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# Consuming *Kyara* 'Characters': Anthropomorphization and Marketing in Contemporary Japan

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Japan is famous for its *manga* tradition, said to form a large part of the Cool Japan image promulgated globally as a lauded aspect of soft power. Yet an important contemporary part of this tradition that reflects domestic aesthetics and values is the practice through which products, services, events and policies can be represented by a *kyara* (originally *kyarakutaa*, 'character'). *Kyara* can be actual people, but are often cartoon characters or imaginary creatures constructed through the process of *gijinka* 'anthropomorphization' of some aspect of the entity they represent. This paper examines a sample of such emergent *kyara* as marketing agents in contemporary Japan.

## Introduction

Why eat a plain sugar cookie when you could have a smiling one -- or, why should a sugar cookie smile? Ubiquitous in marketing food and other products, cute characters provide cues to the Japanese viewer in hopes of generating sales, and via association, good will towards the product and the brand. Things, ideas, events, and persons become products sold by soft power. Japanese consumers are bombarded with cute representations that not only serve as marketing tools, but also guide the user towards specific behaviors. This paper provides specific examples of *kyara* -- 'spokespeople,' cartoon characters, and often anthropomorphized objects -- to examine the mechanisms of this phenomenon.

## Character cookies: *kyara* in corporate context

A rectangular box of Morinaga's DEAR Sable cookies (self-named 'The New Standard Biscuit') show how product and process are characterized for specific outcomes. These smiling sugar cookies are marketed with language and images that teach us how to open the box, how to incorporate cookie eating into a balanced diet, and how to recycle the empty box. These gentle imperatives are delivered through a plethora of grinning, cute figures including the brand logo, several illustrations, and the cookies themselves.

The pale, circular cookies, marketed since 2006, are embossed with six kinds of smiling faces which vary in eye and nose shape, adding visual interest. Photographic images of some of these faces decorate the front of the box, along with the Morinaga "M" logo into which is incorporated a cherub's face and wings. Next to the product's name DEAR, three more smiley faces appear in loose *yuru kyara* style, as if a child drew them with a crayon. Under these faces is the catch phrase, *itsudemo nikkori. yasashii egao.*: 'always grinning. kind smiling faces.' This design also appears on the opposite side of the box, rotated ninety degrees so that the product can be displayed with either lengthwise or vertical orientation on a shelf. On the side next to the opening flap is a diagram showing how to flatten the box for easy disposal. Inside the box is a *manga* version of these instructions, with happy faces incorporated into the drawings of the box and of the trash can. There is also a

reminder inside that the box lid can stand open to allow easy access to the cookies -- complete with a word which represents the sound effect made when the lid is opened fully (*kachi*) and another *manga* of the happy cookie box. On the remaining large side of the box is yet another simply sketched *manga* of two children and a dog enjoying snacks. The accompanying paragraph details the notion that 'a snack should be considered one's fourth meal,' bordered on the right by a catch phrase *tanoshiku tabeyoo. kichin to tabeyoo.*: 'let's enjoy eating. let's eat properly.' To the left of the paragraph is a replica of the Japanese 'food balance guide' (*shokuji baransu gaido*) developed by the Ministry of Health & Welfare and the Ministry of Agriculture (comparable to the US Dept. of Agriculture's Food Pyramid), represented as a spinning top with various foods drawn upon it. One small side of the box contains the ingredient label and the sell-by date, and icons of a computer and a mobile phone (at the bottom next to the website address). The other end has the product name, a computer rendered cartoon image of the naked, blonde Morinaga cherub, and the catchphrase *oishiku tanoshiku sukoyuka ni* 'deliciously, enjoyably, healthily.' Each side of this box, and the inside as well, contains multiple messages couched in cuteness. These messages encourage the consumer not only to buy and enjoy the product, but to use it in specific and predetermined ways. The DEAR section of the Morinaga website directs the consumer how to decorate the cookies further, personalizing the smiling faces or making them look like animal faces with icing, and invites participation by consumers to share photos and comments of how they decorated the cookies (<http://www.morinaga.co.jp/dear/top.html>). DEAR cookies are an especially rich example of how *kyara* are used on everyday products.

### Characters in regional and national food promotions

*Kyara* are also used to represent food consumption ideals to Japanese by government agencies. The food balance guide shown on the box itself contains a human figure running around the top of the guide to represent the need for exercise. Though in its national representation (as shown on the DEAR Sable box) it is a colorful though generic *manga* of a human figure<sup>1</sup>, the Kyushu regional version has developed a specific *kyara* who runs around the top, named *Kyuu-chan*. She also appears at the bottom of the page with a companion, the male, *Shuu-kun*. Their names together make up the place name of Kyushu; in the image, she holds a rice paddle while he holds a ladle. They are introduced as 'hardworking supporters of Kyushu's regional traditional cooking,' in this localized version of the food balance guide. She says that 'the nutrition chart represents an approx. 2200 calorie intake; however, individual needs will vary depending on sex, age, and activity level. He says 'let's enact a healthy dietary lifestyle by exercising and eating a balanced diet.'

As typical Japanese *kyara* characters with a moralizing message, they are telling the reader that one should do something, in this case, to eat and exercise in balance for health. They represent the official voice of MAFF, the Japanese Ministry of Forestries, Farming, and Fisheries, Kyushu branch. Their dress and hairstyles resemble the *manga* depictions of Japan's ancient gods, whose origin legends link to various locations in Kyushu. *Kyuu-chan* and *Shuu-kun* combine local imagery and cuisine with a message to enforce national guidelines about ideal eating habits, using similar strategies as those seen in commercial advertising ([www.maff.go.jp/kyushu](http://www.maff.go.jp/kyushu)).

MAFF worries not only about proper nutrition, but also about Japan's low level of national food self-sufficiency, which is currently about 40%. In hopes of increasing that percentage, the Food Action Nippon Promotion Bureau was formed, operating at the national level. Its *kyara* logo mark shows a smiling child who

embraces the red *hinomaru* sun of the Japanese flag. The child gazes down towards the circle, as if he is about to take a bite from it. This image appears along with the catchphrase *oishii Nippon o*, 'a delicious Japan,' providing a simple representation of domestic consumption.

That simple message is apparently not enough. The bureau's website also introduces us to the eight-year-old boy *Kokusan*, a *kyara* representing the Food Action Nippon (FAN) Promotion Bureau (<http://syokuryo.jp/index.html>), along with his little dog "Gochi." The name *Kokusan* is a homonym for *kokusan*, 'domestic production,' and a cook or chef is known as a *kokku*; thus, *Kokusan* wears white garb and a chef's hat. These characters and the logo mark appear throughout the FAN site, along with tips, recipes and events to promote cooking with domestic products (promulgated by human celebrity chefs) and tie-ups with magazines and other commercial food-related businesses. FAN encourages the reader to sign up for news about their events and the email magazines *MoguMaga* (*mogu* is an onomatopoeia for eating, *maga* is short for 'magazine') and *Kokusan Tayori* 'Koku-san Greetings' by joining the *FAN kurabu* 'FAN club.' In one section of the website one can play a game to determine one's approximate level of domestic product consumption by entering menu choices, and if sufficient points are gained, till and farm imaginary land adjacent to *Kokusan's* plot.

Like any typical eight-year-old boy, *Kokusan* has a family. This family is described in short but surprisingly detailed narratives. Such a strategy in *kyara* construction is common and, as the *kyara* producer Kensuke Kondo points out, important in creating *kyara* with longevity (2006:57). These narratives, intended to promote engagement with the FAN theme, portray an idealized family. *Kokusan's* father *Kokuzo* is forty-eight, a serious-minded and easily embarrassed Japanese restaurateur. He combines his uncompromising *Edokko* (native Tokyoite) professionalism with an unabashed romanticism for his wife *Kokue*, with whom he fell in love at first sight. She is forty-three and is herself the owner and chef of a French restaurant. Many a boy lost his heart over this strong gal, but her devotion to cooking was unwavering until she met *Kokuzo* and married him against her parents' wishes. Though we don't hear her speak, we learn that since she studied in France, she occasionally mixes French into her conversation, a trait that *Kokuzo* finds appealing. *Kokusan* has two brothers. The eldest, *Kokuichi*, is described as a stylish, intelligent, and thoughtful twenty-two-year-old. He is tall, with a long lock of purple hair covering one eye. He is good at sports as well as academics and is popular with women, probably because of the 'ladies first' philosophy he gleaned from the influence of his France-educated mother. Though he is somewhat of a narcissist, he takes good care of those around him and thus earns their esteem. He graduated from a prestigious university and is currently in training at his mother's restaurant. Next appears *Kokuji*, the other brother, who is short and stocky. A sensitive lad of eighteen, he respects his father, and has just begun to apprentice at his restaurant. Cooking is his passion, and his sentimentality extends even towards stray cats and roadside flowers. He is very good with his hands, crafting decorative elements for his father's dishes (his skill at this surpasses his father's), and enjoying respect for his embroidery and knitting.

We can now appreciate another aspect of *Kokusan's* naming. It may seem strange that a young boy would receive a name ending in *-san*, since young boys would usually have *-kun* affixed as an address term. In this case, however, *-san* is not an address term. *Kokusan* is the third son after *Kokuichi* and *Kokuji*, (*ichi* means 'one,' *ji* is a form of 'two' used in naming, and 'three' is *san*) so in address he would be *Kokusan-kun*. The youngest in his restaurateur family, this lad is honest and

beloved by the people around him. He is a gourmand with a mature palate for his years, and his mouth waters whenever he encounters something delicious. He uses surprisingly polite language -- due to the influence of his parents who are in the service industry -- though he still makes cute mistakes. He is a second grader and has owned his dog *Gocchi* since he was three.

Still, a *kyara* logo and a *kyara* family bearing this level of characterizing detail are apparently not enough to carry the symbolic load of promoting Japanese food to Japanese. MAFF also uses a winking tomato and a smiling head of lettuce along with a carrot, a cucumber, and an eggplant in its logo for the *Natsu Beji Purojiekuto* 'Summer Veggie Project.' This project ties in to the overall logic of eating seasonal foods discussed throughout the FAN site; apparently, the Bureau believes that Japanese must be reminded of this aspect of their traditional food culture for which they have been celebrated worldwide.

MAFF has clearly attempted to craft its message in support of domestic consumption in order to appeal to children, via the *Kokusan* narrative, and to their mothers, both through the *kyara* and the inclusion of recipes, events, and commercial tie-ins. This targeting reflects one of the major findings of the Bandai Character Research Laboratory - that the current target audience for characters should be mothers and their young children (Aihara 2007:23). Consumers can, thanks to recent legislation, determine food origins when shopping, and work towards consuming more domestic foodstuffs. What is missing from the FAN site, however, is a discussion of one major part of the domestic self-sufficiency puzzle: the use of imported foods in restaurants and in readymade and frozen foods. The behaviors leading to this situation are carried out by corporate decisionmakers, of whom the majority tend to be men in Japan's glass-ceilinged corporate world. Thus the effects of FAN can only extend towards possibly influencing personal decisionmaking in stores whose purchasing decisions are beyond the reach of FAN's fans. Another part of FAN's message is the importance of eating local foods, for which a variety of local marketing strategies also exist.

### Consumer reactions to *kyara* advertising

In a regional food promotion campaign for rural Shimane Prefecture, a glossy black *shijimi* 'corbicula' clam rests on a cushion with a cup of green tea and some traditional sweets nearby. Above is a thought bubble: *Shimijimi omou Shimane ni umarete yokatta naa~* "I think keenly 'wow, it's good I was born in Shimane.'" There's obvious alliteration between Shimane the place, *shijimi* the clam, and *shimijimi*, the sound-symbolic term describing the depth of thought. Having a clam as a spokesperson is a logical choice given that Shimane produces about 40% of the *shijimi* consumed nationally. It doesn't matter that this is an actual photo of clam lacking a face, rather than a drawing. Japan's pervasive aesthetic and religious tendency to anthropomorphize non-human objects encourages the viewer of this image to interpret the clam as representative of a human. The particular context provides clues as to its age and gender as well. Japanese readily identify the clam as an old man based on the manner of expression, the dark colors of the clam and cushion, the traditional sweets, and the hometown motif. These kinds of contextual aesthetic clues are commonly used to forefront products in advertisements: here, the clam, the tea, and the sweets of Shimane.

Advertisement is, after all, reliant on the manipulation of cultural and linguistic resources in the interests of spreading information and creating desire. In Japan, anthropomorphization is a powerful communicative tool that is frequently used in advertising. Though non-Japanese viewers often see anthropomorphized

representations primarily as cute, if not gratuitous, native speakers report two additional effects. The first reinstates the historical, cultural linguistic lack of imaginal separation between humans and nature, or even between humans and their creations. When a group of students in an MIC course on Japanese Popular Culture were shown ads and asked to describe what kind of human was being represented by the non-human entity in the advertisement, they were quick to identify linguistic and other traits by which identity could be discerned.

The clam is having a moment of deep reflection indicated by the sound-symbolic term *shimijimi*. This term is reduplicated (*shimi + shimi = shimijimi*) showing a continual action. This is one of the large class of sound-symbolic terms in Japanese that are subcategorized as *giongo* 'onomatopoeia,' *gitaigo* 'mimetics,' and *giseigo* 'manner adverbs.' These terms evoke cultural scenarios including emotional and visceral experience, and may take a variety of phonological shapes which indicate their grammatical classification as adverbs or verbal nouns. They are common in *manga* comics as well as in other casual texts such as personal letters. Japanese ascribe the meanings of these terms with a sense of naturalness brought on by their sound symbolism (as in English, the *sl* sound shared in *slip*, *slop*, *slide*). The clam's philosophical rumination is elaborated by the ending particle *naa~* which is akin to 'yeah,' with casual, dialectal, and somewhat masculine overtones. Thus the clam mentioned above is an older male. This identity is easily ascribed because of features of his quoted speech, the rustic teatime scenario, and the dark colors used in the advertisement. Language and image contribute cultural cues that are readily accessible to the viewer.

The second major effect described by viewers of these ads relates to information flow. Contrary to the assumption that anthropomorphization includes extraneous information, viewers state that its inclusion makes the advertisements easy to understand. The linguistic and cultural schemata invoked via anthropomorphization reportedly allowed greater access to the information content of the message. Given that in the Japanese cultural linguistic system, anthropomorphization is a type of schematization which though rooted in historical poetic practice is an enduring practice in the present day, its use in advertising combines textual and visual resources to situate creatures and objects within the world of humans. For this reason anthropomorphization creates a sense of comfort and affinity. Another example of a faceless though emotive *kyara* appeared in the late 1990s, in a Pizza California advertisement. This ad was quite simple visually, depicting a round ball of pizza dough on a blue background. The text was as follows: *Kyoo wa piza ni naru. Waku waku* "Today (I) become pizza. Wowee!" The term *waku waku* is another sound-symbolic *gitaigo* form expressing generalized excitement; it was used to invoke a shared feeling in the reader. As with the clam, the makers of this ad refrained from the common practice of drawing a cartooned face on the dough, which often appears in anthropomorphized ads. By omitting the face, the quoted statement (which also lacks an overt grammatical subject) is made ambiguous and could be ascribed to the reader as well with a slightly different reading, as if deciding what to have for dinner: "Today (it) will be pizza. Wowee!"

Another 'excited' product is the *Meritto* shampoo refill package. My students and I dubbed this *kyara* Shampoo Banzai Boy. It is considered to be a boy, since being unmarked for gender renders it male; its cuteness makes it young. We called him Banzai because the shape of the container is described in the ad as having its arms raised as when Japanese people yell "Banzai!" in celebration. The product's catchphrase was *Katachi wa hen da ga, nani ka to ureshii* 'the shape is odd, but somehow (it is) happy.' The two 'arms' are corners of a rectangular pouch with a cap

in between them on one of the short sides of the rectangle; the other end of the pouch has a gusset so that the product can stand alone. In the advertisement a simple smiling face was drawn just under the cap. The product illustrations and text showed how the refill pouch should be used and rolled up for convenient disposal. The stages of use are described as follows: (1) *Banzai suru ryotei o ageta hen na katachi* 'Do banzai - an odd shape with both hands' raised; (2) *Bôshi o toru...* 'Take off the hat;' -- the cap was removed; (3) *Udekumi o suru...* (*wa~i*) 'Cross the arms (hurrah)' -- as the corners were joined to make a bottle shape; (4) *Dô ga fukuramu...* 'The trunk expands' -- at this stage the product was upended, pouring the shampoo into the owner's original plastic bottle; (5) *Chiisaku naru...* 'It becomes small'-- as it was rolled up and flying into the trash can, still grinning. As with the pizza dough, excitement is the key to understanding the value-added feature of this product. However, by the inclusion of body-part imagery, the shampoo package was further anthropomorphized, to the extent of performing humanlike actions that guide the consumer towards proper use of the product.

### The mushroom families: narratives and advertising

The MAFF promotion of eating domestic foods by means of characters is, though the characters are conceptual rather than directly representational of the product, not unlike the marketing strategies of corporations themselves. An example which combines food as a product with the family motif is the group of mushroom characters popularized by the Hokuto Corporation. Anthropomorphized mushrooms appear on packaging, in television commercials, and in videos describing how to cook the mushrooms. Their song *kinoko no uta* "The mushroom song" is part of the videos and plays in the produce sections of grocery stores, becoming so widely recognized that it is marketed as a CD in its own right including a karaoke version (Sony 2003). In the CD package is a booklet with the song lyrics, finger puppets, and a page describing each character's name, gender, and attributes. These descriptions contain rather a large amount of detail, as in the MAFF site, given the reality that the Hokuto characters are not part of any larger story than that of the advertisement. They are named after the mushrooms they represent: *eringi* 'king trumpet' who takes the fatherly role, *maitake* the mother, and three children -- two girls, *bunashimeji*, and *bunapi* (a hybrid *bunashimeji*), and a boy named for the corporation itself, *Hokuto-kun*.

Here are two of the characterizations. *Eringi*: Substantial and manly. Having a fighting spirit, he's never lost a fight. Yet, his hobby is gardening, and he cries quite easily. A hidden romanticist. *Maitake*: Extremely fashionable. She makes her presence as the fashion leader of the mushroom world. Despite her flashiness, she's good at cooking, and is more home-oriented than one would think. She has a lot of pride, which is occasionally wounded.

These characterizations show not only that the mushrooms are gendered with predictable traits from a Japanese cultural perspective (e.g., the male's fighting spirit and the female's skill at cooking), but that they have hobbies, and rich emotional lives as well. They echo the characterizations of the father and mother cooks in the MAFF website. Of the two girls, one is a tomboy, one a femme. The boy is a model child. These Hokuto mushroom characters appear on product labels and signage, and throughout the company website as decorations and promulgators of mushroom cuisine (<http://www.hokto-kinoko.co.jp/index.html>). Even the English section of the website contains a few images; however, the Japanese version is replete. One can easily imagine that should their popularity continue, the range of Hokuto

character related goods may expand beyond the mushrooms themselves into toys and soft goods.

That was the case with the *DoCoMo Dake*, a mushroom representing the DoCoMo cell phone corporation, and his invented family. *Doko mo* means 'everywhere' in Japanese, and *DoCoMo dake* can mean 'only DoCoMo' as well as 'DoCoMo mushroom.' Cell phone mascots and stuffed toys representing members of the DoCoMo Dake family are awarded to customers, and can be found on internet auction sites. A vast amount of electronic content - games, narratives, downloadable items, and an archive of advertisements - devoted to this character group are found at <http://docomodake.net/top.html>. Among them is a CM 'commercial message' instructing users how to make a fat sushi roll (*futomaki sushi*) that when sliced will show the image of the original *DoCoMo Dake*. The closing screen of the CM reminds the viewer that just as saying *itadakimasu* '[I]will receive' before eating is polite Japanese, that one should mind one's manners while using a cell phone. This ties the character- and food-focused narrative of the commercial back to its maker, the cell phone company while reminding the consumer of a moral imperative.

### History of *kyara*-based advertising

Looking back over Japan's product advertisement archives, it becomes clear how recent the current panoply of *kyara* is. Most Meiji-period (1868-1912) advertisements relied on images of the product, its logo, or a famous personage to appeal to the public. One notable counter-example is the *Oorudo* "Old Gold" cigarette advertisement showing two cats, wearing colorful collars and smoking. Only their facial features show anthropomorphization. In the early Showa period, we see very few creatures in advertising. A Nikka Whisky advertisement depicted a bear wearing a red muffler and holding a bottle in its paw. Here as well the bear resembles the real animal much more so than do the current crop of *kyara* who more closely resemble cartoon characters. As with *manga* generally, the boom in *kyara* advertisements is a post-WWII phenomena.

In 1968, the groundbreaking magazine *Teiin Rukku* 'Teen Look' included a heart-shaped face logo which, like the DEAR Sable cookie, showed a variety of expressions - possibly a predecessor for the *kaomoji* text emoticons which are so popular of late. Based on the results of market survey, Teen Look was designed for high school girls, for whom no targeted magazine existed. It included articles on fashion, popular boy bands, and manga, and even employed young women's slang in its text - considered daring at the time. Shujiro Murakawa of the marketing division of *Shufu to Seikatsusha* 'Housewives and Lifestyle Company' publisher explains that of the many issues they faced in creating the magazine, the creation of a symbol mark or *petto maaku* 'pet mark' was believed necessary. The heart-shaped logo was designed to appeal directly to girls and stimulate their emotional response. It was a success. Designed with various expressions intended to reflect those of real girls such as laughter, crying, and winking, it became popular to the extent that readers requested the creation of rings and pendants bearing its visage. These were not produced for Teen Look, but the popularity of its early *kyara*-like logo mark with women readers was apparently not lost on *Shufu to Seikatsusha*. Its magazine *Suteki na Okusan* 'Wonderful Wife' includes giveaways and other tie-ups to *kyara* licensed from San-X corporation, and it since 2005 even has its own *kyara*, a family of toy poodles. Another magazine in the *Shufu to Seikatsusha* line allows readers to play a sort of 'Where's Waldo' search game with *kyara*-laden pictures. Successful players of the games in *Kyara Sagashi Rando* 'Character Search Land' can then enter contests to win prizes. Such a magazine feeds consumer recognition of and familiarity with

*kyara* in a game format; not surprisingly, a Nintendo DS version of the game is also available.

### **Kyara in the high-involvement marketplace**

It may not seem surprising that *kyara* could help sell such relatively cheap amusements as magazines and games. In the world of advertising, a common distinction is drawn between low-involvement and high-involvement purchasing decisions. Involvement means time spent for decision making, money spent, and longevity of the relationship between consumer and product. Snacks are located at the far end of the low-involvement spectrum, since they are cheap and readily consumed. High-involvement products take a greater financial investment and are more durable purchases, such as automobiles or medical insurance. Though typically *kyara* and other soft-sell strategies have been associated with low-involvement products, while high information load is characteristic of high-involvement product advertising, the encroachment of *kyara* marketing in Japan has extended into the high-involvement market.

The Nissan March is a car labeled in advertising as *furendorii* in that it helps its driver, e.g., by turning off its own headlights upon exit from a tunnel. Not surprisingly, it is anthropomorphized in the television commercial that points out these "friendly" features. Most insurance companies in Japan each have their anthropomorphized *kyara* mascots. Nissay Corporation is even an official partner of Universal Studios Japan, and boasts Snoopy as its mascot (for in Japan, Snoopy is the figurehead character, not Charlie Brown). One recent innovative ad has attempted to indigenize the representation of a foreign insurance company, AFLAC (American Family Life Assurance Company of Columbus), by altering its live duck mascot into a *kyara*. In television commercials the duck appears with the young actress Aoi Miyazaki and a live cat in a garden. The duck and the cat appear to sing and dance together for the actress via manipulation of video imagery. Their ditty ends in the phrase *maneki neko dakku*, combining the traditional Japanese imagery of the shopkeeper's beckoning cat statue (*maneki neko*) with the duck. A catchy reminder of the foreignness of the duck remains in the use of the innovative loanword *dakku* rather than the Japanese term for duck, *ahiru*. The *kyara* version of this combination then appears, with the duck inside a cat costume. The foreign company (represented by the duck) is imagistically subsumed by the familiar and domestic *maneki neko*. The jingle is then used in radio advertising and the *kyara* in print ads without inclusion of the actress who had been the focus in earlier advertising. She becomes extraneous to the company's representation, replaced by a *kyara*.

### **Humans vs. *kyara* spokespeople**

Why are *kyara* considered better than humans for advertising? Beyond the fact that *kyara* draw no salaries beyond the designer's fee, advertisers need not worry about the damaging effects of scandal should a celebrity's life go off the rails. When scandal erupts in Japan, any advertising in which the famous culprit is shown goes immediately off the air. One recent example is that of the Softbank cell phone company, who has a long-running representation by the band called SMAP. When one of its squeaky-clean members, Tsuyoshi Kusanagi, was arrested in Spring 2009 for singing loudly and drunkenly in the nude late at night in a public park in Roppongi, the ads were pulled until his official apology was made and a cooling-down period elapsed. Moreover, his image was dropped permanently from the ads for the DPA, Association of Promotion of Digital [TV] broadcasting, who then

picked up Kitajima Saburo and four younger celebrities to support their cause. Of course, they also ramped up the use of a deerlike *kyara* named *Chidejishika*. *Shika* means deer, and *chideji* is an abbreviated form *chijoo dejitaru hoosoo* 'above ground digital broadcasting.' As part of this promotion, a cell phone strap with the deer figure would be sent to respondents to questionnaire about watching TV on one's cell phone (<http://www.dpa.or.jp>). In animated TV commercials the deer removes its antennalike antlers and plants them atop buildings, with a gesture reminiscent of the commercials in which Kusanagi raised his arm and pointed to buildings with proper antennas. The expression *chidejishika* can mean 'only with *chideji*,' which is the chief message the corporation must express, since Japanese TV broadcasting goes digital as of July 24, 2011, necessitating new antennas. The deer itself represents solely that message, not another corporation, and not the identity of a person who lost his grip on sobriety one spring evening. Characters will not embarrass their corporate creators, and moreover, contain none of the extraneous and possibly scandalous memories viewers may associate with live celebrities.

The worst thing that can happen to the relationship of *kyara* and corporation is still a scandal, however. The *NOVA Usagi*, a pink rabbit spokescharacter advertising the NOVA English conversation school franchise, was launched in September 2002 and had achieved star status of its own as a *kyara* in the five years following, through a series of television commercials depicting it as earnest, if odd -- it sported a yellow beak. Cell phone mascot straps, stationery, toys and even a Nintendo DS game starred the character. Unfortunately, the NOVA corporation became notorious for poor business practices and went bankrupt in 2007. The school has reopened in April of 2009 under different ownership, retaining the *NOVA Usagi* as its mascot, but has yet to reach acceptance by a skeptical public. Not surprisingly, the rabbit figures are no longer found in shops.

### Conclusion: the logic of *kyara*

More enduringly popular *kyara* such as Hello Kitty, who are not initially designed for specific products, appear throughout the marketplace in various configurations including their two-dimensional representations as *manga*, games or storybooks. Their 3-D versions as toys form a large part of Japanese character marketing; they can also lend their fame to endorse other products, as is the case with *An-Pan Man*. Characters that are created specifically as marketing agents from products or to represent products, services, or social imperatives differ only slightly from independent *kyara* in the ways described here. Much has been written about the former, from Atom Boy to Pokemon. However, their fame can easily overshadow any product they may endorse, just as with human celebrities. And celebrities are further flawed by their innate humanity. The creation of marketing *kyara* as specific representatives of a product or service rendered mentally 'sticky' through narratives, wordplay and other specialized aspects of their design, lends these less-famous, yet ubiquitous *kyara* their power to influence consumers in the Japanese marketplace of products and ideas. That is why the sugar cookie smiles.

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<http://www.morinaga.co.jp/dear/top.html>

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<sup>i</sup> The US Dept. of Agriculture has recently incorporated a human figure into its pyramid image to represent incorporating exercise with ideals of nutrition, but image is a dark outline of a generic person. In Japan such dark images are usually evil figures, typically criminals.