The deep influence of the A-bomb on anime and manga

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At the end of Katsuhiro Otomo's dystopian Japanese anime film Akira, a throbbing, white mass begins to envelop Neo-Tokyo. Eventually, its swirling winds engulf the metropolis, swallowing it whole and leaving a skeleton of a city in its wake.

The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki – along with the firebombings of Tokyo – were traumatic experiences for the Japanese people. It's no surprise that for years, the devastation remained at the forefront of their conscience, and that part of the healing process meant returning to this imagery in literature, in music and in art.

The finale of Akira is only one example of apocalyptic imagery in the anime and manga canon; a number of anime films and comics are rife with atomic bomb references, which appear in any number of forms, from the symbolic to the literal. The devastating aftereffects – orphaned kids, radiation sickness, a loss of national independence, the destruction of nature – would also influence the genre, giving rise to a unique (and arguably incomparable) form of comics and animated film.

The directors and artists who witnessed the devastation firsthand were at the forefront of this movement. Yet to this day – 70 years after the bombs – these themes continue to be explored by their successors.

An iconic filmmaker paves the way

We can see the lasting images of the firebombings and the atomic bombs in the works of artist and director Osamu Tezuka and his successor, Hayao Miyazaki. Both had witnessed the devastation of the bombings at the end of the war.

Osamu Tezuka would go on to influence scores of Japanese animators. Wikimedia Commons

The bomb became a particular obsession of Tezuka's. His films and comics both address themes like coping with grief and the idea that nature, in all its beauty, can be compromised by man's desire to conquer it.

His stories often have a young character who is orphaned by particular circumstances and must survive on his own. Two examples are Little Wansa, about a puppy who escapes from his new owners and spends the series looking for his mother; and Young Bear Cub, who gets lost in the wild and must find his own way back to his family.

Misuse of technology

The tensions of technology are apparent in the works of Tezuka and his successors. In Tezuka's Astro Boy, a scientist attempts to fill the void left by his son's death by creating a humanlike android named Astro Boy.

Astro Boy's father, seeing that technology cannot replace his son completely, rejects his creation, who is then taken under the wing of another scientist. Astro Boy eventually finds his calling and becomes a superhero.

Astro Boy is one of many characters symbolizing the fusion of technology and nature, and the tension created by its capacity for both advancement and destruction. TNS Sofres/flickr, CC BY

Like Tezuka, the award-winning animator Hayao Miyazaki witnessed some of the American air raids as a child.

Miyazaki's work often refers to the abuse of technology, and contains pleas for human restraint. In Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind, the radioactive mutants populate the land; at the beginning of the film, the narrator describes the strange, mutated state of Earth as a direct result of man's misuse of nuclear technology.

In the postwar years, Japan grew into an economic superpower. Possessing a fascination with technology, the country became a world leader in the production of cars and electronics. Yet in characters like Astro Boy, we see some of the tensions of the modern age: the idea that technology can never replace humans, and that technology's capacity for helping mankind is only equaled by its capacity to destroy it.

Orphans and mutants

There were also the aftereffects of the bombs, some of which are still felt today: children left parentless, others (even the unborn) left permanently crippled by radiation.

For these reasons, a recurrent theme in anime films is the orphan who has to survive on his own without the help of adults (many of whom are portrayed as incompetent).

Akiyuki Nosaka relayed his personal experiences as a child during the war in the popular anime film Grave of the Fireflies, which tells the story of a young boy and his sister escaping from the air raids and the firebombings, scraping by on whatever rations they can find during last part of the war.

Meanwhile, there are often young, powerful female orphans or independent female youths in Hayao Miyazaki's works, whether it's in Kiki's Delivery Service, Howl's Moving Castle, or Castle in the Sky.

Likewise, in Katsuhiro Otomo's Akira, the adults are the ones who squabble: they jockey for power, and their lust for control of the strange, alien technology of Akira causes the atomic-bomb-like catastrophe at the end of the film. The teenaged characters, on the other hand, display common sense throughout the movie.

The message seems to be that adults can be reckless when man's desire for power and ambition outweigh what is important on Earth. And the children, still untainted by the vices that overtake humanity in adulthood and innocent enough to the point of thinking rationally, are the ones who end up making the most practical decisions overall.

Many families were orphaned by the war, and the bomb as well, so a number of children were also mutated or affected by the bomb. In anime and manga, this is seen in the form of radioactive mutations or having some extraordinary powers, in addition to taking on more adult responsibilities at an early age.

A number of films feature characters who display special powers or abilities, with radiation often being the main cause. Several films exploring the idea of unusual events or experiments resulting in young persons having exceptional abilities include Inazuman in the comic of the same name and the character Ellis in the comic El Cazador de la Bruja (The Hunter of the Witch).

Additionally, the manga series Barefoot Gen tells the story of a family wiped out by the atomic bomb, with a young boy and his mother the only survivors. Author Keiji Nakazawa loosely based these comics on his own life: growing up, Nakazawa watched a sister die several weeks after birth from radiation sickness, and witnessed his mother's health quickly deteriorate in the years after the war.

Death, rebirth and hope for the future

Osamu Tezuka believed that the atomic bomb acted as the epitome of man's inherent capacity for destruction. Yet while Tezuka commonly referenced death and war, he also believed in the perseverance of mankind and its ability to begin anew.

In a number of his works, both a futuristic and historic Japan are seen, with the themes of death and rebirth being commonly used as plot devices to symbolize Japan's (and the lives of many Japanese) wartime and postwar experiences, including the aftermath of its destruction after the bombs fell. But much like the Phoenix – the mythical bird that sets itself on fire at the time of its death, only to experience a rebirth – Tezuka's Japan experiences a resurrection, which mirrors Japan's real-life postwar ascension to world superpower.

In fact, Phoenix was the title of Tezuka's most popular series, one that the artist considered his magnum opus. The work is a series of short stories dealing with man's search for immortality (given or taken from the Phoenix, which represents the universe, by man's drinking some of its blood); some characters appear several times in the stories, mostly from reincarnation, a common precept in Buddhism.

Other filmmakers have repurposed this theme. In Space Cruiser Yamato (also known as Star Blazers), an old Japanese warship is rebuilt into a powerful spaceship and sent off to save a planet Earth succumbing to radiation poisoning.

In essence, what we have seen is that the atomic bomb indeed affected Japan to the point that the works of Tezuka and later artists inspired by him reflect on the bomb's effects on families, society and the national psyche. Much like the cycle of life, or the immortal Phoenix in Tezuka's case, Japan was able to reinvent itself and come back strong as a powerful world player capable of starting anew, but with the idea that mankind must learn from its mistakes and avoid repeating history.

‘Manga': heart of pop culture

Why are comics so near and dear to the Japanese?

BY MINORU MATSUTANI

- MAY 26, 2009

From “One Piece” and “Naruto” to “Doraemon” and “Sazae-san,” comic books have been the heart of Japanese pop culture.

Most “anime,” “cosplay” and other made-in-Japan examples of “otaku” (“nerd”) culture that have spread worldwide would not exist without “manga” because few anime producers are willing to invest the time and money on stories that aren’t proven popular in comic books first.

In the eyes of many Westerners, adults reading manga on a train or at a convenience store appear peculiar, at best.

Why are manga so popular? Here are some of questions and answers on the topic:

What is the origin of manga?

“Choju-giga” (“Scrolls of Frolicking Animals”), a series of drawings of frogs, rabbits and other animals produced in the 12th and 13th centuries by several artists, is widely believed to be the first manga in Japan. The techniques used then, such as how to draw a character’s legs to simulate running, would not appear out of place in contemporary comics.

But in “Manga no Rekishi” (“The History of Manga”), author and researcher Isao Shimizu defines manga as popular works sold to the masses. According to this definition, Shimizu asserts, Japan’s first manga was “Toba Ehon,” a book of drawings accompanying a story featuring the lives of ordinary people in the Edo Period (1603-1867) that was sold by an Osaka publisher in the 18th century.

Newspapers and magazines in the 20th century ran comic strips to help gain readership. But the largest contributors to the development of manga were the weekly and monthly comic magazines that emerged in the 1960s, which carry a collection of about 10 or 20 series installments per edition.

“Comic magazines are the first place where manga artists were given a chance to show their work. Without them, manga artists would not have been born,” manga critic Haruyuki Nakano says.

How well do comics sell in Japan?

Volume 52 of “One Piece,” an adventure story about a boy who wants to be a pirate, was the best-selling comic book last year, selling 2.5 million copies for publisher Shueisha Inc., according to statistics compiled by the Research Institute for Publications. Coming in second was Volume 44 of “Naruto,” a ninja story, also published by Shueisha, which sold 1.55 million copies. In comparison, last year’s best-selling noncomic book was “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows” at 1.8 million copies, institute official Masaharu Kubo said.

Among magazines, best-selling Shukan Shonen (Weekly Boy) Jump had a circulation of 2.79 million last year, followed by Shukan Shonen Magazine with 1.77 million copies.

These figures are significantly higher than in other countries.

For example, in the United States, a book of comic strips that sold 150,000 copies would be considered a success, critic Nakano says, adding that comic magazines in the Japanese style are almost nonexistent there.

He also says English versions of Shukan Shonen Jump have sold 300,000 copies in the U.S., an achievement he calls “amazing,” though shrugged off by the Japanese manga industry.

Why do adults in Japan read manga?

Nakano said publishers have specifically targeted adults with manga series centering on business, politics, history and even gambling.

“People who were kids in the ’80s and ’90s keep reading manga. Before then, comics used to be read only by children in Japan, just like other countries. But publishers had to raise the target age range because readers of long-selling manga did not stop reading,” Nakano says.

For example, Shukan Shonen Jump’s “Dragon Ball,” a popular comic series featuring the adventures of martial artist Son Goku, ran for 10 years until 1995. As the comic’s loyal readership aged, publisher Shueisha had to add more manga with adult content to keep them buying the magazine.

In 1995, the magazine achieved an astonishing circulation of 6 million.

Nakano also points out that Japanese children have developed the habit of buying manga for themselves.

Kids here had more money during the country's rapid economic growth period between the 1960s and early 1990s than their counterparts in other countries, he says. Also, many went to cram schools and they used the dinner money their parents gave them to buy ¥200 comics along with their meal at a convenience store.

"You can easily imagine such kids continuing to read manga when they grow up," he says.

In other countries, parents buy comics for children, so the act of buying comics is not a childhood habit, he argues.

Apart from economic and lifestyle reasons, why are manga far less popular than animated movies overseas?

Nakano believes the answer has to do with "manga grammar."

For example, the established styles of drawing — the use of lines — to express a character's movements and emotions have become so engrained in Japanese readers that it is not easy for foreigners to "crack the code" when the comics are shipped overseas, he says.

He points to the difference in how movement is rendered in American comics, which, whatever the object, be it fighter jet or bullet, is shown from beginning to end. In contrast, he says, Japanese manga artists stop short of the end to give readers the chance to picture the motion in their minds and thus feel a part of the manga.

Nevertheless, Japanese comic books are sold all over the world as graphic novels. A Shueisha spokesman says, for example, "Naruto," one of the company's best-selling manga overseas, is sold in more than 25 countries and regions. He declined to disclose how many are sold outside Japan.

Kubo notes that "Naruto," "One Piece" and "Nodame Cantabile" are doing well overseas.

As for the world-famous Pokemon character, "I have heard not so many (Pokemon) comic books have been published," Nakano says.

How is the comic book and magazine industry faring in Japan?
By 2008, sales of manga books and magazines had fallen to ¥448.3 billion from ¥586.4 billion in 1995, the oldest figure available, according to the Research Institute for Publications. That translates to a drop of 23.5 percent, nearly the same as the 22 percent decrease in sales of all kinds of books and magazines, according to the statistics.

Why is the industry experiencing a slump?
Fewer people are reading manga magazines, and therefore fewer are buying manga comic books because people usually purchase comic books after reading the series in magazines, according to Kubo.

The end of "Dragon Ball" in Shukan Shonen Jump in 1995 is also a big reason people stopped reading manga magazines, he adds.

Both Kubo and Nakano also blame the aging society and the falling birthrate for the drop in sales.

Because publishers focused too much on expanding the range of readership to adults in the 1980s and 1990s, there are less interesting comic series published in manga magazines, which have failed to attract younger readers, they say.

"If you have three or four interesting individual manga (out of the 10 or 20 that are typically carried), you buy that magazine, but if there is only one or two, you don't buy it. That's why children don't buy (comic) magazines," Nakano says.

Kubo and Nakano also say children nowadays have other forms of entertainment such as video games and mobile phones and are busy going to cram schools. Some people read comics on mobile phones, they say.

What does the industry need to do?
"They have to grab child readers again and keep cultivating new young readers to maintain the size of readership," Nakano says.

Kubo says publishers have launched magazines this year whose target readers are junior high students, but how well they will do is still unclear.

Japanese Manga: Its Expression and Popularity

Natsume Fusanosuke

READING 3

Natsume Fusanosuke

Japan's Manga Market

Why has manga (Japanese comic or cartoon) become so popular in Japan? Before we ask this question, we should look more closely at exactly how widespread manga is.

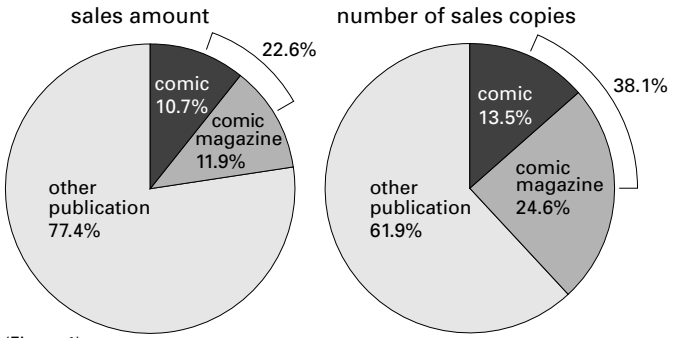
The Japanese publishing market is one of the most vigorous in the world. How much market share does manga have? The gross sales from publishing in 2002 was 2.3 trillion yen. The total number of published materials including magazines was over 750 million. 22.6% of total sales, or 38.1% of published material sold in 2002 are of manga (Figure 1). Since they peaked in 1995, both the percentage of manga in published material and the publishing industry as a whole have been in decline.

Still, there is no other country in which manga or comics hold such a large market share. Manga are less expensive than books or magazines. As we can see from these figures, if we consider the publishing industry as a table, one of its legs can be considered to consist of manga. If the manga industry falls into a crisis, the entire industry suffers.

What has created such a large market? There are many factors, ranging from the system of the publishing industry, historical conditions, and cultural backgrounds. Historically speaking, manga developed in conjunction with television and achieved a commercial success due to its interlocking relationship with other media such as television, animation, and video games, so-called media mix. Manga has become a form of popular culture having a big economic influence through secondary use, or character merchandising in toys, food, and advertising.

Japanese manga researchers have just begun to realize the fact that the success of manga cannot be explained just by discussing manga itself. Collaborative research by researchers in various fields will be needed in the future.

Comics and comic magazines rate in all publications as of 2002



(Figure 1)
source: *Shuppan Geppou* (monthly publishing), February 2003, The Research Institute for Publications

Cultural Background

It is natural to consider the cultural background of manga. Japanese society seems to have been more lenient towards manga than other countries. In the US, faced with strict regulations, comics lost freedom of expression in their growth period. Japanese manga, on the other hand, developed into different genres by working against external pressures.

East Asian cultures have had a relatively close picture-to-language relationship. In cultures with Kanji (Chinese characters), it seems easier to develop a mode of expression in which letters are combined with illustrations and are treated as a picture. *Emakimono*, rolls of illustrations that accompany a story, developed in 12th century Japan as a means to tell a story. There has also been a tradition in popular culture of storytelling with both pictures and words. *Kibyoshi*, in the Edo period, is one such example.

There are traditions of illustrated story telling in Western culture like religious paintings and tapestries. Nevertheless, modern Western art seems to hold that illustrations and words should be separated. Therefore, a medium that contained a mixture of the two tended to be regarded as form of low-class mass culture. A reasonable explanation of manga development that turns to comparative culture is that Japan had a cultural tradition that was more receptive to manga.

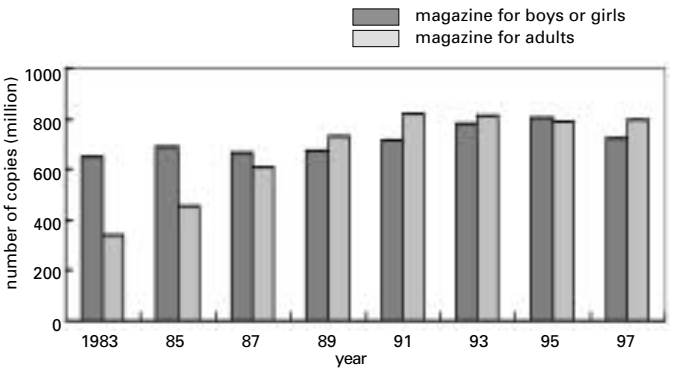
In reality, the style of manga as we know it today was influenced by American newspaper comics, with multiple frames, dialogue in balloons, and narration. These innovations were created at the beginning of the 20th century, in particular after the 1920s. The pre-modern Japanese publishing tradition suffers an interruption at the Meiji Restoration (1868). Modern Japanese manga had its roots in caricatures in Western newspapers and import of modern printing technology.

It is important to realize that there are inherent dangers in claiming manga as an outgrowth of native Japanese culture. Development of manga cannot be solely explained by looking at cultural similarities and ignoring historical discontinuities.

The Characteristics of Japanese Manga

Now, I would like to turn to a different aspect of manga. Figure 2 shows the number of manga magazines published for boys or girls and for adults from 1983 to 1997. We can see that adult manga increased in the '80s and held half the market in the '90s. This is an outstanding characteristic of the Japanese manga market. The fact that half the manga in the market is for adults shows manga in Japan is a major form of popular entertainment much like movies.

(Figure 2) **Number of published manga magazines**



note: All the figures in this article are from *Manga/Sekai/Senryaku* by Natsume Fusanosuke, 2001, Shogakukan Inc. Figure 1 (p. 209), 2 (p.211), 3–6 (p. 215), 7 (p.217)

The criticism that much of Japanese manga is "inappropriate for children" may be due largely to misinterpretations of youth manga. Similarly, Japanese television animation (*anime*) which is strongly influenced by manga, also has an adult market and is prone to the same misconception.

What do these figures tell us? The development of adult manga played a big part in the growth of the overall manga market in the '80s. Adult manga necessitates treatment of a wider variety of topics, which in turn influenced manga for youth.

When looking at Japanese manga, it is important to note that there is a genre for teenagers situated in between those of children and adults. Instead of the two genres neatly dividing the market, they share the market by degrees.

The Emergence of the Youth Manga Market

The Japanese manga market has an amazing variety of genres. There are manga to suit almost any age and interest group: boys, girls, youth, young women, office workers, game aficionados, people in their 40s and 50s. This diversification has its roots in the introduction and success of youth manga which arose with the emergence of '60s counterculture.

American comics and French bande dessinée (BD) were once in a similar situation. American comics became more adult-oriented, during World War II. Many more genres, for example, girls' comics, mysteries for adult women and romances, existed than there are today. Youth comics became more of an underground movement due to backlash from McCarthyism. Bound by strict regulations on expression, only the superhero genre now remains.

In France, as in Japan, the BD movement became more adult-oriented in the '60s, branching off from BD for children and developing artistically. The movement created BD with sophisticated illustrations, but it never achieved a place in the market as it did in Japan.

The young adult movement in American, French, and Japanese comics is part of the youth-oriented culture that emerged after World War II. Having the baby boomer population as its main target, it has a similar anti-establishment orientation as the Beatles and Rock'n Roll.

The reason that comics became exceptionally widespread in Japan may be the cultivation of the baby boomer generation, who were at the time young adults. The emergence of the young adult manga genre successfully kept the baby boomers reading manga into adulthood.

Furthermore, the market system, in which the market develops works cyclically to match a child's growth, may have clinched the success of the manga market in the '70s to '80s.

The Rise of Youth-oriented Manga and Violence

Manga underwent many changes from the '60s to '70s. One important change is the orientation toward older readers and evolution of teen-age oriented themes. The reason for worldwide manga-bashing due to sexual and violent situations may be traced to this period.

Let's look at a scene from *Dragon Ball* (serialized 1984–95) by Toriyama Akira, a big hit both as manga and an animated TV series. The main character is punching the enemy in Figure 3, but his face normally looks like the middle of Figure 4. His rage at his friend's murder changes his appearance including his hair colour and face. This style of illustration plays to the relatively young readers' desire for metamorphosis. The main character at the start of the serial was a cute boy like Figure 5.

The main character learns martial arts and grows up, marries, and has children. During the story, many sympathetic characters die, eventually even the main character. The theme of tragedy and human growth, including battles as a form of initiation, is a traditional theme in post-War Japanese manga, one that Tezuka Osamu (1928–89) began in 1945–'50s.

Although there may be cultural differences, adults who do not know (or read) manga may feel upon seeing only these scenes above, that martial arts are violent and deaths of characters are cruel. The children, as readers, empathize with the characters as they grow and live and read the violent scenes as within the context of the story. Violence is not there just for violence's sake.

Exceptional manga such as *Devilman* (1972–73) by Nagai Go paved the way for such scenes to be depicted in boys' manga. *Devilman* was published in a weekly magazine for boys, *Weekly Shonen Magazine*; yet it grew a strong follow-

Figure 3: (top right) *Dragon Ball* vol. 27 by Toriyama Akira, p. 74, 1991, Shueisha Inc.
Figure 4: (top left) *Dragon Ball* vol. 27 by Toriyama Akira, p. 55, 1991
Figure 5: (mid left) *Dragon Ball* vol. 1 by Toriyama Akira, p. 7, 1985
Figure 6: (bottom) *Devilman* vol. 5 by Nagai Go, pp.196-197, 1998, Kodansha Co.
from *Manga/Sekai/Senryaku* p. 215

ing among university students and other young adult intelligentsia. Thus, this story changed its themes in innovative ways.

It began as a superhero-type story of battles against the "devils," a fearful foe of humans. The main character, Devilman, is half devil and half human. He despairs of the humans who kill the heroine in a witch-hunt caused by mass hysteria. After the extinction of humans, he fights a final battle against the devils led by a friend (who is actually a fallen angel), and finally destroys himself (Figure 6).

Here, we can see influences from student protests of the '60s and anti-establishment activism. The topic of the story evolved from a simple struggle of good against evil to a more complex one. The main character changing from a human to Devilman can be seen to correspond to a youthful desire for initiation.

A person undergoes two main periods of change. One is by age 3, the other before adulthood. A person changes his child self and breaks out of a mold to be reborn. The imagery that expresses this change is self-expression by violence. The same may be said for sexual expressions.

There were many works in the '60s and '70s that expanded their themes through sexual and violent expressions in girls, boys, young adults' magazines, meeting the needs of teenage readers.

Female Authors and Manga

Compared with male-oriented manga that focus on some kind of 'battle,' manga for girls, a genre unique to Japan, underwent a particular development that influenced the entire manga genre. In the '60s and '70s, girls' manga came to be written by authors close to the readers' age. A particular technique was developed to illustrate relationships with parents or friends, or romantic relationships. This technique had a big influence on later expressions of thought and feelings in manga.

For example, in *Wata no Kunihoshi* (1978–present; the serial is currently not being published) by Oshima Yumiko, a female kitten believes that she will grow up to become human. She is drawn as a girl with kitten ears. Her unspoken thoughts are placed inside a square box which floats on top of the frames (Figure 7). The work uses a mix of actual dialogue and inner thought and illustrates scenes which are not seen in reality. These techniques to depict psychological states—showing flashbacks, imaginary scenes, dreams, bits of subconscious—can be taken as a challenge on part of some girls' manga to pursue more "literary" themes.

The work of Oshima Yumiko later influenced Yoshimoto Banana, a famous female novelist. The works of other female manga artists in the same generation influenced many genres: TV, movies, theatre. Such works break the stereotype that literature is superior to manga in terms of creativity and topics.

Okazaki Kyoko, a female artist who had her start in young adult comics, contrasted sex and dead bodies in her work *Rivers Edge* (1993–94), to symbolize modern anxiety and comfort in young adults.

In Japan today, manga deal with topics which books or movies previously would have explored. In fact, much of current Japanese movies and TV dramas are based on manga.

(Figure 7)
Wata no Kunihoshi by Oshima Yumiko
Oshima Yumiko Selected Works
Hakusensha Co., 1978, p.120
from *Manga/Sekai/Senryaku* p.217

The System of Manga Editors

In spite of these developments, manga still remain a form of popular entertainment. Japanese manga can be said to be both a medium of popular culture and one that pursues sophisticated themes.

There is also a factor which ties in two prominent features of Japanese comics: the idiosyncrasies of the market and variety and depth of expression. It is the manga editors in publishers who are the key to Japanese manga's pursuit of market demands and highly developed expressive methods. Their degree of participation in manga-making would be unimaginable in other countries. Editors actively participate in the process, and provide ideas for stories at times. They build personal relationships with the authors, and may stay up all night with authors to do intensive work.

A separate article is needed to explain this editing system probably unique to Japan. Here, I will just point out that this system is based on Japan's now-maligned system of lifetime employment.

Editors who were successful in expanding the manga market and developing it for young adults are trying to meet the wishes of literary enthusiasts while continuing traditions of children's publishing. As a result, manga for boys evolved into material that young adults also read. Techniques they created together with the authors established the later style of manga.

The manga editing system, which is probably in a symbiotic relationship with post-war Japanese society, needs further investigation. On the other hand, I see the present state of publishing as requiring fundamental changes in the system itself.

(translated by Ueki Kaori)

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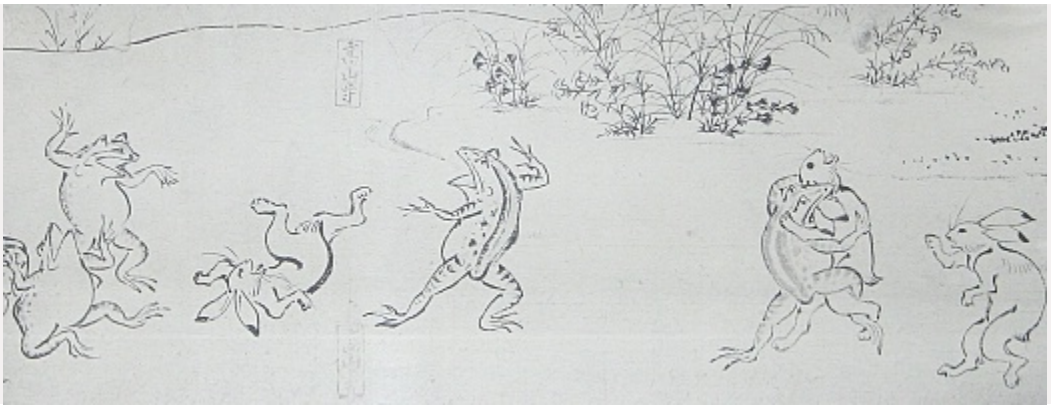
What are manga and anime?

Modern day manga (漫画) can be defined as comics corresponding to a Japanese style which originated during the mid-1900s. The popularity of manga in Japan has since ballooned. Today, there is a huge domestic industry for manga, and increasingly so internationally. In Japan, people of both genders and all ages read manga. For example, it is quite common to see business men in suits reading thick comic books in commuter trains.

The range of manga genres is diverse, with content ranging from history to futuristic science fiction and from teenage romance to profound themes about life. The comics are broadly separated into four categories according to the target audience: boys, girls, youths and matured. They can be commonly found in bookstores, bookstands and convenience stores all over Japan.

A manga series may become popular enough that it is made into an anime (アニメ) - Japanese styled animation. Examples of world famous anime include "Dragonball", "Sailor Moon", "Pokemon" and "One Piece". Of course, original scripts may also be written for anime. One popular anime production company with its own distinct style is Studio Ghibli, which has produced award winning works such as "My Neighbor Totoro" and "Spirited Away".



Some view this approximately 1000 year old work, displayed at Kozanji, Kyoto, to be Japan's first manga

Manga and anime related events and places of interest

The popularity of manga and anime in Japan has led to the establishment of many related attractions and places of interest. In Tokyo, some of the world's largest comic events are held annually.

Manga Cafes (Manga Kissa)

Manga cafes are places where customers can read from a library of manga for a specified time at a corresponding fee. Guests are free to borrow and return books as many times as they wish within the time limit. Many manga cafes also allocate individual compartments, offering guests some privacy for their reading pleasure.

Manga cafes can be found at almost all major city centers, usually located close to the train stations. Big cities such as Tokyo and Osaka have a large number of such establishments. Many of them offer a free flow of non-alcoholic drinks and double as internet cafes. Charges are typically about 300 yen per 30 minutes, but most offer packages such as three hours for around 1000 yen.

Maid cafe at Akihabara

Maid Cafes

Maid cafes were originally created to fulfill the fantasies of fans of maid-themed manga and anime. The concept originated in Akihabara at the dawn of the millennium. Ever since, multiple maid cafes have been opened in the area, making Akihabara by far the best place to go for a maid cafe experience. The success of the cafes have inspired emulations at other locations in Japan and other countries such as Taiwan, South Korea, China, Canada and the United States.

The primary characteristic of maid cafes are the waitresses who are dressed typically in costumes as French maids. Food and desserts served at the cafes are usually decorated in a cute way. The waitresses role-playing as maids may engage in friendly conversations or play card/video games with the customers to make them feel at home. Picture-taking is usually forbidden, but some cafes allow customers to have their picture taken with a "maid" for an additional fee.

AnimeJapan

Events

A few manga and anime grand events are held in the course of a year. In particular, the AnimeJapan(formerly known as Tokyo Anime Fair), held annually at Odaiba's Big Sight convention center, is one of the largest animation related events in the world. Another noteworthy event is Comiket, a huge comic book fair which attracts hundreds of thousands of people. It is held biannually, also at Big Sight in Tokyo.

Shopping

Manga and anime related items have a huge following in Japan and have given rise to the setting up of many hobby shops, especially at places like Denden Town of Osaka and, more prominently, in Tokyo's Akihabara district, the mecca of manga and anime.