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Japanese culture has its own unique forms of comic books and animation. Manga (comic books) and anime (animation) are extremely popular in Japan. The earliest animation that is known to have been created in Japan was released in 1917. This early cartoon featured a samurai testing a sword and being defeated. Japanese animation pioneers included Seitaro Kitayama, Jun'ichi Kouchi, and Shimokawa Oten. The modern style of anime was developed during the 1960s. One of the most influential artists is Osamu Tezuka. He followed the example set by Walt Disney's popular animated films and simplified the techniques they pioneered to save time and money. Today's anime is both generated by computers and drawn by hand.

All genres are represented, but science fiction is by far the most popular. Robots, post-apocalyptic metropolises, and motorcycles are all staples of the art form. Manga features similar content. During the decade of the 1970s, manga experienced a drastic increase in popularity, and many of the books were adapted into anime. Tezuka continued to shape the manga and anime industries over the years. Many of the common characters, like giant robots, come from his influence. Giant robots were further developed by Go Nagai and other animators into a new genre called Super Robot. This genre evolved through the work of Yoshiyuki Tomino and became known as Real Robot. The 1980s brought many classic animes in this genre, like The Super Dimension Fortress Macross and Gundam films. Anime obtained vast mainstream acceptance throughout Japan in the 1980s. Although, it was still less popular than manga. Many would argue that the seminal work of both manga and anime is Akira, written by Katsuhiro Otomo and Izo Hashimoto. Akira a long and epic science fiction story that is set in Tokyo that has been rebuilt after a catastrophic disaster.

One of the interesting things about manga is that it is widely-read by women. People who are familiar with American comic books will know that women are a small minority of its reading audience. Popularity with women has helped manga spread rapidly outside of Japan. Manga that is specifically targeted towards women is called shojo (girl) and usually deals with teenagers looking for boyfriends or going through typical teenage experiences, such as having to attend a different school, suffering the trials and tribulations of being bullied, or attempting to make a break from their regular cliques. However, these are not the only stories that are told in shojo. Shojo can also include exciting action stories with strong female protagonists in interesting roles that inspire young women, like those of scientists and warrior samurai. A common characteristic of manga are females with huge expressive eyes. Supernatural elements are also popular in this reading material. Offbeat subjects are another theme that is common in some shojo manga.

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