Women's Manga Beyond Japan:
Contemporary Comics as Cultural Crossroads in Asia

21-23 February 2011
Venue: Seminar Room A and B, AS7,
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore

CONFERENCE ABSTRACTS

In the last two decades, manga has become a global medium, a transcultural phenomenon which has spread all over the world. Manga has generated massive international interest in part due to the gender-related practices and discourses it gives rise to. While American and Franco-Belgian productions were mainly targeted at male readers, manga hold an equal appeal to girls and women, both as creators and readers. Manga for girls and women occupy a particular position: the manga style becomes a favorite means of young women's expression worldwide, and women dominate the realm of fan creations recently; furthermore, girls' and women's comics contribute significantly to the exploration of gender and sexualities, including but not limited to heterosexual femininity.

This symposium will feature a unique gathering of comics scholars and comics artists in examining the onging conceptualization of of manga, which has perhaps proved more inspiring to female readers and authors than any previous form of comics anywhere in the world. The symposium will open with a keynote speech from John. A. Lent, who is renowed as a forerunner in comics scholarship, and presentations at the symposium will focus on female artists and their works in Asia from both scholarly and artistic perspectives. We hope our international and transcultural approach to explore common scholarly interests related to sequential art in general and manga in particular will suggest likely points of common interest for various cultures and readers far beyond Japan.

DAY ONE　(21 February)

Keynote

Yes, There Are Women Cartoonists:
Interview Snippets of Those I Have Known

John A. Lent

Throughout 25 years of interviewing cartoonists worldwide, one question I almost always asked was: "Where are the women cartoonists?" The answers were uniformly, that either the job of being a cartoonist was too risky, or that women did not have the passion and long-term commitment to the profession because of their household responsibilities, and even that women were not vicious enough to be political cartoonists. In other words, they just did not exist in appreciable numbers.

But Japan stood apart in that there were a number of female manga artists, particularly after the 1970s, when the 49ers began to change the nature of previously male-drawn shōjō. One of the 49ers, Satonaka Machiko, I interviewed in 1993. I learned that some Japanese women cartoonists had not only become world famous, but also very wealthy. By the 2000s, large enclaves of women comics artists also existed in South Korea (40 percent of comic books are created by women), Indonesia (most young comics artists are women), the United States, and to lesser degrees, in the Philippines, and elsewhere. Female political cartoonists are still rare nearly everywhere.

In this presentation, I will share some of the information about and opinions from women cartoonists I have interviewed in Africa (South Africa), Asia (Cambodia, China, India, Iran, Japan, Pakistan, Philippines, Taiwan, and Thailand), Europe (Germany, Macedonia, Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine), New Zealand, Latin America (Colombia, Cuba, Uruguay), and North America (Canada, United States). Snippets will be shared about their careers, their breaking the glass ceiling, their problems in a normally all-male profession, and their work habits.

PANEL 1

Paper 1

So, How Was Your Day?

The Emergence of Graphic Diary and Female Artists in Indonesia

Dwinita Larasati

Comics created by Indonesian female artists were hardly known in Indonesia until the 90s, the era of beauty-romantic series, of which styles are heavily influenced by Japanese comics. Female Indonesian artists who created these comics were obliged to use Japanese pseudonyms and had their works formatted in the standards of comics that were widely published in that period: mainly black-and-white, vertically oriented, A6-size paperbacks. Female Indonesian comic artists were virtually non-existent, save those who created religious comics that are segmented into children and teenage markets. Comic readers were offered with very few other options until the late 2000s, when a new genre was introduced in the market: graphic diary. The embryo of Indonesian "graphic diary" – pictorial depictions of daily life, worries and wishes, just like in a personal diary – has actually surfaced earlier in the form of comics-weblogs, created mainly by female artists. However, it was only in 2008 that Graphic Diary (GD) was published as an official label for a new comics genre in Indonesia. The styles and formats of this first generation of Indonesian GD are completely different from the existing comics that were published in Indonesia at that period, with a new visual presentation and a new theme, directed to new market segments. The genre of GD successfully captures a wide audience and has been progressing since, indicated by further publications and recognition of female Indonesian artists. This paper discusses the emergence of Graphic Diary in Indonesia and how Indonesian female artists started to gain appreciation mainly due to their GD works. Moreover, this paper presents an overview of the growth of GD in Indonesia, both as a movement and as an established category of comic publication.

Paper 2

What does it take to be 'Thai shōjo manga'? A Case Study of Localization

Mashima Tojirakarn

Since Japanese shōjo manga was first published in Thailand around 1970, it has become a popular media among girls, and at the same time, severely criticized. In Thailand, where sexual expressions are seen as taboo especially in media for girls, shōjo manga has been condemned for its 'inappropriate' contents. Accusations are mostly based on the idea that shōjo manga stimulates girls' sexual interests (not only with regard to intercourse in particular, but also relationships in general, that is, finding love and intimacy). As a result, Japanese shōjo manga are voluntary restricted by Thai publishers.

This situation of Japanese shōjo manga being thrown into a society with completely different sexual norms gives rise to what could be called localization in shōjo manga's globalization. This localization has two sides: the publishing of Japanese shōjo manga, and shōjo manga drawn by Thai artists. In the first case, publishers act as a filter, as they decide which title should be imported. Their selection has great influence on how Thai readers recognize 'shōjo manga', which is definitely different from Japanese readers' recognition. Secondly, although shōjo manga made in Thailand may look similar to Japanese manga, the fact that their creation is based on a totally different set of social norms results in varieties between the two. This applies not only to the way how artists try to add 'Thai flavor' to their works, which is only the top of the iceberg. More importantly, the social norms hidden beneath stylistic surfaces have to be tracked down.

Introducing Dim-Sum Studio and Kanda Wangdee, the two main artists of Thai shōjo manga, I would like to explain about Thai artists' strategies to add a so-called 'Thai flavor' to shōjo manga. Furthermore, I want to analyze how Thai shōjo manga may serve as a tool to conserve traditional social and sexual norms, a function that may lead to an opposition between Thai shōjo manga and translated Japanese shōjo manga in Thailand.

Paper 3

The Development and Impact of Hybrid Shôjo Manga in Malaysia

Gan Sheuo Hui

This paper examines the historical formation of the uniquely hybrid comics environment in Malaysia by looking at the work of Kaoru, an emerging Malaysian Chinese manga artist who publishes her works in Bahasa (Malay Language) and is supported by readers of several ethnic communities. Since the 1980s Malaysian readers, especially those from the Chinese community, have had access to a wide variety of comics especially those produced in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan. Chinese lianhuantu and manhua that depict classical literature such as *Journey to the West*, *Three Kingdoms*, and *Dream of Red Mansions* were often recommended as constructive reading materials for students because of their cultural values. Hong Kong comics such as *Old Master Q* by Wong Chak and *The Chinese Hero* by Ma Wing-shing have also had their niche market, even though their contents raised the issues of obscenity and violence. On the other hand, the philosophical tone and humor of works by Cai Zhi-zhong and Zhe De-yong from Taiwan have enjoyed popularity among the literati. Among this multicultural mix of comics, Japanese manga was brought to Malaysia through the Taiwanese Chinese language reprints. The works of Kaoru, who is heavily influenced by the international popularity of Japanese shôjo manga, are prominent examples of the spread and evolution of Japanese manga influences outside of Japan. However, in this process, there is has been an intriguing absence of "local style," which raises the question whether precisely this absence has facilitated unintentional crossovers and bondings among fans from different ethnic groups and backgrounds because it allows for avoiding the delicate questions of "authenticity" and "identity" which are especially sensitive issues in Malaysia today.

Paper 4

Contextualizing Cambodian Manga – a Sliver of Shôjo

John Weeks

Is manga truly a global medium? If so, why is it so difficult to find both original manga and locally produced manga in Cambodia, compared to its neighbors? Cambodia has no 'glocal' term for indigenized manga, such as 'manhwa' (Korea) and 'manhua' (Chinese), largely due to the low number of readers and manga-influenced artists. Is the small number of shōjo creators and readers a mere phenomenon in today's market, or a growing trend?

By examining the historical origins of Cambodia's unique 'post-conflict' media landscape, we can see both challenges and opportunities. In part due to a low degree of literacy, a small but measurable amount of manga is produced/ translated in Cambodia. While there is a clear enthusiasm for manga (and anime) amongst Khmer consumers, very little is sold via legal channels. A survey of female college and high school readers demonstrates both enthusiasm and pragmatism in accessing varieties of manga. Interviews with women comic creators reveal both interest, aspiration and emulation.

Khmer reading habits have been strongly influenced by local economics and politics. We find that a shōjo manhwa visual aesthetic is strong in contemporary Cambodian publications – particularly for young women. In contrast, the publication of manga (in translation and by locals) is for the moment limited by financial considerations. Proponents of manga in Cambodia display an admirable (and idiosyncratic) enthusiasm for a stronger appreciation and dissemination of the artform.

DAY TWO (22 February)

PANEL 2

Paper 1

Uniting Various Cultures and Identities:
40 Years Transformation of Women's Manga and Their Voices

Fusami Ogi

In today's world, manga is not just for Japanese. It goes beyond Japan and has begun to create a new generation of manga artists and readers all over the world. Why has manga developed such a huge market? Among many possible reasons, I would like to suggest the following two. First, in Japan, manga is not just for kids, and it offers representations, no less diverse or complex than those of novels and films. And second, manga has given rise to an independent market for girls and women, which exists side by side to that for boys and men.

Shōjo manga, Japanese comics for girls, was not a genre that originally had women as its primary creators. Only when in the second half of the 1960s, more young female authors began their careers, shōjo manga saw a significant change in authorship which resulted in a women-only space – an arena similar to *feminine writing* which the second wave feminist Hélène Cixous envisioned.

In the 21st century, beyond Japan, many women artists and readers are attracted by manga although they are not familiar with the history of shōjo manga. This might be traced back to a feminist voice present in shōjo manga and formed throughout its history, and it raises the question of what might be shared beyond cultures in terms of being "women."

My presentation will focus on women's voices since the 1970s in Japan, exploring a possible link or bridge uniting various cultures and identities beyond Japan, surveying their transformations over forty years.

Paper 2

Shōjo in Outer Space: The Intersection of Japanese Girls' Comics and SF

Shige (CJ) Suzuki

Unlike the history of US comics where female artists and readers have been marginalized and invisible, if not non-existent, the Japanese manga tradition has a relatively long history of female artists and respective readership. Today, a wide variety of differently-targeted comics from shōjo manga, ladies' comics, 4-frame and "essay" manga pieces in regular women's magazines to diverse genres such as romance, drama, horror, fantasy, sports, and BL/yaoi exemplify the flourish of female creativity and growing readership. Historically, the nascent period of shōjo manga in the 1950s was formed by male writers and editors, but we soon witnessed the burst of female creativity in the subsequent period. This generation of female artists drastically innovated manga forms and styles, fitting them to their needs. Among them, popular female manga artists such as Hagio Moto, Takemiya Keiko, Ōshima Yumiko[1] successfully incorporated the genre of Science Fiction (SF) which was (and is) conventionally placed under the "boys' genres." Examining a couple of their sf manga works, my paper argues that their SF manga provide sites in which patriarchal socio-cultural codes and structures are (re-)examined, contested, and even negotiated against the popular claim that their use of SF settings is for imaginary escapism. Consulting utopian and SF genre theories (Tom Moylan and Darko Suvin), my paper aims to articulate the nexus of socio-historical inscriptions of gender/sexuality and the potential of the SF genre which destabilize the normative structure of the postwar Japanese society from which these works emerged.

[1] Please note that names of Japanese artists are given in Japanese order, that is surname before first name, while the names of Japanese speakers appear in Western ordern (following their specific request).

Paper 3

Historical Shôjo Manga: On Women's Alleged Dislike

Yukari Fujimoto

When Ikeda Riyoko was about to start the serialization of her now-famous manga *Versailles no bara* (Roses of Versailles), her editor first rejected the idea claiming that historical narratives would go down badly with girls. But Ikeda promised to publish a hit, or to break the whole thing off otherwise. Her manga ranked top from the very first installment.

In shōjo manga, there are many popular historical narratives. But admittedly, they are different from historical manga for men. First of all, as distinct from series in male manga magazines, shōjo manga show a lesser dependency on specific historical facts, in regard to who did what where and when. There are, for example, many works which basically follow the flow of historical events, but uninhibitedly insert fictitious characters or rewrite the relationships of historic persons. It is also noteworthy that shōjo manga often introduce a "transgender" setting in that respect. In addition, many works aim at conveying the atmosphere of a certain time and society by means of presenting fictional characters against a certain historical backdrop. But this does not mean that women escape into fiction, that they don't like "history." The issue is rather, that many historical manga created by men are heroic tales, whereas female manga artists tend to focus more on common people's daily life. It goes without saying that these common people, and women in particular, were often nameless. And probably because of that lack of "historical facts," historical shōjo manga show an inclination to rely on fictionality. The "transgender" setting which often comes into play, can be regarded as one way for women to reconsider history subjectively. And it is no coincidence either that often an era is chosen in which people's life is dramatically changing, not that of victors or revolutions.

Paper 4

"Silent Music": Desiring-machine and femininity in music-themed manga

Ming Hung Alex Tu

French comics theoretician Thierry Groensteen highlights comics' "sonorous" quality as follows: "the 'text' of comics obeys a rhythm that is imposed on it by the succession of frames—a basic heartbeat that, as is seen in music, can be developed, nuanced, and recovered by more elaborate rhythmic effects stressed by other 'instruments' (parameters)." As a visual medium, one of comics' most distinctive characteristics lies in the "synaesthetic transfer," a manifest potentiality of transmigration of senses (through onomatopoeia, void-crossing, affective graphic patterning and inter-panel rhythms…etc.). The assemblage of image-clusters eventually draws variations and mutations that constantly undergo deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Tracing the trans-sensual movement and affective turn in Takemiya Keiko's *Variations* and Ninomiya Tomoko's *Nodame Cantabile*, this paper seeks to explore Deleuze's notions of refrain and trans-coding in relation to the problematic of femininity in music-themed comics. In addition, it will probe how this "silent" and motionless medium deploys rhizomatic codes to sonorize "delusional" phantasm and translate woman-as-milieu into a peculiar desiring-machine.

PANEL 3

Paper 1

Crossing Double Borders:
Korean Female Amateur Artists in the Globalization of Japanese Dōjin Culture

Hyojin Kim

Dōjin, which literally means 'same person' in Japanese, refers to people who create or self-publish their work (original or parody) mainly in the fields of manga, novel, anime, or game. As Kinsella (1998) articulates, one of the characteristics of this dōjin culture is that more than two-thirds of the population consists of women, in both artists and readers. Among them, fujoshi, literally called 'rotten girls' for their liking of male-male sexual fantasies, are mainstream, which makes dōjin culture highly gendered. Last is that dōjin culture has involved various complicated problems concerning copyright, piracy, obscenity and censorship, because the vast majority of fanzines deal with sexual relationships between protagonists in original texts without permission. Owing to these reasons, dōjin culture has been one of the highly esoteric and segregated spheres in Japanese popular culture.

Recent advances in internet technology and transportation, however, allow non-Japanese native speakers to participate in the Japanese-based dōjin market and internet actively, which I would call "the globalization of dōjin culture." This paper will focus on the trajectory of Korean amateurs, mainly women in their teens and twenties who actively participate in the dōjin market and internet. What are their motivations? What kind of troubles have they experienced? What meaning do they ascribe to their activities? Is there any possibility to create "a community of interpretation" (Kaneda 2007), even beyond national borders? Ultimately, I aim at offering a fresh look at dōjin culture from outsiders' viewpoints.

Paper 2

Exploring Their "Once-Secret" Sphere:
Innovation of Japanese Women Manga Autobiography Works

Kotaro Nakagaki

Within these two decades, autobiographical works by women manga artists have flourished. Approaching the subject from the viewpoints of family issues (marriage, giving birth, and child care), travel, and semi-autobiography, this presentation will examine the styles, methods and contexts of Japanese women manga artist works and compare them to autobiographical works in other media, or American women graphic novel works, including *The Impostor's Daughter* (2009).

Until the 1980s, the direct depiction of giving birth was regarded as taboo. In 1993, comic artist Ishizaka Kei published her groundbreaking *My Baby Came* in a half-comic, half-literal essay style which was effective for breaking through that taboo. Following a similar attitude and manga style are other artists, for example, Uchida Shungiku, creator of *We Are Breeding* (1994–). Like Ishizaka, Uchida also writes in both manga and text-based media about her experiences. The fact, that these works were not published in women's magazines, made them more easily accessible to male readers and even allows for the conclusion that they are exploring their "once-secret" world beyond the women's sphere.

Even reportage and semi-autobiographical manga forms have their own style, grammar, and traditions, and those works necessarily differ from other media, such as films or literary texts. This presentation will analyze the current methods and contexts of autobiography in Japanese women's manga.

Paper 3

Rebel with Causes:
Essay/Gag Manga of Saibara Rieko and Hosokawa Tenten

Akiko Sugawa-Shimada

Although ten years have passed since the enactment of The Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society in 1999, Japanese married women/ housewives/ mothers still struggle with gender inequality. Domestic Violence (DV), single mother, child rearing, depression, suicide and poverty are shared world-wide as women's issues that have been deteriorating. Although female survivors' works to express their experiences are not uncommon, Saibara Rieko and Hosokawa Tenten portray women's daily lives with their families in simple drawing styles and in a uniquely indecent or funny way in the form of essay/gag manga. Through the representations of women, normative gender roles are interrogated and criticized. Saibara suffered as a result of the alcoholism of her father, the gambling of her stepfather, and DV from her alcoholic and dying husband. Her *Mainichi Kasan* (Everyday Mum), however, positively portrayed her rebellious life story. In *Tsure ga Utsu ni Narimashite* (My Partner Became Depressed), Hosokawa illustrates her life with her husband who quit his job due to depression, one of the most serious problems for overworked Japanese salarymen.

Their comical tones on the relationships with their troubled husbands and children appeal to female readers and survivors. How could such Japanese women's gag manga narratives serve to crystallize women's hardships, change Japanese as well as non-Japanese readers' perspectives on them, and offer a site for possible negotiation? How do representations of women in gag manga by women structurally and metaphorically differ from those in visual media platforms such as US TV sit-coms? This paper explores how representations of women in Saibara and Hosokawa's manga serve as a significant site through which issues on current Japanese marital life and family can be traced and how they may empower global female audiences.

Paper 4

Previously Women's Literature, now Women's Manga?
Some Methodological Thoughts from the Perspective of Comics Studies

Jaqueline Berndt

The sheer quantity of female manga artists, readers and fans both in Japan and abroad is obviously reason enough for research on "women's manga." Reflections upon the very notion of "women's manga" do not seem to be necessary, as also the talks at this conference suggest. While there are still some attempts at ascribing an *écriture féminine*, if not a feminist voice to "women's manga," the majority of recent investigations concentrate not on what "women's manga" is in general, but on how it works in particular (acknowledging, for example, local and also conservative impacts). This is reminiscent of the shift in Literary Studies from focusing on "women's literature" to considering a diversity of women writers, women's writing, and women readers. But Literary Studies are only rarely interrelated with Manga Studies in that regard. Many Japanese discussions draw upon Cultural Studies and Sociology favorizing "women" over "comics/manga", while discussions in English show an inclination to privilege non-commercial works which can more easily be related to "subversive aesthetics." Taking Hillary L. Chute's *Graphic Women* (2010) and its non/applicability to "women's manga" as my point of departure, I will pursue the discrepancy in discourse between "women's manga" as an entertaining practice and "women's graphic narratives" as a site of critical intellectual intervention. This discrepancy calls for attention not only when the proliferation of "women's manga" triggers interest in apparently similar, but nevertheless different phenomena abroad. It also invites speculation on what it would actually take to engage in cross-cultural comics/manga theory. Finally, it raises the hope that the investigation of manga/comics in Asia, where fan creations are often prevalent, opens up opportunities to circumvent well-established critical binaries which are linked to the Japan-U.S. constellation, among others, between practice and theory, commerce and art, entertainment and political intervention.

DAY THREE (23 February)

Workshop and Panel Discussion:

"Female Artists Using Manga to Tell Local Stories"

Organizer: Angela Moreno

The globalization of manga has given rise to a considerable amount of research — this much is true, but it is also a fact that most research is focused on readers and fandom. Usually, if the artists become the subject of research, critics point out how their stories are rarely related to local social issues, or local collective memory. Their manga is global, they say, but not really local in terms of contents. Against this background, it is the intention of this workshop and panel discussion to gain some insight about this issue by dealing directly with the artists that make this sort of comics: "manga" that tell "local" stories.

1. Panel Discussion: "Making Manga Outside of Japan as Professionals".

The panel discussion focuses on the challenges and particularities of making manga and being "manga" artists outside of Japan. The main issues and questions to address in the discussion are as follows:

Main issue: Challenges and particularities of making manga and being a "manga" artists within your own community.

Questions:

- What are the main challenges of making Manga in your country?
- How does the industry of comics in your country feel about local artists publishing original manga?
- Are there censorship or legal issues related to comics publishing in your locality? If so, what are they?
- What does it take to make a living out of making comics in your locality?
- What does being a professional manga artist mean to you?
- What goal do you hope to achieve with your work, on a professional and personal level?

- What is the readership/fanbase of manga like in your country?
- Do you personally participate in fan-related activities such as conventions, cosplay, fanart production, and the like?
- It seems that the recent increase of manga artists from outside of Japan is composed almost solely of women artists. Do you agree? Is this the case in your particular country?
- What changes would you like to see in the comic's industry, both in your community and worldwide?

2. Practical Workshop

Option A: Over the course of 1.5 hours, we will make a 1-4 page manga spread using manga as our drawing style, to describe or illustrate something typical from our home countries and/or cultures.

Option B: Create the short manga prior to the conference and use the workshop to discuss these works among the artists, before presenting them to the scholars as the first part of the "panel discussion".

The participating artists choose from this short list of topics one theme for their manga:

1) Describe or illustrate a proverb from your country using manga as your style.
2) Illustrate a typical situation or day as a high school student in your home country.
3) Relate an important historical and/or social event from the collective memory of your home country and how this affected you personally.

Specifications
- Write and draw the comic in your own native language (this includes reading direction). You may use English is you prefer that, but not Japanese. Exception: special effects, signs and onomatopoeia can be in any language.

- Any materials are fine, so long as they are black and white.

Once the work is finished, there will be a 30 minutes discussion focusing on these key issues:
- Could this work have been made the same had we have been in a different place/country?
- Does the language of the comic change anything about it in regards to Style and Form?
- Can this work be correctly understood/ interpreted by people from other countries/cultures were it to be translated to their local language?

Conclusion

Organizer's note on the development of a comic's industry in one's own country

I think it's not so important that we have a mainstream style, per se, but it is important, however, that we do have some sort of platform, an official space where these works can be published and shared around the world, as a marketable product, to help not only the livelihood of the artists, but also the local economy and help raise the cultural awareness of that particular country. Manga is very powerful as a means of communication and even more so as a source of inspiration and influence, therefore it is an ideal tool to help spread knowledge on a global scale, while simultaneously help the development of local cultures.