



The Cultural Impact of Manga on Society

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analysed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

Article Information

DOI: 10.9734/AJL2C/2018/45673

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Complete Peer review History: <http://www.sdiarticle3.com/review-history/45673>

Original Research Article

Received 06 October 2018
Accepted 26 December 2018
Published 24 January 2019

ABSTRACT

The industry of Japanese comic books ('mangas') has taken the world by storm since the late 20th century. Not only do mangas hold a large market share in Japan, but they have also attracted a global audience and become a popular medium for a broad range of genres. In foreign countries, they are not only selling well but also penetrating the local culture. Mangas have been successful in transcending cultural barriers and making an important and lasting impression on audiences around the globe. At first, this success was limited, but now the imagination of readers has been captured everywhere, spawning a fan base that has been increasing day by day. These comics have nonetheless faced quite a few problems along the way. This paper will focus on the evolution of mangas in society, their content, and criticism of them and their cultural influence on society, with specific references to China and the U.S.

Keywords: Manga; evolution; society; culture; Japan.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most popular comic markets in the world is Japan. Mangas are Japanese comic books created in Japan or in the Japanese language. This term is used both to refer to comics and cartooning. Japanese pop culture, in the form including manga, has increasingly attracted attention over the past few decades. The appreciation of the Japanese comic books has been seen not only due to its entertainment value but also due to the sophistication in the art and storytelling. With a wide variety of theme ranges and depth, mangas cater to every type of audience, which is not only limited to children.

However, mangas have been criticised for their sexual and violent content. As a large percentage of parents perceive mangas to be specifically for children they feel that it has too much gore and sex. They believe that some mangas are unsuitable for underage readers and should be reclassified for an adult audience.

The chapter titled “Sex and Violence” will look at the liberal Japanese culture and unsuitability of certain mangas due to the cultural and geographical differences between countries. The chapter titled “An Attack on Culture?” will deal with the religious controversies that have been seen to arise due to certain mangas and their content. The author then looks at the history of mangas and its development in the United States of America and China. The author concludes the paper by offering a few suggestions and recommendations to help clarify and also for the betterment of the manga industry.

2. SEX AND VIOLENCE

The violence found in mangas is mostly graphic with spurts of blood, objects pierced into other people's bodies, violent dialogues, physical fights and likewise. Although this degree of violence is accepted in Japanese culture, it is not appreciated by audiences around the globe in countries like the United States, China, Iran and others [1]. While Japanese culture allows characters to die because they are not believed to be immortal, audiences from other countries have had opposing views, seeing a bad influence on children that promotes violence.

The sexual content of mangas has long been debated. Several have women with immodest clothing, exposing long legs and big breasts. The most prominent examples would be Tsunade from *Naruto*, Rangiku Matsumoto from *Bleach*,

Nami from *One Piece* and Lucy Heartfilia from *Fairy Tail*. These mangas are rated PG-13 with the tag “*ecchi*” i.e., playful sexual actions. Furthermore, some mangas show nudity, such as *To Love-Ru*, *Sekirei*, *Nozoki Ana* and others.

Nudity in anime and manga appears in the category of *hentai*, i.e., violent anime/manga porn. It has given the entire industry a negative image [2]. This image has been made even worse by instances in which serial killers have been found possessing *hentai* and which are thus entirely blamed on *hentai* mangas. For example, the “Otaku killer” murdered four young girls and was found to possess *hentai* [3]. Even though the anime and manga industry have managed to distance themselves from *hentai*, the nudity expressed in these mangas and anime has outraged families and governments. Iran has banned mangas except for some that have been made available to the public after approval of the Ministry of Islamic Culture. Such approval is highly unlikely in the case of mangas and animes [4]. Singapore has banned any manga that contains “*yaoi*” content, i.e., *Yamete! Watashi no Oshiri ga Itai*, (roughly translated as “*Stop it! My butt hurts*”).

Coupled with negative ratings of these mangas and anime is the regulation of child pornography. A genre called *lolicon* uses underage characters in sexual situations. Public fascination with the sexuality of young girls has been made into a spectacle, which appeals not only to men but also to women [5]. Young girls have thus been seen as valid participants in sexual acts. On the other hand, as Sparks [6] points out and as Diamond and Uchiyama have found in their research [7], exposure to violence and pornography does not necessarily affect the desires of the viewers and does not necessarily incite them to commit such crimes. *Lolicon* mangas and anime were for a long time readily available and consumed in countries such as Japan, the United States, and Australia, but many nations have stopped their import/selling of *lolicon*. Japan has been under increasing pressure to meet global standards for regulating child pornography. However, in the case of *Ashcroft v. Free Speech Coalition* [8], the U.S. Supreme Court held that sexual images of virtual minors cannot be equated with child pornography. From a legal standpoint, no minor is actually part of the production of *lolicon* and no physical harm is done to anyone [9]. Freedom of expression must be upheld, and the fans of anime and manga should have a right to enjoy such material.

Because Japanese culture is relatively liberal in the world community, mangas tend to be rated PG-13 in that country even though some may be unsuitable for audiences brought up in other cultures [10]. Dragon Ball Z was one of the first anime/manga to be appreciated by a worldwide audience in the 21st century, with both the anime and the manga having scenes with nudity and foul language. Other famous animes and mangas such as Naruto, Bleach, and One Piece also contain the same. Such scenes and language cause parents and teachers to associate mangas and animes with behaviour that is deemed inappropriate in real life, thus leading them to seek bans on such mangas and anime [11].

3. AN ATTACK ON CULTURE?

Mangas and anime have also been deemed inappropriate because they “mock” religion. Some mangas and anime do talk about religion. While most of them go unnoticed, some have faced a backlash from religious communities.

The series Angel Beats shows each character's thoughts on religion, and the story revolves around afterlife. The focus is on the paths chosen by each character and how their beliefs help them decide their next step. The series implicitly talks about religions such as Buddhism and Christianity and different icons and principles of these religions [12]. Another series, Hellsing, is a fight between English Protestants and vampires [13]. While these series do have a focus on religion, they have not yet faced any backlash for such focus.

On the other hand, quite a few series have faced a severe backlash by various religious groups for some content that indirectly insult or mock them and their religion. In the manga Jojo's Bizarre Adventure, the antagonist picks up a book from the library and after examining it orders the execution of the protagonist. The book that was picked up was shown to be the Quran. The writer says he did not know Arabic and had picked a random book that turned out to be the Quran. The writer eventually censored the later prints in response to protests by the Muslim community, and soon sales of that manga were halted [14].

The Pokemon series, launched in 1996, is undoubtedly one of the most profitable mangas with earnings of over \$150 billion [15]. However, it has had quite a few problems over the years, especially from American fundamentalist

Christians who link Pokemon to demonism and say that Pokemon teaches violence, evolution, concepts such as reincarnation and the use of occult objects, such as magic stones, to gain the power to defeat your opponent [16]. The severity of the opposition to Pokemon has resulted in anything associated with Pokemon being banned in such households [17]. The same series has had similar controversies with the Islamic community [18] and the Jewish community [19].

4. THE HISTORY OF MANGAS IN THE U.S.

It has become common in the West to attribute everything that is weird in comics to Japanese cultural influence. Yet comics were stigmatised long before mangas became mainstream. In the 1950s, Dr Fredric Wertham accused comics, notably in his book ‘Seduction of the Innocent’, of having a dangerous influence on young readers and inadvertently causing juvenile delinquency. He claimed that numerous comic books showed the use of drugs, violence, sex and carried other adult content. Later on, Wertham attended a conference in New York City called “The Psychopathology of Comic Books” which was the start of the anti-comics movement in the United States. Not long after the conference the Detroit Police Commissioner, Harry S. Toy, investigated this matter and concluded that the comics were “Loaded with communist teachings, sex, and racial discrimination.” This movement eventually led to the banning of various comic books as well as mass burning of comic books in some states and the enactment of the Comic Code Authority (CCA) in 1954. Now every comic book has to be approved by the CCA and a stamp of approval put on each comic book. As a result, there was a decline in comic book sales in the U.S. News such as the one regarding the Otaku killer [20] made sales plummet further; however, this changed in the 21st century. Carol L. Tilley, an assistant professor at the University of Illinois, found flaws in the papers of Wertham. This material was not made available by the Library of Congress until 2010 and as soon as it was, Dr Tilley disproved Wertham's entire work and called it “manipulated, overstated, compromised and fabricated evidence [21].” His work did not even contain a bibliography or any citations [22].

Even though Wertham's work has been disproved of and the CCA lost its importance in the late 20th century, it is due to this movement that mangas did not reach the American audience until very recently. A large number of

comics, especially mangas, are still not sold in the U.S. Mangas were avoided for the simple reason that they were considered to be cartoons, and cartoons are supposed to be for kids [23].

5. MANGA AND THE CHINESE

As one of the most authoritarian major countries, China has been bringing in new regulations to moderate the content seen by the public. The country has been criticised for its policies on freedom of expression [24]. On 8th June 2015 the Chinese Ministry of Culture blacklisted the distribution of 38 titles in both online and print forms. This is not the first time that the Ministry has blacklisted mangas and anime. In April 2015, 62 titles were banned, including international bestsellers such as *Naruto* and *Sailor Moon*. The decision was made to protect the welfare of the children and reduce the instances of juvenile delinquency in the country [25]. Out of the 38 that were blacklisted some are international bestsellers, such as *Attack on Titans*, *Tokyo Ghoul*, *√A*, *Sword Art Online*, *Tokyo Ravens*, *Death Note*, and others. According to a ministry official, Liu Quiang, some of the titles promote violence, some include sexual content, and some encourage juvenile delinquency, and attack the government [26]. This decision and the reasoning given by the Chinese government is questionable, as some of the blacklisted series does not promote any of the themes mentioned above.

Apart from blacklisting mangas and anime, the ministry has imposed a new regulation which requires websites to get approval from the ministry before they can stream any content. In the present times, there has been rampant misuse of the Internet, around the issues of intellectual property and censorship. China is said to have the world's highest piracy rate [27]. The ministry has issued warnings and fined 29 Chinese websites that still show content which the ministry had banned. The Chinese policies alone have been unsuccessful in preventing piracy. In a survey, Peter Goderie and Brian Yecies discovered that Internet piracy is not an isolated phenomenon and exemplifies a wider trend toward liberalisation among Chinese youth [28]. The audience has paid little attention to the State and its ban on manga and anime.

6. CONCLUSION

While mangas and anime may not intentionally try to harm any culture or religion, the industry

has been in the limelight for the wrong reasons. Even the Japanese industry has pushed for a ban on genres such as *Iolicon*. In June 2014, the Japanese government passed a law banning all child pornographic content and gave a time period of one year for this ban to come into effect. Other governments have likewise banned specific anime and mangas. There have also been petitions by people to enact an international ban on manga [29].

The Internet has allowed some people to buy the original manga to subsequently scan, translate, edit, and post it's content on the Internet. This act, called scanlation, has threatened the very existence of some mangas, as the manga artists depend on their income from mangas to create more similar content. Rampant manga piracy makes it tougher for manga artists to earn a living. A solution to this problem could be adopting a Netflix style arrangement and delivering manga and anime with the translations on the same day it is released. People may pay a minimal amount to subscribe to a manga, and the artist will be able to earn a living.

Mangas depict a world completely different from the real world, and this sharp contrast has made them popular among the youth globally. A world that is full of dreams and passion sometimes becomes a world that is more honest and reasonable because human society is shown in an alternative perspective [30]. For the manga industry to flourish throughout the world a few changes may need to be made to the content or at least to the ratings of manga for audience suitability. By doing so the industry will definitely get bigger, and countries will accept mangas into their culture.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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Peer-review history:
The peer review history for this paper can be accessed here:
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