Transnationalism in East and Southeast Asian Comics Art

Edited by
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Preface

History and Development of the Project

The genesis for this book project was the one-day (May 12, 2018) symposium held at Chinese University of Hong Kong, organized by Wendy Siuyi Wong and Benjamin Wai–ming Ng. The seven speakers from East Asia, Southeast Asia, and North America discussed a variety of transnational subjects related to comic art, including cultural flows, comics industry ownership, comics creation and labor, national identity and universal styles, the diaspora, and cross-national representations. They dealt with Japan, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore.

In an effort to make this book geographically inclusive, contributors knowledgeable about Mongolia, South Korea, and Taiwan in East Asia, and about Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam in Southeast Asia supplement the conference presenters. The result is a study of aspects of transnationalism and comic arts in all of East Asia, except North Korea, and all of Southeast Asia, except Brunei, Laos, and Myanmar (The boundaries of these regions were drawn many decades ago by the Association of Asian Studies). Brunei, Laos, and North Korea were omitted because of scant information and lack of contacts, while Myanmar was not covered because of a lack of connections between comics and transnationalism as determined from interviews with local cartoonists conducted by John A. Lent in 2018. Though the first cartoons published in then Burma, in 1912, were drawn by British amateur painters who were colonial teachers

and the railway commissioner, the rest of the country's comic art history lacks transnational links, save for a few Burmese cartoonists, who, in the early 2000s, exposed the oppression and absurdity of the government and military while they were in exile.

The end result is a book of an introduction and thirteen other chapters, six covering East Asia and seven, Southeast Asia, dealing with offshore comics production, transnational ownership, multinational collaboration, border crossings of comics creators and characters, expansion of overseas markets, as well as other topics such as Chinese cartoonists in political exile working in Japan; South Korea's foreign expansion of manhwa through translations, Webtoons, and U.S.-based manhwa firms; Cambodian artists' spring-boarding from strong European and East Asian influences to the creation of indigenous styles; the colonial underpinnings of Indonesian comics; transnationalism by borrowing, swiping, and adapting in Thailand; the impacts of global styles on Malaysian cartoons; representations of Filipinas in Japanese manga; efforts to build transnational ties in Southeast Asian comics, and Vietnamese attempts to find the country's own comic art voice.

The chapters cover a wide expanse of topics that relate by varying degrees to transnationalism; in the process, bringing coherence to the total manuscript.

Authors of these chapters include comics/cartoon researchers, cartoonists/illustrators-cum-scholars (e.g., Muliyadi Mahamood and Chi Huu Do), and a former coordinator of a comic art group within his adopted country (John Weeks). With the exception of John A. Lent and John Weeks, all are native to the countries/territories about which they write.

Framework of Project

As with a large percentage of edited books, *Transnationalism*…tends to be uneven in the approaches and methodologies used. There are chapters that are case studies of individual comics personnel, such as the late Cheng Uen of Taiwan who plied his creativity for Japanese publishers, Wang Ning of China, an entrepreneur who intermingles Chinese and Franco-Belgian cartoonists in joint workshops and collaborative book projects, and the late Lee Wai-Chun of Hong Kong, whose long-running *13-Dot Cartoon* projected Western images to young Chinese women, and an isolated comic book title, such as *Bumbardai* in Mongolia. Conversely,

other chapters provide broad overviews of a country's comics and how they affect or are affected by transnationalism, examples being those on Malaysia, with its trail of influences brought by British colonialism and the manga invasion, and South Korea, also inundated with manga, that has sought transnational links through offshore production, exportation and/or overseas publication of its *manhwa* and animation, and collaborative arrangements.

The editors make no apologies for any unevenness in approaches and methodologies used; on the contrary, they believe such variety is justified, even beneficial, when discussing such an array of different cultures, each incorporating transnationalism in its own distinctive way.

Using a geographical framework to organize East and Southeast Asia makes sense because of the marked differences within the regions and their component countries, relative to culture, language, religion, socio-economic, colonial, and political heritages. To use religion as an example of this diversity, in Southeast Asia, one finds Muslim majority countries such as Brunei, Indonesia, and Malaysia, Theravada Buddhist majority nations such as Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand, Chinese Confucian-influenced entities such as Singapore and Vietnam, and the Christian majority of the Philippines. Almost all East and Southeast Asian countries experienced colonization—by Japan, Great Britain, France, Spain, the U.S., The Netherlands, and Portugal, and a range of governmental and political systems, including various shades of communism, other forms of authoritarianism, socialism, democracy, and monarchy. Such diversity does not encourage a comparative approach.

Common threads tie these chapters historically, politically, and socio-economically. Except for Thailand, all of them had been under colonial or occupation rule; in most instances, it was the colonizers who introduced cartoons and comics often through humor magazines: the British in Japan, China, Hong Kong, and Myanmar; the French in Japan and Vietnam; the Dutch in Indonesia; the Americans in the Philippines. In most cases, the earliest of these cartoon periodicals were designed for the use and enjoyment of the colonizers.

Tied to this tread were later influences by U.S. comics, especially superhero and Disney titles, and Japanese manga. The Japanese eventually designated manga as cultural ambassadors, making their appearance very prominent throughout the region.

Another significant transnational feature common to East and Southeast Asia is an international division of labor. Seeking less-expensive

and strike-free labor, North American and European comics and animation companies leaned heavily on Asians to do the actual production work for their own artists. This transfer of labor was accomplished in various ways: by establishing offshore companies, e.g., animation studio offshoots in Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, and then Southeast Asia; enticing talented comics creators from the Philippines to move to the U.S. and work for Marvel, DC, Disney, and others, or "farming out" production (coloring, inking, etc.) to cartoonists in at least Taiwan, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia.

The other transnational string tying together East and Southeast comic art is the desire to seek overseas markets. This has been the goal particularly of Japanese, Chinese, and Korean comics and animation, but most other regional countries have sought to sell their comic art with varying degrees of efforts and success.

Transnationalism continues to gain a foothold in comics studies, and the aim of this book is to add to that volume of research.

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Do Huu Chi is a Vietnamese comic artist and art advocate. Since 2006, he has been creating comics and illustrations for several magazines and publishers in Vietnam. He was awarded the Special Jury Prize for Best Comics Strips in Asian Youth Animation and Comics contest in 2010. After graduating from the Savannah College of Art and Design with a MFA in Sequential Art in 2013, he returned to Vietnam and founded the creative hub *Toa Tàu*, which offers a dynamic creative platform for a wide range of audiences. Besides drawing, Chi loves graphic design, photography, and writing. His diverse body of work draws from one question: how to use the arts as an instrument to leverage and deepen the human experience. Chi is based in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

Lent John A. taught at the college/university level from 1960–2011, including stints in the Philippines as a Fulbright scholar, Malaysia, where he started the country's first mass communication program; Canada, as Rogers Distinguished Professor; China, as a visiting professor at four universities; and the USA. Lent pioneered in the study of mass communication and popular culture in Asia (since 1964) and Caribbean (since 1968), comic art and animation, and development communication. He has authored or edited 82 books, published and edited *International Journal of Comic Art* (1999–), *Asian Cinema* (1994–2012), and *Berita* (1975–2001), and chaired Asian Popular Culture (PCA) (1996–), Asian Cinema Studies Society (1994–2012), Comic Art Working Group (IAMCR, 1984–2016), Asian-Pacific Animation and Comics Association (2008–), Asian Research Center for Animation and Comics Art (2005–), and the Malaysia/Singapore/Brunei Studies Group of the Association for Asian Studies (1976–1983), all of which he founded.

Lim Cheng Tju is an Educator who writes about history and popular culture. His articles have appeared in the *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science*, *Journal of Popular Culture*, and *Print Quarterly*. He is the country editor (Singapore) for the *International Journal of Comic Art* and also the co-editor of *Liquid City Volume 2*, an anthology of Southeast Asian comics published by Image Comics. He is one of the authors of *The University Socialist Club and the Contest for Malaya: Tangled Strands of Modernity* (Amsterdam University Press/National University of Singapore Press, 2012).

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Ng Benjamin Wai–ming is Professor of Japanese Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He is a historian of Japanese thought and culture by training. He also teaches and researches on Japanese popular culture. His articles on Japanese popular culture have been published in *International Journal of Comic Art*, *Animation Journal*, *Asian Cinema*, *Game Studies*, *Asian Music*, etc. His manga research focuses on the interaction and collaboration between Japan and Hong Kong.

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Shiau Hong-Chi is Professor of communications management at Shih-Hsin University in Taiwan. He had taught in the U.S. before his academic career in Taiwan. He is passionate in building a more nuanced understanding of how increasingly communication flows have helped engender new collectivities. His recent research examines how individuals form impressions of the world through their media use and how transcultural power is negotiated in a global context. He has recently published articles in *Social Media + Society*, *Chinese Journal of Communication*, *Language Communication*, *Leisure Studies*, *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication*, *Asian Cinema*, *Cogent Arts and Humanities* and *International Journal of Comic Art* and also contributed several book chapters mainly on East Asian Popular Culture.

Weeks John is a comics scholar and creator based in Cambodia. His writing on Khmer art has appeared in the *International Journal of Comic Art*. He holds an M.A. in Asian Studies from Monash University. He has worked at American publishers Eclipse Comics and Dark Horse Comics. In Cambodia, he has worked with arts and research organizations including the Center for Khmer Studies, the Cambodian Book Federation, Nou Hach Literary Journal, Cambodian Living Arts and Our Books.

Wong Wendy Siuyi is Professor in the Department of Design at York University in Toronto, Canada. She has taught in Hong Kong, the U.S. and Australia, and has established an international reputation as an expert in Chinese graphic design history and Chinese comic art history. She is the author of *Hong Kong Comics: A History of Manhua* (2002), published by Princeton Architectural Press, and she often receives invitations to speak on the topic at international venues. Her latest book, entitled *The Disappearance of Hong Kong in Comics, Advertising and Graphic Design* (2018), published by Palgrave Macmillan, utilizes the city as a case study to demonstrate the potential of these three media to offer us a global understanding of contemporary visual cultures.

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Introduction

John A. Lent

Historical Context

In New York City, an Indian American mother brings home a Mumbai-published *Amar Chitra Katha*, a comic book to familiarize her American-educated daughter with Indian culture. In Thailand, a Burmese cartoonist-in-exile draws about his homeland's political troubles, while in Kenya, Gado (Godfrey Mwampembwa), originally from Tanzania, finishes one of his hard-hitting, online political cartoons that will be seen worldwide. Meanwhile, in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Turkey, Islamic parliamentarians and protestors are urging the recall of their envoys in Paris and the boycott of French products because of *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons portraying the Prophet Muhammad. In Marvel Comics' New York City offices, an editor is contacting a slew of freelance cartoonists scattered across Asia, Oceania, and South America, offering commissions to draw the company's superhero characters. Perhaps at the same time, Nelson Shin returns to Seoul after overseeing DPR Korean animators in Pyongyang producing work for his Akom Studio, itself under contract by

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Euro-North American animation houses. These are but a few examples of the transnationalization of comic art.

It is becoming evident in comic art scholarship that comics and transnationalism are linked in many ways, a phenomenon existent throughout the medium's history. A few examples suffice to make the point.

After the comical weekly *Punch* was started in London in 1841, other imitators using the name *Punch* popped up all over the vast British commonwealth, on every continent except South America. In Asia, China, Hong Kong, Japan, and India sported their own *Punch*es. Australian cartoon scholar Richard Scully (2013, 14, 29), who mapped the "Punch Empire," did not include all Indian vernacular *Punch*es because he said there were so many. Though not as extensive, the American cartoon magazine *Puck* (1871–1918) had sprouts such as *Puck*, or the *Shanghai Charivari*, *Shanghai Puck*, and *Osaka Puck* (see Lent 2015).

Cross-national impacts also affected the development of comic strips, comic books, and political cartoons in Asia. These comic art forms were introduced and nourished in a variety of ways.

1. By the intermingling of Asian and Western cartoonists, such as European artists Charles Wirgman and Georges Bigot settling in nineteenth-century Tokyo and starting cartoon magazines, Japanese pioneer cartoonist Ippei Okamoto brought home comic strip characters (e.g., "Bringing up Father," cloned into "Nanki no Tosan" or "Easy-Going Daddy") after a visit to the *New York World* in 1922, or French artists Lelan, André Joyeux, and Albert Cézard introducing cartoons to Vietnam;

2. By colonists such as the Dutchman Clinge Doorenbosi and his 1938 strip "Flippie Flink" in Indonesia or the British commissioner of Burma's railroad who is credited with drawing the first cartoon in Myanmar in 1912;

3. By visiting or resident Western cartoonists such as some of the early English-language political cartoonists in Hong Kong, or British businessman Ernest Major, who while resident in Shanghai, pioneered producing Chinese illustrated magazines as early as 1877, or the Russian Sapajou who worked as a cartoonist in China from 1925 to 1940 and influenced major artists such as Hua Junwu (see, Lent and Xu, 2017, 41);

4. By exposure to outside artists, periodicals, and schools of art, examples being Miguel Covarrubias, Aubrey Beardsley, George Grosz, and others in China; British comics magazines *The Beano* and *The Dandy* in Malaysia; *Mad* magazine in Bangladesh (*Unmad*) and Malaysia (*Gila Gila*); Americanized comics characters "Kenkoy," "Kulafu" ("Tarzan"), "Goyo at Kikay" ("Bringing Up Father"), "Lukas Malakas" ("Popeye"), "Kaptayn Barbell" ("Captain Marvel"), and others in the Philippines, and diverse art styles such as art nouveau, art deco, cubism, surrealism, and symbolism in 1930s' Shanghai manhua and manga learned by Feng Zikai, the "father of Chinese cartooning," while studying in Japan in 1921 (Harbsmeier 1984, 19);

5. By the spread of United States comic strips distributed throughout Asia by King Features of New York.

6. By military personnel who left American and British comic books behind when they were discharged from the Philippines and other Asian territories after the Second World War, and from South Korea after the Korean War.

Conceptualization of Transnationalism

Transnationalism is loosely delineated in this work—not specifically defined, but rather conceptualized by what the term can encompass. It makes sense to avoid being strapped by a single of many descriptions of the notion of transnational across different disciplines. Most often, the term applies to immigration and crossing borders; other times, it refers to the global reorganization of the production process. It is sometimes used interchangeably with globalization or as the vehicle of globalization, and in media studies, it can encompass transborder media exports, "capital flows (and ownership concentration), individualization of technology, and consumption practices" (Christensen 2013, 2402). One researcher, in attempting to "disentangle" the term, clustered transnationalism as a "social morphology, as a type of consciousness, as a mode of cultural reproduction, as an avenue of capital, as a site of political engagement, and as a reconstruction of 'place' or locality" (Vertovec 1999, 447). Still another thought is that comparative and transnational "generally go hand in hand, because transnational exchange illuminates similarities and differences" (Hoffmann 2011).

Transnationalism here refers to the movement of products, technology, ideas, and people across national borders—pure and simple. The term "comics studies" encompasses a multitude of forms, including comic books, comic strips, editorial (political) cartoons, graphic novels, animation, and Webtoons, although not all are represented in this collection of studies.

Comics studies, according to Kate Polak (2015), recognized before other disciplines (particularly, literary studies) that analyses carried out strictly along traditional national borders were becoming "increasingly obsolete." She contended that "comics scholars have historically grappled with approaching graphic narratives that are explicitly transnational at the levels of authorship, form, and content," because the comics often have been collaborative efforts. She is correct about the transnational nature of comics production; however, although that phenomenon was there to be studied, researchers did not take up the challenge, to any extent, until the twenty-first century.

Along the same lines, though transnational phenomena existed for centuries (more likely, millennia), the term "trans-national" came about only in 1916, credited to writer Randolph Bourne, who used it in an *Atlantic Monthly* article (Bourne 1916, 86–97). In media studies, the term was popular at the tail end of the twentieth century in discussions of transnational media flows and ownership, especially in the 1970s and early 1980s during the campaign for a New World Information Order, carried out by UNESCO and the Non-Aligned Countries Movement.

An Asian example of pre-nineteenth-century transnationalism—though by another name—was the *Siwilai* project during the reign of King Mongkut (1851–1868) of Thailand. Siwilai was a localization process that selectively adopted socio-cultural traits from the West and hybridized them into a Thai setting, at the same time, retaining Thai sovereignty (see Chapter 13).

Contemporary Scene: Transnational Ownership

In contemporary Asia (and elsewhere), transnationalism and comics/cartoons are bound in other dimensions, most perilously for comic art, by media conglomerates' large-scale, global acquisition of newspapers and magazines that carry comic strips and political cartoons and of some comic book firms.

The extent to which these media conglomerates have gobbled up comic art is mindboggling. A look at a 2017 report by *Publishers Weekly* on the world's six largest media conglomerates with a total value of US $430 billion reveals that comics, animation, and video games hold an important place in these staggering collections of properties. First-ranked National Amusements, which encompasses Viacom, CBS, and Simon & Schuster, also owns Nickelodeon and its offshoots, MTV Animation, Paramount Animation, and CBS Games. Among second place Disney's many holdings are the US$4 billion-dollar Marvel Comics empire, Disney Comics, Ultimate Comics, Lucas Film Animation, Pixar, Industrial Light and Magic, Fox Animation, Blue Sky Animation as well as video games, television channels, film studios, and theme parks. Third-ranked Time Warner Inc., which AT&T purchased in 2016, owns DC Comics, *Mad Magazine*, Cartoon Network, Warner Brothers Animation Studios, which in turn owns Looney Tunes, Rooster Teeth Animation, Warner Animation Group, Williams Street Animation, and videogame companies, in addition to *Time*, CNN, HBO as well as film and television studios. The second-tier conglomerates include Comcast with DreamWorks Animation, Universal Animation, and Illumination; News Corp with Avon Books; and Sony, owners of Sony Pictures Animation and Sony Pictures Imageworks. Since 2017, the order of the top-earning conglomerates has shifted so that by 2020, AT&T was first, followed in order by Comcast, Disney, and Viacom/CBS (National Amusements).

In fact, buyouts, mergers, and other transfer financial arrangements occur so frequently that data become outdated rather quickly. However, one can gauge the degree of conglomerization that exists by looking at the latest figures available and building in the factor that if there are changes, they will be toward lowering, rather than expanding, the number of outlets as the big fish consumes the smaller ones down the line. As already surmised, it is not unusual to see publishing conglomerates consume each other. In recent years, the centuries-old Casterman, a publisher later of Franco-Belgian comics (including the *Adventures of Tintin*), became a part of Groupe Flammarion which, in turn, was bought by RCS Media Group of Italy. Germany's huge comics publisher Carlsen was owned by Sweden's Bonnier Group before it was sold to the Egmont Group of Denmark and Norway, and the once-powerful Robert Maxwell media conglomerate owned Fleetway Editions representing sixty to seventy percent of the UK's comics market before the Danish Gutenberghus Group took it over.

The aforementioned six largest media conglomerates with major comics appendages are not alone. Bertelsmann, the world's fourth-largest publisher, has comics through its wholly owned Random Penguin Group subsidiary, previously partially owned by Pearson, the world's second-largest publisher. Since 2014, the mammoth Amazon has owned ComiXology, a dominant digital comics marketplace. Hachette Livre, one of the world's largest trade and educational publishers, has comics ties through its book publishing giant Hachette, and in recent years, Televisa Group, the Mexican media conglomerate, has brought into its fold at least half of the small companies responsible for hundreds of comic book titles on the Mexican market.

A 2019 *Publishers Weekly* tabulation of the largest revenue producing publishers worldwide found at least eleven of the first thirty-two heavily involved with comics. The world's largest publisher, RELX Group (Reed Elsevier), is also the number one producer of pop culture events, including comic cons worldwide, through its subsidiary, ReedPOP (Steiner 2019, 1). Bertelsmann (fourth), Hachette Livre (sixth), and Harper Collins (ninth) have already been mentioned.

Four of these top publishers with significant comics holdings are in Japan: Kodansha Ltd. (seventeenth), Shueisha (twentieth), Kadokawa Publishing (twenty-first), and Shogakukan (twenty-fourth). Shueisha and Shogakukan are affiliated with the Hitotsubashi Group. Each of these conglomerates has several holdings in other media and entertainment properties, such as broadcasting, newspapers, records, a theme park, software (websites and mobile sites), video games, and film. As an indicator of their size, Kadokawa Group Holdings owns forty-three companies; Shogakukan publishes sixty-four magazines, eighteen of which are comics, and about 760 new book titles annually; and Shueisha, the world's largest manga publisher, also owns Hakusensha publishers and with Shogakukan, Viz Media, to produce manga in the United States, and ShoPro, to distributes, license, and merchandise popular magazines and comic books in Japan.

Other transnational publishers with significant comics holdings that *Publishers Weekly* lists are Egmont Group (thirteenth) of Denmark and Norway, Holtzbrinck (fourteenth) of Germany, and Bonnier (thirty-second) of Sweden. The Egmont Group includes magazines, books, films, cineplexes, television, comic books, textbooks, online communities, games, and game consoles. Egmont's more than 100 companies are active in more than thirty countries. Bonnier is composed of 175

decentralized companies in five divisions (books, magazine group, business press, newspapers, and broadcasting and entertainment) operating in more than twenty countries. Bonnier consists of book publishers and book clubs throughout Scandinavia, is the major publisher of fiction in Finland, Norway, and Sweden, the leading publisher of children's books in Germany, and the owner of Adlibris, an online book retailer. The synergistic holdings of these companies lend themselves well to spin-offs of comics on multiple platforms (Milliot 2019. See also, Milliot 2017, 2018).

Besides the examples from Japan, other media conglomerates in Asia have major holdings in comics publishing. For most of its ninety-year history, the Philippines *komiks* industry was nearly totally in the hands of Ramon Roces, whose family-owned print and broadcast media. Similarly, a large proportion of the comic books published in Indonesia come off Kompas Gramedia Group presses. In Hong Kong, one comics company (Jademan) controlled the industry, its books garnering 70–90% of the market in the 1980s. In South Korea, two companies (Dai Won Publishing and Seoul Cultural Publishers) brought out fifteen of the country's twenty comics magazines for years. In Malaysia, Art Square Group controls many of the comics and graphic novels titles. In Thailand, three mass media groups (Nation, Matichon, and Manager) are heavily involved in comics production and in India, Sir Richard Branson founded Virgin Comics LLC (later Liquid Comics), which was part of his Virgin group of transnational companies.

Emphasizing transnationalism via conglomerate ownership of large segments of the comics industry is justified, because of detrimental elements and consequences inherent in such trends. For one thing, it is not just the power that conglomerates wield, but also that of other companies they interlock with through board memberships. Second, due to their immense holdings, conglomerate owners have many vested interests to protect, some of which can represent a threat to artists' freedom and autonomy, the quality and diversity of comics titles and contents, and the consideration of goals other than just those of marketing. Third, conglomerates tend to enclose intellectual property solely for their own enrichment, putting a price on materials that once were free, strengthening and extending rights to intellectual property, and making sure these rights cannot be breached. Anyone who had tried to obtain permission to reprint material "owned" by these conglomerates can appreciate Herbert Schiller's prediction of a "corporate enclosure of culture" (Schiller 1989).

Finally, conglomerate ownership of mass media has been blamed for the homogenization/standardization of culture (in comics, e.g., the "Marvel Way") and the blending of news and entertainment leading to sensationalism.

Remembering that comic art also encompasses political cartoons and comic strips, the possible ramifications of conglomerate ownership of newspapers and magazines become even more serious. Corporations of the magnitude of those that operate newspaper chains in North America, Asia, Europe, and Australia especially, wield enormous control over their appendages and their journalists and artists. As I said before, they have many vested interests, often tied to government and big business, that can interfere with truthful reporting by writers and cartoonists.

Transnationalism: Inter-country Flows

In the 1970s, much discourse took place in mass media circles concerning issues such as one-way news flows, media and cultural imperialism, and the need for a New World Information Order to right the imbalances between North/South, core/periphery, rich/poor countries. It was an important discussion but seemed to peter out, replaced by terms such as globalization, glocalization, and hybridity alongside strong denouncements of the cultural/media imperialism theory. With globalization, supported by new information technology, as the refrain went, news, information, and entertainment flowed both ways. To a limited degree, they have, but for the most part, globalization favors, as it always has, the dominant countries and their cultural goods, those that initially cornered the market.

During the past quarter century, there have been formidable efforts, backed by strong government financial support, to open up or expand comics and animation of Asian origins to a wider international audience. Particularly, in Japan, South Korea, and China, governments saw the transnational potential of comics and animation and their merchandise as money-generating exports. At the same time, local companies envisioned their worth as products themselves or promotional boosts to other "saleables."

The Japanese government recognized the significant overseas market for *manga* during the past decade, labeling the comics as a cultural "ambassador" and establishing a prestigious international manga award to spur overseas cartoonists to imitate this Japanese comics style.

After 1994, and again in 1997, the South Korean government pumped huge sums of money into comics (*manhwa*) and animation, hoping to cash in on the cultural globalism of the times. As a result, a strong infrastructure was put into place, including a government comics content association, separate animation and comics centers, comics museums, libraries, conventions, competitions, more than 150 university and college comic art programs, and a television cartoon network. Specifically, the federal government's Korean Culture and Contents Agency and at least two municipal governments heavily funded comics and animation. In 2008, the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism set in place a multimillion-dollar stimulus package to promote comics by 2013 into what the Ministry called "killer content" for a global market. Even more money was allocated for animation, character-driven content, and human resources (Han 2008).

The drive for manhwa to enter international markets was in full gear by the early 2000s, accelerated by major South Korean exhibitions at comics festivals in the United States, Europe, and Asia, the expansion of South Korean publishers with branches in the United States, and the opening of markets in China, Europe, and Southeast Asia. A result was that as domestic manhwa sales continued to drop, those outside South Korea increased, especially in Europe, but also in North America, Japan, and Southeast Asia, and to a lesser extent in Latin America, Oceania, and Africa.

The transnationalizing of Chinese comics (*manhua*) was a consideration during China's Eleventh Five-Year Projection for Social and Economic Development (2006–2010), when comics/animation was propped up as the "third pillar" of the economy, a key cultural sector to be developed at the national level. In short order, the Chinese government, viewing comic art as a potentially important investment, designated it as a "new industry" in more than twenty provinces, permitted nine cities to become important production bases with preferential policies, and sponsored many animation/comics extravaganzas. Efforts have been made to push China's comics and animation globally through manhua retrospectives at international festivals, organizing participation in a Northeast Asia animation consortium, and co-production ventures with some foreign companies. For the most part, the immense government expenditure did not yield much improvement in manhua's standing on a global level.

Unquestionably, manga have traveled the furthest and most deeply into other cultures. Usually in pirated versions, they found their way

into Taiwan, South Korea, and Hong Kong in the 1960s and 1970s, leaving strong impacts on local comics. Some Taiwanese cartoonists abandoned the profession because of a perceived double standard practiced by government censorship bodies that favored manga; in South Korea, manga were banned, yet, strangely, a government agency existed to censor them, and in Hong Kong, manga production techniques, such as the assembly-line, were adopted by the then-colony's largest comics firm.

The big boost came in the early to mid-1990s when Japan's economic bubble burst and the country feverishly sought overseas markets. Simultaneously, a generation being nourished on video games and online activity, tired of (or never having taken to) American superhero comics and impressed with the freshness and diversity of manga drawings and stories and often complex, but vulnerable, characters furnished the market.

There are a number of explanations for the enthusiastic global acceptance of manga: their cinematic formats, different types of stories, inclusion of liberal amounts of sex and violence, ease of reading, and the audiences' seeking a different type of comic from those in the Disney style or Marvel way. Add to these two other reasons emanating from Indonesia's switch from local to Japanese comics: the inexpensiveness of imported manga and the very narrow repertoire of local comics.

Transnationalization of manga in Asia has been a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, the impact has been a godsend, reinvigorating some dormant comics cultures and showing the medium has a future. In other instances, the vigorous introduction of manga has homogenized the look of comic books and almost obliterated traditional means of producing them.

A Tiny Country with Transnational Aspirations

As can be observed in the second half of this book, it is not only the larger countries and territories of East Asia already discussed that envision the transnationalizing of their comics as a way to rejuvenate an industry that faced dire straits, if not extinction. For example, with Brunei Darussalam, it was a case of birthing and nourishing a neophyte comics scene, rather than rejuvenating a dormant one.

To compensate for the fact that Brunei did not merit a chapter because of a lack of resources, a few paragraphs about the country's comics are offered here. Though newspaper comics strips go back to the 1960s, comic books and graphic novels are more recent phenomena. Brunei