

**THE CULTURAL IMPACT OF MANGA ON SOCIETY**

**ABSTRACT**

The manga industry has taken the world by storm since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Not only does it hold a large market share in Japan, mangas have attracted a global audience; they have become a popular medium through which entertainment is being derived. Not only has the sales of mangas been booming in foreign countries as well as within their own country, it has penetrated into its readers' culture as well.<sup>1</sup> Mangas have been successful in transcending the cultural barriers and making an important and lasting impression on the audiences across the globe.<sup>2</sup> At first, these Japanese comics did not garner the appeal from the audiences, however now it has been successful in capturing the imagination of the readers around the world, spawning a fan base that has been increasing day by day.<sup>3</sup> However, these comics have faced quite a few problems along the way. This paper will focus on the evolution of manga in society, the content within these mangas and their criticism and their cultural influence on society, with specific references from China and USA.

Keywords: Manga, Society, Culture, Japan

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<sup>1</sup> Hafiz Ahmad and Alvanov Zpalanzani, Manga: Invisible Cultural 'Imperialism' Through Popular Medium, August 29, 2006, 1.

<sup>2</sup> The Manga Phenomenon, World Intellectual Property Organization, September 2011, [http://www.wipo.int/wipo\\_magazine/en/2011/05/article\\_0003.html](http://www.wipo.int/wipo_magazine/en/2011/05/article_0003.html).

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

## 1. MAJOR ISSUES

The major criticism against mangas has always been the sexual and violent content present in it. As a large percentage of parents perceive mangas to be specifically for children they feel that it has too much gore and sexual content. They believe that some mangas are misleading as it should be targeted to an adult audience instead of being for a PG-13 audience.

## 2. THE SEXUAL AND VIOLENT CONTENT

This violence found in mangas is mostly graphic with spurts of blood, objects pierced into other people's bodies, violent dialogue, physical fights, etc. This amount of violence is accepted in the Japanese culture however, it is not tolerated much with the audience across the globe in countries like the United States of America, China, Iran, etc.<sup>4</sup> While the Japanese culture also allows the death of the characters as they believe that the characters are not immortal, the audience from other countries have had opposing views saying that this is a bad influence on their children as it promotes violence.

The sexual content has also been debated for a long time. There are several mangas that have females with revealing clothing, 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 PG-13 that contain the element of "*ecchi*" i.e. playfully sexual actions. Apart from this, some mangas show nudity such as To Love-Ru, Sekirei, Nozoki Ana, etc.

The nudity in anime and manga that forms the category of *hentai*, violent anime/manga porn, has given the entire industry a negative stereotype.<sup>5</sup> This has been furthered dampened by instances in which serial killers have been found possessing hentai and thus the entire blame being put on those hentai mangas. The "Otaku killer", is an example of one such person who had murdered four young girls and he was found to possess hentai.<sup>6</sup> Even though the anime and manga industry have managed to distance

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<sup>4</sup> Jim Rutenberg, Violence finds a Niche in Children's Cartoons, The New York Times, January 28, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Samantha Nicole Inez Chambers', Anime: From Cult Following to Pop Culture Phenomenon, The Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communication, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2012, 95.

<sup>6</sup> Crime Jun, Serial Child Killer Tsumoto Miyazaki, 2 others executed, Japan Today, June 17, 2008.

40 themselves from *hentai*, the nudity expressed in these mangas and anime have sparked outrages by  
41 families as well as governments. Iran has banned every manga and only some are available to the public  
42 which are approved by the Ministry of Islamic Culture, which is highly unlikely in the cases of mangas and  
43 animes.<sup>7</sup> Singapore has banned any manga that contains yaoi, *Yamete! Watashi no Oshiri ga Itai*,  
44 (roughly translated to “*Stop it! My butt hurts*”) content.

45 Coupled with the problem of the rating of these mangas and anime is the regulation of child pornography.  
46 There exists a genre called *lolicon* which is uses underage characters in sexual situations. There has  
47 been a public fascination with the sexuality of young girls which has been made into a spectacle, not only  
48 appealing to men but also the women as well.<sup>8</sup> It is due to this that young girls have been seen as valid  
49 participants for sexual acts. However as Sparks<sup>9</sup> points out as well as what we find in the Diamond and  
50 Uchiyama finding<sup>10</sup> that exposure to violence and pornography does not necessarily reflect the desires of  
51 the viewers and it does not necessarily incite them to commit such crimes. *Lolicon* mangas and anime  
52 were for a long time readily available and consumed in countries such as Japan, the United States of  
53 America, Australia, etc. but many nations have stopped the import/selling of *lolicon* material. As the  
54 Japanese culture has flourished around the world, it has had an increasing amount of pressure to meet  
55 the global standards of regulating child pornography. However, in the case of *Ashcroft v. Free Speech*  
56 *Coalition*,<sup>11</sup> the Supreme Court in the US held that sexual image of virtual minors cannot be equated to  
57 child pornography. From a legal standpoint there is no minor who is actually a part of the production of  
58 *lolicon* and no physical harm is done to anyone.<sup>12</sup> The freedom of expression must be upheld and the  
59 fans of such anime and manga should have a right to enjoy the theme of *lolicon*.

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<sup>7</sup> Michael K., Banned in China, TV Tropes, <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/BannedInChina>.

<sup>8</sup> Durham, M. Gigi. 2009. *The Lolita Effect: The Media Sexualization of Young Girls and the Five Keys to Fixing It*. New York: Overlook Press, 51.

<sup>9</sup> Sparks, Glenn G. 2010. *Media Effects Research: A Basic Overview*. Boston: Wadsworth, 89-91.

<sup>10</sup> Diamond, Milton, and Uchiyama Ayako. 1999. “Pornography, Rape and Sex Crimes in Japan,” *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* (22:1), 9.

<sup>11</sup> *Ashcroft v. Free Speech Coalition*, 535 U.S. 234 (2002).

<sup>12</sup> Patrick W. Galbraith, *Lolicon: The Reality of ‘Virtual Child Pornography’ in Japan*, *Image & Narrative*, Vol 12, No1 (2011), 84.

### 3. AN ATTACK ON CULTURE?

Another reason for mangas and anime to be deemed inappropriate is when it “mocks” religion. Some mangas and anime do talk about religion and while most of them do go unnoticed, some of them face a backlash from religious communities.

Angel Beats is a series which shows each character’s thought on religion and the story revolves around the afterlife. The series focuses on the paths chosen by each character and how their beliefs help them decide their next step. The series impliedly talks about religions such as Buddhism and Christianity and different icons and principles of these religions.<sup>13</sup> Hellsing is another series which is basically a fight between English Protestants and vampires.<sup>14</sup> While these series’ do have a focus on religion, they haven’t faced any issues regarding this until now.

On the other hand there have been quite a few series’ that have faced a severe backlash by various religious groups for some scenes in the series which indirectly insults or mocks them and their religion. The manga Jojo’s Bizarre Adventure is one example. In this comic book the antagonist picks up a book from the library and after examining it he orders the execution of the protagonist. The book that was picked up was shown to be the Quran. The writer says that since he did not know Arabic and so they picked up a random book which turned out to be the Quran. The writer eventually censored the later prints however the Muslim Community and soon the sale was halted.<sup>15</sup>

The Pokemon series, which was launched in 1996, is undoubtedly one of the most profitable mangas with an earning which exceeds \$150 billion.<sup>16</sup> However, the franchise has had quite a few problems arising throughout the years, especially in the U.S. One major religion that has been against this franchise is the fundamental Christian religion. They link Pokemon with demonism and say that Pokemon teaches

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<sup>13</sup> Angel Beats!: An Anime About The Afterlife Influenced By Different Religions, Lady Geek Girl, December 16, 2014, <https://ladygeekgirl.wordpress.com/2014/12/16/angel-beats-an-anime-about-the-afterlife-influenced-by-different-religions/>.

<sup>14</sup> Oh My Pop Culture Jesus: Christianity in Anime, Lady Geek Girl, May 6, 2012, <https://ladygeekgirl.wordpress.com/2012/05/06/oh-my-pop-culture-jesus-christianity-in-anime/>.

<sup>15</sup> Jojo’s Anime, Manga Sales Halted Due to Islamic Images (Updated), Anime News Network, May 22, 2008, <http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2008-05-22/jojo-anime-manga-sales-halted-due-to-islamic-images>.

<sup>16</sup> *Supra* 2.

violence, evolution, concepts such as reincarnation and the use of occult objects, such as magic stones, to gain power to defeat your opponent.<sup>17</sup> It has been opposed by the Christians to a level that they have banned anything relating to Pokemon in their houses.<sup>18</sup> Apart from this the franchise has had controversies with the religions of Islam<sup>19</sup> and of the Jews.<sup>20</sup>

#### 4. THE HISTORY OF MANGAS IN USA

It has become common in the West to stereotype everything that is weird to the Japanese culture. Dr. Fredric Wertham in his book 'Seduction of the Innocent' had accused comic books of the dangerous influence on the young readers which inadvertently causes juvenile delinquency. He had said to have cited numerous comic books, including mangas, which have shown the use of drugs, violence, sex and 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 of America. Not too soon after the conference the Detroit Police Commissioner, Harry S. Toy, investigated this matter and came to the conclusion that the comics were, "Loaded with communist teachings, sex, and racial discrimination." This 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 was to be approved by the CCA and a stamp of approval was to be put on each comic book. Due to this there was a decline in the comic book sales in the USA. News such as the one regarding the Otaku killer<sup>21</sup> made the sales plummet further, however this changed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Carol L. Tilley, an assistant professor at the University of Illinois, found flaws in the works of Wertham. Wertham's work wasn't made available by the Library of Congress until 2010 and as soon as it was Dr.

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<sup>17</sup> Innocent Children's Game...or Not? Pokemon, Real Deliverance,  
<http://www.realdeliverance.com/pokemon.shtml>.

<sup>18</sup> Is Pokemon Okay for a Christian to Watch?, Beneath The Tangles, January 15, 2014,  
<http://www.beneaththetangles.com/2014/01/15/is-pokemon-okay-for-a-christian-to-watch/>.

<sup>19</sup> Qatari religious leader bans Pokemon, BBC News, April 3, 2001.

<sup>20</sup> Jim Fitzgerald, 'Swastika' pokemon card dropped, Chicago Sun Times, December 3, 1999.

<sup>21</sup> *Supra* 6.

Tilley disproved Wertham's entire work and called it "manipulated, overstated, compromised and fabricated evidence."<sup>22</sup> His work did not even contain a bibliography or any citations.<sup>23</sup>

Even though Wertham's work has been disproved of and the CCA has lost its importance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century it is due to this movement that mangas did not reach the American audience till very recently. There still remains a large number of comics, especially mangas, which are still not sold in the USA. It has been avoided for the simple reason that it is considered a cartoon and cartoons are supposed to be for kids.<sup>24</sup>

## 5. MANGA AND THE CHINESE

As one of the most authoritarian major country, China has been bringing in new regulations to moderate the content seen by the public. The country has been criticized for its policies regarding freedom of expression.<sup>25</sup> On 8<sup>th</sup> June, 2015 the Chinese Ministry of Culture blacklisted the distribution of 38 titles both in online and print forms. This isn't the first time that the Ministry had blacklisted mangas and anime. Even in April 2015, 62 titles were banned which included international best sellers such as Naruto and Sailor Moon. The decision arose so as to protect the welfare of the children and reduce the level of juvenile delinquency in the country.<sup>26</sup> Out of the 38 that were blacklisted some are international best sellers again such as Attack on Titans, Tokyo Ghoul √A, Sword Art Online, Tokyo Ravens, Death Note, etc. According to the ministry official, Liu Quiang, some of these titles promote violence, some include sexual content and some encourage juvenile delinquency while some show an attack on the government.<sup>27</sup> This decision and reasoning given by the Chinese Government is questionable as some of the series' that have been blacklisted do not promote any of the above-mentioned themes.

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<sup>22</sup> Dave Itzkoff, Scholar Finds Flaws in Work by Archenemy of Comics, The New York Times, February 19, 2013.

<sup>23</sup> Dusty Rhodes, BAM! WAP! KA-POW! Library prof bops doc who K.O.'d comic book industry, Illinois News Bureau, February 11, 2013.

<sup>24</sup> Ian Terry, The American Perception of Anime: Blood, Legs and Language, The Artifice, July 22, 2013.

<sup>25</sup> Peter Goderie and Brian Yecies, Cultural Flows Beneath Death Note: Catching the Wave of Popular Japanese Culture in China, The Asia-Pacific Journal, August 30, 2010, Volume 8, Issue 35, Number 1.

<sup>26</sup> Caitlin McCabe, China Bans Anime and Manga from the Internet, CBLDF, June 11, 2015.

<sup>27</sup> *Id.*

124 Apart from blacklisting mangas and anime the ministry has made a new regulation which requires  
125 websites to get approval from the ministry before they can stream any content. However in this day and  
126 age there has been a rampant misuse of the internet which revolves around the issues of intellectual  
127 property and censorship. China is said to have the highest piracy rate across the globe.<sup>28</sup> However the  
128 ministry has given warnings and fined 29 Chinese websites which still show content which the ministry  
129 had banned. The Chinese policies alone have been unsuccessful in preventing piracy. In a survey  
130 conducted by Peter Goderie and Brian Yecies, they discovered that internet piracy is not an isolated  
131 phenomenon. It exemplifies a wider trend of liberalization among the Chinese youth.<sup>29</sup> The audience has  
132 paid little attention to the State and its policies regarding the ban on manga and anime.

133 The internet has allowed few people to buy the original manga then scan, translate, edit and then post it  
134 on the internet. This act, called scanlation, has threatened the very existence of some mangas as the  
135 manga artists depend on the income to make more mangas. The rampant manga piracy makes it tougher  
136 for the manga artist to earn a living. A solution to this problem could be adopting a Netflix style  
137 arrangement and delivering the manga and anime with the translations on the same day it is released. It  
138 may cost a minimal amount to subscribe to it but it will allow the manga artist to earn a living and keep  
139 working on the manga.

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<sup>28</sup> *Supra* 25.

<sup>29</sup> *Id.*

## 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 *lolicon*. In June 2014, the government passed a law banning all child pornographic content and they gave a time period of one year for this to come into effect. There have been other governments that have banned specific anime and mangas. There have also been petitions by people to enact an international ban on manga.<sup>30</sup>

With the liberal Japanese culture the mangas do tend to be rated PG-13 while some may not be suitable for such an audience brought up in a different culture. Dragon Ball Z was one of the first anime/manga to be appreciated by a worldwide audience in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the anime and the manga both have scenes showing nudity and also the use of foul language. Other famous animes and mangas such as Naruto, Bleach, One Piece also contain some amount of nudity and foul language. It is due to those scenes and pages that parents and teachers associate mangas and animes with behaviour that is deemed inappropriate in real life and have tried to ban such mangas and anime.<sup>31</sup>

The manga world is completely different from the real world and due to this sharp contrast it has prevailed among the youth. A world that is full of dreams and passion sometimes becomes a world which is more honest and reasonable in reflecting the human society in an alternative perspective.<sup>32</sup> For the manga industry to flourish throughout the world a few changes may need to be brought in the content or at least the ratings of the manga. By doing so the industry will definitely get bigger and countries will accept mangas into their society.

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<sup>30</sup> George King, Enact an International Ban on Anime and Manga, <https://www.change.org/p/the-united-nations-enact-an-international-ban-on-anime-and-manga>.

<sup>31</sup> Parents in Russia request ban on 'Death Note', Japan Today, April 29, 2013.

<sup>32</sup> Yang Wang, The Dissemination of Japanese Manga in China: The interplay of culture and social transformation in post reform period, Center for East and South-East Asian Studies, Lund University, 25.