The Post-World War II Development of Manga

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Today, the word "manga" refers generally to a form of expression that combines images and text to develop an extended narrative over a number of pages, normally containing several panels per page. But it was not until the 1920s and 1930s that manga emerged in the Japanese publishing market as a field of popular culture in its own right. Establishment of the mass media and of media for children in the modern publishing industry was what made this development possible. The popular fiction and film industries were booming, and serial publication of manga in newspapers and magazines flourished.

Figure 1. *Shō-chan no bōken*, Shōgakukan, reprinted 2003, p. 60.

For example, *Shō-chan no bōken* [The Adventures of Shō-chan], a children's manga with a story by Oda Shōsei and drawings by Kabashima Katsuichi, was a huge hit during its serialization from 1923 (Figure 1). Manga in those days were heavily influenced by the comic strips that ran in newspapers in Europe and the United States from the end of the nineteenth century.

Later, the manga originally developed mostly for children expanded among postwar baby-boomers and the generation that followed amid the postwar heyday of Japanese publishing. Overtaking satirical cartoons and comics aimed at the prewar generation, its market share eventually became dominant around 1970. Today's manga and TV anime developed from these beginnings.

In the 1950s there was a fad for "emonogatari" (picture stories), which were a kind of text narrative that incorporated large numbers of often-quite-elaborate illustrations. Then came a shift to a new style of manga typified by the work of Tezuka Osamu, in which the story is developed through abbreviated, symbolic pictures. Both these developments led to the publication of large numbers of specialized monthly magazines, which continued to grow as the postwar consumer market expanded among the baby-boomer generation. Feeling the threat of the new media of television, publishers switched to a weekly format, and as popular serials in such weekly magazines were linked with television anime and live-action dramas, the size of the manga market burgeoned through the 1960s and 1970s. The first ever 30-minute serialized TV anime was *Tetsuwan Atomu* [trans. *Astroboy*], adapted by Tezuka Osamu himself from his own manga (see Figure 2). This ran from 1963 to 1966, for part of that time alongside the original manga version, which was serialized in a monthly manga magazine from 1952 to 1968. As Japan emerged from postwar reconstruction and entered a period of rapid economic growth in the 1960s, manga publishing and television anime programming were linked via character merchandizing and became growing industries.

Figure 2. Cover of volume 3 of *Tetsuwan Atomu*, Asahi Sonorama, 1975.

With the movement in the 1960s and 1970s toward greater self-assertion and anti-establishment attitudes among young people, again led by the baby-boomers, many young people (both readers and creators) adopted manga as part of their own alternative culture. In these years, manga became youth-oriented and the content of stories became in many cases extremely youth-focused. This development had long-term consequences, giving rise to the "otaku" community, as it was later known, the main social group supporting manga and anime, along with the Comic Market (Komike) pop-up venues where enthusiasts sold their own self-published manga magazines. Publishers increasingly turned to narrative-based manga magazines aimed at the youth and adult market, and by the 1980s these publications dominated the market. During the 1980s, the rate of increase for *seinen* ("adult") manga magazines overtook that for manga magazines aimed at children and came to make up half of the total number of copies printed for Japanese manga magazines for the first time after the war (Figure 3).

While the distinctions between adult and children's manga were convenient labels for distribution and circulation, in reality the readership of such manga genres was quite diverse. *Shōjo manga*, for example, a genre of comic written by women for young female (*shōjo*) readers with few parallels anywhere else in the world, has great potential in the manga market. In the 1980s it led to the devel-

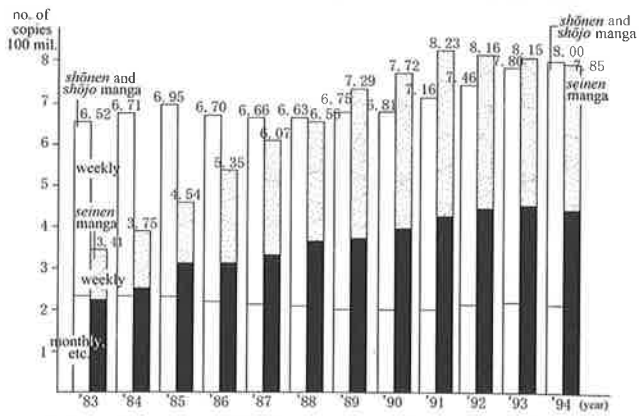

Figure 3. Chart showing estimated number of copies printed for comic magazines, 1983–94. Published in *Tsukuru*, October, 1995, p. 19.

opment of comics aimed at adult women readers. The weekly magazine *Shūkan shōnen janpu*, which has been the best-selling manga title since the 1980s, also has many women and grown-ups among its readers. Many men also enjoy reading "women's" manga, and most popular titles tend to be read by men and women of all ages.

Nonetheless, starting also in the 1980s, magazines marketed for men and those for women began to be published separately by age bracket, with manga aimed at young children, grade schoolers, teens, and adults. Many magazines were also targeted at groups of readers sharing particular interests. This diversity was made possible not only by the huge size of the market and by the revolution that took place in manga in the 1970s as new approaches and styles of expression proliferated but also because the different categories of titles aimed at young readers, girls, and grown-ups had creatively synergistic effects on one another.

It seems likely that future generations will look back on the 1980s and early nineties as the golden age of Japanese manga. Those years produced many titles that became global anime hits and manga that became best-sellers in translation around the world. Among manga aimed at the "youth" market, perhaps the best known is *Akira* (serialized 1982–90, anime film released 1988) (Figure 4). In *shōnen* (boys) manga, the major global hit was *Dragonball* by Toriyama Akira (1984–95), while in *shōjo manga* the anime and manga title *Bishōjo senshi Sērāmūn* [trans. *Sailor Moon*] was hugely popular both in Japan and around the world (the anime ran from 1992 to 1997; this was a "media mix"* title designed as an anime from the outset; the manga did not precede the anime version).

Figure 4. Cover of volume 1 of *Akira*, Kōdansha, 1984.

Japan's bubble economy lasted through the second half of the 1980s and burst at the beginning of the 1990s. In publishing, the collapse came a little later, with the market continuing to grow until 1995. After this, however, sales plummeted, a decline that has continued into the present (Figure 5). Despite the ongoing shrinkage in retail space, the publishing industry continues to publish more and more titles every year. The result of this business model is a market (not only for manga but for books in general) that is heavily dependent on a small number of bestsellers, so that mid-list writers and their works struggle to survive at all. The market for ebooks and online publishing, which seemed promising for a while, is still in its early stages: the transition to a new market model is very slow.

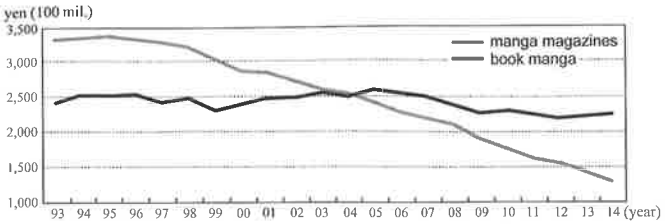

Figure 5. Chart showing shifts in sales of book manga and manga magazines (estimates) by value, published in Shuppan Kagaku Kenkyūjo, ed. *Shuppan geppō* [Publishing Monthly], February 2015, p. 4.

With the domestic market thus in decline, the Japanese media have begun to run reports on the popularity of Japanese anime and manga overseas, as if in an attempt to salvage national pride. In fact, although Japanese manga and anime have been criticized in many parts of the world for their graphic treatment of sex and violence, they have nevertheless sustained high levels of market interest in many countries. Partly, this criticism has been caused by presentation and cultural misunderstandings: sometimes, for example, anime intended for young adults have been shown on children's channels in some countries owing to an assumption that all "cartoons" were suitable for children. In Japan, in the process of the 1960s and 1970s through which manga became youth-oriented, sex and violence tended to be dominant themes among titles developed for late teens and young-adult readers. Demand for works dealing with such themes had become established over several decades. It is not surprising that misunderstandings and other issues arise in other countries where this situation does not apply.

Despite these problems, Japanese works that are intellectually sophisticated in terms of subject matter have received a positive critical response around the world. Since the 1980s and 1990s, the term "graphic novel" has become a common way of referring to comics with intellectual content aimed at adult readers, sparked by the success of titles such as *Maus* by Art Spiegelmann. Japanese artist Tatsumi Yoshihiro (1935–2015) became perhaps better known internationally as a graphic novelist than he was in Japan. Tatsumi had tried at the end of the 1950s to reform Japanese manga to make it more appealing to young adult readers, referring to his work not as "manga" but by the term *gekiga*, or "dramatic pictures."** His best-known work is *Gekiga hyōryū* [trans. *A Drifting Life*] (Figure 6), the autobiographical nature of which perhaps helped its reception among readers of graphic novels, which frequently have biographical content.

Another artist who has enjoyed international success, particularly in France, is Taniguchi Jirō, a babyboomer who made his debut in 1971 in the *gekiga* genre (see p. 16). From an early stage his work, mostly manga aimed at readers of his generation, was strongly influenced by European comics. Tezuka Osamu's *Budda* [trans.

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Figure 6. Cover of volume 1 of *Gekiga hyōryū*, Seirin Kōgeisha, 2008.

* "Media mix"
In the 1960s the increasingly interconnected markets for manga, television, and merchandising led to a multi-media marketing. Media mix (*media mikkusu*) is the made-in-Japan English name for this marketing strategy.

** *Gekiga*
This is the alternative name for manga that dealt with more realistic and serious themes. The term later came to describe the revolutionary new style of manga led by manga aimed at young adults, leading to a "gekiga boom" that produced large numbers of magazines in the 1960s and 1970s. The movement came to an end in the 1980s.

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Buddha] has also been treated as a graphic novel in translation.

These works possess qualities and subject matter that suggest they will continue to be read long into the future both in Japan and other countries.

In Japan, however, many fans and scholars disapprove of the tendency to single out these intellectually oriented works alone as "art," at the expense of the many other manga and anime titles published each year. Thanks to the diversity of the publishing market, works that in other countries might seem to be underground or alternative have been sold and read as part of the mass culture. There are often no clear divisions between "highbrow" and "lowbrow." Having grown up in this market, many Japanese manga fans argue that it is the sheer volume of works published, most of them destined to be discarded and forgotten as soon as they are read, that allows a small number of outstanding works to survive and flourish, thanks to robust competition.

As I have said, Japanese manga is an extremely diverse medium. In many cases it is easy to spot clear evidence of foreign influence. It would therefore be a mistake, I feel, to look for specifically Japanese cultural reasons for what makes Japanese manga unique. It is a characteristic of all popular culture that it tends to lack clear dividing lines; individual titles and genres in and outside of Japan are constantly influencing one another in dynamic ways, and the art form as a whole is always shifting in unpredictable ways. This is what makes popular culture so effective at communicating across national borders.

So what are the chief characteristics of Japanese manga? The first is probably a publishing market that, despite its recent travails, remains huge by global standards, and the diversity that results from it. The fact that just about any subject can be treated in manga form, from fine food to child rearing, the strategy game of *go*, and classical music, shows the close relationship the medium enjoys with people's daily lives in Japan. It is surely true that studying manga remains key to understanding the life and culture of the country as a whole.

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Born in 1950. Manga columnist whose work takes in manga, essays, and criticism, and professor at Gakushuin University. Received the third Tezuka Osamu Special Manga Prize for his criticism in 1999. Major works include Tezuka Osamu wa doko ni iru *[Where Is Tezuka Osamu?] (1992),* Manga wa naze omoshiroi no ka *[What Makes Manga Fun?] (1997) and* Manga ni jinsei o manande nani ga warui? *[What's Wrong With Learning About Life from Manga?] (2006). His paternal grandfather was the famous novelist Natsume Sōseki.*