Introduction

Kyoto Seika University's International Manga Research Center is supposed to organize one international conference per year. The first was held at the Kyoto International Manga Museum in December 2009,[1] and the second at the Cultural Institute of Japan in Cologne, Germany, September 30 - October 2, 2010. This volume assembles about half of the then-given papers, mostly in revised version.

The Cologne conference's point of departure was a Call for Papers launched by Japanologist Franziska Ehmcke[2] (University of Cologne) and picture-book expert Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer[3] (University of Tübingen). Their focus on comics from the perspective of Intercultural and Transcultural Studies met our Center's intentions. Thus, we joined forces, last but not least supported by Steffi Richter[4] (University of Leipzig) who kindly contributed the epilogue to this printed edition. In cooperation with The Japan Foundation (Japanisches Kulturinstitut Köln) and the Center for Intercultural and Transcultural Studies of the University of Cologne, we were able to welcome experienced comics/manga critics, such as Frederik L. Schodt, Pascal Lefèvre, Fujimoto Yukari[5] and Itō Gō, but also a considerable number of up-and-coming academics. The conference was divided into two parts, with the first mainly resulting from the Call for Papers, and the second consisting of invited contributions to a workshop named "Transculture, Transmedia, Transgender; *NARUTO* Challenging Manga/Comics

1   *Comics Worlds and the World of Comics* (English & Japanese, 2 printed vols, Kyoto 2010; http://imrc.jp/lecture/2009/12/comics-in-the-world.html)
2   *Kunst und Kunsthandwerk Japans im interkulturellen Dialog (1850-1915)* [Japan's Art and Craft in Intercultural Dialogue], Munich:Iudicium 2008.
3   co-editor of the Routledge volumes *New Directions in Picturebook Research* (2010) and *Beyond Pippi Longstocking: Intermedial and International Aspects of Astrid Lindgren's Works* (2011).
4   co-editor of *J-culture: Japan-Lesebuch IV* (Tübingen: konkursbuch Verlag Claudia Gehrke 2008) and *Reading Manga from Multiple Perspectives: Japanese Comics and Globalisation* (Leipzig University Press 2006).
5   In this volume, Japanese names are usually given in the Japanese order with surname preceding first name without comma separation, except in the bibliographies, and individual articles such as the one by Giesa/Meinrenken.

Studies." Three of the workshop papers appear in this volume, while the others form the core of the forthcoming Routledge volume *Manga's Cultural Crossroads*, co-edited by Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer and myself.

Titled "Intercultural Crossovers, Transcultural Flows: Manga/Comics," the Cologne conference had two main topics: comics and culture. The very attempt to interrelate Japanese comics—ranging from manga made in Japan, including *gekiga*,[6] to the deployment of manga style outside Japan—with non-mangaesque graphic narratives, that is, alternative comics, picture books or even Chinese *lianhuanhua*,[7] deserves attention for its exceptionality. Recent conferences, special magazine issues and essay collections show an inclination to concentrate on either comics (in the sense of "non-manga") or manga, conceding the respective Other a contrastive role at most. As distinct from that, the Cologne conference saw a whole range of comparative efforts, although not all of them were as convincing as Frederik L. Schodt's keynote talk on the localization of manga in North America.

It goes without saying that the discourses which shape manga/comics texts in their domestic locales are difficult to access without any command of the respective language. Yet, linguistic shortcomings do not excuse to refrain from double-checking available sources, or from any consideration of discourses at all. Such methodological flaws, however, are rather the rule than the exception in recent manga/comics research, as not only some of the papers in this volume but also many of the recent essay collections suggest. Apparently, young academics often feel obliged to claim knowledge about, for example, Japanese comics instead of raising questions which would not cross the mind of Japanese critics or Japanologists. Japanologists, on the other hand, may exhibit a lack of familiarity with contemporary concepts of culture, identity and media. And both tend to take their own disciplinary and cultural angles for granted. Only a few authors in this volume clarify their (necessarily limited) position,

6   Contemporary Japanese discourse defines *gekiga* (lit. pictorial, or graphic drama) mostly in a historical way, as a genre addressed to non-infant readers which emerged in the late 1950s and formed an alternative to magazine-based mainstream manga, due to its site, that is, pay libraries, or rental book outlets (*kashinhon'ya*) and its mainly proletarian readership. The fact that these conditions do not exist anymore may have led Roman Rosenbaum in this volume to see gekiga as a "style." Its characterization as a "new" and "counter-cultural drawing style" calls for contextualization though, since by now precisely the drawing style signals anachronism to younger manga readers. See for example the low publicity of the highly informative yakuza series "Hakuryû LEGEND: Genpatsu mafia [White Dragon: Nuclear-power mafia]" (installments 155-161) by Ten'ōji Dai & Watanabe Michio in *Weekly Manga Goraku* (Febr. - April 2011) which was discontinued after 3/11.

7   Palm-size books containing "linked pictures" (usually one per page), which flourished between the 1920s and 1980s, and are being rediscovered in the name of "comics" recently, for example, here: http://www.asia-europe.uni-heidelberg.de/en/research/heidelberg-research-architecture/hra-projects/hra14-chinese-comics.html (last access: December 10, 2011).

and even fewer employ manga/comics in an attempt to shake established notions and methodologies instead of merely applying authoritative tools to the new topic. The recently published special issue on "Comics Studies: Fifty Years After Film Studies" confirms that this trend is not peculiar to German academe. Bart Beaty notes that "Comics Studies has so far failed to develop analytical and theoretical innovations that could be exported to cognate fields."[8]

Exceptional within this volume is, for example, Thomas Becker's innovative reading of the current manga boom in relation to theories of remedialization and premedialization. Demonstrating that the recent proliferation of manga has revived the penchant for virtuosity and "cold equipment" which was once characteristic for the anticipation of cinematic effects by American superhero comics, Becker's paper draws attention to what superhero comics and manga have in common as modern media, beyond any nationally defined culture. This attention is not strictly directed towards the "materiality of comics," or "comics-ness as a matter of form," which Thomas LaMarre calls for, but it definitely helps to counteract the naturalization of national boundaries in Comics Studies. According to LaMarre, "whenever geopolitical difference comes into question, studies of comics tend to reduce comics to national culture." And he adds, "this comes of the current emphasis on content or representation—the 'what,' not the 'how.'"[9]

While in Becker's essay the focus on intermedia relations undermines the assumption of manga's "transmission" from one national entity to another, Zoltan Kacsuk's paper pursues "localization" with respect to the workings of subcultural capital, mainly in manga (and anime) translation. Vacillating between legitimization efforts and reluctance to compromise, in other words, between rapprochement and detachment in regard to the general public, dedicated Hungarian fans demonstrate virtuosity, or mastery, as he calls it, in a twofold way: they emphasize their direct access to Japanese-language sources and, thus, their independence from the anglophone market; and at the same time, they stress their command of the English language and, by that, their global range of communication. Precisely this critical triangle of English (American), Japanese and local (Hungarian) references has to be reckoned with by those subcultural entrepreneurs, or "fantrepreneurs," who try to market manga translations and corresponding anime synchronizations to both the fandom

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8   Bart Beaty: "Introduction", in: *Cinema Journal*, vol. 50, no. 3, spring 2011, p. 108 (pp. 106-110).
9   Greg M. Smith (moderator): "Surveying the World of Contemporary Comics Scholarship: A Conversation" (with Thomas Andrae, Scott Bukatman, and Thomas LaMarre), in: *Cinema Journal*, vol. 50, no. 3, spring 2011, p. 143 (pp. 135-147)

and a more general public. Kacsuk thus highlights the concurrent diversity of manga readers, whereas Radosław Bolałek foregrounds the historical dimension of fandom, distinguishing between three different generations. Furthermore, he thinks out of the box and considers not only manga but Polish comics culture at large. Holding a master in Japanese Studies and running his own business of publishing Japanese comics in Polish and Czech translations, Bolałek intertwines the multitude of "cultures" related to manga: culture as language, community and even capital, tied to both identity via comics and identity as comics. This is still rare in Manga/Comics Studies.

The Cologne conference addressed comics. However, due to its combination with culture, comics itself were not necessarily regarded as a culture in its own right, i.e., a distinct way of signification and making sense of the world, a realm of specific practices and sometimes even life-styles. Not comics' identity, but comics as a mediator of identity—in terms of gender, subculture and/or national culture—attracted the most attention, as also several contributions to this volume indicate. Yet, Greg M. Smith is right to "worry that the 'Comics and ...' approach encourages us to neglect the actual comics themselves and to favor the elements (characters, iconography, storylines) that readily transfer across media"[10] or, in our case, cultures.

The conference aimed at discussing comics as a means and a site of intercultural exchange, with a special focus on their capacity to cross borders and to occupy a "third space" in between geopolitically defined cultures. Yet, to be precise, it was *Japanese* comics which took center stage, once again. To those of the organizers who are familiar with Comics/Manga Studies, it should not have come as a surprise that young academics turn to manga for investigations of culture. Although any kind of comics relies fundamentally on cultural exchange—ranging from the "melting pot" which gave rise to American comics, to manga piracy in 1970s South Korea—the conference's theme did not trigger papers on "intercultural crossovers" within *bande dessinée*, or the recent "transcultural flow" of the graphic novel. But the preponderance of papers on manga also helped to bundle up diverse disciplinary perspectives. Frequently raised during the Q&A sections was the issue of definitions: How does the popular understanding of manga, which refers mainly to a certain character design and a non-media specific mode of reception, relate to the subject of Manga/Comics Studies? Shall formal characteristics, such as panel layout and pictorial sequences, be favoured over perception, or the above-mentioned discourses? What may be gained by naming

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10   Greg M. Smith: "It Ain't Easy Studying Comics", in: *Cinema Journal*, vol. 50, no. 3, spring 2011, p. 111 (pp. 110-112)

picture-book like *lianhuanhua* "Chinese comics?" How many different phenomena has the Japanese word "manga" been denoting, and do they have anything in common? What fan-cultural connotations does the word "manga" carry in European languages today which may limit manga's readership? Can American reprints of gekiga as graphic novels count as manga? What is obscured when *NARUTO* is categorized a "graphic novel" in English?

Towards the end of the conference, manga critic Itō Gō likened the discussion to the literal meaning of the protagonist's name Naruto (maelstrom) Uzumaki (vortex)— the intercultural exchange among manga/comics researchers seemed to Itō both conflictual and confluent while sharing a common undercurrent. Featuring first in this volume, his paper offers a close reading of *NARUTO* which indicates an understanding of manga as graphic narratives based in magazines (here *Shōnen Jump*)[11] and thereby genres, intertextually complected with previous as well as concurrent series of the same publication site: to Itō, like many other Japanese manga readers, *NARUTO* is a post-*DRAGON BALL Jump* manga. And in response to a question about "Japanese tradition," Itō touched upon a second kind of post, that is to say, the loss of tradition (for example, in the form of reliable communities) as the driving force of the *NARUTO* narrative. Itō's paper printed here appears less interested in Media Studies than in manga-specific representation. In line with his (at least in Japanese) renowned argument of manga characters' ambiguity[12], Itō proceeds from the general characteristic of comics that the visible is merely drawn and therefore apparently less reliable than, for example, photographs, and interrelates it with one of *NARUTO*'s central narrative motifs, namely, that the visible cannot be trusted due to the ninjas' levelling of clone and original. Following this, one might almost want to insinuate that his paper points to a sort of self-reflexivity at the core of the *NARUTO* story. But even if so, has this actually affected the world-wide *NARUTO* fandom? Most of the fans apply the story seriously to value discussions concerning friendship, trust and intimacy. The kind of self-reflexivity which might be cherished in university seminars, reveals itself only to those who are used to reflect upon manga as comics in a formalist way; it does not go along with

11   Where Kishimoto Masashi's NARUTO has been serialized since 1999. By the end of 2011, 58 vols were published as well.

12   As weavering between being just a bunch of strokes drawn on paper [*kyara*] and giving the realistic impression of a human personality [*kyarakutā*], in: Itō Gō: *Tezuka izu deddo. Hirakareta manga hyôgenron e* (Tezuka is Dead. Postmodernist und Modernist Approaches to Japanese Manga). Tôkyô: NTT shuppan 2005. See also Ito, Go: "Manga History Viewed through Proto-Characteristics," in: Philip Brophy, ed., *Tezuka: The Marvel of Manga* (exh.cat.), Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, pp. 107-113.

obvious formal experimentation and, by means of that, a heightened awareness of "comics-ness."

Itō's is followed by the two *NARUTO* papers already mentioned above, Kacsuk's and Bolałek's. Both shift the focus from the manga text itself to its mediators and users, illuminating not how the manga's storytelling works, but how it becomes subject to reception within Eastern European contexts. Their focus does not simply replace an author-centered perspective though, since the position or intention of manga creators are intriguingly absent from Itō's analysis. Trained in German modern literature, Paul Malone takes a different approach when he introduces "German manga," or more precisely, young artists who have been publishing their manga-style creations in German.[13] According to him, German manga amplify the "translocal mélange culture" characteristic for German-speaking countries. The fact that German publishers have put more efforts into raising local artists than, for example, their French colleagues leads him to the assessment of German manga being "more than a mere intercultural appropriation." But one criterion when briefly evaluating the output is whether the artists brought their ethnic background into a central position, and another whether their visual style is "identifiably Western." In addition, their orientation towards an imagined "Japan" is juxtaposed to "European standards." Last but not least it is the final combination of being "German" and "manga" which reveals, unwittingly, the prevailing power of the "intercultural," as both a trait of German manga and an intellectual tool, even if acknowledging the fundamental hybridity of German culture and manga.

Such a notion of the "intercultural" as the exchange between discrete entities, which maintain their solid identities, forms also the undercurrent of Verena Maser's paper. Her endeavor to grasp the Japanese particularities of *yuri*, or girls' love manga, results in two conclusions: first, texts of this new Japanese genre do not address or even claim lesbian identity and, therefore, cannot serve as "mirrors" of lesbianism in contemporary Japanese society; and second, the comparison to American manga-style creations with clearly lesbian subject matter suggests that manga may cross borders as form, but that contents remains country-specific. With respect to the absent identity politics, participants in the audience pointed out that the very concealment of lesbianism within in yuri manga may actually tell a lot about its position in contemporary Japanese society, and suggested to trace allusions back to genre conventions rather then to "Japanese culture" at large.

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13 It should be noted that introductions to current trends like Malone's run the risk of becoming outdated. As for 2011, artists like Ying Zhou Cheng are not active anymore, and others like Christina Plaka have changed their style in a way which makes it difficult to classify them as "manga" anymore.

Verena Maser's contribution is shaped by the field of Japanese Studies as is Roman Rosenbaum's whose profound knowledge of postwar Japanese literature and culture provides the backdrop to his introduction of 1960s gekiga as a "transcultural phenomenon that combined native Japanese aesthetic traditions with audio and visual styles from television, radio and, especially, American movies." His paper stimulates further research with respect to its two central ideas: first, relating gekiga to American underground comix of the same decade beyond any measurable "influences," and second, comparing gekiga to other popular media, especially movies. How these are carried through is a different matter. Some readers may miss historical evidence as well as substantiation by means of textual analysis, while others may take the wording at face value which mostly suggests *intercultural* (American-Japanese) relations rather than transcultural flows. Setting out from the American edition of Tatsumi Yoshihiro's *A Drifting Life* (2008) in 2009, Rosenbaum's paper finds causes for its present appreciation as a veritable graphic novel in North America in the "transcultural" modernity of postwar Japan. Likewise interested in the transcultural appeal of a specific manga is the analysis of Urasawa Naoki's "20th Century Boys" (2000-2006) by narratologist Felix Giesa and art historian Jens Meinrenken. Instead of "Japaneseness," or intercultural exchange in the traditional sense, they focus on intermedia relations, especially by reference to rock music, cinema and iconic images which have been shared on an increasingly global scale since the 1960s, and they try to intertwine their reading of the narrative with basic characteristics of comics itself, especially the "constant fragmentation and repetition of visual motifs and plots moments." This culminates in their appreciation of "20th Century Boys" as an intriguingly multi-layered comics text. Last but not least, Maaheen Ahmed takes Frédéric Boilet and Takahama Kan's *Mariko Parade* (2006) as her example to not only discuss "cross-cultural interchange" within one work but also try out to what extent tools of art history and recent *Bildwissenschaft* (lit. the study of pictures) can be employed for the textual analysis of comics. Ahmed distinguishes two different comics styles—bande dessinée and manga—in Mariko Parade, which tells the story of an intercultural encounter while leaning heavily also on intermedia relations involving photography and the nouveau roman. Precisely the resulting hybridity ensures a scope of possible interpretations, or openness as a marker of quality, as Ahmed maintains. Interestingly enough, her example contains in a nutshell what applies to contemporary comics/manga culture on a global scale. Mainstream manga series such as *NARUTO* seem to balk at intercultural exchange; their readers are usually not interested in any

other kind of comics culture. But on closer inspection, they do not need to look for such exchange outside, since their manga contain it within themselves, although in a dissolving, that is, transcultural way. In contrast, alternative comics, that is, independent, non-generic (and usually less extended) productions seem to be most open towards globalization in the sense of an exchange between different locales, an impression which can easily be confirmed at one of the numerous international comics festivals and conventions. Yet, most of these works are too self-containt, too autonomous to allow for such transcultural obscurations of identity as mainstream manga.

At any rate, it is hoped that this volume contributes to the newly emerging field of Manga/Comics Studies precisely by admitting imperfection, facing blind spots and clearing the view for the tasks at hand. I would like to thank all the authors who, for the sake of furthering Manga/Comics Studies, expose their ideas on the pages of this volume. I am also grateful to all collaborators, including those conference speakers who were not able to submit a revised version of their papers and, of course, all those participants in the audience who tirelessly engaged in discussing the talks and much more. The next conferences are being planned already, and we will report in them within this series named *Global Manga Studies*.

Kyoto, December 10, 2011

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