



# FROM FAMILY VALUES TO NOSTALGIA

## UNDERSTANDING *CHIBI MARUKO CHAN* IN A CULTURAL CONTEXT

**POPULAR** Japanese anime *Chibi Maruko Chan* revolves around the daily life of a young girl named Momoko Sakura, commonly known as Maruko among her friends and family. The series has been running since 1986, is set in the 1970s and focuses on Maruko's interactions with her family, classmates, and other people in her community. The series is known for its heartwarming and humorous portrayal of everyday life and has become a beloved cultural icon in Japan.

My analytic approach involves examining cultural artefacts such as media, literature and art to understand the cultural values and norms that they represent, as well as the ways in which they may reinforce or challenge those values and norms. The critical approach involves questioning and challenging established beliefs and practices, while the cultural analysis approach involves examining the cultural context in which the artefact was created and the ways in which it reflects and shapes cultural values and beliefs.

By combining these two approaches, we can gain a deeper understanding of the themes and insights presented in *Chibi Maruko Chan* and how they reflect broader cultural and societal trends in Japan.

From an academic and critical perspective, *Chibi Maruko Chan* provides valuable insights into Japanese culture and society. This piece explores the themes of family values, community dynamics and nostalgia.

**Family values** – *Chibi Maruko Chan* portrays the importance of family relationships and traditional Japanese

values, such as respect for elders, hard work and perseverance. The storylines highlight the struggles and triumphs of a working-class family, emphasising the bonds that exist between family members. However, the traditional gender roles in Japanese families, with the mother responsible for the domestic sphere and the father as the breadwinner, can limit opportunities for career advancement for women.

**Community dynamics** – *Chibi Maruko Chan* provides insight into the social dynamics of Japanese communities in the 1970s. Community dynamics in Japan are often based on the principles of collectivism and group harmony, where the needs of the group take precedence over individual desires. However, this collectivist mindset can also lead to the exclusion of those who do not conform to social norms or who do not fit into established social hierarchies. Maruko's interactions with her neighbours and classmates reveal the various cliques and social hierarchies that exist within a typical Japanese community.

**Nostalgia** – *Chibi Maruko Chan* portrays a nostalgic glimpse into a 1970s Japanese *mis-en-scène*, a period viewed as a simpler and more innocent time. The show's attention to detail in recreating the fashion, music and cultural trends of the 1970s adds to its nostalgic appeal. However, nostalgia can create a romanticised and idealised view of the past, which may not accurately reflect the realities of the time. Furthermore, nostalgia can perpetuate cultural

stereotypes and exclude the experiences of specific social groups.

Overall, *Chibi Maruko Chan* presents a nuanced picture of Japanese culture and society, underscoring both its positive aspects and areas requiring critical examination. As a postdoctoral autoethnographer, I have often found myself reflecting on my journey as a student, and I remember distinctly how Japanese comic books, cartoons and animations influenced my life. Growing up, I was fascinated with cartoons such as *Doraemon*, *Sailor Moon* and *Chibi Maruko Chan*, which were not only entertaining and playful but also richly imaginative.

My experience with *Chibi Maruko Chan* was particularly relatable. Maruko, who aspires to become a comic book illustrator, is an example of playful, fun ideas enacted in the meta-narrative. Like most children, she dislikes schoolwork, preferring to spend time playing, daydreaming and socialising with her friends. I found these sentiments mirroring my own childhood aspirations, while the daydream reinforces an imaginary life if I (a viewer) were a comic book illustrator.

As a Taiwanese national, the journey towards developing a professional creative identity was challenging. This was a career path not typically encouraged by parents. Furthermore, I frequently felt misunderstood due to the passion of my imagination. East Asian role models are traditionally more aligned with respectable jobs such as civil servants, medical

professionals and education professionals. Interestingly though, I now find myself in the educational sector.

Reflecting on the significant influence of Japanese comics, cartoons and animations, particularly *Chibi Maruko Chan*, on my childhood and professional journey illuminates fascinating insights into the intersections of culture, creativity and identity formation. The nuanced portrayal of family values, community dynamics and nostalgia in the series provided a window into societal norms, values and dynamics inherent in Japanese society.

These cartoons are not merely sources of entertainment, but rich cultural artefacts that informed my perspective and understanding of creativity. My early fascination with characters such as Maruko led me to question societal norms and allowed me to foster an identity that acknowledged my own creative ambitions.

My journey underscores the potential of animation and media as influential tools in personal and societal understanding. They serve as catalysts, prompting individuals to challenge societal notions of creativity, whilst indulging in the pleasure of visual media. Whilst each person's journey is unique, this reflection underlines the complex interplay of media, culture and personal aspirations in shaping actual identities, irrespective of societal expectations and cultural contexts.

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# ASIAN AND PUNK

## WHAT'S ETHNICITY GOT TO DO WITH IT?

**AS AN AVID** researcher into punk, it has been obvious to spot the anomalies and lack of diversity within the punk community. I would like you to meet my dad, James, the only person of colour I have interviewed in the last five years of researching the punk subculture. So, what does ethnicity have to say when it comes to punk?

For my dad, punk was his suit of armour and a way to 'release' feelings of being brown. For many people of colour that may have been interested in punk at the time, this lifestyle would have been just too risky. There are complexities involved in punk that are often overlooked by the majority out of pure lack of knowledge. I have grown up with a punk parent, but what makes my dad different is the colour of his skin. This adds another layer to the complex relational dynamics that make up punk. I would like to argue (until proven wrong) that my dad was one of the first

non-white punks to emerge out of Leicester in the late 1970s. He has been able to explore punk in a multifaceted way, by attending gigs, owning punk memorabilia and being a father, involving the punk ethos in his approach to parenting.

Amongst punk's complicated relationship with ethnicity, sits the lack of academic research, especially when it comes to the British punk scene. Amy McDowell published an article in 2017 looking at Taqwacore punks (taqwa means "God consciousness" in Arabic and *core* comes from *hardcore punk*) from Pakistan. It carved out this idea that those who do not fit the typical subculture have to adopt the ethos and build a new version of that culture in order to participate.

There has not yet been any research into Asian punks in the UK, but this may be purely because they are extremely hard to locate. But what is obvious with both punk

and ethnicity as they collide, is the existence of an outsider complex. Punks became outsiders; that is interesting in itself. But with the added layer of my dad's ethnicity, there is another aspect for investigation. With my work over the years, I have tried to investigate these overlapping factors, using my dad as a key example. There is so much sociological significance in the relationship that punk and ethnicity have, and I am in a privileged position to be able to observe it.

My dad could not physically hide the fact that he had a different ethnicity compared to his counterparts, but it helped him accept who he was. Racism was a constant battle for my dad, being born in England in 1963 and growing up during a hostile time for anyone who was not white skinned. But punk gave my dad a shield, a way that made him stand out for the wrong reasons. One thing that has always been apparent for my dad is that he doesn't feel

that his skin colour is right for him. Instead, he feels white on the inside, which is one of the reasons I believe he was able to immerse himself within punk.

When I asked him about his ethnicity, he relayed to me that he feels like a coconut, white inside with a brown exterior. This statement represents just a small snippet of how we can begin to understand and unpick identity when it comes to ethnicity. Punk has inevitably splintered off into different cultures, allowing for the punk way of life to be experienced by all, something that was not always possible when the scene first emerged.

This is why I believe so strongly that my dad's case needs to be shared with punk academics. It's not only unique, but it's also important to truly understand punk and what it can do for its members.

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