

- 1) A simple description of Shoyo Manga might read: "they are comics for girls that focus on themes of love and are full of cute characters." Drawing on what we have read and discussed in class about shoyo manga, discuss the ways they have changed over the years – in terms of audiences, authors, and content – and what shoyo manga can tell us about the power of "kawaii" (cute) culture in Japan.

One distinct feature of Japanese manga is its separation of target audience, between males and females. The manga aimed at males is termed shonen manga, while the manga aimed at females is termed shoyo manga. Shoyo manga is unique, however, in a number of ways. Although they are aimed at females, particularly younger females, shoyo manga were originally written by men. These men were either trying to enter the mangaka business and had to prove themselves capable before writing shonen manga, which was considered the top of the game in the manga industry; or they were mangaka who normally wrote shonen manga and decided to try their hand at something new. This resulted in shoyo manga visually reiterating proper gender roles and how proper young Japanese girls and women should be in the eyes of Japanese men. This was reflected in both the artwork, where the heroine almost always had a perfect figure with large, twinkling eyes; and in the stories themselves.

The stories of shoyo manga have had an interesting progression. At first glance it may appear that they have always just been love stories with a bunch of flowers and bright colors thrown in there. Upon closer examination, however, there are a number of massive shifts that have taken place. As stated above, shoyo manga was originally written by men and often reiterated proper gender roles as these male mangaka saw them. A good example of this, as Nasami Toku points out in her article "Shoyo Manga! Girls' Comics! A Mirror of Girls' Dreams!", is Tezuka Osamu's Ribbon Knight, in which the protagonist actually changes from male to female; when they are a male, they are heroic knight, and when they are a female, they are a dainty princess. This is a reiteration of Japan's (and, let's be honest, most of the world's) view that men are the heroes while the women are the damsels in distress.

As time went on, however, women became more involved with shoyo manga. Originally these female mangaka were largely influenced by the male mangakas. They eventually began to get a grasp for it themselves, and added in their own desires and dreams, as only a woman would truly know them. At the same time, the age of the target audience of both shonen manga and shoyo manga began to shift, including not just young children but adolescence and even adults. This resulted in more graphic and mature themes for the stories. Although they were often still romance stories, they included more graphic scenes, such as sex and violence. This shift also resulted in new sub-genres, such as yaoi manga, in which these female mangakas use homosexuality to show relationships that do not have the same issue of power balance in a relationship.

The difference between shonen manga and shoyo manga are quite clear after even just a quick glance at the covers. Shonen manga are often action packed, while shoyo manga are often love

stories that play on the emotions. As gender roles in Japanese society are beginning to blur together and becoming less well defined, however, these two types of manga are also beginning to blur. Although women are now writing shojo manga, it is becoming more and more common for men to read the female-oriented stories. Is this a sign of changing gender roles in a society that was once (and for now largely still is) very male-oriented? Or are gender roles in Japanese society heading in a whole new direction all together? Only the future and the manga industry know for sure.

- 2) Compare manga in Japan with comics in the United States – make sure your answer includes comparisons on the level of form and content as well as considerations of how these media fit into society and social life in each country.

At first glance, Japanese manga and American comics appear very similar. They are both visual methods of storytelling, and both were originally aimed at a younger audience. The similarities end there, however. As one looks deeper and deeper into the two, the differences pop up and every corner; the target audience, the style, the length of both each individual work and the length of the series, their accessibility, and even the role they play in their respective societies.

As mentioned above, both manga and comics were originally targeted towards a younger audience. These were simply methods of entertaining children. As time went on however, this changed for manga. As the initial generation of manga readers began to grow older, they continued to read manga. This resulted in more mature visuals, art styles, and stories. American comics, however, never truly went past that initial generation. While manga is still being read by many people of all ages in Japan (and many other nations, including America), American comics are not being read by many children, let alone adults.

The style also differs between these two media types. By this I mean the organization or utilization of space of manga versus comics. Japanese mangaka are allotted much more space to work with than American comic artists. This changes the entire feel of each, such as how the stories in manga often progress at a much slower pace than comics. Comics often try to fit in as much action as possible in each frame as they can so that they can get the point across by the end of their 60 or so pages. Manga, however, will sometimes spend multiple pages on simply setting the mood for the scene. This, in turn, results in manga having a more sophisticated feel than comics, and sometimes requires more of the reader to understand what is going on.

Another important difference between Japanese manga and American comics is their accessibility. I remember as a child here in America wanting to read comics, and yet there was only one comic book store in town, and even that one place went out of business when I was still young. In Japan, however, manga is extremely easy to one's hands on. They even have a number of monthly or bimonthly manga magazines, such as *Shounen Jump*. In a society where most of the population commutes by train or bus,

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having a manga, which can be easily carried around and quickly read, is very convenient. This results in a much larger audience for manga in Japan, versus a much smaller audience for comics in America.

These two forms of media are very similar in nature. However, it does not take one long to see the difference. At the rate manga is progressing, versus the progression of comics, manga will be the only remaining visual story telling form left, with people wondering "What in the world is a comic?"