

## Chapter 5

# Unlearning Internalized Homophobia With *My Brother's Husband*: A Glimpse Into Mainstream Queer Literature in Japan

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The manga My Brother's Husband (2014-2017) talks about a little Japanese neighborhood, the microcosm representing the country's general approach to homosexuality and how the future holds a promise to change for better days. Homosexual relationships and trans identities are frowned upon in the general society of modern-day Japan, just like in many other Asian countries. An openly gay mangaka, Gengoroh Tagame, had so far been a name limited to the gay erotic manga circuit, but this work, targeted at a more general audience, won him critical acclaim for depicting the struggles of being queer in Japan. This chapter is an attempt to understand how Yaichi is a representative of the cis-heterosexual male who is trying his best to navigate out of the patriarchal maze of heteronormativity that has been propagated through generations following European imperialism in Asian countries.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Serialized over four volumes for a stretch of four years, *My Brother's Husband* (Tagame, 2017) is a Japanese manga talking about the struggles faced by the homosexual community of Japan. The small neighborhood in Tokyo acts as the microcosm of Japan and its reception of queerness. Not only Japan, but the manga also touches upon gay cultures prevalent in other countries, mostly Canada and America, and evaluates where Japan stands in this milieu since Mike Flanagan, a Canadian, is the deuteragonist of the story.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Gengoroh Tagame has been a well-known name in the gay erotic manga circuit before *Otouto no Otto*. In doing so, he has been able to gauge the different reactions to his erotica work and finally create something that caters to the general population in order to raise awareness about the LGBTQIA+ community. On a broader scale, this manga is a cultural exchange between Japan and Canada. The manga is translated to English by Anne Ishii and is published in two volumes under the title *My Brother's Husband*.

The first chapter of the first volume of the manga is titled "The Black Ships Have Arrived". This is of course a reference to 'kurofunne', a term from the Edo period, that was used to refer to the vessels that arrived in Japan from the West in the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. Representations of these 'kurofunne' were first found in 1591 on folded screens, (Curvelo, 2012, pp. 581-602).

The chapter begins with Yaichi's dream of attending his parents' funeral where a younger version of him sits with his twin brother, Ryoji. A stark contrast in the two brothers' characters is established here as the very expressive Ryoji sobs throughout the ceremony and Yaichi only sits there, as stoic as ever. Yaichi later wakes up and realizes the impending arrival of Mike later that day is the reason why he had that dream. In this chapter, the readers are introduced to the three main characters of the manga - Yaichi, his daughter Kana and his brother's Canadian husband, Mike Flanagan. As a part of the chapter cover, Mike is depicted in a western navy captain costume at the helm of a ship, while Yaichi is in a traditional kimono and hakama, slightly annoyed and confused, and Kana is in a bright red dress greeting Mike cheerfully. This cover sets the perfect mood for the first volume of the manga. On arriving in Japan, Mike is looking forward to exploring and finding out more about his husband's family and childhood, Kana is excited to get to know him and Yaichi, although confused about how to take Mike's sexual identity, is trying to be as welcoming as possible without letting his prejudices get in the way.

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