

# Idealization of Licca-chan and Barbie: Comparison of Two Dolls across the Pacific

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**Abstract**—Since the initial creation of the Barbie doll in 1959, it became a symbol of US society. Likewise, the Licca-chan, a Japanese doll created in 1967, also became a Japanese symbolic doll of Japanese society. Prior to the introduction of Licca-chan, Barbie was already marketed in Japan but their sales were dismal. Licca-chan (an actual name: Kayama Licca) is a plastic doll with a variety of sizes ranging from 21.0 cm to 29.0 cm which many Japanese girls dream of having. For over 35 years, the manufacturer, Takara Co., Ltd. has sold over 48 million dolls and has produced doll houses, accessories, clothes, and Licca-chan video games for the Nintendo DS. Many First-generation Licca-chan consumers still are enamored with Licca-chan, and go to Licca-chan House, in an amusement park with their daughters. These people are called Licca-chan maniacs, as they enjoy touring the Licca-chan's factory in Tohoku or purchase various Licca-chan accessories. After the successful launch of Licca-chan into the Japanese market, a mixed-like doll from the US and Japan, a doll, JeNny, was later sold in the same Japanese market by Takara Co., Ltd. in 1982.

Comparison of these cultural iconic dolls, Barbie and Licca-chan, are analyzed in this paper. In fact, these dolls have concepts of girls' dreams. By using concepts of mythology of Jean Baudrillard, these dolls can be represented idealized images of figures in the products for consumers, but at the same time, consumers can see products with different perspectives, which can cause controversy.

**Keywords**—Barbie, Dolls, JeNny, Idealization, Licca-chan.

## I. INTRODUCTION

THERE are some people who are fans and enthusiasts of these Licca-chan and Barbie dolls collect them and purchase various doll related items. A Licca Maniac is a person who has an excessive obsession with the Licca-chan doll. They visit Licca-chan's castle, an open factory, where you can see manufacturing of the doll. These people enjoy discussing, buying, trading and collecting Licca's items. In Kijima Kogen in Oita prefecture, there are Licca-chan's house where you can play with many types of Licca-chan and her family dolls. She has many clothes to dress-up in, shops to buy, and houses to play with. There are also other Licca's fans who would call the Takara Company, so that they can listen to the Licca-chan doll's voice on the phone. When a teenage girl called the Licca-chan phone line, a female employee would answer the phone "Hello, I am Licca." From then on, Takara Company employed female operators to answer the phone as Licca-chan. Even today in 2014, when you call to Takara Co., Ltd., Licca telephone line is still active so you can hear a female voice, and converse with "Licca-chan". Thus, Licca-chan has popularity

with teenage girls. There is a woman called Kayama Rica (Rica is a same pronunciation of Licca with different spelling), a psychiatrist, a university professor, and a fortune-teller, who uses the doll's name as a pen name when she works. Everybody recognizes that her original name came from Licca-chan.

On the other hand, there are Japanese people who like to collect dolls and decorate their rooms with Barbie and Ken. They are attracted to dolls and they buy products and fill their rooms with dolls' items. "Barbie Syndrome is a term used to loosely describe the desire of some females to have a physical appearance and lifestyle characteristic of the Barbie doll." [1] Accordingly, they keep buying products and collect them. Moreover, JeNny, a mixture of a figure of Barbie and Licca-chan was launched after producing Barbie and Licca-chan.

## II. LICCA'S AND BARBIE'S CONCEPT AND ITS PRODUCTS

Licca-chan and Barbie produce many types of merchandise. Here, the followings are examined: Licca-chan's characteristics, Licca-chan's and Barbie's corporate philosophies, their characteristics, their collaboration work which both Takara and Mattel put a great deal of effort into, and expensive dolls to compare two dolls.

### A. Licca-chan's Characteristics

Licca-chan has a clear setting of characteristics as shown below. Licca-chan is mainly targeted to teenage girls. Here are Licca -chan's characteristics:

TABLE I  
LICCA-CHAN'S CHARACTERISTICS

Age	eleven years old
Weight and Height	34 kilograms with 142 cm
Favorite Subjects	Japanese, Art, Music
Unfavorite Subject	Math
Favorite Food	Ice Cream
Favorite Books	Anne of Green Gables, A Little Princess
Favorite Comic	Doraemon
Hobbies	Playing the piano, singing, window-shopping, playing tennis
Change of Hair Color	Auburn to blond hair from 1987
Family	Pierre (Licca-chan's father), Orie (Licca-chan's mother), Maki and Miki (Licca-chan's little twin sisters), Kako, Miku, and Gen (Licca-chan's little triplets brothers), a friend, Itsumi (Licca-chan's friend created in 1968), Licca-chan's boyfriends: Wataru (created in 1968), Masato (in 1976), Isamu (in 1981), and Kakeru (in 2000).

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Licca-chan's father is a French musician and her mother is a Japanese model, so Licca-chan is half French and half Japanese. When the doll was first manufactured in 1967, Licca was by herself [3]. Gradually, the doll line expanded with her parents, sisters, brothers, girlfriends, and boyfriends. Licca-chan's auburn hair in 1967 changed to a blond hair in 1987. The change of her hair color can also viewed her desire of change of an image of beauty as like a western good-looking woman, because she had auburn hair instead of Japanese black hair, and she abandoned the color to change it to a blond hair. Moreover, she is not 100 percent Japanese, but a half French and a half Japanese. This shows Japanese people's yearning to European countries, especially a fashionable place such as France. Seeing girls' idealization, Licca-chan likes "Anne of Green Gables" and "A Little Princess." They are about of poor girls: one lost

her father, and the other an orphan, who become happy at the end. This shows hope and desire of happiness which can be attainable even for poor girls. In that sense, Licca-chan's favorite books tell girls' dream of happiness such as happiness and friendship in the future. Moreover, viewing Licca-chan's concepts of Play Together," "Pretend Play," and "Caring a Doll," they teach a model of a mother figure how to go shopping, cooking, and washing by playing together with Licca-chan. Girls learn how to dress-up, make their hair and make-up by playing with Licca-chan. It is needless to say that through Licca-chan, girls can learn an ideal life of their dreams.

### B. Comparison of Licca-chan and Barbie

Now, there is a comparison of Licca-chan and Barbie to see similarities and differences between them.

TABLE II  
COMPARISON OF LICCA-CHAN AND BARBIE

	Licca-chan	Barbie
Products	Doll	Doll
Corporate Philosophy	Realization of Children's Dream, Creation of New Value of Play	Play Fair, Play Together, Play to Grow, Play with Passion
Average consumers	Teenage Girls Mainly Female adults	Age of 40 Men and women of all ages
Price of Doll	3,940 yen (about \$39)	\$29.99
Setting of Doll	10 years old girls	Mainly a teenage girl, but varied depending on the types of Barbie
Dolls' Character	Fashionable, kind, cheerful	Fashionable, kind, cheerful
Dolls' Least Favorite Subject	Math	Math
Recommended Product	Triple Color Change Licca-chan (normally pink hair color, strawberry milk color when being warmed by a finger, and raspberry black color when being cooled by a cool brush, Awarded Japanese Toy Award)	Barbie Photo Fashion Doll (Embedded digital camera, LCD screen, USB cable, photos taken from Barbie's point of view, storage of one hundred photos)
Collaboration Products and Works	McDonald, Mister Donut, Saga Honoka (Strawberry company), Mos Burger (Hamburger shop), Wilson, Pizza-la, Anna Sui	Coca Cola, Harley Davidson, Stila, Crispy Cream, Allitalia, LeSportsac, Christian Louboutin
Expensive Dolls	Hina Doll for Girls' Day costa \$1,830, Licca-chan \$ 1 million with 881 diamonds and 75 grams of platinum for a memory of the 35th anniversary in 2002	De Beers40 the Anniversary Barbie costs \$85,000 with160 diamonds on the belt and white gold jewelry, Barbie & Diamond Castle costs \$94,800 with 318 diamonds on the dress, most expensive Barbie by Stefano Canturi costs \$632,000 with one carat Australian pink diamond of rare emerald cut, and three carats white diamonds with rare emerald cut
Common Art Motifs	"Mona Lisa" by Leonardo da Vinci and "Girl with a Pearl Earring" by Johannes Vermeer	

There are similarities in the two dolls' characters, dolls' least favorite subjects, and common art motifs. However, looking Takara's and Mattel's corporate philosophies, Takara targets, "Realization of Children's Dream" and "Creation of New Value of Play," and Mattel targets, "Play Fair," "Play Together," "Play to Grow," and "Play with Passion." They both want children to play with dolls and give hope and enjoyment through play. However, differences are shown in the average consumers. While Licca-chan has teenage girls as main consumers, Barbie has consumers at the age of 40 by men and women of all ages. It shows Barbies' consumers have a wider range of variety rather than Licca-chan. Comparing the price, Licca-chan is rather expensive in Japan, and her clothes start selling from 600 yen (about \$6).

Recommended products for both Licca-chan and Barbie are used the newest technology. Triple Color Change Licca-chan is fantastic to change hair color with different temperatures. In addition, Barbie Photo Fashion Doll is the latest doll with

digital camera and makes consumers happy and inspires creativity.

Although Licca-chan normally costs \$29.99, there are expensive dolls such as \$1,830 for Hina doll. Almost all the girls in Japan have the doll, and Japanese figure dolls sell well in Japan, but now Licca-chan type dolls are a large sale. A \$1 million Licca-chan doll and a \$94,800 De Beers Barbie, Barbie & Diamond Castle, and a \$632,000 Barbie by Stefano Canturi [4] is extremely expensive.

The memorable dolls are created for a special occasions such as anniversaries. As for Licca-chan's Products and Collaboration Work, both companies promote partnerships with other business enterprises enthusiastically. Accordingly, both doll companies have some similarities, but when it comes to production, they have their own unique products which attract consumers. They produce their own products and create trends of sales. In other words, when Mattel's Barbie was introduced in 1959, and Takara's Licca-chan in 1967 was created, they were only dolls but after almost a half of a century,

these dolls have developed numerous products related to the dolls are sold. We can buy not only dolls but also DVDs, games, books, magazines, and etc.

### III. DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES OF DOLLS AND DIFFERENT PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Although Licca-chan and Barbie produced comparable products, we see different perspectives of consumers. Using Roland Barthes' theory of connotation and denotation, characterization of these dolls can be analyzed.

#### A. Different Perspectives of Two Dolls

There are different perspectives of Licca-chan and Barbie even though they are similar products. Table III shows maternity and multifunction dolls in both cases.

TABLE III  
DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES OF TWO DOLLS

	Licca-chan	Barbie
Products	Doll	Doll
Maternity	Maternity Licca-chan (2001) Surprised consumers since Licca-chan at the age of 10 suddenly pregnant Manufactured as a memory of pregnancy of Princess Masako, Sold out	Midge Single mother
Multifunction	Items in Licca-chan's house talk with 28 kinds of Phonetic Function, such as	Talking Barbie Four out of 270 phrase speak "Math class is tough!"
Doll's costume	moderate	Gaiety sexy
Recommendation for Customers	Handmade, such as clothes, furniture, and items such as dogs' house, recommended to sew and knit for Licca-chan collectors	Consumption

The product, Maternity Licca-chan was welcomed although its sudden pregnancy surprised fans. When you purchase it and send a "kounotori postcard" (a stork postcard) attached in the package, you will receive a baby doll with a message of saying that "Please think of a dreamy way of giving the present." Then, you use the key enclosed and take a part of stomach away and you can get Licca-chan's normal body from her previous pregnant body. Many Japanese girls like the idea of sending a postcard and get a baby. They do not care about a teenage girl's sudden pregnancy. Instead, Princess Masako's pregnancy in the royal family increased the doll's sales volume, and it was sold out in a month.

Contrary to Licca-chan's favorability, Barbie was controversial. Because Midge was a single teenage girl [5], she was criticized as an immoral woman. In 2001, Licca-chan has a multifunctional house, which has IH stove and robot vacuum cleaner, when kids are home alone. There will be no punishment of leaving children at home in Japan. There will be a telephone call from Licca-chan's home. A functional Barbie speaks four phrases out of 270, but when she speaks "Math class is tough!" Teenagers' mothers in the US think it is not good example to let the Barbie says, "Math Class is tough!"

Seeing high cost of Licca-chan's doll and clothes, many Licca-chan collectors designed and made their own clothes.

Recently, Takara and other companies sold books for homemade clothes. Even the Takara Company encouraged consumers to make handmade clothes for Licca-chan and design dress patterns for Licca-chan in a book instead of buying their new clothes.

Accordingly, we can see the two kinds of maternity and multifunction dolls are viewed indifferent ways. In the next section, the different doll development and images will be discussed.

#### B. Different Product Development and Dolls' Images

When we see different perspectives of consumers, they have different images of dolls. It shows consumers' criticisms arise when they see dolls as an image of denotation rather than connotation. When we see objects as it is, it shows connotation, but when we mystify objects, it shows denotation. Here are analysis of Licca-chan and Barbie.

TABLE IV  
DIFFERENT PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT AND DOLLS' IMAGES

	Licca-chan	Barbie
Objective	Provide dreams with girls	Provide dreams with girls
What dolls teach girls	Learn traditional women' lives such as cooking, washing, cleaning, through "let's pretend" play	Outer beauty Moral intelligence
Image of representation	Kawaii	Beauty
Controversy to Doctrine of moral	The traditional way of women's lives	To be moderate No single mother Not sexy No tattoo Should be intelligent
Intelligence	Not necessary	(looking at dolls as an ideology of women)
Good points	Less social problems (looking at dolls as playmates)	Consumption
Recommendation for Customers	Consumption and Handmade, such as clothes, furniture, and items such as dogs' house, recommended to sew and knit for Licca-chan collectors	

We can see that both dolls create demand of illusion or represent girls' models. Idealization of dolls shows people's expectation, illusion, yearning for the future, but illusion and dream are beyond real-life image which connects to ideology. Analyzing from the definition of French philosopher, Roland Barthes, denotation, the meaning of representation, and connotation, an image of representation, shows Barbie and Licca-chan. For example, Barbie represents blue eyes, blond hair, and slender body as denotation, while its beauty is connotation. In Licca-chan's case, Licca-chan represents brown eyes, well-balanced face, and yearning as denotation, while girls' idealization is connotation. Thus, we idealize dolls. So as an ethnic researcher, Anne Ducile comments on Barbie, we can observe that "regardless of what color dyes the dolls are dipped in or what costumes they are adorned with, the image they present is of the same mythically thin, long-legged, luxuriously haired luxuriously, buxom beauty" [6]. People are fascinated by the dolls with an illusionary point of view.

Of course, Barbie represents ideal women with its beauty. As

such, these dolls represent the girls' idealization of beauty. As a French philosopher, Louis Althusser says, "ideology is a 'Representation' of the Imaginary Relationship of Individuals to their Real conditions of Existence" [7]. In other words, considering Barbie means idealized myth as contained as ideology to consumers and they naturally idealize women's beauty. It is true that "Barbie came to stand for glamour, beauty and style" [8] and so is Licca-chan showing representation of dolls' beauty. We can observe the idealized figure of women embodied in Barbie and Licca-chan, although Barbie and Licca-chan are just plastic dolls. Since these dolls can change their shapes and appearance they embody the idealization of the doll's owner's perspectives on beauty. When others see Barbie, as a plastic doll, as denotation, it only becomes a doll of representation afterward. As such, Barbie and Licca should be considered idealized versions of women, they have to be kept idealized, and they should represent how to perceive idealization furthermore.

There is commonality of both dolls which show idealization of women's beauty. Moreover, it has not only idealization of women's beauty but also women's morals and intelligence. Cultural researchers, Claudia Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh specify that "Barbie negotiates images of ideal and actual girlhood, stretching the idea of the girl to encompass past, present, and future possibilities and exploring which borders and which desires simultaneously define girls and girl culture" [9]. Both Barbie and Licca-chan can be used to create illusions and dreams of beauty, which provides a perfect idolized position of women in society.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Barbie's popularity represents a motif of movie actresses, art characters, characters on TV programs, by using famous designers and making collaboration with other companies around the world. Both Barbie and Licca-chan are representations of girls' culture, as consumers don't expect negative images from these dolls. We saw that when Barbie was first introduced in Japan, Mattel was short-sighted or not culturally attuned as they did not consider the Japanese people's definition of "beauty" in the doll as based on the doll's original physical features thus causing poor sales. The Takara Company's introduction of the Licca-chan doll capitalized on Mattel's missteps and enjoyed a profitable sales line.

Seeing Japanese consumers are mainly Licca maniac who love Licca-chan, it is natural to say that Mattel made disparaging remarks toward the Licca-chan line. However, consumers of Midge broaden all over the world. They have various points of view and ideas with different customs and cultures. Accordingly, more attention was paid to Barbie compared to Licca-chan in the small Japanese market. Thus, although both Barbie and Licca-chan dolls are idealized figures, Licca-chan is only idealized by Licca fans and fanatics. In other words, in Midge's case, because Barbie is seen as an idealized woman-prototype, they criticized a single mother for Midge. Thus, because people observe the objects differently, different circumstances in each society will shape their perspectives on Barbie and Licca-chan. Some people see Licca-chan as just

another product in Japan, while others see it as an idealized figure. However, when it comes to Barbie, people subconsciously view it "as a model representing American culture," morality, and intelligence.

Although Mattel, Ltd. experimented to increase dolls sales in Japan, because of poor profits in Japan, they sold Takara Barbie to Takara Co. Ltd, and then MaBa Barbie after an alliance with Bandai Co., Ltd. to make more profits. However, neither MaBa Barbie nor Takara Barbie sold less. Similarly, JeNny by Takara also sold poorly. This explains that consumers don't expect dolls of crossed figure of Licca-chan and Barbie, but they rather expect to have one figured doll such as Licca-chan and Barbie. As we have seen more Licca Maniacs and people who are attracted by Barbie called Barbie Syndrome, there are people who collect Barbie obsessively and emulate Barbie and Ken, called Real Barbie and Ken. People are fascinated with the dehumanized body and see it as an ideal woman figure although it cannot be attained because of her ultrafine, inhuman waist. For example, forty-one-year old Stanley Chlorite in Florida has collected 2,000 Barbies and 1,000 Kens at home for twenty years. He calls himself "I'm Barbie Man." Another single sixty-seven years old Glen Offield is a famous Barbie collector. His 5,000 Barbie dolls were stolen while he was away at a Barbie Show in 1992. He confessed, "They (Barbies) meant everything to me. ... I could do without eating. I don't know if I can live without them" [10], but still he collects the doll. The most famous human Barbie is Valeria Lukyanova, a Real Barbie. She said that she only had breast implants, but many people doubt her story because her facial features look artificial as well, indicating that she has had cosmetic surgery.

As a sociologist Kim Toffoletti once stated, "Barbie, is an icon as the perfect model of femininity" [11], which many people idealize as the perfect female model. Therefore, Licca-chan and Barbie provide us a certain expectation, illusion, and ideal. In other words, people put their hope, illusion, and concept of perfection into the figures. Its aesthetic consciousness relates to ideology. Therefore, people interweave desire and yearning of themselves. Thus, Licca-chan and Barbie provide us expectation, illusion, and ideals. In other words, people put their hope, illusion, and concept of perfection into the figure. Its aesthetic consciousness relates to ideology. Therefore, people interweave desire and yearning of themselves. Fashionable outfits, lifestyles and cosmetic surgery are the ways; people wish to emulate the dolls which are caused by idealization of dolls.

As we see both dolls, they show outer female beauty, the morals of women's way of life, and intelligence. As the Turkish sociologist, Nruha Papatys says, "ideology is conceived as a pure illusion, a pure dream." [12], doll's ideology represents illusion and dream which are beyond real images, and they are mystified ideology of reality. When people buy dolls, they idealize its representation, and they are their idealized figure in the dolls and possess self-existence in dolls.

Mattel creates dreams for many girls, and they show a figure of a social model in dolls, whereas consumers long for an idealized figure of girls' models. These dolls should be a good role model for teenagers and provides dreams and illusion.

As French philosopher, Jean Baudrillard develops Althusser's idea of a relationship between reality and illusion [13], ideology is a system of a reflection in which individuals expresses their ideology. Also, possession of dolls represents idealization in which individuals cannot obtain the dolls' beauty and intelligence. Accordingly, people who are Licca maniacs or have Barbie syndrome are attracted by the dolls, and they breathe new life into the dolls to make them their role models so that they reflect themselves in a new identity.

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