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# Globalizing Manga: From Japan to Hong Kong and Beyond

Many modern societies produce a form of visual and narrative art that contains a series of printed pictures, usually though not always with text.<sup>1</sup> In English, readers may call it sequential art, comics, comic books, cartoons, cartoon strips, or graphic novels. The French term is *bande dessinée (BD)*, literally, “strip drawing.” In Chinese, commonly used terms are *manhua*, *lian-huantu*, and *car-ton*. The written Chinese characters for *manhua* are the basis for both the Japanese and the Korean terms for comics, which are, respectively, *manga* and *manhwa*.

No matter what it is called, this visual art form in various countries and languages has similarities and differences. Scott McCloud points out that this art form is a communication medium able to convey information and to produce aesthetic pleasure for readers.<sup>2</sup> As a part of the globalization of media, American comics and animation have a long history of exporting such works. Studies find that American comics played an important role in introducing modern comics to Asia, as in Hong Kong in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>3</sup> In Japan, the great comics artist Tezuka Osamu openly acknowledged the influence of early Walt Disney and Max Fleisher animation in his work.<sup>4</sup> Japan’s comics



and animation industry was the most developed among countries in Asia in the early 1960s. John Lent's study of the American animation industry and its offshore factory development in East and Southeast Asia confirmed that Japan was the pioneer in the field in the region at that time.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, when comics started to take off in Japan in the early 1960s, the influences of manga began to spread to its neighbors, and American influence started to wane in the region.

Manga is "one of the features of mass culture in present-day Japan. In 1994, 2.27 billion manga books and magazines were published, making up 35 percent of all material published."<sup>6</sup> The manga market in Japan is big, and genres are highly diversified. However, when examining the exportation of Japanese cultural products, including comics, the cultural economist Dal Yong Jin points out that these products "have hardly penetrated worldwide to the same degree as its [Japan's] economic power and the domestic culture market."<sup>7</sup> It was not until approximately fifteen years ago, partly because of Japan's economic recession, that the Japanese manga industry began to grant copyrights to overseas publishers in Asia and to explore the transnational development of its cultural products.

The influence of manga in Southeast Asian societies is obvious. Outside Japan and Asia, the visibility of manga is clearly emerging into the mainstream media.<sup>8</sup> Comics scholars and cultural studies scholars are optimistic that Japan can be "consider[ed] as another centre of globalization" because of the current global development of manga and anime.<sup>9</sup> This chapter aims to investigate the flow of manga as a cultural product in the global market, from its country of origin, Japan, to the neighboring region and then to the rest of the world. Because of the influence of American and Western comics in manga, one may find that Japanese manga are

undoubtedly deeply imbricated in U.S. cultural imaginaries, but they dynamically rework the meanings of being modern in Asian contexts at the site of production and consumption. In this sense, they are neither "Asian" in any essentialist meaning nor second-rate copies of "American originals." They are inescapably "global" and "Asian" at the same time, lucidly representing the intertwined composition of global homogenization and heterogenization, and thus they well articulate the juxtaposed sameness and difference.<sup>10</sup>

I am interested in exploring these globalization flows by focusing on manga. To begin the inquiry, I open with a brief review of the concept of globalization.

## GLOBALIZATION'S THEORETICAL ISSUES

Globalization is one of today's hottest buzzwords. Stuart Hall reminds us that this phenomenon is nothing new and can be traced back through the long history of Western imperialism.<sup>11</sup> Following this Western imperialism, many people in non-Western countries had experienced different degrees of colonialization over the past few centuries. Anthony Giddens sees globalization as the consequence of modernity in which European nations employed their military and economic power to conquer and rule tribal societies and inferior countries, thus gaining raw materials and securing new markets.<sup>12</sup> Because of its historical origins, globalization was dominated first by Europeans and later Americans. However, as "the emergence of new global communicational technologies has facilitated the questioning of the previously taken-for-granted Western cultural superiority,"<sup>13</sup> the stage of contemporary globalization that David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt, and Jonathan Perraton see is becoming possible. For people today, it is "becoming increasingly impossible for them to live in that place disconnected culturally from the world."<sup>14</sup>

How has cultural globalization occurred in the contemporary context? The well-established anthropologist Harumi Befu sketches out the two routes that cultural globalization has taken, based on the Japanese example. The first route is through the "sojourner—emigrants, students, businessmen, and others" who leave their homelands and settle somewhere else. This circle of native carriers creates a network of global ethnoscapes, "as individuals necessarily take their culture with them." The second is "the non-sojourner route, through which cultural products spread abroad without native carriers." Befu explains how "culture carried abroad by sojourners is then taken up by locals," and "human dispersal is itself part of the globalization process, and the two processes are intricately intertwined, rather than empirically separate and distant." Thus, to complete studies of how cultural globalization proceeds, he emphasizes that "both routes need to be examined together."<sup>15</sup>

Befu provides us with another model for understanding the spread of cultural products outside American and European influences. Globalization is "an outcome of capitalism in the modern period."<sup>16</sup> Cultural products, often considered as additional consumer commodities, are being marketed and promoted like any other products. In the case of anime, Jiwon Ahn notes that "anime can be more fully understood within the web of influences organized according to the successful 'media mix' strategy," which started,

although not necessarily in a chronological sense, from the original manga (comic book) series, then the manga is adapted to animated television series or film features or both formats; also video production of the animated series follows. . . . Almost simultaneously, various goods related to the manga and anime, including original soundtrack CDs, paperback books, fanzines, and numerous character merchandises like action figures, toys, stationery goods, confectionary products, etc., are distributed in the market. Also, the release of computer games based on the manga and anime follows, which in turn increase the sales of the original manga series, magazines, books and videos, and spurs the creation extended.<sup>17</sup>

Similar “media mix strategy” analysis can also be seen in the work of other scholars such as Susan Napier, Mary Grigsby, and Anne Allison on manga studies.

To study the global flow of cultural products such as manga, Befu reminds us that in “non-diasporic cultural globalization it is important to distinguish between the ‘structural and institutional’ and the ‘agency’ levels of discourse.” “Structural and institutional” levels of discourse refer to “government regulations” and “a certain level of economic well-being and lifestyle, including middle-class aspiration and the availability of sufficient disposable income to enjoy imported cultural products.”<sup>18</sup> Arjun Appadurai identifies his five famous flows of structural and institutional factors: ethnoscapescapes, technoscapescapes, financescapescapes, mediascapescapes, and ideoscapescapes.<sup>19</sup> All these aspects, Befu points out, “constitute the structural backdrop for agents to act out their volition, the two are interconnected and influence each other in the realm of cultural globalization.”<sup>20</sup>

**TO JAPANESE READERS, FOREIGN COMICS REPRESENTED EXOTIC CULTURE. IT WAS THE ARTISTS WHO LEARNED FROM THE FOREIGN COMICS FORMAT AND ADAPTED THEM FOR READERS.**

Within these theoretical considerations of globalization, I am interested in seeing how “structural and institutional and the agency levels of discourse” in manga interact with each other in different cultural settings and societies in the contemporary globalized landscape. What made manga able to travel from Japan to the rest of the world? What factors and elements made manga able to communicate across cultures? In Asia, “when considering Japan’s globalization, one normally does not consider black markets. But the huge volume of black marketeering of Japanese products suggests the importance of this process. Copyright infringement is a great loss to

the Japanese economy, but it is an aspect of Japan's globalization."<sup>21</sup> However, in North America and Europe, that case may not be applied. Consider the recent phenomenon of "Asianization of the West," in which we "witness japonisme—diffusion of manga and anime, Japanese cuisine, karaoke, and the like. There is no name for this phenomenon, but it is an obverse of 'Japanization of the West.'"<sup>22</sup> "Precisely how power is woven into the globalization of Japanese-made images . . . are issues few have studied," as Allison points out.<sup>23</sup> This study shares her view. With the understanding of "the assumption that globalization emanates from the West, and that the rest of the world is its recipient," this chapter hopes to contribute "an empirically grounded approach that would avoid these Western-centered assumptions and relativize the overall view."<sup>24</sup>

## ANOTHER CENTER OF GLOBALIZATION

### *The Context of Manga in Japan*

Japan is an island country that has long been open to outside influences, especially China. In the case of manga, Frederik Schodt points out, "no one knows exactly when the first Japanese tried his or her hand at cartooning,"<sup>25</sup> but he sees the possibility that the adaptation of this art form was influenced by early Chinese civilization. The now widely used term for comics and cartoons, *manga*, came into popular use around the mid-1700s, with the print artist Katsushika Hokusai's (1760–1849) work—*Hokusai manga*. Western influences on manga can be traced back to when Japan opened up to the Western world in the Meiji period (1868–1912), in which the first Western-style humor magazine—the *Japan Punch*—was published in Yokohama from 1862 to 1887 by a British artist, Charles Wirgman.<sup>26</sup>

The modernization process in Japan began in the Meiji period, when the country began to look for advanced Western models to adapt for all walks of life. Various Western countries influenced the modern Japanese comics in the form of manga. Leading cartoonists traveled abroad frequently, mostly to the United States, but also to European countries. In an example from 1937—"A New Year's Party for the World's Most Popular Comic Characters"—drawn by members of the New Cartoon Faction Group, we can see "Japanese artists were well acquainted with American comic strips."<sup>27</sup> To Japanese readers, foreign comics represented exotic culture. It was the artists who learned from the foreign comics format and adapted them for readers. As Schodt points out, "Japan's relative cultural isolation has always allowed her

to be more choosy about foreign influences and then to adapt them to her own tastes. . . . Foreign comics were exotic but, in the end, alien.”<sup>28</sup> The most famous children’s monthly magazine, *Shōnen Club*, was established in 1914; *Shōjo Club* formed in 1923.<sup>29</sup> The prewar period marked the beginning of the modern comics of Japan—manga.

After World War II, manga picked up where they left off before the war and rose to a new height. This period (1950s to 1960s) saw the flourishing of science fiction and the rise of “the God of manga,” Tezuka Osamu. Tezuka’s “Atomu Taishi (Ambassador Atom), later changed to Tetsuwan Atomu (Mighty Atom) and then made into animated television as Astro Boy,” marked a milestone in manga history in Japan. This development “reflected the movement to a mass society and the influence of American culture and marked the rise of the manga of contemporary Japan.”<sup>30</sup>

Today, “manga culture is well developed in Japan because of the massive scale of the manga industry, and children and adults alike have achieved a high level of manga literacy.”<sup>31</sup> This culture has “enormous circulation of comic magazines and the large number of stories these magazines carry. Comic magazines fall into some broad categories that can be subdivided into genres.”<sup>32</sup> These genres are classified according to the age and gender of the target readers, as well as personal preferences and tastes. Manga marketed to different readers by age include those for teenage boys, known as *shōnen*; teenage girls, *shōjo*; children, *yōnen*; women, *josei* (or *redikomi*, and *rediisu*); and men, *seinen*. Other main genres included *garo* (alternative, underground, and avant-garde manga), *gekiga* (dramatic pictures), *mahō shōjo* (magical girl), *mecha* (giant robots), *moe/mahō kanojo* (magical girlfriend), *shōjo-ai* (lesbian romance), and *shōnen-ai* (gay romance).<sup>33</sup> All the genres appear in magazines containing multiple series of manga by various artists—and some become *tankōbon*, a compilation paperback-sized volume of a single series originally published in the magazine.

Internally within Japan, manga plays a role to “‘release tension’ from the controlled work/school environment” and “is a silent activity that can be carried on alone” in a relatively small space without bothering others.<sup>34</sup> As Grigsby observes, “There is a long tradition linking manga to the world that is separate from the rationalized work-a-day world and locating it in a space that is removed from the usual constraints of Japanese society.”<sup>35</sup> She points out the social function of manga in Japan is to provide readers with

information about the beliefs, values and practices of the culture in which they are conceived; it is important to recognize that the relationships of

the creators and readers to the larger social, economic and political systems within which a given comic is created, published and made available for purchase are key elements in the production of the comic and in the reproduction of culture.<sup>36</sup>

Japanese manga publishers enjoyed huge domestic successes throughout the decades after World War II. They therefore had little incentive to develop international licensing systems for their manga.<sup>37</sup> The successful exportation of manga within Asia first started in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, and other Southeast Asian countries, and black markets operated in individual locales to distribute pirated copies. To most Asian nations, Japanese modern culture represents a hybrid identity of Western and Asian influences. Like other Japanese cultural products, such as Japanese *dorama* (dramas), manga offers “the possibility of modernity in an Asian image,” and for the Asian audience “with a similar cultural-economic experience, these images become highly identifiable and accessible.”<sup>38</sup>

It was not until the domestic market for manga started to decline in the mid-1990s that publishers began to search for a new market. With the initiation started by other Asian locales in the mid-1960s, Japanese publishers finally organized and made international licensing a part of their business with Asian partners in the late 1980s. Then, with the success of licensing in Asia and Europe, publishers “started to focus on their last resort: entry into the remaining market, the United States, where the population of children is twice as big as Japan’s.”<sup>39</sup> The following section investigates the different time frames of the transnational flow of manga as cultural products to the rest of the world.

## MANGA IN HONG KONG AND SOUTHEAST ASIAN COUNTRIES

When studying the global flow of manga, one has to acknowledge that “a pure ‘Japaneseness’ has gone hand in hand with the acceptance of significant Western influence,” and manga has the characteristics “representing the juxtaposed sameness and difference.”<sup>40</sup> Thus this feature contributed a great deal to the cultural flow globally of manga, but different readers may have different degrees of identification. For Japan’s Asian neighbors, manga can be considered to represent the new image of “Asian.” Befu points out that the “similarity of the cultural assumptions and background—undeniably



makes it easier for some Asian countries to understand and empathize with performances and characters. Physical or biological similarity between the Japanese and neighboring Asians also plays a part.”<sup>41</sup> However, the spread of manga in this region was not smooth. Leo Ching describes the tension surrounding Japanese mass culture in Asia:

Japan’s economic expansion has brought fear to its Asian neighbors, mainly because of the great suffering Japan has inflicted on other Asian countries during World War II and because of Japan’s persisting reluctance to face up to its wartime responsibilities. These concerns are genuine in light of Japan’s prevailing prejudice and insensitivity toward its neighbors. Unlike the Germans, the Japanese government has never sincerely or formally acknowledged and apologized for its wartime brutalities and atrocities.<sup>42</sup>

Because of this unsettled past, especially the Japanese government’s non-admission of guilt, both Taiwan and Korea banned major Japanese cultural products for decades,<sup>43</sup> and so Hong Kong became the earliest outlet of the global flow of manga from Japan.

Hong Kong also benefited from being a British colony after the war; free of political turmoil, capitalism was able to flourish. In the 1950s the territory saw an influx of people, including talented artists and entrepreneurs, from the People’s Republic of China.<sup>44</sup> As the economy progressively recovered, newspapers became more affordable, and demand for four-panel cartoon strips began to pick up. With the increasing demand for cultural products, the first comics boom in Hong Kong occurred from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s.<sup>45</sup> The best-selling serial comics, known locally as *manhua*, were Wong Chak’s *Master Q* (1964), Hui Guan-man’s *Uncle Choi* (1958), Ng Gei-ping’s *Boy Scout* (1960), and Lee Wai-chun’s *13-Dot Cartoons* (1966). Also, children’s magazines such as *Children’s Paradise* (1953), *Little Angeli* (1954), and *Little Friends Pictorial* (1959) played an important role in Hong Kong’s *manhua* history. This first boom was led mainly by local artists previously trained in mainland China and influenced by the United States and Europe. For example, the character of *Little Angeli*, created by the Bao brothers, was modeled after *L’il Abner*, *Popeye*, and other American cartoon characters. Lee Wai-chun, known as the “master of girls comics” in Hong Kong, admitted that she was not keen on the “old-style” Chinese *manhua* drawing style. Instead, she modeled her main character, Miss 13-Dot (Figure 1), after fashion magazines such as *Mademoiselle*.<sup>46</sup>

The introduction of Japanese manga to Hong Kong began around the mid-1960s through pirated copies of the Chinese versions. Works such as

Tezuka Osamu's *Astro Boy*, *Princess Knight*, and *Phoenix*, as well as Mochizuki Mikiya's *Wild 7*, Yokoyama Mitsuteru's *Tetsujin 28-go*, and many others, were directly reproduced from the originals without mention of the artists' names or were completely redrawn by local artists. Many classic manga titles were introduced to Hong Kong through this channel. Fujiko Fujio's *Doraemon* was



FIGURE 1. Lee Wai-chun, Miss 13-Dot Cartoon, 1966. Hong Kong.

known as “Ding Dong” (in Cantonese) for a long time until 1999. *Doraemon’s* first appearance was in *Children’s Paradise* in 1975, in which the manga was redrawn completely in full color and all the characters were given Chinese names (Figure 2). The 1970s saw the waning influence of American cartoons on Hong Kong’s *manhua* and the emerging major role played by manga in both local artists and share of readership. Together with the worldwide “kung-fu fever” led by Bruce Lee, Wong Yuk-long’s (also known as Tony Wong) biggest hit—*Siulauman* (*Little Rascals*)—became the unique Hong Kong martial arts–styled *manhua* (Figure 2). Wong was strongly influenced by Mochizuki in drawing style, but like Japanese *mangaka* (manga artists), Wong learned the format and expression style from manga and gave the story a Hong Kong context to suit the local flavor.<sup>47</sup>



FIGURE 2. Wong Yuk-long, *Siulauman* (*Little Rascals*), 1970s. Hong Kong.

After Wong Yuk-long’s success, Japanese manga became the main inspiration source for local artists. The younger generation artists in the 1980s, such as Ma Wing-shing, Li Chi-tat, and Szeto Kimquo, were manga fans themselves and loved titles like Ikegami Ryōichi’s *Crying Freeman*, *Men’s Gang* (*Otokogumi*), Masamune Shirō’s *Ghost in the Shell*, Yoshikazu Yasuhiko’s *Kidō Senshi Gundam—The Origin*, and Ôtomo Katsuhiro’s *Akira*.<sup>48</sup> The kung fu genre started to decline in the mid-1990s, partly because Japanese publishers’ international licensing system was well in place by the time and the genres of other locally produced *manhua* were becoming more diverse. New genre comics such as “car racing (e.g. *GT Racing*), soccer (e.g. *Monk Soccer*) and yoyo (e.g. *The King of Yoyo* and *The Star of Yoyo*) published since 2000 are

modified from the best-selling Japanese manga, *Initial D*, *Captain Tsubasa* and *Beyblade* respectively.”<sup>49</sup> “Elements of manga penetrate different forms of the comics industry of Hong Kong,”<sup>50</sup> as the Japanese studies scholar Wai-ming Ng observed.

Major local *manhua* publishers owned by local artists, such as Wong Yuk-long’s *Jade Dynasty* and Ma Wing-shing’s *Jonesky*, also published licensed Chinese-version manga to diversify their revenue sources. The biggest of these publishers, Culturecom Comics, has published more than three hun-

dred licensed manga titles since its establishment in 1992. Chinese-version manga has a significant market share in Hong Kong's *manhua* industry, and its influences have become more dominant. Typical Hong Kong *manhua* are published weekly, with an average of thirty-two to forty-eight pages in full color, on 7.5" x 10.75" paper. Now, more and more local artists have adopted the manga book format, with about two hundred pages, black and white, printed on 5" x 7" paper and published monthly. Also, various forms of manga culture, such as comics rental shops, comics Internet cafés, *dôjinshi* (amateur comics), and cosplay (costume play) are common in Hong Kong.

The other major consumption center, Taiwan, also has various forms of manga culture. Because of the government's official ban on Japanese songs, films, and other cultural products before the mid-1980s, the penetration of manga into Taiwan was later than Hong Kong. However, in the 1970s pirated Chinese-version manga were widely published and circulated in Taiwan. Some of the Taiwanese pirated titles traveled to Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia as well. Thus Taiwanese readers were familiar with Japanese manga through various unofficial channels. By the mid-1990s, "despite the official ban, Japanese songs and video programs [could] be heard and rented in every record and video rental store."<sup>51</sup> Top comics magazines featuring Japanese comics, such as *New Youth* and *Youth Express*, have circulations larger than 100,000 copies per issue.<sup>52</sup> Unlike Hong Kong, Taiwan does not have long-running, locally produced comic titles like Wong Yuk-long's *Lung Fun Mun (Oriental Heroes)*, formally known as *Siulauman*, or Ma Wing-shing's *Chungwah Yinghung (Chinese Heroes)*, or a unique comics style like the kung fu genre. For Ng, "Taiwan comics are the most Japanese of all Asian comics. Many Taiwanese comic artists copy the Japanese style faithfully and one can hardly find any Taiwanese elements in their work."<sup>53</sup> Perhaps the one outstanding exception is Zheng Wen, who "skillfully combined Japanese (particularly Ikegami Ryôichi and Kojima Goseki's), and Western comic styles with Chinese painting and calligraphic skills in his comics."<sup>54</sup> His best-known works are *Stories of Assassins (Cike Liechuan)* in 1985 and *Stories of Eastern Zhou Heroes (Dong Zhou Yingxiong Chuan)* in 1990.

IN KOREA, MANGA ARE ALSO WIDESPREAD, EVEN THOUGH THE GOVERNMENT'S OFFICIAL POLICY STATED THAT "PRODUCTION OR DISTRIBUTION OF JAPANESE DRAMATIC MOVIES, VIDEO FILMS, COMICS, CDS, AND RECORDS AS WELL AS THE PUBLIC PERFORMANCE OF JAPANESE POPULAR SONGS ARE NOT ALLOWED."

TODAY, THE PRESENCE OF MANGA IN ASIA IS EVERYWHERE. IN AREAS OF HEAVY CHINESE INFLUENCE THE CONCEPT OF “CULTURAL SIMILARITY” OR “CULTURAL PROXIMITY” CAN EXPLAIN WHY MANGA IS MORE POPULAR THERE.

In Korea, manga are also widespread, even though the government’s official policy stated that “production or distribution of Japanese dramatic movies, video films, comics, CDs, and records as

well as the public performance of Japanese popular songs are not allowed.”<sup>55</sup> Like Taiwan, Korea was a Japanese colony; both are under strong Japanese influence, but at the same time are very cautious of being culturally colonized. As for decolonization, “sometimes it meant ruthless galloping into economic development in an effort to catch up and ‘compete’ with Japan.”<sup>56</sup> Despite that, pirated Korean-version manga still developed into major reading material for the people. And locally produced Korean comics—(*manhwa*)—very much mimic Japanese manga in style and technique. Korean comics and animation artists learn skills firsthand from Japan through offshore animation factories. Both Taiwan and Korea have these factories, which provided opportunities for the local talent to learn from the Japanese directly.<sup>57</sup> With that skill set as the foundation, Korea is now eager to develop its own manga and animation. Korea is particularly successful with online animated short pieces such as *Mashimaro* and *Pucca*. These two product lines became popular in Asia and competed with Japanese ones worldwide. Despite the competition, there is a trend for Korean and Japanese artists to collaborate in comics and animation. For example, *Comic Punch*, a Japanese comics magazine published by Shinchōsha, started to publish in both Japanese and Korean in May 2001. And in 2002 a leading *manhwa* artist, Yang Kyong II, collaborated with Hirai Kazumasa to produce *Zombie Hunter (Shiryōgari)* in Japan.

Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Korea are the first group of countries to experience the transnational flow of Japanese manga outside Japan; the other Southeast Asian countries and the newcomer, China, make up the second group. More than 75 percent of Singapore’s population is of Chinese origin, the rest being Malays, Indians, and others. According to Ng’s March 1999 survey, 68 percent of Singaporeans prefer Japanese manga, 14 percent prefer Hong Kong *manhua*, 13 percent prefer English comics, and 5 percent favor Taiwanese *manhua*.<sup>58</sup> Ng points out that “racial composition, cultural background, value system, religion, and state censorship” have all contributed to the different level of acceptance of manga in Southeast Asian countries.<sup>59</sup> Before the legal licensing of the 1990s, Malaysia and Taiwan were the major sources of pirated Chinese-version manga in Singapore, starting in the early

1980s. Readers are familiar with classic titles like *Astro Boy*, *Jungle Emperor*, *Princess Knight*, *Candy Candy*, and *Doraemon*. However, Hong Kong's kung fu manga also garnered significant attention from readers. Starting in the mid-1980s, Japanese manga began to secure the leading role in the comics markets of Singapore and Malaysia.

One might wonder why Southeast Asian nations were slower to pick up manga. According to Ng, Singapore and Southeast Asia have been strongly affected indirectly by Hong Kong and Taiwan, rather than by Japan directly. In addition, Southeast Asian countries, except for the Philippines, do not have their own mature comics culture and local comics production tradition to counterbalance Japanese manga. Finally, the entry of animated TV series into cable and Malay channels occurred much later than in East Asia.<sup>60</sup> As for China, the country has opened up only relatively recently after decades of communism and isolation, and its economy has been growing rapidly in recent years.

In contrast to Hong Kong's tradition of foreign influence, artists in the People's Republic of China (PRC) have not been able to freely embrace the influence of Japanese manga. Because of government policy, the PRC's *manhua* artists "are under pressure from the government and publishers or production companies to cut down Japanese influence in order to develop Chinese-style comics and animation. Regardless of official policy to promote Chinese-style works, Japanese influence is getting stronger in Chinese comics and animation."<sup>61</sup> Chinese-version manga are becoming more accessible in the PRC, and artists are not shying away at all from having their work seen as mimicking Japanese manga.

Today, the presence of manga in Asia is everywhere. In areas of heavy Chinese influence, such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, and maybe Singapore, the concept of "cultural similarity" or "cultural proximity" can explain why manga is more popular there, "but for Southeast Asia it is not a convincing explanatory tool."<sup>62</sup> It is not known how much Chinese and non-Chinese manga readers in Asia look to Japanese manga, as Japanese readers do, for the release of tension because of work and societal stress, or how much they share the "beliefs, values and practices of the culture" that are projected in the manga.<sup>63</sup> Iwabuchi provides the concept of "culturally odorless," as "Japanese media industries seem to think that the suppression of Japanese cultural odor is imperative if they are to make inroads into international markets." He points out that "Japanese popular culture has been deeply influenced by American media. Rather than being dominated by American products and 'colonized' by America, Japan quickly localized these influences by imitating and partly

appropriating the originals.”<sup>64</sup> Thus, in general, Japanese cultural producers have believed that the foreign influences of their products in Asia will eventually be integrated into locally produced ones. Cultural products such as manga and *dorama* are “the trans-local agents, breaking cultural boundaries as they bring to the fore the essential human desire for love, fantasy and aspiration, which might be veiled in the urban reality.”<sup>65</sup> For most Asians, Japanese manga, like other Japanese cultural products, are the “hybridization of modernity (that has been stereotyped as ‘Western’) with more traditional attitudes (that are identified as ‘Asian’),” as well as “the representation of modern living.”<sup>66</sup> Therefore, although Asians are in general cautious about Japan’s past colonization in the region and the invasion of cultural imperialism, they feel they are “completely ‘free’ and apparently autonomous agents who make choices without any ideological assumptions in itself as ideology.”<sup>67</sup>

## THE PRESENCE OF MANGA IN EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

We can easily ascribe the reason for the popularity of manga in Asia to Japanese “cultural similarity” or “cultural proximity” to its Asian neighbors. However, this explanation cannot be applied to manga’s penetration of non-Asian cultural markets, such as Europe and North America. For regions with strong Asian communities, like Hawai’i, the West Coast of the United States, and two major Canadian cities, Vancouver and Toronto, manga have been dispersed via Asian immigrants. In that case, the effects of cultural similarity can still apply to those Americans and Canadians with Asian ancestors. The nonsojourner route of how manga spread beyond Japan and Asia into European and North American markets in the 1990s is interesting to study. Japanese media industries by that time had already utilized the “culturally odorless” principle in their manga and animation-related products in Asian markets, toning down the “Japaneseness” of their products. Now they were ready to explore the possibilities in non-Asian markets.

Non-English-speaking European countries, such as France, Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, and Italy, have their own comics cultures and are relatively open to outside cultural influences, compared with the United States. In the mid-1990s, it was not a surprise when the Japanese company Bandai, handling *Sailor Moon* distribution worldwide, became successful with *Sailor Moon* animation and products in most of Europe.<sup>68</sup> On the other hand, *Sailor Moon* was considered “ultimately failed” in the U.S. market because “it never

really registered with the tastes and desires of American girls. In short, Sailor Moon was perceived as being too ‘different,’” as Allison observed.<sup>69</sup>

Without a doubt, the American market is less tolerant of “alien” cultural products, and almost all foreign cultural products must be adapted and altered to suit local tastes. Even though the Japanese media industries are well trained in “culturally odorless” awareness, it still required a certain learning curve. As some prominent comics scholars point out, the acceptance of Japanese manga and animation by the American audience has been changing in recent decades. This trend reflects the successful marketing mix strategy employed by the Japanese cultural producers since the 1990s. It was also because the domestic manga market in Japan has been declining since the mid-1990s, making publishers seriously push for international licensing and start to focus on the U.S. market.<sup>70</sup>

The new generation of Japanese publishers now has a more conscious marketing strategy and is eager to build distribution networks with local comics publishers, which makes manga books and magazines more accessible to potential readers. Indeed, international licensing for translation in different languages and enhancement of distribution networks are important factors for the global flow of manga. In France, comics are highly respected as an art form and have a long tradition. With a strong and diverse comics market, there are more than ten established French-version manga distributors. Since the 2000s, manga has received more attention, and many titles have reached France. This market is not restricted to the more popular offerings but also includes some nonmainstream genres in Japan. Independent *mangaka*, such as Taniguchi Jirô, are good examples of this phenomenon. In addition, there is a recent local movement, known as *la nouvelle manga*, started by Frederic Boilet, who combined the French and Japanese comics traditions into his comics.<sup>71</sup>

Germany also has German-version manga distributors in place, including Tokyopop Germany, established in summer 2004, and Carlsen Comics, which introduced *Dragon Ball* to Germany in 1997. The first German manga magazine, *Banzai*, targeted at boys, was published in autumn 2001; the second manga, *Daisuki*, intended for girls, was published in the beginning of 2003.<sup>72</sup> The April 2005 issue of *Banzai* (Figure 3) includes popular stories like *Hunter X Hunter*, *Shaman King*, *Is*, *Hikaru no Go*, and *Naruto*. Other manga-related activities such as fan clubs, fan art, and manga shops are active in Germany. Italy has at least seven major Italian-version manga distributors.<sup>73</sup> Spain has at least two Spanish manga distributors, with current popular titles including *Naruto*, *Saint Seiya*, *Samurai Deeper Kyo*, and *Inu Yasha*, distributed by Glenat.





FIGURE 3. *Banzai*, April 2005. Germany.

Even a newly opened-up Eastern European country like Poland has the most current popular manga titles available in Polish through the international licensing system.

In the United States, there is an obvious increase of licensing publishers and titles in response to the demands of the past five years. The English-version manga, known as graphic novels, are now available not only from specialty stores but also in the regular bookstores, typically with a separate shelf and section. The Los Angeles-based publisher Tokyopop released two hundred titles in 2002 and doubled its number of titles in the next year. In November 2002, San Francisco-based VIZ Media, a major American manga

publisher, published the first Japanese manga magazine in English, *Shonen Jump*, in the United States. Like the original Japanese version, the magazine contains serial stories to build reader loyalty. The initial issue, which sold out 250,000 copies instantly, has seven serial stories, including three hit TV animation programs in the United States: *Dragon Ball Z*, *Yu Gi Oh!* (an alternate romanization of the Japanese title *Yū gi ô*), and *Yu Yu Hakusho* (an alternate romanization of *Yū Yū Hakusho*). The May 2003 issue's distribution was 350,000 copies, and the magazine's distribution is expected to increase to 1 million in three years. The marketing objective of the American version of *Shonen Jump* is to make manga another style of comic known to as many Americans as possible.<sup>74</sup> For female readers, the first American *shōjo* manga, *Shojo Beat*, hit American newsstands in July 2005 (Figure 4). That issue includes six of the hottest *shōjo* manga from Japan: *Absolute Boyfriend*, *Baby & Me*, *Crimson Hero*, *Godchild*, *Kaze hikaru*, and *Nana*.<sup>75</sup> Both specialized American manga magazines continue the same formula used in Japan; when the serial stories are finished, an independent edition in the format of a "graphic novel" will be published for the fans to own the whole story in one volume (*tankōbon*). This strategy has successfully cultivated manga culture in Japan for decades. American comics publishers are now experiencing booming sales in graphic novel titles, and sales have been increasing rapidly since 2002.<sup>76</sup>

Studies on how Japanese cultural products are consumed by non-Asian audiences beyond Asia are still limited. American scholars such as Susan Napier, Mary Grigsby, Anne Allison, Kaoru Misaka, and Jiwon Ahn have contributed to an introductory understanding of how the American audience circulates and consumes manga and anime. In her summary of Napier's studies on anime, Allison says that American "fans are engaged in a relatively new form of spectatorship, that of the committed fan, whose interaction transcends issues of national boundaries." She found both children from Japan and the United States "say much the same thing; those characters and stories they like the best are the ones in which they can see or feel something of themselves—by identifying, for example, with a lead character—but that also have the power to transport them to another world—a fantasy or dream world."<sup>77</sup> Her observation echoed with Napier's conclusion that the "issue of Japaneseness is not the major attraction of anime for most of the respondents."<sup>78</sup>

In fact, less "Japaneseness" is better for the transnational circulation of manga and anime, which Japanese cultural producers learned from *Sailor Moon's* failure and *Pokémon's* triumph. It is the "culturally odorless" that Japanese publishers wanted to see—a "creation of imaginary world(s) that strike fans with a mixture of familiarity as well as fantasy."<sup>79</sup> For the American



FIGURE 4. *Shoyo Beat*, the first American *shōjo* manga magazine, 2005. United States.

audience, they might have found “a mixture of familiarity” in Japanese manga from their imaginations and the collective memories within their own cultural context. Indeed, Japan has a long history of learning from American comics, cartoons, and animation. What matters are the forms of manga and the “structures of common difference”<sup>80</sup> that capture “one’s imagination yet also ‘makes sense.’”<sup>81</sup> Like manga readers in Asian countries, both European and North American manga and anime audiences “can take on Japanese culture without loving Japan. This becomes clear when one realizes that Japanese presence and influence are structural phenomena. Loving or not loving Japan is a matter of individual response.”<sup>82</sup> However, there is still no fixed successful formula on “familiarity and fantasy” that can be guaranteed to work every time. To Japanese cultural producers, the transnational flow of its products is still a hit-and-miss event, although the success rates have been increasing.

## CONCLUSION

To continue the inquiry into the cultures of globalization, Ahn seeks inspiration from Appadurai’s “hopeful vision of the political future of the imagined

communities of global media reception, which he believes to be capable 'of moving from shared imagination to collective action' and of 'creating the possibility of convergences in translocal social action that would otherwise be hard to imagine.'<sup>83</sup> Indeed, we can now see the emerging global communities of manga where readers share certain collective action, such as reading the same manga titles at the same time, collecting the same trading cards, mimicking the hottest *mangaka's* work, and so on. According to Ahn, the medium of anime is "the most personal yet social activity, and the most schizophrenic yet possibly liberating experience in the context of globalization."<sup>84</sup> Manga can certainly fit well into her observation. Also, Allison discovered that American children who play with Japanese cultural products have "a greater openness towards, and awareness of, Japan."<sup>85</sup>

Given the long worldwide domination of American cultural products, the challenge being posed by manga and anime can be seen as a good sign that the world is developing more balanced and tolerant practices. At the moment, Japanese cultural products are the only major alternative choice outside the American cultural hegemony. Although the future of Japanese cultural products seems promising, some critics such as Dal Yong Jin are not too optimistic about the future of Japanese global cultural power. Jin reviews Japan's overall global economic power and concludes:

Japan's GDP stood in second place with \$4.75 trillion in 2001, and Japan was the world's second largest exporter of high-technology products. In the 1998–99 fiscal year, Japan exported \$126 billion worth of high-tech products, just behind the US with \$206 billion. . . . Japan boasts the second largest cultural consumption market in the world. . . . Japanese cultural products, however, have hardly penetrated worldwide to the same degree as its economic power and the domestic cultural market. Japan's revenue from cultural product exports is relatively low compared to other Western countries and several East Asian countries. . . . The general notion that cultural power is quite comparable to economic power does not seem to be applicable in the case of Japanese cultural influence in the global cultural market.<sup>86</sup>

He points out that "there are several reasons for the weakness of Japanese cultural power—political and economic as well as cultural reasons: Japan's experience of colonialism; the US's cultural dominance; language and limited diasporas; and the paucity of government cultural policy."<sup>87</sup> He sees "there is only a slight possibility that Japanese cultural products would penetrate worldwide within at least 10 years, mainly because the Japanese economy is

still in its worst economic recession. For the Japanese government, cultural product development and export are not a high priority. After the recovery of its economy, Japan's second major priority is preparing for the silver society," and "Japan will be on the edge of the global cultural business in the near future."<sup>88</sup>

However, he does acknowledge, "Japanese cultural products have increased in their influence in international communication over the past decades."<sup>89</sup> Nowadays, it is safe to say, "Japan is a manga superpower. It has replaced the United States as the world's largest exporter of comics and animation."<sup>90</sup> It is still impossible for a lot of other Japanese cultural products, such as *dorama*, pop songs, and movies, to penetrate the American market without severe alteration and localization. The global phenomenon of manga triggered discussion of the possible Japanese challenge to American cultural hegemony. Here I share the view of Harumi Befu, who sees "Japan as another center of globalization," and agree that "by examining Japan's cultural globalization we should be able to uncover processes of globalization that will help to build a general theory of how globalization occurs."<sup>91</sup> We should question, like Befu, "why 'universal theory' or concepts applicable globally must be born out of Western experience" and why not "developed out of Japan's globalizing experience, to be applied to the rest of the world."<sup>92</sup> Befu argues that "Japanization" is a unique concept with little use in analyzing other cases of globalization, but it is parallel with such concepts as 'Westernization' and 'Americanization,' which have sometimes been equated with globalization. If they represent an aspect of globalization, so does Japanization."<sup>93</sup> He foresees that "sinicization" may be the next global cultural power after "Japanization," as China emerges as an economic superpower. His prediction of the penetration of Chinese cultural products in the global market may take some time to actualize. The role of Japanese manga in counterbalancing Western cultural imperialism and understanding of globalization theory cannot be overstated. More than just an alternative to the hegemonic position of the West, the global flow of manga is the new era of "imagined communities of global media reception."<sup>94</sup> Without question, more studies on this aspect of globalization are needed.

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