Japan's Soft Power: Doraemon Goes Overseas

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At the end of the cold war some observers were asking whether we were witnessing a partial transformation in the nature of power rather than merely a shift in power. Joseph Nye, for example, coined the term "soft power" to capture the growing importance of cultural factors in world politics. Nye argues that Japan is a "one-dimensional" economic power marked by a cultural insularity that robs it of relevance for other societies. Japan, as Richard Doner shows in Chapter 6, may be developing what Nye calls "co-optative" behavioral power (getting others to want what you want). But does Japan command such soft-power resources as cultural attraction, ideology, and international institutions? Nye's negative answer to this question is based on bold assertions and summary judgments, not argumentation and evidence.

I contend that Japan's supposed insularity is less pronounced than Nye and others assume. In Japan artistic innovation has been transformed into a cultural production process; a set of "image" alliances that has augmented the culture industry in size and extent has provided the vehicle for Japan's popular culture to spread through Asia. I acknowledge the continued importance of Hollywood in the production of image-based culture products, but I reject the notion that contemporary Asian popular culture is solely Western and that Japan lacks values that resonate with Asian societies. Asian regionalism has its own undeniable and important contemporary popular culture.

The liveliest segments of Japan's popular culture are comic books and television animation. They are called "manga" in Japanese, and manga's current form originated in bomb-scorched cities of postwar Japan as entertainment for children. As the children grew up, manga grew with them to become the national entertainment. Today, as Japanese economic activities spread overseas, popular manga characters—both on television and in comic books—have accompanied them into most parts of the world "except the South Pole."

"Do-ra-e-mo-n"—a blue cat-type robot or cat-robot—is the most popular manga character of postwar Japan. He was created as a children's comic book character in 1970 by two artists, Hiroshi Fujimoto and Motoo Abiko who shared a pen-name, Fujio Fujiko, and then animated for television in 1978. The serialized paperback comic books had sold more than seventy million copies by 1989, and his images are now found all over Japan on more than one thousand character commodities. Doraemon has become a virtual family member, and most children and young adults can draw Doraemon any time, any place. On February 10, 1995, three weeks after the earthquake, a movie theater in Kobe showed Doraemon cartoons, free of charge to cheer up the children of the ruined city. About four hundred children came to see Doraemon and their jolly laughter filled the two-hundred-seat theater that afternoon.

Doraemon and his friend, Nobita, appeared on television in Italy, Hong Kong, China, Taiwan, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, Russia, Spain and Brazil and other Latin American countries, and the Middle East. They traveled to the United States, Europe, and Australia. Doraemon has become a virtual family member, and most children and young adults can draw Doraemon any time, any place. On February 10, 1995, three weeks after the earthquake, a movie theater in Kobe showed Doraemon cartoons, free of charge to cheer up the children of the ruined city. About four hundred children came to see Doraemon and their jolly laughter filled the two-hundred-seat theater that afternoon.
East in the 1980s. The comic books, including pirate editions, are also widely popular. A Vietnamese student studying in Bangkok, for example, loved Doraemon so much when he was studying in Bangkok that he translated the comic books from Thai to Vietnamese and began to sell the copies upon returning to Vietnam. Similar stories involving other Japanese comic books and animation characters abound from Asia to Europe. Doraemon is one of the most popular export items currently produced by Japan’s fantasy industry.7

Manga has found an enthusiastic market in Asia and has also been successful to some extent in Europe. When a comic book by the artist Fumi Saimon was published in Hong Kong in October 1994, an evening newspaper published a review on the day of publication. Japanese popular culture is becoming Asian popular culture. Bestsellers become bestsellers because they have found “resonance” with large segments of the population.8 It seems that the technological optimism expressed by some of Japan’s popular cultural products has cultural relevance for other societies in Asia and beyond. For bestsellers to become bestsellers overseas, they also need to have the vehicle with which to cross the political and cultural borders.

This paper describes Doraemon and traces the postwar history of the manga industry, follows the move to television animation and the creation of new “image alliances,” examines Japan’s popular perception of technology, and investigates how they have gone “global.”

**Japan’s Postwar Comics**

Comic strips, comic books, cartoons, caricatures, and animation are all “manga” in Japanese. Studies on the history of manga in Japan often go back to the Edo Period, when the term “manga” was coined by the popular Ukiyo-e artist, Hokusai Katsushika (1760–1849). Some studies also point out the influence of the West, such as Japan Punch.9 Recently, with the dawn of the television age, komikkusu (comic books) and anime (animation) have gained general circulation.

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“Children’s manga” in post–World War II Japan flourished so well that the Showa Period (1926–89) is called the “Age of the Children’s Manga,” and Japan the “Manga kingdom.” The numbers that prove the popularity of Doraemon are not that amazing when compared with other popular comic books or animations in the history of the manga industry. About 500 million comic books, 500 million monthly comic magazines, and 700 million weekly comic magazines were published in 1989.9 The figures dwarf even Doraemon’s sales records. Doraemon’s success is as much a result of the structural success of the manga industry as a product of his unique appeal and charm.

Postwar children’s manga began with Osamu Tezuka (1928–89).10 The older prewar cartoonist, Keizo Shimada (1900–73), argued that Tezuka’s works were not comics. He was right at the time. Tezuka’s creations were so different that they caused a radical change in the postwar Japanese comics. Today, Tezuka’s new comics define what manga is to the Japanese. Shimada is not right anymore.11

Tezuka began drawing comics during the war at a very young age. For the more than forty years since, he produced, with legendary enthusiasm and devotion, resplendent and voluminous works.12 His manga had great appeal for the young, and he strove to make manga socially acceptable. He set up the “Production System” in which a team of assistants help the principal artist. That made speedy quantity production possible, improved job security, made possible on-site apprenticeship training, and laid the foundation for the postwar manga industry. Accounts of his warm personal support for and inspirational influence on young comic artists fill the pages of biographies of the celebrated artists of today—Fujio Fujiko, the creators of Doraemon, very much among them.

Tezuka created the first serialized television animation in Japan in 1963 and set up the character merchandising system to pay the cost. His creations, such as Mighty Atom (exported as Astro Boy) and Jungle Emperor, were the first comic and animation characters that had substantial commercial success abroad.

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11 Tezuka has been called the “god [kami-sama] of manga.”

12 Fujishima, *Sengo Manga*, pp. 34–35; Shimada was known for his children’s war-propaganda comic, “Boken Dankichi” [Adventurous Dankichi]. Tezuka caricatured him in his “Captain Atom” as the weather forecaster who says, “The wind will blow from east, south, west, north. The sky will be cloudy, and it will be a fine day with rain. Snow is expected.” Osamu Tezuka, *Mighty Atom, Luxury Reprint*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1997), p. 197.

13 There is Kodansha’s 300 volume, *Tezuka Osamu Manga Zenshu* [The complete works of Tezuka Osamu], 1977–, and many more reprints have been published.
The team of Fujio Fujiko (Fujimoto, 1933–; Abiko, 1934–) were enticed into the world of comics by Tezuka’s works, lived in Tezuka’s old apartment, and were intimately influenced by Tezuka. Their first pen-name was Ashi-zuka. Nobita’s home address, “Tsuki-mi-dai [Moon-View-Hights], Nerima-ku, Tokyo” doubtless refers to Tezuka’s residence/animation studio in “Fuji-mi-dai [Fuji-View-Hights], Nerima-ku, Tokyo,” where the Mighty Atom was produced.

Doraemon For Everyone

A fine sunny afternoon, a ten-year-old boy comes home. Returning to his room on the second floor of his wooden house in a residential area in Tokyo, he bursts into tears. Waiting for him in the room is Doraemon, who fully comprehends the emotional crisis of tender childhood. His round hand immediately searches his front pocket for the fantastic high-tech gadgets that will most effectively help the boy deal with the harsh reality of everyday life.

Thus begins Doraemon. The boy’s name is Nobita Nobi. “Nobi nobi” expresses the way a young child grows up free, healthy, and happy, unrestrained in any sense. That is precisely the ideal of “childhood” in contemporary Japan. This happy, innocent, gentle, and thoroughly undisciplined, easygoing child is, hence, doing poorly at school and is routinely bullied by the shrewder or stronger children in the neighborhood.

Nobita’s great-great-grandson, who lives in the twenty-second century, knows all this, thanks to advanced technology, and sends (or, should I say “will send”?) his own toy robot, Doraemon, to be Nobita’s tutor. Doraemon becomes a full-time, live-in, guardian-tutor-friend to Nobita and not only understands his misery but also figures out how to relieve the pain with the aid of high-tech devices from the future.

Most of the Doraemon’s gadgets are portable, with no intrinsic weight, and readily expand or shrink as needed. They rarely break down and are neatly stored in, or delivered through, Doraemon’s pocket. They are apparently manufactured with high quality control and easily transcend time, space, gravity, energy, and volume. In other words, current science and technology cannot explain what they are made of or how they are mechanically composed or controlled. Doraemon selects equipment to meet Nobita’s highly personal immediate needs and instructs him in using the gizmos, which are always simple and user-friendly—the ultimate goal of commodity designing. No screwdrivers are needed to assemble the parts, and batteries are always included. There are no user’s manuals.

TV audiences and comic book readers must have loved these gadgets because there is now an encyclopedia dedicated to them which lists, studies, and explains over 1,100 of Doraemon’s devices. The best-known is the “take-copter.” Nobita and his friends have used it 214 times. Second in popularity is the time machine, which has appeared 97 times. The third most frequently enjoyed gadget is the Anywhere Door (68 times). Nonetheless, Doraemon, himself a product of high technology, occupies the central position of the story. His endearing nature captivates young audiences. Both children’s intimate friend and a family member, Doraemon represents the optimistic view of the relationship between technology and humanity.

Doraemon was first created in Korokoro Comic, a children’s monthly magazine, and was soon compiled in paperback in the Tento-Mushi [Ladybug] Series. In 1978, TV Asahi began to broadcast an animated version, and Doraemon was an instant hit. Animated features were produced, and massive merchandising of the characters followed, all of which stimulated curiosity. In Batteries Not Included, for example, pseudoscientific jargon such as the robot boy “has an internal interface radio,” “electrologic memory banks,” “dynakinetic circuits,” and so on put children off. Paul Deane, Mirrors of American Culture: Children’s Fiction Series in the Twentieth Century (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1991), pp. 150–51.


Hence, a rumor circulating among the children in Tokyo concerning Doraemon (“too good to be true”) says that future manufactures are keeping records on Nobita’s reactions to their products in order to prepare comprehensive user’s manuals. Nobita is chosen as the monitor because he is both naive and a vigorous experimenter, who leaves no stone unturned. For these rumors, see Shinzuka Kiryu and Koei Cult Club, eds., Toshi ni Habikoru Kimyona Uwasa [Strange rumors in big cities] (Yokohama: Koei, 1994).


A small propeller worn like a hat that enables the wearer to fly, apparently through a combination of antigravity and effective use of the wind. The direction and speed can be controlled “as wished,” that is, by brain waves. The maximum speed is 80km/hour and it needs to be recharged after eight hours of continuous use. It can be unstable in strong winds.

Ibid., p. 139.


Now the two artists go separate ways. Hiroshi Fujimoto uses the pen name “Fujio F. Fujiko”; Motoo Abiko uses “Fujio Fujiko A.”
further sales of comic books. Throughout the 1980s, families with young children watched Doraemon five evenings a week, from 6:45 to 7:00, just before the seven o'clock primetime news programs. On Sundays, there was often “Doraemon Land” in which four-episodes were rerun, and in summer and winter, the feature version ran in theaters during the school holidays. Records, videos, and cassette tapes were made. Doraemon images saturated commercial products such as toys, dolls, games, stickers, stationery, bags, desks and chairs, children’s clothes, hats, shoes, boots, umbrellas, lunch boxes, dishes, snacks, calendars, bicycles, and entertainment facilities in playgrounds and amusement parks. Doraemon had become a part of the daily family life of the postwar generation in Japan.23

Manga: Visual Narration

When Tezuka’s initial fifteen comic books were printed as the Red Book Manga, he was barely twenty years old. The reddish colored comic books were small, thin tissue-paper books published by family-managed candy wholesalers in devastated postwar Osaka. They were sold at candy stalls and night markets for ten to fifty yen. The “bubble” publishers appeared and disappeared overnight, and published, or freely reprinted, the comics drawn by nameless young comic artists.

From the outset, Tezuka created a unique narrative style and novel-like complex composition, which was soon named “story manga” or narrative comics. Tezuka was a passionate movie watcher and employed cinematic techniques—the close up, the long shot, montage, and dynamic camera angles—in irregular frames designed to create the impression of movement and build tension.24 He has pointed out the inspiration he found in German, French, British and American movies and animations. Popular Hollywood movies are still one of the sources of inspiration for Japanese comics and animations.

Tezuka’s New Treasure Island, published in 1947, is now acclaimed as the ancestor of postwar comics.25 Without much advertisement, the two-hundred-page narrative comic sold a record-breaking four-hundred-thousand copies in one year. Young readers were engrossed by its freshness and were inspired to create and experiment with narrative comics of their own. Fujo Fujiko wrote of the overwhelming experience they had as second-year junior high students in 1947:

When I first opened [New Treasure Island], I was dazzled. Under the subtitle, “Toward the Sea of Adventure,” there was a frame in which a boy with a dashing hat was driving his sports car from right to left. Its left page was divided horizontally into three frames. In the top frame, the car ran through from the surface [of the page] deep inside, passing by the sign which said “Harbor.” In the second frame, the car was approaching us on the road by the sea. The third frame was the long shot of the harbor. The car was still running from right to left, about to make a sharp stop, and the boy was jumping out of the car at the moment. All the while, no word, no sound-effects. . . . Nonetheless, I heard the roar of the machine, GYAAAN!! and inhaled the dust the sports car stirred. . . .

This is a mere manga printed on sheets of paper, and yet, this car is running with breakneck speed. It was just like watching a movie!!

A new mode of visual narrative had been introduced. Part of its aesthetic appeal lay in how it used pictorial representation to depict action. Tezuka’s visual narrative techniques replaced verbal narrative techniques of earlier cartoons and comics and changed the nature of postwar Japanese comics. As Frederik Schodt put it, “In many cases the picture alone carries the visual narrative techniques replaced verbal narrative techniques of earlier cartoons and comics and changed the nature of postwar Japanese comics. As Frederik Schodt put it, “In many cases the picture alone carries the story. Just as a dramatic film might opt for a minute of silence, several pages of a comic story may have no narration or dialogue.”27 This new technique requires many more frames and pages for even a momentary incident. The comic books have grown thick. At the same time, because such visual messages—the long strings of frames depicting successive passages of motion—can be fully received at a glance, it takes only a few seconds for the experienced readers to scan the frames and pages. Foreign observers prefer to use the term “browsing” to “reading” to describe the prevalent activity they encounter daily in Japan.

The picture had taken the central position. It no longer simply “illustrated” or “decorated” the voices that, in previous comics, were the primary storytellers. Picture and voice may contradict each other, or voice and sound may “illustrate” the pictorial text that “tells” the story. A playful sense of liberation from the stillness of writing and from the former

23 “Mothers who watched the movies when they were children are now taking their own children to see them.” Akhiro Motoyama quoted in Mark Schilling, “Doraemon: Making Dreams Come True,” Japan Quarterly vol. 20, No. 4 (1993): 406.
26 Quoted by Sato, Manga to Hyogen, p. 81.
27 Schodt, Manga, Manga, p. 21.
immobility of pictures had emerged. One remarkable technical outgrowth is noted as follows:

In recent years artists have wrought miracles of paradox: the use of sound to depict silent activities and emotions. When a ninja warrior-assassin vanishes in midair the “sound” is FU; when leaves fall off a tree the sound is HIRA HIRA; when a penis suddenly stands erect the sound is BIH; when someone’s face reddens in embarrassment the sound is PO; and the sound of no sound at all is a drawn-out SHIIIN, and Yukio Kawasaki created a bit of a stir with SURON, the sound of milk being added to coffee. 28

Voice and sound, now liberated from their narrative duties, have developed the florid functions that were to be taken up in the video game “sound novels” of the 1990s.

Tezuka used to say of the drawings in his comics: “I don’t consider them

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28 Ibid.
pictures—I think of them as a type of hieroglyphics. . . . In reality I'm not
drawing. I'm writing a story with a unique type of symbol.” 29 True to the
manga's diversity, not all artists agree with Tezuka, but his statement ex-
plains how manga has advanced its techniques and increased its readers. 30

Comic artists study one another's works and vigorously borrow one an-
others' novel visions, angles, and techniques. By “quoting” and “citing”
others' images, the artists acknowledge, accept, and share them as new
symbols and idioms. Tezuka used to say that the distinction between imi-
tation and creation was much more difficult to make than one might think.
In reality, it is never clear. 31

Tezuka's insight that visual narration of manga is identical with hiero-
glyphic prompts the following observations:

First, the visual presentations of manga are signs. A picture of a corpse,
for example, is equivalent of the combination of letters, D, E, A, D, in
English. The eyes, nose, mouth, arms, legs, and torso are so combined that
they refer to the abstract idea of death. When combined differently, they
signify something else. A single pictorial sign can convey highly complex
information that would require several paragraphs of the lineal linguistic
text. It can show how the body became a corpse—murdered? sickness?—
and how it was discovered, by whom and where with a single frame.

Second, each graphic frame hangs in midair, suspended in space and
time, if separated from the rest of the frames. Depending on their se-
quence—the same set of frames can recount either construction, destruc-
tion, flashbacks, or a different story.

Third, readers have to become literate in visual signs and narrations—
literacy of manga—by familiarizing themselves with syntax and vocabulary.
Thus visual sign narration is a kind of language. Some Japanese cannot
"read" manga even if its voice portion is Japanese, while some foreigners
can, to some extent, even if they do not understand Japanese.

29 Ibid., p. 25.
30 The theory—figures in manga are signs—made Tezuka's "production system" possible.
His assistants learned how to draw the characters as they would have learned to draw calligraphy.
It also explains how easily anyone, including non-Japanese artists, learn to draw manga
characters. Most of Japan's younger generation has mastered Doraemon calligraphy.
For a critical analysis of Tezuka's manga-sign theory, see Eiji Otsuka, Sengo Manga no Hyogen Kukan;
Kigo-teki Shintai no Jibaku [The representational space of the postwar manga. A bondage of
body-as-sign] (Kyoto: Hozokan, 1994); on the birth of modern manga readers, see Natsuo
Sekikawa, Chishikiteki Taishu Shokun, Kore mo Manga da [Dear intellectual mass, this too is
31 Yet there were casualties of imitation. See the revealing biographical accounts of such
stories by the chief editor of Shonen Jump, Shigeki Nishimura, Saraba Waga Seishun, "Shonen

Fourth, children and youth become literate much more easily and thor-
oughly than the aged.

Fifth, the manga artists emerge from among those who have mastered
the language.

The question then arises how the "unlettered" acquire literacy. It comes
almost spontaneously to many children. Living and growing in society
where everyone is "reading" manga doubtless makes the acquisition of
literacy unproblematic for many children. The question becomes impor-
tant when we ask whether and how manga—Japan's postwar popular cul-
ture—will fare overseas.

The Children's Revolt in the Ruined City

Tezuka's manga was initially categorized as "children's manga" not so
much because they were simple as because they were most accepted by
young, who embraced it as their medium for comprehension, expression,
communication, and signification. These "children" were deeply involved
in the war without having a say in it even if, as minors, they were mostly
spared from actual battlefield experiences. 32 The Americans subjected
more than sixty cities in Japan to indiscriminate systematic firebombings
which razed over two million homes. Many of the children who survived
the bombings and firetraps witnessed the death of their family members,
friends and neighbors, as much as the massive and total destruction of
human bodies, homes, buildings and cities. They suffered from scarcity
during and after the war and, for years, the ruined cityscape was their
playground. It was they who eventually undertook the economic recovery
of society.

Manga grew out of the bomb-scorched, barren city, which became a
liberating space for postwar Japanese literature. It was especially so for the
visual narratives. The ruined black-and-white cityscape became the Orig-
inal Experience and the Original Picture. It was so clear and transparent
that it refused rhetorical elucidation. All the old structures of authority,
moral values, and beliefs were destroyed in this space. The sight of dev-
astation was the proof and sign of their failure and defeat. Vision had
become the only relevant medium. It was evidently so for both the manga
artists in their late teens and readers in their early teens, who set out to
bring forth a new kind of image narration together.

Throughout the history of postwar manga, the scene of the ravaged city
has been drawn with nostalgic affection countless times by numerous art-

32 Some artists were in the last batch of suicide pilots in their late teens in August 1945.
Fujishima, Sengo Manga, pp. 343-44.
ists. The city is repeatedly destroyed, resurrected, transformed into a scene of futurist grandeur, only to be destroyed again. The ruins are depicted as signs of danger, desperation, and attack by hostile forces. They are also calls for help, comradeship, courage, love, and hope. Destruction, the struggle for survival and reconstruction, and the majestic future city can all be found in the Original Picture in a paradoxical depiction of the simultaneous experiences of despair and optimism.

Consider the account of how a robot hero, Iron Man No. 28, was conceived as a symbol of victory through technological advancement:

[Mitsuteru Yokoyama] was influenced by three things in his youth. "One was the sight I saw when the war ended and I returned to [my home] Kobe from my rural evacuation site. Everything as far as I could see had been transformed into scorched earth and piles of rubble.... I was... stunned by the destructive power of war. Second was the V1 and V2 missiles that the German Nazis developed. I had heard that Hitler tried to use them as an ace in the hole to reverse his waning fortunes. The third influence was from the American movie Frankenstein."

Yokoyama's giant iron robot, inspired by the failed dream of V1 and V2 missiles, modeled after the lonely artificial man of the Hollywood movie, and painted the color of ruined city, manifested the future in its purest form.

In the early days of manga, both the readers and the artists were very young. The artists were usually published by age nineteen, by which time they had already been drawing manga for years. They were often quite poor and had been less educated than most established writers in the publishing community. Yet the young adored and participated in creating this distinctly new entertainment art. The distance between producers and consumers of manga was much smaller than that for movies. Readers were creating their own manga, artists were devoted manga readers, and some editors were aspiring artists themselves.

Editors were primarily responsible for discovering artists and helping them develop their talents. They worked with artists step by step from the initial stages of planning to actual drawing. They evaluated the readers' reactions and transmitted them to artists, who would adjust the stories and characters accordingly. The readers' responses were their primary guides.

Together they—artists, editors, and readers—experimented with rebellious pictorial depiction and new techniques. Many images and themes—however scandalous they appeared at the outset—eventually became standard symbols and signs and enriched the vocabulary of the new medium. Comic magazines still come with a "reader's card" inserted.

As the children grew, manga accompanied them into their youth and then adulthood. The "children's manga" have become manga for everyone, young and old. Although the comics themselves and their themes were changing radically, the category "children's manga" endured, and the concept of childhood was continuously provoked. Inside the "children's domain," taboos were thus challenged and broken.

Manga artists have shown an avid interest in human body—a visual sign of human being—its motion, destruction, and transformation, just as they have been attracted by the vision of the city—its destruction and resurrection. Sexual organs, intercourse, cannibalism, torture and killings, creatures from outer space, and parasites that deform human bodies are among the objects of their exploration. (See Figure 7-3; Kiseiju [Parasite Animal] by Hitoshi Iwaaki) An American sex-education textbook was translated and printed, with its illustrations, in the "boys'" manga weekly. Experiments in how far a figure may be deconstructed and still be recognizable as a lifeform, or how to signify individuality and emotional shifts with a few simple visual lines, are constantly being made. The photos of mutilated Vietnamese bodies being roped and dragged by American soldiers were printed in a weekly "boys'" manga magazine. Women's bodies chopped up by Japanese soldiers in Nanking appeared in another "boys'" manga weekly when the government still prohibited printing the facts in textbooks. Sports manga that focuses on the outer limits of bodily motion is another favored subject. Many of them share the theme of empowerment of children and youth.

U.S. occupying forces effectively censored manga in its early days, hence, General Douglas MacArthur and the occupying military forces missed their chance to appear in what was the steaming laboratory for the things to come. From time to time, intellectuals, "concerned" teachers, and many parents condemned the new medium categorically as something repulsive, morally corrupt, or at best, unproductive and meaningless. In

35 Quoted in Frederik L. Schodt, Inside the Robot Kingdom: Japan, Mechatronics, and the Coming Robopedia (Tokyo and New York: Kodansha International, 1988), pp. 78-79. Iron Man No. 28, which was exported to the United States under the name Gigan, and Mighty Atom are the prototypes of robot imagery.

36 Sato, Manga to Hyogen, pp. 96-98.

37 Nishimura, Saraba Waga Seishun, pp. 78-82.


39 Fujishima, Sengo Manga, pp. 139-40.

40 Ibid, pp. 159-60.

41 Shimizu, Mangu no Rokishi, p.184-85. By 1951, with the start of the Korean War and the Red Purge, all the comic magazines for adults, such as Shinso, which caricatured the emperor, were forced to stop publication and the "children's manga" began to thrive.

some cases piles of manga books and magazines were burnt on school grounds during the 1950s.\(^{40}\)

Now, things have changed. Succeeding generations have effortlessly, if not more enthusiastically than their older brothers and sisters, accepted the medium. The manga generations are now in the majority. Fifty years since the end of World War II, the age limit of those who “understand” manga is reported to be around fifty. In 1985, Tezuka’s manga were printed in a primary school Japanese language and literature textbook. Manga artists, such as Shotaro Ishinomori, are invited to advisory councils of government ministries and business groups, which are eager to absorb manga artists’ multidimensional inspirations. Some textbook publishers have decided to replace traditional arts and performances, such as No, with manga as a focus for discussion on Japanese culture. In April 1995, Shogakuto-sho released a high school English textbook with an excerpt from Frederik Schodt’s analysis on manga and technology in Japan. School libraries are stuffing their shelves with comic books.\(^{41}\)

**The Manga Industry**

Comic books in Japan are typically black-and-white and inexpensive. As the Japanese began to have more money to spend for leisure, and as the number of television sets exceeded 10 million in 1962 and 15 million in 1963, publishers and movie producers were forced to restructure their industry to survive in the television age.

As the weekly television programs began to punctuate everyday life, the weekly manga magazines replaced the monthlies.\(^{42}\) Nowadays each issue carries a dozen or more serialized narrative comics, and the competition is fierce. Subscriptions are unusual. The magazines are cheap, massively printed, and sold everywhere. Sales depend on the popularity of the comics they contain.\(^{43}\) Series that do not generate positive reactions disappear in about ten weeks to give space to others. A popular series continue for months or years. These are later published in book form, on better quality paper. The profit in the manga business is made from books rather than weekly magazines. The books are about two hundred pages long and contain ten to fifteen episodes of a series.

\(^{40}\) Fujishima, *Sengo Manga*, pp. 72–74.


\(^{42}\) Shonen Magazine and *Shonen Sunday* in 1959, *Shojo Friend* in 1962, *Shonen King* and *Margaret* in 1963, *Shojo Comic* and *Shonen Jump* and *Seventeen* in 1968, and others.

\(^{43}\) Three popular comics dramatically improve the sale of a weekly. One is not enough, for the readers (now the expert manga browsers) simply take a quick glance at the week’s episode without bothering to purchase the magazine. *Manga Jin*, p. 12.
Yet weekly magazines are crucial in introducing new artists and their works, and selecting popular comics for paperback publication. All the ten best-selling weekly manga magazines have circulations of over one million, and Shonen Jump constantly sells five to six million copies each week. They have typically three or four hundred pages, and cost around 200 yen, or two dollars. Five publishers—Shueisha, Shogakukan, Kodansha, Hakusen-sha, and Futabasha—have an estimated 78 percent of the comics market. In 1992, manga sales totaled 540 billion yen (or over U.S. $5 billion), which was 23 percent of all the sales of books in Japan.44

The industry’s primary concern has always been how to recruit talented artists. A manga artist must be able to do what a script writer, a director, a costume designer, a set designer, a cameraman, and an illustrator do. It takes energy, devotion, creativity and ingrained unconventionality to keep producing episodes week after week for demanding, outspoken readers.45

Manga is a medium for popular entertainment, comparable to American popular music. It has grown large enough to maintain its profitability. In order to multiply its revenue, however, it has undergone further institutional rearrangements.

Television Animation and Image Alliance

In 1956, NHK Terebi (Television) and TBS began broadcasting in Japan. Nihon Terebi (1957), Fuji Terebi (1959) and Terebi Asahi (1959), followed. The old American cartoon Popeye and many others, such as Mighty Mouse and Woody Woodpecker, went on the air after 1959. In 1957, Japan’s first animation production company, Toei Doga Production was set up and started to produce animation movies for theaters. Tezuka participated in its early productions. He also studied the Walt Disney animation movies. He is said to have seen “Bambi” over eighty times and “Snow White” fifty times.46 By 1960, the price for a black-and-white 12 inch television set was down to 50,000 yen from the initial 200,000 yen. The starting monthly salary for a primary school teacher was 13,000 yen in that year.

In 1962, Tezuka established Mushi [Beetle] Production and in January of the next year—when the number of television sets reached 15 million—Mighty Atom was broadcast by Nihon Terebi as the first serialized Japanese television animation. Animation is an extremely labor intensive industry.

A half-hour animated cartoon requires forty people working full-time for forty-five days. Imported American cartoons with worldwide market cost only a little over 100,000 yen for a thirty minute program then, while it actually cost more than 1 million yen to produce thirty-minutes of animation in Japan. By 1970, it cost about four million yen, and seven to eight million yen in 1989. Meiji Confectionery Company, which sponsored Mighty Atom, initially paid 550,000 yen for each episode, which did not even cover the cost of production.47

Mushi Productions implemented several procedures to reduce the cost. For a half-hour program, only 3,000 to 4,300 pictures were used. Tezuka’s “bank system” further simplified the process. Several kinds of mouth, eyes, nose and arms were prepared and, when possible, only these parts were exchanged instead of drawing entire figures anew. His “manga is hieroglyphics” theory found a practical use. While Disney used two hundred colors for its animation, Mushi Productions made do with only eighty. Tezuka wanted his products to be enjoyed by many, even if he had to sacrifice quality at the beginning. He has kept the spirit of his early Red Book Manga days. Tezuka’s product, nevertheless, was of higher quality than the many mass-produced television animations that followed soon after. Since then Japan’s animation industry has grown to be the world largest, and today Toei Doga Productions uses as many colors as it pleases.48

In 1993, four years after Tezuka’s death, his wife wrote: “He had dreamed of creating animation ever since he was a child. The delightful sensation an artist feels when the figures he has drawn start to move is immeasurable, it is beyond anyone’s imagination.”49 The delight may be shared, however, by robotics researchers. Making pictures move and making machines move are very much similar, and they are also both like having a child and seeing it walk and grow. Fittingly, the first episode of Mighty Atom was the thrilling creation and bringing to life of the boy-robot, Atom. Atom was a spectacular hit. The term “Atom Syndrome” was coined to summarize the phenomena. The Nielsen survey conducted in August 1964 indicated extraordinary 40.7 percent rating. Later, when Atom was exported to the United States as “Astro Boy,” it also recorded over 40 percent ratings.50

44 Ibid, pp. 10–11.
45 Nishimura, Suraha Waga Seishun, passim.
46 Sato, Manga to jyogon, p. 77; Fujishima, Senjo Manga, p. 120.
47 For the cost of TV animation, see Fujishima, Senjo Manga, pp. 110–23, pp. 224–49.
50 Tezuka was very pleased to discover that a boy he met in New York City had seen Astro Boy. Fujishima, Senjo Manga, pp. 121–22.
After *Mighty Atom* went on the air, the sale of the comic books went up. Why? Watching television animation is distinctly easier than “reading” comic books, which requires literacy in visual signs and text. The cinematic techniques of manga encode dynamic movements, sound-effects, and characters’ voices. Animating comics liberates the hitherto coded motions and sounds. Exposure to the weekly television animations appears to prepare audiences for comics’ visual narration. Decoding the comics comes more easily when the reader has been familiarized with the characters’ voices and motions. Having learned, readers are likely to become the awakened patrons of comic books in general, hence new members of the manga generation. Television animation trains and entices a wider population into the printed visual narration.51 The close relation between the popularity of a television animation and the sale of its comic books is now a norm for publishers and television companies. Manga has proved to be a literary form that prospers in the television age.

Actually, television animation introduced a more affluent population to the narrative comics. Television sets were priced so high in the early days of broadcasting that the wealthy watched television more than the poor. Meanwhile, as Japan’s economy developed, formerly poor children grew up to be moneyed adults. The result is that manga readership has extended upward in class and in age. The term *komikkusu* (for comic books) spread and because of its English origin, regardless of its original connotation, the new term has come to suggest a more polished image of “manga eiga [movie].” and for animated features “manga eiga [movie].”

Japan’s emerging consumer class has not fully adopted the entertainment and leisure habits of middle-class families in the West, and Japan’s prewar middle-class entertainment and leisure practices vanished in the wake of the war, land reforms, and subsequent dramatic economic development. Some have begun to claim that manga (komikkusu and anime) is the postwar national entertainment and leisure. Thus there is much debate over whether Japanese culture should be represented abroad, and to the younger generation, by traditional theater performances such as No, now sustained by the taxpayers, who might never watch it in their lives, or by flourishing manga that accompanies the Japanese wherever they go.

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51 Fujishima points out TV’s legitimatization effects on the Japanese audience. *Sengo Manga*, pp. 114–18.
52 In 1966 *Comie Magazine*, *Sunday Comics*, and in 1968 *Big Comic*, *Shojo Comic* were published and the term “komikkusu” took root.

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**Character Merchandising**

Tezuka raised money to meet the cost of animation by selling licenses to use the characters on commodities. *Mighty Atom* brought in four hundred merchandise contracts for stationery, toys, sporting goods, clothes, foods, electronic products, and many other items. Mushi Productions received three million yen for each license.53

In 1965, *Obake no QTaro* [Our dear ghost QTaro] by Fujio Fujiko was made into an animated television series.54 Children were enraptured by the endearing ghost, and Oba-Q’s sponsor, Fujiya, found that its chocolate sold out, and its entire sales quickly caught up with and exceeded those of its rivals, Morinaga and Meiji.55 The effects of the popular children’s television animation on the sale of its sponsors’ commodities were thus proved. The sale of comic books also exploded after Oba-Q appeared on television, and when the publisher built a new ten-story office building in Tokyo, it was promptly called the “Oba-Q building.”56

The remarkable advantage of linking children’s television cartoons, comic books, and commodities became evident. The alliance of the comics, animation, television, manufacturers, retailers, and advertisers was cemented through this experience. Schodt explains that

> the typical pattern is for a popular story first serialized in a comic magazine to be compiled into books and sold as a paperback series, then made into an animated television series, and, if still popular, finally made into an animated feature for theatrical release... Animation stimulates further sales of magazines, reprints of comic paperbacks, and massive merchandising.57

Image is the essential component of this multi-industry alliance. The alliance produces images, evaluates them, purchases them, and sells them. As images circulate, profits are generated. The copyright, which brings in enormous profit, is now shared by the original artist, the publisher, and the television network.

In the 1970s, the oil crisis prompted a restructuring of the industries. Television stations were “rationalized” by discharging their employees,
who set up small independent program production houses. Toei Doga followed suit, and a number of small animation studios sprouted. Mushi Productions went bankrupt in 1973.

Coordination is a key factor for an effective image alliance in this new context: numbers of small production houses; television stations with a minimum of programming staff; and numerous comic characters to choose from for animation. An advertisement agency, such as Dentsu or Hakuhodo, ordinarily initiates an animation project by courting prospective sponsors.58 The agents propose suitable characters and stories to enhance the image of the company and its commodities. They then prescribe images to the animation producer in accordance with the sponsor's requests and negotiate with a television station for a time spot.

In most cases, the comic book characters provide the images, which the advertisers sell to the sponsors, and the sponsors sell to the consumers. There is a wide range of choices of comic characters, and they are easy to craft and engineer into certain images. Some successful characters, like Doraemon, are incredibly durable. The increased visibility of characters in daily life, in turn, makes the television program more popular and increases sales of the original comic books. The beauty of the image alliance is that each partner promotes the others. Everyone profits.

Bikkuri-Man Fever

A significant reversal of value, however, occurred when the comics industry joined the image alliance system. Now, the image, one character, one simple drawing such as Doraemon, has more value than the narrative. The image is the core of the alliance, and the comics do not necessarily monopolize image production or always occupy the principal position in the alliance. One interesting incident demonstrates this value reversal between comic narratives and character images.

In 1986, Lotte Confectionery Company's Planning Division devised a series of illustrated cards that were to be wrapped inside the packages of their new commodity—"Bikkuri-Man Chocolate." Some comic artists were enlisted to draw original "Bikkuri-Man" [Flabbergasted-Man] characters for the cards—no comic story was attached. Children, infatuated by the mysterious characters, began competing to collect all the characters of the series as if to decipher the hidden story. Lotte kept adding the number of characters and the children kept collecting them. By 1989, more than five hundred character images were created. Sales of the thirty-yen chocolate reached five billion yen (a little less than U.S. $40 million then) in one year. Forged character images were discovered to have been sold, without chocolates, to children.

The ingenious Lotte Planning Division, showing no sign of being flabbergasted, coolly arranged for their artists to make up stories for Bikkuri-Man characters. In 1988, Korokoro Comic began printing serialized Bikkuri-Man stories. At one point, in June 1988, Bikkuri-Man's popularity exceeded Doraemon's. That summer, the publisher released a special "Bikkuri-Man Edition" magazine, and 200,000 copies were sold out in one day. Soon, television animation was produced, and its rating exceeded 20 percent. Finally a video game was developed.59

In the beginning is the "image" alone. Once the image proves to be popular enough to generate profit, the image alliance takes over. Wherever a popular image appears, the alliance is there, ready to share the image and multiply the profit. Each partner helps increase the profit of the others simply by pursuing his own.

Bikkuri-Man is not an exception. "My Neighbor Totoro" was an extremely successful feature animation produced in 1988, and its characters have been shared by television networks, comic publishers, and many manufacturers. The video game, "Super Mario Brothers," has generated character merchandising and at one point a cartoon version was also created. Alliances are the machines that multiply, maximize, and squeeze profit out of any popular image.

By 1978, there were more than sixty cartoons on television each week. This meant that more than sixty image alliances were actively functioning. Mass production of animation became necessary to meet the demand. It was for the mass production that Japan's animation industry first branched out in Asia. In 1980, animation studios were set up in Seoul and Taipei, and by the middle of 1980s, 50 percent of the animations broadcast in Japan were made overseas.

Republic of Children and Robots

"Protecting mankind...child of science...everyone's friend, Mighty Atom." Thus goes the theme song for the Mighty Atom TV cartoon.60 With the song, the popular imagery of robot as reliable friend emerged to heal postwar Japan's wounded confidence in science and technology. Atom was so popular that by 1981, over one hundred million copies of various Mighty Atom

58 Fujishima, Sengo Manga, p. 245.

59 For the "Bikkuri-Man" incident see ibid., pp. 272–77.

60 Music by Tatsuo Takai, lyrics by Shuntaro Tanikawa, translated by Frederik Schodt. Schodt, Inside the Robot Kingdom, p. 79.
paperbacks had been sold. Atom was first created by Tezuka in 1951, only six years after the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan. How could “atom” become the name of a friend who protects mankind?

Czech writer, Karel Čapek, coined the word “robot” from a Czech word, robota, in his 1920 play, R.U.R. [Rossum’s Universal Robots]. In the post-World War I Europe, the play created a sensation, and the metal men have appeared in novels, plays, and films. Their plots were all quite similar to the original plot, which is, in Schodt’s summary, as follows: “Men mass-produce artificial slaves, or robots, to take over their work and later to wage war as well; the robots, of high intelligence, decide not to kill each other, and instead slaughter their masters, the humans.” In 1924, R.U.R. was staged in Tokyo but it did not gain popularity as it did in the West. The theme, “man make robots; robots kill man,” had no resonance for the Japanese and did not take root. Robots with their humanoid forms embody not only advanced technology but also its relation to humankind. When Tezuka created the robot hero Tetsuwan Atom (Mighty Atom, or Iron-Armed Atom), “robots” became what they still are to the Japanese, reliable friends of children.

In the story, Atom was made as a replacement for a son who dies in a traffic accident. His father, who was a top scientist, eventually sold Atom to a circus when he discovered that the robot would never grow up. Like postwar children and youths, orphaned Atom is freed of the past and familial authority. He is born of the marriage of advanced technology and dreams of the future. This incredibly strong, atomic-powered, superrobot has the body of a young boy—he is about four and a half feet tall—and sensitive innocent eyes.

Tezuka himself had read R.U.R., knew such films as Things to Come, personally witnessed the destructive effects of the modern warfare, experienced Hiroshima in his own way, and as a medical student, had treated patients most of whom were suffering from malnutrition. He originally conceived the character as a cynical parody of science and technology but, as Schodt explains it, “publishers, the public, and the times pushed him to a more romantic depiction of the future, and as is often the case his

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61 Fujishima, Sengo Manga, p. 328.
62 Ironically, his name had to be changed to “Astro Boy” in the U.S. version.
63 Schodt, Inside the Robot Kingdom, pp. 29-30.
64 Ibid., p. 73
65 There are several versions of episodes concerning Atom’s “growth.” Tezuka himself was evidently ambivalent on the subject.
66 A British film in which the world was to be destroyed in 1949.
67 The Japanese minister of finance had predicted that more than eight million people out of seventy million would die in the winter of 1945 from starvation. Fujishima, Sengo Manga, p. 11.
character took on a life of its own. ‘In the days after the war,’ says Tezuka today, ‘the publishers wanted me to stress a peaceful future, where Japanese science and technology were advanced and nuclear power was used for peaceful purposes.’\(^68\) Despite himself, Tezuka created the image of a friendly technology helping men, women, and children attain a peaceful life. It seems that Schodt is quite correct to say that whereas “the carnage wrought by technology in World War II had deepened distrust of it among many intellectuals in the West[,] in Japan it had a decidedly different effect.”\(^69\) The disastrous war between humans and technology had already happened in Japan with the atomic bombs, but in the West, the worst had “yet to happen.” Tezuka created a Day After scenario in which scientific knowledge and technology would be trustworthy partners in rebuilding the land.\(^70\) The awesome power of the atom can be a friend to a human with a pure heart. In Tezuka’s story, a robot is harmless to people when it is being controlled by a man of evil intent or when it is not made with precision. Tezuka’s “Principles of Robot Law” states, “Robots are created to serve mankind,” and “Robots shall never injure or kill humans.”\(^71\) Robots can only fully obey their law when they are freed from their creators, men, who are prone to make mistakes. “All robots have the right to live free and equal.”\(^72\) It was a declaration of the republic of children and robots, where the future is no longer to be determined by the past, rather, it is the image and hope of the future that guides and defines the present. “Science and technology” are intimately associated with “children,” and Atom incorporated two otherwise unrelated concepts in his body. Atom has become a symbol of the confidence and hope people place in technology as the trustee of the future of their children. Technology, which once caused total devastation, was purified by this image of an innocent child, and children were conceptually empowered as those who are responsible for befriending, and advancing, science and technology. In Mighty Atom young readers were treated to a feast of images, from the Manhattan-like splendor of twenty-first-century Tokyo, to glorious masterpieces in Japanese comics and animation. . . . planted the idea of robots as friends in the minds of young Japanese and helped create the psychological conditions for the current explosion of [Industrial] robots in the Robot Kingdom [Japan].”\(^74\) Tezuka was invited to robotics research conferences and institutions to exchange ideas. Atom stands at the crossroads of high technology and its popular perception in Japan.

Doraemon: Dream Agent of High-Tech Commodities

In January 1970, a quarter-century after World War II, nineteen years after the birth of Mighty Atom and two years after its discontinuation, Fujio Fujiko launched Doraemon. Doraemon also contains a nuclear reactor as his source of energy. Nobita lives in a suburban residential area, and Atom’s illustrious “metropolis” has become ordinary “urban” space where the contemporary people live. Doraemon does not need to redeem the city. He comes to remedy the pain of his spoiled yet imaginative friend. Nobita’s father is a white-color salariman who leaves home every morning and comes back in the evenings to have dinner with his family, that is, his wife Tamako, their only son Nobita, and Doraemon. On Sundays, he usually reads newspapers or watches television. Nobita’s mother stays home tending the family. They spend most of their time on the first floor, leaving Nobita’s childhood world undisturbed.

Nobita’s room on the second floor is connected to, and separated from, the first floor family space by the stairs.\(^75\) The modern private family home is already set apart from the public sphere, but the child’s room is further hidden inside the home. The spheres of politics, production, and transaction are invisible from Nobita’s room, although Nobita’s father visits them every day.

With Doraemon’s “ta-ke-co-pu-ter” Nobita can fly, and using Doraemon’s “Do-ko-de-mo [Anywhere] Door” he and his friends can have adventures anywhere in the world. Using the time machine parked inside Nobita’s desk drawer, they can travel into the past or the future. The world

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\(^68\) Schodt, Inside the Robot Kingdom, 1988, p. 76.

\(^69\) Ibid., p. 77.

\(^70\) Atom’s story begins with the destruction of the earth and subsequent human efforts to rebuild society on a new planet, in which Atom plays a crucial role in bringing peace to the new world.

\(^71\) For Robot Law, see Fujishima, Sengo Manga, pp. 293–95, and Schodt, Inside the Robot Kingdom, p. 77.


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kitchens. Bauhaus-style furniture sits in offices, and Porsche-style cars run on the streets. They are both the fruits of civilization, which can easily be destroyed.

Japanese robotics researchers have grown up reading and watching Mighty Atom. The scientist Eiji Nakano wrote that “science fiction masterpieces in Japanese comics and animation . . . planted the idea of robots as friends in the minds of young Japanese and helped create the psychological conditions for the current explosion of [Industrial] robots in the Robot Kingdom [Japan].” Tezuka was invited to robotics research conferences and institutions to exchange ideas. Atom stands at the crossroads of high technology and its popular perception in Japan.

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\(^73\) Ibid., p. 126.

\(^74\) Schodt, Inside the Robot Kingdom, p. 73.

\(^75\) Concerning the second floor as a private urban space in modern Japan, see Ai Maeda, Toshi Kukan no Nakano Bungaku [Literature in the urban space] (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1989).
that Nobita and Doraemon explore is the world of world maps, pictures of dinosaurs and dragons, science fiction movie posters, comic books, fossil collections, and toy robots, the world of discourse that fits most comfortably inside a child's room. No newspapers allowed. The child's room is a privileged space in modern society, where the occupant can freely transcend time, space, and political boundaries.

Doraemon delivers the high-tech gadgets to Nobita who occupies this secluded space. In contemporary society where the consumers, not only the children, are separated from the site of manufacturing, transaction, and negotiation, Doraemon appears to be the ideal agent of marketing and delivery.

Advertisers target groups, point out problems and desires they may have never known they had before, and try to convince them that the purchase of a certain commodity is The Solution. Most commodities today are manufactured by strangers whom the prospective consumers have not met and will never meet. They are produced and transported in places entirely unknown to the consumers. It matters little, indeed, whether they are produced in a factory in the next town, overseas, or even in the future. In periods when lifestyles are changing so radically, such as in the late-nineteenth-century United States or in Asian countries today, goods that consumers have never heard of before are advertised. Consumers often do not know how an appliance works. The effectiveness of an advertisement relies, therefore, largely on how and by whom the commodity is introduced to the target audience.

Ohmann describes the effect of the familiar neighborly voice in advertisement commonly found in monthly magazines in 1890s America: "It is a voice like ours, reaching across the gap between anonymous corporation and anonymous readership, establishing in that gap a chatty, humorous, reliable, neighborly helper, as if to stand in place of the grandmothers and mothers who no longer live with or near the young wife or pass on to her their generational skills and wisdom" [emphasis in original].

The familiar "neighbor" helps erase any uneasiness the consumer may have in purchasing a strange object. The familiar popular characters may play the role of "a chatty, humorous, reliable, neighborly helper" most effectively. Commodities in hand, they can even wait for consumers in stores.

Among them, Doraemon is a dream agent for both the manufacturer and for the consumer. He lives with Nobita, the prospective consumer and knows all Nobita's problems, dispositions, and fantasies. He may not take the place of Nobita's grandmother, but he does stand in for Nobita's great-great-grandson to pass on the "generational skills and wisdom" that will have accumulated. Although the gadgets Doraemon delivers from the future are always strange objects, Nobita is assured that they are always designed for, and manifest themselves as responses to, his personal needs. The intimate relationship between Nobita and Doraemon is converted into trust in the unfamiliar high-tech products. Doraemon selects the gadget for Nobita and frees him from the burden of searching for and updating information and from selecting suitable and affordable items. He is handier and more effective than a Sears catalogue.

Nobita: An Imaginative Consumer

Nobita is, on his side, an ideal consumer. He accepts the way the world is, despite his daily misery, and is content with his children's domain. Since nothing fundamental changes, he continues to feel miserable, which keeps him in need of Doraemon's gadgets. Thus by 1991, Doraemon had pulled out more than 1,100 items out of his pocket.

At the same time, Nobita is a vigorous and imaginative experimenter. Once his problem is solved, Nobita cheerfully experiments with each high-tech toy to find a new application not intended by its designer, manufacturer, or the supplier, Doraemon. Nobita's experiments often cause mishaps. Yet the optimistic, good-natured boy never loses his curiosity. Nobita reminds us of a young child who plays with his little toy car not only as a car, but as an airplane, as a boat or as dozens of other enchanting objects in his imaginative world. Nobita's mettle is as much a source of the comics' popularity as are its breathtakingly fresh ideas for high-tech products. In fact this playful and engaging literacy of objects that Nobita Nobi exhibits makes the entire structure of the story persuasive.

Thus Nobita brings together the elements of an affluent consumption society supported by constant advancement in technology. That is the Japan of the 1970s and 1980s as pictured in *Doraemon*.

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For the "literacy of objects," see Brian Sutton-Smith, *Toys as Culture* (New York: Garden Press, 1986).
Dawn of the Television Age in Asia

Indonesia’s national broadcast company, TVRI (Televisi Republik Indonesia), started to broadcast on August 24, 1962, \(^{78}\) the year Tezuka set up Mushi Productions in Tokyo. In October 1965, a state funeral for six army generals killed in an abortive coup was broadcast. President Sukarno, famed for his “baritone” voice and his radio speeches, did not attend the funeral. A speech by General Nasution made the audience cry, and General Soeharto made his first conspicuous appearance, standing silently, with his dark sunglasses, behind Nasution. The age of Sukarno the marvelous orator was about to end.

Soeharto became president in 1968, and has been known for his composed silent smile. In the mid-1970s, the government required every village to have at least one television set and requested that villagers watch the news and cultural events. Electric generators spread television to villages ahead of electrification. In 1989, there were approximately six million registered television sets, about one television set for every thirty-three persons. By 1990, TVRI’s 13 regional stations, 350 transmission facilities, and 6,000 employees reached 40 percent of the land. This meant, in theory, that 70 percent of Indonesia’s population was provided with national television news from Jakarta every evening at seven and nine o’clock. Soeharto’s image appears at the beginning of news almost every day. His portraits are on walls of government offices and schools throughout the archipelago.

The commercial television age began after a controversial deregulation in the late 1980s. Now, five privately run television stations have national broadcast licenses: RCTI (Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia), TPI (Televisi Pendidikan Indonesia), SCTV (Surya Citra Televisi), AN-Teve, and Indo-siar Visual Mandiri. Thanks to satellite dishes, people in the archipelago in fact have more choices to make: TVRI, RCTI, SCTV, TPI, ANTEVE, CNNI, ESPN, STAR TV, HBO, CFI, ATVI, and DISCOVERY. The 3,500 rupiah (about $1.50) monthly television guide, VISTA TV, lists the programs for all the channels. A ten-foot satellite dish, with “Full Remote Control-Stereo System” is advertised at Rp. 850,000 (about $425). \(^{79}\) Many second-hand dishes are also available.

Indonesian viewers are now learning how to cope with television commercials. Some intellectuals and religious groups are against television commercials that arouse unwanted desires. Television commercials started, nevertheless, with shampoos and soaps. No alcohol. In a very short time commercials have become the norm. \(^{80}\) Rich numerical data on the television industry now floods the mass media. TPI’s fee for a thirty-second advertisement, for example, is reported to have been reduced from 18 million Rupiah ($9,000) to 14 million Rupiah ($7,000), and RCTI charges Rp. 17 million ($8,500) to broadcast commercials twenty-one times. It is accepted that television is a business and that popularity of the programs begets value. The programs and their target audience are noted, and audience likes and dislikes are spotlighted in the weekly and monthly surveys conducted by SRI and printed in VISTA TV. It is a new phenomena in the country where the intentions of the president, not that of the citizens, have been the usual object of focus for the mass media.

The second issue widely discussed concerns how much of the TV programming is produced domestically and how much is imported from abroad. In 1993, for example, RCTI broadcasted eighteen hours a day. Domestically produced programs cost about Rp. 40 million ($20,000) per hour, and they took up one third of the day (6 hours), costing the station about Rp. 240 million ($120,000) per day, Rp. 7.2 billion ($3.6 million) per month. On the other hand, the imported programs cost only Rp. 5–10 million ($2,500–$5,000) per hour.

A similar situation prevailed in Japan in the 1960s, and impressive progress has been made by the domestic television production companies in both countries. With the exception of a few extremely popular imported programs, the audiences tend to prefer domestically produced programs. Over the long term, a familiar language, familiar stories, actors, landscapes, and social, political, and cultural backgrounds play a crucial role in audience preference. Program sponsors also take the nationality of the images into consideration. This is one good reason why Japan’s image alliances are always on the lookout for local image producers; they feel no need to stick to Japanese characters—in many cases their nationality is already indecipherable—as long as they can participate in profit sharing and maximization. VISTA TV’s articles show that intellectuals and artists are constantly sought after for interviews, movie reviews, fashion or pop music information, suggestions for new programming, and so on. Indonesia is in search of its own talents and celebrity figures, who will follow their first television celebrity, President Soeharto.

The third issue often discussed focuses on television’s effects on children. Usually these discussions typically end with the suggestion that mothers restrict children’s viewing times or watch the programs “together” with their children. Familiar suggestions in the United States, yet a strikingly

\(^{78}\) At first with only thirty minutes of programming per day. See Vista TV Special Anniversary Edition, August 1992, for the details.


\(^{80}\) Television has this power of making the new seem normal through sheer repetition.
new trend for a country where the children have always accompanied their parents and neighbors everywhere and enjoyed theatrical entertainment together. The conceptual separation of the domain of childhood is progressing. The Japanese children’s television animations and comics are generally regarded to be suitable and educational for children. A local Muslim leader has said that he allows his children to watch only the national news and children’s animations.

Doraemon in Indonesia

American comics such as Superman were introduced to Indonesia in the 1950s. Affluent parents commonly bought translations of Disney picture books for their children. After television deregulation, however, Japanese cartoons and other programs were introduced with remarkable success. A dominant local publisher set up the agency to import television programming from Japan.

When I visited Indonesia in 1992 and 1993, Doraemon had been on air since 1991 on RCTI. I found him to be a highly popular and intimately familiar figure. Once, I witnessed a friend’s five-year-old son turn on the television precisely when Doraemon started (at 8:00 A.M. on Sunday). He watched it engrossed for half an hour (two episodes), and as soon as it was over, he switched the television off to play video games. Only Doraemon could compete against the games. My friend, who used to enjoy sleeping late on Sundays, now gets up at eight to watch Doraemon with his son. He has bought toys with Doraemon characters for his son’s birthday. A cabinet minister also confessed that he watches Doraemon every Sunday, and when he cannot, he asks his wife to tape the day’s episodes for him. According to a survey conducted for the week of April 24 to April 30, 1994, Doraemon was the favorite children’s program in all four areas surveyed—Jakarta, Medan, Surabaya, and Semarang. Soon after television broadcasting of Doraemon began, locally drawn comic booklets appeared on the streets. The corner bookstands and hawkers sold the small, palm-size, thin (one episode each), pirated (or creative, local versions of) Doraemon comic books at prices even children could afford—around two to four hundred rupiah (ten to twenty cents) each. The tissue-paper booklets were drawn by teenage boys and are reminiscent of the early postwar days of Japanese manga. Japanese publishers took no direct action against the pirated comics. When interviewed, they said that the domestic (Japanese) market being so large, and the pirates’ businesses overseas being so miniscule, they could afford to wait and see how the situation developed. After all, that was how the narrative comics took root in postwar Japan. Their insight proved to be right. Thanks to the pirates’ ingenuity and risk taking, handmade Doraemon comics spread and the local publishing houses decided to join the party. They struck legal deals with Japanese publishers and started to sell better quality, copyrighted Tento-Mushi Series paperback books for 3,300 rupiah (or about $1.50) through their bookstore chains. They found it in their interest to enforce the copyright against the peddlers on the streets, and the pirated editions quickly disappeared.

In Indonesia, Elex Media Komputindo, a subsidiary of the largest publisher group and bookstore chain, Gramedia, publishes Doraemon in press runs of 40,000 for each volume. It has already translated and published more than four hundred titles of Japanese manga in last five years. The character merchandising division was created in 1994.

Copyright protection is crucial for the image alliance to maximize profit. Once the local publishers and advertisers join the alliance, they try to suppress the pirates more effectively than Japanese publishers could in order to protect their shared interest. In fact, they have requested that the Japanese publishers pay more attention to the copyright issue. Doraemon has helped establish an image alliance in Indonesia identical to that in Japan. Candy Candy, Sailor Moon, Dragon Ball, and other popular Japanese television programs are following suit. Commodities with the popular characters on them crowd the shelves in the first-generation shopping malls, which are sprouting in big cities.

TV programs, especially animated cartoons, which are popular in Japan and are therefore already supported by the image alliances, are guaranteed some degree of commercial success abroad. Their product lines accompany them on their trip abroad and help increase the characters’ visibility and familiarity. Even if a character fails to gain popularity, there is an endless supply of new characters to replace it. It is the size of local consumer class—the families with TV sets who are capable and willing to spend money on their children—that determines the extent of their success. In other words, the “success” of television animations, comic books, and their character commodities attests to the presence of an emerging consumer class in the region.

Doraemon cartoons are dubbed, and the comic books are translated into

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81 Christine T. Tjandraningsih, “Japan’s ‘manga’ oust rivals from Indonesian market,” Japan Times, January 11, 1995.
82 VISTA TV, June 1994, p. 35. It was the first survey on the “children’s” television programs in Indonesia.
83 In retrospect, the street pirates functioned both as astute market researchers and agile advertisers.
Indonesian. In the process, predictably, some mistranslations occur. On television, because the original pictorial flow is unhindered, the problem is voices. For example, when Nobita's father says to his wife, “Isn't dinner ready yet? I am hungry,” in Japanese he is commanding his wife to hurry. Literally translated into Indonesian, however, the sentence is read as if a small child asking his indulgent mother, “Isn’t dinner ready yet, [Mom]? I am hungry.” Yet nuances appear not to matter much. The language portions are not central to the narrative. Indonesian children watch their Dragon Ball videos, for example, in pirated editions from Hong Kong with the Japanese voices and the Chinese subtitles.

The translation of printed manga conversation can be difficult. Utterances are short, casual, and sometimes comically crafted at the cost of grammatical precision. New words are frequently coined and quickly adopted by others. The fact that language does not necessarily determine the progression of the stories has liberated voice from logical sequence. Meaningless words can be thrown in. The translation of the manga’s sound-effects that creatively illustrate the characters’ activities and emotions is most arduous. Indonesian children appear to be learning quickly how to “read” manga, and many of them are routinely spotted “browsing” comic books at bookstores.

**Difficulties in the U.S. Market**

The difficulty of exporting the postwar comics to the U.S. market was demonstrated in the case of *Hadashi no Gen* by Keiji Nakazawa. The United States has its own history and style of comics and did not have Tezuka to stage a manga revolution. The existing distribution channels and markets for comics are not receptive to the thick, black-and-white manga comics. In spite of numerous cartoons, literacy in manga’s visual narration has not taken root widely yet, and perhaps need not to. Potential manga consumers in the United States have ready access to the Hollywood movie.

Nakazawa was the victim of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. He drew his experience as an eyewitness account. A nonprofit peace group in Tokyo published an English-language edition of *Hadashi no Gen* under the title *Barefoot Gen* in the late 1970s and sent copies around the world. In the United States, a San Francisco underground publisher cut the 1,400-page narrative into several “normal” comic books, but still no one bought it. Lack of manga literacy may have been one reason; the other was the intervention by the Comics Code Authority. It considered the Day-After scenes “too graphically violent.” It was one thing to drop the bomb and let children go through the experience, and it was another to allow an eyewitness’s visual narration to circulate. Perhaps the story did not unfold “qualities of fineness and permanence,” or “experiences worth reliving,” which were the values presented in American literary circles for children’s literature. On the other hand, American adults normally do not read “children’s” accounts, which was how the narrative was scripted. The line between the adult literature and the children’s literature is clearer in the United States than it is in postwar Japan.

Tezuka’s *Astro Boy* comics also had to be rescripted, redrawn, and colored by the Americans in order to be accepted in the United States market. In turn, American comic books—colored yet thin, which require the readers to read each conversation of the characters—are faring no better in the Japanese market.

Japanese cartoons also have problems in the United States. They are often categorized as “animation for small children” and then censored under the broadcasting code, which is “even more stringent than the Comics Code.” Ironically, animation with conspicuous violence, a relatively unpopular genre in Japan, has had no difficulty breaking into the United States market because they were categorized “not for children.” “Children’s” animation like *Doraemon* still has not been broadcast on television in the United States.

The primary reason, however, that Japanese children’s animations and comics have not been pushed into the U.S. market appears to be the lack of enthusiasm among Japanese agents. Tezuka compromised to get his comics accepted in the American market, and his animations were popular. The American market at that time was profitable—NBC paid 3,600,000 yen ($10,000) for each *Astro Boy* episode, while Fuji paid 550,000 yen—and Tezuka was proud to see his creature accepted by the “international” audience.

The U.S. market is mature, with its own ability to produce popular images. It is also so rich that it is possible for individual industry, such as video games, which in Japan is becoming new foci of the image alliance, to make huge profits independently of such alliances.

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84 For the trip of “Barefoot Gen” to the United States, see Schodt, *Manga, Manga*, p. 154.
85 For the censorship of children’s books in the United States, see Deane, *Mirrors of American Culture*, pp. 16—29.
86 For the “Honor List of Children’s Books,” see ibid., pp. 17—18.
88 The Japanese in the United States are shocked to find violent made-in-Japan videos so available. They are hard to find in Japan.
89 *Sailor Moon* began broadcasting in September 1995.
90 Fujishima, *Manga, Manga*, pp. 238, 244.
Asian and European Markets

In the Asian region, economic growth has translated into the emergence of a consumer class. At the same time, the television age is dawning, which opens the gate for inexpensive animations. In the initial stage, the cartoons themselves do not have to show a profit because soon the comic books are going to follow, and so is character merchandising. The shared copyright promises eventual profit and helps promote the entire move.

The manga theme of children's empowerment finds rich soil in the developing countries. Children in the region are generally better educated than their parents, and they are expected to lead in the national march into the future. The manga's prevalent dream of a high-tech society built by the young generation also finds support and sympathy everywhere except in the Philippines, which bans Japanese comics and TV animations from time to time because of their "violence."91 The Chinese translation from Taiwan, however, is easily available there.

China, the largest potential market, has shown a special receptivity to Japanese cartoons and comics that encourage children to aspire to careers in science and technology. In 1980, the Astro Boy series became the first foreign animated television series in China. Publication of the comic books by Science Promotion Publisher accompanied, and Doraemon has followed. According to Mark Schilling, "In China, where a printing of 20,000 copies is considered average for a comic book, Doraemon manga have sold 900,000 copies in the past three years. The television show has become a nationwide hit, and Doraemon merchandise is sold at stores, including state stores, all over the country."92

In Taiwan,93 Doraemon's images are found all over the place—on television, in comic books, on T-shirts, and even on the school bus of the "Xiao Dingdong Preschool" (Doraemon in Taiwan is Jiqi Mao Xiao Dingdong—Little Dingdong the Robot Cat). The staff at Ching Wen, a Taiwan manga publisher, speculated that Doraemon arrived in Taiwan seventeen or eighteen years ago both as "manga" and television animation. The term "manga" is commonly used in Taiwan. A man in his early thirties remembers that Doraemon was very popular from his "middle teens" and that a great variety of manga were already available on the market. In Taipei, Doraemon cartoon show peaked in popularity around 1990. Nowadays it is only one of a vast array of cartoon shows. Many of them are backed up with comic books, videos, calendars, stationery, plastic warriors, weapons, and war machines. Evidently, the first introductory stage is long over. The image alliances are actively recreating themselves with new characters on a regular basis. TV channels 37 and 39 are devoted to programs imported from Japan. Japanese cartoons are broadcast all day, every day, not only on these channels but on others as well.

Many stationery stores carry Doraemon comic books as well as a great many other manga. They are new and shrink-wrapped—to prevent browsing without purchase—and usually bear the marks of the companies licensed to distribute them in Taiwan. The book rental stores rent out all varieties of manga from many different publishers, some of them still clearly illegal copies of Japanese originals and some Taiwanese imitations. A storekeeper complained that the imposition of GATT restrictions a few years ago drove the illicit manga off the market and left only the much higher priced legal manga.

Before Ching Wen and Da Ran received publishing rights, many artists of Ching Wen specialized in drawing Doraemon; in fact, many drew Doraemon for practice before moving on to other projects. "No artists draw Doraemon now; they all do their own comics," says a staff member. No one seems to remember exactly when Ching Wen started publishing Doraemon, it was "a long time ago." This most successful and visible company is housed in a small second story suite and appears to have about thirty employees: editorial staff, translators, and artists.

Other publishers also produced versions of Doraemon.

Peng Li used to publish many Doraemon manga. According to a staff member, they stopped two to three years ago when the "copyright troubles" began. In business thirty years, they now have over fifty employees. Peng Li began publishing Doraemon manga about twenty years ago. They had cartoonists drawing the character, but "some of the stories" were copied, implying that some were lifted.

Jin Wen still publishes Doraemon manga. They have no copyright, nor do they have cartoonists of their own. My contact there told me they have been printing Doraemon for at least five years, though he "wasn't too clear" on when they started. He was also "not too clear" on whether the stories were copied from Japanese comics or created by their company.

Yang Ming continues to publish Doraemon, and has for at least five years. The person I spoke to there said some of the stories are copied from Japanese comics, some created by them; the same goes for the drawings.

91 For history and a content analysis of the comics in the Philippines written by Filipino scholars, see Motoe Terami, ed. and trans., Filipino na Taishu Bunka [Mass culture in the Philippines] (Tokyo: Mekon, 1992), pp. 75-129.
93 I would like to thank Gardner Bovingdon for collecting the materials on Doraemon in Taiwan for my research.
Evidently, many artists in Taiwan today can easily create both their versions of *Doraemon* and their own comics.

The manga industry in Japan combines the manga magazine, which offers space for new stories and novice artists, and comic books, which brings in profits. Japanese publishers are trying to reproduce the system in Taiwan. Shueisha has licensed two monthly manga magazines in Taiwan to print comics of its weekly *Shonen Jump*. At the same time, they proposed that “more than 40 percent of their pages have to be reserved for the young local artists.”94 Talented artists are the most precious assets of the industry. Taiwan has already become a full member of the manga club, with its own artists, manga magazines, and paperbacks. Moreover, China and Taiwan have actively been producing and exporting the character goods to the countries in Asia including Japan.

While cartoons and comics captured their most enthusiastic market in Asia, they are doing better in Europe than in the United States. In Italy, *Candy Candy* broadcasts were followed by the publication of deluxe hardbound comic books, rescripted, redrawn, and colored by local artists. There was also the usual heavy merchandising of stationery, toys, and records with the theme songs. *Candy Candy* was so popular that after the Japanese series ended, local artist drew Italian sequels.95

In France, following a period of television broadcasts, young manga readers have begun to emerge over the last three years. It is even considered fashionable to buy and “read” the original Japanese versions, rather than the translated comics. These originals progress from right to left and are not cheap (about fifty franc each). A thirteen-year-old high school student who was browsing comics in a store was quoted: “I watched the television animation so I know the story. I can understand it [Dragon Ball by Akira Toriyama] even though it is in Japanese. The pictures are nicely drawn and have movements.”96

**The Search for Overseas Artists**

In the whole structure of the image alliance, the artist who conceives and develops the original character and story still sits at the core. A talented artist, who can contrive strong characters, fresh visual devices, and witty story lines, generates and regenerates the entire system and keeps it expanding. Without talent, magazine sales drop quickly, and the rest of the alliance dwindles. It does not really matter where the popular images and their creators come from as long as the alliance has the means to multiply and maximize profit from them. China and Taiwan are considered the most promising birthplaces for popular comic artists. Translation between Chinese and Japanese is relatively easy because the visual flow of the frame is from right to left in both. The manga market in Japan is huge and has a bottomless appetite for new visions and voices, and publishers are willing to try out foreign talents from Asia and all over the world. Local artists drawing for local markets also bring in profit for the multinational image alliances.

The video game industry, which is intimately linked with the comics and animation industries in creating characters, is also seeking exotic story lines and character images for their products. A pioneer of narrative video games (in which the player can control the story), which he calls “sound novel”, confidently states, “We can enjoy more when translating from English into Japanese than from Japanese into English.”97 The artists and producers want to be fascinated and entertained themselves while entertaining others.

Kodansha has introduced manga by overseas artists in its weekly, *Shukan Morning*, and there was an “ASEAN Manga Artists Exhibition” in Tokyo in 1990. That same year, a special exhibition of the works of Osamu Tezuka was carried in the prestigious National Museum of Modern Art. Manga has gained the status of a modern national art.

Postwar Japanese comics originated as a children’s medium. Its primary characteristic is pictorial storytelling, in which narrative is mainly carried by pictures with optional voice and sound. The graphic depiction of flowing movement is itself a source of entertainment. It has become a form of folklore, passed on from children to children, visually narrating scenes of destruction and devastation, resurrection and redemption. It is a forum in which children sing the themes of desperation, rebellion, optimism, and hope. As early readers have matured, manga has become popular culture for everyone, young and old.

In the Age of Television, animation helped its audience learn literacy of visual signs and narration—literacy of manga. The images on the screen also proved to be highly effective in generating popularity and profit, and image alliances were formed to multiply and maximize profit. The artists, manga publishers, animation production houses, TV companies, manufacturers, retailers, and advertisers, all join these alliances. The popular characters have marched through the screen on which Doraemon has played

94 Takarajima *Shonen* (Boy’s Treasure Island) and *Netsumon Shonen* *TOP*.
a leading role because of his endearing nature and his message of optimism about technology and its relations to humanity. The series also decode and validate the new relations of production and consumption in industrialized society.

When *Doraemon* went overseas, the image alliance followed and the result was multi-industrial, multinational image alliances. The penetration of Japanese popular culture into Asia is pulled along by an insatiable local demand. In this process, image alliances have been replicated in Asia—in Taiwan and Hong Kong for quite some time, and increasingly throughout Southeast Asia. In the developing countries of the region, Japan’s postwar comics, animated cartoons, and related merchandise have been welcomed and have taken root. *Doraemon* is as much a sign of the emerging consumer class and of new family life with television, children, and their toys as it is a sign of optimism for the future.

In the U.S. market, Japan’s animations and comics have faced more obstacles than in Asia and other parts of the world because the United States has its own system of popular image production and sales. Regulation of children’s entertainment and a lack of literacy of visual narration have also blocked manga’s entrance to the United States. The manga videos, nonetheless, have found fans among university students. To some extent manga have been accepted in Europe and Latin America.

What is the political significance of the penetration of Japanese popular culture in Asia? Though few would deny the importance of cultural hegemony in politics, it is notoriously difficult to pinpoint its political significance. Yet this much may be said. As Hollywood films have been immensely important for disseminating the idea of the American way of life in Asia as well as elsewhere, Japanese comics and television animations are spreading Japanese ideas about childhood, war and peace, science and technology, and the future world as well as the accessible new medium for entertainment often without revealing their Japanese origin.

Today, for example, Disney cartoons are what parents tend to buy for their children; Japanese comic books, animation videos, video games, and other character merchandise are what children ask for or buy with their own money. They are actually practicing and verifying the notion frequently found in manga that the children are capable of deciding what they want and getting it for themselves. This notion substantiates the perception of children as the pioneers for the future world, which is closed and alien to the older generation.

This does not necessarily mean that the hegemony of American popular culture is being undermined or that the idea of the American way of life has lost its luster. It is rather that a new item has been added to the popular culture mix operating in the open market of Asia, one that may or may not have recognizable political consequences.