

Beyond Otaku Community to Global Business: Manga in Academia—a Literature Review

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Abstract

Comics is commonly appreciated for its entertaining value but ignored for other values due to its lack of seriousness. Japanese comics is in no way an exception. Despite its popularity in the global market, manga is the reading material that is far from being intellectual. However, the study on manga suggested differently. Manga is treated with seriousness in academia. This article reviewed how manga was studied in various aspects. It was found that manga was studied from multidisciplinary, mainly from cultural studies. Other studies of manga focus on the translation of manga, its role in education and media, and its application as soft power and cultural commodities. While manga is interrelated to merchandise from entertainment industry and other consumer products even in automobile industry, its value in economy is less explored. Porter (1990) indicated that innovation was crucial for a business to remain competitive. Therefore, this article suggested that to understand the value of manga in economy, innovation studies should be taken into account in the future research of manga studies.

Keywords: manga, cultural studies, innovation studies, literature review, economic value

INTRODUCTION

Once merely an object obsessed by otaku, those who are viewed as social isolators in Japan, today manga is loved by its fans around the world. For Japanese, otaku is not a positive term since it connotes antisocial and deviated behaviors. This is in no way to stop manga lovers outside Japan to proudly call themselves otaku (Tsutsui, 2008). The immense popularity of manga has become a global phenomenon. For many countries in Asia, Japanese popular culture, including comics, is nothing foreign. Children in Thailand, for instance, spend their free time reading Japanese comics and watching animation on TV (Phornprapha & Podsatiangool, 2019). The success of manga in the U.S., however, is another story. The market in the U.S. has just welcomed manga in recent years reflected by the establishment of publishing houses specifically for Manga in the U.S. (Podsatiangool, 2017).

In discussing the achievement of manga, one should not consider only the sales of Manga but should take a closer look at other related merchandise since Japanese comics is often associated with other products such as video games, toys, and animations (Nobuoka, 2010; Hernández-Pérez, 2019). In Japan, the popularity of a manga can lead to the production of toys, video games, and animation of its plots and characters. It is common with Japanese consumers to read manga before watching its adaptation into animation or 'anime' in Japanese. On the other hand, consumers of Japanese manga abroad often start from watching anime before getting to read manga. This discrepancy is due to the different patterns of publishing between Western left-to-right and Japanese right-to-left styles (Phornprapha & Podsatiangool, 2019). Nonetheless, products originated from manga such as character goods and video games are not in any way less successful in the international market. Third of licensing revenues of \$13.9 million from Crayon Shinchan, for instance, was made from the market outside Japan. In 2002, at the peak of Japanese Manga industry (Hernández-Pérez, 2019), the value of market of Japanese animated characters in the U.S. reached \$4.3 billion (Otake, 2003). In Thailand, the launch of Honda Monkey Dragon Ball Limited Edition by CUB House by AP Honda can prove the success of manga in the Thai market when all of the motorcycles were sold within three days after its launch (Piantanongkit, 2019).

It is probably fair to state that manga has become a subject of interest in academia because of its popularity in international markets, especially in the U.S. The establishment of manga in the publishing industry in the U.S. has marked a significant change in the U.S. comics market. The U.S., the most influential creator of popular culture, has been challenged by manga not only in international markets but also in their own market as Roland Kelts put in his book's subtitle, "Japanese Popular Culture Has Invaded the U.S. (as cited in Brienza, 2014, p. 383). The phenomenon has called the attention from researchers to look at manga as an academic subject. Once again, manga has earned its place outside otaku community and made it into academia.

The review of literature related to Manga studies suggested that manga is often studied from multidisciplinary approaches, most of which cultural and textual analysis. However, even manga is one of major sources of Japanese revenues, its value in terms of economic is less investigated (Daliot-Bul & Otmazgin, 2017). Since the economic success of a country

depends on the ability to compete in international market, innovation plays an important role in enhancing the ‘winning’ possibility (Lundvall, 2013). To examine manga’s place in academia and the direction especially in terms of its economic values, this article focuses on two questions, (1) How is manga studied academically? and (2) How can the success of manga be explained more systematically? By reviewing the studies of manga, the article argued that manga studies can be beneficial from the Innovation Studies.

MANGA STUDIES

The definition of manga itself is problematic. The term ‘Manga’ is sometimes used interchangeably with its closely related product, ‘Anime’. Because of manga’s popularity, it influences the production of local comics in other countries, for example, Malaysia and Thailand (Chan, 2018; Phornprapha & Podsatiangool, 2019). Whether one should recognize these comics as manga is a question. The discussion of the term that is widely discussed in manga studies is if manga should be used to refer to the origin or the style of comics. A group of scholars started to work from the definition of manga itself (Kacsuk, 2019; Brienza, 2016). The terms proposed to refer to such comics are not settled as Brienza (2016) provided the references for these manga produced locally with no direct connection with Japan as “OEL manga, world manga, Amerimanga, international manga” and what seemed the most possible one for Brienza “global manga” (p. 4).

For the purpose of discussion in this paper, manga is defined as all Japanese style graphic novels printed in black and white by any publishing companies whether as periodicals or books. The plot can be fiction or non-fiction. However, it is not necessary that manga artists must be Japanese, or the language of manga should be Japanese. Even though the term is often used to refer to comics with the Japanese origin as well as the style, manga is categorized as a cultural artefact. Hence, the study of manga is often under the cultural studies.

Manga as a Cultural Artefact

How one sees manga as a cultural artefact depends on how culture is defined. Although common as it may seem, the meaning of ‘Culture’ is ambiguous. Williams (1976) explained that it was “one of the two or three most complicated words in the English Language” (p.76). The most influential definition central in the cultural studies is what proposed by Tyler (1871), “taken in its wide ethnographic sense...that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (p. 1). Using this definition, however, is problematic since it is based on “Eurocentric cultural hierarchies, evolutionary conceptions of racial difference and genocidal colonial projects” and tends to ignore the history of reconceptualization of the term during 20th century (Bennett 2015, p. 547). The definition is even made more complicated to respond to the dynamic nature of the terms when used in myriad of ways (Williams, 1976; Collier, Hedge, Lee, Nakayama, & Yelp, 2002).

Collier et al. (2002) outlined six definitions of culture depending on the purpose of its application.

- Culture = uniquely human efforts (as different from nature and biology)
- Culture = refinement, mannerism (as different from things that are crude, vulgar, and unrefined)
- Culture = civilization (as different from backward barbaric people)
- Culture = shared language, beliefs, values (as different from language, beliefs and values that are not shared; dissenting voices; and voices of the “other”)
- Culture = dominant or hegemonic culture (as different from marginal cultures)
- Culture = the shifting tensions between the shared and the unshared (as different from shared or unshared things) (p. 229-230)

In cultural studies, how one defines culture greatly affects the approach to the topic. Martin & Nakayama (2010) suggested a dialectical approach that provided more comprehensive approach to the study of culture. According to their study, there were three approaches in the study of culture, social science, interpretive, and critical.

Social science viewed culture as “learned, group-related perceptions” (Martin & Nakayama, 2010, p. 87). Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov, M. (2010) compared culture as mental programming. In their view, culture should not equal to refinement or civilization but should extend its scope to all patterns in ordinary things in life. These patterns were learnt from the social environment and experiences one encountered. Consequently, culture can affect people’s behavior and how the behavior was interpreted (Spencer-Oatey, 2012).

Interpretive researchers viewed culture as “contextual symbolic patterns of meaning, involving emotions” (Martin & Nakayama, 2010, p. 87). Scholars who work in this area perceive culture as having patterns and symbols that are available for access for members of a society. Similarly, Kroeber & Kluckhohn (1952) defined culture from this view as “Culture consist of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiment in artifacts...” (as cited in Adler, 1997, p. 14). These patterns in culture instigated emotions such as sense of comfort for the member or “embodied ethnocentrism” (Martin & Nakayama, 2010, p. 88). Interpretive scholarship entails the framework of communication developed by Dell Hymes’s SPEAKING that paid attention on the communicational context namely scene, participation, end, act sequence, key, instrumentality, norm, and genre (Hymes, 1974). However, this view could lead to the misperception that culture is equally shared by every member of a society as it is easily accessible by all members.

Critical view of culture responds to the question whether every member of society shares common culture. This view opposes the fifth definition collected by Collier et al. (2002) that culture is dominant or hegemonic. Avruch (1998) pointed out that conceptualizing culture as homogeneous and that an individual had only one culture were inadequate con-

ceptions of culture often found in work using a cultural approach. In contrasting received culture and postmodern culture, Atkinson (2004) indicated that the concept of received culture was central in a discussion in applied linguistics, English for Academic purposes and second language acquisition to name a few. Since received culture refers to the understanding of culture as tradition which is close to the view that sees culture as custom, it ignores the inequality in terms of power between dominant groups and minorities and the effect on culture. On the other hand, postmodern culture embraced the hybridity, diffusion, difference, and inequality to the concept of culture as the result of globalization (Atkinson, 2004). Recent approach to culture, therefore, needs to take the effects of globalization into account. Critical scholarship includes the heterogeneous nature of culture and the unclear line of cultural boundaries. The view of culture is extended beyond the second definition outlined by Collier et al. (2002) that culture refers to refinement or as Spencer-Oatey (2012) summarized Matthew Arnolds' definition of culture in *Culture and Anarchy* (1867) as "special or artistic endeavors or products" or more common term "high culture" (p. 1).

For cultural studies, the definition of culture has been highly influenced by globalization. Contemporary culture, mass culture, or popular culture becomes the topic of interest among scholars. It was found that popular culture is a "dynamic, ideological, power-involved force" (Atkinson 2004, p. 282).

Popular culture is studied under two major schools of thought. Frankfurt School includes critical scholars in 1930 such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. These scholars identify three characteristics of products from popular culture as commodification, standardization, and massification. Producers and consumers of popular culture that is produced under so-called "Culture Industry" lose their individualism and fell victims of the bourgeoisie. Birmingham School or originally Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) focuses more on cultural practice than cultural products. Scholars in this school are intrigued by the relationship between cultural practice and political, economic, societal, and cultural structure. In their view, popular culture is not only used to reaffirm ideologies but also to criticize and resist against power (Kaewthep, 2014). In addition to those scholars who express the dynamic nature of popular culture, Ting-Toomey and Chung (2012) referred to popular culture as "cultural artefacts or systems that have mass appeal and that infiltrate our daily life" (p. 16). This definition is paralleled to Martin and Nakayama's (2010) that highlights the characteristics of popular culture as easy to access and difficult to avoid. Therefore, people usually are exposed to other cultures through popular culture.

One of the definitions of popular culture that relates most to manga is 'the culture that is widely favored, produced, consumed, interpreted, shared by many people through media experiences, and is driven by business purposes'. By this definition, manga is perceived as a Japanese popular cultural artefact.

Manga and the Studies from Multidisciplinary

From its original start as whimsical pictures (Prough, 2010a), manga has been through cultural diffusion process. At the current stage, it does not only express 'Japaneseness' which is incomprehensible by consumers outside Japan. The fact that manga is well received in the international market indicates the universality of manga as a cultural product. From such phenomenon, manga has become the topic of academic interest.

Manga in cultural studies. Under both schools of thoughts of cultural studies, some have investigated Manga as Japanese commodities (Denison, 2010; Junid & Yamato, 2019; Hernández-Pérez, 2019) while some have focused on how manga reflected Japanese history (Ito, 2005; Bouissou, 2010). Some work are more specific than the others and investigated in the history of specific genres such as Shamooin (2017; 2018) who investigated Boys Love manga and Shōjo manga respectively. Taking more or less a social science approach to focus more on genres of manga than the history of the comics is the study by Bryce & Davis, (2010) which explained categorizations of Japanese manga. However, the categorizations are often complicated since manga is written for all demographics with different interests. Therefore, Japanese manga are usually in "genres of anthologies" such as Josei Manga or ladies' comics, Dojinshi or Amerteur of fans' Manga, and Yaoi or male-male love stories (Johnson-Woods, 2010, p.8).

Manga and translation studies. Nevertheless, these studies on history and genres did not take the consumption outside Japan into account. Since Manga are written in Japanese, translation has become a means for manga to reach its fans. To respond to the demand of manga readers abroad, one of the most common translation of manga is scanlation or the amateur translation by fans of manga. The unique ways that manga are consumed posed important issues of translation studies. Outside Japan, manga is translated into target languages not only by authorized publishers but also by fans and its fans of fans. Magera (2018) examined how Manga was translated into Russian after the end of the Soviet Union. Some researcher investigate the topic using both interpretive and critical approaches the role of the English language in the translation of manga to international readers (Fabbretti, 2017) while others portrayed the problems in translation and offer the solutions (Fabbretti, 2016; Okyayuz, 2017). The studies in the translation also extended their scopes to legal issues of the scanlation, for example, copyright (Lee, 2009) or the studies regarding the establishment of transnational corporate convergence against scanlation aggregators (Madeley, 2015).

Manga in education. Manga is studied as a pedagogy in education in both teaching Japanese and non-Japanese subjects. Prough (2018) used manga to teach analytical skills to students. In the study, the students did close reading with manga and acquire the visual analysis skills while gaining more understanding of Japanese popular culture. Han and Ling (2017) suggested the use of manga in the classroom differently. They focused on the use of manga as a teaching tool for Japanese as a foreign language class. They concluded that teachers should understand behaviors of the learners outside the classroom to ensure the success in learning. By using manga, teachers can be successful in gaining students' interest since the students perceived such materials as relevant to them. Some suggested the use of man-

ga in the teaching of translation. Turner (2013) believed that manga can be applied to help students develop reading and writing skills as well as other learning skills namely critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Manga as media. At the core of Japanese popular culture studies, manga and anime are a part of visual culture (Hernández-Pérez, 2019). It is regarded as one type of media. Berndt (2016) argued that the factors that determined the position of manga as media were targeted readers, genres, format, and placed of publishing, while some identified manga as transmedia story telling (Jin, 2019). In media studies, manga is investigated under mixed media forms which visual elements are the main focus of the studies (Unser-Schutz, 2010). Hernández-Pérez (2019) argued for the revision of the term ‘anime media-mix’ as ‘Manga media’ that the researcher believed can better represent the transnational nature of manga. The researcher explained the key features of transnational cultural industries as “Character licensing, transcreation in non-media products, and above all, the building of fictional worlds populated by characters and histories” (Hernández-Pérez, 2019, p. 61). The study of manga as transnational or global frames is not novel (Daliot-Bul & Otmazgin, 2017; Hernández-Pérez, 2019). In this respect, manga and anime are investigated based on its transnational nature especially from the way they are adapted and consumed from many parts of the world. The studies in this area include the investigation of the transcultural elements in the production of anime and manga as cultural commodities (Denison, 2010; Junid & Yamato, 2019).

Manga as cultural commodities. To identify where Manga is in the global market, it is useful to consider these two terms, global popular and cultural globalization. During (1997) provided a distinction between these two terms. Using the popularity of the Hollywood star, Arnold Schwarzenegger, across the globe, During (1997) identified the phenomenon as global popularity. On the other hand, the researcher made a case of cultural globalization using an example of *Protele*, a telenovela, that was greatly successful in Asia and only some countries in Europe. The researcher indicated that cultural globalization may facilitate the glocalization process. Based on the distinctions of these two terms, the phenomenon of manga can be categorized under cultural globalization. While almost every genre is popular in Asia, only specific genres like *Shōjo* and *Shōnen* made it to Europe and U.S. markets. However, compared to other topics in cultural studies, work on Manga studies are still inadequate even when manga reached its apogee at the beginning of 21st century (Hernández-Pérez, 2019).

Significant work on manga during this time include work by researchers namely Brienza (2009; 2014), Chambers (2012), Chen (2012), Couch (2010), Prough (2010a), and Roland (2006) who studied reasons behind the accomplishment of Manga abroad. Podsatiangool (2017), Brienza (2009) and Ito (2005) suggested that the success of Manga in the U.S. market was likely due to the influences of U.S. culture in Japanese Manga since WW II.

The impact that the U.S. has had on Japan in many aspects entails politics, education, economy, and society. Chen (2012), Grigsby (1998), Ito (2005), Prough (2010b) suggested that Japanese society was strongly influenced by U.S. popular culture, manga included. The exposure to U.S. culture and popular culture results in the adulteration of western concepts in Japanese comics. In its early years, manga was a good source to learn about Japanese society

as it reflected the situations that Japanese were facing economically and culturally. In later years after the encounter with the U.S. popular culture, intertextuality from classical mythologies and Christianity to modern cultural products such as Disney's and Hollywood movies were found in Japanese Manga. Tezuka Osamu, the founder of modern Japanese Manga started developing unique techniques of drawing Manga after the World War II (Ito, 2005). The unique Japanese drawing styles using non-Asian hair colors and big eyes have become the interest topic studied by Brophy (2010), Cohn (2010), Chen (2012), and Prough (2010b). Interestingly, the blend of American popular culture to Manga was not intentionally created to attract a market outside Japan. Manga artists in Japan did not focus on exporting their Manga, at least not until recently. Nevertheless, manga has finally made their ways into the U.S. market. The explanation of the achievement of manga is unsettled but debating on the concept of Japaneseness. First, Japaneseness is the key to the success. Second, Japaneseness in Manga should be concealed. Japaneseness refers to any visible forms of Japanese or any Japanese scents that can be detected as it is 'from Japan' in the Manga. McGray (2002) argued that Japan's superpower was not its economic power, but its cultural influence on a global level. The influence of Japan has gone to the extent that there is certain resistance to the globalization or Americanization of Japanese popular culture in the U.S by American fans. The claim is based on the notion that the U.S. imperialism is polluting the intent of anime and manga. It is devaluation of Japanese cultural products (Imaoka, 2010). The second pole seems to be more convincing to many researchers. Chen (2012) pointed out that the characteristics that capture attention of the Western readers were those that were fantasy, contemporary Japanese. Others argued that the coolness of manga for U.S. fans was its not-the-United-States-ness (Allison, 2006; Brienza, 2014). Some claimed that the success of manga came from its universality. Yamato (2012) suggested that the popularity of Manga and Anime outside Japan was from the culturally odorless representation of Manga. In the U.S. the characteristics of popular manga were universal, exotic, hybridized, and culturally odorless (Podsatiangool, 2017). Manga artists use intertextual reference to western concepts for instance, Christianity in Fullmetal Alchemist or Greek Methodology in Saint Seiya. Based on Fiske (1990), readers created the meaning of the text using their cultural experiences, attitudes, and emotions. Therefore, American readers found the concepts in Manga relatable and comprehensible.

Manga as soft power. All of the studies by Podsatiangool (2017), Brienza (2009) and Ito (2005) investigated Manga as a cultural commodity that was globally successful. They also supported the position of manga as cultural globalization. Even with the accomplishment of manga as cultural globalization, the manga and animation industry did not receive adequate attention from Japanese government. It was not until Japan launched so called 'Cool Japan' policies that manga and animation received formal attention from the government to help promote its status as a cultural superpower (Mandujano-Salazar, 2016; Nagata, 2012).

The purpose and effectiveness of 'Cool Japan' have called attention from researchers to investigate the topic, especially regarding Japan's soft power (Pellitteri, 2019; Mandujano-Salazar, 2016; Agyeiwaah, Suntikul, & Carmen, 2019). Keener (2015) argued that the soft power of Japan that infiltrated across the world was due to the success of manga and that even the publication of Shakespeare Manga in Britain can be explained by the appropriation of Japan's soft power.

The universality of manga through cultural diffusion process is undoubtedly for many researchers a vehicle driving manga to the success. The wide diffusion of Manga around Japan and other parts of the world is probably due to the transient nature of culture itself. Opposed to the view that culture is timeless, Spencer-Oatey (2012) argued that culture is evolving over time. Such changes are a direct result of intercultural communication (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). The concept of discovery and invention explain the changes that occur within a society while diffusion leads to the spreading of one culture to another. However, when two cultures come into contact, it does not always result in the complete acceptance of both cultures. The process of cultural diffusion is selective; only useful and applicable aspects of culture in contact will be borrowed into one culture. The characteristic of cultural diffusion; therefore, is highly related to cultural innovation (Spencer-Oatey, 2012).

Manga and Innovation. Despite its value in economic, manga is not adequately studied in relation to innovation. Porter (1990) identified innovation as the key to remain competitive in the market. From the traditional microeconomic perspective, innovation involves using technology and scientific knowledge to improve or develop existing products or processes (Rossi, 2002). Therefore, to general understanding, innovation needs to relate to technology. Manga is inevitable evolved as habits of the consumers render new way to read manga. Book publication is not the sole platform for manga when digital manga is created to answer the need for the consumers. Rigaud, Thanh, Burie, Ogier, Iwata, Imazu, and Kise (2015) investigated how the new technology in reading affects the understanding of manga readers by analyzing speech balloon. They argued that positions of characters and speech balloon affected readers' understanding of the comics. Manga is also the topic for the studies of three-dimension character design and development of streaming video systems (Hernández-Pérez, 2019). Nonetheless, the investigation of manga as a non-technological innovation is especially rare. Butcher, Sung, and Goldie (2019) explored the accomplishment of Pokémon Go, the top hit mobile game with highest gross revenue in August 2019 (Willingham, 2019), as an innovative brand extension. This study, however, focuses on manga related merchandise rather than the comics. Phornprapha and Podsatiangool (2019) investigated the relationship between manga and innovation differently. They argued that manga was successful in global markets because it was a non-technological innovation. They further indicated that since innovation was often associated with technology, the application of the concept became limited. By reviewing the concept of innovation provided by Schumpeter, the study concluded that manga was a cultural innovation. This article, therefore, suggests that to study the success of manga in terms of economy, manga studies should make use of the innovation studies to systematically explain the population of manga in global markets.

CONCLUSION

Manga has evolved from its original stage as a nonsense picture to a cultural commodity. From its popularity across the globe, manga attracts the interest of researchers who draw their approaches from multidisciplinary into manga studies. Manga is investigated in other fields, namely cultural studies, translation studies, education, media, and soft power research. However, what probably provides the explanation of the success of manga is to study manga as cultural commodities which the value of manga is not only for the entertainment but also economy. Since innovation is the key of economic competitiveness, innovation studies should play an additional role in the study of manga.

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