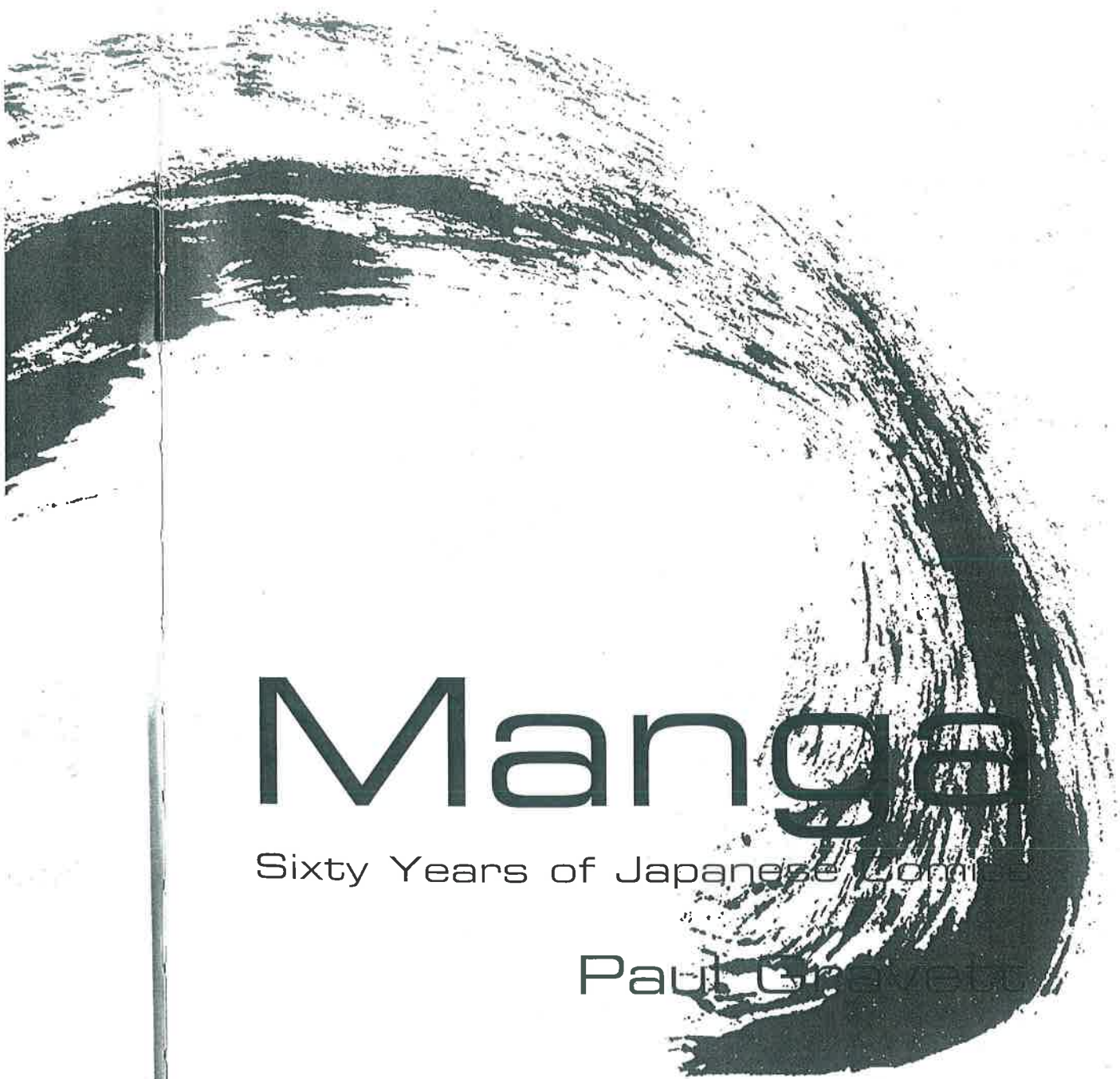




Manga

Sixty Years of Japanese Comics

Paul Gravett

Manga: Sixty Years of Japanese Comics
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Laurence King Publishing

2004

Introduction:

008 Irresponsible Pictures
Addressing perceptions and prejudices

Chapter 01:

010 Catch Up, Overtake
The medium, the industry, the market, the profession

Chapter 02:

018 Japanese Spirit, Western Learning
Roots in traditional arts and imported cartoons and strips

Chapter 03:

024 The Father Storyteller
The life and role of Osamu Tezuka, originator of story manga

Chapter 04:

038 From a Darker Place
Gekiga or 'dramatic pictures' from pay libraries to newsstands

Chapter 05:

052 Boys are Forever
Boys' comics as the driving force of story manga

Chapter 06:

074 Through a Woman's Eyes
The genres and genders of girls' and women's comics

Chapter 07:

096 Developing Maturity
The mass market for young males and adult men grows up

Chapter 08:

116 The All-Encompassing
A medium for every taste, interest and stage of life

Chapter 09:

132 Personal Agendas
The individualism of underground, fanzine and art comics subcultures

Chapter 10:

152 Culture and Imperialism
Manga as a major export and global influence

Irresponsible Pictures

WHAT ARE MANGA? Try looking the word up in the Oxford English Dictionary and you'll find a very misleading definition. The OED says that they are 'Japanese comic books and cartoon films with a science fiction or fantasy theme'. This is wrong on two counts: manga are not Japanese animation (which is closely related but is properly known as anime), and they actually deal with almost every theme imaginable, not just sci-fi and fantasy.

So, roughly speaking, the word manga in English means Japanese comics. Westerners often have a number of preconceptions about them: 'All the characters have big, Bambi-like eyes'; 'The magazines are as thick as phone directories'; 'Businessmen devour them in public on trains'; 'They are full of sex and violence.' Often misrepresented as little more than 'tits and tentacles', manga were, and still are, open to being doubly damned in the West for being Japanese, and for being comics.

Wherever you go, prejudice seems inevitable where 'comics' are concerned. Personally, I have a great regard for their culture of words and pictures and I am particularly fascinated by the sheer diversity of Japanese comics. As with any popular publishing phenomenon, taking a closer look reveals surprising and unexpected qualities and truths among the ocean of overexcited pages. Part of my endeavour here is to draw attention to the creations that stand out above the ordinary, that don't just glide by forgettably but at the very least make the reader pause, admire and perhaps even think and feel. However, since some people undeniably have an 'attitude' towards comics, let's try and put some of that prejudice into perspective.

In 1951, the Japanese gave General Douglas MacArthur a hero's farewell. After nearly six years overseeing the American occupation and post-war reconstruction of Japan, MacArthur had been abruptly recalled after disagreeing with President Truman over US military policy towards the

Chinese in the Korean War. Japanese admiration for MacArthur evaporated overnight, when, during his subsequent three-day testimony to the Senate, he described the Japanese patronizingly as being 'like a boy of twelve'. In fact, he had intended to express his regard for the Japanese 'susceptibility' to following new models, new ideas', and therefore to declare them more trustworthy than the Germans. But his unfortunate and clumsy phraseology provided a rude awakening for the Japanese, who interpreted what was well-meant as an insult. Nevertheless, MacArthur's phrase was very revealing of how the West now saw them: childlike, immature, very much the dependent junior to a paternalistic, controlling America.

For years, this quaint caricature seemed to reassure the West of its superiority. The illusion was shattered in the late 1960s when Japanese cars and electronic goods began seemingly out of the blue to overtake global markets, and the label 'Made in Japan' no longer suggested shoddy imitation but quality and innovation. Caught off-guard, the Western powers greeted this zealous economic empire-building with a mixture of anxiety and envy, while a whole congratulatory literature sprang up extolling the unique 'Japaneseness' that had transformed a defeated country into a superpower and role model in little more than two decades. The 'boy of twelve' was growing up.

As the West looked again in puzzlement and not a little fear at the emerging giant, another equally patronizing caricature of the Japanese as being 'like a boy of twelve' was emerging via reports of their baffling, otherworldly comic books. In the early 1970s, during her two years in Japan, novelist and feminist critic Angela Carter's fascination with the Sadeian excesses she found in manga horrified readers of her dispatches to the British magazine *New Society*. Recording his fraught train journey from London to Tokyo in *The Great Railway Bazaar* in 1975, American travel writer Paul Theroux described his disgust

漫画

Below: Xenophobic stereotyping of the Japanese in American comic-book propaganda, 1944. Right: manga's two constituent ideograms, *man* and *ga*.



at the 'decapitations, cannibalism, people bristling with arrows like Saint Sebastian... and, in general, mayhem' inside a 'distressing comic' left by a girl on the seat next to him. Unlike in the fields of literature, film, even pop music or football, where Japanese comics are concerned, it seems that anybody can be taken seriously for their opinion, regardless of their knowledge of the medium.

By the 1980s, when a skewed sample of manga and anime started to be exported, one image repeatedly came to sum up Western disdain towards the Japanese and their comics: the business-suited salaryman on the commuter train to work, absorbed in his violent, sexy manga magazine. A 1987 headline in *The Wall Street Journal* mocked: 'Grown Men in Japan Still Read Comics and Have Fantasies'. This was yet another caricature of 'the boy of twelve', but with the boy now occupying an adult body and displaying a taste for the disgusting and the cruel.

The very word 'manga' entered English parlance weighed down with negative baggage. Not that it was his fault, but it was probably Frederik Schodt's landmark 1983 study, *Manga! Manga!*, that started this. Here Schodt explained the meanings of the word's two constituent Chinese ideograms: *man*, meaning 'involuntary' or 'in spite of oneself', and *ga*, meaning 'pictures'. The Japanese artist Hokusai had coined the term in 1814 for his books of 'whimsical sketches'. The ideogram *man*, Schodt added, 'has a secondary meaning of "morally corrupt"', which produced a translation of 'irresponsible pictures'. Not surprisingly, this morally charged definition was pounced on by the media and critics of the form, so ensuring the effective stigmatization of manga in the West.

The appeal of cultural snobbery is universal and extends to Japan itself. The Japanese establishment has been embarrassed by the national portrait manga transmit abroad. In 1991, as part of the largest ever Japanese cultural festival held in Britain, Oxford's Museum of Modern Art was keen to exhibit Japanese comics in all their variety; ironically it was their Japanese sponsors who were uncomfortable with the inclusion of more adult and disturbing material. When MOMA refused to compromise, the project collapsed. Stirred into action, a small independent London art gallery, Pomeroy Purdy, stepped into the breach and staged an exhibition of manga, deliberately slanting their choice of examples towards the marginal and often extreme avant-garde. Unsettling imagery such as Mitsuhiro Yoshida's menstrual nightmare of a pre-pubescent girl being chased by a phallic horned rhino only confirmed people's worst fears of 'Japanese laughing matter', as the *Daily Telegraph* described it.

Ten years later, the mounting commercial success of manga abroad forced the organizers of Britain's second Japan Festival in 2001 to admit comics alongside the more traditional tea ceremonies and examples of Kabuki theatre. The Japan Foundation decided to display 25 short stories, which had already been shown in Paris and Rotterdam. Work by four artists that had been exposed to the Dutch and French was removed, however, presumably because it was deemed unsuitable for the British palate. This revision did not stop British reviewers from reminding the public that manga were pornographic, even though only one page in the exhibit included some bare breasts. Even this nudity was swiftly covered up following a complaint at a family fun day when the exhibit was shown in Brighton.

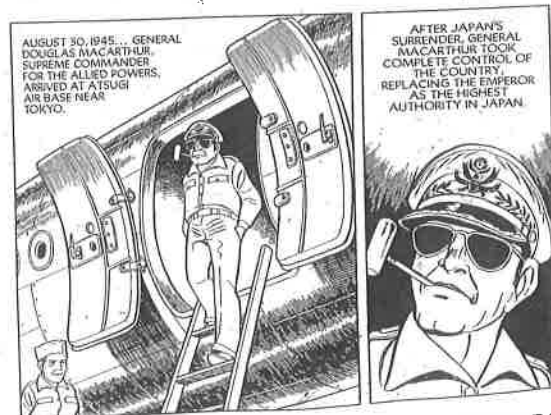
Prejudices refuse to go away. Instead, they tend to take on new forms. The tired spectre of comics contributing to illiteracy was revived in the *New York Times* on 10 January 2002, when a report asserted that Japan had a low literacy level because people preferred to read subliterate manga instead of memorizing the thousands of characters needed to decipher Japanese. The paper was subsequently forced to print a retraction, acknowledging that Japan had a very high literacy rate, far ahead of America's.

This book is no eulogy or apology for manga.

If anything, it will show that they can indeed be 'irresponsible', irredeemably so, often the products of largely unfettered individual minds allowed to respond to the moment and to their readers' desires. But it will also show that manga's 'irresponsible pictures' may well be their greatest strength.



Above: Whatever next? Grown men reading manga on public transport.



Below: General MacArthur's arrival portrayed in Keiji Nakazawa's *Barefoot Gen*.

Catch Up, Overtake

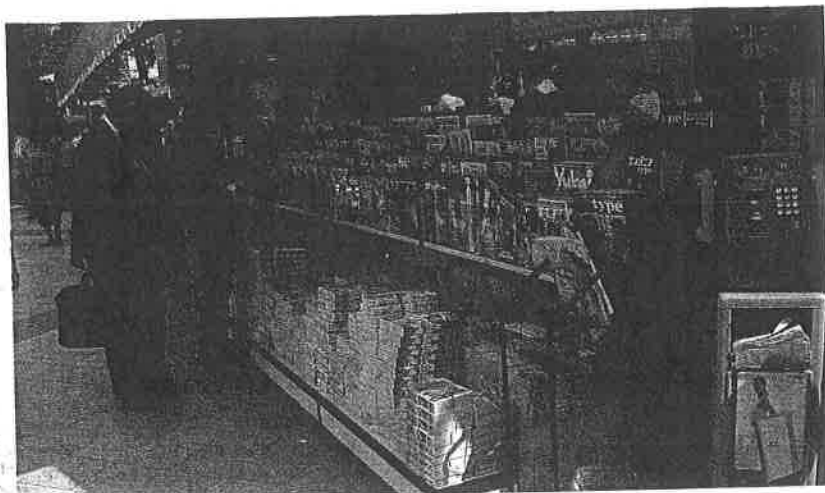
THERE ARE NO 'foreigners' in Japan, only 'outside persons', or *gaijin*. This concept of the 'outside person' seems to encapsulate Japan's image as an exclusive, inward-looking, self-contained country, sealed off by blood and tradition. This national identity as a race apart was forged during nearly three centuries of self-imposed isolation. The first 'outside' nation to push its way back in was the United States, whose ships steamed into Edo Bay in 1853. The ruling Japanese shogunate was given little choice but to sign the visitors' trading treaties; other Western countries swiftly followed in the Americans' wake. There was turmoil as shogun control collapsed; when the emperor was reinstated in 1868, he advocated 'the seeking of knowledge throughout the world in order to strengthen the country'. Thus, if the Japanese could no longer avoid it, contact with the outside world was at least to be made on their own terms, as part of their patriotic duty to help make the nation stronger.

In the campaign of the early Meiji period (1868–1912) to ensure that the people took modernization to their hearts, slogans were persuasive weapons. One extolled them to *oitsuke! oikose!* or 'Catch up! Overtake!'. The fact that the Japanese did catch up and overtake vindicates General MacArthur's high opinion of them. It could be said that the Japanese have always been quick to learn from the 'outside person'. More than a millennium ago, China was Japan's first great teacher, but this

relationship lasted only until Japan was ready to pursue its own direction. In the 19th century, the newly opened nation reinvented itself as an empire-builder by closely studying and copying the Western imperial powers. After World War II, Japan was so efficiently indoctrinated in American capitalism that the conquered frequently went on to outstrip the conqueror. Yet again the Japanese island mentality proved able to absorb a foreign concept, adapt and improve on it, and then export it back to the outside world.

With manga, the Japanese have demonstrated the same facility as with the automobile or the computer chip. They have taken the fundamentals of American comics, the relationships between picture, frame and word, and, by fusing them with their own traditional love for popular art that entertains, have 'Japanized' them into a storytelling vehicle with its own distinctive form. Manga are not comics, at least not as most people know them in the West. The Japanese have liberated the medium's language from the confining formats and genres of the daily newspaper strip or the 32-page American comic book, and expanded its potential to embrace long, free-form narratives on almost every subject, for both sexes and almost every age and

Below: Browsers can choose between the approximately 300 different manga magazine titles for all age groups and sexes that swamp the newsstands every month.



Above: Fresh off the press, bundles of some of the latest *redikomi*, or ladies' comics, waiting to be cut open. Opposite: Kodansha's top-selling weekly *Young* serves up over 340 newsprint pages of 'men's interest' serials and gag strips. This judo story cover is by Makoto Kobayashi.

YO!N WEEKLY

●成功者連合会第1期
ターミネーター2 古く試学会 1000人 招待



Magazine

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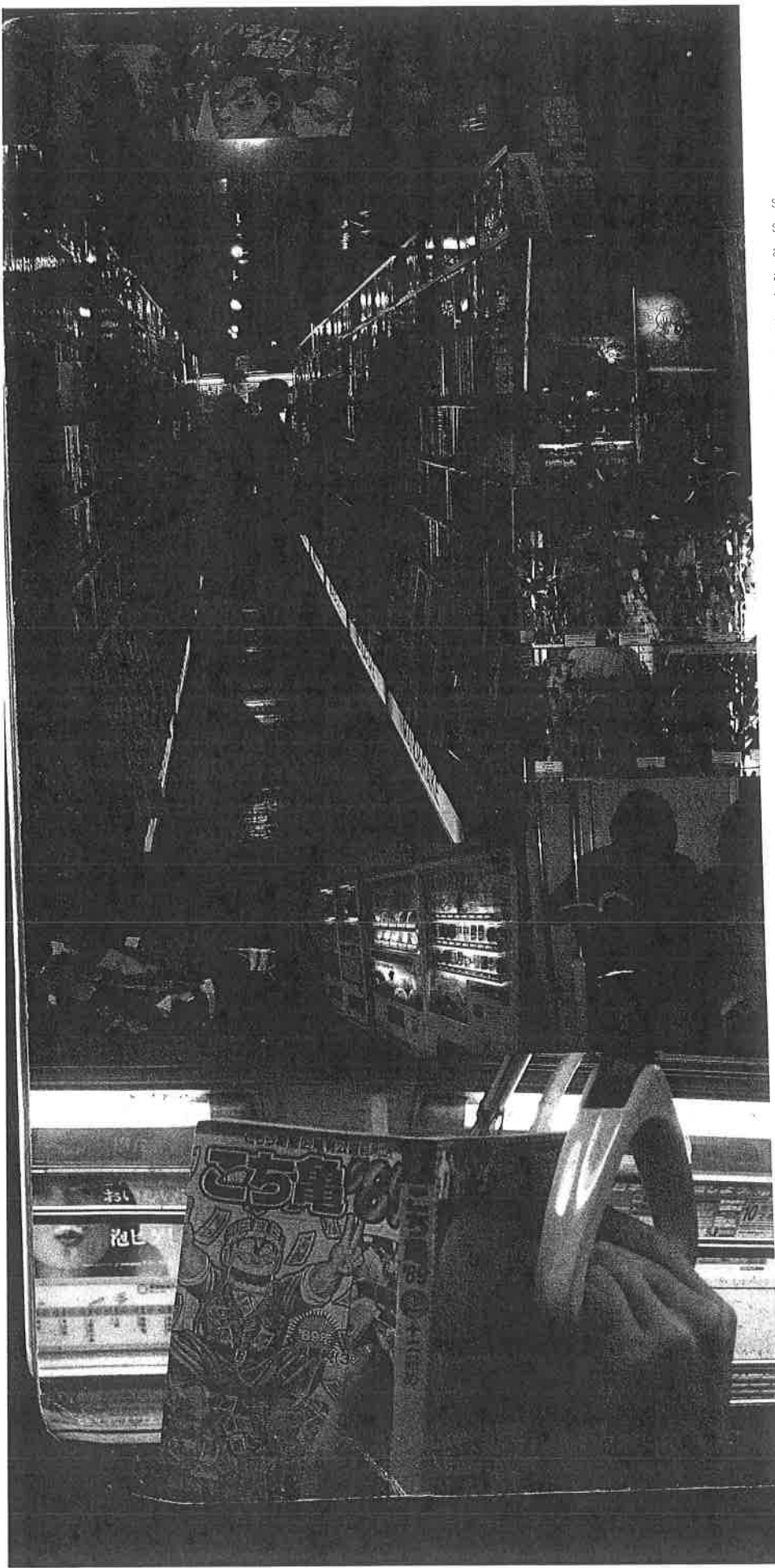
感動の最終回！
米道部物語
小林あづ

■大ベスト/シリーズ！
【オマツカ】鈴木由美子
■怪奇話みかひ！
【蝶の季節】平井一郎
■短期集中連載！
【ビデオハンター】明けの竜 角野勝彦

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大腕受乳—キ—新連載！
【高校の人達】
葛原 晃

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丸の内ビルディング 5F (丸の内線) 丸の内駅 徒歩 5 分
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social group. The Japanese have developed comics into such a powerful mass literature that it can stand up against the seemingly unstoppable dominance of television and movies. In fact, manga have a hold over Japanese TV and film; a good many of the most successful works in both media derive from manga, having been either adapted into animation or live-action productions.

Of course, there was a time when an equally high level of media power was enjoyed by comics in America. This was back during the heyday of the newspaper strips in the early decades of the 20th century. The so-called 'funnies' were syndicated to papers from coast to coast and across the globe, their daily episodes enthralling young and old alike. When a newspaper strike hit New York, Mayor La Guardia read out the latest instalments over the radio. When Little Orphan Annie's dog Sandy went missing, none other than Henry Ford sent the publishers an anxious telegram. Rumour has it that an impatient president rang Dick Tracy's originator to find out what was going to happen the next day. The strips were spun off into radio serials, stage shows and movies, and became as potent an export and symbol of American cultural imperialism as the cinematic productions of Hollywood. The newspaper comics swept the globe, reaching Japan, Universal in their storytelling clarity and appeal, America's stories became the world's stories.

From its inception in 1933 through to its near-death in the mid-1950s, the American format of the 'comic book' (actually more magazine than book) became an almost indispensable part of everyday life in the USA. The American way of life was sold and devoured through the comic book, 'all in color for a dime'. Then, just as comic books in America were starting to address real-life issues and winning more of an adult audience, they became the target of Cold War moral panic. They also became the scapegoat for rising juvenile crime. In 1954, in the wake of the Communist witch-hunt, the most powerful and conservative publishers succumbed to patriotic fervour and imposed on themselves a strict code governing content that effectively emasculated comic books and drove them out of most adults' lives. The crime and horror genres were particularly targeted. These 'horrors' lent themselves to being exploited by anybody with a cause to promote. In America, they were demonized as being pro-Communist, whereas in Britain, motivated by anti-Americanism, the secretary of the Communist Party opposed their import on the pretext of protecting innocent minds and safeguarding jobs in Britain's own comics industry.

American comic books swept into Japan from 1945 via the occupying forces. Imagine the impact of

these strange new artefacts, all in pictures and in striking colours, on children who for years had suffered the deprivations of war. Comic books proved irresistible. Like chewing gum, they came and they stuck. Some titles were unofficially translated in pirate editions, such as the *Archie* comic books starring 'America's typical teenager'. The Japanese also began to make their own, increasingly using the same page size as American comics, but they produced them more cheaply, in black and white on low-quality paper over many more pages. Gradually, the range of themes expanded in synch with the readership, though not without resistance. Wherever you go, it seems that comics are guaranteed to court controversy when they presume to take on more challenging subjects.

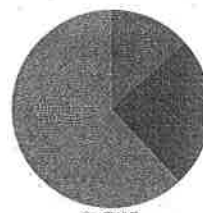
Much of a Japanese person's home, school and work life is governed by strict notions of respect and hierarchy. The solitary activity of reading manga allows him or her to leave behind daily formalities and experience, if only vicariously, for the more liberated realms of the mind and the senses. In many societies where repression rules, extraordinary and provocative creativity results. For all their outward decorum and ritual, such as the precisely regulated angles of bowing and terms of address, the Japanese are inclined towards a pragmatic and tolerant approach to religion and morality. This makes quite a sharp contrast to the 'liberated' West. Compared to Europeans and Americans, the Japanese generally have far more relaxed attitudes about representations of sex and bodily functions. No wonder earlier generations of Westerners professed outrage at the explicitness of Japanese erotic prints, forerunners of some of manga's wilder moments.

Manga's success proves that size does matter. American monthly comic books of the 1930s offered a selection of different stories printed in four colours across 64 pages. As production costs rose, publishers held the cover price at ten cents, and so began to whittle down the number of pages. By the 1950s, there were only 32. This is where it has remained ever since, despite sporadic attempts to introduce formats with more pages. The 1960s saw the cover price start to rise, skyrocketing through the 1970s and 1980s, so that the average 32-page comic book today pushes \$3 for 20-something story pages plus adverts. Not surprisingly, current top-ten sellers are lucky to shift 100,000 copies, mostly to collectors through specialized comic shops. At least British and Franco-Belgian weekly and monthly comics are still sold off the newsstands, even if they don't offer many pages in return for their pocket-money price. Newer titles based on the latest TV and toy crazes are a more expensive brand and so are usually bought by

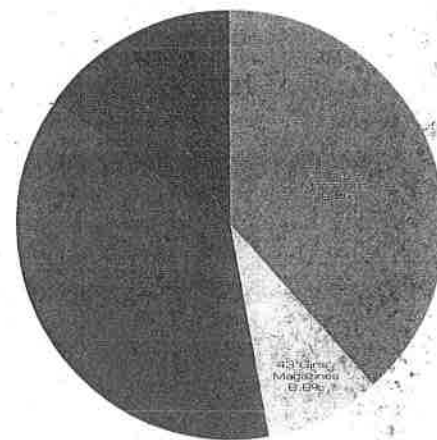
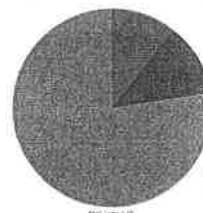
parents for their kids, as much for the free gifts taped to the cover as for what's inside.

In contrast, what appears to govern the purchase of Japanese manga periodicals, or *mangashi*, is their stories – lots of them, anything from around six to 20 or more, depending on the page count. The majority are serials in episodes of around 20 pages, enough to leave you wanting to read more, true page-turners in the best storytelling tradition of Dickens and *The Perils of Pauline*. There can also be short complete pieces, the equivalent of a comedy sketch, or sections of vertical four-panel gag strips. Apart from the attention-grabbing cover, colour is confined inside to an insert or fold-out to kick off the opening strip and a few four- or eight-page signatures elsewhere, sometimes used for adverts. A second colour,

Opposite: For millions of Japanese, manga are part of their daily lives, bought from newsstands, bookstores and vending machines, and read on trains, subways and park benches.



Manga as a Percentage of Overall Publishing Market
Figures for 2002. Source: Shueisha Group, Research Institute for Publications



Types of Manga Magazines as Percentage of Total Manga Magazine Market
Figures for 2002. Source: Shueisha Group, Research Institute for Publications

often orange, may be used to brighten a star feature, or another ink colour like blue or purple or pastel-tinted papers may be used. Everything else is in black and white. Some manga monthlies are as thick as phone directories, with a thousand pages or more, but most offer some two to four hundred side-stapled pages. When they grow too bulky, they come perfect-bound with a spine, making them a truly hefty 'comic book'.

Every day fresh deliveries are piled up on the newsstands, with their inky insides still smudgy, their paper smelling of the chemicals used to mill them. They offer a relentless tide of different stories to hook the reader. Prices are kept low to entice you to sample a story and, if it grabs you, to ensure that you keep following it issue after issue. The long-running boys' weekly *Shonen Sunday*, for instance, costs a mere 220 yen, around \$2,

● **Note: Of the total of 281 different manga magazines published in 2002, the sector shown above of '104 Other Magazines' included pachinko (22), boys' love (11), four-panel gag strips (17) and sports and hobbies (4).**

Manga: Sixty Years of Japanese Comics

for over 400 pages. Manga are cheap enough for people to be able to buy a different one every day and throw it away. They are left behind on trains or in cafés and noodle bars, passed around at work or school or among friends and family, retrieved from trash and recycling bins and resold on the secondhand market or on the streets.

'Pile 'em high, sell 'em cheap' seems to work as a philosophy. Several manga weeklies have among the highest circulations of any magazines in Japan. The recession has bitten, so *Shonen Jump*'s highs of over 6 million copies may be a thing of the past, but it still shifts 3 million every week, to a population of 126 million people – roughly half that of America, just over twice that of Britain. Out of the whole magazine industry, about one-sixth, or some 250 billion yen (about \$3 billion), of that

turnover is accounted for by manga periodicals. Due to the potential for making massive profits, comics are the most competitive publishing sector of all. Roughly two-thirds of it is carved up between the three market leaders: Kodansha, Shueisha and Shogakukan. The rest is divided up between other substantial publishers who might

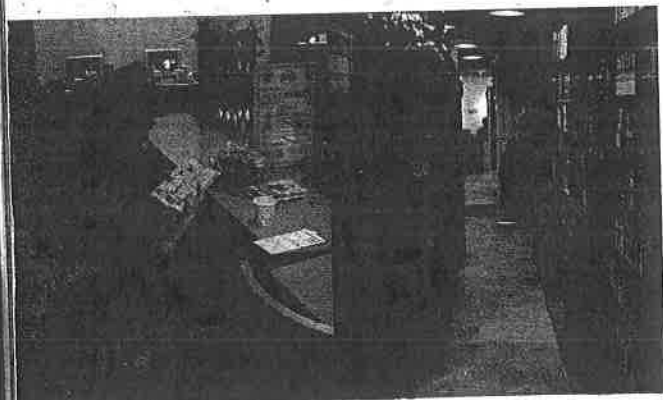
hope to corner up to 5 per cent of the market, while the crumbs fall to around 70 smaller companies, often specializing in subjects such as erotica, martial arts, golf and mahjong. Fierce in-fighting can exist between competitors and even between different magazines published by the same company. But it is not unusual to find that all acrimony melts away over glasses of sake during an evening in a karaoke bar. An editor from Shueisha may sing along to the theme song of the animated TV version of *Sailor Moon* produced by rivals Kodansha; then a Kodansha editor may join in with competitors Shueisha's *Cat's Eye* tune:

Big, thick magazines are not what most Japanese buy to keep in their homes. Who has the room, especially in a tiny, cramped 'cockpit'-style city apartment? One year's worth of *Shonen Sundays* stacks up to over four and a half feet or 1.4 metres. The end product of manga is the compact, usually paperback book that gathers together episodes of particular serials, shrunk down and printed more sharply in black and white on thicker paper in handy *tankoban* volumes of around 200 pages, or in the

smaller, chunkier *bunkoban* of 300 pages or more. On the cover they tend to have a fairly sedate, one-colour design, over which is wrapped a bright, attractive colour dust jacket. When you buy a book, instead of putting it in a bag, the store will often fold its own brown-paper wrapper over the cover, enabling you to read it discreetly in public.

Obviously, there are people who, for whatever reason, do not read manga in any form. By far the majority of the millions who do read them are casual consumers, happy following a story, one that's easy to find, as a magazine serial and sometimes perhaps buying the books, as you would with a favourite TV series or author. To them, manga are cheap, disposable mass literature, as American comic books once were, bought for entertainment, for a good story, to kill time, to chill out. A smaller but sizeable readership love manga and take a more intense interest in finding and keeping works that appeal to them, regardless of their fame or popularity. Then there are the genuine *otaku*, or obsessive fans, who make manga a lifestyle. Dedicated collectors of 'rare' manga make up another much smaller group, on nothing like the same scale as the American mania for collecting old comic books as investments, a pursuit ruled by stringent 'grading' and heady prices. Why bother scrabbling after antique or first-edition manga when so much gets reprinted?

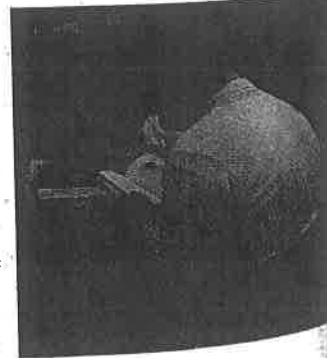
So where do you buy manga from? Many pick up the magazines from local newsstands and shops. If these are closed, there are always the impersonal vending machines and the inviting, brightly lit all-night convenience stores, hangouts for the young and the sleepless, outlets that now account for 30 per cent of all magazine sales. To buy the books, there are specialized shops, and pretty much all general bookstores have sections, aisles, even whole floors dedicated to manga. But why buy them? As another option, one enterprise that has been popping up all over the place since the recession hit in 1990 is the manga café. Free to join, these are often open 24 hours a day and have internet access. Members pay a small hourly charge to read comics that might cost thousands of yen to buy. The cafés attract a very mixed crowd, from businessmen leaving the office to late-night clubbers waiting for the early-morning train. A selection of 20,000 to 30,000 books to choose from is not uncommon. Otherwise you can borrow from a more limited range at public libraries, or join the crowds



Above: A sign of the times – relaxing in a manga kisa, or café, where for a modest price you can read from more manga books than most people can afford or fit into a typically small city apartment.

Right: For rarer items, you can consult one of the manga libraries that archive the history of the medium.

Opposite: Casual browsers and devoted addicts alike can buy manga from shopping-mall outlets, often dedicated to one character or creator such as Tezuka, as well as from general book chains and 24-hour convenience stores.



of browsers reading their favourites while standing at the bookshelves and magazine displays in the shops.

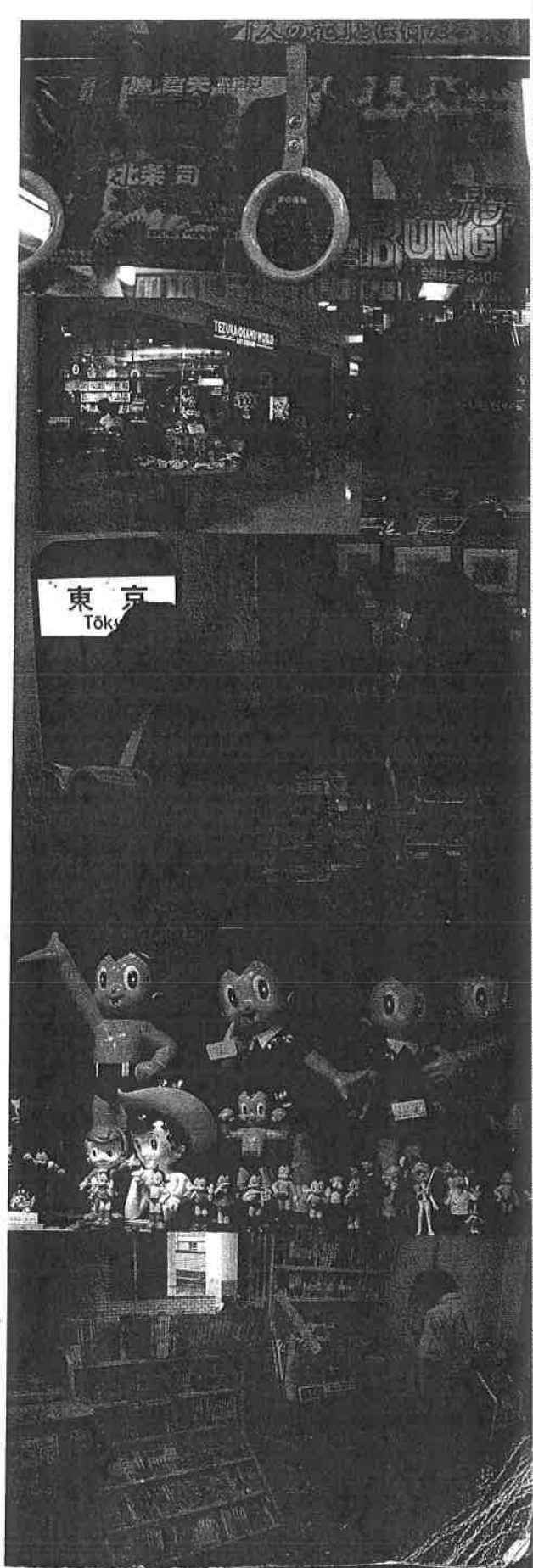
Neither the publishers nor the creators, or *mangaka*, make their fortunes from the magazines; the real money is in the book compilations and their ongoing, multiple printings. There are a good many series that fill 20, 30, 50, and a handful that even fill 100 or more volumes. Others tell their tale in a handful of volumes, totalling, say, 600 to 1,000 pages, a movie-length read. Readers tend to acquire the set, because they want the whole story. The sales figures can be staggering. *Dragon Ball*'s sagas have amassed sales of over 120 million copies since 1984. Now that record is being challenged by *One Piece*'s 65 million, accumulated since only 1997. A recent volume of *One Piece* set the record for the highest initial print run of a manga book so far of 2.52 million copies. Now that's a bestseller, to my knowledge unrivalled by a graphic novel anywhere else, except for the huge orders in France, and even bigger orders in Germany, for the latest and possibly last *Asterix* album in 2001.

Another strength of manga is that for decades the stories and characters have been owned by their creators, or co-owned with the publishers. Any *mangaka* who has a hit may be tempted to milk it for all its worth, and some can spin their story out longer than it perhaps needs. Still, few devote their careers to just one series; most eventually tie it up and move on to another project. They are free to switch subjects, genres, styles, story lengths and target audiences, like a filmmaker or novelist, and produce a variety of different finite pieces. In America or Europe, lucrative, long-running properties like *Superman*, *Judge Dredd* and *Spirou*, owned by the publishers, have to be kept alive by forever passing them on from one writer or artist to the next. Their stories can never end. In Japan, the continuation of a character like *Doraemon* by other hands is the exception rather than the rule. In most cases, when creators stop or die,

their comics stop or die with them. This cycle of renewal provides a healthier regeneration. In Japan, Spider-Man would not live long enough to wear out his tights.

The survival of any mass-market manga depends on how well it entertains and communicates with readers. This applies equally to an established name as to a first-timer. In various ways, readers are continually consulted. Their votes and opinions are taken seriously. Incentives like free merchandise and prize draws are offered to persuade readers to fill out and return the questionnaires on detachable pre-paid postcards inside most *mangashi*. The significance attached to their votes and views varies according to the publishers. Allegedly a few can be as cruel in their use of ratings as American TV companies and axe any new series that hasn't made it into the top ten after only a few appearances. Others use the surveys as valuable, almost instant market research. For example, the youth weekly *Morning* goes on sale on Thursday. By the following Monday a thousand or so postcards are pulled out of the mailbag and tabulated into charts and comments. This feedback is never seen by the creators, but it is filtered to them via their editor to boost their egos or motivate them to do better.

In American and European comics, it is not unusual for creators to be left to their own devices, with the minimum of editorial intervention. In contrast, editors are manga's secret weapon. On a weekly there can be a hierarchy of up to 40, each assigned on average to seven or eight creators at a time. Often an editor has to wear many hats: those of coach, collaborator, critic, friend, researcher, promoter, psychiatrist, cook and more. The experience of a novice editor like Kazuyo Yasuda, who worked on *shojo* or girls' comics for five years, is not untypical: 'I had just been to university and I didn't choose the manga department, the company just told me, "Oh, you go to manga!" I had a poor knowledge of them, I didn't read them much, I preferred normal



Manga: Sixty Years of Japanese Comics



Above: Koji Aihara and Kentaro Takehuma, shown dressed in their Tezuka-style berets, produced a three-volume series, translated as *Even A Monkey Can Draw Manga*. This is a funny and critical satire of their struggles to break into the industry, at the same time a sly parody of 'How To' manuals and a sophisticated 'meta-manga' or a comic about comics.

novels. It was my first work as an editor on a magazine. People around me taught me on the job, that's what you go through in any Japanese company. If you start working as a manga editor, it's better if you don't have that much expertise already in manga, so you can bring a fresh eye to it. Takumi Kasukobe was the first mangaka I worked with properly. She had been popular but I was brought in, because at the time she was not in the top ten of the readers' polls. You have to build up the trust between artist and editor. It is probably similar to the relationship between rock musicians and their managers – if you have a good manager, your records might sell a lot. I was 22, she was 19. That is very normal in shojo manga, you have to be young to be close to the reader, otherwise you forget all the details! For her new series, she came up with the character descriptions and we'd talk about what would be a good story for them and for the magazine. She really respected my comments, because I didn't have so much experience, so my voice was like her ordinary reader's voice. You have to be aware of the trends in girls' manga and also the trends in real life, among junior-high and high-school girls. It's the same thing for comic writers too, they have to be aware of other things and read so many magazines. Her series got a really good response from readers from the first week and stayed in the top three for most of the time. To get each episode done, I used to stay at her flat quite a long time, making food. I even did a little bit of assistance – the easiest things, inking in, doing screen tones.'

Editors are very much 'hands-on', from coming up with first ideas through to the final proofing stage. They can guide a manga creator's career from its start to its maturity. Editors usually judge the competitions that most magazines run to discover new talent, often offering winners very large cash prizes and publishing deals. If an entrant is championed by an editor and wins or shows promise, he or she may well be assigned to that editor for the development stage prior to publication. To prepare a

major new series, editor and artist may meet every week for as much as a year, initially in the office perhaps, but afterwards in bars, cafés, in the artist's studio, in research locations, bouncing story ideas off one another and defining a character to appeal to the largest possible number of readers. This to-and-fro and fine-tuning process continues with the generation of the

sketches of the all-important first episode of 20 to 32 pages that will define the series' tone and style.

Regularly producing manga entails plenty of pressure and deadline-chasing. Once a serial is up and running, editors on the weeklies live in dread that 'their' artists will miss the very last deadline, usually a week before publication. Many wait anxiously for a phone call from any latecomers to tell them the next episode is ready. It is not uncommon for editors to stay at the mangaka's studio, even sleeping there, until the work is done. Others will 'can' their mangaka, isolating them in a hotel room, cut off from all distractions, until the pages are finished. Famously, the legendary Osamu Tezuka was once running late and about to fly off abroad. The very morning of his flight, he arranged to meet his editor at the airport and handed over the pages he had only just polished off en route in the taxi. With the artworks in house, it's down to the editor over three sleepless days to cut and paste in the dialogue, captions and logos already typeset, and finalize every last detail, before the first sample copies are printed and checked. Three days later the final copies hit the racks, by which time the whole process has started again.

The Japanese editors' importance may be related to the small number of writers in the manga field. Manga are regarded as 'a one-man (or one-woman) universe' and it is not nearly as common as in America for artists to collaborate with scriptwriters. Becoming a mangaka represents a serious decision. Many students join companies straight from university, having been recruited before they graduate. To reject this career system and pursue manga means gambling everything; the job prospects are thin for a failed manga artist, even with a degree. For inspiration, young hopefuls can look to manga's success stories, though they account for no more than 10 per cent of the industry's estimated 3,000 professionals. Among those 300 are the real high-flyers. *Dragon Ball* helped make Akira Toriyama one of Japan's highest earners. Rumiko Takahashi's annual income grew so great that she ranked among the ten wealthiest people in the whole of Japan. An equivalent in America might be Charles Schulz, of *Peanuts* fame, though he was strictly a one-man operation. To meet demand, most manga creators, especially on a weekly, have to become managers running a studio and dividing up the labour and their modest page rate among a staff of between a couple and 20 or more people. The hope is that the investment pays off when royalties start to come in for the book compilations.

After the layout sketches have been approved by the editor, the mangaka draws the art boards so that they can be handed over to assistants who will carry out the subsequent stages: finishing the inking; drawing in panel

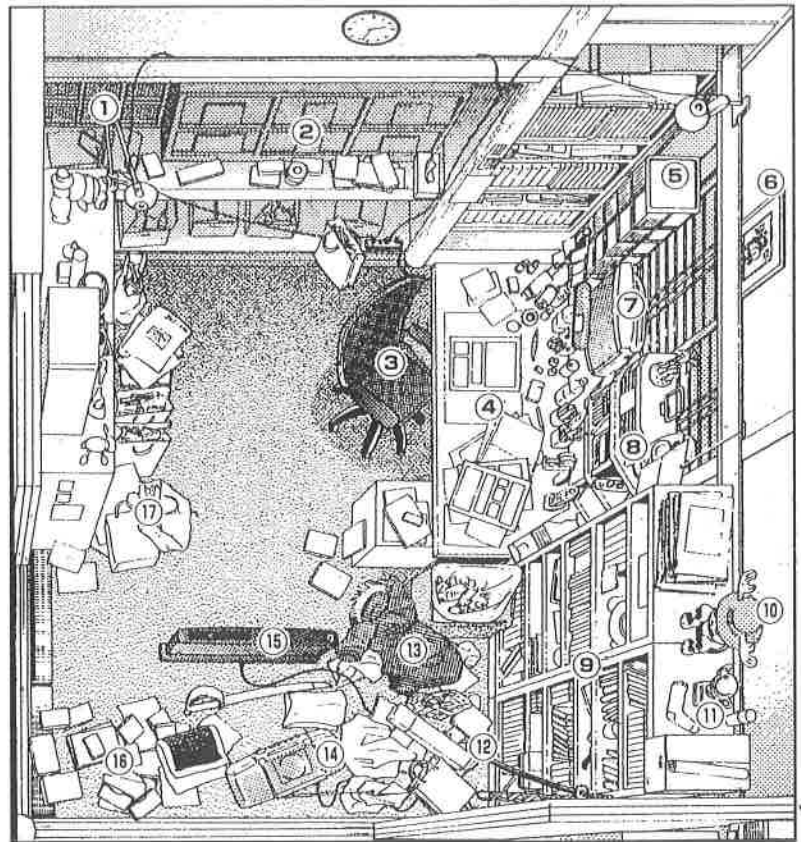


Right: A master artist directs his assistants, all seated around the same table, while an edgy editor looks on in a flashback from Keiji Nakazawa's life story, *I Saw It*.

borders, balloon shapes and sound effects; adding photo-reference drawings of machinery, nature, architecture; and applying the kaleidoscope of screen tones and patterns available. The end result can make black and white art look almost more vivid than full colour. Given the scale of production, there is a constant demand for visuals of a similar nature. Out of this need for quick turnover has arisen an industry supplying a variety of standard backgrounds, skies, explosions, brickwork, flowers, etc. The master artist's finishing touches may involve giving the signature look to the faces or specifically the eyes, or no more than a perfunctory nod at the end of a production line. In America in the 1930s, with a readership of 60 million, the creator of boxing champion Joe Palooka at one stage drew little more than the faces. Today, the roll-call of collaborators on a modern American comic book can be almost as long as the credits on a movie. In manga, it's still only the mangaka who normally gets the byline; everyone else works in anonymity.

Assistants may never move on, for lack of talent, ambition, luck or because they are in such demand for their specialist skill. But becoming an assistant is one path to becoming a mangaka in one's own right. True knowledge of manga, some would argue, is like that of a martial art. You won't pick it up from any number of 'How To' manuals. It can only be handed down by studying under a *sensei*. As a humble apprentice, your training might take you from the most menial tasks to published professional status. Or, like Rumiko Takahashi, you might enrol for a course at Gekiga Sonjuku, one of the most demanding manga schools, run by Kazuo Koike, writer of *Lone Wolf and Cub*. These are paths that many still follow, the risk being that the student ends up as little more than a clone of the master. Other aspiring creators are entirely self-taught and self-directed, learning by copying or by trying for themselves. If they're talented, persistent and lucky, their personal vision may get noticed via competitions, fanzines, porno manga or experimental non-paying magazines and win them a cult following or maybe crossover success without too much compromise. Naturally there are always those who won't, or can't, fit into the commercial system. From their ranks emerge the struggling artists for whom self-publication can offer an alternative and sometimes sizeable market in itself.

A few years before his death in 1989, the originator of story manga, Osamu Tezuka, observed: 'Now we are living in the age of comics as air.' By this, he meant that manga are everywhere, permeating everyday life and almost taken for granted. But he was also warning that, like air itself, some manga might be polluting and damaging. He was speaking as someone who had devoted his adult life to the advancement of the culture.



Two first-generation *otaku*, or fans, raised on Tezuka's works, Kentaro Takekuma and Koji Aihara, felt that the master's hopes, and their own, for the medium were being so betrayed by the mass market that they had to respond. They did so in their 1990-92 exposé *Even a Monkey Can Draw Manga* by turning themselves into a comedy double-act. Shown sporting Tezuka's trademark berets as they pursue their dream 'to rule Japan with manga!', they conducted readers through a breezy and deliberately crass mock-instruction manual. Their painfully accurate 'lessons' tore into the crises of creativity they saw afflicting the industry: the lack of passion, risk and originality among the next generation of artists; the domination over them by editors often imposing their own pat storylines; the opportunism and cowardice of the publishers; and the complicity in all of this of the readers.

The medium will always be a fragile ecology, as Tezuka knew. Like any form of mass entertainment, it is prone to dumbness, plagiarism and formula. Fortunately, the continual demand for more and more stories makes it dependent on giving new talent a chance, on letting in that all-important breath of fresh air.

Above: All mod cons in One Piece creator Eiichiro Oda's studio. His assistants work in the next room.

1. About 200 American and European music CDs
2. Closet converted to magazine rack
3. Ergonomic chair
4. The dynamic drawing board
5. About 300 more music CDs
6. Prized sketch by Akira 'Dragon Ball' Toriyama
7. Air purifier
8. Sound system
9. Reference books
10. One Piece Chopper doll
11. One sock
12. Antique swords and flintlock
13. Coat thrown on the floor
14. Radio/cassette player
15. Heater (for the winter)
16. Shonen Jump and other manga magazines
17. Fan letters

Japanese Spirit, Western Learning

TO WHAT EXTENT are modern manga continuous with Japan's long tradition of narrative art? The Japanese government seems to think entirely so. Since April 2000, the new national art curriculum for junior high schools has insisted that manga be brought into the classroom. In its accompanying explanatory textbook, the Ministry of Culture and Education affirmed that 'manga can be called one of Japan's traditional modes of expression'. Art teachers are supplied with a three-page illustrated history to help them convey the uninterrupted continuity between historic picture scrolls, and prints and manga. Alas, in this visual material, the portrayal of contemporary manga was limited to one wordless sequence by Tezuka and a pin-up of Dragon Ball, with not a speech balloon or sound effect in sight.

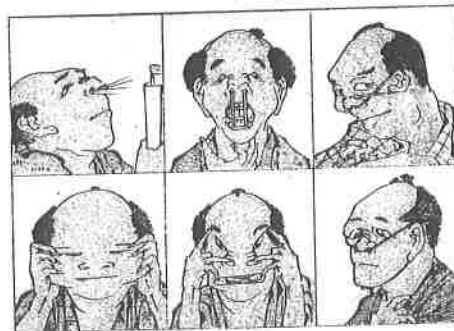
Such a view hinges on a very broad, and largely outdated, definition of manga in Japan, which embraces everything from the single-panel cartoon and political caricature to the four-panel newspaper strip, in addition to what the word now means to most people: namely, story manga and gekiga, or multi-panel comics and graphic novels. The only way to equate all of these vastly different artforms is to emphasize the purely pictorial aspects they have in common: in other words, exaggeration, simplification and movement lines. By concentrating on the obvious similarities, however, the authorities conveniently ignored the panel-to-panel storytelling and complex mingling of words and pictures that are the very keys to modern manga.

In fact, manga – that is, comics – might never have come into being without Japan's long cultural heritage being soundly disrupted by the influx of Western cartoons, caricatures, newspaper strips and comics. To deny this is to rewrite history. Manga grew out of an amalgam of East meets West, old meets new; or, as another 19th-century modernization slogan put it, it was a matter of *wakon yōsai* – 'Japanese spirit, Western learning'.

What exactly is the 'Japanese spirit' that is so apparent in manga? Some have pointed to the inherently visual nature of the Japanese written language itself, which uses *kanji*, or Chinese characters. These ideograms do not represent objects realistically but abstracted into symbols, streamlining reality into shorthand strokes of a brush or pen, in much the same way that comics do. Perhaps the way in which writing for the Japanese involves symbol-making and reading involves symbol-decoding predisposes them to accepting the symbolization integral to comics.

Another distinctive national characteristic that may help explain why manga account for nearly 40 per cent of all books and magazines sold in Japan is the people's long-standing appetite for pictorial art, which – in the manner suggested by the Ministry of Culture and Education's brochure – at times gets close to the spirit of the comic. Comics critic Fusanosuke Natsume has classified some of this early narrative art as 'pre-manga'. Such works began with 12th-century drawings painted onto paper scrolls as much as 20 feet (6 metres) in length and placed in sequence to tell of legends, battles and events from daily life. Scrolls could be funny, too. The

artist-priest Toba (1053–1140) gently mocked the priesthood by turning them into rabbits, monkeys, foxes and frogs; he also drew infamous farting contests. As on a modern computer, the readers' eyes could 'scroll' through the landscape, moving right to left as the scrolls were opened out. Perhaps that flowing way of viewing and reading survives in manga? Similarly, the way a



scene painted onto a folding screen is divided into sections could be said to be echoed in the rows of frames in a manga. It is no accident that the vertical white gaps or 'gutters' between frames are frequently made to abut more closely than the horizontal gutters, in effect making each row of frames more readable, not unlike a screen.

Printed matter that was more affordable and accessible to the public, and probably closer in spirit to

Right: Though seldom narrative, Hokusai's *manga*, or 'playful sketches', such as these facial contortions, prefigured much of the humorous draughtsmanship of modern cartoons and comics. Hokusai produced the sketches between 1814 and 1834. **Opposite:** Battered and bandaged but never beaten, Norakuro enlists as a dog soldier in the Japanese army. The black stray was among the first pre-war characters to be widely merchandised and have his magazine exploits compiled into hardbacks.

Manga: Sixty Years of Japanese Comics

Ukiyo-zoshi, or 'floating-world novels', include illustrated narrative pages that incorporate written speech and thoughts within the pictures using flattened perspective. These two examples come from *Characters of Worldly Young Men*, written by Kiseki Ejima in 1715; the artist is uncredited. Right: The son's moment of triumph. 'Shall I tame this steed for you?' he asks, as the trampled grooms cry 'Ouch!', and his samurai father looks on admiringly from the veranda: 'Wonderful!' he says. Far right: Two shop-boys raise sticks over their heads and shout, 'If you insist, sir!' Their master, who is dressed as a samurai, shouts, 'Come on! Attack me!' His fencing instructor sits in the background. Below: The English tradition of satire and caricature arrived in Japan in 1862 courtesy of Englishman Charles Wirgman and *The Japan Punch*.



manga, included the *ukiyo-e* pictures of the entertainment quarters or 'floating world'. From the 17th to 19th centuries, these woodblock prints were produced in hundreds of copies in as many as 15 colours and portrayed all kinds of secular subjects. One print might be dedicated to a night of passion with a courtesan, another to a kabuki player's performance or a sumo wrestling bout, others to watching beautiful geishas, cherry blossoms or the shifting seasons. The contemplation of the transient pleasures of everyday life through these prints can be echoed in certain manga in the fleeting moments they capture within each panel. Other links between the old and the new can be found in the *shunga*, or 'spring pictures', from this period. Banned in 1722, their erotic exaggerations seem to recur in current pornographic manga. Similarly, several examples of the horror genre of manga draw on the demons and monstrous apparitions in *yokai* prints. The precise outlines, bold compositions and meticulous use of delicate and repetitive patterning characteristic of all these prints are not a world away from manga illustration, where dynamic line artwork is the norm and fabric and other textures are applied as flat, unmodulated tones. The relationship is even clearer in modern manga set in the distant past. In these, artists often make conscious reference to *ukiyo-e* and other prints; after all, this is how history looked.

Other ancestors of manga include the *Toba-e*, named after the great scroll painter. These were

collections of pictures showing comical situations using visual humour and minimal text. The first were produced by Ooka Shumboku in the early 18th century in Osaka, then and now a city of entrepreneurs. Another format was the mass-produced *kibyoshi*, or 'yellow-cover books', which were full of woodcut cartoon stories lampooning figures of authority. Furthermore, there were also *ukiyo-zoshi*, or novels of the floating world, which featured pictures containing additional dialogue not found in the main text.

It was easier for pictures and words to be printed together in Japan than in the West. In books using the Roman alphabet, for example, blocks of text were composed employing a 26-letter alphabet of moveable type; any woodcut illustration would need to be made separately, so early publishers of English books and broadsheets preferred to save trouble and expense and keep pictures to a minimum, or drop them entirely. In Japan, however, moveable type took longer to take hold because the language requires so many more letters and characters. Thus it was easier to cut the words onto the same wood block as the illustration. The upshot of this was that from the start text could be smoothly incorporated within images and the two elements conceived, printed and read together, as in the basic system of comics.

Since printed text and images developed in tandem in Japan, this created a mindset receptive to modern



comics. By contrast, in Britain there developed a greater division between the verbal and visual. During the so-called 'Golden Age of Caricature' between 1780 and 1830, London's bars, coffeehouses, printshops and drawing rooms were strewn with the scurrilous prints of James Gillray and his contemporaries. These satirized politicians and other popular figures of the day and sometimes incorporated copious hand-lettered text and slanted, ungainly speech balloons. But in most early, British comics speech balloons were banished, and the text was relegated outside the pictures and typeset underneath.

So what might the word *manga* have meant to print artist Katsushika Hokusai in 1814 when he invented the term? To him it meant looser, unself-conscious sketches in which he could play with exaggeration, the essence of caricature. Hokusai never dabbled in narrative in his sketchbooks but, were he alive today, he might recognize in modern manga some of the same pleasure in grotesque expressions, physical comedy and uninhibited drawing.

Manga as we know them today evolved from the efforts of a series of pioneers during the modernizing Meiji period and after, who adapted newly imported Western influences. First to arrive and be imitated were single-frame political cartoons. In 1862 British army officer Charles Wirgman launched *The Japan Punch*, based on the British *Punch* weekly magazine. It was intended for foreigners living in Yokohama and featured Wirgman's own cartoons. This uneasy marriage between Western innovation and Japanese tradition involved using the latest copper-plate techniques to print the first issues on the finest-quality soft Japanese paper. His cartoons were utterly new. Prior to this, making caricatured likenesses of actual people or critical comments about contemporary events had been forbidden in Japan under the shogunate.

Nicknamed *ponchi-e*, or 'Punch drawings', these exotic Western-style pictures gradually caught on with Japanese artists, who began to get up the courage to attack their leaders' corruption. Readers of the magazine *Marumaru Chinbun* from 1877 delighted in the clever compositions of Honda Kinkichiro, who loaded Western cartooning conventions with traditional Japanese references and puns. By the 1890s, the rather derisive term *ponchi-e* had been replaced by the word *manga*, now redefined to cover all

the cartoon arts at that time. In these periods of social unrest or dissent, the single political cartoon had some teeth, but since 1945 the medium has declined in Japan, enjoying little of the gravitas it has in America or Europe. In fact, in the last few years it is manga themselves that have taken on more politicized roles, both as opinion-forming tools and as highly critical projections of contemporary society.

It was in the closing years of the 19th century that Japanese artists began to respond to the discovery of multi-panel comic strips from Europe and America. The broad humour of one-page strips from *Punch*, French magazines *L'Assiette au Beurre* and *Le Rire*, Germany's *Bilderbogen* and America's *Puck* clearly made an impression on Rakuten Kitazawa. He began by sending up country bumpkins baffled by the big city in his first strip serial in 1902 for *Jiji Manga*, a weekly newspaper supplement. In 1905 Kitazawa unveiled *Tokyo Puck* as a colour showcase for Japanese cartoonists. He was also aware of the mischievous kids of the American Sunday funnies, derived from European cautionary series like Wilhelm Busch's *Max & Moritz*. Kitazawa invented the tomboy Miss Haneko, a thoroughly modern Japanese girl whose high spirits and enthusiasms for the latest foreign crazes regularly backfired.

American newspaper strips were very accessible, even to foreign audiences. The funnies cast a wide net and tended to be non-specific. Even when set within an Irish family, for example, a story would broadly reflect the

new urban and immigrant experience shared the world over. Translations of many strips spread to Japanese newspapers in the early 1920s. Among the most influential exports was George McManus's *Bringing Up Father*, which poked fun at both the unambitious everyman and the grasping nouveaux riches by contrasting Jiggs's down-to-earth simplicity with his wife Maggie's vain social climbing. The strip also served as a catalogue of the latest Art Deco fashions and interior designs. In Belgium, it was a favourite of the young Hergé before he created *Tintin* in 1929; in Japan, it served as the basis for such variations as *Easy-Going Daddy* and *Bringing Up a Rich Man*. These and other Japanese copies tended to be limited in their ambition and length, veering only occasionally outside of mild farce and occupying only a single page of up to



Top and above: In *Jiji Manga*, the Sunday section of the *Jiji Shinpo* newspaper, Rakuten Kitazawa (1876–1955) used the full-page American-style colour format for *Donsha*, which related the adventures of a plucky street kid, and *Haneko*, whose eponymous star is here seen attempting the latest dance import, the Charleston. Left and below: From 1936 to 1971 spunky five-year-old Fuku-chan romped through the newspaper strips of Ryuichi Yokoyama (1909–2001). He was also animated for a propaganda film in 1944 and a TV series in 1982.



Manga: Sixty Years of Japanese Comics

As iconic as Felix the Cat and Mickey Mouse, the puppy Norakuro became a mascot of Japan's militarism in the 1930s. He enjoyed a new lease of life after the war, and was later revived in 1970 in new comics and a TV series, and as part of the 1980s 'retro anime' trend. Right: Norakuro leads his canine commandos into blood-free cartoon combat in this adventure from 1938, block-printed in combinations of blue, red and yellow. Far right: Norakuro cleverly has them use a tank tread as a shield and as a walkway over barbed wire against the enemy pigs who represent the Chinese. Below: Norakuro's creator, Suiho Tagawa (1889-1989), with a canine friend.



Right: Among Tagawa's other 1930s characters was an octopus in glasses who puts two of his tentacles down each sleeve and trouser leg in order to appear human. Far right: In this patriotic scene, he has brought sailors' uniforms to recruit his fellow octopuses into Japan's navy.



eight frames. As with the political cartoon, the impact of newspaper strips in post-war Japan has also become less significant than in America or Britain.

Beyond the 'gag-a-day' ritual of humour strips, what really kept US readers loyal to a paper were the melodramatic weekly and daily serials. In Japan, serials were mainly cartoonish and confined to a few pages in new magazines aimed at children, like *Shonen Club* (1931). In their prime these monthlies were a couple of hundred pages thick, forerunners of today's massive manga periodicals. One of *Shonen Club*'s best-loved figures was the brave little stray dog Norakuro, a sort of canine counterpart to Felix the Cat. This cute-looking kiddies' entertainment soon became steeped in the militarism of the period. In pursuit of his dream of becoming a world-famous general, Norakuro enlists as an accident-prone 'private second class' in a tough dog regiment commanded by Buru, the bullying bulldog. The funny animal comedy soon gives way to heroism on the battlefield. By his perseverance and bravery, the plucky pup rises through the ranks. Compiled into hardcover books printed in blocks of bright colour, his collected adventures sold over a million copies before World War II.

Tagawa and most of his contemporaries took an almost theatrical approach to their comics. They drew characters mainly head-to-toe, rarely in close-up or from unconventional viewpoints, as if the reader were watching actors perform on stage. The clarity and calm of their pages appeal to American graphic novelist Chris Ware. 'To me, this is the course comics should've taken before they got sidetracked and transformed by movies in the 1930s.' For better or worse, that transformation would overtake manga too, but it was slower and interrupted by the war. Historically, those visual storytelling innovations that would become known as 'cinematic techniques' were being pioneered by Western cartoonists from the early 19th century, long before film directors could put them into practice. By the 1930s, heightened realism, shifting camera angles and rapid cutting became the common language of American comics and movies, but these techniques went largely unseen in Japan. Cut off and cramped by wartime restrictions, manga could only hint at the changes to come. Still, these early works provided a foundation and inspiration to their young readers. After the war, one mangaka in particular, Osamu Tezuka, would unlock the Pandora's box and throw away the key.



Above: In San Francisco in 1931, Henry (Yoshitaka) Kiyama self-published *Manga Yonin Shosei*, or 'The Four Students Comic', his bilingual autobiographical account of life in the city as experienced by him and three young Japanese countrymen from 1904 to 1924. Left: In 52 two-page episodes, drawn in the American gag-strip style of the period, Kiyama records the big events – earthquakes, riots, the flu epidemic and, here, the 1914–18 Great War in Europe – as well as smaller happenings such as instances of racial prejudice that affected the lives of Japanese immigrants, students and servants.

EPISODE 45
The Great War in Europe

