

About eternality of characters in books of Tove Jansson

What will happen to “Moomin without Tove Jansson”?

1] Introduction

The theme of this discourse is the difference around the eternality of characters in books of Tove Jansson between the product image created by the market expansion of such character businesses and the image sustained by the worldview of Tove Jansson's books.

Branding of Moomin characters has been successful by staying away from the image of a hit animation in early Showa Era, “Moomin”, in Japan, whose worldview is different from that of its original version in Europe by Tove Jansson, and emphasizing the lifestyles in Northern Europe and artistic senses of Tove Jansson's; meanwhile, I'll analyze the tendency that younger generations in Japan who love Moomin are mostly not interested in her books but just in characters of Moomin.

2] Business-oriented characters

It is generally believed in the field of marketing that characters born in books for children such as Moomin will breed familiarity or sense of security for reading experiences in childhood and products with such characters loved in childhood will boost purchasing intentions more than ordinary products.

As for Japan, there have been more of people who were interested in Moomin's characters by watching TV or its animation rather than reading its books; their purchasing intentions toward Moomin goods incurred by sympathizing with its story, familiarity with and loving of Moomin have expanded the market for Moomin characters, anyway.

However, I read an article on how Moomin had boosted sales by intentionally parting with the traditional marketing method “Why Moomins is the most popular in Japan; ‘behind-the-scenes’ of sales boosted 6 times for a decade, revealed by its top management in Japan”,(11th March 2015, Jun Morikawa *Diamond Weekly* editor wrote on web media *Diamond Online* (*1) and have been greatly shocked by the fact that the business method of Moomin characters has changed the market by emphasizing the artistic senses of Tove Jansson's, not the book story itself.

Mr. Roleff Kråkström, Managing Director of Oy Moomin Characters Ltd, primarily engaged in managing of licenses for Tove Jansson has talked about its marketing in Japan in the article as follows:

"We changed the strategy of our company to a great extent in 2008. We had depended on the copy rights of its animation on TV for about 20 years since 1990s to 2008, which we decided to terminate completely. While there are various characters in the world, there are not so many that can be an art by themselves. Tove Jansson was at once a writer and an artist, where Moomin is one of the few works in the world with such senses of art. So-called 'art' cannot be made by manufacturing. Thus, we've noticed that Moomin has its unique strength that even Sanrio or Disney does not have." (*2)

This is close to a method of product development with hyper-contents using pictures or works of world-renowned artists' as seen in MoMA Design Store; I've been very much interested in how effective an idea to apply characters remembered through reading experiences in childhood to picture books would be.

3] Moomin depicted by Tove Jansson to be the symbol of lifestyles in Northern Europe

The strategy with Moomin's senses of art at its core, therefore, is a renewal of its brand to interpret Tove Jansson as an artist and not to consider characters in her story just as ones in picture books or animation, intending to expand the market with targeted consumers who love North European styles.

Its bold perspective must have been effective especially for Japanese. This is because North European lifestyles to spend relaxing time while loving integration of human lives and the mother nature is what Japanese admires, who are not good at work-life balancing and self-realization; the brand as Moomin that symbolizes their such notion or its characters have been made very familiar and so closely felt among fans through its animation.

Moomin characters have been boosted to a visual art more fitted for high-quality art spaces such as museums than for toy sections in department stores or shopping malls by leaving its image for animation characters or books for children.

A decade or so since such change in strategy took effect in 2008, Moomin art exhibitions are still being held nationwide in Japan attracting many of visitors; Moomin goods are still very popular, with specialized shops filled with customers.

The growth rate of revenue by actual numbers is not publicly known, many of media reports on "Moomin Valley Park", a theme park opened in March 2019 that will remind us of Moomin characters have been getting such a huge attention and there is no doubt that sales are increasing.

4] Moomin transforming itself into a lifestyle entertainment

I have mentioned the perpetuality of Moomin characters sustained by Tove Jansson's senses of art; on the other hand, I have started to feel in field my reading activities for children such as in libraries that people are demanding more of entertainment factors as "chic Northern European styles" in Moomin characters than Tove Jansson's story telling.

For example, I met two high-school girls in the Library who want to visit new open "Moomin Valley Park". I asked them if they had read Moomin books; they answered that they hadn't read such books or watched its animation, not even knowing that its author was Tove Jansson. They said the reason why they love Moomin, because they "preferred Snufkin's cool image".

A college student I interviewed on another occasion answered that "Moomin is a character cited in an university entrance exam he took", where he did know it had been authored by Tove Jansson but hadn't read her works and was not much interested in her books. To my question over whether he loved Moomin, however, he answered that it "Good taste" was not so bad

While the marketing strategy to emphasize Tove Jansson's senses of art has expanded the market, the worldview of Moomin stories authored by her has disappeared in the mind of younger generations; a change in consumer tastes and trends is now conspicuous as Moomin characters, as a lifestyle entertainment that has stemmed from such artistic aspect is being loved.

I have implemented a questionnaire research on mostly university students aged teens and tweens, about what they think of Moomin, with using internet from September 20 to October 4, 2019 (*3). It has given out a result that may support my hypothesis.

5] Analyses of the questionnaire

The rate of recognition of Moomin among researched people in their 10s to 20s with no sex bias has turned out to be astounding 100%(Q1).

But the asking their reading experience, about 90% of them have not read

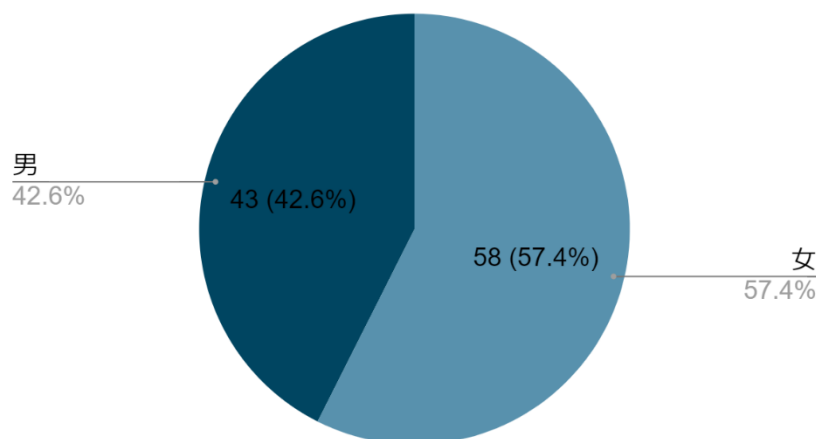
Moomin books either its picture books(Q2,Q3); about 55% of them haven't watch animation(Q4). However about 81% of them love Moomin itself (Q6), and 41% having some related goods with them(Q5).

What should be noted here (Q7) among all, is that about 73% of them have not recognized Tove Jansson as its author. It has been known as the result of the questionnaire research, therefore, that the eternality of Moomin characters has stemmed not from her stories themselves but from the younger generations' "love of chic characters in Northern Europe styles" as well as entertainment factors as a recent trend. (Q8,Q9)

● Profile of respondents / by sex

101 respondents; Male 43(42%) / Female 58(57%)

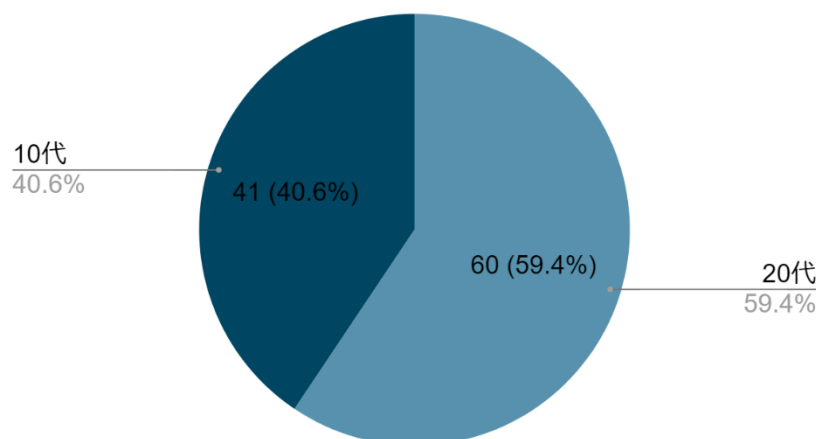
【回答者プロフィール】 n=101



● Profile of respondents / by age

101 respondents; 10s 41(40.6%), 20s 60(59.4%)

【回答者プロフィール】 年齢 n=101

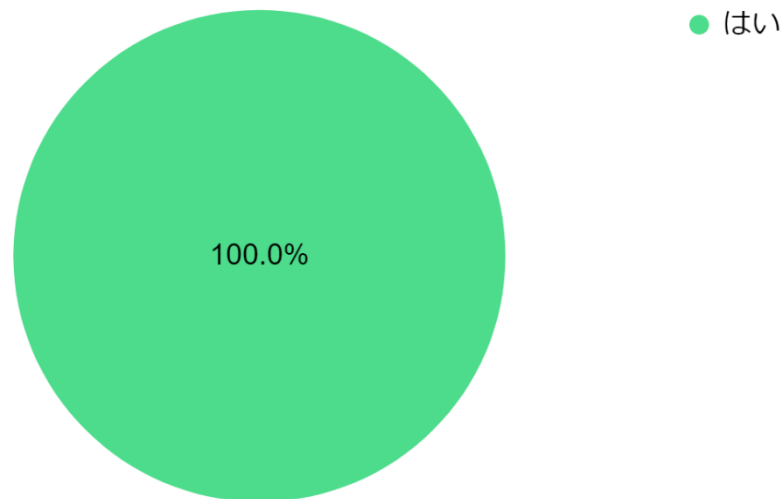


Q1: Do you know Moomin?

101 respondents;

yes 101 / no 0

<Q1> ムーミンを知っていますか？ n=101

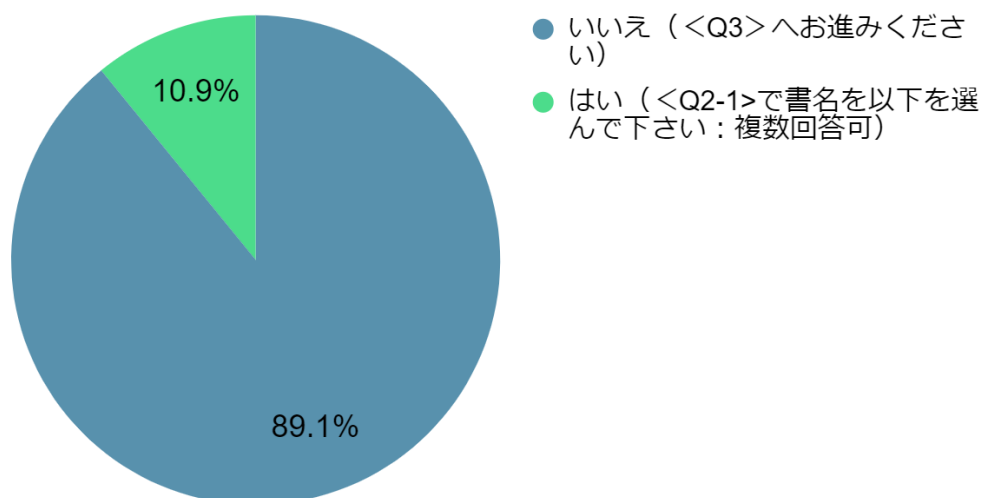


Q2: Have you read picture books of Moomin (Tove Jansson's version)?

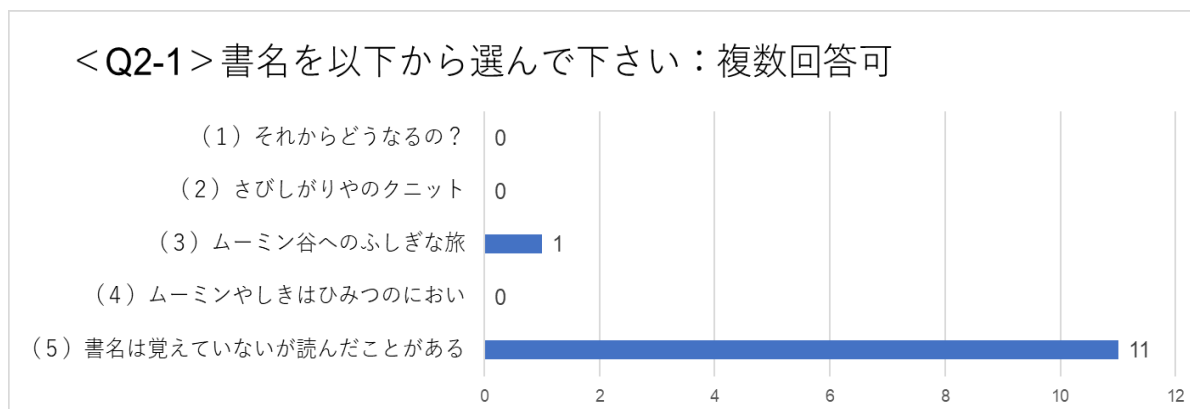
101 respondents;

yes (choose books you have read in Q2-1) 11 / no (proceed to Q3) 90

<Q2> ムーミン絵本（トーベ・ヤンソン版）を読んだことがありますか？ n=101



Q2-1: Choose books you have read (multiple answers possible).



Title of the Japanese picture books from Kodansha issued

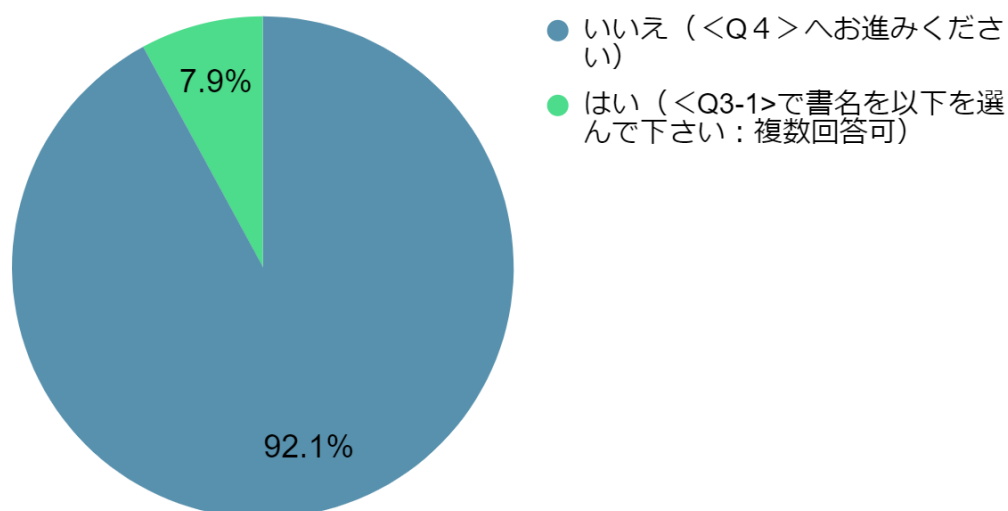
- 1] *The Book about Moomin, Mymble and Little My* 0
- 2] *Who Will Comfort Toffle?* 0
- 3] *The Dangerous Journey* 1
- 4] *Villain in the Moominhouse* 0
- 5] I have read, though I do not remember its title 11

Q3: Have you read Moomin novels for children?

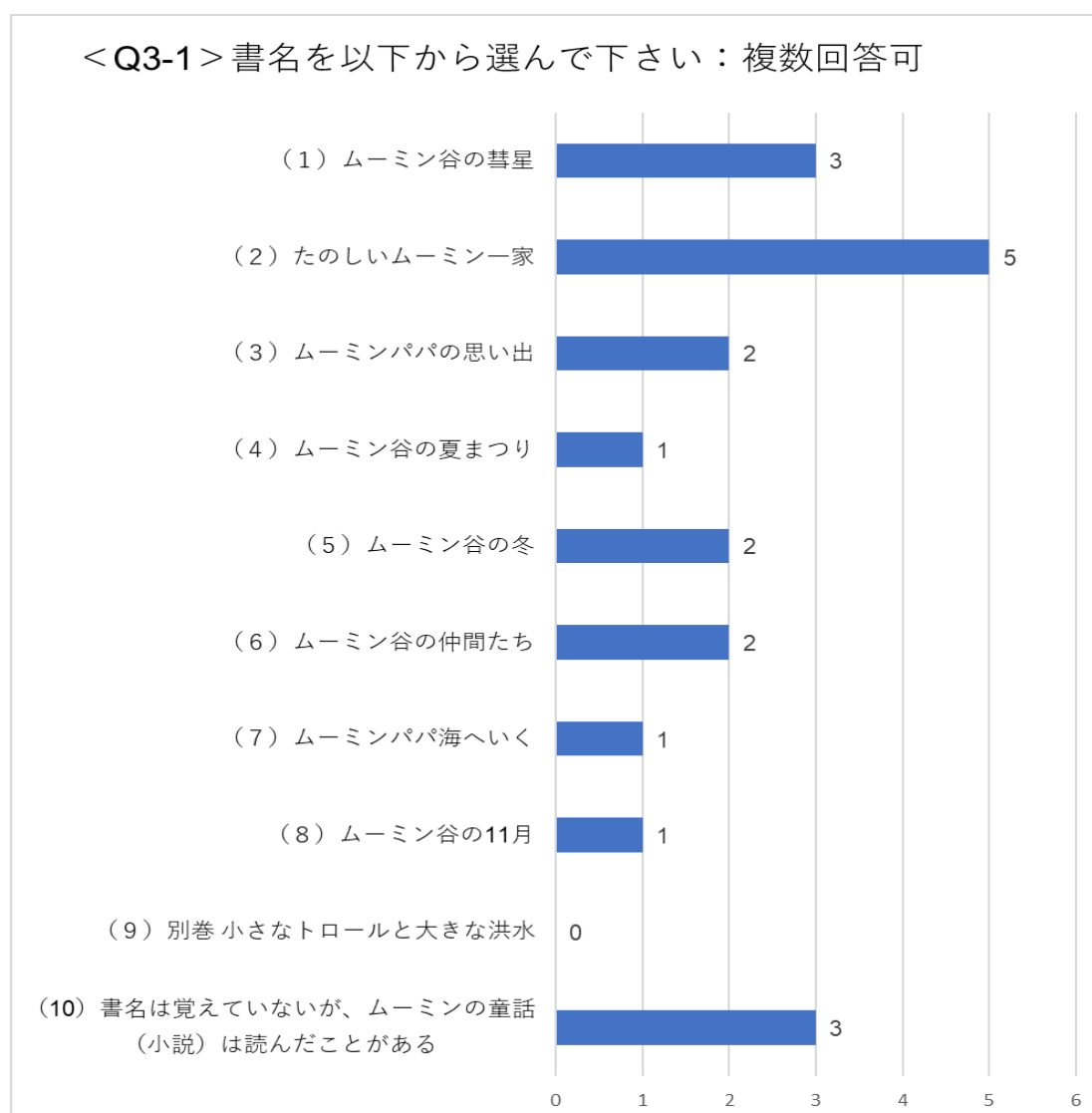
63 respondents

yes (choose books you have read in Q3-1) 8/ no (proceed to Q4) 93

<Q3> ムーミンの童話（小説）を読んだことはありますか？
n=101



Q3-1: Choose books you have read (multiple answers possible).



Title of the Japanese noble books from Kodansha issued

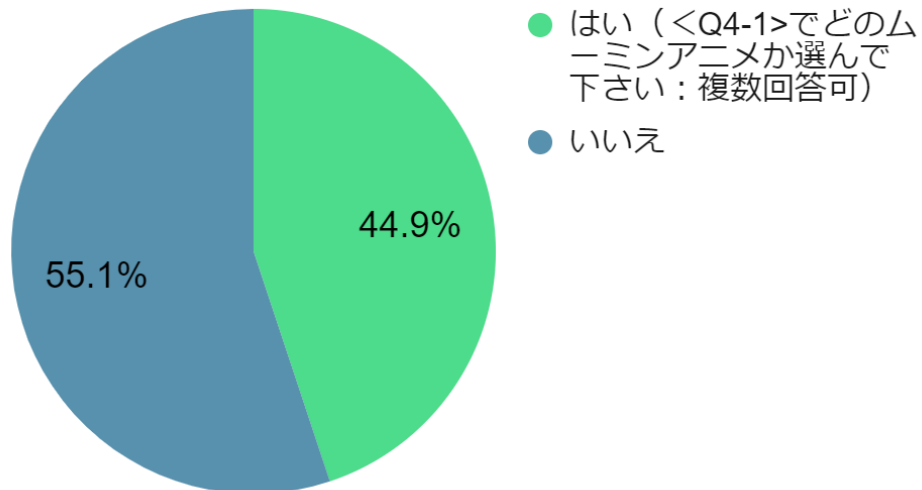
- 1] *Comet in Moominland* 3
- 2] *Finn Family Moomintrol* 5
- 3] *Moomin Papa's memories* 2
- 4] *Moominsummer Madness* 1
- 5] *Moominland Midwinter* 2
- 6] *Tales from Moominvalley* 2
- 7] *Moominpappa at Sea* 1
- 8] *Moominvalley in November* 1
- 9] *The Moomins and the Great Flood* 0
- 10] I have read, though I do not remember its title 3

Q4: Have you watched Moomin animation?

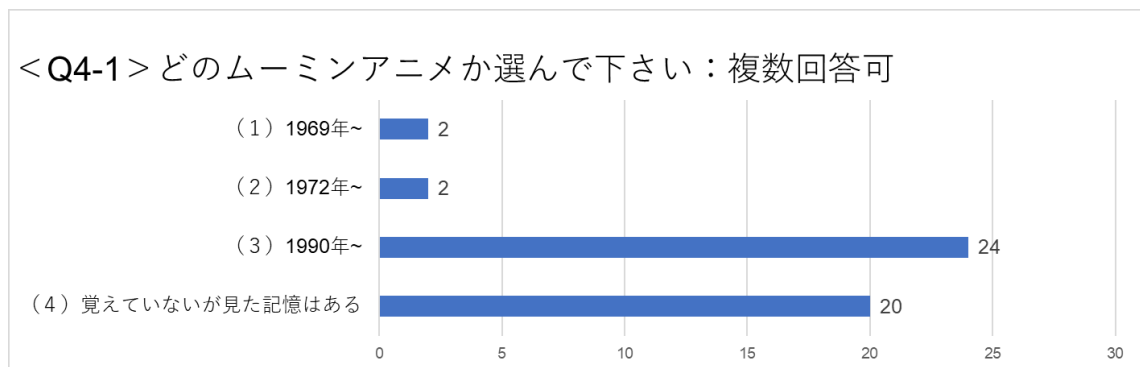
98 respondents

yes 44 (choose ones you have watched in Q4-1) / no 54

<Q4> ムーミンのアニメは見たか？ n=98



Q4-1: Choose ones you have watched (multiple answers possible).



1] Ones in 1969- ; 2

2] Ones in 1972-; 2

3] Ones in 1990-; 24

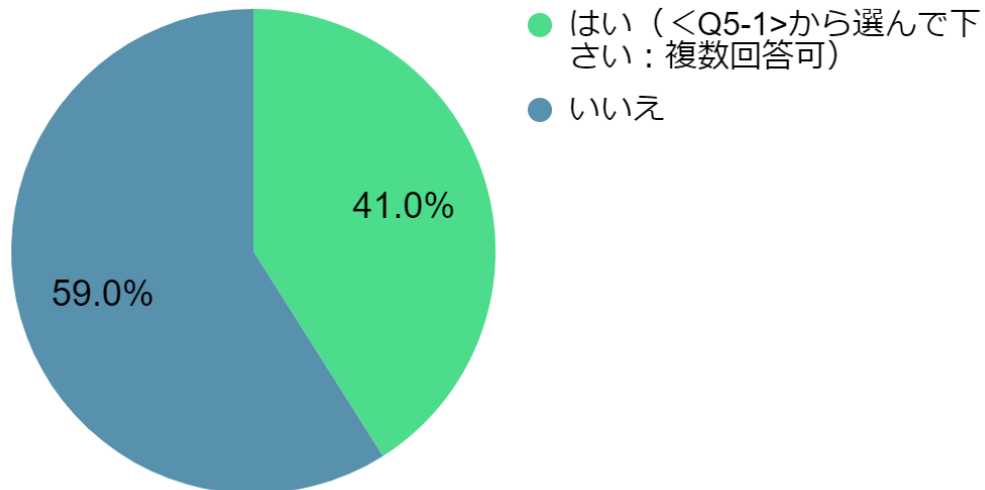
4] I have probably watched, though I do not remember well; 20

Q5: Do you have Moomin goods?

100 respondents

yes 41 (choose ones you have in Q5-1) / no 59

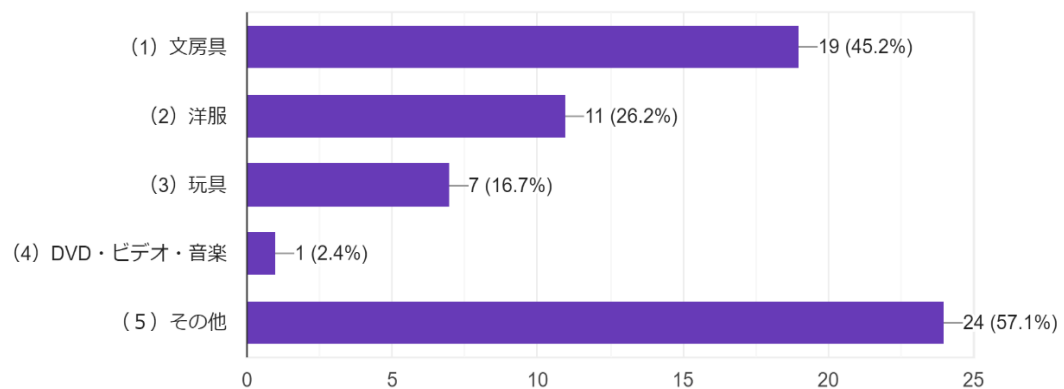
<Q 5> ムーミンのグッズは持っていますか？ n=100



Q5-1 (multiple answers possible)

<Q5-1> (複数回答可)

42 件の回答



1] Stationaries 19

2] Clothes 11

3] Toys 7

4] DVD / video / music 1

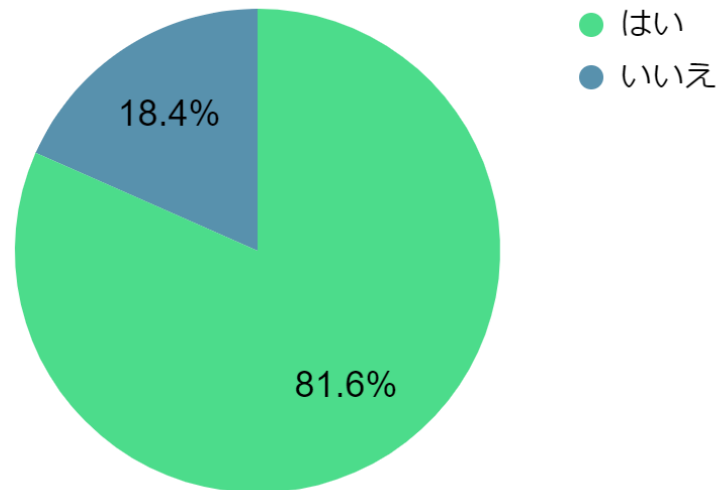
5] other 24

Q6: Do you like Moomin?

98 respondents

yes 80 / no 18

<Q6> ムーミンは好きですか？ n=98

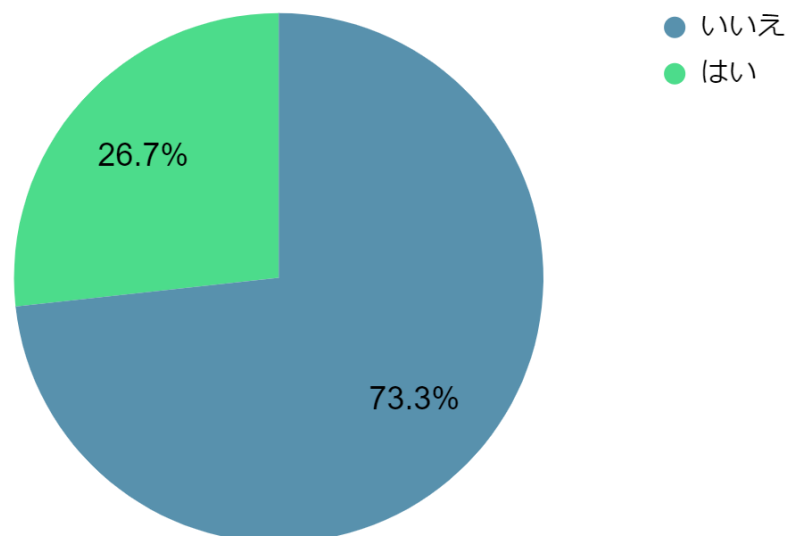


Q7: Do you know that the author of Moomin is someone named Tove Jansson?

101 respondents

yes 27 / no 74

<Q7> トーベ・ヤンソンがムーミンの原作者であることを知っていますか？ n=101

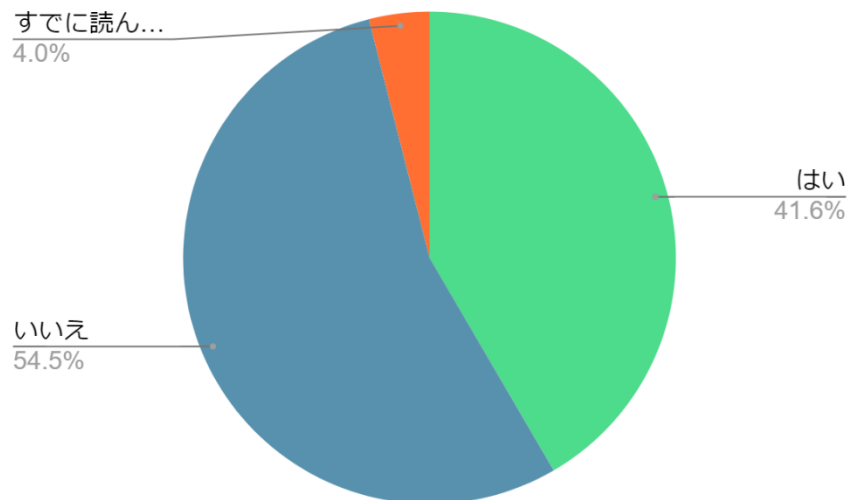


Q8: Do you want to read original works authored by Tove Jansson?

101 respondents

yes 42/ no 55/ I have read already 4

<Q8> トーベ・ヤンソンの書いた原作ムーミンシリーズ
(絵本や小説の日本語訳) を読んでみたいですか? n=101



Q9: Write freely about Moomin and / or Tove Jansson.

<Q9> その他ムーミンやトーベ・ヤンソンに関することがあればご自由にご記入下さい。
● ムーミンそのものもかわいいと思うのですが、スナフキンが好きです。I love Snufkin while I think character of Moomin itself is also cute.
● 僕はセンター試験世界史受験でしたI took World History as a subject in Japanese SAT.
● カバに似てる気がするLooks like a hippo
● 母がすき。ニョロニョロがすき。I love Moomin Mama and Hattifatteners.
● バーバパパBaba Papa.
● ムーミンたんがカバさんだって最近知りました。妖精さんだと思ってました(カバ・ムーミン)ううっ I have recently come to know that dear Moomin is a hippo, while I thought it was a fairy, sadly.
● 西武池袋線が最寄りなので、飯能にムーミンのアミューズメントパークがあるおかげか謎の親近感があります。As the closest railway to my house is Seibu Ikebukuro Line and there is an amusement park of Moomin in Hanno alongside the line, I somehow feel an enigmatic familiarity toward it
● テレビのアニメ特集や車のCMで見たので知っている。知識としては知っているが、具体的にどのような物語かは知らない。また、物語の内容よりも、ネット上にある都市伝説的な噂の方は知っている。The reason why I know Moomin; I looked in Car CM and special feature program of cartoon on TV. I know it as knowledge, but do not know what kind of story clearly. I certainly know some "urban legend" like rumor on the website contents.
● によろによろかわいいHattifatteners are so cute.
● 以前フィンエアーを利用したときに、ムーミンとのコラボレーションをやっていて可愛かった。日本でも何かコラボして欲しい。When I boarded Finnair before, Moomin was focus on for collaboration campaign inside the plane. I want you to see some collaborate in Japan too.
● あけぼの子ども森公園に行きましたI went to Tove Jansson Akebono Children's Forest Park.

6] Conclusion

Since 1965 when Moomin series were translated into Japanese and started to be sold as books for children, they have become a best seller with over 50 thousand volumes sold in their total; the reasons not only lie in being made animation but also in sympathy felt by Japanese, who have been long familiarized with Oriental "ghosts" or "monsters" deemed to be naturally existing in their surroundings and "enigmatic" or "horrifying, toward Moomin stories authored by Tove Jansson that contain similar familiarizing factors.(*4)

Meanwhile 1st generation who read or watched "Moomin" from 1960s to 1970s, may be there worldview of Tove Jansson had rendered more vague with characters with Japanese arrangements showing up in its version of "Moomin", but the worldview written out in her books had reached if rather unconsciously. 2nd generation who know mother's generation from 1980s to 1990s, "Moomin" stories combined with its characters, strange and a bit horrifying but ever attractive, have indeed constituted its worldview.

In more than 50 years now since the birth of Moomin, we may need to further research the changes of and influences by its images inherited through three generations from parents to children to grandchildren; the 3rd generation from end 1990s is certainly away from the worldview of Tove Jansson's stories that Moomin characters growing as a license business are starting to evolve.,

That "Winnie-the-Pooh", a masterpiece created by A. A. Milne, has totally gone in Disney's character strategy is an issue around such character businesses much talked about among researchers of children literatures, which may or may not happen to Moomin.

I myself hope humbly that current younger generations will inherit Moomin in its stories, not only symbol of "chic Northern European style".

I expect, the new marketing method will make up to reborn the Moomin characters with worldview of Tove Jansson stories, just like they have changed Japanese-style Moomin into one with the original image.

For that reason, I want to say focus on the Q8, about 41% say they want to read a Tove Jansson books, that we should remember how to work with libraries and librarians who deliver the joy of reading stories to children and the loving books people around the world.

Reference:

- *1: Diamond online(11th March 2015) ,Jun Morikawa, Diamond Weekly editor
<https://diamond.jp/articles/-/68129>
- *2: Work cited from Diamond online (11th March 2015), Jun Morikawa, Diamond Weekly editor <https://diamond.jp/articles/-/68129>
- *3: A questionnaire research had done by MightyBook, using google form on internet; the form was sent to university and high -school student's personal e-mail or SNS address with permission. The survey period is September 20 to October 4, 2019.
- *4: 『妖怪学新考 妖怪からみる日本人の心』小松 和彦 (著), 講談社 (2015): *The new concept of ghost science; Japanese mind as seen from ghost*, author Kazuhiko Komatsu, Koudansha,2015

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