey with their readers saying, "Please tell your memories of eating alone." The result shows that many readers take "eat alone" affirmatively. One hundred twenty-four of the 262 readers who answered this survey proudly wrote their favorite menu on the postcard. They can fully enjoy a special menu without worrying about anyone. I would also like to add that some answered as follows: sixteen people answered that when they eat alone, they can eat the meal more comfortably and more slowly;" additionally, twelve people said eating alone on the way home from work or overtime is quite delicious.

5.3 *Hitori Gohan* and its sociality

As stated in 4) in Chapter 5.1, the publisher of *Panic 7* strongly connects readers in real life through various media. In contrast, *Hitori Gohan* has no official website or Twitter, and there was only a postcard at the end of each issue. Therefore, there is no real connection between the readers. *Hitori Gohan* itself does not show special interest in social media. Of 510 episodes, I examined 101 episodes, including the scenes in which characters use smartphones. However, they only contact their family or friends by phone, email, or LINE before or after a meal. Of the 510 episodes, the scenes of photographing a dish, uploading it to the network, and sharing it with others only appears three times (No.4, *Akashi Yaki*, No. 11, *Inari Zushi*, and No. 18, *Chicken Nanban*⁷). The protagonist is immersed in eating itself while eating food without any external contact. The same applies to postcards from the readers. Only one in the "others" category mentions photographing dishes using a smartphone.

However, although *Hitori Gohan* does not create a connection in real life between readers, it offers the healing in a world of manga ("I am cheerful after reading the episode") and has the power to reconnect readers to real life. In other words, while *pachislot* manga connects

readers with each other as one of the closed circuits of *pachislot*, *Hitori Gohan* becomes a contact point that connects different circuits of personal life and the work of each reader. Moreover, in a sense, it can even be said that it is open to real life. In this regard, *Hitori Gohan* does not represent merely the darkness of solitary eating. It has the light side of giving hope for real life through the darkness of solitary eating. It is social.

6. Concluding remarks:

***Hitori Gohan* and a contemporary sensibility of convenience stores in Japan**

Finally, I would like to confirm the findings of this study compared with the traditional Japanese aesthetic *sabi* and its contemporary version, *mabusabi*.

6.1 *Sabi* and *Mabusabi*

As quoted in the introduction, Tanizaki said, “As a general matter we find it hard to be really at home with things that shine and glitter.” In a later part of the essay, he states:

“Yet for better or for worse we do love things that bear the marks of grime, soot, and weather, and we love the colors and the sheen that call to mind the past that made them. Living in these old houses among these old objects is in some mysterious way a source of peace and repose.”¹⁸

This paragraph might suggest a sensitivity that perceives the changes over time as *mujo* (impermanence, uncertainty, transitory). This sensitivity is what has been called *sabi*. However, convenience stores are quite new entities. It would be difficult to find this traditional aesthetics of *sabi* as it is in convenience stores or *Hitori Gohan*, even though I have succeeded in pointing out that light and darkness are adjacent in them.

Therefore, where does *mabusabi*—the contemporary version of *sabi*—fit in? A Japanese philosopher, poet, and the proponent of *mabusabi*, Motoaki Shinohara, stated:

“*Mabusabi* that I advocated is the sensibility that accepts the two sensitivities with the heart of *sabi*. The two sensitivities that have been developed during the middle of the 19th and 20th centuries are the sensitivity to “*mabayusa* (dazzlement, the glare)” and the sensitivity to *sukitori* (transparency). The sensibility to *mabayusa* is inseparable from the development and use of various artificial lights, and the sensibility to *sukitori* is inseparable from the development and use of various transparent materials.”¹⁹

Shinohara gives an example of *mabayusa*²⁰ by illuminating the past historical heritage with artificial light, noting that it gently highlights the heritage. He says that there is the heart of *sabi* that *mujo* is eternal. He also recalls that these artificial lightings will eventually become outdated

with the appearance of new lighting. It is also the heart of *sabi*. On the other hand, he considers glass architecture as example of *sukitori*. In particular, he studies the glass pyramid of the Louvre by Ieoh Ming Pei. The Louvre contains the cultural heritage that Napoleon brought back during his Egyptian expedition. Thus, the transparent pyramid is a reference to the historical past with new transparent materials. He says that there is also the heart of *sabi*.

Accordingly, does Shinohara consider a convenience store filled with glass (transparency) and artificial lighting (brilliance or brightness) to be a manifestation of his *mabusabi* sensibility?

6.2 The findings of this paper

Nevertheless, convenience stores have no sensibility. If someone accepts a convenience store with the heart of *sabi* = gaze on impermanence, there is a possibility that *mabusabi* is established.

It seems possible. Convenience stores are full of impermanence of life. Some elementary school students fend off hunger with rice balls at a convenience store to attend a study school until 9 p.m. Some adults sit down and sleep at night in convenience store chairs because there is no home in which to return. Some elderly people who cannot go to distant supermarkets because they are old and live alone, due to fear of misfire, purchase ready-made dishes at convenience stores to avoid cooking. Some midnight workers eat at a convenience store that is only open late at night. There are foreigners who come from countries far from Japan and work part-time every day at convenience stores late at night, though someday their works might be replaced with AI. People who buy *Panic 7* and *Hitori Gohan* also have their own darkness. I am one of them.

However, if such impermanence is captured by personal sympathy or mere lonely feelings, it cannot be said that it is accepted with the heart of *sabi*. There are various meanings that have been put in the word *sabi* since the seventh century, for example, "the decay of life's vigor," "the brittleness and eventual disappearance of an original strength and form," "feeling desolate, feeling sad deep down inside one's heart," "the fading away of colors," "lonesome, lonely," "flower withering, people leaving," "emptiness," "sense of desolation reflecting the feelings of someone who lived alone in a village deep in the mountains, and who spent his time indoors, looking over a snowy twilight" etc.²¹ If anyone like poets can feel convenience stores with sensitivities that include all of these, then there may be *mabusabi*.²²

Unfortunately, this paper did not succeed in confirming it. Rather, what this study has revealed is that convenience stores are not so brilliant or bright. Convenience stores and *Hitori Gohan* are where light and darkness are adjacent. The light wrapped in the darkness is placed next to the light and provided to the user. Even those who have darkness must be able to resolve the darkness in the light. Just as a light that only shines in the dark exists, there is a shadow that can survive only in the light. This is an aesthetic attitude present at convenience stores in Japan.

Acknowledgement: This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 16H01912 and 19H00517

- ¹ For example, according to the website for Family Mart, a major convenience stores, its business started in 1978. <https://www.family.co.jp/company/familymart/development01.html>
- ² <https://www.jfa-fc.or.jp/particle/320.html>
- ³ In recent years, there have been increasing debates that 24-hour business should be discontinued to improve the working environment. <https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXMZO53693320T21C19A2EE8000/>
- ⁴ Masayuki Qusumi and Jiro Taniguchi, *Kodoku no Gurume* (Tokyo: Fuso Sha, 2000), 193.
- ⁵ Jun'ichiro Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadow*, trans. Thomas J. Harper and Edward G. Seidensticker (New Heaven, Conn.: Leete's Island Books, 1977), 10.
- ⁶ Masahi Kawasaki, Hideyuki Hori and Tsuna Sasaki, "Nihon no Dentoteki Kukan ni Arawareru In'ei no Ishosei ni Kansuru Kenkyu" (*Doboku Gakkai Ronbunshu*, 458 (IV-18), 1993), 126.
- ⁷ Hiroko Tokunaga, Shoji Yu, and Naoki Mukawa. "Koshoku to Kyoshoku ni okeru Hito no Shokuji Kodo no Sikumi." *JCSS2015*, 680.
- ⁸ Kei Sugimura, *Gurume Manga 50 Nen Shi* (Tokyo: Kodan sha).
- ⁹ Nobunaga Minami, *Manga no Shokutaku* (Tokyo: NTT Publishing, 2013).
- ¹⁰ Kazuma Yoshimura, "Gyanburu Manga no Media Ron: Panikku 7 to Iu Na no Pachisuro Manga Zasshi ga Kaketa Mono," *Tobaku no Kigoron* (Tokyo: Shin Yo Sha 2018), 118-141.
- ¹¹ Of the 510 episodes that could be investing, the best five are noodles (61 episodes), cutlet (26 episodes), *donburi* (rice bowl, 23 episodes), curry (19 episodes), *sushi* (13 episodes), and *yakitori* (13 episodes). Of the 28 issues currently published, only number 9 was unavailable. However, the special feature of Volume 9 is "Ramen(Chinese noodles)", so it seems that this ranking will not change.
- ¹² Kei Sugimura, *Gurume Manga 50 Nen Shi* (Tokyo: Kodan Sha, 2018), 4-7. I have attached the numbers from 1) to 7) for convenience.
- ¹³ Masayuki Qusumi and Jiro Taniguchi, *Kodoku no Gurume* (Tokyo: Fuso sha, 2000), 123.
- ¹⁴ Kazuma Yoshimura, *Gyanburu Manga no Media Ron* (Tokyo: Shin Yo Sha 2018), 122-134. The numbers are given for convenience.
- ¹⁵ If the tabulations introduced later were the result of arbitrary extraction by the publisher, it would represent the publisher's ideal *Hitori Gohan* image and ideal reader image. In other words, publishers want to make *Hitori Gohan* resonate with readers and make them feel more energetic. On the other hand, publishers seem to be asking readers to sympathize with the manga and to read and cheer up.
- ¹⁶ https://www.sej.co.jp/library/common/pdf/yokogao2018-19_all.pdf
- ¹⁷ Karo Jishima, "Akashi Yaki," *Hitori Gohan* 4 (Tokyo: Shonen Gaho Sha 2015), 121-122. Machi Yamakawa, "Inari Zushi," *Hitori Gohan* 11(Tokyo: Shonen Gaho Sha 2017), 70. Rin Asano, "Chicken Nanban," *Hitori Gohan* 18 (Tokyo: Shonen Gaho Sha 2018), 133. In the episode of "Parfait" the female protagonist also takes a photo of a parfait, but she uses a normal camera and does not send it to others. Beside the camera the word "only for the record" is written. Sally Imobata and Kitaki Taki, "Pafe (Parfait)," *Hitori Gohan* 18 (Tokyo: Shonen Gaho Sha, 2018), 195. In the episode of "Liver Cutlet" the female protagonist takes a photo of a liver cutlet, but she becomes aware that she posts only for getting evaluation from others, and stops posting. Umi Kuwana, "Liver Cutlet," *Hitori Gohan* 11(Tokyo: Shonen Gaho Sha), 149.
- ¹⁸ Jun'ichiro Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadow*, trans. Thomas J. Harper and Edward G. Seidensticker (New Heaven, Conn.: Leete's Island Books, 1977), 11-12.
- ¹⁹ Motoaki Shinohara, "Kireisabi, Barokku, Posutomodan: Fugamodan e" *Between/Becoming* 1, 2011, 9.
- ²⁰ M. F. Marra translates *mabusabi* as, "glaring lonesomeness." Michael F. Marra, "Aesthetic Categories: Past and Present," *Whither Japanese Philosophy? Reflections Through Other Eyes* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Center for Philosophy), 56.
- ²¹ Michael F. Marra, "The Paradox of *Inton*: Between Aesthetics and Anti-Aesthetics," *Mabusabi* (Kyoto: Shichigatsudo), 33-34.
- ²² In fact, *mabusabi* must be accompanied by various practices such as poetry writing, contemplation, and so on.

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