

Wonderland and Fairy-Tale

Japanese Manga : Wonderland and Fantasy

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Abstract

Reading of stories as well as storytelling are age-old traditions. Even in the modern high-tech society storytelling is regarded as a medium of sharing facts about the history and development of different corporate and companies. Among all stories Fairy-Tales always be among the world's best loved stories. It is all time favourite for all group of readers irrespective of age. *Manga*, i.e. Comic Stories influence Japanese Society through its fantasy. *Manga* is a developed form of two types of Pictorial Story-telling E-toki and Emakimono. Stories for boys (*Shonen Manga*), Young men's Manga (*Seinen Manga*) or Girls (*Shojo Manga*) as well as Women's Manga (*Josei Manga*) are the important divisions of Japanese *Manga*. There are some more varieties in *Manga* Industry which controls the intellect and psychology of Japanese community.

Stories and mass-communication

Along with stories, storytelling is an ancient tradition among all nations and countries. Stories or narratives are used in every culture and civilization as a medium for entertainment as well as education and also for the preservation of cultural traditions and transmission of moral values. Reading of story book, of course is a very interesting passion and addiction among many of us. Good and favourite story writers are sometimes considered as super human among the readers. Moreover, reading of good story-books as well as its modern visual and oral interpretation helps to enrich the knowledge of language, culture and history.

Even in the modern high-tech society storytelling is regarded as a medium of sharing facts about the history and development of different corporate and companies. As a good story is usually believable, it enchants the listeners and thus had a deep impression of a particular fact or situation which the storyteller wishes to communicate.

In Buddhist countries the *Jataka* Stories played a vital role in developing the character of the citizens. Those stories were told by the monks during their preaching and also by some adherent of Buddhism, who were actually lay preachers. Some of those stories were even used by Lord Buddha himself in his teachings and from him, his followers learned those and passed into common listeners for popular use in the society. Those are not always real-life incident of Lord Buddha or any other personalities. The imagination of different heavens and the process

of attainment of ultimate renunciation moved the common people and they got the inspiration for good deed. That is their Fantasy of getting the supreme reality of life.

Even earlier, same type of story- telling was popular during the Vedic age in India. Those stories are used for variety of purposes. In Sanskrit, the stories of *Panchatantra* used to teach law and economics, while *Kathasaritsagara* narrates the development of knowledge as well as just for enjoyment and there are many more examples.

Fairy Tale and its relevance

Among all stories Fairy Tales are always among the world's best loved stories. Many of us, long after we have grown up, still remember the fairy tales of childhood days. Hans Christian Anderson who is considered to be the father of true fairy tales thought that "what a dull place our world would be without these stories"¹. Anderson believed that he was writing Fairy Tales not only for small children but for grown-ups also and he once said that he could sit in his own modest kitchen and his imagination would, in the twinkling of an eye, transform that kitchen into a gorgeous and attractive palace. Actually, everything is possible when you settle down to read a proper fairy tale. The genre of Fairy Tales has continuously evolved across the culture of the time and also time beyond. Fairy Tales have found a way to infiltrate everyday lives of people. Their effect ranges from remembering of youthful days or bed-time stories up to a phenomenon that dictates an entire generation.

Japanese Manga: A World of Fantasy and rich in variety

In this article I try to focus on how *Manga*, i.e. Comic Stories influence Japanese society through its fantasy. Though *Manga* might not truly be included within the genre of Fairy Tales but the essence of Fairy Tales and Wonder World are there in its process of writing, drawing and story-telling.

As I mentioned earlier, Anderson believed that he was writing not only for small children but for grown-ups too, similarly Japanese *Manga* artists are creating their stories not for Children only. It is a part of Japanese literature that has been enjoyed at all levels and groups of readers since the 1930s. It is a very common sight that a middle-aged businessman and or an office worker while commuting in a train, has his eyes glued on some comic book. Manga or Japanese comic art is a profitable business platform and is really popular in Japan these days. But manga was not the first of this genre in Japan.

E-Toki and Emakimono

Prior to *Manga*, in Japan some other types of storytelling in pictures were prevalent. It is said that *Manga* was developed from the conception of *E-Toki* Story Telling (Picture deciphering). and *Emakimono* (Illustrated scroll painting). *E-Toki* Storytelling in Japan, may be considered as tool for an extensive outreach of Buddhism in Japan. Actually, after the introduction of Buddhism in 538 AD, until the 10th Century, Japanese Buddhism was confined among the

literate class and it was prerogative of the elite to get the benefits of Dharma. But with a gradual decline in the fiscal and political hegemony among those aristocratic patrons, the Buddhist establishment had to turn their face to commoners. To attract the commoners and also to some extent to expedite fund raising, the priests of the Buddhist Temples used paintings during their teachings, which were used for preaching as well as entertainment. This type of preaching was commonly called as *E-Toki* or pictorial decipherment. *Emakimono* or “Illustrated Scroll Painting” was popular from the 8th Century AD. *Emakimono* usually narrates the political scenario and international exchanges started during that period between Japan and other neighbouring countries. All are explained through picture along with the lecture by some eminent personalities of those periods. *Manga* is a developed form of those two types of Pictorial Story-telling.

Manga in modern Japan

Manga has become increasingly popular in recent years in Japan. It has had a significant influence in Japanese Society as well. *Manga* often reflects the ideas and values of their creators and readers. This is because *manga* are usually created with a specific group of readers in mind. Thus those creations involve the interests of that group of readers. For example, since Japan is a technologically advanced country, many *manga* also deal with futuristic technical themes and settings. While, regardless of specific *manga* there are creations which aim the general public as the reader. Thus it is believed that *manga* can serve as a window to the values, morality and concerns of their creators and readers.

Manga are available at every Kiosk and book store in Japan. The reason behind this huge popularity of *Manga* is that, the stories in *Manga* are “faster and easier to read than a novel, more portable than a television set and provide an important source of entertainment and relaxation in a highly disciplined society”². *Manga* has become an unavoidable part of Japanese culture, more specifically Japanese pop culture and undoubtedly it works as an important mass-media in Japan.

Now, if we discuss about the definition of *Manga*, it is basically graphic novels. The word first came to popular use during 1798 and has been used to describe the woodblock prints by famous Japanese Artist *Katsushika Hokusai*.³ The widespread popularity of *Manga* started with the publication of serialized *Manga* in the daily Newspapers since 1930s. Those *Manga* were popularly known as *Yonkoma Manga* (i.e. four cell *Manga* in a comic strip format). Etymologically the word “*Manga*” means “Impromptu Pictures”. Thus from the meaning of the word it is clear that the artists have the liberty of drawing the pictures as well as to write the conversation what so ever the author thinks the best.

The interesting thing about *Manga* is that they have branched into various genres. From Satire to Social Commentary or issues, from Political situation to Economic situation are narrated in one frame. In the stories for boys (*Shonen Manga*), Young men’s *Manga* (*Seinen Manga*) or Girls (*Shojo Manga*) as well as Women’s *Manga* (*Josei Manga*), realism for young-stars, challenges

faced by the heroes in pursuit of victory, adventures of everyday life and lots of fun and comedies are narrated through picture and interesting conversations, *Gekiga Manga* or *Manga* based on Drama, Sports *Manga* are all narrated through systematic illustrations and story-line and conversation.

The *Manga* Tree in Japan has spread its branch in every sphere of life which has created an Empire of Fantasy. Another interesting point to be noted that, unlike other form of visual art, literature and or entertainment, *Manga* exists in practical aspect of life and not on the vacuum or imagination. *Manga* always deals with some particular social issues, surroundings, that includes history, language, culture, politics, economy, families and their relationship, everyday life including religion, gender-based attitude of society, crime and also environmental problems. All these are thoroughly permeated with the feeling of fantasy and entertainment. As rightly observed by Adam and Hills, Japanese *Manga* are “the dominant force in Japanese Pop Culture” and also “a window of Japanese Society”⁴.

Japanese Society underwent several changes in its system and norms of life. A massive social and political changes occurred after the World War II. One of those prominent changes may be cited as the status of women. The status of women in Japan had been slowly moving towards equality though it took a long time later on to become equal actually. This social changes on gender equality was also reflected in the use of language by the women. One interesting point to be noted in this reference that in the *Shojo Manga* or in the Girls’ Comics (popular among female of all age-group) the heroes and heroines have a profound Western or European physical structure with big eyes, blond hair. This type of physical structure is not usually seen in the *Shonen Manga* or in the Boys’ Comics. This Western orientation in Girls’ as well as Female Comics “appears to be a symbol of alternative life-style, a liberation from the suppressive rigidities, of traditional social organization.”⁵

In early post-war period, three main forms of *Manga* were popular, i.e. *Kamishibai* (Picture Card) shows, *Kashihonya* (Rental *Manga*. The people can rent those Picture Cards and enjoy playing by themselves at their own place.), *Yonkabon Manga* (booklets). From 1946-48 there was boom of *Kamishibai* (Picture Card) shows.

Manga genre in Japan has have changed in various ways with the passage of time. The influence of Westernization and later the influence of Globalization also cater various changes in *Manga* industry. In 1970s, development in *Manga* layout and composition, graphic style and gender specific format has become firmly established. Again in 1970s the paperback publication of *Manga* started. This paperback format of *Manga* is known as *Tankobon*. This *Tankobon* soon gave birth to *Manga* magazines. Recent years, *Manga* has moved into online environments. This moves away from print mode to digital format.

A Few popular *Manga*

One of the prominent creator of *Shojo* (Girls’) *Manga* is Tezuka Osamu. His classical series Princess Knight is quite popular not only among the female but it has popularity among menfolk.

This is the story of Sapphire, who was born as a girl with a heart of a male. Thus the whole story generates the gender identity issue.

Among the Josei Manga, one of the famous is Willow Tree, where Hagio Moto, the artist, narrates the feeling of a mother, who became ghost. The ghost-mother always keeps watch on her son who has gradually grown to be a man.

Shonen Manga is in the category of manga mostly aimed the boys between 10 and 18 years old. But reader of various age group enjoyed reading those stories.. *Shonen* stories feature action scenes depicting adventure, sports, friendship and struggles with adversity. *Shonen Manga* probably is the most popular among all manga for all categories of readers. The stories are written with more advanced storyline aimed at matured as well as tender group of people of the society. The graphic action scenes and amazing story lines make this particular sort of *Manga* very much attractive to the reader. As a result of this popularity many of these are widely translated into other languages. A classic example of *Shonen Manga* is *ONE PIECE* by Oda Eiichiro. This is the story of the adventures of a boy whose body has become rubberised after eating ‘Gum-Gum fruit’ and who travels the world on a pirate ship in search of the priceless treasure ONE PIECE. Besides ONE PIECE, *Captain Tsubasa* by Takahashi Youichi and *Dragon Ball* by Toriyama Akira are another two prominent Manga of this genre. *Shonen Manga* is the most successful manga and popular Manga and is often published in magazines. Similarly, *Seinen* manga is the Manga of another genre which aims at the Senior Group of people in the Society.

Sports *Manga* always touches the heart of sports loving Japanese community. This particular sort of Manga focuses some sport and has shown the technique and narration of the sports in detail. Often there are drama behind the scenes and also emphasise the characters’ personal and professional world.

Subject matter includes baseball, basketball, tennis, golf and football. One of the current best-selling manga of this genre is *Chihayafuru*, by Suetsugu Yuki, which deals with the competitive sport of *karuta* or Japanese traditional card game.

Gekiga or ‘Dramatic pictures’ is the kind of *Manga* which aims the adults only and features complex narratives and cinematographic effects. Saito Takao is the most popular master of this group of Manga. The most famous among all of his works is *Golgo 13*. It first published in 1968 in a magazine *Shogakukan’s Big Comic* in every two weeks. This series features Duke Togo, a professional assassin and a man of few words known as *Golgo 13*. *Golgo 13* always anguish fear and anxiety into the mind of his targets. The name was taken from the name of the mountain Golgotha, the hill where Christ was crucified and 13 as an unlucky number.

Manga industry is Japan has undergone continuous research and changes and development since 1930s till today.

Conclusion

In general, both traditional and modern Fairy tales have an extremely important role in society.

It narrates the complexity in human behaviour. It extends its story-line up- to the disturbances in human desire, their sorrow , success failure and along with that the influence in the society regardless of the age, sex, rituals followed by and social category of its character and readers. Similarly, *Manga* also reflects the reality of Japanese Society along with myths, beliefs, rituals, traditions, fantasies and Japanese way of life. *Manga* like the Fairy tales of any other countries depicts various social phenomena such as social order and hierarchy, racism, ageism, classicism and so on.

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- ² Schodt. F. 1983, "*Manga Manga the Japanese Comics*", New York, Harper and Row, p.25
- ³ Katsushika Hokusai (31st October, 1760 to 10th May, 1849) was a Japanese Ukiyo-e Artist of the Edo Period. He was best known for his woodblock print series.

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