

You Are Doing *Burikko*!

Censoring/Scrutinizing Artificers of Cute Femininity in Japanese

A journalist writing for the *New York Times* (Kristof 1995) offered the following description of a female elevator operator at the Mitsukoshi department store in Ginza: "The Voice is as fawning as her demeanor, as sweet as syrup, and as high as a dog whistle. Any higher and it would shatter the crystal on the seventh floor." The author is reporting on the high-pitched voice frequently considered a stereotypical feature of the *burikko*, a derogatory Japanese label used to describe women who exhibit feigned naïveté. The word is derived from the term *buru* 'to pose, pretend, or act' and the suffix *-ko*, used for "child" or "girl," to mean something like "fake child" or "phony girl." This chapter will argue that the *burikko* designation does not simply reflect the uniform affectation of a childlike persona but rather is primarily established through situated social judgment elicited by a combination of speaker, recipient, and setting. A variety of linguistic and nonverbal phenomena are assessed as constituting the makeup of a *burikko* performance. I will look at some folk perceptions and media representations of the *burikko* and will also provide examples of socially contextualized occasions of talk in which *burikko* features in its evaluation. One outcome of a *burikko* performance is that it downplays or masks the adult sexuality of the woman doing it. An exploration of *burikko* supports a growing scholarly interest in the interconnections between linguistic ideology and gender performativity and also contributes to the literature on labeling practices.

According to Cherry (1987), the term *burikko* was invented by female singer Yamada Kuniko on a television program in 1980. Whether or not this is true, by at least 1981 *burikko* was commonly used in colloquial conversation, and the editors of an encyclopedia of postwar culture provided it on their list of trendy new words

that were popular that year (Sasaki et al. 1991:1049). It certainly reached mainstream status by 1982, as evidenced by the song title for the debut single by the pop music group Grease, “*Burikko Rock 'n' Roll*.” Although use of the word these days has decreased, Inoue (1986) found that during the years 1983–1984 *burikko* was one of the most popular new coinages used among young people.

Burikko was one of several neologisms formed during the first half of the 1980s through the suffixing of *-ko*. Yonekawa (1996:150) mentions *gameko*, coined in 1980 and clipped from *gameisui ko* ‘a chintzy, money-grubbing girl’ (Kansai dialect). There was also *kidoko*, from *kidotte iru ko* ‘a girl who puts on airs’, and *yumeko*, from *yume miru ko* ‘a girl who dreams’, for a romantic girl or woman. Once *burikko* was established, there was a gradual semantic broadening of the concept that allowed new coinages, including *majime burikko* ‘child who pretends to be serious’ and *burikko joshidaisee* ‘cutesy-coeds’, clipped from *joshi daigakusee* ‘female college students’. Most recently we find *burikko kogyaru* ‘phony KoGal’. *Kogyaru* originated as a media term used for young women who have bleached hair, loose socks (knee-length socks worn hanging around the ankles), and big shoes (Miller 2000). The term *kogyaru* is most likely a clipped version of *kookoossee gyaru* ‘high school girl’, and is not derived from the morpheme *ko*, which means “small,” as many folk etymologies claim. *Kogyaru* has overtones of rebellious insolence and unchecked sexuality. The *burikko kogyaru* is therefore not a real KoGal at all but only someone pretending to be naughty and cool.

One problem connected to the *burikko* tag is that it has become synonymous, in some writing, with *young woman*. When the subject of women’s language arises, the *burikko* label may worm its way into the discourse, especially among male writers. In Inoue’s (1989) report on linguistic changes in the speech of women, he discusses the shift in pronunciation of the syllable *shi* to “*si*” as a phenomenon named *burikko hatsuon* ‘*burikko* pronunciation’. This label is used because only young women employ the new pronunciation, but it has the effect of classifying all young women as *burikko*.

Despite its use in numerous other contexts, the core meaning of *burikko* remains that of a woman who displays bogus innocence. Now the frequent object of ridicule, only a few decades ago the *burikko* was the natural product of the cult of cuteness so deliciously described by Kinsella (1995) and McVeigh (2000). The reified cute aesthetic that Treat (1996:283) once termed a “celebration of vapidness” was perfectly expressed by women who acted the part of the contriving maid. The master and prototype for exemplary *burikko* style was 1980s singer Matsuda Seiko. Wearing the hair of Gidget and the petticoats of Marie Antoinette, Matsuda with her pigeon-toed impersonation of a 14-year-old is still remembered as the epitome of the type more than 20 years later, even though she has since reinvented herself as a more mature celebrity. In my interviews, young people only a few years old when Matsuda first appeared still offer her first when asked to name *burikko*. Matsuda was part of the stream of childlike performers, called *aidoru* ‘idols’, who populated the 1980s pop music scene. Although these days *aidoru* tend to be much more womanly, a modified style of ultrafeminine cuteness is still a fashion option. For example, a women’s magazine categorizes *burikko* as a trendy style obtainable through wearing pastels and lace (Tokyo go dai GAL sutairu zukan 2002).

Scholars have historically had an interest in how women are labeled and how these labels may reflect sexist, stereotypical viewpoints. A critique of such words is important because they often serve as vehicles for assumptions that are uncritically accepted as normal and therefore go unchallenged. As Cameron (1990:12) asserted, "Like other representations, linguistic representations both give a clue to the place of women in culture and constitute one means whereby we are kept in our place." A feminist perspective assumes that use of denigrating labels for women is not simply the reflection of an individual's nasty opinion or attitude but is also the manifestation of patriarchal social structure (Flax 1979). One goal of a feminist analysis is to explore the ways in which labeling and naming fortify a patriarchal system.

Although negative labels for women have been a focus of research in many languages, discussions of terms rarely incorporate an analysis of the contexts of their use and their evaluation. Researchers of language and gender note the scholarly history of ignoring women's experience in studies of language in society (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992, Ochs 1992, Bucholtz 1999). While this erasure has been addressed in current research on Japanese, the speech of women characterized as *burikko* is still avoided as silly, inconsequential, and embarrassingly unworthy of academic attention. Stimulated and aided by the work of [Shibamoto] Smith (1992), Okamoto (1995), and others, I have been thinking about the nature of the *burikko* designation, what it means, and how it relates to a Japanese cultural ideology about proper female behavior. My interest in this topic was also aroused when I observed Japanese women I admired for their intelligence, good sense, and capability occasionally performing behaviors judged as *burikko*-ish. In the same manner in which Okamoto (1995) questions the category "Japanese women's language," I want to view the *burikko* not as a fixed personality or character type but as an evaluative interpretation of the behavior exhibited through linguistic, paralinguistic, prosodic, and non-verbal means in specific social settings. In other words, although some people are dismissed for "being" *burikko*, they are in fact simply "doing" *burikko*. Indeed, one often hears the expression *burikko suru* 'to do *burikko*'. This phrase indicates that there is a certain level of awareness on the part of scrutinizers and observers that *burikko* is a gender performance.

This approach to social identity means that individuals are not viewed as linguistic versions of the "social dope" (Giddens 1976) or as unthinking "types" who unthinkingly carry and broadcast their social identities at all times. Rather, we should see speakers as consciously and unconsciously drawing on linguistic and nonverbal repertoires that reflect idealized norms. In this case, some women who select too generously or inappropriately according to cultural norms from a menu of "feminine" and "childish" indexical forms will be negatively sanctioned through labeling as *burikko*. This is not to say that there is some absolute threshold level of linguistic forms that will trigger the evaluation or that there is a set amount of frilly femininity that will automatically doom the behavior as *burikko*. Because they draw from the same gendered cultural system, many of the features that typify a *burikko* performance are also part of acceptable female gender presentation or innocent girls' talk. When a woman is regarded as doing *burikko* because she is displaying overly feminine, innocent, or cute childishness in a specific situation, it is because these otherwise valued traits are thought to be inappropriate for her or for the situation at hand.

What is considered too much or inappropriate femininity or cuteness will also depend on the evaluator's stance. Young men might view this through jaded postmodern acerbity as impishly fake, while an older man thinks it sweetly girlish. In short, the same display of cuteness, childishness, or femininity can be seen as real or fake, depending on who is the actor and who is doing the evaluation.

Before offering examples of folk representations, I will begin with a description of some features that are thought to mark feminine or childish speech and commonly accompany the manifestation of *burikko* behavior.

8.1. Vocal drag and other features considered part of a *burikko* performance

In addition to the grammatical features of talk considered part of the female register (Shibamoto 1985, Ide & McGloin 1990), the performance characterized as that of a *burikko* may include specific vocal attributes. A combination of linguistic, prosodic, paralinguistic, and nonverbal features contributes to an interpretation of speech as *burikko*-like. Although representations and interpretations of *burikko* do not always distinguish these as separate indices, the most readily associated traits are the falsetto voice and a glissando movement through a pitch range. Additional features include a nasalized delivery, use of a baby-talk register, a sprinkling of amusing coinages, and mannerisms such as covering the mouth when smiling or laughing.

Vocal pitch is only partially the product of anatomical differences between women and men (Mattingly 1966). Pitch also reflects a pattern of cultural training that funnels speakers' voices into expected grooves. Differences in adult voices are due to unconscious pitch selection that approximates a vocal image that reflects culturally expected attributes. Although the manipulation of the vocal tract in order to correspond to gender expectations is usually learned early, transgender and transsexual media often includes books and tapes on voice passing. In a sense, the *burikko* voice is a similar form of vocal drag. For decades foreign observers of Japan have commented on the noticeably high voices of some female train station announcers, department store clerks, elevator girls, and television commercial narrators. The heightened pitch combined with formulaic politeness phrases used by these women is sometimes called the "service voice." Ohara (chapter 12, this volume) discusses the change of pitch heights in the service voice according to interlocutor. Moreover, despite superficial impressions, Japanese women's public voices show a range of variation and are not uniformly high-pitched. Morita Miyuki, an evening news anchor for Japan's public broadcasting corporation, was first rejected when she entered the broadcasting business because it was thought that her voice was too low, and an esteemed member of the Japanese Diet, Doi Takako, is often characterized as having a voice on the extreme low end of the scale.

The seemingly marked nature of women's vocal pitch in Japan led many researchers to embark on more empirical analyses, with the aim of examining actual pitch variation. Yamazawa and Hollien (1992) review three different studies that reported a higher average pitch for Japanese women than for Euroamerican women. Loveday (1981) measured pitch in two Japanese women's speech while uttering formulaic expressions. While the average pitch range for American and English women is

214 hertz (van Bezooijen 1995:253), Loveday found soaring pitch peaks between 310 and 450 hertz for the Japanese women. We should note that most often these studies are carried out in foreign laboratory settings, where subjects are usually from elite social backgrounds and are speakers for whom a particular version of femininity impression management is important. In another study, Ohara (1992) found that Japanese women modify their pitch when reading English sentences, producing speech in a slightly lower pitch range. The average pitch frequency for her subjects was 19 hertz greater when speaking Japanese. The outcome was explained as unconscious, learned behavior: "Displaying femininity is an automatic process in most cases. Controlling the larynx to produce higher-pitched sound may be a part of the automatic process" (Ohara 1992:474). Van Bezooijen (1995), working in Japan, asked 8 Japanese women to read a narrative text and used a recording of their voices as the stimulus for ratings by 30 other Japanese subjects. She did not find the expected high pitches in the speakers she used in her study. However, she did find that listeners associated women's higher pitch with the values of femininity, weakness, meekness, and dependency. She also found that listeners considered a medium and a high pitch more attractive in women than a low pitch.

When a woman is performing *burikko*, her pitch will often rise to a level above that she normally uses in casual speech. This *burikko* voice, with its air of ineffectuality, is thought to most often be elicited in the presence of powerful males. It announces that the speaker is unsure, weak, or less powerful. In my interviews and in my reading of women's magazines, I frequently encounter the belief that it is *otoko no mae* 'in front of men' that the *burikko* voice is most frequently manifested. In order to stay within the bounds of gender expectations, Japanese women have been described as using a variety of techniques when faced with conflicting role responsibilities, such as managerial positions in corporate life. They may, for instance, use a combination of listening behaviors, repetition, sentence particles, intonation patterns, and prefacing to buffer managerial directives. [Shibamoto] Smith (1992) has suggested that use of a mother register, or "Motherese," is one strategy women in positions of authority employ when dealing with male subordinates. *Burikko* talk may be exploited as another type of linguistic strategy, this one used on the part of subordinate women for dealing with male authority. A wheedling pitch is used for the same reason we find it in other language communities, because speakers "calculate that it is most likely to bring the ends they desire" (McConnell-Ginet 1983:83). A woman who takes on the social role of a *burikko* is asking to be given the same lenience and indulgence accorded to an unschooled child. Of course, the speaker herself must be aware of her fake performance for it to be considered intentional. She is consciously placing herself in the role of the innocent, reflecting cultural expectations that women not be knowledgeable about certain cultural domains.

It is not just a high pitch that leads to an interpretation of the speaker as simulating innocence but also a melodic swoop over the vocal cords (physiologically, the speed of the vibration of the vocal folds varies from low to high). The importance of this element became clear to me when I watched a Japanese television series named *Hotel* with a Japanese female friend.¹ In one scene a prostitute mistakes one of the main male characters for a customer. When he explains the misunderstanding, the woman riffs through a protestation of surprise, exclaiming, with a particularly sweet

and sugary voice, “*Nan da. Anata mita toki rakkii to omota no ni*” ‘Oh, gee. When I saw you I thought I got lucky’. As she watched, my friend sneered, “*Burikko!*” at the screen. Here, despite the fact that the character’s interlocutor demonstrated knowledge of her activities as a sex worker, the actress presented her character as a pristine pixie expressing disappointment at a failed date. She did this through the manipulation of the features of pitch range often attributed to the *burikko* character.

The doing of *burikko* may also be accomplished through use of a nasalized delivery that accompanies the high-pitched voice. I located an example in a television program titled *Tokyo erebeetaa gaaru* ‘Tokyo Elevator Girls’, a soap opera series about the young women who greet and assist customers in posh department stores.² Interspersed throughout the narrative are scenes of the elevator girls being trained in how to properly address customers with just the right words and cheery intonation, the so-called service voice. In one scene, an elevator girl (played by actress Miyazawa Rie, considered something of a *burikko* herself by some critics) is out visiting a shrine on an illicit date with a married coworker. Although they have been standing next to it for some time, she “suddenly” notices a box that sells fortunes and exclaims in a high-pitched voice, “*Ahh . . . ne, omikuji ikoo, omikuji ne*” ‘Hey! Let’s go for a fortune—a fortune, OK?’ After paying her fee, she reaches into the box to grab a fortune paper while imploring the gods to be kind, chanting, “*Li no ga demasu yoo ni*” ‘Let a good thing come of it’, a formulaic way of requesting a happy wish, yet here uttered with emphasized nasality. The viewer of this performance knows that the character has seen the fortune box prior to the exclamation of noticing it, that she is not in a happy situation (she sneaks around to see her married lover), and that her childlike expressions and innocent vocal qualities are not at all reflective of her actual status.

When *manga* ‘comic book’ artists want to illustrate *burikko* behavior, they often use drawn out syllables in speech bubbles to represent the high-pitched, nasalized voice. For example, figure 8.1 (Moritsugu 1998:458) features a 21-year-old OL character (*OL* or *Office Lady* is used to mean a female clerical worker), who responds to a question about how her lover is doing with, “*Iya~~ne, himitsu yo*” ‘Oh, dear . . . it’s a secret’. Elongation of the syllable *ya* is indicated with a wavy line. The hand-to-cheek gesture also suggests that she is overacting the role of an unsophisticated girl.

Another important feature attending the *burikko* display is a baby-talk register that casts the speaker in the role of a credulous innocent who ought to be the recipient of the listeners’ indulgence. Features characteristic of baby talk are avoidance of Chinese loans, use of the honorific prefix *o-*, phonological modifications, use of onomatopoeic words, and reduplication. Avoidance of Chinese loans entails rejection of erudite *kango*, words of Sinitic origin that suggest complex concepts beyond the *burikko*’s hazy scope. An example would be using *uso* ‘lie’ but never *kyogi* ‘falsehood’. The use of the honorific prefix *o-*, often considered polite and refined and hence a feature of the female register (Shibamoto 1987), is extended to everyday words such as *otete* in place of *te* for “hand” and *omeme* for “eye” rather than *me*. There are often phonological modifications, such as *katchoi*, from *kakkoi* ‘cool’, and *yappashi*, from *yappari* ‘after all’. Similar forms are *kawayuu* for *kawaii* ‘cute’ (Inoue 1986) and *utchoo* in place of *uso* ‘lie’ (Horiuchi & Omori 1994). Onomatopoeic words and mimetic nouns are used liberally, such as *wanwan* ‘bowwow’ for “dog” (the unmarked form is *inu*) and *chu chu* for “small bird” (rather than *kotori*). In her research



FIGURE 8.1. Comic book representation of *burikko* behavior

on Japan's cultural aesthetic of cuteness, Kinsella (1995) suggests that some favorite *burikko* words derive from the deliberately contrived speech of pop idol Sakai Noriko. During 1987, Noriko's coinages, uttered with an endearing lisp and called *Norippi-go* 'Noriko language', were widely emulated by others. These cute labialized forms included *ureppi*, from *ureshii*, meaning "happy," and *kanappi* from *kanashii* for "sad." Yonekawa (1996:83) also includes *okabii* from *okashi* 'funny' and *batchishi* from *batchiri* 'right on' or 'no sweat' on his list of Noriko words. Reduplication is often used for animals, body parts, or indelicate concepts, as in *nenne* in place of *neru* 'to sleep', which has a euphemistic connection to sex, and *babatchi* from *baba* 'poo-poo' for "icky poo" or "yucky."

Other features that imbue speech with *burikko*-ness involve special lexical and stylistic forms, such as extended use of diminutive or familiar title suffixes with names, novel lexical clipping, and display of hesitation or uncertainty. For example, address terms are used for inanimate objects, animals, or parts of the body. One example is *taku-chan* 'Little Mr. Taxi' for "taxi." This is derived from a clipped form of *takushii* 'taxi' combined with the diminutive address term *-chan* (Yoshioka 1993). Indeed, both the elfin *-chan* and the familiar *-kun* have proven to be very productive for the creation of "cute" lexical items. Other combinations I have heard used by adult women include *wanchan* 'Mr. Bowwow' to refer to a dog and the appellation *tsuru tsuru-kun* 'Mr. Smooth' used in reference to young men who use hair removal products on their chests in order to be more attractive (in accordance with new beauty norms; see Miller 2003). Talk may be heard as girlishly cute when it contains an abundance of amusing coinages or charming constructions of the *wasee eego* 'Japan-made English' type, which frequently involve novel lexical clipping (Miller 1998b). For example, there is *pii suru* for *PHS o kakeru* or "use a cell phone," *PHS* is an acronym for "personal handyphone system." Another amusing coinage is *kenta-kun* 'Mr. Kentucky Fried Chicken', used to refer to relatively young men who have beards and are sort of fuddy-duddyish (Yonekawa 1991). This is created through a clipped form of *Kentucky* combined with the intimate address term *-kun* and is presumably derived from the Kentucky Fried Chicken logo, which features the company's goateed founder, Colonel Sanders. Although use of new or trendy lexical items in and of itself does not transform the speaker into a *burikko*, their use in otherwise formal situations may have that result. A type of syntactic clipping, in which sentences are left incomplete or drift off into inaudibility, will also mark speech as timorously artificial.

Nonverbal correlates of the *burikko* performance include a head tilt to the side and clasping the hands in front of the body when one hand is not demurely covering the mouth. The use of the hand to shield the mouth when smiling or laughing is a custom traced to at least the Edo period (Casal 1966), and most likely is related to an underlying interpretation of teeth display as an aggressive signal. Covering the teeth is therefore seen as a form of submissiveness. These days many young women are expressing opposition to the enduring custom of enshrouding the female mouth by emphasizing their white teeth and by refusing to cover their mouths when laughing or giggling. The result is that when they are "doing *burikko*" this aspect of the performance is highlighted.

An assemblage of vocal features, linguistic usage, and nonverbal behaviors as described earlier contributes to a gendered performance that may therefore become the object of criticism or commentary. These reactions to the *burikko* display frequently surface in books, magazines, and other media.

8.2. Media and folk assessments of *burikko* performances

An etiquette book titled *Anthology of OL Taboos* (Zennikku Eigyohonbu Kyoiku-kunrenbu 1991:181) admonishes female clerks to avoid loading their office desks with "character goods," such as Mickey Mouse pencils or Hello Kitty staplers

(fig. 8.2). A woman who surrounds herself with such items is said to be *yoochi* 'infantile' and incompetent. Advice like this tells us that while cuteness is thought to be an approved aspect of femininity display, it is nevertheless sanctioned within certain age/status limits or locales.

In an interview with *Harvard Magazine*, an anthropologist in the United States classified *burikko* as a cultural style of consumption and self-expression. According to him, the quintessential *burikko* collects toys, wears girlish clothing, and is heard "giggling and squealing in a high-pitched voice" (Hodder 1997). But his description suggests that *burikko* is an all-or-nothing identity, rather than a social evaluation that arises from situated behavior. His characterization, in fact, is more properly that of the *shoojo* 'young miss' rather than the *burikko*. Treat (1996:281) describes the *shoojo* as one whose sexual energy is directed toward stuffed animals and cute artifacts. The concept of the *shoojo* implies an adolescent postpubescent space that revels in all that is cute, pink, fluffy, and adorable, with an absence of heterosexual experience (but not necessarily of homosexual experience; see Robertson 1989:59). In some cases then, women too obviously beyond the *shoojo* age-group who perform childlike behaviors will be termed *burikko*. The display meant to neutralize adult sexuality, when performed by those clearly beyond an age of innocence, unmasks the artifice of the maneuver. A disjuncture between the speaker's age and her display of cuteness is a critical aspect of many cases of *burikko* ascription. This fact is illustrated by reactions to women's use of an orthographic fashion popular among schoolgirls, the use of writing called *maru moji* 'round characters' (Yamane 1986; see also Kataoka 1997). Some women retain this innovation from girls' culture as they enter the

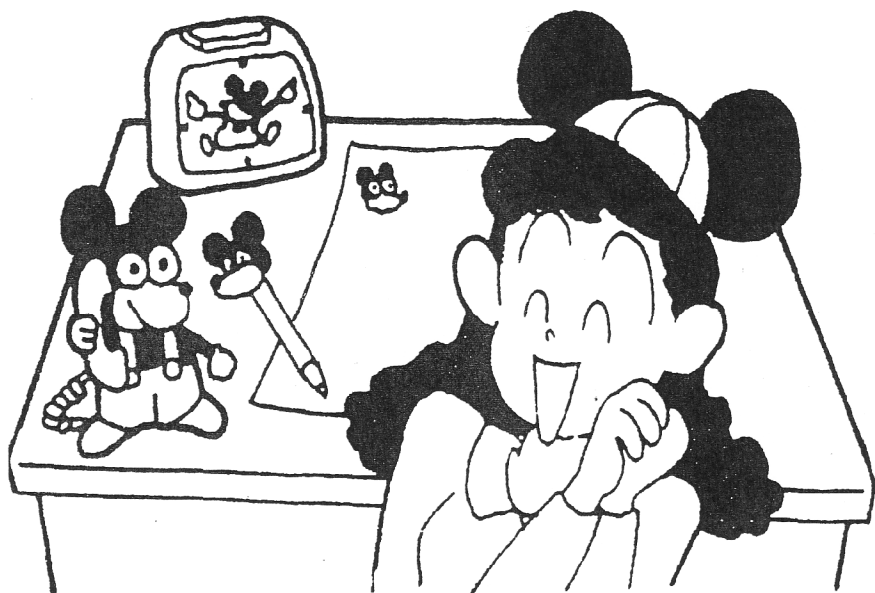


FIGURE 8.2. Cute goods in the office. Published with permission of Goma Shobo

workforce, where it may become an object of commentary and ridicule or mark them as doing *burikko*. In conduct literature such as *Anthology of OL Taboos* (Zennikku Eigyo honbu Kyoikukunrenbu 1991:100), female clerks are advised not to use round script in memos to coworkers, even when they do so because they think it will make the information easier to understand. In figure 8.3, a male colleague expresses exasperation at the use of round characters he finds in a memo from an OL, which says: “*Nakamura-san kara Tel arimashita. Keeko*” ‘There’s a telephone message from Mr. Nakamura. Keiko’.

Complaints about *burikko* can be found in Japanese women’s magazines, which have become a forum where expressions of anger or dissatisfaction with others may be safely vented. In one feature article that discusses disliked behaviors of coworkers, people complained about women they termed *burikko* (Uchi no kaisha no kanchigai OL 1996). One writer deplores a woman who uses nicknames on the telephone, saying things like *Waa . . . Kin-chan* ‘Ohh! . . . Kinnie!’ In this case, it is felt that use of a diminutive nickname and the diminutive address term *-chan* is evidence of babyishness and immaturity. Another reader provided the example of a 30-year-old woman in her office who uses a kittenish, obsequious voice to say things like *Gomen nachyaa* ‘Ooohh, I’m sorry!’ The hearer’s reaction is *Kimochi warui* ‘It gives me the creeps’.

In popular media and in interviews, *burikko* are characterized as both shallow airheads and crafty flatterers. People often say a distinctive feature of *burikko* talk is that they always utter *hazukashii* ‘I’m embarrassed’ even though it’s clear they aren’t the least bit mortified. And as noted earlier, most commentators suggest that it is *otoko no mae* ‘in front of men’ that the *burikko* is most likely to make her appearance. Former pornographic film star Ikuma Ai once performed a classic *burikko* drill on TV when

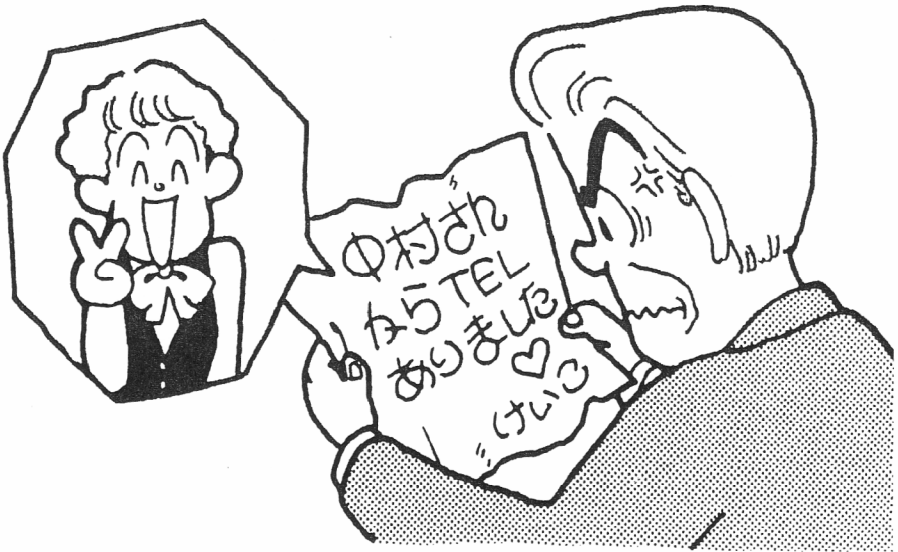


FIGURE 8.3. Cute ‘round characters’. Published with permission of Goma Shobo

she covered her mouth while giggling and saying, “*Hazukashii!*” ‘How embarrassing!’ in response to a talk show host’s impertinent questions. When young men were asked to name the top five celebrities they would not want to be married to, they included actress Miyazawa Rie (Otoko hyakunin ga yuu onna no fushigi rankingu 1996). Miyazawa represents a *burikko* type because early in her career she publicly presented the image of a sheltered upper-class daughter of the suburbs but in fact has done some racy things behind the scenes, such as posing nude and having a love affair with a Sumo wrestler (Schilling 1992).

Readers of a women’s magazine asked to provide examples of “really nauseating *burikko* OLs” (*choo mukatsuku burikko OL*) offer examples that illustrate how the switch to counterfeit behavior is often triggered by the presence of men (Uchi no kaisha no kanchigai OL 1996). One clerk writes to complain that a coworker uses *amaeta koe* ‘bootlicking voice’, a sweet, smarmy tone used to wheedle things out of silly male section heads and managers. A 27-year-old man writes in to gripe about a woman who aggressively chastises juniors and coworkers, yet “her voice goes up one octave in front of male seniors” (*jooshi no mae de wa ichi okutabu koe ga takaku naru*). Another woman reports on a coworker who graphically talks about anything and everything imaginable among girlfriends when they are in private areas such as the ladies’ room, but if there’s naughty talk in front of men she modestly exclaims, “*Ya daa! Hazukashii!*” ‘That’s disgusting! I’m so embarrassed’. Describing a woman who does *burikko* in her office, someone else writes: “She uses a saccharine voice to butter up male superiors. I can’t tell you how disgusting it is when I see her stroking his arm while saying things like, ‘Section head, the shirt you have on today is really fab’” (“*Chokuzoku no otoko no jooshi ni amattarui koe de obekka o tsukau ‘Kachoo kyoo no Y-shatsu suteki desu ne’ to ude no atari o surisuri shite iru tokoro o mita toki ni wa, akirete mono ga ienakatta*”).

That some women will use a *burikko* performance to manipulate an older male coworker points up another dimension to interpretation. Not all observers will agree on whether or not a given performance is *burikko*-like. It is clear that there will be different attitudes on the part of those from different age and social backgrounds and that interpretation also hinges on the social situation in which *burikko* behavior occurs. In other words, one person’s *burikko* is another’s proper well-bred miss. Contemporary young people, both female and male, react negatively to extreme forms of docility and cuteness, but older Japanese men may still admire and endorse the subservient pose of those who do *burikko*. Even if an older man discerns the fakeness of a *burikko* stance, he may still like what the pose represents. As feminist writers remind us, the cute infantilization of women places them in a weaker social position. According to a male critic, while seeing *burikko* behavior as somewhat silly, some men will still consider it “ear massage” (Hosokawa Shuhei, personal communication). Since the 1990s, there has been a change in younger men’s attitudes and women

who are now overly docile and indolent have been diagnosed (Miller 1998). When

Is it the case that she deploys indexical forms unbecoming her situation and is disliked because the manipulation of expected gender traits becomes just too transparent, too camp? Perhaps a *burikko* performance makes us uncomfortable because it asserts a hard truth about gender roles in general, which is, as American drag queen RuPaul put it, that we're all born the same and the rest is drag.

From the study of *burikko* we may detect a rising consciousness that the way one speaks is intimately tied to social position. There is increasing evidence that a change in gender roles and expectations is changing speech behavior. Many younger women are eschewing features of language considered markers of the "feminine" and are incorporating aspects of the male register into their own speech (Okamoto & Sato 1992, Okamoto 1995). There have been enough of these latter types that a negative label was coined to categorize them. This is the *oremeshi onna* 'me-food woman', a term that parodies an autocratic husband's command. *Oremeshi onna* are said to totally reject features of talk characteristic of the *burikko* in favor of hypermasculine forms. In the worldview of younger, contemporary Japanese, the type of sugary child exhibitionism displayed in *burikko* performances is viewed as deceitful and creepy, and they would rather risk being called *oremeshi onna* than *burikko*. Although this change suggests that ideas about women's speech are opening up a space for variation, it also tells us that women continue to be objects of intense social surveillance. Whether they are conforming to gender norms, challenging them, or overdoing them, Japanese women continue to be the recipients of derogatory labeling.

Notes

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1. *Hotel* was a five-part Tokyo Broadcasting System television drama that first began airing in 1990, about workers and guests at a luxury hotel.

2. *Tokyo erebeetaa gaaru*, written by Komatsu Eriko, aired on the Tokyo Broadcasting System during Winter 1992. The English loan *girl* has two forms in Japanese, *gaaru* and *gyaru*. This TV program used the former.

3. The line between acceptable feminine behavior and *burikko* categorization may also relate to other factors besides age or innocence, particularly class status. A display of pro forma sweetness might be tolerated when done by debutante girls from elite family backgrounds, yet the woman or girl who lacks cultural capital and displays her class origins will have her failed efforts described as *burikko-ish*.

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