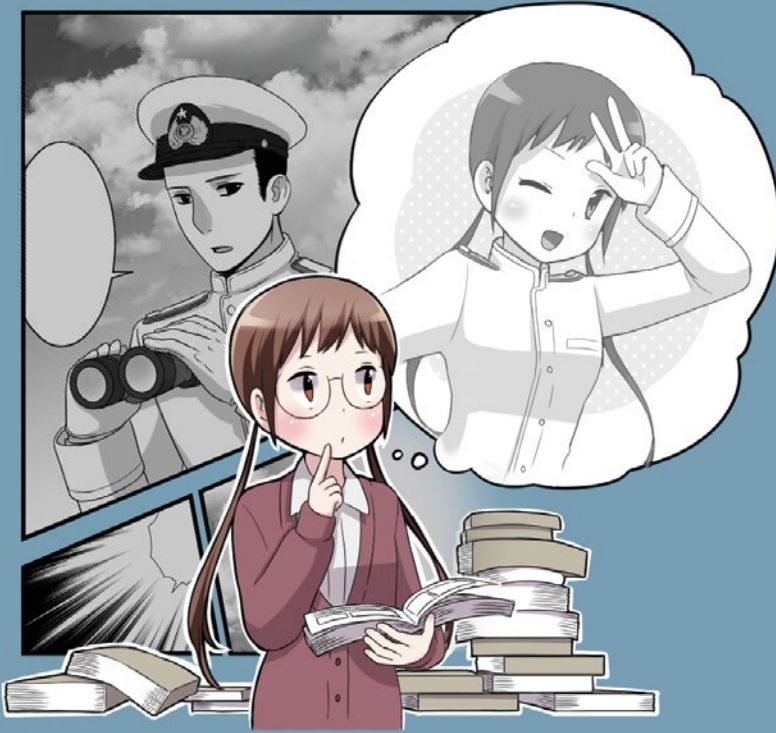


EAST ASIAN POPULAR CULTURE



Rewriting History in Manga

STORIES FOR THE NATION

EDITED BY **NISSIM OTMAZGIN**
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PREFACE

In recent years, Japan's manga market has become an alternative stage for political and historical debate. While in the first few decades after the Pacific War, manga had typically dealt with national and international history, and with wartime trauma in an implicit and indirect manner, since the 1990s there have been increasingly numerous conscious attempts to use the manga industry as a means to convey political messages that are not represented in the mainstream media. Two highly publicized, and highly controversial, examples are the comics *Intro to China* (*Chūgoku nyūmon*) and *Hating the Korean Wave* (*Kenkanryū*), which portray Chinese and Koreans as enemies of the state and urge their readers to refute the “masochist” version of Japan's modern history and the media's exaltation of Korean popular culture and China's cultural heritage and economic potential. On the other hand, recent works like Yoshinaga Fumi's series *Ōoku: The Inner Chambers*, which reimagines Tokugawa Japan as a matriarchal society and portrays the life of the female Shogun's “male harem,” have used fantahistory as a means to reflect on the gender and social norms of premodern and modern Japan from a feminist perspective.

The publication of these manga has been invigorated by recent social and political transformations. Since the 1990s, Japan has faced, and still faces, deep challenges, including a shrinking population, economic slowdown, rising unemployment and growing economic inequality, changing gender relations, the emergence of new social and gender formations such as “parasite single” and “herbivore men” and the surrounding media hype, and an increasing distrust of the institutions that was recently exacerbated in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster. Furthermore, contested

historical memories have often become an important currency in international relations, and a major source of tension between Japan and its Asian neighbors. Contentious issues include the question of Japan's apologies for its wartime aggression, the depiction of the past in history textbooks, the debate surrounding the use of "comfort women" who were forced to provide sexual services to the imperial Japanese military, and Japanese politicians' continuous visits to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine. Within such context, manga has played a distinctive role as an alternative venue to express and debate views of history and contemporary society across a broad spectrum of political positions and perspectives outside the more conventional channels of print and online news media.

But what specifically is manga's ability to reflect and influence the formation of historical memory, and what are the concrete ways in which this medium relates to the Japanese nation at large, beyond appealing to particular affectionate communities of readers? This volume seeks to answer such questions by exploring the mechanisms for propagating new perceptions about Japan's history through manga, the advantages and disadvantages of manga as a tool to discuss/contextualize history, and the ability of manga to transcend the limitations of conventional historiography.

Rather than focusing on highly formulaic symbols of collective memory on the national level such as museums, monuments, state rituals and ceremonies, or history textbooks, as the majority of historical literature has done, our book looks at the way in which the past is being integrated and insinuated into the surrounding through the everyday production and consumption of manga. The individual chapters showcase specific instances of reimagining, rewriting, and consuming history in manga format, from the late nineteenth century to the present, to address wider questions related to nationalism, modernity, politics, gender equality, and economic and social transformations. This book seeks to do so through a variety of disciplinary approaches derived from the fields of history, anthropology, political science, cultural studies, visual cultures studies, and of course manga studies; to explore and conceptualize the variegated relations between manga and political and social history.

Focusing on the manga's distinctive stylistic features, the book argues that manga possesses a peculiar appeal that transcends the limitations of conventional historiography. As a highly popular medium with a distinct grammar and inner logic made of pictograms, written text, and visual frames, the chapters in the book suggest that manga has a strong potential to influence mass opinion. While conceived as a popular medium primarily made to entertain, manga involves the selective construction of narratives

based on the opinion of its author, the details she/he chooses to include and those she/he chooses to leave out, the historical and political context at the time of writing, and the historical and intellectual “fashions” of the time, which makes it not only a valuable historical source but also a form of historiographic writing. By depicting historical events and reshaping historical narratives, manga combines information and imagination, fact and fiction, representation and political statement.

Looking at manga as a means to reproduce and creatively appropriate history raises a series of interesting questions: in the face of a growing depiction of history in manga and other forms of popular culture, has professional historiography lost its authority and allure to interpret the past and set the agenda for remembering it? Can the emergence of manga as a politico-historical medium create a gap between academic and historical understandings of history or are these simply complementary processes? Looking at governmental policy, national symbols, the education system, and intellectual discourse only partly explains the way historical memories and political views are being constructed and reproduced. The chapters in this book thus explore the role of manga as a way to write and rewrite history, and suggest that manga provides an alternative venue for people to acquire information and shape their opinions about history and politics.

* * *

The introductory chapter, by Nissim Otmazgin, outlines the phenomenon that this research is concerned with, namely the increasing presence of manga in Japan’s political life and its political and social trajectories. It explores the way historical memory is created, disseminated, and reproduced through manga, and demonstrates how manga’s special grammar, aesthetics, text, and inner logic build new historical narratives. As a road map to the book, the chapter introduces the concept of “banal memory” to analyze the way in which everyday popular culture—such as reading manga—becomes part of the construction of national memory. It is suggested that looking at manga as a historical and political medium should matter to scholars of historical memory not only because of manga’s wide accessibility and emotional appeal in Japan and other Asian countries but also because manga serves as a political field of contested memory.

Michael Lewis’ chapter investigates the role of *Tokyo Puck* editor Kitazawa Rakuten (1876–1955), considered to be Japan’s first modern cartoonist, in creating a stream of widely circulated pictorial satires and caricatures that indicted official indifference to the mass impoverishment

that accompanied industrialization. Through a close reading of Kitazawa's cartoons, Lewis demonstrates that Meiji period cartoon's critiques, made more powerful by the use of humor and parody, presented a readily understandable explanation of the public's economic desperation and political frustrations but also suggested means of redress. Looking at Rakuten as an "organic intellectual," to borrow Gramsci's definition, Lewis argues that his cartoons helped shape the public's response to social inequality seen in the 1918 "rice riots," a convulsive series of variegated protests, at times violently destructive, that seemed to bring Japan to the brink of revolution.

Orna Shaughnessy's chapter explores the political Manga of Kanagaki Robun and Kawanabe Kyōsai from the 1870s through the early twentieth century as a means to comment in dissenting and irreverent ways on the current events of the day. It further compares Kanagaki and Kawanabe's publication *Eshinbun Nipponchi* with the roughly contemporary publications of Japan's *Marumaru chinbun*, *Japan Punch*, and the Northern Indian publication *Avadh Punch* to emphasize how the medium both embraced and scorned all things "Western," shedding light on the transnational and multicultural origins of the medium.

With Michele Mason's chapter we move on to postwar manga and particularly the works of Nakazawa Keiji (1939–), most renowned for his ten-volume collection *Barefoot Gen* (*Hadashi no gen*, 1976–1980), which centers on the eponymous, six-year-old Gen and his family in the aftermath of the US atomic bombing of Hiroshima. While in that work Nakazawa deftly tempers the horror with tender moments and humor appropriate for a youthful audience to create a heartwarming, humanistic portrayal of the victims' struggles, in his less-known *Hit by Black Rain* series (1968–1973), the author illuminates in a much grittier fashion the postwar hardships of atomic survivors (*hibakusha*). By examining the collection's storylines, suffused with bitter anger, hard-hitting violence, and cutting cynicism as they depict wretched poverty, sickness, discrimination, disfigurement, depression, and alcoholism, Mason shows how Nakazawa explicitly decries the hypocrisy of both the US and the Japanese governments, and situates these compelling narratives within their complex global, political, and social intersections.

Roman Rosenbaum's chapter tackles the works of one of the great classics of historical manga, Ishinomori Shōtarō's magnum opus *Manga Nihon no rekishi* (*A Manga History of Japan*). This voluminous compendium marks an attempt at historiographical analysis of Japanese society

and culture from its ancient ancestral roots right up to the contemporary world. Against the background of the transcultural renaissance of manga on a global scale, the chapter examines the neglected graphic discourse of Ishinomori's work within the discourse of Japanese cultural representation.

Barbara Hartley's chapter takes a different approach to the idea of rewriting history in manga, focusing on intertextuality in the manga series *Shanaō Yoshitsune*, comparing it with depictions of Yoshitsune in historical sources and in the eighteenth-century drama *Yoshitsune Senbonzakura* (Yoshitsune and the Thousand Cherry Trees), one of the "big three" kabuki/bunraku texts and perhaps Japan's best-known Yoshitsune narrative. This enables Hartley to consider the fraught relationship between the "facts" of history and information circulated in fictional representations, and reflect on why it is that when trying to understand the past we must be as alert to the importance of cultural production such as manga as to the historical record. In other words, she argues that both fields, history and cultural production, are, in fact, essential for the reconstruction of narratives of the past and the inclusion in history method of some of the strategies generally associated with cultural production and will add value to our attempts to understand and learn from the past.

The next two chapters focus on reception of manga, in different yet related ways. Alexander Bukh's chapter focuses on the reception of revisionist historical manga in Japan. While the majority of current scholarship on revisionist manga focuses on the structure of the texts and the intentions of the authors, this chapter explores through of a survey conducted among students of two Japanese universities the way in which young readers in Japan actually receive the texts.

On the other hand, Toshio Miyake's chapter is based on fieldwork conducted on the multiple media platform originated by the historical web-manga *Axis Powers Hetalia* (2006–present) and on its globalized success among female fandom in order to reflect on the biopolitical mobilization of *moe* ("burning passion"), as a combination of polymorphous pleasure and sexualized parody, shaping emergent representations of nation, history, and identity. The chapter thus shifts the focus on the increasing intermingling in contemporary Japan between nation branding of Cool Japan, historical revisionism, and youth subcultures and the way this has contributed to raising popular culture as a strategic site in the hegemonic redefinition of the past, present, and future of the nation.

Finally, Rebecca Suter's chapter closes the book by positioning its investigation within the broader context of past and present trends in the

field of manga production and scholarly analyses of the medium, highlighting the ways in which the book helps reassess manga's history, as well as resituating manga in history. It surveys some of the main developments in Japanese Manga Studies (*manga kenkyū*) from the 1960s to the present, and shows how the chapters in this book build on such theories and expand on them to complicate our understanding of the role of manga in the construction and reconstruction of historical memory.

Nissim Otmazgin
Rebecca Suter

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This volume stems from an international workshop held in August 2012 at the School of Languages and Cultures at the University of Sydney with the support of the Sir Zelman Cowen Universities Fund. The workshop was an attempt to examine alternative modes of historical memory and debate manifested in manga. Rather than only analyzing the way manga depicts past events and creates narratives, the aim was to consider the emergence of Japan's comic industry as a medium for political debate, with particular focus on its role in the domestic discourse on contemporary Japanese uses of history.

The editors would like to express their gratitude to the institutions that supported this project: the School of Languages and Cultures at the University of Sydney, the Australia Research Council, the Sir Zelman Cowen Universities Fund, and the B'nai B'rith of Australia. We also thank Shir Shapira, a student at the Department of Asian Studies at the Hebrew University who proofread the manuscript. We are also indebted to the people whose advice and support at critical points in the project helped the volume to come to fruition. We would particularly like to thank, in no particular order, Lionel Babicz, Olivier Ansart, Adrian Vickers, Jaqueline Berndt, Eyal Ben-Ari, and the anonymous reviewers for excellent comments on earlier drafts of the manuscript.

May 2015

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Introduction: Manga as “Banal Memory”

Nissim Otmazgin

In August 17, 2013, the Asahi Shimbun discovered that copies of *Hadashi no Gen* (Barefoot Gen), an internationally renowned manga about the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, had been pulled out from school library shelves at the city of Matsue in Shimane Prefecture. The city’s education board decided that children should not be allowed to freely check out *Hadashi no Gen* at the libraries of public elementary and junior high schools due to graphic descriptions of violence committed by Japanese troops, but teachers could still use them as educational materials. “We are not going to remove the manga because it is an invaluable piece,” Furukawa Yasunori, the deputy head of the education board, was quoted as saying. “But we understand that it contains portions that warrant consideration as appropriate reading material for children.” According to the article, the board’s decision stemmed from the complaint of one citizen who said the manga described actions that were never committed by Japanese troops during the war. Nakazawa Misayo, the widow of *Hadashi no Gen* creator Nakazawa Keiji, expressed dismay over the decision. “It is incredible and I am saddened,” said Misayo, 70. “I am afraid that board members do not grasp the tragedy and pain that the war and the atomic bombing brought on us.”¹

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The board's decision was eventually overturned but the episode demonstrates the ways in which memories of the past continue to haunt post-war Japanese society, moving from textbook issues and elite discourse into manga. Manga, as a highly popular medium that is read by wide sections of Japanese society, is viewed by groups and individuals as an effective means to shape historical memory without having to pave their way through the mainstream academic discourse which is largely closed before them. While in the first few decades after the Pacific War, manga had typically dealt with national and international history, particularly wartime trauma, in an implicit and indirect manner, many conscious attempts have been made recently by manga publishers and by mangaka (manga artists) themselves to use this popular medium to convey political messages that are not represented in the mainstream media. Two highly publicized examples are *Chūgoku nyūmon* (*Intro to China*) and *Kenkanryū* (*Hating the Korean Wave*), which portray Chinese and Koreans as enemies of the state. Both urge their readers to refute the “masochistic” version of Japan's modern history and to reject the media's exaltation of Korean popular culture and China's cultural heritage and economic potential. For this purpose, manga is viewed by both publishers and certain mangaka as a legitimate political tool for changing popular attitude toward the past and influencing readers' political opinions in the present (Fig. 1.1).

The question is, does manga play a significant role in creating, reproducing, and disseminating historical memory or is it only a reflective expression of the past in a rather passive and “entertaining” manner? Given that an increasingly large number of people in Japan, young and old, are exposed to manga and spend many hours reading it, can we assume that these practices have an impact on their world views, and introduce new social and political symbolic references to the readers? When, for example, Japanese kids are being exposed to historical images coming from manga even before learning about the history relevant to the images in school, can they perceive history differently? Or perhaps feel more emotionally attached or repulsed by history? The available literature has not yet answered these questions sufficiently, nor has it provided adequate conceptualization of the relations between manga and national memory. While many studies examine historical manga, they mainly focus on the depiction and reflection of historical events, the narratives coming out of the text, the artistic qualities of the manga and their cultural “meaning.” This content-analysis approach is understandable, owing to the fact that up until recently the preponderance of relevant studies has been in the



Fig. 1.1 Example of manga publications dealing with Asian/Japanese history

fields of literature and cultural studies. On the other hand, while being cognizant of the influence of media such as films and popular literature on shaping historical memory, scholars of historical memory continue to favor a textual-based approach and focus on textbooks, national symbols, and discourse while overlooking manga or refer to it only in passing.

There is very little doubt that manga, similar to other historiographical work, such as photography, documentary, and literature, may provide a representation or a reconstruction of the past. The more interesting question is what sets manga apart from other mediums and what makes it different from the more conventional representations and contestations of history? This chapter suggests that manga possesses a peculiar appeal that transcends the limitations of conventional scholarship of historical memory, making it a sophisticated tool for historical contestations, rich in content and aesthetics, and a productive site to rediscover and interpret the past. For one, in Japan, manga is a much more widespread genre than historical books or historical novels. It presently occupies approximately one quarter of all published materials and one out of every three

books published in Japan in the 1990s and 2000s was manga (Itō 2008: 46). Manga books and magazines are readily available in most convenient stores in Japan and in special manga-reading cafés located near any major train station. As such, it might not be surprising that manga has been viewed by some publishers and mangaka as an effective tool to promote political agenda.

Second, manga raises questions about authenticity and authority in history. An academic historical work ostensibly carries with it a sort of authority—through its academic publication, the position of the author, the archival materials used, footnotes, etc. Yet we may forget that such a work is written in a particular context and involves a great deal of interpretation. Manga does not usually raise the question of authenticity and authority due to its unique form of visuality and fictional stories. Its emphasis is to engage and entertain the reader in a way that historical interpretation is presented through fictional rendering of history. As such, similar to other cultural products such as literature and films, in manga the boundaries between fictional and reality collapse and there is a strong tendency toward oversimplification, sensationalism, polemic, and where the controversial dominates (Sakamoto 2008).

Indeed, manga is a popular medium primarily made to entertain. Nevertheless, the representation of history in manga provides an interesting perspective on how the past is constructed and moreover exemplifies the complex relationship between history and historiography. Similar to the work of professional historians, historical manga involves the selective construction of narratives based on the opinion of its author, the details s/he chooses to include and those s/he chooses to leave out, the historical and political context at the time of writing, and the historical and intellectual “fashions” of the time. As such, manga provides its own interpretations of historical events, which might be contested and disputed. However, manga is also a highly popular medium with a distinct grammar and inner logic made of pictograms, written text, and visual frames, which has a strong potential to influence mass opinion. Put differently, in the Japanese context manga is especially important since it is a daily mechanism that translates “history” into collective memory and experience. As people who lived in the past are becoming scarce, direct testimonies are replaced by the interpretation of what mediates it—text, films, and manga itself.

This introductory chapter examines the way in which the past is being evoked—not in the conventional form of textbooks, museums, monuments, and state rituals, but rather as a past that is insinuated by the