MANGA, WHICH MANGA?
PUBLICATION FORMATS, GENRES, USERS

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ABSTRACT

Since the beginning of the 21st century, manga has gained global renown to such an extent that its name is now surfacing in various discourses. What is more, politicians, journalists, and even academics show an inclination to generalize about manga. In light of both the practical political and scholarly consequences which such generalization has, this chapter calls for differentiation, focusing on manga as media. Methodologically informed by the fields of manga studies, art history, and media culture, the notion of “media” applied here conjures the aspects of material support and technology, traditionally referred to by “medium,” with a consideration of the institutions, practices and interrelations underlying the production, distribution, and consumption of manga. Starting from historical notions mediated by the term manga, this chapter highlights how manga texts are conventionally positioned by format and site of publication, gendered and thematic genres, associated target groups and possible usages. Having proposed a tripartite classification, this chapter finally identifies a specific kind of manga that is in demand by fans on a global scale, a kind which not only matches the interactivity of the age of the internet, but historically also rests on a remarkable internal receptivity to non-Japanese comics in Japan.

INTRODUCTION

Since the late 1990s Japanese comics have been proliferating to such an extent that their name, manga, is now circulating as a neologism in many languages. Manga has also become an easy-to-grasp label, deployable for a wide range of purposes. Japanese government institutions, for example, have come to use manga as an umbrella term when addressing soft power and the global dissemination of Japanese media products. In December 2015, a federation of Diet members, with former prime minister Aso Taro as highest advisor, launched a proposal to establish a National MANGA Center in 2020, acknowledging that manga, as well as anime and video games, are by now Japan’s main culture, calling for political initiatives to increase the nation’s competitiveness and promote tourism (Editorial 2015). At the same time, manga is being regarded as a stronghold of child pornography, especially by non-Japanese readers from North America and Australia. In June 2014, the Japanese Diet passed a bill, which sanctions the possession of child pornography, but makes an exemption for manga and anime. This has caused international outrage. During a brief visit to Japan in October 2015, the UN’s envoy on child protection, 71-year-old Dutch jurist Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, called for banning sexually abusive imagery of children, specifically targeting manga (McCurry, 2015).

As contradictory as these positions may seem, they have at least one thing in common: their sweeping generalization of manga. Such generalization, however, does not only subordinate comics to political interests, it also misses the fluidity of manga in contemporary Japan. The maturation of manga as an industry and culture since the 1990s has given rise to an enormous range of expressions, readings, and other usages. Today’s manga is polycentric, and as such it calls for differentiation. Precisely this shall be demonstrated below. Taking its departure from a brief discourse-related overview of the term manga, this chapter focuses on publication formats, genres, and their addresses, before finally touching upon manga as global media. Thus, its underlying approach is formed by media-studies concerns, which prevail in Japan-based manga research in contrast to the majority of English-language comics criticism with its roots in literary studies, and Japanese-studies cultural anthropology with its inclination to dissolve manga (and anime) in “popular culture,” reducing it to a mere mirror of society (Berndt, 2013, p. 66-67; Berndt, 2014b).

THE TERM: FROM VISUAL ART TO GRAPHIC NARRATIVE

The word manga (which is used here, in line with Japonological custom, without an “s” in the plural) was initially written with two Sino-Japanese characters: 漫 (manga: diverse, random, rambling, capricious) and 畫 (ga: line drawing, picture). This compound has been translated as “funny, spontaneously drawn pictures.” Artist historian Tsuji Nobuo, for example, explains that the word manga meant “random sketches” in the 18-19th centuries whereas it translates now as comic strip, or more precisely “cartoon-like art created in Japan or rendered in a Japanese style” (Tsuji, 2001, p. 54). The randomness mentioned by Tsuji invokes uncalculated visualizations of things and thoughts in quick brushstrokes. Thus, however, was an ascription to the Hokusai Manga by 19th-century Europeans, who failed to determine the criteria underlying this pictorial reference book and assumed an “oriental” spontaneity (Guth, 2015, p. 59). From a contemporary perspective, the immediacy and quickness implied in the conventional definition can also be regarded as suggesting movement beyond any...
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representation of intent, yet more than to the moving line, discourse has tied manga to laughter. The bilingual Dictionary of Japanese Art Terms defines it as, “Comic pictures intended to make the viewer laugh,” continuing with the reservation that “it means, however, free pictures of self-indulgence in case of Holkasi’s Manga” (1990, p. 599). Katsumasa Holkasi (1760-1849) began to publish his Manga in 1814; fourteen more volumes were to follow until 1878 (cf. Bouquillon and Marquet, 2007). Holkasi did not count the word manga through. Historians from as far back as 1928 have pointed to much earlier examples of its use (Hosokibara and Mitsuhashi, 1928, p. 124). When the term manga first spread in the early 19th century, it was primarily used to indicate a large and wide assortment of drawings or an extensive catalog of motifs, which did not necessarily serve a humorous purpose (Miyamoto, 2003, p. 322). Pictures with a comic orientation were more specifically referred to as giga or tobo-e, the latter alluding back to the Buddhist abbot Toba Soji (1053-1140), the purported creator of the Frolicking Animals Scrolls (Saiji jinbutsu giga). While both tobo-e and giga already had a long tradition in Japan, manga was a new term. In reference to Chinese painting treaties, it designated a compilation of models for amateurs and trained professionals alike. This educational function, in addition to the missing emphasis on storytelling, distinguishes the early manga from Japan’s graphic narratives as they developed after World War II. In terms of the production process, both their deliberate rendering and the team work required also set post-war manga apart from random, spontaneously drawn sketches.

Around 1900, Holkasi’s and others’ collective term manga changed into the signifier of a certain style of drawings, that is, satirical and comical pictures (fukikobito no gyo). This manga emerged from modern newspapers. Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901), one of the leading intellectuals of his time and publisher of Jiji Shizyo (Current Affairs News), issued a textual column called Migosi and employed his America-experienced nephew Inazumi Ippyo (1865-1904) to add cartoons to it. In 1895, Inazumi released a collection of his drawings under the name of manga, and two years later he presented some so-called manga in the second exhibition of the White Horse Society (Hokubakai), a group of Western-style painters. Noteworthy here is the fact that modern manga was institutionally affiliated to painting (cf. Miyamoto, 2002). Throughout the 19th century reading, watching and talking about cartoon-like images had intermingled, but at the century’s end, manga came to be recognized as a predominantly visual art which addressed itself to an individual viewer. This shift was epitomized by Kitazawa Rakuten (1876-1955), who took over the cartoon section in Jiji Shizyo when Inazumi fell ill. In 1902, Kitazawa was given a Jiji Manga (Current Affairs Cartoons) section in the Sunday supplement. But by calling his illustrations and comic strips manga he did not aim at the Holkasi tradition, he rather distinguished his drawings from the caricaturistic ponch-e (ponchi: Japanese for Punch, the British journal which served as the model for The Japan Punch by Charles Wigram, 1862-87) (cf. Duns, 2013; Stewart, 2014). In the late 19th century, the term ponch-e replaced tobo-e before manga assumed the modern meaning of satirical picture or cartoon, as it predominantly signified when manga ultimately became part of everyday public in the 1920s. Ronald Stewart notes that “Rakuten would repeatedly express his distaste for Edo-period visual culture and for the form that shared its outdated traits, ponchi. In his eyes, these were vulgar, too worldly, incapable of direct [pictorial] expression” (2013, p. 34).

In the 1920s, in the wake of newspaper comic strips and satirical journals, the term manga came into wide use, but it was to change its meaning fundamentally after World War II when Tezuka Osamu (1928-1989) refined earlier attempts at so-called story-manga by

profiting from references to modern European novels and American cinema. Disney’s animated movies to begin with, rather than traditional painting or calligraphy. Henceforth, manga assumed the meaning of graphic narratives, which is to say that its other meanings disappeared. Throughout the 20th century, the word manga denoted cartoons, caricatures, comic strips (koma manga) as well as graphic narratives serialized in weekly or monthly manga magazines. Since the 1960s, these narratives have been often indicated by rendering the word manga in katakana syllabary, and in this form, the word sometimes serves as a collective term for all kinds of comics, regardless of nationality. The word was further used for animated films (manga eiga, TV manga) before the name anime gained currency in the 1970s. Due to the global spread of Japanese comics since around 2000, the romanized version of the word has found entrance into Japanese script (like in the name of the federation mentioned at the beginning of this chapter). Today, manga generally signifies serialized entertainment fiction in comic form that integrates image and text with the help of a vast variety of balloons, pictograms and modifying lines, fonts, and graphically rendered sound effects. Used in a narrow sense, manga has come to refer to a specific illustration style and character design, especially abroad. This chapter focuses on neither newspaper cartoons, comic strips, nor “manga-anime” as a finish and industrial compound, but rather magazine-based graphic narratives.

“MANGA PROPER”:

MAGAZINE-BASED GENRES AND BEYOND

Many people picture manga as a more or less uniform, easily recognizable body of media texts (despite the fact that anime exhibits a much higher degree of visual consistency due to its conditions of production). Manga are usually assumed to be graphic narratives that invite readers’ immersion, first of all, by means of attractive characters. Such characters address their consumers with huge eyes and other signifiers of cuteness, breathtaking long legs or compressed doll body, seemingly bland hair and other similarly de-Japanese markers of physical difference. Manga is typically characterized further by speedy consumption and semiotic excess. In addition to its monochrome rendering, it is expected to exhibit an extraordinary variety of comic-specific symbols and typefaces as well as fascinating double-spread compositions. Often, complex panel layouts undermine the grid of the traditional comics page while guiding the reader’s gaze efficiently through potted-centered narratives, whose dynamic impression is being achieved by alternations between rushing forward and pausing. This kind of manga functions less as a visual art, it rather leans on a visual language: pictorial elements are supposed to be read, or better, quickly grasped, rather than watched and contemplated. Moreover, a language can be learned. Manga is defined by some as a kind of comics that prompts copying, and it is also a well-known fact that How to Draw publications have served as a major gateway for establishing manga firmly within youth cultures worldwide (cf. Bainbridge and Norris, 2010). In other words, “manga proper” consists, first and foremost, of highly conventionalized signs, which are memorized by artists

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* Cf Neil Cohn, Chapter 8 “Japanese Visual Language” (2012, p. 153-171). "Comics are not a language, but they are written in a visual language of sequential images." (2013, p. 2)

* According to recent English language comics studies, the word “comics” is used for both singular and plural here.
and readers in order to be replicable and to be shared. For many dedicated fans, a single manga’s intrinsic quality as a narrative work is less important than its potential as a text to invite participation, facilitate relationships, and mediate taste communities. A typical manga is therefore not a self-contained “graphic novel” by a single author, but something like a TV series, although unfolding in close relation to audience response to a higher degree. Such escape the modernist concept of originality, their appeal owing more to cultural circumstances, to being revisited and having the value of individual texts measured by emulation and parody.

What is held to be “manga proper” leans heavily on popular series first published in specialized anthologies. After magazines for children successively increased the amount of pages dedicated to manga during the 1950s, a new publication format was established in 1959, the manga weekly, taking its departure from the concurrently launched Shōnen Magazine (Kodansha) and Shōnen Sunday (Shogakukan). Not quite a decade later, in 1968, the leading publishers introduced book editions under the name of komikku (comics), beginning with Jump Comics and Margaret Comics. Running to approximately 200 pages, these bound volumes (tankōbon) have made the cheaply produced, low-price and highly volatile manga profitable. The close interaction between magazines as market makers on the one hand and tankōbon as profit generators on the other is the core of the exceptionally successful manga business model between 1970 and 2000.

The magazine format gave rise to manga's conventional genres, which have been less defined by thematic content (such as science fiction, fantasy, etc.) than age and gender, namely shonen (boys), shōjo (girls) (cf. Berndt, 2014a), seinen (youth), and Josei (women). One of manga's most striking particularities is the “gendering” by publication site and, closely related, style. This is not to say that series targeted to men are exclusively being read by men. However, in terms of the discourse, the standard of manga has manifested itself as that of the male genres. Thus, it does not come as a surprise that genre borders are mostly crossed by women, who may read certain manga—mostly seinen titles—as “universal” works or reframe heteronormative shōnen titles parodically as male-male romances. Fanish activities like the latter have spawned a new commercial genre since the 1980s, now known under the name of Boys Love in Japan (and yaoi abroad). This actually represents a thematic category. Other thematic categories that have come to the fore in the domestic Japanese market are, for example, Horror, Science Fiction, and Gag. Typical of manga proper, however, are works that intertwave, at least in part, a mishmash of those genres. This can be spotted already in series of the 1970s. Ikeda Ryouki’s classic series The Rose of Versailles (1972–73), for example, switches abruptly from the romance to the gag register and then again to the historical mode inserting explanations on the French revolution, which the series' young female readership withstood because they were compensated with images of fashionable costumes and admirable characters. Nakazawa Keiji’s Bettegao (1973–87), the famous semi-autobiographical account of the Hiroshima A-Bomb dropping and the subsequent struggle of its victims, contains depictions which are reminiscent of the Horror

5 Established proper names, including place names, are romanized without matron on vowels.

6 Cf. Utsu (2009), who also links the emergence of the shōnen manga genre to the magazines of the 1960s.

Symptoms include the influence by politicians and civil servants to change male artists who employ a generically male style, such as Kazuo Umezu, who was commissioned to create the 14-page Tokyo X Days manga, a supplement to the Tokyo Metropolitan Government's brochure Tokyo Tours (Reprinted Tokyo 2015; available online in Japanese, English, Chinese, and Korean).

7 A supplement to the Tokyo Metropolitan Government's brochure Tokyo Tours/Diary Prepared by Tokyo Shibuya District Preparatory Committee (2015), which provides a catalogue-like round-up within a given geographic field, books are capable of lowering the gender-specific barriers between genres. This again may invite misapprehensions, especially abroad where the traditional magazine-based manga genres have never been as firmly rooted as in Japan. If, for example, a male reader who has never heard of the Boys Love genre, blunders into such a manga, he may perceive the stereotypical pairing of an under-age debauch and his older-aged object of desire as politically incorrect, not noticing at all that he holds the product of a heteronormal female fan culture in his hand. In other words, the inflex of the magazine format has been so profound that even in book
form manga may stay closely connected to a specific readership, with a particular horizon of expectations, shaped by specific genre conventions.

Yet adult readers may also reach for the new genre of **essay manga**. Using simple vertical strips that stretch over only a few pages, it relates almost diary-like episodes, be it life with a depressed and therefore unemployed husband, a strong-willed child, or a died-with-their-heel-down husband. In essay manga, the satirical comic strip, which has lost the role it once assumed in daily newspapers, seems to recur, albeit autobiographically tinted and at different times in women’s magazines, city journals, as an epilogue or bonus episode added to manga tankōbon editions, and sometimes as a series in manga magazines. Neither plot-drawn like long-running graphic narratives not bound to one publication format, essay manga holds the potential to carve out a future for Japan’s graphic narratives beyond the conventional genres.

**A DIFFERENT GENERIC FABRIC**

Besides entertaining fiction there is another genre, which circulates primarily in book form, although not that of the manga tankōbon – *gakushū manga* (literally meaning “manga to learn something”). In order to promote the view that entertainment and education are not mutually exclusive, especially with an eye to foreign countries, The Nippon Foundation launched its Manga Education project in 2015. Under the auspices of veteran manga artist Satoshi Machiko (b. 1948), a hundred titles were selected, including the above-mentioned *Roses of Versailles* and * Barefoot Gen*. Remarkably enough, the list does not include any *gakushū manga* in the strict sense, that is to say, publications tagged as such, produced directly in book form without prior magazine serialization and released by a publisher not specialized in manga. Sometimes drawn by artists unknown within the field of graphic narratives, these *gakushū manga* have hidden non-spectacular cover designs, which at times even indicate the name and affiliation of an academic supervisor. Such comics have not necessarily been regarded as “manga proper” by regular consumers, manga researchers included. In contrast, foreign critics who are unfamiliar with not only the visual language used in manga but also the general biculturalism of Japan’s manga culture may find educational productions most authentic, as has happened with respect to manga adaptations of the *Tale of Genji*.11

**Gakushū manga** appear in a vast variety of forms, stretching from literary digests to science textbooks, and, in terms of style, from entirely fictionalized accounts to talking-heads, occasionally including hybrids of purely textual passages and a few paneled comic pages in between. Japanese “science comics,” meant to support school education and characterized by a more or less patronizing attitude, can be traced back to the late 1950s (cf. Ito, 2015), and the Japanese equivalent to *Classics Illustrated*, that is, editions of *Famous Literary Works in Manga*, took off in the mid-1950s. But the breakthrough for *gakushū manga* enjoyed by salarymen as comics (and not as a supplement to, or surrogate of, schoolbooks) was heralded by renowned manga artist Ishimomori Shotaro (1938–98) and his production studio. Their *Japan, Inc.: Introduction to Japanese Economics* (1986–88) was not only one of the first to cross borders, it also seems to be the only *gakushū manga* available in Western languages. Within manga/comics studies this genre also remains a blind spot, which is not to say that the phenomenon as such can be easily passed over: educational, or informational, comics are gaining ground in Europe and North America, and they play a crucial role in the South Korean manhwa and Chinese-language *manhua* industries. But while educational manhwa are being exported within Asia to a significant extent, Japan’s *gakushū manga* stay a domestic phenomenon and as such usually go unheeded by foreign readers.

Leaving the categories of the domestic industry aside and considering globalization, manga presents itself as a tripartite field. The first and major part is dominated by graphic narratives serialized in major manga magazines such as *Shonen Jump*, which circulate abroad in tankōbon editions and exhibit what is widely recognized as “manga style.” Inaugurated around 1996 by Toriyama Akira’s *Dragon Ball* (1984–95) and maintained by front-runners like Oda Eiichirō’s *One Piece* (1997–) and Kishimoto Masashi’s *NARUTO* (1999–2014), the global boom of this kind of manga has won over non-Japanese teenagers to reading comics. While interlinked with anime, light novels, video games, and merchandise, to form just one part of larger media-max franchises, the global boom of this kind of manga has given rise to a whole new form of “alternative comics,” namely fan-made, self-published manga (*dōjinshi*).

In the early 21st century, the interrelation between industrial mainstream and fan culture has reached a level which no longer allows the latter to be characterized as small-scale, amateurish, or entirely not-commercial, at least not in Japan. The first kind of manga, or “manga proper,” further includes so-called Global Manga, defined by Casey Brienza as “published sequential art products of a sometimes globalized, sometimes transnational, sometimes hyperlocal world in which something its producers and consumers might call ‘manga’ can be produced without any direct creative input at all from Japan” (2015, p. 4). Frustrated, however, are concerned with manga’s relation to Japan, first foremost in the form of a familiar style and storytelling. This is suggested by fans’ rejection of the second kind of manga, comics reminiscent of avant-garde or underground traditions, closely related to the so-called *gothic* of the 1960s and early 1970s (cf. Hiedlberg, 2011). Abroad, this kind of manga is usually popular among comics aficionados with a general interest in graphic narratives, and thanks to that interest Japanese artists like Tsuji Yoshiharu (b. 1957), Tatsunori Yuki (1995–2015), and Maruo Saejuro (b. 1956), but also Yokoyama Yūichirō (b. 1957) enjoy much more prominence overseas than at home. Detrimental to domestic fame is that these works lack the basic requirements of “manga proper,” such as characters to empathize with and world-settings which easily offer themselves to both fanzine and commercial appropriation.
But there is a third kind of manga, bridging the two poles. Tanimichi Jrū, Takano Fumio, or Satoh Chiyo, for example, produce a few whose works are available in official translation, and all experienced authors of longer or shorter graphic narratives that are first serialized in manga magazines and later republished in bound volumes. But the magazines they publish in do not belong to the major commercial forces of the manga market. Within the industry, these artists’ works occupy a position between the franchise-related bestselling series that capitalize on fan activities, that is, manga of the first category, and the small group of often geisha-related productions, that is, manga of the second category. Neither confronting the reader with unusual depictions nor serving them unconditionally, these graphic narratives are both catchy and thought-provoking. Due to their not necessarily genre-oriented style and storytelling as well as their medium-range print runs, such works are performed as “alternative” by Japanese manga readers, something which is difficult to convey to non-Japanese comics critics.

GLOBAL MEDIA

The manga boom, which set in at the end of the 1990s, was not a direct continuation of previous attempts at exporting translated editions, such as Barfoot Gen (cf. Sabon, 2006), Japan Inc., Lone Wolf and Cub, or AKIRA. This makes itself evident in the differences of both generic category and readership. While the early translations appealed to readers of the above-mentioned categories 2 and 3, the manga of category 1 predominates now. This manga has been welcomed by young people on a large scale as a media par excellence, its main attraction owing to the possibility of participation on a number of levels. For example, readers’ empathy with characters and immersion into world stories facilitated by long-running series, fan service and media-mix strategies, creating fan art and fan fiction mainly by appropriating existing characters and narratives, forming taste and knowledge communities, preferably online, and meeting up in real life, for example, at conventions and Cosplay events. As manga have come to be employed as screens onto which to project experiences and desires, publishers deliberately produce series full of gaps and blanks, thereby opening up manga texts for a whole range of applications. Consequently, the strength of manga sellers rests less on representational contents than on effects; that is, affective and as such sensory, or even sensual, effects—Scott McCloud describes the manga-specific participation as “physocal” (2006, p. 221)—but also cultural and subcultural effects, which apply to both Japan-related exoticism and community-building, and finally economic effects. With manga translations, readers do not face a shortage of supply (Boussois, 2006, pp. 153-154), and publishers have had better chances to operate in the black than with most other kinds of comics, at least until the climax of official releases was reached around 2007. In short, “manga proper” can be characterized as media—less in view of its technological support, but rather in consideration of the relations it mediates: between producers and consumers, readers and characters, and amongst readers themselves.

In the recognition of the global manga phenomenon, the Japanese government, represented by the foreign minister Asō Taro, established its International Manga Award in 2007. Initially not intended to attract Japanese readers with unfamiliar comics, to confirm the spread of the home-made model in recent years, non-manga style productions have made their way among the nominees. Yet, while award winners receive an invitation to visit Japan, the translation of the awarded works into Japanese are not endowed, which prevents the Award from becoming a tool of mutual exchange. In comparison, the Japan Media Arts Festival, bestowed by Japan’s Agency for Cultural Affairs, have promoted foreign comics available in Japanese translation by means of their Excellence and Encouragement Prizes since 2009. Additionally, three major manga-related institutions, including the Kyoto International Manga Museum, mounted the so-called GAIMAN Awards in 2011, completely unrelated to British comics author Neil Gaiman, foreign (gai-jin) comics (men-ge) are selected through online polling. All these endeavors seem to be attempts at reviving the cultural exchange that allowed manga to develop its aesthetic and cultural hybridity, which happens to match the contemporary global mediascape.

Whereas today, manga is mostly regarded as out-of-date, during the 1970s it was characterized by an astonishing openness to foreign comics. From the pre-war era onwards, Mickey Mouse had been a popular character, it appeared already in 1934 in one of the earliest manuals for drawing manga and also in the weekly Shonen Magazine (1960). Disney’s influence on Tezuka is legendary. Tazamma was a character of overwhelming presence in the post-war years, and Superman was no stranger to Japanese boys either. In 1970, Ikkuji Ryūichi (b. 1944) even transferred Spiderman to Japan in a series, which was translated into English and published by Marvel in 1991 (cf. Stem, 2013). In 1968, Shonen Jump featured a 15-page episode from Alex Raymond’s Flash Gordon (1934) in its very first issue, followed by another one from the syndicated newspaper comic strip Mandarin the Magician (1934) in issue No. 2. Tezuka’s alternative magazine COM (1967-1973) commissioned critic and translator Ono Kōsuke to run a special column on foreign comics, where he introduced Captain America, Robert Crumb, and The Perils, but also Trinit, whose first Japanese translation had actually been published in 1968. Japanese manga readers, who do not learn French, got to know Trinit as a children’s book available through the book editions of a Christian publisher (Fukushin chokin) and a publisher addressing housewives (Shiyo-to-teiki shise), but because of this publication site and format, only few have regarded it as a ‘manga.’ Contrary to what one may expect, the deep-rooted ignorance of Japanese manga readers towards foreign comics is not necessarily due to a lack of translations. What has thus far blocked a broad view on comics is different taste communities on the one hand, and publication formats on the other hand. The fact that the majority of manga readers cling to one specific category, namely the above-mentioned first category, stems back to the major manga magazines, which have eventually come to set the standard for manga worldwide (even if their products circulate in book editions outside of Japan).
In sum, during the formative phase of the kind of manga that is most successful on a global scale today, foreign stimulation was obviously welcome. But once this kind of manga had matured, an international set in that has led to a deterioration of the earlier openness. From the late 1970s onwards, the domestic market provided such satisfying growth rates that publishers did not have to look abroad. Eventually, manga started to spread outside Japan thanks to the work of foreign fans. It was not big businesses, but subcultural entrepreneurs that developed the respective markets in their countries.

However, the fact that manga’s globalization gained momentum around 2000 cannot not be traced back to the disinterest of major Japanese publishing houses in foreign markets. Manga works themselves seem to have matched the pace of transition from the culture of the Gutenberg galaxy to the mediascape of the information society. One of manga’s major properties – its networking, or mediating, potential – leads back to the publication format, which has shaped style and storytelling, that is, the manga magazine. By means of letter columns, special pages reserved for letters and fan art, but also for the manga artists to directly address the fans in the page margins of their series, the magazines accomplished a way to involve readers in quasi-virtual taste communities. In that regard, they seem to have anticipated what was materialized fully by the internet, which in turn has proved to be vital to manga’s global spread.

CLOSING REMARK

In recent years, an increasing number of journalists, critics, and researchers from different academic fields have shown interest in manga. This interest is primarily related to larger social issues, stretching from nuclear power to attempts at constitutional amendment, from gender relations to fictionalized sexuality. Manga is expected to provide insight into popular assumptions and everyday life. But manga cannot simply be “deciphered as a symptom, mirror, index, or antithesis of some larger social structure – as if there were an essential system of correspondences […]” (Felski, 2015). Neglect of mediation – publication sites, genre conventions, readers’ “horizon of expectations” – may easily lead to arbitrary findings, to assumptions about the socio-cultural potential of one specific series or the discrimination of women in another. Against this backdrop, the discussion above has highlighted the necessity to consider the specific discursive and institutional positioning of individual manga texts. The differentiation, called for at the beginning, was eventually pursued in a twofold manner: by introducing a historical perspective to draw attention to diachronic change, and by looking at synchronic diversity in the early 21st century. As a result, a highly relational notion of manga has appeared. In the broadest sense, and across all variations, manga texts may be approached as mediators of relations, which precondition their respective usage to a certain extent, ranging from traditional modes of reading to appropriative and transformative practices. In order to weigh the possible social, affective or sensual impact of a manga text, it is vital to acknowledge variables such as gender, age, and taste, familiarity with media and genre, affiliation with fandom and so on. What passes as “manga,” depends on a network of changing practices, discourses, institutions and texts, which deserves to be noticed.

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