

Omega Chronicles: Mapping the Landscape of Violence in Japanese Manga

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Abstract

Influenced by the traditional Edo culture where homosexuality was prevalent, Japanese manga artists do not shy away from portraying different gender relationships explicitly through art. Among the contemporary homosexual genres of *Yaoi*, *Yuri*, *Shounen-ai*, and *Shoujo-ai* found in Japanese manga, the concept of Omegaverse, a subgenre of erotic slash fiction, has been gaining popularity. The term “omegaverse” is a combination of the words “omega” and “universe”. The omegaverse is an alternate universe where, apart from the primary gender of male and female, three other secondary genders of alpha (α), beta (β), and omega (Ω), also exists. This results in six genders in total, with each primary gender further classified into three secondary genders. The societal structure is usually based on the “wolf’s hierarchy” where alphas possess the features of alpha wolves and are considered superior. On the other hand, omegas are considered inferior and possess the ability to reproduce, irrespective of being male or female. Though there are also heterosexual and lesbian omegaverses, the term is most widely used for boys’ love genres like *Yaoi* and *Shounen-ai*, and is often referred to as a world where men can get pregnant, creating a new subgenre called Mpreg. This article focuses on understanding the dehumanizing factors of omegaverse, which strip humans of the most basic value of reason (which differentiates them from animals), using three manga, namely *Kiraide Isasete*, *The Alpha’s Bride* and *Remnant Kemonohito*, which cater to omegaverse boys’ love.

Keywords: Manga, Omegaverse, Alpha, Omega, Beta, Pheromones, Reason, Instinct, Secondary Sex, Rut, Heat

Introduction

Marica Felici traces the history of Japan, focusing on the presence of homosexuality in Japanese tradition.¹ Homosexuality was a socially accepted part of life in Japan since the Edo period. Ancient Japan was much more liberal and open in terms of an individual’s sexuality. Despite strict rules regarding one’s role in a family, homosexual relationships were prevalent and accepted outside the boundaries of family. Japan, the country of origin of the contemporary literary and artistic genre, manga (comic books and graphic novels), has a rich history of homosexual culture dating back to the Edo period (1600-1867). The Edo period is also known as the Tokugawa Shogunate, which was inaugurated by Tokugawa Ieyasu in 1600 and persisted up to 1867. The Edo period was a time of peace and economic growth for feudal Japan, and its liberal attitudes towards homosexuality were the norm.

Mark J. McLelland notes that homosexuality was accepted in four specific areas: the Buddhist priesthood; masters and servants; theatre and brothels; and between

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¹ Marica Felici, ‘Male Homosexuality in Japan’ (2019). At:

www.researchgate.net/publication/334416746_Male_Homosexuality_in_Japan. Accessed 30/06/2023.

samurais.² These were regulated in the *nanshoku*, a code of ethics. These relationships are also termed as *wakashudo* or ‘to love the young’, where the older man (*nenja*) participates in a sexual relationship with a younger boy (*wakashu*) until he reaches adulthood. This form of relationship flourished among the samurais, the elite Japanese military. The seniority of the *nenja*, both in terms of age and distinction, gave him the active role in the sexual relationship where the *wakashu* is bound to be penetrated.³

The introduction of the Meiji Civil Code during the Meiji period (1868-1911) brought Japan closer to the legal and governmental systems of the West. The Tokugawa Shogunate came to an end as the monarchy was restored, and the new Emperor Meiji (‘enlightened one’) transformed Japan into a modern military and industrial power. The Meiji Civil Code set regulations that followed the European heterosexual standards and created a distinction between *normaru* (normal) and *hentai* (abnormal/ perverted) relationships. It was contradictory in nature as it validated the patriarchal construct of the samurai family while simultaneously condemning the homosexual practices of some samurais. In the past, the samurais were free to practice homosexuality as a part of their social life while at the same time maintaining a heterosexual family structure. The influence of heterosexual European standards on the Japanese during the World Wars led to a reduction of sexual diversity, and the propagation of the Japanese salaryman stereotype, reducing homosexuality to being *hentai* (abnormal/ perverted).⁴

McLelland demonstrates how *hentai* representation resurfaced in the 1950s, leading to a rapid rise in the representation of male homosexuality as a result of the post-World War II moral liberation. This period witnessed the inclusion of homosexual tropes in almost all media, such as manga, magazines, and newspapers, and came to be known as the *gei bumu* (gay boom) of Japan. As the Japanese media industry actively invested in this through an influx of movies, mangas, and magazines, it led to the second *gei bumu* (gay boom) in the 1990s, where male homosexuality was celebrated above any other sexual minority in Japan and the category of *gei bōi* (gay boy) emerged.⁵

Manga specifically refers to comics or graphic novels that developed in Japan. Manga was a major part of the explosion of the *gei bumu*, with the emergence of two new genres, namely *Shounen-ai* and *Yaoi*. These two genres catered to the representation of gay relationships. *Shounen-ai* (boys’ love) portrays stories that feature humans as well as supernatural characters with beautiful physical attributes. Sexual activity is not much emphasized as it is only seen as a way of bonding. The protagonists are referred to as *seme* and *uke* or *tachi* and *neko* where *seme/tachi* is the active partner and *uke/neko* (*neko* literally translates to “cat”) is the receiver, similar to the *nenja-wakashu* distinction of the samurais. While *Shounen-ai* concerns itself with the development of the romantic relationship between the *seme* and the *uke*, *Yaoi* focuses more on the sexual aspect in an explicit manner.⁶

The gay men in *Shounen-ai* and *Yaoi* were portrayed as much more understanding, chivalrous, and caring than real heterosexual men, which made these popular among

² Mark J. McLelland, ‘Japan’s Original Gay Boom’, in *Popular Culture, Globalization and Japan*, eds M. Allen and R. Sakamoto (London and New York, Routledge, 2006), pp. 159-173.

³ Felici, ‘Male Homosexuality in Japan’, p. 2.

⁴ Mark J. McLelland, ‘A short history of “hentai”.’ Paper presented at Sexualities, Genders and Rights in Asia: 1st International Conference of Asian Queer Studies. Bangkok, Thailand: AsiaPacifiQueer Network, Mahidol University; Australian National University, July 2005.

⁵ McLelland, ‘Japan’s Original Gay Boom’, p. 160.

⁶ Angela Drummond Mathews, ‘What Boys Will Be: A Study of Shōnen Manga’, in *Manga: An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Toni Johnson-Woods (London and New York, Continuum, 2010), pp. 62-76.

heterosexual women seeking such idealized men. This also increased the tolerance regarding homosexuals, especially among the female population of Japan. Ágnes Zsila and Zsolt Demetrovics investigated the psychological mechanisms that influence and operate in the production of boy's love media.⁷ Various gender-related issues such as dissatisfaction with traditional roles, traumatic experience, and repressed desires play a major role in the attraction of readers for such genres and often acts as a coping mechanism for the readers. It caters to the interests of both homosexual as well as heterosexual individuals. *Shounen-ai* and *Yaoi* stories portray an ideal romantic world which plays the role of a utopia for its female readers in a heterosexual dystopian society. Gay love avoids the problems of reality and presents the picture of a pure love that, ironically, completely excludes its female readers.⁸

The actual size of its fan community is difficult to estimate as many readers keep these interests hidden. Recently, however, *Shounen-ai* and *Yaoi* have become an integral part of the adolescent fan culture, not just in Japan but across the globe. The Japanese manga industry is one of the pioneers for the development of comics in the Southeast Asian region. Japan has developed as another centre of globalization due to its global influence of manga and anime.⁹ Anime refers to a form of television animation which originated in Japan and is mainly based on manga narratives. Even outside Asia, manga is rapidly gaining ground and penetrating the mainstream media.

The origin of the omegaverse concept can be traced to 1967 where the "Amok Time" episode of the television series *Star Trek* introduced the concept of the Vulcan mating cycle called *pon farr*. This resulted in the inclusion of such tropes in human settings in fan fictions. It gained further popularity in 2010 with the *Supernatural* franchise, when actors talked about 'alpha' males and 'bitch' males. In East Asia, omegaverse as a sub-genre did not emerge via active production of fan fictions, but was directly adopted in the Japanese publishing industry from the West as a theme in boys' love tropes. While the concept of male pregnancy caters to the fantasy of countless homosexual couples regarding creating a socially acceptable family, it arguably takes humanity further from being human by restraining its reasoning capacity. An understanding of the alpha-omega binary also sharpens the male-female distinction in the real world, facilitating the understanding of gender power plays operating in the society.

The term 'omegaverse' is a combination of the words 'omega' and 'universe'. The omegaverse is an alternate universe where, apart from the primary gender of male and female, three other secondary genders of alpha (α), beta (β), and omega (Ω), also exists. This results in six genders in total with each primary gender further classified into three secondary genders. The society is usually guided by the 'wolf's hierarchy' where alphas (sharing the features of alpha wolves) are superior and omegas are inferior, with the ability of reproducing regardless of being male or female. Though there are also heterosexual and lesbian omegaverses, it is most widely used for boys' love genres like *Yaoi* and *Shounen-ai*, and is often referred to as a world where men can get pregnant, creating a new sub-genre called Mpreg.

Alphas have knots in their penises, similar to male wolves, and experience ruts every month during the mating cycle where their mating instincts are heightened and

⁷ Ágnes Zsila and Zsolt Demetrovics, 'Redrawing the Boundaries of Gender and Sexuality: A Psychological Reconceptualization of the Boys' Love Phenomenon', *Intensities: The Journal of Cult Media*, no. 9 (2017), pp. 34-49.

⁸ McLelland, 'Japan's Original Gay Boom', *passim*.

⁹ Wendy Siuyi Wong, 'Globalizing Manga: From Japan to Hong Kong And Beyond', *Mechademia*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2006), pp. 23-45.

they release pheromones in order to attract omegas. Similarly, omegas go through monthly heats (similar to menstruation for women) where they desire alpha mates and release omega pheromones. Alphas and omegas are frequently compared to beasts; they often lose their reason during ruts and heats and are no longer in a human state of mind. Many omegaverse tropes also include the element of a lifelong psychic bond which occurs when an alpha marks an omega by biting their nape (the back of their neck) during their heat.¹⁰

There are many who view this genre negatively for having roots in bestiality fiction and containing highly gendered power imbalances in its stories. Mpreg and omegaverse is seen as a more risqué subject even in the WMST-L (Women's Studies List) who were quite liberal in the acceptance of various taboos and kinks, but could not avoid a rift in the fandom with the introduction of 'pregnancy without women'. Texts from as early as the 1960s talk about men who experience pregnancy symptoms simultaneously with their pregnant partners, a phenomenon known as 'couvade'. Most of the omegaverse stories are highly pornographic in nature, and are mainly produced for the purpose of sexual arousal. Despite this, a majority of its readers are aware of the social inequality among the characters and the issues regarding consent that are highlighted in the setting, and use it to as a means to further explore the genre.¹¹

Marianne Gunderson shows how the omegaverse genre helps one in understanding gender and sexuality without being bound by the structures of the real world. Every writer has the freedom to derive their own interpretation of the various tropes in the genre and customize according to their personal interests. Apart from the primary animalistic features of omegaverse, the writers are free to make use of some while rejecting the others in their plot or form their own unique omegaverse.¹² Power, desire, intimacy, and consent are some of the central aspects of the omegaverse genre. Its unnatural application of gender roles in a universe where male and female share similar social construct enables the readers to objectively analyse the gender inequalities and power plays from a third person perspective and to observe how these gender dynamics affect relationships in the real world as well. Arguably, the unfamiliarity of the setting creates a distance to allow its readers to view the society more rationally.

Every piece of omegaverse is somewhat different to others in terms of certain details regarding the world. While the basic classification of alpha, beta, and omega remains the same, there are slight differences according to the author's wishes and needs for the story. The author provides information regarding their own understanding of the omegaverse. Most omegaverse stories show alphas as the elite class of the society who fill up the high-ranking positions in every sector, with omegas as the inferior beings present only for the sake of reproduction and to be exploited by the alphas for their heat. Negative stereotypes about omegas and their heat are present in almost all omegaverse stories. Omegas are meant to submit to the superior alpha, who is driven by the sole purpose of knotting and impregnating when he encounters an omega in heat. This loss of reason is taken as an acceptable social construct or the responsibility of the omega to control its heat. The idea of consent seems to be non-existent in an alpha dominated society where the submission of omegas is viewed to be an inherent right.¹³

¹⁰ Marianne Gunderson, 'Rewriting Sex and Gender In Omegaverse Fanfiction', Master of Philosophy (Gender Studies), University of Oslo (2017), pp. 15, 36, and 48.

¹¹ Milena Popova, 'Dogfuck Rapeworld: Omegaverse Fanfiction As A Critical Tool In Analyzing The Impact Of Social Power Structures On Intimate Relationships And Sexual Consent', *Porn Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2 (2018), p. 175-191.

¹² Gunderson, 'Rewriting Sex and Gender In Omegaverse Fanfiction', pp. 60-94.

¹³ Popova, 'Dogfuck Rapeworld', p. 184.

In this article, an alternate universe where alphas are superior, followed by betas and omegas, is analysed to see how animalistic features are associated with humans to create a human species where the difference between reason and instinct becomes vague. By taking into account three manga, *Kiraide Isasete*, *The Alpha's Bride* and *Remnant Kemonohito*, the article focuses on the dehumanizing factor of omegaverse which strips of the most basic value of reason and brings them closer to a primitive state of being. The conflict between reason and instinct is focused upon along with the gender dynamics of the genre and its ability on blurring the real-life gender distinction.

Kiraide Isasete

Kiraide Isasete, by Hijiki, revolves around Koga Naoto, a twenty-one-year-old rare male omega with a five-year-old daughter named Koga Shizuku.¹⁴ Due to his physical constitution Naoto was forced to drop out of school and was only recently able to secure the job of a janitor in a high school. In one of the matchmaking parties that his mother had arranged for him, Naoto was suddenly grabbed by one of the alpha waiters in the party who declares himself as his "...lifemate. No my soulmate."¹⁵ On hearing this Naoto flees the party in fear. In omegaverse the relationship of soulmates, or fated pair, can only occur between an alpha and an omega. It comes from the theory that every omega has a predetermined alpha in the world who is a perfect match for them. They are instinctively attracted to each other when they meet, an attraction which cannot be denied. It is a rare occurrence as one's fated pair can exist in any part of the world and many lead their lives without ever meeting them. The attraction between a fated alpha and omega cannot be refused even if they are already bonded with someone else.

As it turns out, Naoto had previously been a victim of rape while at school when it was revealed that his secondary gender is an omega. Naoto had been forced by his alpha classmates with the excuse of luring them with his pheromones. The pheromones of an omega are released during their heat and attract alphas to mate. This is a completely involuntary physiological function upon which an omega has no control. This aspect has been used in countless omegaverse narratives as a way of subjugating the omegas and justifying their violation by alphas. Naoto, too, had been guilt-trapped by the perpetrators into believing that his rape is the result of his secondary gender and he is the only one that can be held responsible for it. This incident and its justification somewhat resonate with the treatment of rape cases in the contemporary human world. In various instances women who had been victim of such sexual crimes are subjected to intense scrutiny by the common ignorant masses who question the woman's character, behaviour or clothing as the reason for attracting the male gaze and not taking care of their body, instead of highlighting the faults of the perpetrator.¹⁶ This is further exaggerated in omegaverse, where omegas who are victims of assault are ignored as they were "tempting" the alphas with their scent. Ironically, alphas are not blamed for their weak mental strength and loss of reason in the presence of pheromones as it is an involuntary physiological phenomenon. Alphas do not step away from misusing this understanding and take the liberty to assault whichever omega they wish to, with or without their heat. Due to this past incident Naoto got pregnant and, instead of getting an abortion, decided to give birth to Shizuku.

¹⁴ Hijiki, *Kiraide Isasete* (Tokyo: Libre Inc., 2018).

¹⁵ Hijiki, *Kiraide Isasete*, p. 1.

¹⁶ Rachel Egan and Janet Clare Wilson, 'Rape Victims' Attitudes to Rape Myth Acceptance', *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, vol. 19, no. 3 (2012), pp. 345-357.

Naoto once again encounters the alpha from the party in the school where he was hired as a janitor. Tsuchiya Hazuki is a student in the same school and a dominant alpha who is open in expressing the love and attraction that he feels towards Naoto since their first meeting. In various narratives dominant alphas are presented as the epitome of alpha supremacy who propagate the discourse of omegas as only child bearers. Since alphas are usually the elite group who dominate every aspect of the society, it is quite easy to establish their twisted view of the secondary gender as the common norm. In this light, Hazuki is different. After experiencing the discrimination first hand during his secondary gender revelation, Hazuki detests the hypocritical society which shuns omegas for the same reasons that they praise alphas. As it goes, one of his classmates was heavily criticized when her results presented her as an omega and on the other hand, Hazuki, who presented as a dominant alpha, was commended as heroic just for trying to stop the bullying. It blatantly presents the functioning of a society based on shallow morals, which only seeks to be a part of the crowd and favour the elite minority. This event instigated Hazuki to hide his secondary gender and live as a beta in this school.

Naoto, while hiding from Hazuki's persistent expressions of love, encounters yet another alpha student who had surrendered to his beastly instincts as he attempts to bond with Naoto for the sake of curiosity. His justification is like any other stereotypical alpha where he places the blame on Naoto for being an omega and spreading his pheromones to mate with alphas. While Naoto is saved by Hazuki in time, Naoto's heat strikes suddenly and he is barely able to keep control. The beastly nature of an alpha in front of his soulmate in heat is exposed. Hazuki is able to refrain himself from biting Naoto in the back of his neck by biting his own arm until it bled, and holding on to Naoto, who was almost paralyzed by his heat. Even when his friend brings people to help them, they are initially unable to separate the two. Hazuki, displaying an almost animalistic possessiveness was like a wild wolf protecting his omega from being taken away by others, unable to recognize anyone other than his soulmate, Naoto.

Hijiki's omegaverse is slightly different from others in the sense that betas are not completely insensitive to pheromones. Though they are not a part of the alpha omega binary, they can smell the pheromones of an extremely dominant omega like Naoto and be affected by it. This is seen from Hazuki's friend, who realized whenever Naoto's scent became stronger and admitted to himself that he would have lost his reasoning as well during Naoto's heat if he had not witnessed Hazuki's resistance and readiness to kill anyone who might harm his omega.¹⁷

The inferiority of one's secondary gender and sexual assault is a constant occurrence in the life of an omega surviving in an alpha dominated society. Years later, after being married to Hazuki and having a second child named Minato, Naoto encounters one of his past rapists again as a business partner to the Tsuchiya's company. Murasame Ikuya, the main alpha involved in Naoto's rape incident, once again reminds the readers of the discrimination faced by omegas. For him the assault was an "inevitable accident" where Naoto spreading his scent meant "you can't say 'I was violated against my will'."¹⁸ Naoto, being married to a rich alpha like Hazuki, can only mean that he "seduced him with your scent, making him feel obligated to mark you and make you his mate."¹⁹ Murasame is the typical alpha who differentiates others on the basis of their secondary gender and openly abuses omegas as well as betas in his

¹⁷ Catherine Salmon and Rebecca L. Burch, 'I'm with You Till the End of the Line: The Romanticisation of Male Bonds', in *Evolutionary Perspectives on Imaginative Culture*, eds Joseph Carroll, Mathias Clasen, and Emelie Jonsson (Cham: Springer, 2020), pp. 291-306.

¹⁸ Hijiki, *Kiraide Isasete*, p. 9.

¹⁹ Hijiki, *Kiraide Isasete*, p. 9.

workplace. Upon meeting Naoto again, he does not hesitate to threaten him with rape and reveal the truth behind Shizuku's parentage to destroy his relationship. Though he receives his due punishment, he is unable to reform his thinking and still tries to justify his actions as normal to Hazuki. He says "when you met him you should've thought the same as I did...the weird thing is for them to go out to the streets, spreading their dirty scent, it's not the alpha's fault...it was Naoto who wanted to get raped."²⁰

The Alpha's Bride

Kaoru Iwamoto's *The Alpha's Bride* is set in an elite alpha society where an alpha heir is a necessity to take over any leading business family.²¹ During one of the gatherings hosted by the Shutou family, Riku Emori, the heir of the Emori family, is mistaken as an omega and harassed by a few alphas until they are discovered and told off by Keiki Shutou, the current head of the Shutou family. In a certain turn of events, it is revealed that Riku is indeed an omega, as he experiences his first heat in the metro station and is once again helped by Keiki. While Keiki did help Riku in various occasions to make him aware of his real secondary gender, the fact cannot be denied that he sexually assaulted Riku using the excuse of his first heat to reveal him as an omega. Riku has himself been subjected to the biased education of a high class alpha for whom omegas are nothing more than reproducers. Suddenly being stripped of his authoritative position leads him to despair. This is further emphasized when Keiki investigates the truth behind Riku's birth. Most elite families are made up of alphas and in an omegaverse two alphas can only give birth to an alpha. This factor had previously ruled out the possibility of Riku being anything other than an alpha, but now it raised the question of Riku's legitimacy.

Keiki finds out and reveals to the Emori family that during Riku's birth their baby had been switched out by a nurse who held grudges against the privileged alphas. The omegaverse society as a whole, not just the elite, possess a very toxic desire to give birth to alphas due to their superior physiology. Riku's parents, who had been portrayed as a loving couple providing everything for their son, are no exception to this thinking. When Riku's identity is revealed, they fail to understand Riku's inner turmoil or even their own misfortune of losing their son, but instead are shocked that Riku is not an alpha. Their main concern is that "for Riku to be an omega...there's no way that's true!"²² Now that Riku is no longer an alpha, it also questions his right to lead the Emori family in the future. When Keiki presents the proposal of taking Riku to the Shutou family and raising him as an executive, in exchange for providing financial support by the Shutou group to the declining Emori business, Riku's father approves Riku's sacrifice for the family's progress. The value of Riku as a human is lost, and he is no longer important for the family and easily sacrificed for monetary gains and social connections. While Keiki's actions can be seen as necessary for Riku's survival in the ruthless alpha world, they are not devoid of his instincts as a dominant alpha.

While various alpha females strive to be acknowledged by Keiki as a potential partner and develop connections with the Shutou group, the sole reason for Riku attracting Keiki's attention is because he recognized Riku as his fated pair. Unlike in *Kirai de Isasete*, the recognition of fated pairs in this omegaverse does not take place through instant involuntary desire, but by a spark felt by the fated individuals when coming in contact. Keiki had identified the link between their souls the moment he

²⁰ Hijiki, *Kiraide Isasete*, p. 12.

²¹ Kaoru Iwamoto and Kana Yukimura, *Alpha's Bride* (Japan: Taiyo Tosho, 2019).

²² Iwamoto and Yukimura, *Alpha's Bride*, p. 3.

made contact with Riku during their second meeting. Riku faces the plight of an omega for the first time when he is raped by Keiki during his first heat and is also almost assaulted by his best friend, who finally sees it as an opportunity to force his unrequited feelings on Riku. Unlike an omega who is raised being subjected to alpha atrocities since the beginning and is constantly warned against his heat and pheromones, Riku is unable to resist the temptation and gives in to Keiki's molestation as part of his omega nature that he now cannot refuse. He is now unknowingly subjected to his own prior inferior understanding of omegas as breeding machines to satisfy an alpha's beastly instincts.

One of the common features of breeding between alphas and omegas is that the probability of giving birth to an alpha is high between a dominant alpha and dominant omega. Due to this factor, elite alphas are often on a hunt for the perfect omega to give birth to a perfect alpha heir. In this view, Keiki is no different. As the eldest son and head of the Shutou family, superior even among the elite families, he holds the centre stage, and has the responsibility to give birth to the perfect alpha to carry on the legacy of the Shutou family. For this purpose he had held countless social gatherings catering to his search and now was finally in the possession of the unknowing omega Riku, his soulmate. Unaware of the norms of the Shutou household, Riku is initially kept in one of the many apartments owned by Keiki, taken care of by his secretary, and occasionally visited secretly by Keiki.

The arrogant alphas are not the only ones who propagate the inferiority of omegas. This discriminating discourse is embedded so deeply in the omegaverse society that omegas themselves prefer to portray themselves as weak and in need of protection from an alpha, unless they are extremely rich and influential enough to create their own space among the elite alphas of the society.²³ While it is true that patriarchy forces women to be submissive to men, it cannot be denied that women are taught to be submissive and weak by their predecessors themselves. They seek to be acknowledged by their male counterparts through a sexual and weak portrayal of themselves to make men believe that they are superior and needed by their female partners. Women can only afford to disobey patriarchy and strive to be equal to men in the social sector if they already possess enough financial resources to sustain themselves.

Kuou Iriya, head of the Iriya family, sets a perfect example of an omega who is recognized by the social circle as someone capable enough to stand next to the Shutous. He is often considered to be a perfect match for Keiki in terms of their status, wealth, as well as gender. Despite being a progressive omega in a privileged position, Iriya has his own stereotypes regarding 'lowly' omegas. According to him, Keiki's acknowledgement of Riku as a potential partner is not 'worth it'. Riku's integrity as an individual is distorted as the other alphas in the social circle see him as "an omega who posed as an alpha to get close to the head of the Shutou family. A gold digger who wants to make a fortune."²⁴ Riku's voice as an individual goes unheard, and is deemed unnecessary even by Keiki, who fails to see the identity crisis that Riku is suffering, and uses assault as a means of teaching Riku the ways of an omega. When Riku is almost attacked in Iriya's social gathering by an alpha in the absence of Keiki, instead of making Riku more aware of the dangers faced by an omega in an alpha's lair, he blames him for letting an alpha leave his scent on him and proceeds to molest him by rendering him incapable of resisting his alpha pheromones. Riku, unable to control his

²³ Anna Madill, 'Men on the Market: Feminist Analysis of Age-Stratified Male-Male Romance in Boys' Love Manga', *Studies in Comics*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2016), pp. 265-287.

²⁴ Iwamoto and Yukimura, *Alpha's Bride*, p. 10.

instincts, is forced to submit, thereby confusing his mating instincts with the feelings of love.

The norm of omega inferiority is stressed further when Riku is informed by his friend about the “supreme rule of the alpha,”²⁵ that is, to never accept an omega as an official member of the family. Once an alpha baby is born, they are taken by the main family for further education and the omega is abandoned. Only now does Riku finally realize his position as an omega belonging to a dominant alpha, a creature he himself initially believed to be only a tool for breeding. One can only empathize with the plight of another if he/she are subjected to the same atrocities. A former alpha, he now claims that “omega is not a tool,”²⁶ in a desperate attempt to overcome their instincts.

Remnant Kemonohito

Unlike *Kirai de Isasete* and *The Alpha's Bride*, Hasumi Hana's *Remnant Kemonohito* is different in its portrayal of the superior alpha.²⁷ Alpha, omega, and beta in Hana's omegaverse are both humans as well as humanoid animals; animals like wolves walking on two feet, with the ability to converse perfectly. They are beasts in the most literal sense. It is a world where humans and beasts co-exist and are further differentiated by their secondary genders. The protagonist, Daato, is a male human omega currently residing in a church, which, on the surface, takes care of the orphan omegas until they are married. However in reality the church acts as a farm to breed omegas to sell to brothels or the black market when they get their heat, in the disguise of being married into a well-to-do family. Desperate to save his younger sister and acquire medicines to suppress her heat, Daato is provided with enough money to buy high quality suppressants by a mysterious man.

In a cliched turn of events, when Daato later encounters the mysterious person again he goes into heat and ends up forming a bond with his benefactor, Juda, an alpha beast belonging to the noble Siegfried Clan. Juda is supposedly able to resist omega pheromones to some extent, but is unable to keep his instincts in check and ends up biting Daato's nape due to their connection as a ‘fated bond’. As Ruado, Juda's cousin, explains, in this omegaverse “a ‘fated bond’ is between two people who are drawn to each other regardless of their feelings.”²⁸ This bond, unconsciously, provides Daato with a sense of comfort and security that he never experienced, even though Juda was a stranger to him. Ruado states that Daato's sole purpose now is to “bear our clan's offspring.”²⁹ The use of omegas as child-bearing tools is the most recurring theme in maximum omegaverse narratives and is more prominent in the elite social setting.

One of the most principle after effects of forming a bond is the inability of the bonded omega to mate with anyone other than his alpha. An attempt to do so results in a strong physical rejection by the omega's body. On the other hand, a bonded alpha faces no restrictions in mating with as many partners as he wishes to, with the exception that despite mating they can bear children only with their bond. “When the ‘bond's contract’ is sealed, the entire being of an omega becomes the ‘possession’ of an alpha. When you (omega) mate with those other than your bond, it causes your body to have an ‘immunological reaction’ and reject them.”³⁰ When Daato was raped by the priest

²⁵ Iwamoto and Yukimura, *Alpha's Bride*, p. 13.

²⁶ Iwamoto and Yukimura, *Alpha's Bride*, p. 13.

²⁷ Hasumi Hana, *Remnant Kemonohito* (Japan: Frontier Works, 2016).

²⁸ Hana, *Remnant Kemonohito*, p. 3.

²⁹ Hana, *Remnant Kemonohito*, p. 3.

³⁰ Hana, *Remnant Kemonohito*, p. 4.

at the church while trying secretly to meet his sister, his body forced him to vomit, and he felt as if his “organs are being squished together... and scream out in pain.”³¹

The commodification of omegas is highlighted time and again. Noble families such as the Siegfried Clan follow the practice of housing several omegas from honorable origins for the purpose of mating and producing offspring. These omegas take pride as special beings who have the looks and lineage to mate with the noble alphas. These omegas view Daato as a ‘low class’ omega interfering with the natural order by bonding with their master, Juda. For Daato, this foreign concept of hierarchy even among omegas comes as a shock, since throughout his life he had considered the entire world his enemy, except the omegas. Through the atrocities that he had faced during his stay in the church he had always believed that every omega faced the same fate as them. In such circumstances, the thought of an omega receiving education seems outrageous.

Hana’s portrayal of alphas as literal beasts blurs the already degraded distinction between reason and instincts in omegaverse fictions. An alpha man already struggles to keep his reason intact when faced with an omega’s pheromones. This struggle between one’s human reasoning and animalistic instincts to gain control over the body becomes completely one-sided when the individual is physically more beast-like than human.

Conclusion

Mori Mari was one of the first authors who brought back the ancient boys’ love tradition in her works about the eighteenth century wrote a series of novellas throughout the 1960’s dealing with older men’s infatuations with beautiful younger men. The early 1970’s saw a significant increase in tales about male-male love when girl’s manga began to deal with male homosexuality. The Yaoi genre emerged as an acronym for *yama nashi, ochi nashi, imi nashi* meaning “no climax, no point, no meaning” referring to the slender plot lines of the stories. These stories do not always portray how real gay men are but how they ideally should be to suit the tastes of a group of fans.³²

In the East, boys’ love did not emerge as a form of slash fan-fiction by amateur writers but was formally adopted by the *mangakas* (manga artists) in the industry. The manga industry was the first to adopt the omegaverse narrative in Asian countries. This article focuses on three manga which are set in the omegaverse (omega-universe) and analyses the use of omega-alpha dynamics in its characterization. It investigates the similarities that it has with the contemporary world and how the use of instincts makes it possible to portray gender dynamics.

Violence and lack of consent is one of the major characteristics of boy’s love manga and more so in an omegaverse narrative. Omegaverse manga makes extensive use of rape scenarios in their plot to cater to the pornographic element of *Yaoi*. Animalistic instincts become a major factor in instigating sexual acts. In all the three manga, pheromones are the only reason that the alpha and omega come into contact with each other for the first time. The alpha *seme* is always overcome by the pheromones of the omega in heat and attacks the *uke*. The first intercourse always occurs under the drunken influence of pheromones and without the omega’s consent. The element of a fated bond is used as an excuse to justify the overflow of instinct. These factors resonates with the playful acronym of *Yaoi*, that is *yamete, ochiri ga itai!* meaning “Stop, my ass hurts!” since all protagonists indulge in anal intercourse.³³ The

³¹ Hana, *Remnant Kemonohito*, p. 3.

³² McLelland, ‘Japan’s Original Gay Boom’.

³³ McLelland, ‘Japan’s Original Gay Boom’, p. 87.

omegas are more feminine and prettier than alphas and betas, and are subjected to situations and problems typically faced by women. Such an androgynous image provides its female readers a form of relief from the patriarchal system. Women's sexuality is highly limited by Japanese society, which considers heterosexual sex mainly for two purposes: sex trade and reproduction within the family.³⁴ This kind of narrative can also be seen as a form of revenge by putting men in the dangerous situations faced by women on a daily basis due to their gender.

³⁴ McLelland, 'Japan's Original Gay Boom', p. 87.