

Articles by NDL staff

Manga research in Japan

Yu Ito, Kyoto Seika University International Manga Research Center, Kyoto International Manga Museum

This article is a translation of the article in Japanese in [NDL Monthly Bulletin No. 673 \(May 2017\)](#).

This lecture was originally given as part of the [Training for Japanese Studies Librarians outside of Japan held by the NDL in 2017](#)

1. Introduction

The National Diet Library (NDL) offers training programs to Japanese studies librarians from around the world as part of its efforts to provide support for Japanese studies conducted outside of Japan. This article presents a special lecture given at the Kansai-kan of the NDL in Kyoto as part of a training program held in January 2017. A brief report on this program is available in the [April 2017 issue of the NDL Newsletter](#). Manga studies are becoming increasingly popular both in Japan and overseas, and this lecture provides an overview of the history and recent trends that can be seen in manga.

The lecture was given by Mr. Yu Ito, researcher at the [Kyoto Seika University International Manga Research Center \(IMRC\)](#) and the [Kyoto International Manga Museum](#).



Kyoto International Manga Museum



Mr. Ito, the lecturer

2. The beginning of manga studies and its background

Although the manga industry flourished throughout the postwar period, it was not considered a suitable field of study. However, Tezuka Osamu's death in 1989 changed the situation dramatically. It was front-page news, his work found a place in school textbooks, and he was the first manga artist to have his work exhibited at the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo. Such was the impact that Tezuka had on ordinary Japanese who grew up in the postwar period. This acknowledgment of Tezuka's numerous achievements also paved the way for dramatically increased recognition of the place of manga within Japanese culture.

Since the late 1990s, there has been increased interest in manga not just as entertainment but as a subject suitable for serious academic research. This trend culminated in the establishment of the [Japan Society for Studies in Cartoons and Comics](#) in 2001.

Additionally, as overseas interest in popular Japanese culture grew, especially in Europe and America in the early 2000s, so too has worldwide interest in manga grown. When then Prime Minister Koizumi Jun'ichiro declared in 2002 that Japan was a "nation built on intellectual property," he seemed to be implying in part to manga's tremendous potential as a medium that sells well globally, making it a powerful tool against global economic competition.

The continued success of the manga industry brought about recognition from the Japanese government and municipalities nationwide of the importance of manga as merchandise, resulting in the development of a framework for sustaining cultural institutions, such as the Kyoto International Manga Museum and the [Kitakyushu Manga Museum](#), that had been founded in places throughout Japan.

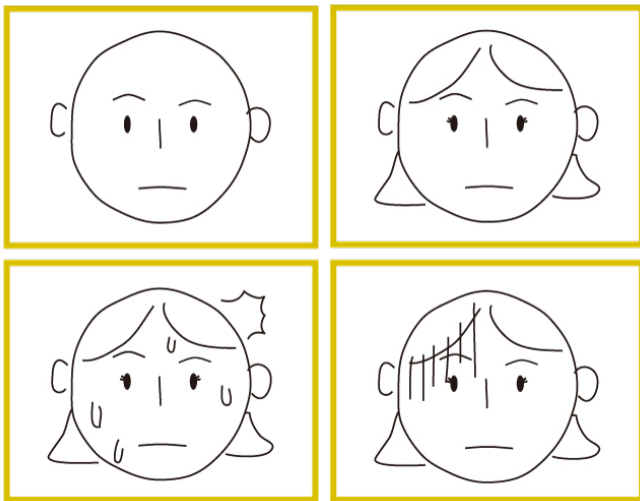
3. Mapping manga studies

How are manga studies performed? There are two primary methods of study in the fields of humanities and social sciences. The first is textual analysis, in which the work itself is regarded as the subject of research, and the second is contextual analysis, in which the social, cultural, and political context in which the work was produced is

the subject of research.

Natsume Fusanosuke's theory of manga expression is an example of the textural analysis of manga. For instance, when a human face is depicted in manga, showing sweat indicates impatience or concern on the part of the character (See lower-left below.), while showing vertical lines on the face indicate that the character's face has lost its "color." (See lower-right below.) Techniques like these can be used to analyze manga according to visual representations that are idiomatic to manga.

Manga Expressions



Examples of typical manga expressions

Two examples of contextual analysis can be found in the work of Nakano Haruyuki, who analyses the structure and logistics of the manga industry, and Nagaoka Yoshiyuki, who delves into society's perception of manga and how manga is accepted, denounced, and regulated. Two well known authorities on the history of manga are Shimizu Isao and Yonezawa Yoshihiro. Additionally, conventional theories of fields such as sociology and literature have also been applied in some manga research. (Refer to section 6. Recommended reference materials for manga research.)

4. Manga criticism or manga studies?

In a relatively new field like manga studies, the attitudes and expectations of individual researchers greatly affect their approach to research. Manga criticism since the 1970s has tended to reflect personal experiences and preferences. Now that manga studies have been recognized as a legitimate subject of academic research, the current trend is away from individual preferences and toward basing new findings on the collective knowledge of earlier researchers. Still, the boundary between these two elements sometimes remains obscure in contemporary manga studies.

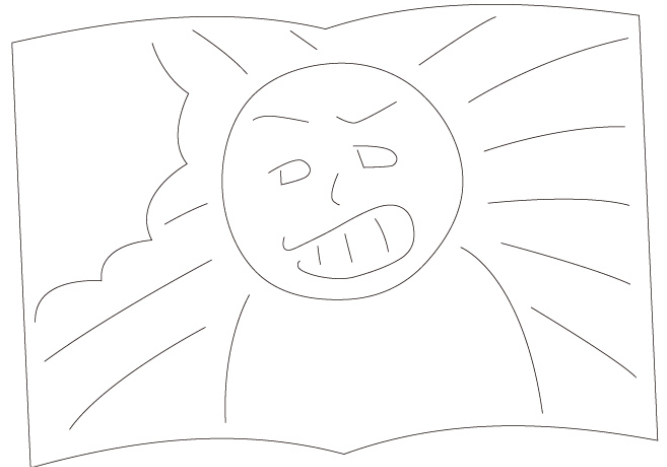
Although this conflict between personal preference and academic objectivity might appear to be a weakness of

manga studies, seen from a different perspective, it also underscores the tremendous potential of manga studies. I personally find it interesting that this conflict continues to remain unresolved.

5. From the audience

Q: What are some characteristic features of manga, compared with graphic novels and comics from other countries?

A: Manga tends to emphasize the characters rather than the plot. French comics, for example, often depict full body views of a character with a detailed background in each panel. In contrast, manga pays more attention to the characters' facial expressions, and backgrounds are frequently omitted so that the reader can focus more readily on the character.



In manga, it is not rare to see a large panel covering a two-page spread



Mr. Ito is demonstrating manga expressions.

6. Recommended reference materials for manga research

Methodology of humanities and social sciences (textual analysis)

- Natsume Fusanosuke, Tezuka osamu wa dokoni iru (Where is Tezuka Osamu?), Chikuma Shobo, 1992, NDL call no. KC486-E304*
- Ito Go, Tezuka izu deddo (Tezuka Osamu is dead), NTT Shuppan, 2005, NDL call no. KC486-H180 **

Methodology of humanities and social sciences (contextual analysis)

- Tsurumi Shunsuke, Manga no sengo shiso (Postwar ideology of manga), Bungei Shunju, 1973, NDL call no. KC486-18
- Nakano Haruyuki, Manga sangyo ron (Theory of manga industry), Chikuma Shobo, 2004, NDL call no. UE57-H26
- Nagaoka Yoshiyuki, Manga wa naze kiseisarerunoka (Why are manga subject to regulation), Heibonsha, 2010, NDL call no. UC71-J3
- Nagai Yoshikazu, "Manga <kankyo> ron (Manga environment theory)" Gendai Fuzoku '93 Manga kankyo (Modern customs '93 manga environment), Gendai Fuzoku Kenkyukai, 1993, NDL call no. Z8-1440

Historical research on manga

- Shimizu Isao, Manga no rekishi (The history of manga), Iwanami Shoten, 1991, NDL call no. KC486-E219
- Yonezawa Yoshihiro, Sengo shojo mangashi (The history of postwar manga for girls), Shinpyosha, 1980, NDL call no. KC486-111*
- Yonezawa Yoshihiro, Sengo esuefu mangashi (The history of postwar sci-fi manga), Shinpyosha, 1980, NDL call no. KC486-110*
- Yonezawa Yoshihiro, Sengo gyagu mangashi (The history of postwar humorous manga), Shinpyosha, 1981, NDL call no. KC486-J121*
- Yonezawa Yoshihiro, Sengo kaiki mangashi (The history of postwar horror manga), Tetsujinsha, 2016, NDL call no. KC486-L288

Applying sociological research methods to the manga studies

- Iwabuchi Koichi, Toransunashonaru japan (Transnational Japan), Iwanami Shoten, 2001, NDL call no. EC211-G144***
- Hori Akiko, Yokubo no kodo (Code of desire), Rinsen Shoten, 2009, NDL call no. KC486-J109

* Available from Chikuma bunko

** Available from Seikaisha shinsho

*** Available from Iwanami gendai bunko

(Translated by Tomoaki Hyuga and Shihoko Yokota)

Related content on the National Diet Library website:

- [Searching manga \(Research Navi, in Japanese\)](#)
- [Training for Japanese Studies Librarians Outside of Japan: Library services practicum at the Kansai-kan of the NDL 2017 \(No. 211, April 2017\)](#)